

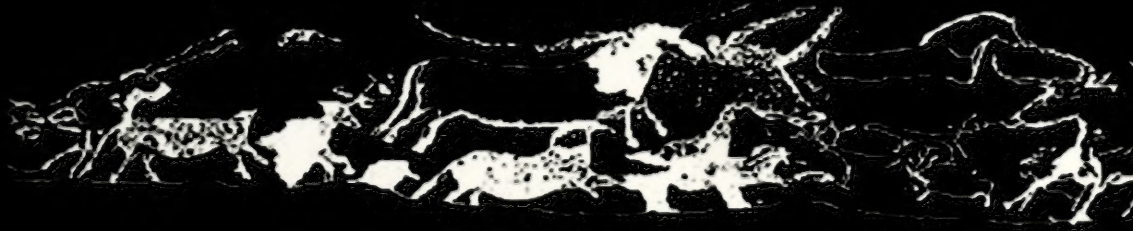
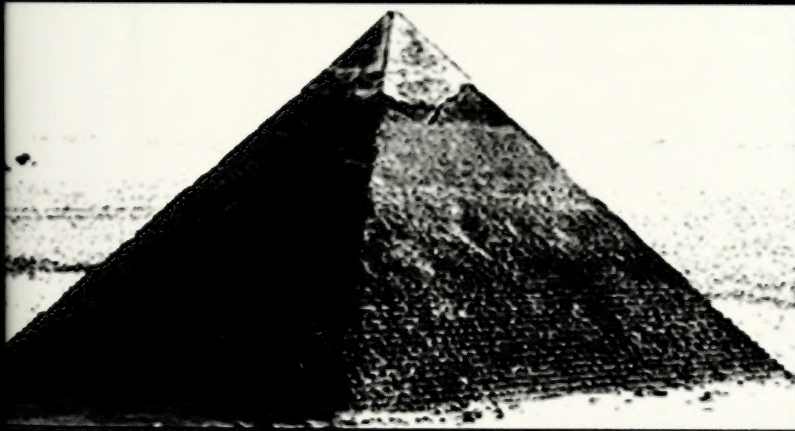
Annali d'Italianistica

Volume 18, 2000
Beginnings / Endings / Beginnings

Edited by
Dino S. Cervigni



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<http://metalab.unc.edu/annali/>

e-mail: <annali@metalab.unc.edu>

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Annali d'Italianistica seeks to promote the study of Italian literature in its cultural context, to foster scholarly excellence, and to select topics of interest to a large number of Italianists. Monographic in nature, the journal is receptive to a variety of topics, critical approaches, and theoretical perspectives. Each year's topic is announced well ahead of time, and contributions are welcome. The journal is issued in the fall of each year. Manuscripts should be submitted with a McIntosh or IBM compatible disk and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Authors should follow the MLA style for articles in English; articles in Italian should conform to the *AdI* style sheet. For all communications concerning contributions, address the Editor, *Annali d'Italianistica*, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3170, or post <annali@metalab.unc.edu>. Provide e-mail address with all correspondence.

Notes & Reviews

This section occasionally publishes essays and review articles on topics treated in one of the previous volumes of *Annali d'Italianistica*.

Italian Bookshelf

Italian Bookshelf is edited by Dino S. Cervigni with the collaboration of Paolo Cherchi, Gustavo Costa, Valeria Finucci, Francesco Guardiani, Albert N. Mancini, Massimo Maggiari, and John P. Welle. The purpose of *Italian Bookshelf* is to identify, review, and bring to the attention of Italianists recent studies on Italian literature and culture. *Italian Bookshelf* will cover the entire history of Italian literature. *AdI* will review books exclusively on the basis of their scholarly worth. To this purpose, junior and senior colleagues will be invited to collaborate without any consideration to academic affiliation and with an open attitude toward critical approaches. Contributions to this section are solicited. Scholars who intend to contribute are encouraged to contact the editors or one of the section's permanent collaborators. Book reviews, to be submitted on a disk, should be sent to the Editor. For inquiries post <annali@metalab.unc.edu>. Please provide e-mail address with all correspondence.

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Exile in Literature/The Literature of Exile

The year 2002 marks the seventh centenary of Italy's most famous exile. On January 27, 1302, in fact, Dante Alighieri was expelled from the city of Florence in which he was born and which he was destined to make famous more than any other Florentine. He then began a life of forced wanderings that made him realize in the deepest sense the Christian believer's condition of exile on earth.

The seventh centenary of Dante's exile, which we will celebrate shortly after the beginning of the Christian era's third millennium, may be viewed as a most appropriate occasion to open a forum on exile itself and the condition of the exiled person in Italy's literary and cultural history. Such a forum would seem to appear not only appropriate and timely but even imperative insofar as the 20th century, whose closing is imminent, has witnessed the exile, in all its deplorable forms and excesses, of the largest number of people in humankind's history.

Exile may be viewed as the forced or self-imposed moving away from one's country; as such, exile may connote not only the time away from one's place of origin but also, and perhaps primarily, the inner condition caused by such a physical absence. Exile, therefore, is only rarely exclusively physical. At the same time, without necessarily entailing the absence from one's own country, exile may also connote the exclusively spiritual, intellectual, or even existential condition of someone who lives a life of alienation and estrangement from the surrounding community. Whether the exile is physical or existential, spiritual or intellectual, what concerns the scholar in this context is the written document left behind by either the person who lives this exilic condition or by someone else who has witnessed that person's life.

For the 2002 *AdI* issue, scholars are invited to examine this complex notion of exile in Italy's millenary cultural history, from the first vernacular expressions to the end of the 20th century. Accordingly, scholars may focus on exile in its literal meaning, from emigration to expatriation, expulsion, deportation, and even slaughter; they may also examine the existential, spiritual, and intellectual consequences of physical or metaphorical exile. In fact, the implications and ramifications of exile are so far-reaching that one may arguably speak not only of exile in literature but also of the literature of exile according to either a Christian or a secular perspective. The Christian perspective, on the one hand, views human life as an earthly and temporary exile to be lived, endured, and redeemed while hoping to arrive at the heavenly kingdom, as Dante reminds the reader time and again throughout his works. The secular view, on the other hand, may either give up any attempts at finding a meaning in human life, or may seek other categories capable of overcoming in some way the perceived negativity of the human condition.

Prospective contributors are invited to contact the journal's Editor, either by regular mail or e-mail. All contributions, in English or Italian, written according to the MLA style, should be submitted no later than March 31, 2002 on diskette and in print.

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Beginnings & Endings

Two years ago, in proposing the topic for *AdP's* current issue, I wrote that the conclusion of the second millennium and the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era, in spite of or perhaps precisely because of such endings' and beginnings' artificiality, offer a most appropriate time – a unique and privileged *kairos* – to investigate the meaning and function of, as well as the many relationships between, beginnings and endings.

In fact, books and the human beings who write them; the historical and literary periods in which both artifacts and their authors are situated; the books' internal structures and material configurations as well as their authors' lives: in brief, every human being's life and all human artifacts are, by their intrinsic nature, situated within a beginning and an ending. At the same time, the purpose of every individual, humankind as a whole, and the sum of all their activities and products seek to create ever new beginnings in order to postpone indefinitely, as it were, the ineluctability of the individual's and humankind's end.

1. Toward a Theory of Beginnings & Endings

The first section of the volume deals primarily with theoretical analyses aimed at uncovering the multifaceted aspects of endings and beginnings in humans and their artifacts. These essays have different starting points, which range from Vico to contemporary authors.

In "Vico's Beginnings and Ends: Variations on the Theme of the Origin of Language," **Roberto Maria Dainotto** starts out with a series of questions: Is Vico's *Scienza nuova* the beginning of a new scientific prose, or is it rather the symptom of a nostalgia for the classical world's system of values and beliefs that has now come to an end? The essay brackets away these questions to claim instead the importance of the theme of origin: namely, a topos where beginnings and endings coincide, as is the case in the writing of the *Scienza nuova*.

In his essay, "La definizione dell'*Incipit*," **Aldo Nemesio** starts from an empirical observation; namely, that the narrative *incipit* found in 18th- and 19th-century novels does not present specific characteristics capable of differentiating it from the body of the text. On the basis of this evidence, he proposes to shift the focus of the research on the narrative *incipit* from the text itself to the reader's behavior in reading the novels' initial words. Accordingly, Nemesio's essay provides the data of an experiment he has conducted among students who were asked to read the narrative *incipit* of eight different texts.

Giuliana Adamo, by contrast, seeing the novels' narrative beginning and ending as a datum, offers a very insightful and useful overview of many critical approaches to the study of narrative beginnings and endings that have been

developed in the second half of the 20th century. Her essay, entitled “Twentieth-Century Recent Theories on Beginnings and Endings of Novels,” ranges from the controversial issue of the definition of textual *limina* (Aragon, Jean, Pope, Lintvelt) to the identification of their ambiguous nature (Barthes, Cornille, Brombert, Calvino, Coletti, Hamon, Herrnstein Smith, Lintvelt, Del Lungo), their interpretation in terms of speech acts (Genette), the setting up of models for their classification (Del Lungo, Lintvelt, Torgovnick), and finally the recent blooming of popular, non-academic texts on the same subject (Ensign, Fruttero & Lucentini, O’Connor, Papi and Presutto, Schwamental and Straniero, Weaver).

In his “Tabucchi Echoes Lacan: Making an End of ‘Postmodernism’ from the Beginning,” **Jonathan Smith**, while focusing on Tabucchi, deals with far-reaching theoretical considerations. Smith’s starting point is the consideration that Tabucchi’s writings between 1975 and 1997 articulate an intellectual as well as a literary project. This project begins, as it were, from a reading of Lacan, Blanchot, and cognate authors at odds with the classic formulations of Italian postmodernism proposed by Eco and Vattimo in particular, and it ends with the diagnosis of an “end” of the credibility of historical narratives of progress from past authoritarianism to present democracy. In this sense, from the “beginning,” Tabucchi takes issue with a fundamental principle of Italian culture, which is deeply rooted in the national tradition, with a view to “ending” its dominance, and thus “beginning” a more searching examination of Italian national identity than the tradition permits. Hence two of Tabucchi’s frequently recurring fictional themes: the residual Fascism of the republican period, and the exploration of this problem through the metaphor of the more recently democratized Portugal.

In his “Beginning/Ending, Openness/Consistency: Models for the Hyper-Novel,” **Massimo Riva** focuses precisely on these issues as they pertain to contemporary novels. Riva’s point of departure is Italo Calvino’s last, unfinished memo for the next millennium, which deals with the concepts of beginning, ending, openness, and consistency. Accordingly, Riva ties Calvino’s notes on these issues to the writer’s own musings on the hyper-novel, and he also explores Calvino’s fundamental anxiety over the nature (and future) of narrative art in the age of electronic media, most tellingly expressed in *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*. . . .

The journal’s first section concludes with **Charles Klopp**’s essay, entitled “Writers from the Margins and the Canon in the Year 2000: New Beginnings or Business as Usual?” Klopp focuses on beginnings and endings from a different perspective; namely, the “fraying” of the literary canon in Italy in the so-called marginalized writers. Hence — Klopp argues — the importance, at millennium’s end, of taking stock of the state of the literary canon in Italy. Here, as in many other areas of Italian intellectual life, immense changes have taken place. In his survey of new kinds of fiction by what he calls “Italophone,”

“unlettered,” or “marginalized writers,” Klopp examines several examples of writings new to the Italian canon. In concluding, he suggests that a “fraying” or “decomposing” of canonical boundaries is perhaps typical of the operations of the literary establishment throughout the twentieth century.

2. Medieval & Renaissance Texts: Closure, Open-Endedness, Narrative Cycles

It is well known that medieval authors' view of beginnings and endings is often affected by their Christian perspective, according to which humans and their artifacts carry, and therefore should also evince, their Maker's presence in them. Dante's entire *opus* bears out such a Judeo-Christian perspective. Accordingly, in the essay entitled “From Beginning to End: Dante's Fourfold Judeo-Christian Mytho-Poiesis,” I propose to read Dante's works — from the *Vita nuova* to the *Commedia*, but also his linguistic, encyclopedic, and political writings — from a unifying perspective focusing on myth and Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes. I thus seek to show how Dante's *oeuvre* rests on the fourfold Judeo-Christian myth that fully describes every human being's existence, individually as well as within the context of a universal community that unfolds along a temporal and historical axis: humankind's creation, fall, renewal, and redemption, precisely from beginning to end.

Medieval authors, obviously, Dante included, bear out differing approaches to the complex issue of beginnings and endings. Thus **Rebecca S. Beal** examines the tale of Narcissus from the *Roman de la Rose*, the episode of Pier della Vigna in *Inferno* 13, and the metamorphosis of Fileno in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, in order to show how the ending of the intercalated narrative may resist closure even while validating the resolution of the larger narrative.

Luigi Monga, in his “Cycles of Early-Modern Hodoeporics,” examines travel literature from the 14th to the 19th centuries in order to investigate travel cycles in hodoeporic texts and practices. Whereas Renaissance travel narratives usually focus on the journey's bare facts, with the notable exception of Montaigne's *Journal*, 18th-century intellectual curiosity and 19th-century *égotisme* gradually put the writer's *moi* at the center of the literary discourse. Thus, Monga argues that the voyage becomes a quest: the discovery of one's own self in its relationship with the surrounding world.

Armando Maggi examines the concepts of beginning and ending in the vast journal of Saint Veronica Giuliani. In particular, Maggi studies how this mystic visualizes the beginning and the ending of a divine insight in the form of a mental emblem or “impresa.” In Veronica Giuliani's *impresa*, an insight announces itself as the *opening* of her heart wound. Throughout her journal we read of the repeated *closing* (ending) and sudden *opening* (beginning) of this wound, even before the stigmata are inscribed on her body. Thus pain and blood are the signs marking both the beginning and the end of a divine communication in the heart.

3. *Beginnings & Endings in Modern and Postmodern Literature*

A cluster of essays focuses on beginnings, endings, and/or the process of formation of human subjectivity in modern and postmodern literature and film.

In "'That in Giving Me Life, You Still Remain Alive': Fetal Beginnings and Maternal Endings at Two Centuries' Ends," **Cristina Mazzoni** focuses on 19th- and 20th-century texts on maternity. Her analysis bears out literary, scientific, and theoretical connections between the beginning of a human subject (as fetus) and the ending of another (the pregnant woman, the mother). This fascination, perhaps even obsession, with existential beginnings and endings is especially visible in texts from the ending of the 19th century to the beginning and ending of the 20th century.

In the next essay entitled "Writing for the Third Millennium: Gadda and the Unfinalizability of Life," **Norma Bouchard** assesses the lack of completion in Gadda's narrative discourse, from his earlier texts to *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. Gadda forces the reader into an open-ended itinerary across beginnings, middles, and endings, thereby running counter to the most basic and widely shared assumptions about narrative as a textual structure of intelligibility (Kermode's *The Sense of an End*) and as a paradigmatic form (Brook's *Reading for the Plot*).

Then, in her essay, "From Start to Finish: Intertextual Roads of Reading between Manzoni, Tozzi, and Calvino," **Silvia Ross** explores the interrelationships of beginnings and endings in those three writers, centering her analysis on the act of reading and the recurring image of the road.

Focusing exclusively on Calvino in her essay entitled "Principio senza fine: l'iper-romanzo di Italo Calvino," **Assumpta Camps** analyzes *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* . . . in order to focus on the novel's literary themes and narrative structures and thus highlight Calvino's postmodernity.

Olimpia Pelosi analyzes Guido Piovene's *Le stelle fredde*. Her starting point is the novel's *incipit*, which is configured like a desolate foreboding of an end: the author's reflection on the posthumous condition of western mythography, a ritual song on the agony of the symbolic archetypes of a plurimillenary cultural cycle that the author views as dead simulacrum no longer capable of pointing to any beyond. While also comparing Piovene's novel with some of the works by the American postmodern novelist Thomas Pynchon, Pelosi pursues her analysis by means of a postmodern approach that involves entropy and chaos theories applied to literature.

In "Il finale del *Partigiano Johnny*," **Alberto Casadei** examines the endings of various works by Beppe Fenoglio in order to demonstrate that in *Partigiano Johnny* the protagonist's death is both necessary and inevitable. In fact, Casadei argues, the representation of death in other novels of the Italian Resistance bears out the reading proposed for *Partigiano Johnny*.

Finally, in "The Unending Process of Subjectivity: Gendering Otherness as Openness in Pasolini's *Decameron*," **Colleen Ryan-Scheutz** analyzes the dynamic and unending process of subjectivity in Pasolini. She thus sets out to

show how the open-ended nature of the tales' conclusions and the links between them bear out a gender discourse that celebrates otherness. She also identifies certain female figures as vital and regenerative sources of self-knowledge for the male subject, pointing out that their presence and activity allow the process of human subjectivity to continue.

4. An Intellectual's Wanderings at the Turn of the Millennium

An intellectual's wanderings at the turn of the millennium — **Riccardo Campa's** "Divagazioni di fine millennio" — conclude this issue's numerous attempts to analyze human society's complex cycles and dichotomies throughout its history. In a series of far-reaching interpretive investigations on areas and themes as varied as literature, philosophy, history, and socio-politics, Campa's intellectual musings underscore the problematic nature of human experience that comes through apparent contradictions and inconsistencies, thereby offering challenging reflections on the outgoing millennium and the future that faces humankind.

5. Hymns to a Millenary Beginning and Ending

Celebrating for the ending of the second millennium and the beginning of the third one, poets from Italy and North America invite us to reflect imaginatively on the passing of time, human emotions and passions, love, and God. These poets are: Laura Stortoni, Tomaso Kenemy, Mario Baudino, Roberto Mussapi, Gabriella Galzio, Roberto Cariffi, Giuseppe Conte, Rosita Capioli, Massimo Maggiari, and Alessandro Carrera.

Thus, *Adl 2000* provides the scholars with a vast gamut of investigations dealing with theoretical principles as well as individual authors from the Middle Ages to our own times, in the best tradition of an open, intellectually solid, and oftentimes challenging forum. It is the editor's intention to continue such stimulating debates. *Adl 2001*, in fact, will pursue the ethical implications of literature and scholarship; *Adl 2002* intends to focus on the literature of exile, to be followed in 2003 by another volume on travel literature or hodoepics.

In conclusion, *Adl 2000* — entitled *Beginnings/Endings/Beginnings* — has provided scholars of Italian culture and literature with an open forum to investigate theoretical issues and specific literary and historical texts in order to shed light on the function, meaning, and interrelationship of beginnings and the endings in human artifacts, endeavors, and human lives themselves. The first word "Beginnings" in the title implies the mysteriousness and difficulty inherent in the inception of human life and all human endeavors. At the end of the title, however, the same word emphasizes the perennial human hope that life might continue forever, always evolving in ever new beginnings of undertakings,

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activities, and forms of life. The central position of the word *Endings*, by contrast, bears out the human condition's ineluctable end, just as we read in Dante. He, in fact, portrays life as a "flight" toward its end (*Purg.* 20:39) and a "race" toward death (*Purg.* 33:54). At the same time, he also depicts God as "padre d'ogni mortal vita" (*Par.* 22:116), who wants his children to share "di vita eterna la dolcezza" (*Par.* 3:38).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Vico's Beginnings and Ends: Variations on the Theme of the Origin of Language

E cominciò da un principio troppo sciapito — dall'acqua — forse perché aveva osservato con l'acqua crescere le zucche [. . .] —

Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova*

1. A Tale of Two Cities

In 1690, when Giambattista Vico returned to Naples from Vatolla, he found himself a stranger in his hometown. In the one year he had spent in the bucolic and secluded timelessness of the province, tutoring the children of the marquis Rocca and leisurely reading *gli antichi*, the city had not remained the same. Vico, not unaccustomed to change, had certainly anticipated the possibility of finding a transformed Naples upon his return. He knew, for instance, as his third-person autobiography reports, that “nel tempo nel quale egli parti da Napoli, si era cominciata a coltivare la filosofia d'Epicuro sopra Pier Gassendi” (*Opere* 13). He knew, too, that “una fisica meccanica, una metafisica tutta del senso” (*Opere* 13) had been spread in the city by *gassendisti*, *galileiani*, and *novatori* alike. All this Vico *could* anticipate.

That is why, before returning to Naples, this future professor of rhetoric had equipped himself with all possible *topica* to counter the rhetoric of Epicureans, Gassendists, and Lockeans alike. He had read, to begin with, the thesaurus of Plato. He felt ready, therewith, to face the “ciorma dannata” with the principle that “le verità eterne, che non sono da noi e non hanno dipendenza dal nostro corpo, dobbiamo intendere essere Principio delle cose tutte” (*Opere* 15). Put differently, at the beginning, Vico could argue, there is neither a sensation of the thing, nor a thing-in-itself. The beginning is truth — a formal abstraction, a Platonic idea — whence representations of *aletheia* can issue forth *as* sensations or things. There you have it! So Vico could have answered “alla setta di Epicuro”!

Alas, so much preparation was in the end for naught. A true intellectual metamorphosis had taken place in Naples, and, in the new context, all the precautions and prepared arguments were to no avail. Surpassing Vico's most

radical expectations, Epicureans had almost disappeared,¹ and the dark *vicoli* of Naples were now crossed by a new rush for experimental physics, “per cui si gridava da per tutto Roberto Boyle” (*Opere* 15). Descartes was the new hero in town, and natural philosophy the new dogma. Not sensations but objective facts of nature were at the core of the new intellectual fashion. Not things-in-themselves but things, as represented by the *cogito* and its scientific method, were its beginning.

Vico, displaced a bit by the unexpected situation, frantically started reading the new best-seller; it was René Descartes’s *Fundamenta Physicae*, 1646. He read it carefully, as circumstances exacted. Yet he could hardly see any substantial difference between Epicurean atomism and “i corpiciattoli del Renato”! Both led, not altogether differently, to a world reduced to mechanical fatalism and absolute matter. The *Fundamenta Physicae* was in truth, as Descartes had already lamented in the Preface to the French edition of his *Principia Philosophiae* of 1647, the work of an impostor. A false Descartes born Hendrijk Van Roy, otherwise known as Regio, was already disseminating, in that self-assured age of certainties, the first symptoms of a malaise of both the Ego and the *autorità del vero*. This, too, Vico could not know. However, Descartes or not-Descartes, the fact was that a new *doxa* reigned in town. If it could have been somewhat easy to argue against Epicurus that sensations must come from something other than pure materiality, the problem with the new *doxa* was that this something other was, on the one hand, apodictically admitted, but, on the other, quickly bracketed away.

On the one hand, Descartes was explicitly maintaining an albeit unknowable — in fact, irrelevant for the *cogito* — metaphysical order, “un agente sopra la materia, che materia non sia” (*Opere* 18-19). Malebranche and Pascal, in France, had already tried the way of the enthymeme: If Cartesian method produces *knowledge* of nature, then an agent other than the *cogito* has to produce nature itself, the object of knowledge. Not only does God exist; moreover, science cannot take the place of metaphysics, but merely *supplement it* with physics. On the other hand, a use of Descartes to give some “objective” foundations to Christian ethics had, simply, failed: “Né anche il padre Malebranche vi seppe lavorare sopra [il Cartesianesimo] un sistema di morale Cristiana, ed il pensiero di Pascale [è] per lumi sparsi” (*Opere* 19). It had failed because neither Malebranche nor Pascal had been able to answer the most radical problem posed

¹ Fausto Nicolini (1955) gives Vico’s anti-Epicurist polemic a political significance. Vico’s privileging of the *verum* (a moral Ideal) against the Epicurist (and Cartesian) *factum* (an objectivity established in accord to the constant repetition of phenomena that, qua repetition, becomes “law”) is seen as a bourgeois reaction against the dynastic *imperium* of the aristocratic elites following the restoration of 1647-48. For Vico, trained in jurisprudence, the authority of a law based on the moral imperative of the *verum* was preferable to an oligarchic law based on the repetition of the *factum* (Petruzzelli).

by Cartesianism. As Gassendi had claimed in *Animadversione*, 1675, the physical world (with its own intelligible laws) and the metaphysical one (unknowable to human intellect) were, to put it simply, independent.² Cartesianism, in other words, had imposed a “radical separation” (Brunyeat 247-49) between (physical) knowledge and (metaphysical) ethics, or, in Vico’s own terms, between *factum* and *verum*. As Spinoza put it, “[. . .] we may draw the absolute conclusion that the Bible must not be accommodated to reason, nor reason to the Bible” (195).

What this sort of “absolute conclusions” entailed was the possibility of achieving truth independently from divine revelation, *ergo*, of rendering Truth fundamentally independent from the sacred. More radically, it made the existence of “amazing” societies and cultures developed apart from God’s revelation thinkable. The Jesuits coming back from China, Egypt, and the New World had already witnessed the reality of such societies, which allegedly preceded even the beginning of the cosmos as attested by the Scriptures. Older than the three thousand years proposed by the Bible as the age of post-Flood civilizations, pre-Adamitic civilizations, extraneous to the grace of God, had left incredible traces of their existence for the explorers of the new age to find. Societies and cultures, in other words, had prospered well without the help of Providence.

All this showed not only the plurality of Fontanelle’s human worlds, but also the perfect superfluity of Christianity for the wealth of nations. The refutation of an Adamitic origin, coinciding *de facto* with a refutation of the *auctoritas* of the Testaments, led to the conclusion that the world itself had no “origin.” There could have been no God capable of creating the amazing diversity of the world. The universe, as Tyssot de Patot wrote in his *Journal Littéraire* of 1722, existed by itself, uncreated, and “d’une ancienneté inexprimable” (Rossi 142).

Even writing, the *scrittura* which Vico interestingly values as the privileged and first vehicle for accessing Truth — “tutte le nazioni prima parlarono scrivendo” (*Principj* §36)³ — was said to have begun before God’s writing of the tablets on Mount Sinai. So it could happen, for instance, that

il padre Michel de Ruggiero, gesuita, affermi d’aver esso letto libri stampati innanzi la

² Of course, one can read Vico’s famous distinction between the knowable — “questo mondo delle nazioni, o sia mondo civile, del quale, perché l’avevano fatto gli uomini, ne potevano conseguire la scienza gli uomini” — and the unknowable — “questo mondo naturale, del quale, perché Iddio egli il fece, esso solo ne ha la scienza” (*Principj* §332) as a marginal acceptance of Descartes. The problem with Cartesianism, however, is that he thinks it knows physics at the moment in which it only knows its own laws of physics.

³ Following a standard practice of quoting the *Scienza nuova*, I give reference to paragraph rather than page numbers. Paragraph numbers can also help the reader to find in Bergin and Fisch’s standard English translation each passage cited.

venuta di Gesù Cristo; e [che] [. . .] il padre Martini, pur gesuita [. . .] narri una grandissima antichità di Confucio, la qual ha indotti molti nell'ateismo [. . .] [e] onde Isacco Pereyro [. . .] forse perciò abbandonò la fede cattolica, e quindi scrisse che 'l diluvio si sparse sopra la terra de' soli ebrei.

(*Principj* §50)

Sure enough, Vico could claim in the *Scienza Nuova* that such incredible antiquities were mere inventions, just the fruit of the *boria delle nazioni*, that is to say, the “vana oppenione ch’avevano della lor antichità queste gentili nazioni, e sopra tutte gli egizi” (*Principj* §51). He could also oppose to Ruggiero, Martini, and Pereyre “Niccolò Trigailzio, [che] meglio del Rugieri e del Martini informato [. . .] scrive la stampa appo i chinesi essersi truovata non più che cinquecento anni innanzi di Gesù Cristo” (*Principj* §50). Yet reducing the antiquity of ideograms and hieroglyphs to “five hundred years before Christ” to remain within the limits of Biblical chronology, and to place them chronologically after the revealed writing of Hebrew (1500 B. C.), could only partially solve the epistemological challenge thrown at Vico by the new Cartesian method. Even the separation of gentile history from the Hebrew one (*Principj* §51), probably maintained just to please the Catholic orders (Bedani), fell short of the mark. The challenge, the problem, could not be solved on any factual ground. It was more profoundly and insidiously an epistemological one: if science and logic *could* achieve truth, then the sacred, which revealed itself through the Word and language (*Principj* §38), and was imprinted in writing, was no longer a necessity, but rather a supplement societies could easily dispense with.

It is in this context that Vico’s interest in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* can be situated (Campaila). What had originally been a mere quarrel between literary factions had now grown into a more general epistemological problem. The humanistic culture of the ancients, founded on the authority of tradition and based on the written text, was by now not simply *opposed* by a modern culture celebrating the new, but rendered superfluous. A divide had been created (Preti) between two cultures — one based on words, the other on logic.

More dramatically for Vico, the “ancient” culture had retrenched, under the aesthetic influence of mannerism and the rhetoric of the *precettistica*, into “artifice, insincerity, decadence” (Marrou 82). It had thus abandoned any claim to Truth. In this context, it is certainly true that Vico, the institutional preceptor of rhetoric, needed to restore to his discipline a “fondazione metodologica di dignità pari a quella matematica” (Barilli, *Retorica* 104). Yet, such re-legitimization of rhetoric is at the same time more problematic and more radical than is often assumed. Appealing to the much abused concept of *corsi e ricorsi*, Barilli, for instance, sees in Vico’s rhetoric a “Providential” instrument of knowledge that is subsequently substituted, in some sort of *corso*, by the newer instrument of logic:

[la retorica per Vico] diventa lo strumento “provvidenziale” attraverso cui Dio insegna all’umanità, nelle sua fasi primordiali [. . .] certe verità che questa non sarebbe in grado di comprendere in versione nuda. Bisogna quindi presentarle avvolte nella *fabula* e nell’esempio, condite con linguaggio immaginoso. Ma successivamente, avvenuta l’evoluzione psicologica, subentrata l’età adulta, sarà possibile accogliere il linguaggio diretto della logica.

(Retorica 104)

Yet Barilli’s argument, framing itself in the expository, analytic, and logical language proper to the academic treatise, seems constitutionally blind to the very rhetorical — and allegorical — construction of Vico’s own argument. It might be, in fact, the desire to stress the allegorical dimension of the *Scienza Nuova* that convinces Vico of the necessity to append a *dipintura allegorica* (Garulli) to the second edition of the *Scienza Nuova*. And it might be the same desire that makes Vico abandon “l’andamento puramente raziocinativo della prima *Scienza nuova*” and adopt instead, in his revision, a “rhetorical” and “poetical” style allegorically apt to *comprehend* “lo spirito dell’antica epopea” (Fubini 19). Barilli’s idea of rhetoric as a “first” and “indirect” apperception of a Truth that returns then in the “direct” formulation of logic builds *itself* a linear logic — a teleology — that is neither the one of rhetoric nor that of Vico.

These sorts of readings leave unresolved the main problem that Vico tries to face: that of a radical separation of rhetoric from logic, and the superfluity of the former when the latter is available. Implicitly, Barilli suggests that truth can be “directly” and fully reached by logic only, whereas rhetoric, as likeness to truth, is brought back to the Aristotelian category of verisimilitude (which is then the ultimate meter to measure the validity of rhetoric). Interestingly enough, Barilli *does* recognize that Vico’s is “l’estrema difesa di una cultura integrata” against the epistemological fracture of rhetoric and logic (*Poetica* 164), and the attempt to reach a new “combinazione unitaria” (Botturi 37). Yet he seems convinced that the solution to such a fracture is for Vico not a synchronic, but a diachronic one. In the beginning, it was rhetoric; in the end, logic will tell us the truth (*Poetica* 182-95). However, why would Vico try to give legitimacy to rhetoric only to declare it dead and superfluous in *nostri temporis*, until its rebirth in a next *ricorso*?

A “diachronic” reading of Vico, it seems to me, has become some sort of *doxa* in contemporary discourse. More than historicizing Vico, scholarship seems determined to put Vico in a place that should be strictly defined in terms of either beginnings or ends. If, on the one hand, Barilli situates him at the end of a rhetorical tradition, others like Verene see him as the beginning of an anti-Cartesian modernism of sorts. This sort of polarity does, in a curious way, entail yet another “tale of two cities,” which takes its institutional weight in a little *querelle* between the Italian scholarship, centered in Centro di Studi Vichiani,

and the North-American one, connected to the *New Vico Studies*. Whereas Italians see Vico defending the virtues of Christianity from all that is modern (Rossi), Anglo-Americans see him impiously undermining Christianity itself (Vaughan). If the former handle a conservative humanist, the latter face a revolutionary that breaks away from an anthropomorphic idea of humanism (Tagliacozzo). Giambattista Vico, the prophet of a “beginning” understood as “transgressive intention” against all “origins” (Said) in New York, becomes the priestly and myth-oriented arch-enemy of secular reason (Asor Rosa 141-42) in Rome.

It is possible to see, in the polarity of these positions, a divide between a “traditional” all-too-Italian reading of Vico, on the one hand, and the “relative independence from tradition” of Anglo-American scholarship on the other (Tagliacozzo 174). To rephrase the same concept from an Italian perspective: there is an Anglo-American Vico “diventato una sorta di passe-partout con cui svolgere un discorso multidisciplinare, reso possibile attraverso ardite trasposizioni attualizzanti [. . .] della *Scienza nuova*” (Battistini 28); and there is an Italian Vico, lost in the philological effort to “reconstruct” his *Scienza nuova*. One might hardly resist the temptation to read this — albeit gracious — quarrelling as the epiphany of both some *boria* and some anxiety of the nations, to speak in Harold Bloom’s Vichian terms. But my own intention for recalling all this is not so much to reconcile positions, or to defend one against the other. Rather, my aim is to propose a leap out of these *corsi* and *ricorsi* of beginnings and ends, and to take a look instead at the *Scienza nuova* from the point of view of “origins.”

“Origin,” as Said has argued, is not exactly the same thing as “beginning.” Whereas the latter has a “more active meaning,” the former has a “more passive one: thus, ‘X is the origin of Y,’ while ‘The beginning A leads to B’” (6). “Origin,” in other words, is for Said the sign of metaphysics and the sacred, whereas “beginning” is a secular intention, a “praxis,” in a way, that Said makes coincide (problematically, in my opinion) with Vico’s *poiesis*, or etymologically — and idealistically!⁴ — with “making.”

Yet, “origins” may have meant something different for Vico than a mere symptom of the sacred. In a rather more banal way, the kind of origin Vico aims at discussing — namely, the origin of language, and *thus* the origin of society — is, put simply, some sort of rhetorical exercise, a topical exertion. From Leibniz

⁴ See for instance Giovanni Gentile: “[Vico] denies the pre-existence of the object to the mind that knows it, and attributes to this mind an activity which creates this world. [. . .] Truth is thought, as Descartes maintained; yet, thought is not the spectator of what is represented, but its creator. One can debate whether we construct and create abstract geometries only, or something more tangible and real — how much, that is, our power resembles the one we attribute to God. For now, it is enough to say that the way is open. And Vico guides us in it” (Gentile 383-84).

to Mersenne, and from Locke to Wilkins — to whom Gino Bedani (42-51) adds Bacon, and the catholic hermeneusis of the Babel episode from *Genesis* — was a central theme in Vico's age (Aarsleff, "Vico"). Moreover, the origin of language was not only a dominant theme, but also one apt to show the very limit of science. The latter, dependent on facts and certainties, could hardly grasp origins. For those, a new science was needed.

The logic of science, one might briefly observe, needs to bracket away the discourse on origins in order to claim its own legitimacy. Science cannot lose itself in a discourse that is, by its very nature, infinitely regressive (Derrida; McDonald). The search for origins is "an endeavor condemned to endless repetition because the 'origin' is 'always already' inhabited by the search for itself" (Gans ix). But can science ever evade this moment of regression? Is not there, in the famous doubt that originates Descartes's science, a prior "search" for the doubt itself? "Renato delle Carte certamente l'avrebbe riconosciuto, se l'avesse avvertito dentro la stessa dubitazione che fa del suo essere" (Vico, "Riprensione" 713)! Can then science ever escape its own origin in language, in the question, rhetorical or not, that originates it?

Science — Cartesian linguistics and Port-Royalist grammar — had dismissed the question of the origin of language as irrelevant for the purpose of "natural philosophy" (Chovillet). However, the fact remained that science had to use that very language to whose origin it remained blind. The definition of a scientific law or the very demonstration of a mathematical theorem are as much a matter of syllogisms and enthymemes as they are of algebra (Goetsch 49-87). And while that same science aimed at the purity of a formal logic that could eliminate the imprecision of language, was not language still re-entering formal logic from the back door of its questions and answers? Was not Descartes's *cogito* a metaphor that transported, as the Dignità LXIII has it, "da' corpi e dalle proprietà dei corpi a significare le cose della mente" and of the mathematical method? Was not Galileo Galilei's *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* of 1632, after all, a dialogue in the most classical of rhetorical traditions?

Vico's raising of the question of the origin of language thus seems to me central in forming the spirit and anxiety of the *Scienza nuova*. My stress on origin rather than on beginnings and endings does not claim, however, any originality by itself. Vico's handling of the question of origin has its own scholarly tradition (Bedani, Fano, Tagliacozzo). The same can be said of my focus on rhetoric (Giuliani), which, as Apel has argued, places Vico in a humanistic tradition which equates civilization and humanity with nothing else than eloquence. The specific question of the origin of language, however, has scarcely been discussed from the point of view of rhetoric. If, on the one hand, Benedetto Croce dismissed the whole problem as badly proposed, imaginary, and insoluble, Anglo-American scholarship, though interested in the topic, is driven more by a psycholinguistic interest than by a rhetorical one (Danesi). However, Vico's "discovery" of origins coincides, quite directly, with his

intuition of a *rhetorical* nature of language — or, put differently, with the idea that language originates as/through rhetorical figures: metaphor (*Principj*, §404-05), metonymy and synecdoche (§406-07), and, finally, irony (§408). More interestingly for us, this origin of language is for Vico not a fact that science can study and analyze, but a theme — what Rousseau will later call a “hypothesis” — that only rhetoric itself can articulate.

Through the theme of origins, a theme which leads to probabilities more than to objective facts, Vico then tries to imagine his own *nouvelle rhétorique* (Giuliani). While refusing an idea of rhetoric as pure ornament, or as mere formalism (Crifo xxiv), not only does Vico reconstitute to rhetoric its access to Truth (Grassi 5). Moreover, he gives to the “probable” that rhetoric is able to articulate the task of founding the “certain” (Grassi 12-14) on which science can grow.

We might need to open, at this point, a brief parenthesis on the question of Vico’s new rhetoric. Verene (1981) and Goetsch read Vico as a moment of recuperation of the Aristotelian rhetoric of the *topica* and the enthymeme. However, I am not quite sure that a return to Aristotle (even the “Aristotle” that Vico might have constructed for himself) could lend Vico the needed answer that Plato, after the return from Vatolla to Naples, had ceased to offer. What interested Aristotle (and Plato himself) about rhetoric was its ability, through dialectics, syllogism, and enthymeme, to achieve exactitude. As Hegel noticed, it is precisely with Aristotle that the “poetry” of existence (Vico’s heroic age) turns into a “prose” of the world, namely, logic. And as Heidegger added, it is with Aristotle that rhetoric stops being the attribute of the virtuous man and becomes exactitude, precision, and certainty: *orthotes*. The return to the origin — or its “divination” — which marks the entire *Scienza nuova* might then be more properly imagined as a return to the origin of philosophy, which is neither Plato (unable, as we have seen, to answer the Cartesianism that sweeps the “new” Naples) nor Aristotle. This origin is, rather, Socrates himself, that pre-Platonic Socrates, to whom recent scholarship is turning again (Sini 35ff.), and for whom the ethical justice of discourse and rhetoric, not its certitude, was of determining importance.

For Socrates, what is important is to know myself, not the apodeictic certainty that I am because I think. It is not important for him to know within which category I can be defined, but who I am as an ethical being. What is important, to put it differently, is to learn what virtue and wisdom are, not to come to a definition of such terms, but to *be* virtuous and wise. It might not be irrelevant, in this context, to remind my reader that the very end of the *Scienza nuova* closes exactly on the hope that the book will teach its own reader not how to define things, but how to become pious and wise:

Insomma, da tutto ciò che si è in quest’opera ragionato, è da finalmente conchiudersi che questa Scienza porta indivisibilmente seco lo studio della pietà, e che, se non siesi pio.

non si può davvero essere saggio.

(*Principj* §1112)

Vico, like Socrates, talks about being “good,” not methodically exact. He does that at a moment in which the entire encyclopedic project of the West founds itself on the exactitude of the proposition, measured against the thing.

Whereas Descartes, taking his cue from Aristotle, sees rhetoric and language as some subjective accident on the way to the certain and clear definition of the thing, Vico's irony (Goetsch), like Socrates's, hypothesizes the “origin” of all knowledge, concepts, categories, and ideas in a rhetorical language. If human passions are the same for everybody, but different are the words from one people to another, then language is convention, and not nature. If language is convention, it is therefore superfluous to the understanding and definition of the natural thing. But this is Aristotle, or, if you will, Descartes. The following is instead Vico:

Delle lingue volgari egli è stato ricevuto con troppo di buona fede da tutti i filologi ch'elleno significasser a placito. [. . .] i grammatici, abbattutisi in gran numero di vocaboli che danno idee confuse e indistinte delle cose, non sappiendone le origini [. . .] per dar pace alla loro ignoranza, stabilirono universalmente la massima che le voci umane articolate significano a placito, e vi trassero Aristotile con Galeno ed altri filosofi [. . .].

(*Principj* §444)

Yet, how is conventionalism (*a placito*) credible at all? Is not it, in Vico's ironic and Socratic terminology, just the fruit of an essential ignorance? If one has conventions, one must *already* have societies. And if one has societies, one must *already* have the laws that keep societies together. But how does one have laws without a language? “Come le nazioni, senza le leggi, possono trovarsi diggià fondate?” (*Principj* §67).

The ignorance of logic and scientific method has, therefore, to be denounced. Its own laws exist because a language pre-exists them. Its own logic is a language, a meta-physics that one cannot hypothesize if not as “Providence.” Vico, like Socrates, but differently from Descartes, knows that he does not know; his science is “incerta, informe, oscura” (*Principj* §41). He does not want to “dar pace alla [sua] ignoranza” with some axiomatic certainty. He makes his ignorance, instead, his own strength, because it is ignorance that “partorisce la scienza” (*Principj* §189), because it is only by knowing the impossibility to know what originates a science that the latter does not become dogma. Yet, a (Cartesian) science that lives in the optimism of certain knowledge can never grasp this fundamental aporia. A different science, a new science, is needed for that. It is a rhetorical science, which sharpens its weapons by rehearsing on the beautiful theme of the origin of (its own) language.

2. The Heyday of a Question

Although the problem of the origin of language had been raised before the eighteenth century, it is only in the years around the publications of Giambattista Vico's three editions of the *Scienza Nuova* (1725, 1730, and 1744) that the question acquires unprecedented relevance. The discovery of new linguistic systems made by the Jesuits in their voyages to America and China, the academic institutionalization of Egyptology, which begun about 1715 with Tuki and Wilkins's dissertations on hieroglyphs, and the renewed interest in etymologies launched by Leibniz, had increased both the interest in the study of specific languages, and the concern for the universal foundation and original cause of language in general (Aarsleff 84-100; Iversen 88-123; Kristeva 172). Whereas the biblical dogma of the common origins of both humankind and language had sustained Renaissance theories of language (Aarsleff 178-98; Dubois 17-92), Egyptology and the Jesuits' reports from the new world were now challenging the very foundation of such certitudes. Isaac de la Peyrère, for instance, had debated in 1655 the thesis that the biblical Flood had been but localized in specific areas of Palestine. He could also conclude that the existence of black (African), red (American), and yellow (Asiatic) races proved, beyond any reasonable doubt, that there was no "original" race to inhabit the world before the Flood. Discoveries such as these meant, among other things, that it was wrong to convert to Christianity peoples that were not, in origin, Christian at all (Rossi 153). The world was becoming a coexistence of relative differences, a multiculturalism of sorts.

It is not surprising, in this view, that the notion of an original language started to be raised, for instance, by Leibniz, in order to reconstitute or defend a challenged theocentric, metaphysical system. His *Brevis designatio meditationem de originibus dictus potissimus ex iudicium linguarum*, published in 1710, attempted a first reconciliation of religion with the contemporary rationalistic fashion (Diels). An original language, a *lingua adamitica*, was for Leibniz at the root of all languages, and the original state of linguistic grace could be found again by creating a purely rational, clear language. The origin of language was, then, a *topos* through which one could articulate the truthfulness of one doctrine, and its reconcilability with another one.

The Catholic Church was quick to capitalize on Leibniz's theses, and canonized its own interpretation of the Tower of Babel myth by restricting, however, the limits of orthodoxy (Bedani). In the meantime, the rise of so-called "Cartesian linguistics" (Chomsky; Chovillet; Hildebrandt) was trying to dismiss the question of the origin of language as irrelevant for the purposes of a "natural philosophy" of language. Yet, once again, the theme of original language, even when deprived of "scientific" importance, was handled as a *topos* to prove or disprove something — in this case, the superiority of a science dealing with observable facts rather than with origins.

For eighteenth-century writers, fascinated with the wider world open by conquest and explorations, the question of the origin of language was eminently useful to discuss the origin and essence of society, culture, and its institutions (Cornelius). Already John Locke, though fundamentally disinterested in the question of the origin of language, promoted, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690, the thesis of a contractual origin of speech. Interestingly enough, an allegedly uninteresting question turned out to be a useful *topos* to discuss and claim the contractual origin of society. The categorization of “man” as an animal with speech, still valid in texts as varied as Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues* and Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle*, becomes *doxa* by mid-century (Aurox 1973, 1979; Wells). It serves in turn to convince audiences of opposing theses such as, on the one hand, the goodness of nature, or, on the other, the perfection of society.

However we classify the various eighteenth-century treatments of the theme of the origin of language, we soon discover that each approach is a matter of rhetoric. Locke could certainly not demonstrate the contractual origin of language — a dogmatic assumption indeed — but he did not hesitate to denounce the “fantasies” of the “naturalists” who could have questioned such an assumption. Rousseau’s attack on academies and learned societies constructs his discourse with deep irony about the possibility of a literal belief in the theses that Rousseau himself puts forward (Nicolini). And when Herder (Piovani) discussed the *Sturm und Drang* of the original language, he engaged an aesthetic sense of style and a rhetoric immediately opposed to any French classical or Cartesian norm.

It is in this intellectual climate that Vico gives a new twist to the debate concerning the origin of language. If some of his conclusions are rather in tune with his age (for instance, the fact that institutions and languages are intimately related), others are radically new. Theses such as the beginning of language as a written expression, or its originally metaphorical and poetical essence, were, for instance, nothing less than original. However, more than what Vico says about the origin of language, what is striking for its originality is the way Vico says it. The tone of ironic *sprezzatura* with which Vico demolishes the theses of his adversaries is indeed original in its own right. Some examples: John Marsham “vuol provare” the plain absurdity (for Vico) that the Egyptians preceded the Israelites in knowledge and civilization (*Principj* §44)! Hermann Wits “si tacque” of anything that contradicted his theses (§44)! The whole literature on hieroglyphs and ideograms is a “libreria dell’impostura” (§84)! The histories of so many nations are “boria delle nazioni,” and the thinking of antiquity is often a “boria de’ dotti” (§127-28)!

Execratio, concessio, dubitatio are the rhetorical procedures that Vico adopts when facing contrary opinion. To these one can add the rather impertinent use of antonomasia: “Gli uomini che non sanno il vero delle cose procurano d’attenersi al certo” (§137). His method, Socratic rather than Cartesian, is that of

irony. Vico the *éiron*, “that who interrogates” the *dotti* (pretending he does not know), flips the adversarial thesis into its opposite: “Questa stessa degnità rovescia tutte l’idee che si son finora avute” (§146) — *permutatio ex contrario ducta*. The form of this irony is, more often than not, that of antiphrasis: “Quindi veda Bayle se possan esser di fatto nazioni nel mondo senza veruna cognizione di Dio!” (§1110).

Vico, in other words, recognizes in the question of the origin of language the latency of a rhetorical *topos* — or the *topos* of the latency of rhetoric *tout court* — that cannot be avoided, and that must be faced, instead, with all the instruments of a figural language. In this lies his originality. It is not enough to claim the rhetorical origin of language. What is necessary, in the Age of Science, is to flaunt the inescapable rhetorical nature of ail logic, including one’s own:

“Logica” viene detta dalla voce *logos*, che prima e propriamente significò “favola”, che si trasportò in italiano “favella” — e la favola de’ greci si disse anco *mythos*, onde vien a’ latini “mutus” [. . .] onde *mythos* significa e “idea” e “parola” [. . .] per lo che *logos* o “verbum” significò anche “fatto” agli ebrei, ed a’ greci significò anche “cosa” [. . .].

(§401-02)

It is not only that Cartesian “logic” has its origin in “myth” and “fable”; even its “facts” and “things” are, in the last analysis, “ideas” and “words.” To say, as formal logic does, that if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$ is true — but only within a *mythos* that can accept the paradox that A may be equal to C . Outside of this *mythos* one could only say, as Parmenides claimed, that $A=A$, which amounts to saying nothing. What is “true” and “a fact” is true and factual only within the *mythos*, the word, that articulates it. Or, to put it in Vico’s own words, geometry constructs its own objects through its own *mythos* made of measures. It does know, in the end, *its* reality. Yet, *the* reality does not have, in itself, “punti, linee, superficie e figure” (*Principij* §349).

The *Scienza nuova* thus presents itself as a science, above all, of limits. It is reason itself — the very *deus* of Descartes — that must be limited. This limit, in turn, is nothing less than rhetoric, understood here in a twofold sense: as that which articulates words into a coherent *mythos*, and as that which can convincingly communicate its truths to the “senso comune” (*Principij* §141-42) of humankind: “questi deon esser i confini dell’umana ragione. E chiunque se ne voglia trar fuori, egli veda di non trarsi fuori da tutta l’umanità” (*Principij* §360).

At any rate, this science of limits is a descent into the origin of philosophical reflection itself. It begins and ends with a “know thyself” which is now addressed not only to the individual, but to the science itself. To know means here to think the limits of any science. But can science think its limit? Can logic think its language? If logic is the ground of knowledge, with what knowledge did Aristotle articulate his logic? Where do we start reading Aristotle, from the *Organon*, or from the *Topica*? Are logical categories the forms in which things

are? Or are they the forms of the language that utter and define things? Can there be a meta-discourse or meta-science — a science, that is, “che medita questa Scienza” and tells it “a se stess[a]” (*Principj* §349)? The questions are insoluble for a science — Descartes’s — that uses the instruments of language without knowing it. No doubt, they may remain insoluble for the new science as well. Yet, one advantage for the new science is obvious: “[. . .] questa Scienza [. . .] dell’umane idee, sulla quale sembra dover procedere la metafisica della mente umana” (*Principj* §347) is conscious of its own ignorance. It *does* know that an aporetic “metaphysics” of the human mind must precede its investigation of the human mind. It is, in this sense, an “arte critica” which leads itself, in an infinite regression, to yet another critical science “pur metafisica” (*Principj* §348).

Whether this “metaphysic” is language (Frankel), mythopoiesis (Stam), thinking (Gentile), or the truly divine (yet, whether “Jove” or “God,” the *numen* is still a *nomen*) is of a lesser importance here. What matters is that science and logic have not — cannot — break away from rhetoric and language. A “radical separation” (Brunyeat) of the two is impossible. Because it is not simply that in the beginning was the word, and now, diachronically in the end, it is logic. The word “rhetoric” is not a beginning, but an origin; it is an ethical and eternal ideal, what “dovette, deve, dovrà” (*Principj* §349). In the origin, beginning and end are the same. So that, at the origin, humankind begins by its end: “da ‘humando’, ‘seppellire’, prima e più propriamente vien detta [dai latini] ‘humanitas’” (*Principj* §12).

Duke University

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La definizione dell'incipit

Le prime parole dei romanzi italiani dell'Otto-Novecento non presentano caratteristiche particolari rispetto al resto del testo. In altre parole, se leggiamo un incipit narrativo senza sapere da quale parte del testo proviene, di solito non abbiamo modo di sapere se è un incipit oppure no. La narrativa italiana dell'Ottocento e del Novecento non segue schemi rigidi all'inizio: qui possiamo trovare materiali molto diversi, come dialoghi, descrizioni, commenti, valutazioni, azioni improvvise. Non c'è una specificità nelle caratteristiche testuali degli incipit narrativi nel periodo preso in esame.

Questa considerazione ha diverse conseguenze perché, in un progetto di ricerca, è necessaria una definizione dell'oggetto da studiare. Nel nostro caso, per esempio, se due ricercatori analizzano l'incipit dello stesso testo e il primo si occupa delle prime dieci righe, mentre il secondo analizza le prime tre pagine, sarà molto difficile paragonare i risultati dei due lavori, perché in realtà i due studiosi si stanno occupando di oggetti diversi che hanno soltanto una parte in comune. Nella narrativa italiana degli ultimi due secoli non è possibile trovare un oggetto distinguibile in modo tale da poter dire con una certa sicurezza che si tratta di un incipit: gli incipit narrativi si identificano soltanto sulla base del fatto che si trovano all'inizio dei loro testi. Quello che hanno in comune è soltanto *il tipo di azione che i lettori devono compiere quando li leggono per la prima volta*: i lettori li leggono come incipit.¹

Una porzione di testo è riconoscibile come incipit non per sue caratteristiche, ma soltanto per il luogo dove è collocata. Sulla base di queste osservazioni, sembrerebbe necessario concludere che uno studio dell'incipit narrativo nella letteratura italiana dell'Otto-Novecento non è un progetto promettente. Tuttavia se, da un lato, l'incipit non è riconoscibile in quanto oggetto testuale con sue specificità, d'altro la lettura di un incipit richiede comportamenti cognitivi particolari, in parte diversi da quelli prodotti nel corso della lettura del resto del testo, perché il lettore, quando inizia un testo, attraversa una fase particolarmente complessa, per il fatto che deve fare ampio uso delle informazioni presenti nella sua memoria per ricostruire il mondo presentato nel testo.

Se, nei testi esaminati, l'incipit narrativo non può essere descritto come una parte determinata della superficie del testo, se l'incipit narrativo non finisce in

¹ Parlo di questi argomenti nel libro *Le prime parole. L'uso dell'“incipit” nella narrativa dell'Italia unita*.

modo chiaro dopo un certo numero o un certo tipo di parole, è necessario ridefinire l'oggetto di un progetto di ricerca sull'incipit narrativo, passando da uno studio della superficie del testo ad uno studio del comportamento dei lettori: in questo modo è possibile trovare caratteristiche specifiche riguardanti la lettura dell'incipit.

La lettura dell'incipit di un testo può essere paragonata alla lettura delle regole di un nuovo gioco al quale i lettori stanno per partecipare: l'incipit comunica ai lettori — di solito in modo indiretto — che cosa si possono aspettare e qual è il tipo di operazioni che probabilmente dovranno compiere. Leggendo le prime parole di un testo narrativo, il lettore incomincia ad attivare, nella sua memoria, i *frame* e gli *script*² che sono necessari perché possa ottenere informazioni necessarie alla comprensione del testo che è di fronte ai suoi occhi. La comprensione del testo avviene in seguito all'incontro tra i segni del testo e la competenza linguistica e culturale del lettore.

La parola "lettura", come la parola "gioco", è in realtà un termine generico che include atti tra di loro diversi. La lettura dell'incipit attiva alcune parti della memoria a lungo termine dei lettori, richiamando informazioni sul mondo: in questo modo, è inevitabile che lettori diversi producano effetti di lettura differenti, basandosi su diversi modelli di ciò che viene narrato. Il testo viene così "concretizzato" in modo diverso in diversi atti di lettura. Dopo una prima fase, nella quale si pongono interrogativi a proposito del testo al quale si stanno avvicinando, i lettori incominciano a porsi le domande che la loro concretizzazione del testo suggerisce che devono porsi. Potremmo dire che a questo punto essi sono "all'interno" del testo: non stanno più leggendo le regole di un gioco, ma hanno incominciato a giocare.

È importante osservare che, poiché gli incipit attivano informazioni che vengono dalla memoria a lungo termine dei lettori, è sicuramente inadeguato limitare la ricerca a informazioni che provengono dall'introspezione dello studioso del testo: è molto improbabile che lettori normali compiano le stesse operazioni che compiono i ricercatori esperti in studi testuali. Il procedimento di ricerca letteraria tradizionale — consistente nella lettura del testo da studiare, insieme ad eventuali altri testi storico-critici che riguardano lo stesso argomento — qui non è più sufficiente. È necessario studiare anche i lettori. Gran parte della ricerca testuale contemporanea, basandosi principalmente sulla lettura del testo da parte dello studioso, produce risultati incompleti: gli studiosi limitano l'oggetto dello studio alla loro concretizzazione del testo che stanno analizzando. In questo modo sappiamo poco di come funzionano i testi, mentre veniamo a conoscere qualcosa a proposito degli studiosi, che però sono lettori

² Possiamo tradurre il termine *frame* con "cornice", "struttura", "ordinamento" o "quadro di riferimento" e il termine *script* con "sceneggiatura" o "copione". Si vedano: Bara; Corno e Pozzo (a c. di); Reed.

molto atipici. Negli studi testuali, l'introspezione è un metodo di ricerca molto debole.

La lunghezza dell'incipit di un testo — cioè la durata delle operazioni iniziali di lettura — può essere diversa in lettori diversi, perché dipende dalla competenza, oltre che dall'attenzione e dall'interesse, dei singoli lettori. Quindi la definizione dell'incipit di un testo richiede l'introduzione di una tipologia di lettori, con la descrizione degli effetti probabili dei loro atti di lettura. La durata di questa operazione — cioè la parte di testo che ciascun tipo di lettore legge come fase iniziale — può essere diversa in lettori diversi: non è possibile delimitare l'incipit narrativo come una parte fissa del testo, perché la superficie del testo porta ad azioni di lettura diverse in lettori diversi.

Una volta che è stato determinato lo scopo di un progetto di ricerca, non è facile decidere come è possibile raggiungerlo, cioè quali dati significativi è realisticamente possibile raccogliere in modo affidabile. Nel nostro caso, abbiamo bisogno di informazioni sui processi cognitivi messi in opera durante la lettura dell'incipit di un testo. Il lettore, quando inizia un testo, attraversa una fase particolarmente complessa, perché deve fare ampio uso delle informazioni presenti nella sua memoria per ricostruire il mondo presentato nel testo. In questo caso, come avremo informazioni su cosa accade nell'elaborazione testuale del lettore? In questo esperimento ho provato a raccogliere dati sulle interruzioni della linearità della lettura, cioè sui momenti nei quali non si passa con gli occhi da una parola a quella seguente, ma si fa una pausa o si dirige lo sguardo altrove (verso parole precedenti, parole seguenti o al di fuori del testo), sulla base dell'ipotesi che, quando si interrompe la linearità dell'atto di lettura, questo può indicare un mutamento dell'attività di elaborazione del testo compiuta dal soggetto.

A questo punto si potrebbe obiettare che qui non si sta parlando di studi testuali, ma di studi sulla lettura. Ma si tratterebbe di un'obiezione debole, perché *il solo oggetto di studio testuale che possiamo avere è costituito dall'esito di un atto di lettura*: non possiamo analizzare un testo senza leggerlo e l'atto della lettura mette in gioco la nostra memoria a lungo termine. Quando analizziamo un testo, in primo luogo lo leggiamo e l'oggetto della nostra analisi è costituito dall'esito del nostro atto di lettura. Per questa ragione, per evitare di limitare la nostra analisi all'esito di una soltanto tra le tante operazioni di lettura possibili — e in questo caso un'operazione molto atipica, perché prodotta da una persona che si occupa di testi per professione — è opportuno raccogliere dati da una campionatura che sia più rappresentativa della reale popolazione di lettori.

In questo articolo descrivo un esperimento nel quale ho studiato l'atto di lettura di testi di tipo diverso, prendendo in esame la parte iniziale di otto testi: un romanzo realistico (*Tre operai* di Carlo Bernari); un romanzo che fa uso dello stile del racconto poliziesco (*A ciascuno il suo* di Leonardo Sciascia); un romanzo di tipo fantastico (*Il cavaliere inesistente* di Italo Calvino); un libro di musica (*Breve storia della musica* di Massimo Mila); un libro di filosofia (*Linee*

di storia della filosofia di Nicola Abbagnano); un libro di storia (*Storia dell'Italia moderna* di Giorgio Candeloro); un romanzo che presenta un lungo monologo interiore (*Il male oscuro* di Giuseppe Berto); uno scritto di tipo sperimentale (*Nuovo commento* di Giorgio Manganelli).

Ricordiamo che il testo di Bernari è ambientato in una fabbrica e racconta i primi giorni di lavoro di un operaio; il testo di Sciascia racconta la consegna di una lettera anonima, contenente una minaccia di morte. Nell'inizio del romanzo di Calvino, Carlomagno passa in rivista i paladini dell'esercito francese; tra di essi, uno ha la caratteristica di "non esistere": si tratta, appunto, del "cavaliere inesistente". Il testo di Mila parla della musica dell'antica Grecia; il saggio di Abbagnano è un'introduzione alla storia della filosofia; il testo di Candeloro introduce alla storia politica italiana degli anni che vanno dal 1939 al 1945. Il testo di Berto è un monologo interiore nel quale il narrante parla del suo rapporto con la figura paterna; il testo di Manganelli fa uso di un linguaggio decisamente complesso sia a livello sintattico che a livello lessicale.

Per l'esperimento ho raccolto le risposte di 224 studenti universitari: 112 di sesso maschile, provenienti da una facoltà di scienze applicate (Facoltà di Ingegneria), che chiamerò "Gruppo A" e 112 studentesse, provenienti da facoltà umanistiche (Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Scienze della Formazione e Lingue e Letterature Straniere), che chiamerò "Gruppo B".³ L'età media era di 23 anni nel primo gruppo e 21,4 nel secondo.

Il test è stato effettuato in normali classi universitarie nel corso delle lezioni. A ciascuno dei soggetti è stata data la copia della parte iniziale di uno degli otto testi, spiegando che si trattava dell'inizio di un testo e che il test aveva come scopo lo studio del funzionamento della lettura. Per decisione arbitraria, ho scelto segmenti di testo di circa due pagine e mezzo. Non è stata comunicata nessuna altra informazione, come il titolo, il nome dell'autore o l'anno di pubblicazione. Veniva precisato che il test non aveva scopi valutativi. Ai soggetti è stato chiesto di leggere il testo a velocità normale e di fare un segno nella pagina ad ogni interruzione della linearità della lettura, indipendentemente dalla causa che l'aveva prodotta: il segno doveva essere collocato nel punto esatto nel quale avevano interrotto la lettura. L'esperimento non aveva limiti di tempo: i soggetti potevano leggere alla velocità che preferivano.

Alla fine, quando vedevo che tutti i soggetti avevano finito di leggere, chiedevo di guardare i segni fatti sui fogli e di cercare di ricordare le cause delle loro interruzioni di lettura. Venivano proposti sei tipi di interruzione: "A" ("avanti") se avevano interrotto la linearità della lettura per guardare parole che seguivano; "I" ("indietro") se avevano guardato parole precedenti; "R"

³ I dati sono stati raccolti a Torino nei giorni 11, 12 gennaio, 25, 26, 31 marzo, 14, 18, 29 ottobre e 3 novembre 1999. Ringrazio Edoardo Barbisio, Daniela Calleri, Aldo Canova, Paolo Ferraris, Vincenzo Ferraro, Carla Marello, Mario Pozzi, Luisa Ricaldone, Alberto Tenconi e Marco Vanni per la collaborazione.

(“riposò”) se avevano interrotto la lettura per riposarsi; “E” (“esterno”) se erano stati interrotti dal rumore o da altre cause esterne; “F” (“fantasticheria”) se avevano smesso di leggere per fantasticare su ciò che stavano leggendo; “?” se nessuna delle ragioni precedenti sembrava adeguata o se non si ricordavano. Chiedevo quindi di scrivere la lettera appropriata (“A”, “I”, “R”, “E”, “F”) o il punto interrogativo in modo evidente vicino a ciascun segno. Per facilitare il lavoro, ai soggetti veniva dato un foglio contenente le cinque lettere con il loro significato.

Il foglio conteneva anche tre domande. Nella prima veniva chiesto se avevano già letto il brano in precedenza. La seconda era una scala a cinque modalità, che chiedeva se avrebbero voluto continuare a leggere il romanzo (5 = moltissimo; 1 = niente). Inoltre ai soggetti veniva chiesto di fornire informazioni sul contenuto delle pause di tipo “F” (“fantasticheria”): il questionario conteneva un punto, intitolato “Lista”, nel quale ai soggetti veniva chiesto di numerare le loro fantasticherie e di riassumere molto brevemente, in una o due righe, il contenuto di ciascuna di esse. Il test era anonimo: i soggetti dovevano indicare solo l'età, il sesso e il titolo di studio posseduto. Non sono state utilizzate le risposte dei soggetti che hanno dichiarato di aver già letto il loro testo, perché la rilettura presenta caratteristiche evidentemente diverse dall'atto di prima lettura.

Il test si proponeva di evitare il rischio di disturbare l'atto di lettura in modo pesante, rendendolo innaturale. La sola operazione che i soggetti dovevano compiere durante la lettura consisteva nel fare alcuni segni sui fogli, un'operazione non molto diversa dalla pratica abituale della sottolineatura. I soggetti hanno fatto una media di 10,29 segni in due pagine e mezzo, cioè circa quattro segni per pagina. Per studiare la distribuzione delle interruzioni nel corso della lettura, nei nostri conteggi abbiamo poi diviso i brani in tre parti di lunghezza il più possibile simile, prendendo come punto di divisione la fine di un capoverso e abbiamo calcolato la media del numero di parole per interruzione, in modo da rendere possibile il confronto tra parti di lunghezza diversa.⁴

Il metodo è simile a quello già applicato in un esperimento di Steen Larsen e Uffe Seilman, che hanno proposto una raccolta dei dati divisa in due fasi: in una fase concomitante (durante la lettura del testo) i soggetti fanno un segno sul testo per indicare un particolare evento di lettura (l'evento che costituisce l'oggetto della ricerca) e in una fase successiva (al termine della lettura), il segno — insieme al testo letto — viene usato come sonda per richiamare alla

⁴ Nel testo di Bernari la “prima parte” comprende 327 parole, la “seconda parte” 383 parole, la “terza parte” 416 parole. Ecco il numero di parole per ciascuna parte negli altri testi: Sciascia (305, 332, 524); Calvino (394, 356, 398); Mila (299, 455, 404); Abbagnano (315, 340, 494); Candeloro (285, 329, 406); Berto (549, 330, 430); Manganeli (372, 241, 448).

memoria, in modo presumibilmente affidabile, i dettagli dell'evento di lettura studiato. Si tratta di un procedimento che cerca di ottenere una descrizione il più possibile fedele dell'evento studiato senza però disturbare l'atto di lettura. In questo modo il processo di lettura non viene disturbato in modo pesante, perché leggere facendo segni sul testo (per esempio sottolineando) è un comportamento abituale. D'altro lato, nella fase successiva, la presenza di un segno sul testo, insieme al testo stesso, dovrebbe richiamare alla memoria in modo attendibile l'evento che ha causato il segno. È importante osservare che questo metodo non richiede l'uso di macchinari o di procedimenti particolarmente complessi o costosi. Si tratta di uno dei procedimenti di ricerca più funzionali, affidabili e facili da eseguire tra quelli attualmente disponibili.

Osserviamo però che anche questo procedimento presenta alcuni limiti. In primo luogo, il metodo si fonda sulle risposte dei lettori, che possono capire in modo diverso, decidere di mentire, o rispondere in modo casuale per disinteresse. Per questa ragione i dati possono essere poco affidabili e, soprattutto, non commensurabili tra di loro. A questo limite si può cercare di porre rimedio aumentando il numero dei rispondenti, nella speranza che le differenze si distribuiscano e si bilancino: però non c'è nessuna certezza che ciò avvenga. In secondo luogo, l'aver indicato, all'inizio del test, un fenomeno da segnalare durante la lettura, può aumentare la sensibilità dei soggetti al fenomeno stesso, in modo da incrementare, in modo artificiale, il numero delle segnalazioni. In terzo luogo, questo metodo non sembra idoneo per cogliere eventi particolarmente complessi nel corso della lettura di testi non brevi. In questo caso, la presenza di un segno può sicuramente aiutare la memoria, ma è insufficiente se i segni sono molti e se ciascuno di essi si riferisce a informazioni complesse: al ricordo di ciò che è accaduto nel momento della lettura possono sostituirsi una spiegazione o un riassunto molto incompleto prodotti successivamente.

Inoltre, nel prendere in esame il rapporto tra le risposte dei maschi e quelle delle femmine, dobbiamo ricordare che tutti i soggetti di sesso maschile provengono da facoltà di scienze applicate e tutti i soggetti di sesso femminile da facoltà umanistiche. Nel paragonare il comportamento dei due sessi la variabile del genere sessuale è confusa con quella riguardante il tipo di formazione dei rispondenti: non possiamo quindi sapere se le differenze di comportamento tra i due gruppi sono dovute al sesso degli studenti o al fatto che la lettura di un testo è un atto molto più comune per gli studenti delle facoltà umanistiche. Non possiamo quindi, per il momento, giungere a conclusioni a questo proposito.

La *Tabella 1* presenta la media della distribuzione delle pause negli otto testi. Le pause di tipo "I" sono state di gran lunga le più frequenti in tutti e due i gruppi (44,82% in totale), circa quattro volte la percentuale di quelle di tipo "A" (10,28%). Leggendo un incipit, il lettore sposta spesso i suoi occhi indietro per riorganizzare la sua percezione del testo. Probabilmente deve rivedere

informazioni precedenti, di tipo sintattico o semantico, per poterle elaborare in relazione alle nuove informazioni che il testo propone nelle parole che seguono: per esempio, le parole seguenti possono mostrare che la precedente percezione dell'organizzazione sintattica del testo era errata, o che una parola già letta è stata interpretata in modo non adatto. È anche possibile che il lettore debba cercare nelle parole precedenti del testo delle informazioni che ha trascurato, perché sembravano poco importanti, ma che ora le parti seguenti del testo sembrano richiedere.⁵

Notiamo anche che il "Gruppo B" (studentesse di facoltà umanistiche) presenta una percentuale più elevata di pause di tipo "F" (9,44% rispetto a 6,71%). I membri del "Gruppo B" hanno ricevuto una formazione specifica che riguarda la lettura di testi: è possibile che questo generi una maggiore attitudine alla fantasticherie nel corso della lettura.

TABELLA I

MEDIA DELLE INTERRUZIONI DELLA LINEARITÀ DI LETTURA NEGLI OTTO TESTI

	Gruppo A	Gruppo B	Due gruppi
A (avanti):	1,26 (11,13%)	0,86 (9,25%)	1,06 (10,28%)
I (indietro):	4,92 (43,49%)	4,30 (46,44%)	4,61 (44,82%)
R (riposo):	2,46 (21,70%)	1,88 (20,23%)	2,17 (21,04%)
E (esterno):	0,78 (6,87%)	0,64 (6,94%)	0,71 (6,90%)
F (fantasticherie):	0,76 (6,71%)	0,88 (9,44%)	0,82 (7,94%)
? (sconosciuto):	1,14 (10,10%)	0,71 (7,71%)	0,93 (9,02%)
Totale:	11,31	9,27	10,29

Nota. Il punto interrogativo «?» comprende anche i casi in cui il soggetto non ha scritto nulla vicino al segno di interruzione.

Vediamo ora i dati suddivisi a seconda del testo. La *Tabella 2* indica che la prevalenza delle pause di tipo "I" è comune a tutti gli otto testi. È interessante vedere se le fantasticherie sono più frequenti nei testi letterari rispetto alla saggistica. Osserviamo che probabilmente non è così: la percentuale di fantasticherie non è dovuta al tipo di testo, ma alla sua organizzazione e al suo argomento. Notiamo subito che un testo sperimentale come quello di Manganelli genera notevoli difficoltà di lettura, che lo portano ad avere la percentuale più alta — tra i testi esaminati — di pause di riposo e la percentuale più bassa di fantasticherie. Il testo di Berto (un monologo interiore nel quale il narrante parla del suo rapporto con il padre) presenta la percentuale più elevata di pause di tipo "F", probabilmente perché l'argomento è particolarmente coinvolgente e porta il

⁵ Questi dati confermano i risultati di un esperimento precedente, riguardante la lettura di *Tre operai* di Bernari, che ho presentato nell'articolo *La ricerca empirica sul testo: riflessioni sul metodo*.

lettore ad attivare ricordi della propria infanzia. Il testo di storia (Candeloro) ha una percentuale più alta di pause di tipo “F” rispetto al giallo (Sciascia).

TABELLA 2

MEDIA DELLE INTERRUZIONI DELLA LINEARITÀ DI LETTURA IN CIASCUNO DEGLI OTTO TESTI

	0-Bernari	1-Sciascia	2-Calvino	3-Mila
A:	0,79 (8,24%)	1,25 (14,23%)	1,00 (10,65%)	1,14 (8,47%)
I:	4,00 (41,95%)	3,93 (44,72%)	3,50 (37,26%)	6,46 (47,88%)
R:	2,39 (25,09%)	1,50 (17,07%)	2,36 (25,10%)	2,61 (19,31%)
E:	0,50 (5,24%)	0,54 (6,10%)	0,82 (8,75%)	0,93 (6,88%)
F:	0,82 (8,61%)	0,68 (7,72%)	0,86 (9,13%)	0,93 (6,88%)
?:	1,04 (10,86%)	0,89 (10,16%)	0,86 (9,13%)	1,43 (10,58%)
Tot.:	9,54	8,79	9,39	13,50
	4-Abbagnano	5-Candeloro	6-Berto	7-Manganelli
A:	0,57 (6,48%)	1,00 (11,81%)	1,32 (11,82%)	1,39 (11,02%)
I:	4,96 (56,28%)	3,89 (45,99%)	4,32 (38,66%)	5,82 (46,05%)
R:	1,21 (13,77%)	1,54 (18,14%)	2,46 (22,04%)	3,25 (25,71%)
E:	0,64 (7,29%)	0,68 (8,02%)	0,61 (5,43%)	0,96 (7,63%)
F:	0,68 (7,69%)	0,71 (8,44%)	1,39 (12,46%)	0,46 (3,67%)
?:	0,75 (8,50%)	0,64 (7,59%)	1,07 (9,58%)	0,75 (5,93%)
Tot.:	8,82	8,46	11,18	12,64

La *Tabella 3* presenta la distribuzione delle interruzioni nelle tre parti degli otto testi. Le interruzioni della linearità di lettura sono state più frequenti nella prima parte (una media di una interruzione ogni 91,77 parole negli otto testi), sono diminuite nella seconda parte (ogni 114,23 parole) e sono ancora diminuite nella terza parte (ogni 129,86 parole). Questo indica che, nella lettura delle prime parole di un testo, un lettore deve fermarsi più frequentemente che nei segmenti seguenti. La prima parte di un incipit probabilmente richiede uno sforzo maggiore da parte del lettore che, non conoscendo ancora il significato generale del testo, deve probabilmente elaborare le stesse parole diverse volte: sono quindi necessarie più interruzioni, per poter cercare informazioni nel testo e nella propria memoria. Soltanto nel caso del testo di Abbagnano troviamo un aumento delle pause nella seconda parte, subito seguito da un calo nella terza parte e nel caso del testo di Manganelli troviamo un aumento delle pause nella terza parte rispetto alla seconda.

TABELLA 3

DISTRIBUZIONE DELLE INTERRUZIONI NELLE TRE PARTI DEGLI OTTO TESTI

	Parole	Media delle interruzioni	Media delle parole per interruzione	Variazione rispetto alla prima parte		Parole	Media delle interruzioni	Media delle parole per interruzione	Variazione rispetto alla prima parte
0-Bernari					1-Sciascia				
I parte:	327	3,18	102,88		305	3,11	98,16		
II parte:	383	3,21	119,16	(15,82%)	332	2,36	140,85	(43,49%)	
III parte:	416	3,14	132,36	(28,66%)	524	3,32	157,76	(60,72%)	
Totale:	1126	9,54	118,08		1161	8,79	132,15		
2-Calvino					3-Mila				
I parte:	394	4,21	93,48		299	3,96	75,42		
II parte:	356	2,71	131,16	(40,29%)	455	5,21	87,26	(15,69%)	
III parte:	398	2,46	161,51	(72,75%)	404	4,32	93,49	(23,95%)	
Totale:	1148	9,39	122,22		1158	13,50	85,78		
4-Abbagnano					5-Candeloro				
I parte:	315	2,50	126,00		284	3,00	94,67		
II parte:	340	3,36	101,28	(-19,62%)	329	2,75	119,64	(26,38%)	
III parte:	494	2,96	166,65	(32,26%)	406	2,71	149,58	(58,01%)	
Totale:	1149	8,82	130,35		1019	8,46	120,39		
6-Berto					7-Manganelli				
I parte:	549	5,82	94,31		372	5,21	71,34		
II parte:	330	2,32	142,15	(50,74%)	241	2,29	105,44	(47,79%)	
III parte:	430	3,04	141,65	(50,20%)	448	5,14	87,11	(22,10%)	
Totale:	1309	11,18	117,10		1061	12,64	83,92		
MEDIA DEGLI 8 TESTI									
I parte:	356	3,88	91,77						
II parte:	346	3,03	114,23	(24,47%)					
III parte:	440	3,39	129,86	(41,49%)					
Totale:	1141	10,29	110,92						

La *Tabella 4* indica la distribuzione di ciascun tipo di interruzione nelle tre parti del testo. Notiamo che, mentre le pause di tipo "A", "I" e "R" sono diminuite, le pause di tipo "F" (fantasticheria) sono invece aumentate nel corso della lettura. Sembra quindi che, proseguendo nella lettura, i lettori tendano a fantasticare di più: ciò è probabilmente dovuto al fatto che, man mano che proseguono nella

lettura, si trovano ad aver attivato *frame* e *script* che considerano soddisfacenti e, dedicando meno tempo a riorganizzare la loro percezione del testo — di qui il calo generale delle pause — possono concentrarsi su di una percezione del testo che può portare alla fantasticheria. Si tratterebbe del passaggio da una fase iniziale di lettura di un testo ad una fase centrale, nella quale il lettore si pone meno domande a proposito del testo e compie più operazioni generate dalla lettura del testo. Si tratterebbe della fine della fase iniziale dell'atto di lettura del testo.

TABELLA 4

MEDIA DEL NUMERO DI PAROLE PER OGNI TIPO DI INTERRUZIONE NELLE TRE PARTI DEGLI OTTO TESTI

		Variazione rispetto ad A1		Variazione rispetto ad I1		Variazione rispetto a R1		Variazione rispetto a F1				
Gruppo A	A1:	594		I1:	177		R1:	390		F1:	1810	
	A2:	1139	(91,6%)	I2:	251	(42,0%)	R2:	461	(18,1%)	F2:	1249	(-31,0%)
	A3:	1232	(107,2%)	I3:	287	(61,9%)	R3:	554	(41,8%)	F3:	1540	(-14,9%)
Gruppo B	A1:	1076		I1:	195		R1:	517		F1:	1475	
	A2:	1249	(16,0%)	I2:	307	(57,4%)	R2:	596	(15,2%)	F2:	1291	(-12,5%)
	A3:	1760	(63,5%)	I3:	324	(66,1%)	R3:	725	(40,1%)	F3:	1202	(-18,5%)
Due gruppi	A1:	766		I1:	186		R1:	445		F1:	1626	
	A2:	1192	(55,6%)	I2:	277	(49,0%)	R2:	520	(16,8%)	F2:	1270	(-21,9%)
	A3:	1449	(89,2%)	I3:	304	(63,8%)	R3:	628	(41,1%)	F3:	1350	(-17,0%)

Nota. «A1» è la media del numero di parole per ogni interruzione di tipo «A» nella prima parte del testo, eccetera. Le interruzioni di tipo «E» (esterno) e «?» (sconosciuto) non sono state prese in considerazione in questa tabella.

A questo punto è interessante verificare, nella nostra campionatura che comprende otto testi, se la distribuzione del tipo di interruzioni è in qualche modo collegata al tipo di testo. Potremmo per esempio chiederci se si notano differenze tra testi narrativi e testi di saggistica (Tabella 5).

TABELLA 5

MEDIA DEL NUMERO DI PAROLE PER OGNI TIPO DI INTERRUZIONE NELLE TRE PARTI DI CIASCUNO DEGLI OTTO TESTI

		Variazione rispetto ad A1		Variazione rispetto ad I1		Variazione rispetto a R1		Variazione rispetto a F1				
0-Bern.	A1:	916		I1:	241		R1:	382		F1:	1526	
	A2:	1532	67,32%	I2:	282	17,13%	R2:	466	22,22%	F2:	1341	-12,16%
	A3:	2330	154,43%	I3:	324	34,28%	R3:	582	52,66%	F3:	1294	-15,19%
1-Scia.	A1:	534		I1:	190		R1:	712		F1:	2135	
	A2:	775	45,14%	I2:	387	104,10%	R2:	715	0,48%	F2:	1549	-27,43%
	A3:	2096	292,69%	I3:	358	88,56%	R3:	863	21,27%	F3:	1630	-23,64%
2-Calv.	A1:	1103		I1:	216		R1:	409		F1:	919	
	A2:	1246	12,94%	I2:	399	84,32%	R2:	415	1,65%	F2:	1994	116,85%
	A3:	1114	1,02%	I3:	507	134,17%	R3:	743	81,83%	F3:	1592	73,17%
3-Mila	A1:	492		I1:	150		R1:	441		F1:	1674	
	A2:	1593	223,37%	I2:	187	25,32%	R2:	439	-0,30%	F2:	1416	-15,46%
	A3:	1616	228,14%	I3:	198	32,75%	R3:	452	2,69%	F3:	943	-43,70%
4-Abb.	A1:	1764		I1:	210		R1:	882		F1:	4410	
	A2:	1587	-10,05%	I2:	167	-20,47%	R2:	1360	54,20%	F2:	1587	-64,02%
	A3:	2766	58,83%	I3:	346	64,67%	R3:	814	-7,75%	F3:	1257	-71,49%
5-Can.	A1:	663		I1:	166		R1:	612		F1:	3976	
	A2:	921	39,01%	I2:	318	91,74%	R2:	542	-11,41%	F2:	1024	-74,26%
	A3:	1895	185,92%	I3:	355	114,44%	R3:	874	42,96%	F3:	1263	-68,23%
6-Berto	A1:	809		I1:	214		R1:	439		F1:	1025	
	A2:	1155	42,76%	I2:	462	116,39%	R2:	770	75,32%	F2:	616	-39,89%
	A3:	1204	48,82%	I3:	415	94,46%	R3:	547	24,61%	F3:	1338	30,54%
7-Man	A1:	694		I1:	135		R1:	267		F1:	3472	
	A2:	1125	61,96%	I2:	355	162,55%	R2:	281	5,28%	F2:	2249	-35,22%
	A3:	697	0,36%	I3:	187	38,40%	R3:	448	67,74%	F3:	1792	-48,39%

Nota. «A1» è la media del numero di parole per ogni interruzione di tipo «A» nella prima parte del testo, eccetera. Le interruzioni di tipo «E» (esterno) e «?» (sconosciuto) non sono state prese in considerazione in questa tabella.

La Tabella 5 mostra la media del numero di parole per ogni tipo di interruzione nelle tre parti di ciascuno degli otto testi: più alto è il numero di parole, più bassa è la frequenza di un tipo di pausa. Notiamo che il calo delle pause di tipo «A» ed «I» e l'aumento di pause di tipo «F» nel corso della lettura è comune agli otto testi, con alcune eccezioni. Le più evidenti sono costituite dai testi di Calvino (nel quale abbiamo un calo delle pause di tipo «F» dalla prima alla seconda parte del testo, seguito però da un aumento dalla seconda alla terza)

e di Berto (nel quale abbiamo un calo delle pause di tipo “F” dalla seconda alla terza parte). Nel caso del testo di filosofia (Abbagnano) abbiamo un aumento delle pause di tipo “A” e “I” dalla prima alla seconda parte, seguito però da un calo dalla seconda alla terza. Anche le pause di tipo “R” diminuiscono nel corso della lettura, con parziali eccezioni che riguardano i tre testi non letterari (Mila, Abbagnano e Candeloro). Nel testo di Manganelli, abbiamo un aumento delle pause di tipo “A” e “I” dalla seconda alla terza parte. Tuttavia non si notano differenze regolari collegate al tipo di testo.

Il nostro questionario conteneva anche una domanda — presentata in una scala a cinque modalità — che chiedeva ai soggetti se avrebbero voluto continuare a leggere il testo. La *Tabella 6* presenta l’interesse dei soggetti per la continuazione della lettura. Hanno prodotto l’interesse più alto il giallo (Sciascia) e il libro di storia della filosofia (Abbagnano). Molto basso l’interesse per i testi atipici: il lungo monologo interiore (Berto) e soprattutto il testo sperimentale (Manganelli). Più del 50% dei soggetti ha mostrato poco interesse anche per il romanzo di Calvino e per i libri di storia della musica (Mila) e storia dell’Italia (Candeloro). Esaminando il totale, più della metà delle risposte indica un interesse basso, mentre soltanto il 14,73% indica un interesse alto. Si tratta di un dato notevole, se ricordiamo che i rispondenti sono studenti universitari, cioè persone che dedicano una parte rilevante del loro tempo alla lettura, in particolare il “Gruppo B”.

TABELLA 6 - INTERESSE PER GLI OTTO TESTI: TOTALE DEI GRUPPI A E B

	Int. basso (1 o 2)		Int. alto (4 o 5)	
0-Bernari	12	(42,86%)	4	(14,29%)
1-Sciascia	7	(25,00%)	7	(25,00%)
2-Calvino	18	(64,29%)	5	(17,86%)
3-Mila	19	(67,86%)	4	(14,29%)
4-Abbagnano	10	(35,71%)	7	(25,00%)
5-Candeloro	17	(60,71%)	4	(14,29%)
6-Berto	14	(50,00%)	1	(3,57%)
7-Manganelli	26	(92,86%)	1	(3,57%)
Totale	123	(54,91%)	33	(14,73%)

Nota. I 68 soggetti rimanenti hanno scelto la posizione intermedia (3).

Vediamo, nella *Tabella 7*, se ci sono differenze tra i due gruppi. Ricordiamo che il “Gruppo B” (studentesse di facoltà umanistiche) ha ricevuto una formazione particolarmente diretta verso la lettura. Il “Gruppo B” mostra un interesse maggiore per la continuazione della lettura dei testi, in modo però non uniforme: mostra infatti un interesse minore, rispetto all’altro gruppo, per il romanzo di Calvino, il libro di storia (Candeloro) e il testo sperimentale (Manganelli).

TABELLA 7 - INTERESSE DEI GRUPPI A E B PER GLI OTTO TESTI

	Gruppo A		Gruppo B	
	Int. basso (1 o 2)	Int. alto (4 o 5)	Int. basso (1 o 2)	Int. alto (4 o 5)
0-Bernari	8 (57,14%)	1 (7,14%)	4 (28,57%)	3 (21,43%)
1-Sciascia	4 (28,57%)	2 (14,29%)	3 (21,43%)	5 (35,71%)
2-Calvino	9 (64,29%)	4 (28,57%)	9 (64,29%)	1 (7,14%)
3-Mila	12 (85,71%)	0 (0,00%)	7 (50,00%)	4 (28,57%)
4-Abbagnano	6 (42,86%)	3 (21,43%)	4 (28,57%)	4 (28,57%)
5-Candeloro	8 (57,14%)	3 (21,43%)	9 (64,29%)	1 (7,14%)
6-Berto	10 (71,43%)	0 (0,00%)	4 (28,57%)	1 (7,14%)
7-Manganelli	12 (85,71%)	1 (7,14%)	14 (100,00%)	0 (0,00%)
Totale	69 (61,61%)	14 (12,50%)	54 (48,21%)	19 (16,96%)

Nota. I soggetti rimanenti (29 del «Gruppo A» e 39 del «Gruppo B») hanno scelto la posizione intermedia (3).

La *Tabella 8* ci permette di vedere se c'è un rapporto tra l'interesse per i testi e le interruzioni durante la lettura. Non abbiamo fatto confronti per quanto riguarda i testi di Berto e Manganelli, perché hanno ottenuto soltanto una indicazione di alto interesse ciascuno. Notiamo che i testi che hanno generato un interesse alto presentano una percentuale più che doppia di pause di tipo "F" (il 13,31%, paragonato al 5,81%). Il dato è comune a tutti i testi, con l'eccezione del giallo (Sciascia), nel quale i dati sono molto simili (8,14% paragonato all'8,20%). Osserviamo quindi che è possibile che l'apprezzamento del testo sia collegato alla produzione di una percentuale maggiore di fantasticherie. Inoltre in tutti i testi confrontati notiamo una percentuale più alta di pause di tipo "?" nei soggetti che dichiarano un interesse basso. È quindi anche possibile che il maggiore interesse generi una maggiore attenzione durante la lettura, che determina un ricordo più efficiente delle cause dei singoli segni di pausa.

TABELLA 8 - MEDIA DELLE INTERRUZIONI IN RELAZIONE ALL'INTERESSE PER I TESTI

Interesse:	0-Bernari		1-Sciascia	
	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)
A:	0,75 (9,89%)	1,00 (12,50%)	1,29 (14,75%)	1,71 (13,95%)
I:	2,92 (38,46%)	3,00 (37,50%)	3,86 (44,26%)	5,71 (46,51%)
R:	2,17 (28,57%)	1,75 (21,88%)	1,14 (13,11%)	1,14 (9,30%)
E:	0,50 (6,59%)	0,25 (3,13%)	0,57 (6,56%)	1,29 (10,47%)
F:	0,50 (6,59%)	1,50 (18,75%)	0,71 (8,20%)	1,00 (8,14%)
?:	0,75 (9,89%)	0,50 (6,25%)	1,14 (13,11%)	1,43 (11,63%)
Totale:	7,58	8,00	8,71	12,29
Interesse:	2-Calvino		3-Mila	
	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)
A:	1,00 (9,23%)	1,40 (15,22%)	1,53 (9,51%)	0,25 (4,17%)
I:	3,78 (34,87%)	3,60 (39,13%)	7,95 (49,51%)	3,75 (62,50%)
R:	2,94 (27,18%)	2,00 (21,74%)	3,11 (19,34%)	1,25 (20,83%)
E:	0,89 (8,21%)	1,00 (10,87%)	1,00 (6,23%)	0,00 (0,00%)
F:	1,00 (9,23%)	1,00 (10,87%)	0,84 (5,25%)	0,75 (12,50%)
?:	1,22 (11,28%)	0,20 (2,17%)	1,63 (10,16%)	0,00 (0,00%)
Totale:	10,83	9,20	16,05	6,00
Interesse:	4-Abbagnano		5-Candeloro	
	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)
A:	0,30 (4,76%)	1,00 (7,45%)	1,24 (13,91%)	0,75 (8,82%)
I:	3,70 (58,73%)	7,57 (56,38%)	3,76 (42,38%)	3,50 (41,18%)
R:	0,60 (9,52%)	1,71 (12,77%)	1,88 (21,19%)	0,50 (5,88%)
E:	0,60 (9,52%)	0,86 (6,38%)	0,94 (10,60%)	0,25 (2,94%)
F:	0,30 (4,76%)	1,43 (10,64%)	0,29 (3,31%)	3,00 (35,29%)
?:	0,80 (12,70%)	0,86 (6,38%)	0,76 (8,61%)	0,50 (5,88%)
Totale:	6,30	13,43	8,88	8,50
Interesse:	MEDIA DEGLI 8 TESTI			
	basso (1 o 2)	alto (4 o 5)		
A:	1,20 (10,95%)	1,03 (10,53%)		
I:	4,68 (42,92%)	4,67 (47,68%)		
R:	2,51 (23,03%)	1,45 (14,86%)		
E:	0,85 (7,75%)	0,67 (6,81%)		
F:	0,63 (5,81%)	1,30 (13,31%)		
?:	1,04 (9,54%)	0,67 (6,81%)		
Totale:	10,91	9,79		

Nota. Non sono stati confrontati i dati riguardanti i testi di Berto e Manganelli, perché presentano soltanto una indicazione di alto interesse (Berto: int. basso 14, alto 1; Manganelli: int. basso 26, alto 1).

Nell'esperimento citato prima, Larsen e Seilman hanno studiato l'attivazione di ricordi personali nel corso della lettura. I due ricercatori sono partiti dalla

considerazione che i testi letterari sono spesso percepiti dal lettore come profondamente pertinenti e ricchi di significato, in modo che un testo può suscitare una *risonanza personale* in chi legge, richiamando alla memoria esperienze personali, provenienti dal ricordo di eventi della sua vita. L'esperimento ha raccolto informazioni sui ricordi suscitati dalla lettura di testi di tipo diverso: un testo letterario (un racconto) e di un testo espositivo (un saggio sui problemi generati dall'incremento demografico).

Larsen e Seilman hanno classificato gli eventi ricordati in tre gruppi, che rappresentano un grado decrescente di coinvolgimento del lettore: eventi ai quali prende parte in qualità di *attore*, eventi nei quali è presente in qualità di *osservatore* e infine eventi che gli sono stati riferiti da altri, nei quali assume il ruolo di *ricevente*. I risultati mostrano che il testo letterario ha generato un numero doppio di rievocazioni di esperienze in cui il lettore aveva un ruolo attivo rispetto al testo espositivo. Al contrario, il testo espositivo ha suscitato più ricordi nei quali il lettore aveva il ruolo di osservatore o di ricevente. Questi risultati indicano che la lettura di testi letterari comporta l'attivazione di esperienze personali precedenti, nelle quali il soggetto ha un ruolo di particolare coinvolgimento. Inoltre, in entrambi i testi sono stati attivati più ricordi nella parte iniziale della lettura. Questo è probabilmente dovuto al fatto che il lettore, quando sta costruendo una rappresentazione dell'universo di discorso cui il testo fa riferimento, ha maggiore bisogno di ricorrere ad informazioni provenienti dalla sua memoria episodica, cioè quella parte della sua memoria che contiene ricordi di esperienze personali, dalla quale trarre informazioni per analogia. Una volta che questa rappresentazione è stata costruita, l'universo testuale ha poi meno bisogno di ricorrere all'universo personale del lettore.

L'attivazione di ricordi personali durante la lettura ha rapporti con la produzione di pause di tipo "fantasticherie", perché i ricordi personali sono fonte di materiale per le fantasticherie. Alla fine del nostro test ai soggetti è stato chiesto di fornire informazioni sul contenuto delle pause di tipo "F". Ho raggruppato le risposte ottenute in sei categorie: fantasticherie riguardanti eventi nei quali il soggetto compie un'azione ("1-A" nella *Tabella 9*), eventi o immagini che osserva direttamente ("2-O"), eventi o immagini a proposito dei quali riceve informazioni, anche attraverso la lettura ("3-R"), la ricostruzione della scena narrata o del senso del testo ("4-S"), riflessioni collegate al testo ("5-T"). Le fantasticherie per le quali non sono state fornite informazioni o per le quali le cinque categorie precedenti non sono pertinenti sono state raccolte nel gruppo indicato con il punto interrogativo ("?").

Le prime tre categorie hanno diversi punti in comune con quelle utilizzate da Larsen e Seilman; si tratta tuttavia di fantasticherie e non necessariamente di ricordi di eventi accaduti al soggetto e quindi depositati nella sua memoria episodica. Le fantasticherie raccolte nel corso del mio esperimento riguardano immagini e oggetti, oltre che eventi e si riferiscono anche alle operazioni di elaborazione e di riflessione sul testo che viene letto. Ecco alcuni esempi:

“ricordo mia partecipazione teatrale” (“1-A”, in relazione ad un punto del testo di Mila); “discussioni da bambino col padre” (“1-A”, Berto); “mi è venuta in mente l’immagine dei candelotti d’acqua ghiacciata che sono appesi ai tetti d’inverno, quando gela” (“2-O”, Bernari); “ho pensato alla professoressa (carina) di Filosofia del Liceo” (“2-O”, Abbagnano); “vociare di uomini e latrato di cani in una fattoria (novelle di Verga)” (“3-R”, Sciascia); “fine di una guerra, con il pensiero a quella attuale nei Balcani” (“3-R”, Candeloro); “ho immaginato come poteva essere vedere C. Magno, le sue vesti, i suoi modi di fare ed ho pensato che potesse assomigliare a S. Connery” (“4-S”, Calvino); “pensato sul significato del testo” (“4-S”, Manganelli); “ho esaminato la diversa psicologia dei due personaggi: "l’operaio semplice" e "l’operaio che studia"” (“5-T”, Bernari); “riflessione generica sul mio rapporto con il Mondo e la Natura. Qual è il mio rapporto con essa?” (“5-T”, Abbagnano).

È facile notare che i confini tra le quattro categorie non sono del tutto rigidi. Attribuendo una fantasticheria ad una categoria, non si esclude in modo totale la sua pertinenza con altre categorie. In particolare, quasi tutte le fantasticherie possono in qualche modo essere collegate alla ricostruzione della scena narrata, o del senso del testo, o costituiscono in qualche modo riflessioni collegate al testo. Leggendo le prime parole di un testo, il lettore incomincia ad attivare le informazioni necessarie per comprenderlo. La comprensione del testo avviene in seguito all’incontro tra i segni del testo e la competenza del lettore. Le fantasticherie indicano quale scenario è stato attivato per l’elaborazione del testo.

TABELLA 9 - TIPI DI INTERRUZIONI «F»

0-Bernari				1-Sciascia				2-Calvino			
			Variazione rispetto alla media				Variazione rispetto alla media				Variazione rispetto alla media
1-A:	1	(4,3%)	-72,6%	2	(10,5%)	-33,6%		5	(20,8%)	31,5%	
2-O:	6	(26,1%)	44,7%	3	(15,8%)	-12,4%		2	(8,3%)	-53,8%	
3-R:	2	(8,7%)	-38,8%	3	(15,8%)	11,1%		0	(0,0%)	-100,0%	
4-S:	6	(26,1%)	44,7%	4	(21,1%)	16,7%		12	(50,0%)	177,3%	
5-T:	8	(34,8%)	27,3%	6	(31,6%)	15,6%		5	(20,8%)	-23,8%	
?:	0	(0,0%)	-100,0%	1	(5,3%)	-19,7%		0	(0,0%)	-100,0%	
Totale:	23			19				24			
3-Mila				4-Abbagnano				5-Candeloro			
			Variazione rispetto alla media				Variazione rispetto alla media				Variazione rispetto alla media
1-A:	6	(23,1%)	45,6%	1	(5,3%)	-66,8%		2	(10,0%)	-36,9%	
2-O:	8	(30,8%)	70,6%	6	(31,6%)	75,1%		1	(5,0%)	-72,3%	
3-R:	6	(23,1%)	62,4%	3	(15,8%)	11,1%		7	(35,0%)	146,3%	
4-S:	3	(11,5%)	-36,0%	0	(0,0%)	-100,0%		1	(5,0%)	-72,3%	
5-T:	2	(7,7%)	-71,8%	7	(36,8%)	34,8%		7	(35,0%)	28,1%	
?:	1	(3,8%)	-41,3%	2	(10,5%)	60,5%		2	(10,0%)	52,5%	
Totale:	26			19				20			
6-Berto				7-Manganelli				TOTALE 8 TESTI			
			Variazione rispetto alla media				Variazione rispetto alla media				
1-A:	11	(28,2%)	78,0%	1	(7,7%)	-51,5%		29	(15,8%)		
2-O:	7	(17,9%)	-0,5%	0	(0,0%)	-100,0%		33	(18,0%)		
3-R:	2	(5,1%)	-63,9%	3	(23,1%)	62,4%		26	(14,2%)		
4-S:	5	(12,8%)	-28,9%	2	(15,4%)	-14,7%		33	(18,0%)		
5-T:	8	(20,5%)	-24,9%	7	(53,8%)	97,1%		50	(27,3%)		
?:	6	(15,4%)	134,6%	0	(0,0%)	-100,0%		12	(6,6%)		
Totale:	39			13				183			

I primi tre testi sono romanzi, i tre seguenti sono saggi e gli ultimi due romanzi di tipo sperimentale. Nei primi tre notiamo, rispetto alla media degli otto testi, una percentuale più alta di fantasticherie che portano a ricostruire la scena narrata o il senso del testo (“4-S”). Si tratta di pause descritte con frasi come: “cercavo di immaginare come potessero essere effettivamente quelle macchine” o più semplicemente “ho immaginato la scena descritta” (in relazione ad un punto del testo di Bernari), “cerco di immaginarmi il tipo di persona di cui si parla nel testo, anche fisicamente” (Sciascia), “immaginare la scena, molto sontuosa e importante” (Calvino).

Nei tre saggi notiamo, rispetto alla media degli otto testi, una percentuale più bassa di fantasticherie del tipo precedente (“4-S”) e più alta di fantasticherie che riguardano eventi nei quali il soggetto riceve informazioni, anche attraverso la lettura (“3-R”). Queste pause sono descritte con frasi come: “ricordi di studi e letture fatti su F. Nietzsche in merito a quanto scritto” (Mila), “nozioni riguardo alla visione di Kant della morale e della religione” (Abbagnano), “immagini storiche della guerra in Africa settentrionale” (Candeloro).

È possibile che, nell’elaborazione dei testi di tipo letterario, sia necessario un maggiore lavoro di ricostruzione della scena e del senso del testo che, in quanto testo letterario, non ha riferimenti referenziali sicuri dai quali attingere informazioni e conferme. D’altro lato, i saggi rinviano ad altri libri e ad altre situazioni nelle quali il soggetto riceve informazioni. Per quanto riguarda il rapporto tra i tipi di testi e la collocazione del soggetto che ricorda nei ruoli di attore o osservatore, non troviamo coincidenza con le conclusioni dell’esperimento di Larsen e Seilman. Non notiamo cioè nei testi letterari un numero più elevato di fantasticherie di tipo “1-A” e un numero più basso di fantasticherie di tipo “2-O” rispetto ai saggi. Va però osservato, da un lato, che l’esperimento di Larsen e Seilman ha studiato il comportamento di un numero molto ridotto di soggetti (soltanto venti) in relazione ad un numero molto basso di testi (soltanto due). D’altro lato, l’esperimento di Larsen e Seilman non è identico a quello descritto in questo capitolo: come abbiamo visto sopra, i ricordi personali hanno rapporti con le pause “F”, ma sicuramente non coincidono con esse.

Le conclusioni del nostro esperimento portano a supporre che le differenze principali nel comportamento dei lettori siano dovute alle caratteristiche del segmento di testo letto più che all’appartenenza della totalità del testo ad un tipo. In effetti, qualunque sia il tipo testuale nel quale un testo nel suo insieme può essere collocato, sulla base delle sue caratteristiche globali, ogni testo è composto di parti che svolgono funzioni diverse. Per esempio, sia un romanzo che un saggio possono contenere parti narrative, descrittive e argomentative. Il comportamento del lettore dipende, oltre che dal tipo globale del testo, dal tipo

in cui può essere collocato il segmento che sta leggendo. Inoltre, nel comportamento dei lettori, è determinante l'argomento del testo. Se la pagina che viene letta riguarda l'infanzia o il mondo della scuola, è più probabile che vengano attivati ricordi o fantasticherie nei quali il soggetto ha un ruolo attivo, rispetto ad una pagina che parla di un paese lontano. Questi argomenti sono presenti sia in narrazioni letterarie che nella saggistica. È poi importante osservare che, oltre al contenuto del testo, la semplice presenza di alcune parole e non di altre può favorire l'attivazione di particolari fantasticherie e di particolari ricordi. Va anche ricordato che gli otto segmenti studiati in questo esperimento sono gli incipit dei loro testi. Quindi è probabile che la caratteristica fondamentale delle operazioni di lettura dei segmenti testuali esaminati sia l'attivazione di procedure adatte al primo contatto con un testo: di qui una certa uniformità nel comportamento dei lettori, indipendentemente dai tipi testuali nei quali gli otto testi possono essere collocati nella loro totalità.

Dall'esame dei dati riguardanti le interruzioni nella lettura degli incipit, notiamo poche differenze tra gli otto testi. In tutti i testi si osserva una prevalenza di pause di tipo "I", cioè di pause che indicano attività di rielaborazione di materiale già letto. È possibile che il numero di pause di tipo "F" sia collegato alla competenza dei lettori: più i lettori sono esperti, meno hanno bisogno di pause determinate dal lavoro di rielaborazione della superficie del testo e più fantasticano a proposito dei testi letti.

Dividendo i testi in tre parti, notiamo un calo del numero delle pause man mano che si procede nella lettura. Durante la lettura delle prime parole di un testo, un lettore deve fermarsi più frequentemente che nei segmenti seguenti, probabilmente perché la prima parte di un testo richiede uno sforzo maggiore da parte del lettore, che deve scegliere come concretizzare il testo. Poiché il lettore non conosce ancora il significato generale del testo, deve probabilmente elaborare le stesse parole diverse volte ed ha bisogno di più interruzioni, per cercare informazioni nel testo e nella sua memoria. Notiamo però che, mentre la frequenza totale delle interruzioni diminuisce nel corso della lettura, le pause "F" aumentano. Questo dato è importante: se, proseguendo nella lettura, trovassimo un calo nella registrazione di tutte le pause, potremmo sospettare che non si tratti di un dato affidabile, perché potrebbe indicare soltanto una minore attenzione alla segnalazione delle pause man mano che si procede. La tendenza all'aumento delle pause "F", contemporaneo al calo delle pause di altro tipo, ci fa pensare che esiste un mutamento del comportamento dei lettori nel corso della lettura. Troviamo qui una traccia del passaggio da una fase iniziale della lettura di un testo a fasi successive, il che ci dà informazioni sui "confini degli incipit".

I dati riguardanti l'apprezzamento dei testi mostrano un interesse molto basso per la continuazione della lettura. Notiamo che i rispondenti sono studenti, cioè persone che dedicano una parte rilevante del loro tempo alla lettura: probabilmente mentre l'adulto può considerare la lettura come uno svago, lo studente la vive come atto di lavoro obbligatorio, quindi non gradito, ma fatto

per forza. Si tratta, in realtà, del suo lavoro. Questi dati ci fanno riflettere e possono invitarci a organizzare con molta attenzione lo stile della nostra didattica, che dovrebbe presentare la lettura come fonte di stimolo e di arricchimento culturale ed emotivo, evitando che venga percepita come fastidioso lavoro obbligatorio.

Università di Torino

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Twentieth-Century Recent Theories on Beginnings and Endings of Novels

1.0 Introduction

Storytelling means *in primis* respecting a number of conventions on the part of the storyteller so that these can be recognised by the listener: a beginning, a middle and especially an ending are essential.¹ When a story is told, it is usually framed within the traditional semiotic formulae “once upon a time” and “they lived happily ever after”; the story signposts its limina, marks out and establishes well-defined borders. The *discours* is structured so that it reaches a significant order and form. Storytelling is one of the major categories or systems of understanding to which we turn in our dealings with reality, and in particular with problems of temporality. Inherent in our nature is the need to exist only within the precise confines marked out by death.² And literary forms, among which for example the novel, are some of the forces that organise those meanings which we stubbornly struggle to wrench from time. What emerges, therefore, is not only an awareness of the importance of narrative structures which have induced so many writers and critics to grapple with this fascinating problem, but also the usefulness of having an overview of the many existing approaches, proof of the interest in this subject and of the complexity of the studies dedicated to the beginnings and endings of artistic works, particularly in the literary context.

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¹ For a stimulating discussion on this topic, see Brooks where the author in his attempt to go beyond the purest formalism and structuralism builds the foundation for a convergence between psychoanalysis and literary criticism.

² Walter Benjamin, simply and innovatively, observes that what we are really looking for in narrative construction is that very knowledge of death which we cannot achieve in life: “La morte è la sanzione di tutto quello che un narratore possa narrare” (255).

2.0 Twentieth century interest in textual *limina*

I have already discussed elsewhere some of the many different approaches which twentieth century scholars have used in studying the beginnings and endings of novels (Adamo, 'Riflessioni' and 'Beginnings and Endings' 83-104). The broad spectrum of the studies I examined is an attempt to present in an organic and chronological manner the progress of twentieth-century thinking on narrative *limina* according to the viewpoints of various experts, schools, and currents which have confronted one another, in the larger field of their respective narrative analyses and with varying degrees of acumen and attention, over the problem of how to begin and end a literary text. I believe it is worthwhile to briefly recall the principal positions that emerged from my study.

A number of scholars (the Russian formalists, Propp, Dundes, Bremond, Todorov, Prince, Eco, Greimas) taking as their topic, with a high degree of abstraction, the structural immutability of the *fabula* and of the *narrative model*,³ have shown how the beginning is always characterised by a certain tension, a lack, a negative quality, or at least by a stasis which has to be broken, and how the ending is always the place where the equilibrium is re-established, the lack removed, the negative abolished. The wider interpretations of Kermode and Said have shed light on some of the *biological* reasons that cause people to desire a clear definition of beginnings and endings,⁴ whose structural role, adds Lotman from his semiotic viewpoint, is fundamental within a given culture (135-41). Others have analysed the framework function of *incipit* and *explicit* as places where a discourse on the text and on its codes is concentrated (Hamon, *Texte* 261-84).

On the other hand, those who chose as their subject matter not the *fabula* but the *discours* have provided (or have permitted the inference of) valuable information concerning mode and voice (Genette, *Figure III*, 208-58; 259-310); point of view (Uspenskij 8-172); the problem of time within the confines of the text (Benveniste 289-300, 129; Weinrich; Genette; and all those who studied, for example, the *incipit*-date); the implications of the model and the antimodel (Kermode 131; Calvino, *Appendice* 737); and the relationship with the reader. Of note, in this area, are the various theories of a large body of French critics, such as Barthes, R. Jean, Dubois, and others; the didactic proposals of Verrier;

³ For a definition of narrative discourse, *fabula*, plot, and narrative model, see Segre, *Le strutture* 3-15 and *Semiotica* 29-34.

⁴ Kermode deals with the complex problem of the ontology of narrative forms. His main assumption is that the fading of the eschatological notion of time also entails a fading of the authority which allowed a story to begin and to end. Said comments on the notion of beginning, in general terms, and on *début* as willingness to produce meaning. He underlines the intentional aspect of beginning in the novel literary genre and studies its evolution in Western culture since 1700.

the transverse study of the beginnings of literary works, films, and folklore edited by Caprettini and Eugeni; the examination of beginnings in European novels by Traversetti and Andreani; the computerisation of the topic of the openings of stories prior to the nineteenth century, carried out by SATOR (*Société d'Analyse de la Topique Romanesque*); the reply to Kermodé's *Sense of an Ending* made by Nuttall (212); and the attempt made by Boie and Ferrer to throw light on the relationship between *incipit* and *entrée en écriture*.

In turn, theories of reception (Booth, Lotman, Iser, Eco, Rabinowitz) have contributed to an understanding of what happens at the other end of the chain of literary communication. Finally, others like Grivel have gone into an analysis of the seductive role of the textual framework.

But interest in the topic does not stop here, and the aim of this article is to expand the map of the more significant and stimulating areas of research within the twentieth-century study of textual borders. Twentieth-century thinking on beginnings and endings does, in fact, contain many other aspects that I shall develop below. The diversity of the various critical and literary approaches to the problem ranges from the provocative brilliance of Aragon to Genette's illocutionary interpretation of beginnings, to Del Lungo's brilliant proposal of a poetics of *incipit*, to the wide range of Calvino's posthumous notes on beginnings and endings of novels, to the metanovel of *incipit* by Antonomasia *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, to the concepts of closure and *clausule* analysed respectively (and successfully) by Smith and Hamon, to Torgovnick's attempt at an elastic description of the endings of novels, to the current publishing success of books consisting of the beginnings or endings of novels.

3.0 The mystery of beginnings: the opening sentence

Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire ou les incipit of Aragon is a long, fascinating, and provoking reflection on the difficulties of writing and on the enchantment and power of literary *incipit*. Aragon takes up the French symbolists' ideas on beginnings and artistic creation (one thinks of Mallarmé) and rekindles an interest in the concept of beginnings linked to the inscrutability of their mystery: the beginning as 'the clash of the word with the white space of the text', words colliding against silence (Aragon 47). Aragon excludes any premeditation about the future events in the story to be told. Everything in the novel is arbitrary: the beginning and all the rest that will follow on. And it is precisely to this arbitrary quality that Valéry was referring, with refined scorn, when he said to Breton that

he would never have been able to write a novel (inferior genre) that began, for example, with the sentence: '*La marquise sortit à cinq heures.*'⁵

Aragon is aware of the element of substantial formal uniformity and conventionality that characterises literary beginnings throughout the century and shows his dislike of it (37-8). His dream, refined and evasive, is, indeed, to see the singular nature of the story emerge right from the first lines, not unlike Stendhal who said that every novel must bring something new in the first, or at the latest, the second page.

Aragon attributes a magical significance to the beginning of a story and adopts Kaverin's concept whereby the tone of the first sentence is the one to which the writer listens during the course of the whole novel.⁶ The opening sentence, the *phrase-seuil*, the awakening call, the turning on of the light, the source, the spring, is the one that sets the key for the whole text, and to which the tone of the work conforms (96). Nonetheless, despite Aragon's declaration of the unconditional superiority of beginnings over endings, he does not deny that these too are ineffably mysterious (145).⁷

In 1971, Jean, following the path set by Aragon, wrote an essay on narrative openings or *phrases-seuils*. Acknowledging the authority of Stendhal, Valéry, and Aragon, Jean emphasised the generative power of the opening words.⁸ The first sentence of a novel is a writing gesture that reveals the text, makes it emerge from silence. Writing becomes, as does painting for Braque, a process of restoration-restitution.

Following the same line as Aragon, Pope also writes about the mystery of beginnings and the importance of the struggle to find the first words with which

⁵ Breton recalls that Paul Valéry subscribed to a purist perspective. Within such a perspective he suggested that if he were to gather a conspicuous number of beginnings of novels in an anthology, it would have showed the imbecility of novels' beginnings (314).

⁶ Aragon, marked by a greater creativity and freedom, distances himself from Russian critic V. Kaverin's deterministic concept, used by the latter with regard to Cechov's *incipit* and to the gestation of Tolstoj's *Anna Karenina*'s beginning after one of Pushkin's sentences (93). Kaverin's article, to which Aragon refers, was also published in 1969, in the first issue of the review *Novy Mir*.

⁷ Aragon, like many other authors experiencing difficulties in commencing a work of art, quotes Braque and Beckett. Braque, in his very short 1959 novel, explains his poetics as a painter according to which artistic creation is, in the end, an act of discovery, the unveiling of a pre-existent reality. Beckett, *être de la négation*, writes texts which are almost secretive since they start without ever ending (Aragon, 147-48).

⁸ For the beginning intended as the engine of the text, see also Greimas-Courtés, 81. I briefly recall that Greimas (in *Semantica strutturale* and in *Del senso*) offers two definitions of *beginning*. The one I am using here refers to the beginning as a programme, in a condensed and potential form, of the *récit*. That notion of beginning came into Greimas's system as his contractual theory became more and more important from a theoretical viewpoint.

to begin a narrative.⁹ Pope's mystical interpretation leads to a two-way reading of beginnings depending on whether they are being considered by the writer or by the reader. In the former case, the writer is the conscious vehicle of a voice that is not his own (an immortal voice, perhaps divine, which takes on the form of the human voice of the author). In the latter, the reader, who asks only to be captured, abandons himself to the flow of the opening words and, leaving aside his everyday guide (his rational mind), gives himself over to that voice which slowly creates a fictional world that, although outside time, has time's taste and smell.¹⁰ Beginnings told in the author's manner but not in his voice do not transmit bits of information (which, however, they often carry), but the manner and the authority of the voice through which such functional information will arrive sooner or later.¹¹ In 1984 Lintvelt re-examined the definition of beginnings as the *seuil* (threshold) between the text and the non-text, and established a theoretical model of a beginning which he applied to J. Green's *Moira* and G. de Maupassant's *Auberge*.¹²

3.1 The structural ambiguity of beginnings

In the 1950s, Barthes was one of the first to confront, with a certain lack of prejudice, the problem of the ambiguity of the literary text. His considerations on the double nature of the *passé simple* are the same as those which, years later, we find many critics applying to the *soft* concept of beginnings.¹³ In 1973, Dubois

⁹ On the mystery of beginning, see Corti, 103. On the beginning which stems out from a varied and mysterious background from which the narrating voice takes off (for example, 'Call me Ishmael' from Melville's *Moby Dick*) see Calvino, 'Appendice', 738.

¹⁰ For a different approach to the study of the author as a guide, Booth discusses the theory of the reliable narrator as dramatized spokesman of the implied author (211-34).

¹¹ Pope exemplifies his theory with references to the beginnings of *La metamorfosi*, *Le rovine circolari*, *Lolita*, and *Cent'anni di solitudine*. He chose those *débuts* not because of the gracefulness of their narrating voices, but because he could not resist their greatness and richness (749).

¹² Lintvelt ('L'ouverture et l'ensemble' 520-27) has set a theoretical model to be applied to literary beginnings. That model is based on 4 possibilities: 1) relations between text and *hors-texte*; 2) relations between text and *avanttexte*; 3) *topoi* of beginnings (drawn from Dubois 435; Duchet, 'Idéologie 36-101'); 4) narratological analysis (Genette's *Figure III*).

¹³ I call that concept *soft* in a Lachanian sense, since *incipit* cannot be easily defined. The authors that I quote in my article never refer to an unitarian definition of *incipit* which in fact does not exist. Contemporary criticism shows uncertainty. Some critics (Jean, Duchet) mean for *incipit* the very first sentence of the text; others (Dubois) prefer the notion of *entrée en matière* (to designate the *récit*'s first unit which goes from the actual *incipit* to the first scene. Nevertheless they do not suggest any selective *criterium* for the

wrote an article, fundamental to the study of beginnings, which contains considerations similar to those of Barthes:

[. . .] le texte réaliste rencontre deux exigences difficilement conciliable. D'un côté, il se doit de mettre la fiction en train, d'en instaurer l'appareil (sujet, personnages, décor, instance narrative [. . .]). De l'autre, il vise à produire les garanties de l'authenticité de son dire, en faisant référence à un *hors-texte* et en masquant le caractère fictif de son geste initial.

(491)

In 1976 Cornille produced an article that contained similar reflexions.¹⁴ The *incipit* is conceived as a feint (*feinte*) which is at the root of every novel, a feint which reveals the difficulty of every beginning.¹⁵ Tension results from the contradictory demands to appear as real at the same time as the fiction is set in motion. The *incipit*, therefore, is the site of tension between the illusion of reality and the declaring of that illusion (52). A few years later, Brombert insisted forcefully on this same aspect with his brilliant suggested reading of the opening of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, a striking example of the duplicity inherent in beginnings, of their twin nature suspended between the desire to appear truthful and the duty to declare their own fictitious nature, between the creation of the illusion of realism and the revelation of the notion of mimetic representation (497-501).¹⁶

In the same year (1980), Coletti too insisted on the *doppio gioco* of beginnings which if, on the one hand, signal their own veracity (let the example of *incipit-date* suffice for all), on the other, ostentatiously reveal the signs of their literary fictitiousness (185; rev. ed. 143). In addition, Linvelt in

definition of *incipit*). Some like Lintvelt seem not to be bothered by the problem, whereas others (Cornille, Del Lungo) talk of *première unité du texte* whose extent is variable.

Furthermore, according to Barthes's theory, the *passé simple* has had a fundamental role within Western bourgeois society's artistic conception of which the novel is a characteristic product. It gives to the imaginary the formal guarantee of reality; it leaves to that mark the ambiguity of a double object, simultaneously *vraisemblable* and false. The *passé simple* of novels defines verisimilitude while designating it as false. It establishes a credible continuity whose illusion is, in fact, exhibited. It re-dresses with *truth* the unreal: it is a *menzogna manifesta* (32-3).

¹⁴ The author proposes a criterion of delimitation of the *incipit* in terms of the search of an effect of closure. This way of defining an *incipit* will be briefly addressed by Del Lungo.

¹⁵ On the difficulties in beginning a narrative, Genette identifies seven beginnings in Proust's *Recherche*, and underlines the zigzag movement of such an initial stammer which mimes the inevitable difficulty of all beginnings (*Figure III*, 93).

¹⁶ Brombert provides an analysis of the narrative opening signals by different critical points of view, which place special focus on the answers to the three basic questions of every narrative *incipit* — who? where? when?

'L'ouverture' reminds us that in order to create the necessary illusion of truth (to which corresponds the fact that in a novel's beginning the reader wants truthfulness and honesty [Coletti 184; rev. ed. 142]), the text attempts, from time to time, to authenticate itself as a chronicle, a letter, a memoir. It has recourse to temporal definition; it makes use of authentic topography; it appeals to the reader's encyclopedic knowledge (162).

More than ten years later, Del Lungo emphasised once more the two-fold role of the literary beginning. At the same time as opening the door into the fiction, it must justify its own right to speak and legitimise its function as a start (which, I would remind you, was one of the roles of the classical *exordium*, whose function was to exorcise the arbitrary nature of the opening). The *incipit*, moreover, is also the locus of a paradoxical ambiguity: it has to say as much as possible and, at the same time, as little as possible (138).

3.2 Informative beginnings

Dubois introduced the designation of the *entrée en matière*. This phrase indicates the passage (very hard to describe) from chaos to the *unicum*, from the arbitrary to the necessary, from the insignificant to the significant, from the casual to the causal. According to Dubois, every beginning is defined by two elements which are apparently irreconcilable, but which in reality are indivisible, a *surcodage* and a *protocole de lecture*, which anticipates the whole novel (491).

In 1971, Duchet, in setting out his critical-sociological approach to the problem, had defined beginnings as a place of transitivity,¹⁷ a place where the text is set in motion, where world and word, life and talk, necessity and freedom are interchanged, and where the choice of a "then," and a "next," and the projection of a particular meaning are decided in conjunction, after all other possible meanings have been suspended (9).¹⁸ Subsequently, in 1980, Duchet defined the narrative beginning more clearly as a strategic place conditioned by four elements: 1) relationship with the title; 2) relationship with the *hors-texte*; 3) relationship with the text; 4) rhetoric of beginnings (stock phrases, techniques required by the setting of the scene, whose function is to answer the initial 'Who? Where? When?' and to stimulate expectation and surprise in the reader).

¹⁷ For the opposition between *transitive* and *intransitive* beginnings, see also Said, 7.

¹⁸ Duchet applies a critical and sociological approach to his subject. He proposes a backwards reading of beginnings as passage from syntagmatic (text) to paradigmatic (world), as going back from the novel's opening gestures to that *archeology of knowledge* that Duchet draws from M. Foucault. *Madame Bovary's incipit* is the example chosen by Duchet. In a few masterly touches, Flaubert represents in the first lines of the text the social stratifications depicted in his novel.

Reaching a conclusion that is the opposite of Aragon's, Duchet maintains that all novel beginnings involve a technique and cannot be ascribed solely to the arbitrariness of an omnipotent demigod (101). Both Dubois and Duchet, despite their respective and diverse viewpoints, emphasise above all the informative nature of the beginnings of novels.

3.3 The illocutionary force of beginnings

In 1989, Genette, referring to an article by Searle, examined the pragmatic statute of narrative fiction.¹⁹ The French scholar attacked two corollaries of Searle's theory: 1) the description of the fiction as an assertion is exclusive; and 2) the pronouncements of the fiction have no meaning other than the literary one. For Genette neither corollary is true. It cannot in fact be excluded that the pronouncements of the fiction are at the same time something else, and that the novelist, while pretending to make assertions (on fictitious beings) is doing something else, which is creating a novel. At this point, and this is what really interests me, Genette wonders if it is not rather the case of including fictional statements among the non-literal ones: both figurative (e.g., 'You are a lion'), and indirect (e.g., 'Would you pass me the salt?'). And the answer is affirmative. In order to explain it, Genette turns to the example of the prophetic signal of the fictional, "Once upon a time," which is certainly a fictional assertion (not serious, in Searle's language), but is also a figurative statement (according to Genette's suggestion). This second aspect of "Once upon a time" hides its true reality, its zero degree, its primary pragmatic force, which is threefold. First, it is a request: 'Try to imagine that there was a time.' Then, it is a performative declaration: 'Now I am causing you to imagine that there was a time.' Finally, it is an obviously serious assertion: 'Now I want to create in your mind the fictional story in which there was a time.' The difference between the direct formulation (1) and the declarative (2,3) is that the effect of 2 and 3 is more marked. For Genette, the second is the most correct formulation:

¹⁹ Genette chooses only the third person *eterodiegetic* and *extradiegetic* narration as the object of his study, and wants to define which type of speech acts are performed by the author in texts of that sort (237-8). In order to do so, he departs from Searle's theory which considers narrative assertions not to be speech acts.

One consequence of Searle's viewpoint is that fiction is not a specific illocutionary act; it is a problematic one and, in fact, Genette questions it and succeeds in correcting it. I would also like to recall that, on different grounds, Chatman tried to apply Austin's speech acts theory to the analysis of literary narrative sentences (see his reading, for example, of the beginning of *The Brothers Karamazov*). Chatman insists upon the fact that characters' speech acts are logically different from those of the narrator (161-65).

La fiction narrative, comme la fiction mathématique et sans doute quelques autres, peut donc être raisonnablement décrite, dans son état primaire et sérieux, comme une déclaration au sens searlien, et donc comme un acte illocutoire *sui generis*, ou du moins *sui speciei*, dans le genre plus vaste des illocutions déclarative à fonction instauratrice.

(242)

The “Once upon a time,” which Searle defines simply as a pretend assertion, can be understood (according to Genette) as an indirect illocutionary act for which the fictional pronouncement acts as the vehicle and whose value is *ad libitum* a request, a performative declaration to start the story, or another true assertion. What interests Genette is a fuller definition (fuller than Searle’s) of the ordinary statements of fiction as pretend assertions which hide, with varying degrees, very serious declarations and requests that must be considered as declaratory acts. Genette concludes his article by raising two other problems connected to the first. First of all, taking the gnomic beginnings of *La princesse de Clèves*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, he shows that it is definitely not true that all the statements of a work of fiction are fictitious, but that they can also be serious, as the beginnings of these novels demonstrate. Then, he asks that we not underestimate the fact that alongside the voluntary pragmatic force (voluntary on the part of the author) of the fictional statements there also exists an involuntary one, whose illocutionary strength is not the same at both ends of the literary chain of communication (245-6).

I found Genette’s proposals very stimulating, and I believe that the idea of the narrative beginning endowed with an illocutionary power that serves as a performative speech act to start the novel can be extended to all narrative beginnings and explains even those which appear most obscure and elliptical.

3.4 For a poetics of beginnings

Del Lungo set out a number of criteria for a poetics of *incipit*. After indicating some of the more significant contemporary ideas on beginnings, arguing with some of them and adopting a Jakobsonian position,²⁰ he arrived at a definition of beginnings that was sufficiently elastic to allow him to overcome the typical difficulties encountered by all those who study beginnings:²¹

²⁰ I am mainly referring to Jakobson’s six-part scheme used by Del Lungo (134) regarding three fundamental functions of narrative *début*: 1) referential (setting up its context); 2) metalinguistic (setting up its code); 3) phatic (setting up its contact with its addressee). It should be noticed that the latter has a double goal offering a strategy for orientation and one for seduction.

²¹ The question of beginnings’ variable geometry, of their spatial delimitation is one of great urgency. Del Lungo refuses to identify the *incipit* with the first sentence of the text, preferring the notion of *incipit* as *première unité du texte*: a unit which goes from the first

[. . .] — un fragment textuel qui commence au seuil d'entrée dans la fiction [. . .] et qui se termine à la première fracture importante du texte; — un fragment textuel qui, de par sa position de passage, peut entretenir des rapports étroits, en général de type métonymique, avec les textes qui le précèdent et le texte qui le suit, l'*incipit* étant non seulement un lieu d'orientation, mais aussi une référence constante pour le texte suivant.

(137)

This definition also permits elements that are outside the text to be included in the *incipit*.

After emphasising the two-fold structural role of beginnings, Del Lungo then identified four functions of a beginning: 1) to begin the text (the codifying function); 2) to arouse the reader's interest (the seductive function); 3) to set the scene for the narrative fiction (the informative function); 4) to set the story in motion (the dramatic function) (138).²²

It was in relation to functions 3 and 4 that Del Lungo set out his theory of the *incipit*. Within the third function (informative), Del Lungo made the following distinctions: a) the thematic function (reference to the real world, to information outside the text); b¹) the metanarrative function (concerning the organisation of the narrative); b²) the constitutional function (concerning the construction of the fictional world).

Now these three functions allow the drawing of an axis which encompasses the whole range that goes from the saturation of information to the rarefaction of information which it is possible to find in an *incipit*. As for the dramatic function (point 4 above), it is necessary to make a distinction between two possible ways

lines to the first (formal or thematic) fracture which indicates the end of the *incipit*, and whose signals may be different (typographic, narratological, linguistic). (For this definition see also Cornille 50). Del Lungo also wonders where an *incipit* actually begins, because sometimes it may be unclear (see, for example, the beginning of Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*).

²² Within each of those four functions, further specifications can be found. I) A codifying function which may be: direct (metatextual discourse), indirect (intertextual reference), implicit (latent signals). II) A seductive function which is characterized by: use of the enigma, unpredictability (*Tristram Shandy*), explicit determination of the reading pact (*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*), immediate dramatization (*incipit in medias res*). Note that within the seductive function Del Lungo does not take into consideration beginnings' aesthetic value which in my view is essential. III) An informative function which may be: on text, and in this very case it does coincide with the above-mentioned (I) function; on referent (that is on the world); on fiction (that is, on story, or on discourse). IV) A dramatic function, according to which a text can start off *in medias res* or enter progressively into the plot (138-44). As for this interpretation I would like to stress that, although Del Lungo does not acknowledge this fact, it was Coletti in 1980 who first signalled the different speed of language opposed to the very beginning of the narration (Coletti, 136-7).

of entering into the narrative: I) *in medias res*; II) progressively, deferring the action to the heart of the story. Based on I and II (that is, according to whether the entry into the action of the story is immediate or delayed) we have a second axis, similar to the first, which goes from immediate dramatisation to deferred dramatisation (144).

The conclusions drawn by Del Lungo are that the first two functions, codifying and seductive, are transverse and constant, while the last two, informative and dramatic, are variable. This variability is measured by the intersection of the first axis (saturation of information/rarefaction of information) with the second (immediate dramatisation/deferred dramatisation). The schema thus obtained allows for *incipit* to be classified as follows: static (with saturation of information and deferred dramatisation, for example, Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*); progressive (with saturation of information and immediate dramatisation, eg. Zola's *Germinal*); suspended (with rarefaction of information and delayed dramatisation, for example, Beckett's *L'Innomable*); dynamic (with rarefaction of information and immediate dramatisation, for example, Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*) (145).

The two functions at the basis of the classification of each *incipit* are hierarchically different: the dramatic function prevails in dynamic *incipit*, while the informative one dominates in static *incipit*. They co-exist in the progressive *incipit*; they are absent (or seem to be) in the suspended *incipit* which appears almost to be a refusal to begin. Del Lungo concludes by suggesting a chronological reading of beginnings from Balzac (static beginnings) to Beckett (suspended beginnings). But I do not agree with this last point, because it is possible to disprove it if one thinks, for example, of the beginnings of *Jacques le fataliste* and *Tristram Shandy*, which to me are two striking examples of suspended *incipit*, even though they belong to the eighteenth century.

3.5 The seduction of beginnings: The case of Italo Calvino

With *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, Calvino succeeded in writing a novel of beginnings. Within the sphere of his rigorous search for the meaning and function of literature, Calvino, particularly sensitive to the metanarrative dimension of the literary text, defined his anxiety over the problem of beginnings in this work. He himself stated:

[. . .] è come se nel momento dell'attacco il romanzo sentisse il bisogno di manifestare tutta la sua energia. L'inizio d'un romanzo è l'ingresso in un mondo diverso, con caratteristiche fisiche, percettive, logiche tutte sue. È da questa constatazione che sono partito quando ho cominciato a pensare a un romanzo fatto solo di inizi, quello che è diventato *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*.

We also know, furthermore, from an *explicit* declaration by Calvino, that *Se una notte* is not the only case where the problem of how to begin has become the very theme of the novel itself; something analogous was also attempted in *Cosmicomiche* (750). Calvino's fundamental concept is that literary beginnings (and endings) are decisive because they delineate "un mondo a se stante, autonomo, autosufficiente, un mondo ipotetico, uno dei tanti possibili, un'isola in un arcipelago, un corpo celeste in una galassia" (750-1). The literary beginning is the transition from the unlimited possibility of saying everything in every possible way to saying only one thing in only one way:

Fino al momento precedente a quello in cui cominciamo a scrivere, abbiamo a disposizione il mondo [. . .] e noi vogliamo estrarre da questo mondo un discorso, un racconto, un sentimento [. . .] Ogni volta l'inizio è questo momento di distacco dalla molteplicità dei possibili: per il narratore l'allontanare da sé la molteplicità delle storie possibili, in modo da isolare e rendere raccontabile la singola storia che ha deciso di raccontare stasera.

(734-5)

The beginning, therefore, is the transition from the universal to the particular.

In *Se una notte* Calvino, influenced by the refined and extremely literate literary games of his friends in Oulipo,²³ created, in Coletti's words, 'il più singolare trattato di narratologia che si conosca' (143), in which the problem, the seduction, and the obsession of beginnings, as well as their ambiguous role as the signpost of fiction and at the same time of veracity, become the subject of the narrative, or rather of the metanarrative.²⁴

It seems to me that the possibility of a novel composed of beginnings, exemplified by *Se una notte* in the form of a continuous conversation with the reader, could be called a success from the point of view of the metanarrative, but

²³ Amongst the most important exponents of Oulipo, I refer here to Queneau and Perec. Queneau in his very refined literary texts, based on his combinatory *virtuosismo* built upon breathtaking linguistic games, succeeds in achieving comic, oddity, and paradoxical textual effects. Perec, perhaps the most creative and most imaginative member of Oulipo, was a genius of catalogations. Given that his poetics might sound mechanical and arid, it is, on the contrary, incredibly rich and inventive. It is well known that the gestation of Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* was largely influenced by Oulipo literary games.

²⁴ Calvino writes: "Ho riflettuto sul mio ultimo colloquio con quel Lettore. Forse la sua intensità di lettura è tale da aspirare tutta la sostanza del romanzo all'inizio, cosicché non ne resta più per il seguito. A me questo succede scrivendo: da qualche tempo ogni romanzo che mi metto a scrivere s'esaurisce poco dopo l'inizio come se già vi avessi detto tutto quello che avevo da dire. M'è venuta l'idea di scrivere un romanzo fatto solo di inizi di romanzo. Il protagonista potrebb'essere un Lettore che viene continuamente interrotto.[. . .]" (*Se una notte* 197-8).

it is certainly not successful from the point of view of the narrative, which requires that a novel cannot be nothing more than a beginning, but must also be capable of moving forward, of reaching an end. Nonetheless, the dream of Calvino who, let us not forget, wrote only short stories and novels and never a long novel, was precisely to maintain in the rest of the novel the fascination which is to be found in its pure state in the first sentences of a book.²⁵ Contaminating Borges's ideas of the infinite novel with the eastern model of *A Thousand and One Nights*, Calvino's novel manages to exist by creating the desire to listen to the story and ensuring that the tension of the beginning is not lost in the telling. *Se una notte* is a metastory in which the pragmatic and conative functions of its poetic message are the most important. The narrator speaks openly to his reader, deceiving, disillusioning, provoking and, as a result, constantly exerting a fascination over him. Hand in hand with the plot of books constantly begun and never brought beyond the beginning is the plot of the readers, male and female, who are called to read and co-operate with those broken beginnings and to place conditions on the writer. With an irony typical of Calvino, the book, which opens and closes iconically,²⁶ finishes with a very particular happy ending that alludes with irony to the conclusive endings so beloved of readers, that is, with a marriage, not of lives, but of the parallel readings of the two protagonists.

4.0 The arcane element in endings

Ejchenbaum and Tomaševskij observed that in the global economy of the narrative rhythm of a novel, the conclusion presents a structure that is an

²⁵ In Calvino's words: "Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un *incipit*, che mantenesse per tutta la sua durata la potenzialità dell'inizio, l'attesa ancora senza oggetto. Ma come potrebbe essere costruito, un libro simile? S'interromperebbe dopo il primo capoverso? Prolungherebbe indefinitamente i preliminari? Incastreterebbe un inizio di narrazione nell'altro, come le *Mille e una notte*" (177)? The utopian nature of such a proposal is unveiled earlier in the text where Calvino, referring to the present day classic *incipit* used by Schultz's Snoopy, "It was a dark and stormy night," says disenchantedly: "quel cane mitomane non riuscirà mai ad aggiungere alle prime sei parole altre sei o altre dodici parole senza rompere l'incanto" (176-7).

²⁶ "Stai per cominciare a leggere il nuovo romanzo *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* di Italo Calvino. Rilassati. Raccogliti. Allontana da te ogni altro pensiero. Lascia che il mondo che ti circonda sfumi nell'indistinto" (3). And here is the ending, circular and ironically metatextual: "Ora siete marito e moglie, Lettore e Lettrice. Un grande letto matrimoniale accoglie le vostre letture parallele. Ludmilla chiude il suo libro, spegne la sua luce, abbandona il capo sul guanciale, dice: 'Spegni anche tu. Non sei stanco di leggere?' E tu: 'Ancora un momento. Sto per finire *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* di Italo Calvino'" (263).

anticlimax, a slowing down, a reduction, an annulling of the narrative tension (*Spannung*). In the 1960s these ideas blossomed in the works of Herrnstein Smith, whose *Poetic Closure* represents a milestone in contemporary studies on literary endings. To be completely accurate, the first person to raise the problem of literary endings, in the poetic instance, was I. A. Richards in his short and eccentric essay written in 1963, while the person who most definitely rekindled interest in this long-neglected problem was Kermode in 1967.

In the wake of Herrnstein Smith's essay dealing with endings in poetry, other important studies were published among which are Hamon's '*Clausules*,' Torgovnick's *Closure in the Novel*, and the volume of the periodical *Yale French Studies* dedicated to the concept of closures.²⁷

The proposals of the above-mentioned authors are concerned with the definition and the modality of poetry endings (Richards, Herrnstein Smith) and novel endings (Hamon, Torgovnick). Their diverse stances have given rise to fertile discussion with which I intend to deal in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Poetic endings and closure

In her volume, Herrnstein Smith looked at a wide range of Anglo-American poetry and studied how they ended. She focused on metrical forms from Renaissance sonnets to the most recent avant-garde experiments of no-structure and anti-closure typical of most modern poetry. Unlike Richards (164-5), she did not believe that the poetic text was a self-contained entity that contained its own beginning and ending. Consequently, the closure or the failure of closure cannot be explained only in terms of the text (as Richards claims), but are an effect of the reader's experience.²⁸

The fundamental point of her argument is that all the procedures of closure that she indicates (38-195) are never conclusive in themselves and can, in fact, easily be found in other parts of the text, but it is the perception that the reader has of these elements that makes them conclusive. Always bearing in mind the relationship between structure and closure in poetic texts, Herrnstein Smith tries to identify rhetorical techniques similar to those that socio-linguists attribute to

²⁷ Larroux also offers a rich bibliography on spatial delimitation of *incipit* and conclusion (227-37).

²⁸ It should be noted that Herrnstein Smith's study was published in 1968, showing that she has elaborated the contemporary reflections on the renewal of importance of the reader's role in the creative process of textual meaning. The notion of closure that every reader formulates about a given text is genetically linked to at least two factors: 1) the relation between text and spoken language; 2) literary codes (30).

speakers of oral dialogue, whose purpose is to announce, to organise, to emphasise the end of a poem.²⁹

The closure of a text is concerned with the sense of completeness that the reader draws from it, and this often depends on the type of forms we use to identify it.³⁰ In other words, closure occurs when the conclusive part of a poem creates in the reader a sense of appropriate cessation. Some of the more common procedures used to determine the closure of a poem are: verbal repetition, metric regularity, formal parallelism, non-modified absolute assertion, clausal reference, oracular statement (195)

Of particular interest is the interruption of a repetition (formal or thematic). Repetition, in fact, tends to give stability to the poetic structure, and the longer it lasts the stronger is the reader's desire for variation and conclusion. Repetition produces many effects (boredom, weariness, impatience), but not closure. Closure requires the introduction of a variation, something which will break the anti-conclusive flow of the repetition (50-95). Another element which is identified as being strongly conclusive is thematic concentration at the end of a poem.³¹

If Herrnstein Smith's theories were formulated in relation to poetry, it is nonetheless true that the above ideas are also valid where the novel is concerned. Coletti in particular successfully applied the *rule* of interrupted repetition to the endings of various novels, noting, for example, that many endings have one or more statements on an ascending climax which are immediately contrasted with an opposite statement, often linked by a conjunction (*and, but*) or by an adverb of immediate consequentiality (*then, therefore*). In these cases

si può notare come la fine sia preceduta da un vero e proprio affollarsi di verbi, da un ingorgo fatto di accrescimenti ritmici ravvicinati, cui segue, più o meno distesa ma quasi sempre asimmetrica, una frase ritmicamente rovesciata.³²

(155)

²⁹ For a socio-linguistic approach, see Schegloff and Sacks. The two authors develop a totally empirical analysis on conversation and on the ways used by speakers to signal their addressees the end of the conversation.

³⁰ "Our sense of the completeness of a form, in other words, often depends upon the class of forms with which we identify it. We will know that a sonnet is complete *as such* only if we know what sonnets are" (26-7; original emphasis).

³¹ "The force of the whole piece, is for the most part left to the shutting up; the whole frame of the Poem is a beating out of a piece of gold, but the last clause is as the impression of the stamp, and that is it that makes it current" (John Donne, *Sermons*, qtd. in Herrnstein Smith 37).

³² As an example, the ending of Buzzati's *Deserto dei tartari* could be mentioned: "Giovanni raddrizza un po' il busto, si assesta con una mano il colletto dell'uniforme, dà ancora uno sguardo fuori della finestra, una brevissima occhiata, per l'ultima sua porzione di stelle. Poi nel buio, benchè nessuno lo veda, sorride" (210).

And it is certainly not a coincidence that Rabinowitz when talking about *and, but, then, therefore*, etc. used the terms *intratextual disruptions, ruptures* (66). Finally, Loafer identified on a lexical level certain pre-closure adverbs such as *never, eventually, finally* (301).

4.2 Clausule and closure

Following *Poetic closure*, Hamon published an important article on the subject of literary endings entitled 'Clausule'. He went back to the Latin origin of *clausula*, deploring the age-long lack of interest in the topic, and applying the term equally to poetry and prose (poetry in the Jakobson sense) (497-8). He made a distinction between *clausule* (formal) and *clôture* (thematic), and emphasised the necessary intervening relationship between a text's *fin* (its *clausule* in the strict sense of the word), its *finalité* (its ideological function: greater or lesser *lisibilité* of the text, its conative or referential functions), and its *finition* (in the traditional sense of closure, internal coherence, stylistic, and structural completeness) (499).³³

In the average modern reader, the sense of clausula is identified with the perception of the interaction among the three parameters (*fin/finition/finalité*) at that particular point in the text which is followed by the maximum of textual white space.³⁴ Clausula(s) are linked to literary genres. Each genre develops its own *clausulae*, which serve as indications, signposts: "And they lived happily ever after" (fairy tales), "Yours faithfully" (letters), "Remove from the oven and serve cold" (cookery recipes), the *envoi* (ballads), *Amen* (prayers) (500-1). Each text establishes its own code of closure in ways that are more or less stereotypical. Given the high degree of codification of *clausulae*, it is more a question of recognition than understanding. For Hamon, *clausulae* are not only to be found at the end, but can also be scattered throughout the body of the text, always producing, however, a feeling of a check, a stop. Taking up Herrnstein Smith's central idea (which is that no textual element can actually be called

³³ "Un texte peut avoir une fin sans avoir de 'fini' (une conversation 'à bâtons rompus', 'sans queue ni tête'), avoir du 'fini' sans avoir de finalité identifiable (un mythe, un rite), ou de fin proprement dite (la fin 'en queue de poisson' d'un monologue lyrique diffus, ou la devinette et la charade privées de leurs réponses, ou encore le texte autobiographique écrit au jour le jour sous form de journal — exemple *le Horla* de Maupassant — qui ne peut se terminer qu'avec la mort du narrateur, mort que, par définition, il ne pourra raconter lui-même)" (500).

³⁴ Sandras, by choosing Flaubert's narrative as object of his study, maintains that the strategy of textual blanks is fundamental for creating the conditions which make the end of the book possible.

conclusive in itself, but is only so in function of the reader's reaction), he argued that final *clausulae* do not exist as such. It is true, however, that there is a convergence and a simultaneity of determined procedures at the end of a text (that is, it frequently occurs that even texts which are very diverse end with certain recurring procedures) in the presence of which the reader knows that he has reached the end, in the same way that a spectator at the cinema knows that the film is about to end and begins to gather up his coat and hat (498). But what are these procedures? Some of the more common are (let us not forget that Hamon is referring to both poetic and narrative texts): metatextual interventions (the intrusion of the writer's technique, his problems, his thoughts, his efforts, of retrospective or prospective interrogation, etc.); word play (metaphor, double meanings, ambiguity, paradox, etc.); thematic elements of ending (recourse to all its metaphoric variations: death, night, silence, mutism, closure, falling off, etc.); framing devices (the repetition at the end of the beginning or the title; to this technique belongs the theme of memory); the moral, the final maxim, the universal affirmation (which is set out as the *legenda* of the text; usually these are minimal, nominal phrases containing hyperbolic vocabulary: *never*, *always*, *nothing*, *everything*, in an atemporal present tense, with no modifiers, etc.); parallelism, chiasmus, repetition (e.g., the effect of *clausole* is particularly strong in an enumeration the last element of which is preceded simply by the conjunction *and*); ellipsis (514-26). None of these procedures, which we will find amply used in the endings of the novels in my thesis, is either necessary or sufficient for the closure and can be found anywhere else in the text. Nonetheless, they always involve the perception of a stop, a pause, a break.

4.3 Closure and the novel

Taking his inspiration from Kermode's work on endings and Herrstein Smith's work on closure, Torgovnick examined the problem of the endings of novels. Taking as her starting-point the assumption of the literary work as an artistic *tout se tient* (in the footsteps of Aristotle, H. James, E.M. Forster), Torgovnick's study looked at the suitability and the appropriateness of the way the ending relates to the beginning and the middle. The ending and the closure reveal the essence of a novel with particular clarity (19).³⁵ Her work, carried out on a restricted corpus (eleven novels), tackles some of the more common prejudices and gaps in certain contemporary theories on the endings of novels,³⁶ and

³⁵ She underlines that the end is the textual *locus* where the author mostly wishes to sum up the situation regardless of its type (esthetical, ethic, social, political, epistemological) or, even, it is where the author decides whether or not to make a summation.

³⁶ Actually, Torgovnick takes an opposite view to Girard's and Friedman's theories (9-10). They are too biased. Girard's text discusses only one type of novel (Stendhal,

provides a flexible model, an expandable outline of concluding techniques which could be applied to many other literary endings. In Torgovnick's opinion, the traditional opposition between *epilogue* and *scene*, relating to the form of the ending, is effective but insufficient (and she aims therefore to improve on it).³⁷ She points out the limitations of a merely formal identification: if used too simply, the markers of *scene* and *epilogue* can distort the sense of the wholeness of the ending, which is one of the main arguments of her work. This inadequacy of the terminology results in the need for new terminology to account for the variety in types of endings, which would respect the differences within the similarities and take into account the relationships of the ending with the form of the novel, the preoccupations of the author, and the experience of the reader.

By reason of these relationships, she came up with four sets of terminology: I) concerned with the connection between the ending and the rest of the novel; five possible closures depending on circularity, parallelism, incompleteness, tangentiality, connection;³⁸ II) connected to the author's point of view and the reader's (at the end of the work) on the characters and the main action; two concluding strategies: overview and close-up;³⁹ III) concerning the writer-reader

Dostoevsky, Proust) while attempting to sum up the nature of all novelistic endings. According to Girard, novels either end with conversions or they are stigmatized as *romantique* in opposition to *novelistic* (147). Therefore his theory, though illuminating for a small number of texts, does not account for all novels' endings, and it obscures differences which, in narrative endings, are as important as similarities.

Friedman's work overturns Girard's principles. For Friedman, the only true endings are open endings, which are the most typical in twentieth-century literature. As a result, he scorns many nineteenth-century novels. Furthermore, prejudices of modernist critics like Friedman have virtually destroyed the usefulness of terms such as *open* and *close* to describe narrative endings by making *open* the positive term and *close* the negative one.

³⁷ According to the Russian formalist Ejchenbaum (240) the epilogue presents two formal characteristics: 1) it establishes a final perspective thanks to a change in the temporal scale or in the focalization; and 2) it offers some elements of *Nachgeschichte* (after-story) for the main characters. I recall that Henry James is one of the keenest practitioners of the scenic ending which is one of the possibilities of the open ending. Modelled after drama's endings, scenic endings present a final dialogue between two or more characters. That dialogue is usually intensely focused and lacking in authorial comments (James, *passim*).

³⁸ *De facto*, only the first three are discussed by Torgovnick. *Circular* endings are those which use again elements already used in the beginning; *parallel* endings employ again elements already used in the middle; *incomplete* endings are an elliptic case of the two above and they do not fully realize either circularism or parallelism (12-14).

³⁹ *Overview* ending: characterized by a sudden temporal change which makes possible the insertion of authorial comments. *Close-up* ending: no temporal distance separates the end from the novel's body leaving the reader often perplexed and deprived of the comfortable *overview* (14-16). We may, therefore, infer that often epilogues are an *overview* in their technique, whereas scenes are a *close-up*. In my view, Torgovnick's proposal does not

relationship during the closure; three types of ending: complementary, incongruent, confrontational;⁴⁰ IV) concerning the relationship of the author with his own ideas; two types of closure: self-aware and self-deceiving.⁴¹

The combined use of these four sets of terminology provides a flexible, non-polemical grid for the description of endings and closures of the novel. I found the first of these particularly useful (especially circular and parallel endings) and also the second (especially complementary or incongruent endings). As for III, I believe that there are better ways to describe more or less the same things (Uspenskij 8-172; Genette, *Figure III* 208-58). Finally, regarding IV, I find it implausible that a critic could go as far as examining the unconscious workings of a writer and thus the degree of control he/she exerts on the closure.⁴²

5.0 The fascination of extreme limits: The current publishing success of novel *incipit* and *explicit*

As well as the recent interest in beginnings and endings shown by critics and writers in the wake of the works by Aragon and Kermode, we should also note

succeed with her opposition *overview/close-up* in surpassing the traditional opposition *epilogue/scene* as she intended to.

⁴⁰ Torgovnick, from the viewpoint of the relationship between the author and the reader in relation to the ending, speaks of *complementary* endings when the novel's endings do not meet with the reader's resistance; *incongruent* endings when the author has to push his reader to accept the text's ending; and *confrontational* endings when the author confronts the reader with endings which contrast strongly with the reader's expectations (16-18). For another definition of this aspect, see also Louvel and Verley, who, in relation to short stories, oppose *rounded (boulée)* endings and *non rounded, unsatisfactory* endings. They also identify *disphoric* endings (which follow *euphoric* beginnings), *euphoric* endings (which follow *disphoric* beginnings), and *euphoric* endings (which follow *euphoric* beginnings) (51-55).

⁴¹ *Self-aware* endings: most authors know in depth their own opinions; they know exactly what they mean with their endings, and they succeed in so doing. *Self-deceiving* ending: authors (for several reasons) either do not have a clear and sufficient knowledge of their own ideas, or they do not succeed in communicating them in the closing part of the text (18-19).

⁴² The monographic issue of *Yale French Studies* is devoted entirely to the concept of closure in its broader meaning. The matter mainly discussed is whether closure be concerning the text (Richards) or whether it be an effect performed by the reader (Herrnstein Smith). The real solution should be sought between those two possibilities. The fourteen articles collected in the volume, each focused on a specific text, deal with the topic of closure from different viewpoints and cover a huge span of time, from the Middle Age to the twentieth-century Parisian avant-garde. However, the closure is perceived by all contributors as synonymous of coherent and cohesive text, as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

the spread of more popular publishing efforts that have met with considerable success with the general public. The last ten years have seen the publication, both in Italy and abroad, of a number of books dedicated to the beginning and ending of novels. These are non-academic texts conceived as anthologies or collections, whose declared intention is to entertain the reader, arousing his interest and curiosity.

5.1 *Era una notte buia e tempestosa*

In 1985 O'Connor published in Dublin a short book entitled *First Lines*, in which she collected an anthology, by its nature incomplete and subjective, of some of the best *incipit* of world literature (*incipit* in the sense of the first sentence of the novel). Her book is divided into thirteen very brief chapters, each of which is introduced by a thematic subtitle which groups together a variety of beginnings (e.g., 'Of Writers and Readers', 'Matchmaking', 'Important Places', etc.). On every page, the beginnings are quoted one after the other, challenging the reader to recognise the work and the author from which they are taken. The answers are given in small print at the foot of the page, separated from the rest of the text by an unbroken black line.

Three other books on the beginnings of novels, in the same vein as *First Lines*, came out in 1993 (two in Italy, one in the United States). Similar to O'Connor's book in terms of concept and layout but wider-ranging is the collection of 757 *incipit* (this time meaning the first lines of the text) by the refined Fruttero and Lucentini. Taking as their starting point the concept that the first lines of great novels are, at times, the most important in the whole book, the two authors made a selection of beginnings that are, in their opinion, the best, the most curious, stimulating, and mysterious, particular, but not only, in novels (the texts range from the *Bible* to the *Italian Constitution*). The first part of the book consists of the beginnings, strictly anonymous and numbered progressively. It is divided into short chapters introduced by a thematic sketch, in place of the traditional subtitle, under which are grouped beginnings that have some characteristic in common (theme or situation) (13-191). The second part of the book consists of the solutions (193-275). In chronological order (corresponding to the number of each *incipit*) are listed the name of the author, the title of the work, the year of publication and, in certain cases, a few tasty titbits of information. The text, extremely lightweight, is rather interesting, particularly as a result of the odd, irreverent, and striking way the two authors have juxtaposed entries. This is a book created with the aim of engaging the reader who will be happy or frustrated at the end, depending on how many *incipit* he succeeded in recognising. *Incipit* can be used in various ways: to consult, to play with, as a guide to the ideal library, as a taste of books not read, as a manual on how to begin a story.

Published in the same year, but lacking the challenging element of guesswork that characterised the two previous examples, is the well-known book by Papi and Presutto, *Era una notte buia e tempestosa*, with an introduction by Eco. The authors collected 1430 beginnings of novels, divided into short chapters, each of which is introduced by a thematic subtitle. The *incipit* (of varying lengths ranging from a few words to several sentences) are followed by the name of the author and the title of the book. Once again, this is a personal anthology of beginnings, devoid of any element of research, that displays an unbridled passion for the novel. The hundred or so beginnings are classified according to subject, theme, time, and country. Here is Eco:

La lettura di questo libro può costituire un buon esercizio per educare il gusto, per riconoscere i colpi di stile, le idee felici. Per giustificare chi non ce l'ha fatta al primo colpo eppure ha un nome celebre (e giustamente). Questo libro serve a molte cose.

(14)

Again in 1993, this time in America, Ensign published *Great Beginnings*, a small unpretentious volume, less cultured than the books by Fruttero and Lucentini, and Papi and Presutto, appealing to the wider public and decidedly didactic. It is a collection of narrative beginnings (first sentences), grouped in short chapters introduced by a subtitle which relates to the narrative technique rather than to the theme that connects diverse beginnings (e.g., 'Once upon a time'; 'The Author Intrudes'; 'The Impersonal Pronoun', etc.) and by a short explanatory introduction. The author herself gives us the key to reading her text:

[. . .] every writer's voice is unique, and it is the differences, not the similarities, that make a story worth beginning. Great beginnings. Short. Long. Descriptive. Active. Philosophic. Each of them a small gem, a mini-masterpiece, and most of all, a joyful solution to Bertie Wooster's "dashed difficult problem of where to begin."

(244)

1995 saw the publication of Weaver's mighty volume *Novel Openers*, in which the author anthologizes 11,004 beginnings of novels. This time, beginnings are the opening lines which already contain the fiction and which are addressed by the narrator (and not, it should be noted, by the author) to the reader, and go as far (for the sake of brevity) as the completion of a thought, an image, or an idea. The beginnings are grouped (chronologically according to the year of publication and alphabetically according to the author's name) in short sections named for the subject which links them. The subjects are given in alphabetical order (the first is 'Ability', the last is 'Youth'). The corpus of the beginnings is followed by two indexes: the first of subject, key words, and key phrases; the second of author and title. It is an imposing work for its scope and organisation, and offers the possibility of seeing and comparing the largest number of *incipit* that have ever been gathered in one volume.

5.2 Famous last words

In the more general sphere of cultural history, we have Guthke's publication *Last Words*. The author examines the fascination of final words, the words uttered by the dying as a seal full of meaning that will shed light, with continuity or with discontinuity, on the life that has gone before. In real life we have the problem of the authenticity of those last words, which are often falsified. But what is important is the human need for such artifice, as Kermode brilliantly proved. It is in literature that we have particular recourse to the expedient of the last words of the dying hero, a mirror of our 'never-ending search for meaning' (34). The sacred quality which man attributes to last words is one of the components of the fascination created by literary endings (let the example of the end of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* suffice for all).

A few years after the publishing success of his book on beginnings, Ensign published another on literary endings. The small volume is similar to the first: same editorial guise, same structure, same arrangement of the material, same didactic intent. It is, therefore, a collection of endings drawn from a very wide range of novels, according to the author's personal criteria of choice. Just like the collection of beginnings, this is a light work, an easy and pleasant read, that can be used as a text for consultation or simply for enjoyment.

The most recent book on endings is the Italian *Il Corsaro Nero piange* by Schwamental and Straniero, a collection of 365 endings not limited to novels (poems, novels, essays) of varying length (from a few words to three pages), the selection of which was carried out at the whim of the authors (Dante omitted, Dario Bellezza included; Homer no, Craxi yes, etc). In the preface, the two editors declare a preference for open endings, indicating Henry James (none of whose works is included) as a real pioneer. But, I wonder, is the open ending really so modern? What then about the *interruptus* ending of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or *Sentimental Journey*, two texts from the eighteenth century? Doubts aside, what I consider important to emphasise is that this interest in beginnings and endings, whether academic or more popular, fully confirms the perceptions of Said and Kermode on our biological need for a framework. Moreover, perhaps the always hovering, irrational fear of the end of the millenium may have increased this interest, as witnessed by the success of the more popular publications just examined. And it is to the good that if literature on the one hand, with its serious and thoughtful works, represents human dilemmas, on the other, with works that are essentially *divertissement*, it helps resolve them.

6.0 Conclusion

The numerous studies examined so far, without claiming to be exhaustive, show the richness of the approaches used in the twentieth century for the study of textual *limina*. The definition of the opening sentence as *phrase-seuil* (Aragon, Jean, Pope, Linvelt), places the emphasis on the element of mystery in every beginning in the sense of a gesture of creation which is largely unconscious. Some studies focus on the question of the passage, of the link between the text and the *hors-texte* (Jean on beginnings). The identification of the ambiguous nature of beginnings (Barthes, Cornille, Brombert, Coletti, Lintvelt, Del Lungo) attempts to capture their essential inexpressability, and emphasises the borderline *transitività* between the real world and fiction and vice-versa. Duchet and Dubois concentrate, in their respective and diverse studies, on the informative nature of narrative beginnings. I found Genette's stimulating interpretation of the beginning of stories as indirect linguistic acts very fertile, and I extended it to endings as well (*Come iniziano* 218-41). The importance of the beginning as a moment of passage from the general to the particular is at the root of Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* and his notes for an American lecture, which unfortunately he was not able to finish, on the phenomenon of beginning and ending a story ('Appendice'). Attempts have also been made to set up models for study and classification to be applied to beginnings (Lintvelt, Del Lungo) and endings (Torgovnick), the insufficient and partial nature of which reflects the *mollezza* of the object of the study, and enriches the discussion rather than rendering it sterile. Investigations into the concepts of ending, *clausule*, and closure (Herrnstein Smith, Hamon, Torgovnick) identified some of the most recurrent formal processes in the ending of a text. And finally, the contemporary success of more popular, non-academic texts on the beginnings and endings of stories is proof of the vitality of this ever-fascinating literary problem.

I would like to conclude with the following summary: I) the incredible variety of opinions on the subject, which gives us an indication of the interest with which these privileged and valuable textual *loci* are regarded from all sides; II) the significance of the uncertainty revealed by critics in their definition and textual limitation of beginnings and endings, which has resulted in each one adopting his/her own subjective criteria; III) the fact that, despite my efforts at balancing the treatment of the two problems, in the twentieth century the emphasis has been on beginnings; IV) a certain iconic lack of symmetry between beginnings and endings. Calvino, given his natural propensity for beginnings, emphasised that they are symmetrical from a theoretical point of view, but not from an aesthetic one ('Appendice' 749-50). I do not agree and would argue, instead, that they are aesthetically symmetrical, for there exist not only unforgettable beginnings but also unforgettable endings. They are not symmetrical from a more iconic point of view (and not, I do stress, the narrative

one), so much so that while it is quite common to signal the end in a metatextual manner (by explicitly using the caption THE END), there exists no such analogous procedure for beginnings.⁴³

Dublin University

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⁴³ This practice, moreover, is also common in the world of cinema where, following the now classic American custom, the conclusion of a film is announced by the caption 'The End'.

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Jonathan Smith

Tabucchi Echoes Lacan: Making an End of “Postmodernism” from the Beginning

Piazza d'Italia begins at the story's end, with an *epilogo* narrating its hero's death, shot through the head on a *piazza* lined with police (11-12). By the time this is recounted again (143-45), Garibaldi personifies both political practice, and collective memory: Tabucchi's first novel begins at the end of history. Although his second and fourth are likewise set in Italy, the scene moves to India in the third (where Pessoa's name is invoked), and Portugal (where it regularly recurs) thereafter. Given the geographical, generic, thematic, and stylistic diversifications of the two volumes following the second and preceding the third novel,¹ this might savour of exotic diversion, especially since *Notturmo indiano* opens with an epigraph from Blanchot. Yet all seven novels narrate violent deaths, always suffered in the presence of the civil power, always somehow veiled or travestied: this narrative and thematic nucleus constitutes the series as a pivotal axis of the corpus.² The end of history brings no end of baffled suffering, dictating an investigation that begins again and again, its terms given by the names Pessoa and Blanchot (although neither can be taken at face value).

The theatrical text “Il signor Pirandello è desiderato al telefono” signals Pessoa's significance: an actor impersonates him for around twenty “figure maschili e femminili”, the majority “manichini” although “ci sono anche cinque o sei persone che . . . come dei pazienti di un manicomio, indossano una sorta di pigiama grigia” (*I dialoghi mancati* 15). The actor's manager has sold the idea that “parlare di follia sarebbe / terapeutico, dunque se mi state a sentire / stasera

¹ *Il gioco del rovescio* (first edition 1981), *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie* (1983).

² Compare with the passages cited from *Piazza d'Italia: Il piccolo naviglio*, part 1, chapters 8 and 9, and part 2, chapter 9; *Notturmo indiano*, chapter 12; *Il filo dell'orizzonte*, chapters 1, 5, and 19; *Sostiene Pereira*, chapters 2 and 24; *La testa perduta di Damasceno Monteiro*, chapters 13 and 21. The exception is *Requiem*, but compare chapter 6, on the destruction of an unpublished story, with the “storia di una storia che non c'è” in *I volatili del Beato Angelico* (58-61), the preface to *L'angelo nero* (9-10) and “Voci portate da qualcosa, impossibile dire cosa” (13-28): on this evidence, “Capodanno” (107-52) appears to be a fragment of the lost novel, and to fill the gap in *Requiem*.

dormirete più tranquilli, / e il vostro direttore c'è cascato, / bisogna capirlo, / è un'anima semplice" (25). "Pessoa" also aspires to relieve his own anguish by establishing communication with Pirandello, in distant Agrigento – but when the telephone rings, the call is from the asylum's *direttore*, bringing the performance to an inconclusive end. Somewhat as Italian history is beyond reach, so are both the literary tradition which might have been called upon to assist in interpreting it, personified by Pirandello, and the audience for the interpretation: a surrogate, venally counterfeited, is imported to assist in retrieving a collectivity Tabucchi suggests is irretrievable, in view of a conflict between unseen, ineffectual puppet-masters inside and outside an institution the action never leaves.

The title inaugurating the project, *Piazza d'Italia*, combined with the subtitle "favola popolare in tre tempi, un epilogo e un'appendice", thematizes superimposition of static, institutionalized, spatial configurations on the prior temporality of a popular culture. The quasi-cinematic term "tempi" stresses this point. For the coming of the cinema to the village of Borgo is a protracted non-event, and the building a space of collective existence strangulated: transformed into a *casa del popolo* after repeated failures to launch it as a place of entertainment (66, 70, 82, 85, 97, 121-23), it is the venue of the violently interrupted strike meeting whence Garibaldi goes to his death (139-40). Re-configurations of institutional space — the demolition and erection of statuary on the *piazza* by each régime between 1860 and 1948 (16-17, 89, 121) — introduce a derived, historical, temporality: the second narration of Garibaldi's death specifies that he is shot down from the pedestal of the current statue of Democracy (143-44), underlining the event's terminal significance, but also the vacuity of the series terminated. The third *tempo* further emphasizes the benefits of an agricultural community's transformation by the newly established factory where the strike occurs, and by road and rail links that bring outsiders into the village, and prospects of tourist development (135-39): the end of history becomes visible with modernity.

Narrative time approaches indecipherability, being segmented by very short chapters, disorientatingly ordered, but also dilated in domains ordered by pre-historical temporality, or female prerogatives. Melchiorre's abortive courtship of Asmara extends from the middle of the First to the middle of the Second World War (65-67, 82, 89-91, 99-100, 109-12), and Garibaldi's begins even earlier, coming to term hours before Melchiorre's suicide during the massacre occasioned by his denouncing Garibaldi to the Germans (60-61, 68-69, 72-73, 82, 86-87, 92, 100-102, 106-107). The rest of the story is structured as by requirements to interpret these events, and Asmara's temporizing towards Garibaldi ultimately explained by a disclosure that she was attempting to elude the pattern of events leading to his death predicted by aged, ageless, soothsayer Zelmira (83, 87, 92, 106, 135, 145). Although Asmara realizes on the day Garibaldi dies that their destinies have outwitted her, and the prediction is about

to be realized, her masquerade leads the story to this conclusion, and is itself led by the enigma outside time Zelmira personifies: sexual difference.

This is one hint that despite affinities between them, and Tabucchi's readier acknowledgements of Blanchot, Lacan plays more part in the project:³ section I sketches their conjoint significance. In preparation for a global reading, section II shows the Lacanian reference, introduced in 1975 in an uncollected essay on Pessoa as well as in *Piazza d'Italia*, sustained and developed into the 1990s; section III outlines the extent of this divergence from a general configuration of Italian culture since 1968. Section IV shows problems already sketched in 1975 confronted as late as 1997 on the basis of readings of Lyotard, as well as Blanchot, after Lacan: Tabucchi resists various classic Italian formulations of "postmodernism", annexing to the literary tradition powerful intellectual resources elsewhere dissipated.

I – Pessoa, Blanchot, Tabucchi

Blanchot's name enters the criticism in Tabucchi's 1986 introduction to his own translation of *The Book of Disquietude*, a microcosm of the de-centred "galassia che non sta in nessun luogo" Pessoa and his literary production are (*Un baule pieno di gente* 69). In 1975, Tabucchi already reads Pessoa "in termini di . . . letteratura in assoluto, non letteratura in rapporto a" ("Interpretazione" 142), and his 1979 general interpretation is explicit that Pessoa's recorded biography is a fiction on a par with those of his other personae, or heteronyms.⁴ Now, the unfinished or unfinishable *Book's* generic discontinuities and posthumous publication evoke an absolute standard of "letteratura in assoluto" that was a landmark for Blanchot, Mallarmé's *Livre* (*Un baule* 68).⁵ Before this, however, Tabucchi establishes a thematic resonance by characterizing heteronymic author/narrator Bernardo Soares's observations and narrations as those of "una

³ Explicit reference to Lacan informs two pieces on Pessoa collected in *Un baule pieno di gente*, "Un fil di fumo. Pessoa, Svevo e le sigarette" (76-92), and an "Intervista con Andrea Zanzotto" (114-22) where Zanzotto's is the Lacanian voice, but with bizarre intermittences. The interview resists interpretation, partly because the structure of argumentation and paragraphing suggest fallible transcription from a tape-recording, but also because the argument of "Un fil di fumo" finds echoes throughout *Un baule* (whose contents date from the period 1977-89), and earlier: beyond the interview, Tabucchi's critical voice is more consistently Lacanian in its accents than Zanzotto's is within it.

⁴ See "Un baule pieno di gente" (*Un baule* 11-41), but note that this reproduces the introduction to *Una sola moltitudine*, volume 1.

⁵ For a richly contextualized account of Blanchot moving between his reading of Mallarmé and the writing of his own fiction (which will ultimately be an important term of comparison with Tabucchi's), see Clark; for complementary overviews, see Antonioli, Hill, and Holland.

vita esterna e reale ma che si svolge estranea a lui, anche se gli transita accanto; e una vita interiore e inventata . . . due paesaggi che si intersecano e si confondono” (67). As already in Blanchot’s 1943 note “Mallarmé and the Art of the Novel” (Holland 43-48), the interiority registered in literature is no less alien than exteriority (and, to that extent, more so). These hints start the piece toward its intersection with Blanchot, *via* a cluster of associated references, and themes prominent in Tabucchi’s fiction.

Although the *Book’s* quotidian register lends cogency to the dysphoria announced in its title, its themes of the gaze and the Soul introduce “qualcosa di più di una semplice analogia” with Rilke’s less prosaic *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, bearing on Rilke’s character Erik Brahe, “che con l’occhio sano guarda il mondo dei vivi e con l’occhio fisso guarda il mondo dei morti” (69-70):

la consistenza del personaggio . . . tende continuamente a . . . ridursi a . . . qualcosa che sta oltre lo sguardo e la psiche, oltre gli occhi e l’intelletto, e che Bernardo Soares chiama l’anima. Lo sguardo . . . costituisce la percezione e insieme l’alterazione dei dati dell’esperienza: è ciò che sta fuori dell’Io e che l’Io fa suo, è il mondo esterno che diventa Io. L’anima di cui Soares parla . . . è dunque uno spazio difficilmente definibile: è la Coscienza e l’Inconscio, l’Io, l’Essere e l’Esserci . . . si pone fra la vita e la coscienza di essa, fra l’essere e l’idea dell’essere, fra se stesso e l’idea di se stesso, fra il reale che egli guarda e il reale che egli riproduce nella sua descrizione letteraria.

(70-71)

This casts fiction as ontological investigation on a plane preceding the establishment of subjective identities and objective realities, autonomous to the extent that “non è il caso di ritornare ora sulla controversa interpretazione heideggeriana di Rilke e di trovare il modo di aggiustarla al *Libro*” (70), but significant for its harmonies and differences with Heidegger (“l’Essere e l’Esserci”) as well as Freud (“la Coscienza e l’Inconscio”). Already these references combine to suggest muted invocation of Lacan: correspondingly, the interlacing of the narrating *personaggio’s* gaze with the self-fashioning writing of his book is repeatedly unravelled and re-worked when Tabucchi’s novelistic project is re-inaugurated in *Notturmo indiano*, after readings of Lacan as well as Blanchot.

Although Rilke’s language and thinking inform *The Space of Literature*, Tabucchi draws a direct analogy between the insomniac condition of Soares’s Soul and the “febrile stato di veglia” evoked by the “esistenzialismo degli anni quaranta” of Lévinas and Blanchot, the second reference emphasized by attribution of the first to another critic (73 and 75). No bibliography is given, but the earlier mention of Erik Brahe secures an interpretation of this “esistenzialismo” as envisaging the radically de-centring exteriority figured in *The Space of Literature* by the impossibility of completing the literary work, by death, and, in the appendix furnishing *Notturmo indiano’s* epigraph, by night: the

potentially distracting imputation of existentialism is a blind, demanding elucidation. Equally enigmatic, Soares's "vita come impossibilità di riposare", is spent in what is "solo un apparente monologo: in realtà è un dialogo incerto, un dialogo con un interlocutore inesistente, in certi casi una conversazione mancata" (73). Whereas the piece sketches the thematic core and intellectual matrix of Tabucchi's project, this condensed questioning of inter-subjectivity points towards its ethical dimension, where subjective identities in question come into a correlatively problematic relation with each other, this too staged in *Notturmo indiano*.

By way of clue to these enigmas, Soares's habitual insomnia triggers a gesture towards the project's constant, uneasy proximity to psychoanalysis: sleeplessness denies access to the "spazio privilegiato del romanticismo . . . il messaggio convenzionalmente interpretabile e comunque liberatorio: il sogno. Che farsene di Freud e di Jung?" (73). This questioning combines with that of dialogical inter-subjectivity to evoke the later Blanchot of *The Infinite Conversation*, where the ambiguous promise of psychoanalysis is personified by Lacan.⁶ Tabucchi's reference to the 1940s and Lévinas, who is Blanchot's indispensable interlocutor throughout the relevant period, therefore acknowledges Blanchot's project as such, rather than simply *The Space of Literature* (1955): the preface to *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), which postulates the "radical change of epoch . . . or, to speak hyperbolically, 'the end of history'" Tabucchi's fiction addresses, also indicates continuity since "Literature and the Right to Death" (1948), and less directly since "Mallarmé and the Art of the Novel" (xi-xii).⁷

The structure and argumentative procedures of *The Infinite Conversation* are such that Tabucchi's global reference to Blanchot includes an equally global one to Lacan: this piece is characteristic of Tabucchi's writing throughout the period 1975-1997, in the readings invoked, in its oblique strategy of allusion, and in thereby deflecting interpretations of its psychoanalytical frame of reference as a clinical rather than ontological one, and of its ontological one as an under-elaborated postmodernism. At the same time, it affords readers the two-fold possibility of re-constructing the formative context of Tabucchi's own project, or else ignoring this, and taking him for a practitioner of literature and criticism who leaves everything as he finds it. Although Blanchot's reputation as

⁶ See *The Infinite Conversation* 230-37; on Freud and Jung see also 194-201, 298-306 and 407-21. Where possible, French works are cited in English-language translations, for reasons of accessibility; dates of original publication in French are given in the text because often germane. This material is introduced in some detail, because indispensable to persuasive interpretation of Tabucchi's project.

⁷ On this continuity, see Davies, whose condensed discussion may require supplementation by those listed in note 5; "Literature and the Right to Death" closes Blanchot's second collection of essays, *The Work of Fire* (300-44).

a *littérateur* makes him a relatively uncontroversial landmark, “literature” and “conversation” as configured by his enquiry bring into view the limitations of the tacit or explicit terms of reference available to any attempt to imagine individual or collective human existence: that these have expired is the sense of the end of history, and the cue for an ontological investigation moving beyond them.

Blanchot’s name returns in the 1990 preface to *Un baule*, elucidating a formulation of Pessoa’s project that admits his occult interests as the 1975 essay, purporting to understand them as irony, did not:

Pessoa rimanda . . . ad una metafisica della finzione, o ad un occultismo della finzione; forse ad una teosofia della finzione . . . è sempre una finzione “trascendente”, è parola, ma nel senso che εν αρχη ην ο λογος; e questa parola non è certo “il testo” letterario. Il Logos di Pessoa, nella sua trascendenza . . . evade dal piano esistenziale-testuale e si attua nell’ontologico-metafisico.

(8)

Esoterica aside, the impending reference to Blanchot might seem ill-assorted with those to the Evangelist, metaphysics, and even ontology, a term whose effects Blanchot questions during a reading of Heidegger that forestalls other, influential, ones Tabucchi finds in his way: Blanchot’s programme resists unitary principles of explanation or meaning such as the term “Logos” suggests.⁸ Yet Tabucchi moves in a similar direction: by keeping enough cards in hand to prevent any particular term congealing into objectivity, he suspends the received opposition between a continuous objective reality and fallibly subjective interpretations of it, echoing the effect of the multiple re-metaphorizations and re-combinations of others’ language in both *The Infinite Conversation* and *The Space of Literature*.

Tabucchi calls on the latter book’s opening essay, “The Essential Solitude” (19-34), for specification of the “‘zona’ nella quale avviene la finzione metafisica dello scrittore, la sua personalizzazione” (*Un baule* 8):

when to write is to discover the interminable, the writer who enters this region does not leave himself behind in order to approach the universal. He does not move toward a surer world, a finer or better justified world where everything would be ordered according to the clarity of the impartial light of day. He does not discover the admirable language which speaks honourably for all. What speaks in him is the fact that, in one way or another, he is no longer himself; he isn’t anyone anymore.

(The Space 28)

⁸ See *The Infinite Conversation* 3-10 (ontology) and 298-306 (Heidegger); on Blanchot’s response to Heidegger relative to others, see section III below, as well as Clark, and Hill, *passim*.

Blanchot's option for de-centring exteriority over the objective and universal principle of a historical teleology announces that the writing of an ontological investigation and the end of history are mutually implicated. The questioning of political practice and collective memory opened in *Piazza d'Italia* follow from this as much as from any empirical data or experience, while light's absence here complements the darkness visible of *Notturmo indiano*'s epigraph, from Blanchot's third appendix, "Sleep, Night" (*The Space* 264-68): "Le persone che dormono male sembrano più o meno colpevoli: che cosa fanno? Rendono la notte visibile" (*Notturmo indiano* 7; compare *The Space* 265). Together, these mutually complementary passages displace received criteria of moral responsibility as well as objective reality and subjective identity: Tabucchi's project is one of substantive ethical as well as ontological investigation. On both fronts its primary but largely covert reference is to Lacan.

II – Pessoa, Lacan, Tabucchi

Unlike later essays, "Interpretazione dell'eteronimia" distinguishes Pessoa's heteronyms from the pseudonym he used in *The Times* crossword competitions: "A.A. Cross rappresenta il Potere di Sintesi, colui che è capace di trarre conclusioni e di dare risposte" (147). This persona, intrigued by the proposition "'tutto ciò che è reale è razionale'" (148), sought satisfaction in reading Hegel, but also in reading and writing crime fiction: "Pessoa, affascinato e terrorizzato dal mistero gnoseologico . . . cerca nel 'giallo' l'impostazione del problema fra apparenza ingannatrice e verità nascosta" (148-49).

Rather than explore this thinking in the terms still cautiously outlined in 1986, Tabucchi moves directly to its transformation into the "'Shakespeare problem'" in 1910, when Pessoa found himself held back from literary creation, and from all but the most casual or practical reading: the texture of the — paradoxically, no longer enigmatic — world was poetry enough. Previous commentators took the Shakespeare problem to be a philological one of textual tradition or attribution, but Tabucchi's complex comparison with Rimbaud suggests he is already reading Pessoa alongside Blanchot, in an ontological key.⁹ The Shakespeare problem "si riassume nel cercare di individuare con quali mezzi o grazie a quale strattagemma (*sic*) Shakespeare è riuscito a tradurre sul piano del teatro (una finzione) la finzione della vita (un teatro)" (151), in order to "tradurre sul piano della poesia (una finzione) quella finzione che è la vita" (152), thus staging the dissolution of the "problema fra apparenza ingannatrice e verità nascosta" into a texture of appearances without specifiable term relative to which it could be judged deceptive. Pessoa's "radicalismo intellettivo" calls

⁹ Compare "Interpretazione" 158 and 160-61 with *The Work of Fire* 153-61, *The Space of Literature* 19-34 and 51-83, and *The Infinite Conversation* 285-92.

forth a second-hand, feinting, reference to Wittgenstein (151), undeveloped, but signalling the gravity of Tabucchi's reading: from 1975, all his fiction addresses the Shakespeare problem on the basis of Lacanian resources marshalled but not declared in "Interpretazione".

A theme of blockage informs *Piazza d'Italia* when the death of political practice is linked with that of collective memory: before Garibaldi's death in the role of strike-leader, his attempts to commemorate the massacre of his fellow-villagers are stifled by the PCI, which invites his performance as a latter-day *cantastorie* at its *fiesta*, but finds it disruptive of a social stability this occasion both demands and cements (131-33). Yet as in later works, storytelling also enquires into its own possibilities on the basis of a story of sexual masquerade, here benign but elsewhere modulating between ambiguity and malignancy: such episodes both provoke and obstruct the progress of storytelling and of the stories told. In Bowie's condensed formulation, "there is no such thing as a sexual relationship, Lacan repeatedly announces . . . because, although each partner plays the role of Subject to the other's Other, this dispensation can never produce symmetry or reciprocity: language always creates between them an intractable and unshedtable surplus cargo of otherness" (154). Commenting on Lacan's maxim that "'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other'", Bowie further observes the inter-dependent instability of two constituent notions of his gloss on the impossibility of the sexual relationship: language may "be construed as an abstract system", but once it "takes again the form of speech it reassumes its intersubjective character: it becomes a 'third locus', the endlessly mobile space in which the Subject and its Other are made, dissolved, and remade" (82). Correlatively, "Lacan's 'Other' . . . designates now one member of the dialectical couple 'Subject-Other' and now the limitless field and overriding condition in which both members find themselves – 'alterity', 'otherness'" (82-83).¹⁰ *Piazza d'Italia*, the contemporaneous discussion of Pessoa's Shakespeare Problem, and much of Tabucchi's subsequent fiction, all turn on this relative specification of the de-centring exteriority also canvassed in more general terms by his references to Blanchot.

"Interpretazione" construes Pessoa's heteronymic poetry as a definitive solution to the Shakespeare problem, and the 1915 play *O Marinheiro* as a provisional one. Tabucchi's discussion of the play is more directly illuminating of his fiction than is that of the poetry, which — satirically — purports to construct a semiotic system serving the purpose of rehabilitating as irony those aspects of Pessoa's output which met with the Salazar regime's approval, and

¹⁰ The canonical reference is to Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (especially 19-21), explicated at length in Wilden, "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other". Bowie's discussion of Lacan on the impossibility of the sexual relationship is based, among other materials, on *Encore*, a work that carries the terms of the problem well beyond those in which, after Bowie, it is here introduced.

corresponding disapproval from points left (161-62 and 183-84). However, part of the significance of the system postulated is that it is repeatedly undermined by Tabucchi's presentation of the poetic material it allegedly organizes, and incompatible with that of *O Marinheiro*: from the beginning, appeal to Lacan insinuates response to the polemic against him in Eco's seminal work of semiological theory, *La struttura assente* (325-43).

Tabucchi had written on *O Marinheiro* in 1970, and would write two more texts to be published with his translation in 1988, and re-published in *Un baule*:¹¹ despite shifts of emphasis, his thinking remains largely unchanged between 1975 and 1988. Conversely, relating the Shakespeare problem directly to *O Marinheiro* in 1975 involves repudiating an interpretation of the play, as an exercise in Symbolism after Maeterlinck, previously endorsed. Sharpening focus coincides with Tabucchi's own simultaneously literary and intellectual vocation in the early 1970s:

non sarebbe dunque il simbolismo del poeta belga, ma la poetica shakespeariana che Pessoa ha scoperto nel suo significato profondo: il Play within the play di Amleto e di Prospero con cui Shakespeare è riuscito a tradurre sul piano della finzione teatrale la finzione della vita. *O Marinheiro* è però . . . un'opera shakespeariana senza intrecci, senza miserie, senza umanità e senza personaggi: è la grammatica di Shakespeare che Pessoa, nel tornio dei suoi ragionamenti, applica alle voci del dramma.

...

"We are such stuff / as dreams are made on; and our little life / is rounded with sleep", è l'aforisma (non di *etica* calderoniana, ma di *poetica* shakespeariana) con cui Prospero, all'inizio del quarto atto, avvia a conclusione *La tempesta*. *O Marinheiro* comincia a questo punto.

(153)

Existing only in a dream, *O Marinheiro*'s three female characters watch over the corpse of a fourth in a dimly-lit circular room. Pending dissolution in a dawn both feared and desired, they convince each other of their existence by recounting their own dreams: "sono vive nella misura in cui ingannano se stesse, giocano e si intrattengono col loro a-passato. Parlare è l'unica possibilità di resistere alla storia enigmatica che le travolge" (152). One re-tells her dream of a shipwrecked sailor on a desert island, himself dreaming day-by-day and year-by-year every particular of a homeland and a past he never had: "la vegliatrice (un sogno) sogna un marinaio che sogna una patria, ovvero *Play within the play within the play*" (155). Yet when a ship arrives, the sailor is no longer on the island: by dreaming the dreamer who dreams him and recounts her dream, he has already escaped, deferring indefinitely the reversal whereby "Prospero-Shakespeare, dopo aver mostrato che il mondo è teatro e il teatro il mondo, . . .

¹¹ See "Il marinaio": una sciarada esoterica?" (*Un baule* 102-108), and "Traducendo 'Il marinaio'" (109-11); on the reversal of the 1970 interpretation, see "Interpretazione" 152.

rientra nel mondo degli uomini” (*ibid.*). This is the point where Tabucchi’s interpretation connects with his interpretation of the later poetry, as well as his fiction.

Pessoa was runner-up, with his 1934 poem *Mensagem*, in a national competition to “dare una patina ‘artistica’ all’imperialismo e alle teorie panlusitaniche della politica estera fascista” (183-84). Yet read ironically, *Mensagem*’s ideology of “antistoricismo . . . il disegno e la predestinazione di una esoterica Provvidenza, l’imperialismo giustificato da concetti mistici e occulti . . . potrebbe anche essere la fotografia pietosa e amara di un paese che non ha ancora trovato la sua identità storica, che si è perduto nella vastità dei mari, che è il fantasma di se stesso” (184). Pessoa’s dissociation from Portuguese identity will be crucial to Tabucchi’s interpretation in 1979, as already in 1975: unlike the shipwrecked sailor, Pessoa cannot construct his homeland *in absentia*, because “la sua patria è intorno a lui: la realtà massiccia e fittizia non gli lascia scampo” (157). The multiplicity of heteronymic identities and voices responds to this situation, and dissolves it. Tabucchi’s fiction addresses the same problem *vis-à-vis* Italy, placing him, *qua* author, in the role of shipwrecked sailor, or Pessoa minus heteronyms, without either resorting to theoretical discourse, or subjecting ordinary language to the stress evident in his stipulation of Pessoa’s predicament, which grows: “Fingere che sia reale ciò che è reale (reale che a sua volta è una finzione assurda e misteriosa) significa sottrarsi, con uno stratagemma, alla schiacciante e massiccia presenza della finzione: è un paradosso magico grazie al quale resta al poeta, nella sua assoluta non-libertà, la libertà di non essere libero” (158). Beginning in this essay, Tabucchi commits himself to the conditions imposed by the discourse of the Other, modelling his own imprisoning nation at sea on Pessoa’s, and Pessoa’s thinking on his own, in a chiasmic movement continued up to 1997, when it models life as well as art in *La gastrite di Platone* and *La testa perduta*.

In 1975, “che lo si voglia sfuggito al Tempo e allo Spazio, o semplicemente suicida fra gli scogli dell’isola, il Marinaio ha comunque risolto il mistero ed ha raggiunto la dimensione della Patria: sia essa l’archetipo inconscio o l’idea platonica di patria o magari di (*sic*) Nulla, che per Pessoa è forse la patria più adeguata dei sogni quali noi siamo” (157). In 1988, the suggestion of suicide is softened, and the Platonist option withdrawn: “che lo consideriamo fuggito al Tempo e allo Spazio o che lo vogliamo addormentato/morto fra gli scogli dell’isola, il Marinaio ha risolto comunque il mistero e ha raggiunto la dimensione della sua patria: sia essa un archetipo inconscio, una dimensione ‘altra’ o il Nulla, che forse è per Pessoa la patria più idonea ai sogni che noi siamo” (*Un baule* 106-107). Already in 1975, the Platonist option seems anomalous relative to Pessoa’s dissolution of the “problema fra apparenza ingannatrice e verità nascosta” into the Shakespeare problem, and together with its Jungian complement, it reads as a complex, simultaneous, allusion and blind: Plato and Jung triangulate Lacan.

In both 1975 and 1988, Tabucchi compares the sailor's predicament with a riddle also cited in *La gastrite* (24-25): a prisoner must choose between two doors leading one to freedom and one to the gallows, and knows that one of his two guards always lies and the other tells the truth, but not which guard (or door) is which. The solution is to ask one guard what advice the other would give, and not follow it. At each telling, Tabucchi spells out a conclusion: in 1975, "bisogna invertire ciò che è stato invertito" (157), in 1988, "il prigioniero deve riuscire a percorrere in senso inverso il processo attraverso il quale gli arriva la risposta" (107), and in 1997, "bisogna sempre stravolgere l'opinione di un'opinione" (25). Each time, Tabucchi alludes to other versions of the riddle, without observing that it is a simplified variant of a scenario repeatedly deployed by Lacan to illustrate the relation between Subject and Other, and declined by Eco in attempting to secure the foundations of semiology (*La struttura assente* 325-28). Tabucchi's hints at a Jungian interpretation of *O Marinheiro* afford a permanent possibility of distraction from his transactions with Eco and Lacan: these are already complete by 1975 (as the semiological satire shows), although their oblique exposition continues until 1997. By inverting it, the Platonist option of 1975 advertises Tabucchi's engagement on the Lacanian side (as does his elision in 1975 and 1988, but not 1997, of the crucial narrative, or temporal, dimension of the riddle's canonical version): contrary to Plato's anamnesis or recollection of eternal Ideas, Lacan, revising Freudian therapeutic practice as well as symptomatology with the assistance of Heideggerian hermeneutic ontology, writes of a "psychoanalytical anamnesis" envisaging future dislocations, inversions and re-structurings of the past's burdensome meanings for the present.¹² This is the point at which Tabucchi's and Lyotard's responses to Lacan intersect: despite exploratory deviations and extrapolations from this thematic axis, Tabucchi consistently essays anamnesis (not narrative re-presentation) of twentieth-century history, illustrated here by *Piazza d'Italia* and *La testa perduta*.

More decisively than some other fictions — including *Sogni di sogni*, where the riddle reappears (15-18), its significance to some degree camouflaged by a blatantly mythological context — these novels avoid the facile implication that everything is a dream: the dream-within-the-dream encountered in *O Marinheiro* is one of several devices used in Tabucchi's fiction to stage the opacities of the constitutively unconscious, inter-subjective, states and processes that insinuate themselves into the attempt to imagine collective existence, blocking it beyond the horizon too powerfully to be calculated or corrected. The sailor's conception of his homeland and access to it are controlled by the

¹² For anamnesis, see *Speech and Language* 16-20, and compare Bowie 178-90, Wilden 207-209, and Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 87-129; for the — closely related — canonical Lacanian version of the riddle articulating Tabucchi's difference with Eco, see *Speech and Language*, especially 17-19 and 50.

discourse of the Other, as Tabucchi's apparently tortuous, but careful, formulations of the relation between fiction and reality are controlled by Lacanian conceptuality despite adopting Pessoa as a pre-text. The fictional devices that ensue are not ludic: they studiously replicate the effect of Lacan's topological models of mental functioning, where the inside is continuous with the outside, and the whole cannot be grasped in a single moment. The most easily described is the Moebius band, a strip of paper twisted before being glued into a circle to give a single surface on which a line can be drawn whose end re-joins its beginning, but only in two revolutions: a single one arrives on the "opposite" side of the paper.¹³

Tabucchi's most important device of this type is the chiasmic movement of the fiction and thinking already noted, between himself and Pessoa, Portugal and Italy. This is most fully developed in *La testa perduta*, but responds to problems posed in *Piazza d'Italia*, where a double *mise-en-abyme* presents complementary scenarios of failure against which the novel demands to be appraised. On the one hand, Garibaldi's success as an entertainer – until he encounters stifling institutional indifference to popular memory — is launched by his stories of events broadly co-inciding with those of the novel, and culminating in the massacre (131-32). On the other, he has a counterpart in his Fascist cousin Melchiorre, author of stirring tales of colonialist exploits in Africa, recounted in a garish register of racist and sado-masochistic sexual fantasy and published in the 1930s (79-82). Their content, and success as prize-winning propaganda, narcissistically – if briefly – compensate Melchiorre's unfitness for military service or colonial adventure, and his erotic misery: he vainly expects authorship to advantage him in competition with Garibaldi for Asmara's love. Melchiorre's example says Tabucchi's fiction of sexual masquerade, set in a pre-industrial popular ambience on the point of vanishing, is open to interpretation as a fantasy made possible by the inaccessibility of inaccessible others, and on a par with the fantasies of triumphalist Fascism; Garibaldi's, that its best reception is likely to be as entertainment. Yet this message is aggravated.

Tabucchi ventriloquistically ascribes to the preceding generation of Garibaldi's family a quasi-Lacanian comprehension of the discourse of the Other, emblemized by a penchant for palindromes, and pathologically intense empathy (15, 22-29, 32-33, 42-44). Passed down to him but denied to Melchiorre, whose conception and birth occasion his father's suicide, his mother's entering a convent, and his adoption by his paternal grandfather (30-

¹³ For discussion, see Bowie 192-194, and Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* 32 and *passim*. Clark, whose discussion does not explicitly bear on Lacan, uses this metaphor for certain effects of Blanchot's fiction (92), while Antonioli's general argument is that Blanchot's oeuvre establishes a relation of this kind between the theoretical and fictional domains (7 and *passim*).

31, 33-39), this motivates Garibaldi's superiority *qua* suitor and storyteller, and thus the novel's story as well as its persuasiveness relative to Melchiorre's own efforts. The semblance of access to traditional culture, diagnosis of the Fascist novelist's sado-masochism and narcissism, and that of Garibaldi's narcissistic bravado in provoking his political and sexual rival, thus occasioning the massacre (99-102), all stem from the same point. Lacanian psychoanalysis deciphers the novelist's and political actor's predicaments illustrated by Melchiorre and Garibaldi respectively, as well as providing the means of facing the former, but is in the first place an element of the post-traditional culture standing between the novel and the world it affects to narrate.

If the novel is understood to articulate popular memory in the manner Garibaldi attempts, or as entertainment of the kind he provides, it functions as a fantasy of the kind Melchiorre's fictions exemplify; but once understood as so functioning, it documents a disavowed continuity, such as Garibaldi's muzzling by the PCI also suggests, of the democratic present with the Fascist past. Continuity collectively denied, and, correlatively, the fictionality of contemporary reality, are, respectively, the trauma and the symptom Tabucchi addresses, both in works set in Italy (including, most programmatically, the second novel, *Il piccolo naviglio*),¹⁴ and in those set in Portugal, where historical perspective is frequently foreshortened by the more recent watershed of 1974. The continuities denied are by definition perceptible only retrospectively, sharing this characteristic with the symptom's traumatic cause as conceived by Lacan, which conjures itself into malignant being retro-actively, when it disrupts processes of symbolization it eludes: causation follows the same logic of temporal inversion as anamnesis.¹⁵ Precisely because fiction does not claim to communicate an objective truth adequately symbolized, it is the medium in which this problem can best be staged (as *La testa perduta* shows). Already in *Piazza d'Italia*, however, it also poses ethical problems Tabucchi develops throughout the intervening period.

Melchiorre resorts to narcissistic self-affirmation through Fascist activism and literature in response to an emotion, fear, that pervades his story from boyhood to death (51-54, 56-57, 65-67, 79-82, 99-100, 112), first announced in conflictual relations with childhood peers that capsizes into solitude in

¹⁴ *Il piccolo naviglio* has been re-published in Lise Chapuis's 1999 French translation; Tabucchi's preface refuses to countenance a new Italian edition without fully clarifying his reasons. In conjunction with the studied obscurity of *Il filo dell'orizzonte*, the material outlined in note 2, and the publication of an earlier version of "Capodanno", "Lettere a Capitano Nemo", under the legend "capitoli scelti dal romanzo di prossima pubblicazione" (14), this partial, retrospective self-censorship stages — *sul piano della finzione che è la vita* — the impossibility of satisfactorily narrating Italy to Italians in any direct way.

¹⁵ See, correlatively, the material referenced in notes 12 and 25.

adolescence. Culpable as Melchiorre is in Asmara's and Garibaldo's eyes, this echoes Tabucchi's interpretation of the collectivity synthesized in Pessoa's heteronymic literary production, as responding to the solitude of the ontological investigation ultimately re-introduced, in the 1990 preface, by reference to Blanchot. Tabucchi formulates this response as a therapeutic one to a pathological state, but resists the quasi-clinical diagnoses hazarded by other critics, indicating from the standpoint of his own, ontological, investigation that Pessoa's is not accessible to pre-Lacanian, positivist, causal explanation (see "Interpretazione" 141-42, and *Un baule* 11-41). Correspondingly, Melchiorre's fear reads as a variant of the sensibility exhibited by other members of his family, rather occasioned than caused by a primary conflict with his grandfather and guardian. Tabucchi's subsequent developments of the theme lead his own investigation: Pessoa's, Melchiorre's, and his own projects are all presented as being similar in kind if not outcome.

These developments are staged as successive re-inaugurations of the project, beginning chronologically with *Notturmo indiano*, but also, in the retrospective autobiographical perspective of the preface to the 1988 edition of *Il gioco del rovescio*, signed with Tabucchi's initials,¹⁶ somewhat earlier. Here, a see-saw between "meraviglia" and "paura", weighted towards the latter, is adduced as a mainspring of inspiration, and recurrences foreseen, indicating the therapeutic sense of a continuing project: "il rispetto che si deve alla paura mi impedisce di credere che l'illusione di addomesticarla con la scrittura soffochi la consapevolezza, in fondo all'anima, che alla prima occasione essa morderà com'è nella sua natura" (5-6). This repeated, complex, emotional response to "una scoperta che mi turbò", that "una certa cosa che era 'così' era invece anche in un altro modo" (5), is an essential premise: the emotion echoes Melchiorre's, while pointed refusal to deny appearances in the name of unequivocal realities phrases the project, in terms echoing the introduction of the Shakespeare problem in "Interpretazione", as one of ontological investigation.

The narrating voice of *Notturmo indiano* is only slightly more equivocally identifiable as Tabucchi's own than is that of *Il gioco's* preface, being characterized as belonging to an Italian scholar well acquainted with Portugal and Pessoa (35-36, 41, 53-61, 73-79, 100, 109), and because the preface, again initialled (9), lays claim to a journey across India along the narrator's route. Here too, the narcissism of the fictional enterprise is emphasized, partly by marked suppression of fear's significance when the novel's conception is

¹⁶ Signature is an important theme in *Sostiene Pereira*, developed in *La testa perduta* by reference to Lyotard (see section IV below), but neither this nor Tabucchi's signed prefaces should distract from the way his inflections of the emotional lexicon here outlined, down to the blankness of *La testa perduta*, themselves constitute the elements of a form of "signature" closer to that outlined by Clark's discussion of Blanchot in conjunction with Heidegger and Derrida.

narrated during the flirtatious or seductive masquerade of the final chapter. Although the narrator earlier confesses his fearful disposition in humorously reflective conversation with a Jain encountered at Bombay railway station (42), and is tormented by it in a dream (75-79), both Jain and dream are omitted from the final chapter's summary, together with other episodes so plotted as to demonstrate the impossibility of the sexual relationship (compare 96-109 with 45-52 and 80-82). There is therefore a marked discrepancy between the novel as it is printed, and the flirtatiously narcissistic account of it given during the concluding dialogue, which also suggests it is too ludically fragmentary to be considered a novel: it is to the contrary a rigorously coherent re-inaugurating formulation of Tabucchi's Lacanian novelistic project.

The censored dream's double echo of the preface to *Il gioco* and the conversation in Bombay indicates continuity – as of the Moebius band — between the inside and outside of novel and dream, which itself closes with an assertion of universal mortality that corrodes both the dramas of history, and the historical discipline that has brought the narrator to the library where it occurs:

Fece un gesto che abbracciò la stanza. “Siamo tutti morti, non l’ha ancora capito? Io sono morto, e questa città è morta, e le battaglie, il sudore, il sangue, la gloria e il mio potere: è tutto morto, niente è servito a niente”.

“No”, dissi io, “qualcosa resta sempre”.

“Che cosa?”, fece lui. “Il suo ricordo? La vostra memoria? Questi libri?”.

(78)

This re-metaphorizes the abyss of the Indian setting as the de-centring exteriority of *The Space of Literature*: if “qualcosa resta”, its place is neither on the stage of history, nor on those of the family and school-yard dramas where Melchiorre first comes to himself, but on the plane of ontological investigation. The setting and the emotion of fear — phrased at the beginning of the dream as an accusation of “codardia” (71), and at its end as nihilistic despair — are points of entry to it.

Notturmo indiano also poses an ethical problem, since the version of it narcissistically conceived in flirtatious conversation places the narrator himself in the position of the sick, long-lost, friend in distress he has been seeking, hoping to help him, in the previous eleven chapters. These are now effectively disowned as a secret fantasy of being so sought: the ethical commitment of friendship is a symptom of a solitude as ineliminably pathological as Pessoa's, and is founded on projection of the initial pathology onto an imaginary other. Cross-reference between *La gastrite* and *La testa perduta* will find anamnestic, ontologically investigative, storytelling configured as the essential ethical commitment, but without this implication of *Notturmo indiano* being withdrawn. This complex conclusion emerges from a partially explicit reflection on psychoanalysis in *Requiem*, *L'angelo nero*, and *Sostiene Pereira*, during which

the emotion of fear and ascription of cowardice modulate into the subjective remorse or objective guilt — for writing, for not writing, and at the continuing, traumatic, inscrutability of human relations — into which such commitments capsize when the desire leading them is compromised.

Although this reflection is organized as an uneasy negotiation with the Lacanian ethics of resistance to the superego, Tabucchi's emotional lexicon of *paura*, *colpa*, *codardia*, and *rimorso* (but also *meraviglia*) takes a less measured distance from Lacan's Heideggerian than his Freudian authority.¹⁷ This is also underlined by the semi-autobiographical register of both *Notturmo indiano* and *Requiem* (as well as the preface to *Il gioco*): the fictional project articulates itself as an existential one. Correspondingly, it cannot be controlled by an immediately decipherable canonical bibliography or conceptuality: any global reading therefore faces a requirement to decipher its engagements and differences with authority. One effect of these, however, is partial retrieval of literary tradition from the state of inaccessibility diagnosed in "Il signor Pirandello": the dialectics of *codardia* and *rimorso* with imagination articulated respectively by Calvino in *Il barone rampante*, and Pirandello in *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, enter into the genealogy of Tabucchi's vocabulary and signature. Several themes of Pirandello's novel — sexual masquerade, death, the archive — are likewise hybridized with Tabucchi's more exotic readings in *Notturmo indiano*, but also in *Il filo dell'orizzonte* and *La testa perduta*, where this retrieval of tradition issues in extravagantly graphic homage to Sciascia, who now personifies it.

Nonetheless, it is "Rebus", a story of sexual masquerade with unmistakable Lacanian resonances, that most directly links the fearful disposition prominent between 1975 and 1988 to the remorse thematized at the beginning of the 1990s: in the narrator's words, 'sentii vergogna per non aver mai conosciuto l'amore . . . una specie di rimorso, come una consapevolezza di mediocrità o di codardia' (*Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* 39; for the title "Rebus", see Lacan, *Speech and Language* 30). There is therefore a degree of narcissism about his departure from type in circumstances whose melodramatic menace he recognizes from the outset and never disentangles, as also in his confessional narrative to a casual drinking-companion, for whose benefit he phrases it as a puzzle to which "una soluzione sembra plausibile solo in questo modo: sognando" (29-30; 46). This underlines the psychoanalytical reference informing Tabucchi's consistent

¹⁷ On the irreducibility of emotion, but also conscience, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, and Polt, *passim*, and compare Wilden 183; on ethics, Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 275-76, and Žižek, *The Sublime Object* 110-17, and *The Metastases*, especially 54-85.

These themes are negotiated most directly by Tabucchi in *Requiem* 16-19, 37-49, 58-63, 73-80, 87-94; *L'angelo nero* 9-10, 13-28, 31-49, 107-52; *Sostiene Pereira* 119-24 and 153-59.

staging of the unconscious discourse of the Other, from 1975, in dreams, and links it directly with his exploration of the relation between emotion, ethics, and storytelling. Yet continued engagement with Blanchot also permeates this reflection more profoundly than its intermittent functions of screening and signalling that with Lacan might suggest: the story of Isabel, twice told in *Requiem* (46-49 and 100-109) and *L'angelo nero* (13-28), debates the possibility of suicide — an irresolvable enigma in *The Space of Literature* (100-103) — condensing this particularly mysterious desire of the Other into the mystery of sexual difference, and leaving Isabel's survivors much scope for remorse.

Although this thematic complex is first sketched in Melchiorre's story and developed into the 1990s, development begins with the chronicle of Garibaldo's death foretold. When he steps forward, having failed to commemorate the massacre, to voice the survivors' demands of post-war society, the step he takes is doomed, to the point of being suicidal: of his two boyhood friends, one was murdered for intransigent opposition to Fascism (95-96), and one when police dispersed the previous day's strike meeting (140-44). Garibaldo thus expiates remorse for the narcissistic defiance he showed in taunting Melchiorre, provoking the massacre that has haunted his dreams ever since, one of them foretelling all as he dozed at his own wedding celebrations to find himself in the grave of his suicidally heroic paternal uncle Volturmo (29-32, 99-102, 128, 142). Like Volturmo, but unlike the narrator of "Rebus", Garibaldo eventually compromises his epic desires, in his case vested in Asmara, and in the gesture of narration itself. Tabucchi thus opens a fictional anamnesis whose first fruit is a recognition (re-articulated with remarkable consistency in *Sostiene Pereira*, *La gastrite*, and *La testa perduta*) that the finest discursive and practical gestures of political and ethical commitment are themselves symptoms of trauma, but that storytelling is nonetheless an essential ethical commitment. Yet as the semiological satire of "Interpretazione" already suggests, the intellectual resources this requires stand condemned to general mis-recognition by the broadest configurations of contemporary Italian culture.

III – Eco, Vattimo, Tabucchi

For political, pre-philosophical, reasons, Eco's "methodological structuralism" requires categorical distinctions between object- and meta-languages, and between nature and culture. His immediate antagonist in *La struttura assente* is Lévi-Strauss's "ontological structuralism", which admits neither, and his purpose to make possible a relativistic stance towards culture analysed as object-language: this is also the basis of his objection to the Lacanian conception of the unconscious as discourse of the Other. Lacan (like Blanchot, Foucault, and Derrida) works on Eco's reading with an ontology that rather diverges from

structuralism than admit his categorical distinctions (323-50): Eco reduces this divergence to fidelity to philosophical tradition, and submits the tradition to political denunciation. Refusal of his first categorical distinction is referred to the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger (352), associated with Nazism on the basis of a single under-interpreted quotation from *What is Called Thinking?* (358), then referred also to the contemplative tradition of the Athenian slave-owning *élite* expressed in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Politics* (359).

Yet one hundred pages earlier, Eco derives the distinction between ontological and methodological structuralism from terminological ambiguities in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Physics* (256-58). On its own terms, Eco's argument belongs to the tradition repudiated, although this places in question the tradition's homogeneity (as well as the politics of the argument itself). Conversely, Blanchot's questions to Heidegger in *The Infinite Conversation* bear precisely on the susceptibility of the term "ontology" to having foisted on it, as by Eco, the sense of an enduringly transmissible answer rather than a question requiring persistent re-formulation: it is an ontological questioning in which Tabucchi is decisively assisted by Lacan and Blanchot.

Controversies arising from Eco's polemic against Lacan caused him first to re-write the relevant section of *La struttura assente* for foreign-language editions, then re-write the book, as the *Theory of Semiotics*, rather than publish it in English.¹⁸ The relevant section excised, theory and book were re-cast and the polemic's conclusions thenceforth assumed rather than argued, although a recent survey of responses shows the continuity of the later with earlier versions of the theory did not go universally unrecognized (Caesar 106-107). However, the terms of the polemic are canonical for a configuration of Italian culture very much broader than the field of mass-communications studies in whose defence it was conceived, being both influential, and representative of more widespread intellectual and institutional resistances.¹⁹ It was, for example, echoed into the 1990s by attempts to insulate received practices of literary study, both philologically- and sociologically-oriented, against the threats, perceived and real, of deconstruction and of the market in intellectual property and personnel that disseminates it. In Segre's case, this defence is continued even when the politics of criticism is envisaged – in a remarkable palinode — in terms that

¹⁸ Eco's account of this episode, plus the variants it occasioned, are given in the preface to the revised edition of *La struttura assente* cited (i-xxv).

¹⁹ These await intellectual-historical and sociological analysis, beyond what is possible here, of their over-determination by Italian intellectual traditions of neoidealism and historicism, and by political cultures of Fascism and anti-Fascism, as well as by the specific history and structure of the Italian university. The initial Italian readings of Heidegger by Eco's and Vattimo's future teacher Luigi Pareyson, but also by Ernesto Grassi, are among a range of landmark responses to Croce and Gentile which also include those of Ginzburg's teacher Delio Cantimori, and Gianfranco Contini; they will not be fully understood without reference to this context.

require deconstructive resources: he re-constructs semiology as propaedeutic to an ontologically investigative literary aesthetics, despite persisting in his earlier, restrictively instrumental, reading of Bakhtin.²⁰ Luperini's use of Benjamin as well as Bakhtin in *L'allegoria del moderno* follows comparable procedures to similar effects, re-casting both as theoreticians of the literary object by arbitrarily selective and de-historicized readings that obscure their complex intellectual-historical affinities with the post-Heideggerian tradition he and Segre follow Eco in condemning. Conversely, Tabucchi's appeal to Blanchot and Lacan establishes a premise that neither literature nor language is accessible as an object, whether before theorization (empiricism), or after (positivism): the effect of attempting to position them as such is to place them beyond reach, as indicated by the parable of "Il signor Pirandello".

Eco's polemic has also been extended to cover Certeau and Lyotard as well as Foucault and Derrida, and protect established conceptions of historiography: Ginzburg like Eco insists that objects and subjects of knowledge are independently constituted.²¹ Whereas in Ginzburg the historical object tends to exceed subjective capacities of differentiation, generating huge anthropological generalizations,²² Eco affects absolute control, by a relativistic subjectivity, of an object world reduced to an array of discursive repertoires: this generates a scholarly output so encyclopaedic as to be unfathomable to less manoeuvrable subjectivities, and a fictional one in which Žižek finds a prototype of postmodern cynical irony (*The Sublime Object* 27-28). These mutually complementary denials of the part of the discourse of the Other in constituting the given relations of subject and object are instructive, although the most significant figure in this context is probably Vattimo.

La struttura assente acknowledges that Vattimo's early studies inform its own expositions of Aristotle and Heidegger, and that its dismissal of Lacan is based on the latter (258, 339, 341-42, 354). However, Eco's book is also cited as authority – against Foucault's use of Heidegger in particular — in Vattimo's 1974 interpretation of Nietzsche as a proto-sociological thinker: the polemical sense of this enterprise is partly to historicize psychoanalysis, and discredit it,

²⁰ For the self-cancelling palinode, see "La critica semiologica in Italia"; for Bakhtin already abridged, *Avviamento all'analisi del testo letterario*; for a recent, painstaking assessment of what is at issue in productive transplantation of Bakhtin, Hirschkop; on Bakhtin in the Italian academic context, Tabucchi, "Il rancore e le nuvole", *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* 83-98.

²¹ Against Derrida, Foucault, and Certeau, see *Il formaggio e i vermi* (xvi-xvii); Bakhtin with an admixture of Benjamin is canvassed as an antidote here too (xiv-xv and xxv). Again against Certeau, see *Il giudice e lo storico* (12-13 and 113), and against Lyotard as well as Certeau, "Just one witness".

²² For two sympathetic review-articles, both responding to Ginzburg's *Storia notturna* (1989), but both pressing this point, see Anderson, and Fortini; for a less sympathetic account balanced by a parallel interrogation of Derrida, see Cohen.

sharing the first objective (but not the second, even more ambitious, one) with Foucault himself.²³ There is no retreat from this in Vattimo's subsequent Gadamerian phase, where he typically acknowledges the writers evaded by Eco either to homogenize them with his own "hermeneutic ontology", or dismiss them as lesser readers of Heidegger than Gadamer, and metaphysical humanists:²⁴ the conflict between these strategies is even more striking than that between the second, and the earlier Vattimo's bringing this last charge against Gadamer himself (*Le avventure* 15-43). The contradiction of the Gadamerian phase is only possible because the reading of Heidegger expounded between 1975 and 1979 in essays collected in the third and fourth parts of *Le avventure* (71-173), and canonized as *il pensiero debole*, consistently attempts to subordinate principles of causal explanation, absolutely, to those of hermeneutics. Although Vattimo regularly re-calls Nietzsche to testify that interpretation is not at the interpreter's whim, this accounts for his programmatic indifference to the given internal boundaries of philosophy, but also to its external ones — notably, in different phases, with journalism, natural science, and religion, but also with the arts and humanities generally, and political practice (see, in particular, *Al di là del soggetto*, *Le mezze verità*, *Oltre l'interpretazione*, and *Credere di credere*).

This projects an image of a human subject permanently and infinitely mobile relative to whatever discursive formation, and is virtually an ideal type of the postmodernism/poststructuralism against which Žižek insists on Lacan's re-insertion of a principle of causality not simply into hermeneutic practice (thus re-configured as anamnesis), but also into hermeneutic ontology: the symptom (and ultimately the subject) are effects of the traumatic cause, which is ineliminable because it cannot be fully phrased, and cannot be fully phrased because it comes into being only retro-actively, when it eludes symbolization adequate to present needs. Conversely, the binding symbolism concealing the gap, and holding the subject in place, is the symptom, and the occasion for anamnesis.²⁵ This articulates the standpoint of Tabucchi's fiction as well as the

²³ See *Il soggetto e la maschera* 279 (against Freud) and 323 (against Foucault); on Foucault and psychoanalysis, see Derrida.

²⁴ In *Le avventure della differenza*, containing essays dating from the period 1972-9, contrast the first strategy (25) with the second (71-94 and 151-71), but note that this oscillation can be traced down to *Oltre l'interpretazione* (1994), via the intervening collections *Al di là del soggetto*, *La fine della modernità*, and *Etica dell'interpretazione*, as well as Vattimo's own contributions to the classic collection edited with Rovatti, *Il pensiero debole*.

²⁵ Žižek's project has a somewhat idiosyncratic form of exposition that impedes economical referencing; but see the appendix to *The Metastases*, "Taking Sides: a Self-Interview" (167-217), where the author purports to "look at myself through the eyes of 'common knowledge', raising all the questions that seem to bother 'common knowledge' apropos of Lacanian theory" (167). "Part I. Cause" (5-85) is a particularly useful

essays on Pessoa, but also assists in pin-pointing an important difference between Vattimo's "postmodernism" and Lyotard's: Vattimo's hostility toward psychoanalysis modulates characteristically, *via* reductive assimilation of Lacan's notoriously mobile position to his own (*La fine della modernità* 147), into declaring it redundant (*Credere di credere* 53-54). Contemporaneously, Lyotard withdraws earlier resistance to Lacan, both explicitly and by canvassing an investigation conceived as anamnesis: his enterprise and Tabucchi's converge in a manner developed in section IV.

Eco invented the unity later called poststructuralism, to denounce it, influentially. Ginzburg assimilates it (*via* conflation of Certeau on the history and politics of the constitution of objects of study with White on the rhetoric of historiography, and the latter's readings in Italian idealism) to Gentile's Fascism, fabricating a Heidegger controversy *all'italiana* to further discredit the same phantom object ("Just One Witness"). Vattimo alternately refuses it any differences with himself, and repeats Eco's gesture of expulsion by projecting onto it the humanism he diagnoses in Gadamer before succumbing to it himself. The intellectual and practical interest of Tabucchi's anamneses lies in entering the intellectual space thus mis-recognized without naming it, to explore the libidinal and ethical cogencies of lived experience: his use of fiction reflects the impossibility of formalizing the binding symbolism of such experience into semiotic repertoires, or compartmentalizing it as the discursive formation of one among other intellectual or philosophical disciplines, and its correlative resistance to the easy analytical and political manipulations envisaged by semiology and *il pensiero debole*.

La gastrite parallels the situation of the prisoner in the riddle first adduced in 1975 with the structure of experience in contemporary Italian society, and the riddle's solution with Tabucchi's own fiction (but also with writing as allegedly conceived by Blanchot). Tabucchi's text, an open letter to Sofri, appears wilfully casual, referring repeatedly to own its zigzags (32, 38, 40), but is elaborately designed, unobtrusively re-phrasing Sofri's trial as a symptom of sociopathology:

supponiamo dunque che la lettura della tua vicenda giudiziaria . . . possa servire da 'illuminazione' per qualcuno su alcune pagine di storia italiana recente . . . costui naturalmente si inquieta . . . la tua vicenda, oltre che costituire l'esempio di una sentenza . . . ingiusta perché priva di prove verificabili, assume una dimensione molto più vasta: è davvero il perturbante di freudiana memoria, un *Unheimlich* non più desunto da un racconto di Hoffmann, ma dalla Storia. Insomma diventa . . . un oscuro segno (semiologicamente inteso) che risemantizza le pagine precedenti. E a questo punto . . .

counterpart to Vattimo, as well as providing a helpful introduction to *The Sublime Object*, where a Lacanian position on the relation of object- to meta-language is distinguished from a generically poststructuralist one (153-61), and "The Symptom" is the theme of Part I (9-84).

non sarebbe più tanto l'effetto di una causa quanto, paradossalmente, la causa postuma di un effetto preventivo.

(25-26)

Tabucchi disingenuously credits Eco's reading of Joyce in *Opera aperta* with leading him to this purview (25), also identified with that of his own "molti romanzi" and "poetica del doppio, dell'assenza e dell'equivoco" (22 and 57), but the terms in which he sets it out, developing those in which he expounded the riddle in 1975, identify it, to the contrary, as one of anamnesis, after Lacan. Yet although the mechanism of temporal inversion is brought into play as it was not when the riddle was deployed in discussing *O Marinheiro*, there is still some indirection about the way the vocabulary of cause and effect used inverts Lacan, the reference *via* Freud, and that to semiology. This complex manoeuvre is remarkable, since *La gastrite* mounts Tabucchi's first overt polemic against Eco, defending his own writing against a sally in which Eco had refused "intellectuals" any role in society beyond their disciplinary specialisms plus, at most, a responsibility to educate (see Eco, "Il primo dovere degli intellettuali", and *La gastrite* 15-18). Rather than personalized controversy, what Tabucchi avoids is therefore, specifically, theoretical debate, as though recognizing that it is constitutionally dysfunctional: infiltration of Tabucchi's own reading of Lacan into *Opera aperta* is accompanied by the briefest oblique indication of *La gastrite's* differences with Vattimo (16-17), and despite the essays on Pessoa, it is the fiction that most concertedly exposes the exteriority traversing and controlling interiority.

Already on arrival in India at the beginning of *Notturmo indiano*, the narrator's purpose in seeking the prostitute who has summoned him to help his long-lost friend is repeatedly deflected by Indians' assumptions that since he is a Westerner, his business must be sex tourism: the entire novel is about relations of mutual misrecognition, although the Indian characters and ambience tend increasingly to shed light on the way these engage the narrator and other Europeans. Correspondingly, the scene narrows in the closing chapters to the former Portuguese colony Goa, and is permeated by repeated reminiscences of Portugal itself, including an appreciation of Pessoa's occult mysticism seemingly shared by the narrator and his Indian host in Madras, each uneasy until this point of contact offers the basis of a tacit contract between them that is crucial to the story's development (53-61). It becomes increasingly questionable, however, whether the contract is willed on either side, and indeed whether the encounter ever took place, so dislocated is this point in narrative space and time by the novel's wider exploration of inter-subjectivity: host assists guest in tracing his Portuguese friend to Goa, where the search is apparently abandoned, but also re-phrased as a fantasy of being sought, and thus of being Portuguese. Yet in "Il gioco del rovescio", a Portugal mapped for the Italian narrator by his enigmatic lover's reminiscences of Pessoa had already figured as

the exteriority traversing and controlling interiority (*Il gioco* 9-24). Enjoyment of this and subsequent fictions' exotic details of Portuguese landscape and culture is therefore a distraction, signalled as such by the rapidly shifting significance of fictional references to Pessoa, away from enabling characters even the fragile sense of complicity initially sketched in both "Il gioco" and *Notturmo indiano*.

Key in this respect is *Requiem*, written in Portuguese and recounting an hallucinatory vision of Lisbon and of *fantasmi* from the past. This is stimulated by reading *The Book of Disquietude*, and culminates in an encounter with Pessoa himself, although he is named only for being depicted on the 100-escudo notes begged from the narrator by an addict (13-19, 117-29). *Qua* character, he is designated "tizio", "poeta", and, at dinner with the narrator in the last chapter, where he is taxed with provoking excessive anxiety, and heralding a generalized postmodern sensibility exemplified by the restaurant's *décor* and menu, "convitato". A sense that Pessoa – now himself a hallucination – has been dispersed into the environment of the chiasmic movement driving the fiction is underlined in *La testa perduta*, where his name features in a TV programme distractedly half-watched, and presented in English, with subtitles, by a young, female, Norwegian tourist who does not read poetry: it is the name of a restaurant on the Algarve and its resident tame chameleon. Meanwhile, an allusive conversation off-screen identifies another chameleon: the novel's villain Titânio Silva, a veteran of counter-insurgency operations in Angola turned dealer in drugs as well as policeman (183-84). Tabucchi's Portugal is no more a comfortable tourist destination, or Archimedean point of authentic vision, than the settings of *Piazza d'Italia* and *Notturmo indiano*. It is another theatre of trauma, for outsiders in *Notturmo indiano* and *Requiem*, for the indigenous population of Fascist past and democratic present in *Sostiene Pereira* and *La testa perduta*, and for all such in various stories, although "Notte, mare o distanza" (*L'angelo nero* 29-49) is so densely meta-fictional as to obscure which the narrator is: seeds sown in 1975 bear much of their fruit in the 1990s.

IV – Blanchot, Lyotard, Tabucchi

After diagnosing a national culture of contempt for writers, intensified since the 1980s, *La gastrite* proposes that "la 'conoscenza' intellettuale e la conoscenza artistica possono essere coniugate in una miscela assai feconda . . . dove ogni ingrediente, da solo, può risultare meno efficace" (31). Specifying one ingredient as "il linguaggio della letteratura, ovvero la finzione che interpreta la realtà e le dà un senso" (82), Tabucchi indicates that these effects are investigative, interrogative ones (34-35), and an open question also addressed in *La testa perduta*, concerning the ratification or disqualification of discourse as knowledge, or truth. Tabucchi also orients himself by reference to Vittorini and,

especially, Sciascia and Pasolini, to whose memories *La gastrite* is dedicated (9, 29-32 and 45), but takes as his text Blanchot's "Intellectuals under Scrutiny" (1984; Holland 206-27), and presents it as a riposte to Lyotard's "Tomb of the Intellectual" (1983; *Political Writings* 3-7), where "con la disinvoltura di chi interroga il mondo soprattutto attraverso i mass media, il noto filosofo-semiologo-sociologo francese aveva decretato la morte dell'intellettuale" (35). This represents both pieces so selectively as to misrepresent them, introducing an antithesis so artfully fictitious as to acknowledge affinity with both writers, but without squaring accounts, or being drawn into public calculation of their substantial overlap, in both cases, with Lacan's. Calculation would invite controversy: by avoiding it, while also paying Eco Lacan's dues and Blanchot Lyotard's, Tabucchi establishes a position such controversy would cloud.

Quoting Blanchot's first paragraph, and the first sentence of his second, Tabucchi interprets them as suggesting that "l'atto di conoscenza intellettuale è anche un atto creativo" (36), but reverses this several times. He first acknowledges the — rhetorically — interrogative character of Blanchot's formulations, and next alleges Blanchot's "concetto di fiducia nella funzione della letteratura e dell'arte come atti intellettivi" (*ibid.*), before registering that this is a paradoxical one of success in artistic practice through failure to achieve the objectives set for it. He then affirms the fictitious antagonism by reference to the intellectual and artistic vitality and *novità* of Blanchot's position, and to Lyotard's allegedly contrasting, funereal, conception of intellectuals' managerial role in transmitting culture as *per* an encyclopaedia. With some qualification in recognition of Lyotard's intellectual versatility and the *Encyclopédie* as channel and model of cultural communication, this introduces a contrast between the Diderot who edited it, and the author of *Jacques le fataliste*: Tabucchi infers greater sympathy on Blanchot's part for the latter persona, because of its relative richness in *novità*. Although a quotation — not transmitted by Blanchot — shows otherwise (36-37), Tabucchi also suggests Lyotard's working definition of the intellectual excludes artists and writers (implying Lyotard considers these functions superannuated), disingenuously suggests Lyotard should have read more poetry, and quotes another long passage from Blanchot, by equally disingenuous implication glossed as a portrait, formulated *contra* Lyotard, of the intellectual or writer as "sentinella che non è lì che per . . . attendere con un'attenzione attiva in cui si esprime meno la preoccupazione per se stessi che . . . per gli altri" (39).

Notwithstanding the vitality of Lyotard's thinking has recently been argued without concession to his own later disavowals of earlier work in acknowledgement of its supposed vitalism (by Williams; but see Lyotard, *Just Gaming* 3-6, 89-90, and *Peregrinations* 13-15), these are more plausible than Tabucchi's suggestion that he is a funereal thinker: Blanchot's meditations on death *qua* figuration of de-centring exteriority make him the stronger candidate to be considered such (as by Rose), but also a point of reference for Tabucchi's

introduction to Pessoa-Soares and for *Notturmo indiano*. Whereas Lyotard repeatedly cites Diderot (fiction included) as authority,²⁶ there is no such density of reference in Blanchot, although his later reflections on cultural institutions do include a direct defence of encyclopaedic culture, contrasting Diderot, for intellectual mobility, with D'Alembert (*Friendship* 51-56): Tabucchi's artful selectivity conceals a reflection it also signals to readers prepared to engage with it.

Lyotard's essay summarizes much of his thinking over an extended period,²⁷ and canvasses a continuing "experimental" or "creative" function that requires a commitment, "essentially dispossessed and dispossessing" ("Tomb of the Intellectual" 5), to ontological investigation such as Tabucchi elsewhere finds modelled in Blanchot's conception of literature, and endorses. What Lyotard deems obsolete is revolutionary or reformist intellectuals' commitment to articulating and achieving a universal criterion of human self-realization in society. Nothing in Tabucchi's writings since 1975 dissents from this reformulation of a problem Blanchot had tested from the 1930s, from various different standpoints, for its ethical and political implications: neither Tabucchi nor Blanchot is any more committed to the function of the intellectual in Lyotard's sense than he is (or than he is to semiology and sociology).

Nor does Blanchot's essay reach the conclusions Tabucchi suggests. It does argue an intermittent duty of political and ethical commitment, but also that this involves forsaking the essential solitude of the artistic vocation: Blanchot here abandons the plane of ontological investigation. Tabucchi effaces Blanchot's palinode, partly by translating his quotations from the French edition referenced in such a way as to mute the idiosyncratic vocabulary in which Blanchot phrases the artist's solitude, now disowned, from "Literature and the Right to Death" onwards: even comparison with the English translations of Blanchot cited here shows this clearly. Although Tabucchi does not acknowledge the route leading Blanchot to this reversal, it moves *via* various phrasings of themes also addressed by Tabucchi without explicit reference to him, including friendship and political commitment at the end of history, sexual difference, and suicide.²⁸

²⁶ See his remarks to van Reijen and Veerman 279-80, and compare Lyotard, *Just Gaming* (1979) 11-12, as well as *The Inhuman* 45-46, 96, 149-50, and *Peregrinations* 13-14 (both 1988).

²⁷ Not coincidentally, Bennington discusses the same essay in introducing Lyotard, with a view to establishing a schematic overview (5-9); his book is arrestingly complemented by those of Readings, and Williams.

²⁸ Schematically, these inform the narrative works (a rich selection of which appear in Quasha's volume of Blanchot's *Fiction and Literary Essays*) up to the uncollected *Awaiting Oblivion* (1962), as well as the passage from material gathered in *The Work of Fire*, *The Space of Literature*, *The Infinite Conversation*, and *Friendship* (1971), to *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), and *The Unavowable Community* (1983). For introductory commentary, see Hill, and Holland.

Given Tabucchi's detailed reading of Blanchot, their convergences and differences in these areas, in conjunction with Tabucchi's with Lacan, will structure a global interpretation of his project.

Tabucchi calls on Blanchot to support a supposition that the literary vocation is in itself, intermittently, a commitment to explore political and ethical problems, notwithstanding his own conception of this is closer to Lyotard's essay than Blanchot's: whereas Blanchot divorces ethical from ontological investigation, Lyotard abandoned revolutionary hope to bring them together.²⁹ His engagements with psychoanalysis thematize its response to otherwise unrepresentable singularities, albeit somewhat differently in different phases, calling on *The Space of Literature* for reinforcement of an ontological rather than scientific investigation in the 1970s, and elaborating a practice of anamnesis, after Lacan, in the 1980s; his writings on literary and other art envisage and attempt articulation of singularities resistant to reductive conceptual representation, into which even psychoanalysis tends to congeal, to the point that art and writing on art themselves come to be conceived as anamnesis. "Postmodernism", in his usage, is partially synonymous with anamnesis, but after *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) he increasingly disowns the more familiar term's confusing and confused effects.³⁰

Tabucchi's disavowal of Lyotard, in favour of an equally misrepresented Blanchot, disowns a name more widely identified with the self-cancelling effect identified by Lyotard himself than with anything else, plus the ethos of

²⁹ For the relation of this trajectory to its point of departure, see, apart from the essay under discussion, and the entire collection of *Political Writings* assembled by Readings (in which it is collected), the introductions cited in note 27, *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1986), and *Peregrinations*, especially the 1982 "afterword", "A Memorial of Marxism: for Pierre Souyri" (45-75).

³⁰ On psychoanalysis and ethics (personified by a reference to Lévinas that immediately brings Lyotard into close proximity with Blanchot), see "Jewish Oedipus" (1970) and "On a figure of discourse" (1973). This negotiation continues, *contra* Heidegger, up to and beyond Heidegger and "the jews" (1988) and the presentation of this book collected in *Political Writings* (135-47), the ethical phrasing predominating in *Just Gaming* and *The Differend* (1983), and the psychoanalytic one in *The Inhuman* and *Signed, Malraux* (1996). For the infiltration of Blanchot, *contra* Lacan, into a psychoanalytically-oriented aesthetics, see *Discours, figure* (1971) 357, but especially "The Psychoanalytic Approach to Artistic and Literary Expression" (1973), and on Lacan compare *Peregrinations* 10-11 and 31. For writing as anamnesis, against postmodernity in the sense of the eclectic market in cultural goods ranging from food to thought dubiously contemplated by Tabucchi in *Requiem*, see *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, especially 11-25; for anamnesis explicitly indebted to Lacan and repudiating the postmodernist badge, "Rewriting modernity" (1987) in *The Inhuman* 24-35. This – complex – outline of Lyotard on psychoanalysis, ethics, Judaism, and postmodernism is a simplified one: it is indispensable to cogent interpretation of *Sostiene Pereira* as well as *La testa perduta*.

professionalism advocated by Eco (but not by Lyotard, whose essay actually resists it).. The convergence of Tabucchi's project with Lyotard's locates it with some precision relative to the field of postmodernisms: when he effaces Blanchot's recognition of the obligation to abandon creative solitude, he multiplies by each other the two demands Blanchot separates, suggesting the literary vocation calls forth the essential response to the demand of ethical and political commitment precisely when it leads to ontological investigation such as the reading of Eco or Vattimo would discourage.

This is the burden of *La testa perduta*, where, against the alternately magical and devastated backdrops of a (post)modernizing Portugal, a cast of cartoon grotesques gather about a headless corpse to enact and dream the inconclusive parodies of various dystopian Sciascia novels, in a macabre pantomime scripted by and for the communications industry. Organization of the story around traffic in drugs recalls *Una storia semplice*; Titânio Silva's hypocritical denunciation of smoking (compare 196 and 236), *Il cavaliere e la morte* (12-15). Tabucchi thus re-stages Sciascia's concluding analyses of Sicilian and Italian realities, although the mood of emotional and intellectual blankness cast over the novel by investigative-journalist anti-hero Firmino contrasts markedly with both, as with much of Sciascia's other work, and of Tabucchi's. Firmino also dreams a dream, of Paris, which echoes Sciascia's mordantly ironic denunciation, from his own dystopian location, of all Utopianisms, including those of blithe de-politicization and erotic fulfillment — *Candido, ovvero Un sogno fatto in Sicilia*: the difference is that Firmino aspires to enact it. The quixotic gentleman-amateur Avvocato's towering verbosity and erudition is an inverted image of the lugubrious President of the Supreme Court, Riches, in *Il contesto* (itself already subtitled "una parodia"), and thus, also, a portrait of Sciascia mobilizing reminiscences of his writings too dispersed to catalogue. However, the Avvocato's characterization, like Firmino's name, is also informed by Lyotard's *Signed, Malraux*, a biography of a subject haunted by sexual difference whose identity turns on his signature, and whose anti-Fascist rhetoric is toweringly inaudible: Tabucchi's mock disavowal of Lyotard in *La gastrite* coincides with the coalescence of their practices of anamnesis. A juridical metaphor is also common to Lyotard's book, which re-cycles it from *The Differend* (9 and *passim*; compare *Signed, Malraux* 3 and *passim*), and Tabucchi's novel, which in a characteristic gesture hybridizes it with Italian literary tradition, now personified by Sciascia.

Firmino belongs, constitutively and without remainder, to a milieu insensible to the end of history it witnesses. This is decipherable from within the fiction — if at all — only to the prodigious literary and philosophical sensibility of the Avvocato, whom Firmino's perceptions reduce to a caricature legible as such — if at all — only to the reader. Firmino is likewise a caricature, but one mirroring the sensibility of any reader who takes the Avvocato for the bafflingly histrionic grotesque Firmino encounters. The theme of sexual difference is again

key: it is the bachelor *Avvocato* who warns Firmino, late in the day, against continuing neglect of his *ragazza* or *fidanzata* Catarina (200), a figure more remote even than the female characters of *Il contesto* (30-38, 51, 90) and *Il cavaliere* (40-47, 48-51, 73-80), whom Sciascia leaves shrouded in the unfathomable texture of appearances his novels report. Up to this point, Catarina figures only in the day-dreams of a character reduced to these, plus his professional activities; subsequently, she features briefly only to be pushed again into the background (229-38).

The novel here re-joins *La gastrite's* polemic against Eco's ethos of professionalism. Correlatively, the one episode not reported as witnessed by Firmino is that of the corpse's discovery in the first chapter, by the underclass gypsy Manolo: any development of the mystery requires the testimony of another sensibility than that sketched in Firmino and challenged in the reader, variously personified by the *Avvocato*, and by Manolo, but also otherwise. On the closing page Firmino questions the credibility of the new witness the *Avvocato* hopes may close the case: "– Un travestito, disse Firmino, ospedale psichiatrico, schedato per prostituzione. Figuriamoci" (238). Unrecognizable (because articulated in fiction), mad (in its extremity), and venal (because it could not articulate itself without the assistance of the communications industry), the standpoint of Tabucchi's – ontological – investigation is in an important sense not one at all, constitutively lacking the validation for which he argues in *La gastrite*. By the same token, enough filters through their conversations, however obscurely given Firmino's obtuseness, to convey the *Avvocato's* role of sentinel, such as *La gastrite* finds outlined by Blanchot, but also that his enterprise is – self-consciously – as hopeless as Garibaldi's, and pathological as the commitment of friendship in *Notturmo indiano*.

The *Avvocato's* commitment, to marginals otherwise denied the possibility of voicing their claims to justice and liberty, arises from past traumas and present remorse that are inscrutable to Firmino (113, 123, 126-31, 170-71, 173, 178, 183, 200), lying beyond the limits of what can be represented to his sensibility. They also remain unresolved, as emblems of another trauma likewise left unresolved by deceptively rapid identification of corpse and murderers, and by the ensuing travesty of justice. Dated "Helsinki, 30 ottobre 1996" (238), this is the seventh novel by Tabucchi to narrate death suffered in the presence of a civil power, somehow camouflaged or counterfeited. The other six had all been published by 1994, although this story of murder inside a police station, followed by the corpse's decapitation and concealment on wasteland, was borrowed from reports in the Portuguese news media of an incident on 7 May 1996 (239). Collective human existence is the enduringly dire enigma requiring an anamnesis pursued here through a complex chiasmic movement between Italian storytelling and Portuguese story, the first studiously trivialized by its exaggeratedly malign account of the second, but the second aggravated in its malignancy by its conformity to the first: each is a fiction visible in its truth only

insofar as it coincides with the other, like either face of the Moebius band. That the novel is in this strong sense about Italy as well as Portugal is underlined by continuities with the theme of marginalization in the more recent *Gli Zingari e il Rinascimento* (1999), a disconcerting blend of fictional and non-fictional treatments of a contemporary Florentine setting.

Both books develop an interrogation of readers' sensibilities begun when *Notturmo indiano*'s erotic theme demands careful re-reading of the novel's disparities from the description of it given in the final chapter: these are no meta-fictional game, notwithstanding some margin of freedom to read them as such, and evade their questioning in the manner of both participants in the closing dialogue. There is a similar possibility of reading *La testa perduta* without registering its indirections, its radical dystopianism, or the insensibility of Firmino, whose dreams – asleep and awake — are repeatedly infiltrated by advertising for beach holidays in Portugal and Madeira, by a Parisian idyll that reverses *Candido*'s ironies for him whether or not it does the same for the reader, and by aspirations to a life of literary scholarship. However, Tabucchi's questions of his readers are also developed in *Il filo dell'orizzonte* and in associated stories: the bafflement of *Piazza d'Italia* is relocated in the time of writing, in the Italian history of the 1970s and after, sometimes explicitly linked with that of the 1930s and 1940s, but sometimes realistically resisting all the reader's efforts to decipher events. Despite intermittent indirections, these are pivotal themes of *Il gioco del rovescio*, *Piccoli equivoci*, and *L'angelo nero*. In addition to the ethical analysis of the fictional enterprise in *Requiem*, and Tabucchi's differences and convergences with themes in Lacan, Blanchot and Lyotard, a global interpretation would therefore turn on the disparity signalled in *Notturmo indiano*, between a reading that responds to Tabucchi's questioning, affording realizations of the Shakespeare problem's gravity scarcely glimpsed in "Interpretazione", and one that does not.

University of Wales Swansea

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Beginning/Ending, Openness/Consistency: Models for the Hyper-Novel

I like to take in hand none but clean, virgin, fair-and-square mathematical jobs, something that regularly begins at the beginning, and is at the middle when midway, and comes to an end at the conclusion; not a cobbler's job, that's at an end in the middle, and at the beginning at the end.

(H. Melville, *Moby Dick*, ch. 126, 431)

That of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best — I'm sure it is the most religious — for I begin with writing the first sentence — and trusting to Almighty God for the second. 'Twould cure an author for ever of the fuss and folly of opening his street-door, and calling in his neighbours and friends, and kinsfolk, with the devil and all his imps, with their hammers and engines, &c. only to observe how one sentence of mine follows another, and how the plan follows the whole...

(L. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, VIII, ch. 2, 438)

Per chiudere la rassegna dei finali, ricorderò una delle ultime pièces di Samuel Beckett, *Ohio Impromptu* [Improvviso dell'Ohio]. Due vecchi identici con lunghi capelli bianchi, vestiti con lunghi mantelli neri, siedono a una tavola. Uno ha in mano un logoro libro e legge. L'altro ascolta, tace e talvolta lo interrompe con un ticchettio delle nocche sul tavolo. "Little is left to tell" [Poco resta da dire], e racconta una storia di lutto e solitudine e d'un uomo che dev'essere l'uomo che ascolta quella storia fino all'arrivo dell'uomo che legge e rilegge quella storia, letta e riletta chissà quante volte fino alla frase finale: "Little is left to tell," ma sempre ancora qualcosa forse resta da dire in attesa di quella frase. Forse per la prima volta al mondo c'è un autore che racconta l'esaurirsi di tutte le storie. Ma per esaurite che siano, per poco che sia rimasto da raccontare, si continua a raccontare ancora.

(I. Calvino, "Cominciare e finire," *Saggi I*, 752-53)

Prologue: "A life-buoy of a coffin"

The first quote I have placed above as an epigraph is taken from chapter 126 of Melville's *Moby Dick*, entitled "The Life-Buoy." In this chapter, Captain Ahab plays the role of an ironic Ulysses explaining (with a hollow laugh) to his frightened crew the origin of the ominous cries they've heard, which they

believe, “according to the religion of the crewmen,” to be either the singing of mermaids or the voices of newly drowned men in the sea. The sound, Ahab says, is only the “human sort of wail” which sometimes causes seals to be mistaken for men. In the scene that follows, however, the ominous quality of this “wail” is confirmed by the sudden fall to his death of “the first man of the Pequod that mounted the mast to look for the White Whale, on the White Whale’s own peculiar ground” (429), a foretaste of the destiny which, within a few chapters, awaits the captain himself.

The life-buoy is dropped from the stern but no hand rises from the sea to grab it. The unlucky sailor is swallowed by the waves, and soon the buoy, too, disappears in the deep. The lost-life buoy needs to be replaced and attention is now drawn to Queequeg’s coffin; in short, the ship’s carpenter is asked to build “a life-buoy [out] of a coffin.” As a skilled craftsman, he is not pleased with the “cobbler’s job” assigned to him and expresses his discontent with the words quoted above. His words distinctly sound like Melville’s own commentary on the ambivalent task of all human craftsmanship, and particularly the writer’s own; the coffin turned into a life-buoy ironically serves both the purposes of life and death, converting one into the other.¹ Narrative art is no different. What is apparently a “linear” job — telling a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, according to classical prescriptions — can be a frustrating (and depressing) task, one “that’s at an end in the middle” or, even more enigmatically, “at the beginning at the end”: “[. . .]whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses,” says Ishmael in the book’s famous opening statement, “and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet [. . .] then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can” (12). “To get to sea” in order to save himself from “hypos” and melancholy is for Ishmael/Melville the equivalent of “to get to writing,” yet from the depths of the sea comes the [in-]human wail of the seals, irresistible as the Sirens’ song.

Beginning and Ending

As both the title and the third epigraph suggest, my point of departure — my beginning — is Italo Calvino’s last memo for the next millennium, left unfinished, and thus open to conjecture and interpretation, by his sudden and untimely death. Yet this is not simply an essay on Calvino’s “last” memo or on his six memos in general, often read as the writer’s prophetic “last will and testament.” Rather, the following remarks should be read as an approximation of what, for lack of a better definition, I will call the cognitive loop in the age of the “hyper-novel.”

¹ “We workers in wood make bridal-bedsteads and card-tables, as well as coffins and hearses. We work by the month, or by the job, or by the profit [. . .]” (*Moby Dick*, 431).

In an outline dated 23.2.85 (the day after the completion of a second draft of the lecture itself), “Cominciare e finire” appears as the first title of the six Norton lectures that Calvino was supposed to deliver at Harvard. Another of the many outlines sketched by Calvino, dating from the beginning of April, lists the slightly modified title: “The Art of Beginning and the Art of Concluding,” as the sixth and last lecture of the series. Later in June, the outline of the lectures begins to resemble what we have come to consider their definitive order: “Lightness,” “Quickness,” “Exactitude,” etc. In the last two outlines, all traces of “Beginning and Ending” have in fact disappeared. “Lightness” is consistently listed as the first lecture. The last missing one that we have come to know as “Consistency” is listed, instead, in the outline of June 22, under the title “Openness.” Basing himself on the examination of the five Norton notebooks and various references and marginal notes left by Calvino, Mario Barenghi comes up with this conjecture. The content of “Beginning and Ending,” presumably abridged, would have served as an introduction to the new, concluding theme of “Consistency,” which would have also included some fragmentary ideas (referred to in the marginalia) about “Openness” (for example, under the rubrics “sense of connection” and “disconnection”), in addition to various references to three books: Franz Kafka’s *Amerika*, Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Herman Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener*. The missing lecture, concludes Barenghi, would have likely addressed the connection between “intersubjectivity” and “solipsism,” thus perhaps allowing Calvino to talk about himself without making concessions to psychology and autobiography, categories he always preferred to avoid (*Saggi*, II, 2958-65).

I assume Barenghi’s hypothesis to be reasonable and valid. Yet, rather than conjecturing further about the content of the missing memo, or the compositional order of the series, I will focus here on the two contradictory ideas that would seemingly have been intertwined in that never completed and never delivered first / last lecture. Beginning↔Ending and Openness↔Consistency both imply a sequential order and an opposition (they are logical opposites that form a linear sequence). This is intuitively clear for the first couple of terms (Beginning and Ending), but can be also assumed for the second couple, if Consistency is understood simply as a synonym of Closure. The double sequence can be thus represented as a semiotic square composed of two symmetrical couples, two sets of literary, stylistic, and cognitive values which both exclude and imply each other:



Yet, if we do not consider it simply a synonym of Closure, the term “Consistency” — which Calvino eventually preferred to “Openness” as the concluding title of the last memo — implies a deliberate and semantically relevant choice. Beginning and Ending on the one hand, Openness and Consistency on the other are not rigidly symmetrical or equivalent terms any more; rather than being mutually exclusive in a linear sequence, Openness and Consistency seem to establish a series of *non-linear*, or *multilinear*, *recursive* and *reversible* connections.



Here, schematically represented, is the cognitive feedback loop, or knot, I referred to at the outset. Perhaps what Calvino was searching for in writing his six memos was a (semantic and stylistic) value which could both sum up his itinerary as a writer and keep the end open (although always in sight). A Consistency of Beginning and Openness of Ending which can be achieved only by exorcising Closure, securing, at least theoretically, a virtually endless flux of writing: a spinning wheel, constantly weaving, tangling and disentangling the intertwined spirals, the double helix, of life and fiction.

“Quickness”

In “Quickness,” the second memo for the next millennium, we read the following passage, in which Calvino is quoting from Carlo Levi’s introduction to an Italian translation of *Tristram Shandy*:

Tutti i mezzi, tutte le armi sono buone per salvarsi dalla morte e dal tempo. Se la linea retta è la più breve fra due punti fatali e inevitabili, le digressioni la allungheranno: e se queste digressioni diventeranno così complesse, aggrovigliate, tortuose, così rapide da far perdere le proprie tracce, chissà che la morte non ci trovi più, che il tempo si smarrisca, e che possiamo restare celati nei mutevoli nascondigli.

(*Saggi I* 669-70)

(Every means and every weapon is valid to save oneself from death and time. If a straight line is the shortest distance between two fated and inevitable points, digressions will lengthen it: and if these digressions become so complex, so tangled and tortuous, *so rapid as to hide their own tracks*, who knows — perhaps death may not find us, perhaps time will lose its way, and perhaps we ourselves can remain concealed in our shifting hiding places.)

(*Six Memos* 47)

Parole che mi fanno riflettere. Perché io non sono un cultore della divagazione; potrei dire che preferisco affidarmi alla linea retta, nella speranza che continui all'infinito e mi renda irraggiungibile. Preferisco calcolare lungamente la mia traiettoria di fuga, aspettando di potermi lanciare come una freccia e scomparire all'orizzonte. Oppure, se troppi ostacoli mi sbarrano il cammino, calcolare la serie di segmenti rettilinei che mi portino fuori dal labirinto nel più breve tempo possibile.

(*Saggi* I 669-70)

(Words, words that make us think. Because I am not devoted to aimless wandering; I'd rather say that I prefer to entrust myself to the straight line, in the hope that the line will continue into infinity, making me unreachable. I prefer to calculate at length the trajectory of my flight, expecting that I will be able to launch myself like an arrow and disappear over the horizon. Or else, if too many obstacles bar my way, to calculate the series of rectilinear segments that will lead me out of the labyrinth as quickly as possible.)

(*Six Memos* 47-48)

In the fifth (and last written) memo, "Multiplicity," Calvino discusses various models for the hyper-novel, the novel "as a vast net," not least of which are his own "novels" (*The Castle of the Crossed Destinies*, *Invisible Cities*, and *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler*). A quote from Gadda (the writer-engineer) serves him as an introduction to the topic: "[. . .] il romanzo contemporaneo come enciclopedia, come metodo di conoscenza, e soprattutto come rete di connessione tra i fatti, tra le persone, tra le cose del mondo" (*Saggi* I 717) ("[. . .] the contemporary novel as an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world" (*Six Memos* 105)). According to Calvino, "Carlo Emilio Gadda cercò per tutta la sua vita di rappresentare il mondo come un garbuglio, o groviglio, o gomitolo, di rappresentarlo senza attenuarne affatto l'inestricabile complessità, o per meglio dire, la presenza simultanea degli elementi più eterogenei che concorrono a determinare ogni evento. (*Saggi* I 717) ("Carlo Emilio Gadda tried all his life to represent the world as a knot, a tangled skein of yard; to represent it without in the least diminishing the inextricable complexity or, to put it better, the simultaneous presence of the most disparate elements that converge to determine every event" (*Six Memos* 106)). This definition captures the epistemological challenge of the hyper-novel, the novel as "an open encyclopedia" — a definition that openly contradicts the etymological meaning of the word, *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*, which implies a closed circle of knowledge and education, "an attempt to exhaust knowledge of the world by enclosing it in a circle" (*Six Memos* 116).

If Gadda's novels are all, in a sense, "unfinished or left as fragments," it is because they implicitly challenge the epistemological principle of the (modern) novel: the (impossible) representation of a closed universe. The same can be said of Calvino's own books of "fiction" (destinies, cities), including his hypothetical "novel of the Reader," *If on A Winter's Night a Traveler*, itself a

sort of (open) encyclopedia of the novel, reduced to its multiple beginnings. Correspondingly (and consistently), in Gadda's (and Calvino's) humorous shorter pieces from the *Cosmicomics* on, "[. . .] ogni minimo oggetto è visto come il centro d'una rete di relazioni che lo scrittore non sa trattenersi dal seguire, moltiplicando i dettagli in modo che le sue descrizioni e divagazioni diventano infinite." (*Saggi* I 718) ("[. . .] the least thing is seen as the center of a network of relationships that the writer cannot restrain himself from following, multiplying the details so that his descriptions and digressions become infinite" (*Six Memos* 107).² This dual, opposite pull of writing, synthetic and analytical, centripetal and centrifugal ("the immediate connection that writing establishes between everything existent or possible," "the digression [as] a strategy for putting off the ending" *Six Memos* 45, 46) is what characterizes the "system of systems" of (modernist) narrative as a field of incompatible epistemological tensions or forces. For Robert Musil, another writer-engineer, for example, "knowledge is the awareness of the incompatibility of two opposite polarities [. . .] mathematical exactitude and the imprecision of human affairs" (*Six Memos* 109). Musil's major encyclopedic work, of course, remains unfinished, like Proust's: "Neanche Marcel Proust riesce a vedere finito il suo romanzo-enciclopedia, ma non certo per mancanza di disegno, dato che l'idea della *Recherche* nasce tutt'insieme, principio e fine e linee generali [. . .]" (*Saggi* I 721) ("Not even Marcel Proust managed to put an end to his encyclopedic novel, though not for lack of design, since the idea for the book came to him all at once, the beginning and end and the general outline [. . .]" (*Six Memos* 110)). The *Recherche*, itself the model of a relativistic universe, is generated out of a singularity, a single point in space and time, as though in a creative "big bang." The idea or the "design" (the form) of the book in its instantaneous wholeness (beginning and ending) contains in itself, as in a kernel, all its centrifugal hidden dimensions, which drive its own unraveling:

La rete che lega ogni cosa è anche il tema di Proust; ma in Proust questa rete è fatta di punti spazio-temporali occupati successivamente da ogni essere, il che comporta una moltiplicazione infinita delle dimensioni dello spazio e del tempo. Il mondo si dilata fino a diventare inafferrabile, e per Proust la conoscenza passa attraverso la sofferenza di questa inafferrabilità.

(*Saggi* I 721)

(The network that links all things is also Proust's theme, but in him this net is composed of points in space-time occupied in succession by everyone, which brings about an infinite multiplication of the dimensions of space and time. The world expands until it can no longer be grasped, and knowledge, for Proust, is attained by suffering this intangibility.)

(*Six Memos* 110-11)

² On this issue see Musarra-Schröder.

Telephones, cars, airplanes, the “irascible” or mercurial deities of modern communication technology, as they appear in the *Recherche*, are not just external references to its epistemological uncertainties. They are the material manifestations of a shifting perception of reality, “della forma stessa dell’opera, della sua ragione interna, della sua ansia di dar fondo alla molteplicità dello scrivibile nella brevità della vita che si consuma.” (*Saggi* I 722) (“part of the work’s very form, of its inner logic, of the author’s anxiety to plumb the multiplicity of the writable within the briefness of life that consumes it” (*Six Memos* 112)).

The models for the hyper-novel are necessarily models of anxious (or neurotic) multiplicity, theoretically and stylistically ranging from Joyce to Borges and Perec, and Calvino himself. They all point to complex mental “structures” or constraints which enable the writer to achieve exactitude in imagination and language, to connect the intelligence of poetry and that of science (Valéry), producing “works that match the rigorous geometry of the crystal and the abstraction of deductive reasoning” (Borges) and “unite density of invention and expression with a sense of infinite possibilities” (*Six Memos* 118-19). Yet, what seems to be the common destiny of these works is their inability to escape the very contradictions that nurture them. The “inability to find an ending” thus becomes, in Calvino’s work, the very epistemological (and creative) principle of the hyper-novel (“the strategy of putting off the ending”), conceived as the extreme form that the novel must assume, not only at the historical boundaries of a genre but also at the very boundaries of narrative (and perhaps of writing) as we know it. Like Proust, Calvino’s fundamental anxiety or neurosis finds its material-immaterial “objective correlative” in the new technology of writing and communication which characterizes our *fin* (or *début*) *du siècle* (millennium). The novel as a vast net, a sort of rhizomatic labyrinth, is the paradoxical form of the novel in the age of electronic hypermedia, when beginning and ending, openness and closure, the very consistency of the writing process, seem to inevitably lose their traditional cognitive function and meaning. The answer to this fundamental epistemological challenge, which threatens the very survival of the novel(ist), must be equally paradoxical: one meant to suggest that the art of labyrinthine digression and the tireless calculation of the arrow’s linear flight, apparently antithetical yet symmetrical strategies for escaping the entrapments of death and time, may prefigure a new type of narrative space, where opposite ends meet — digressions that go straight to the heart of the matter, straight lines that escape in all directions. Calvino certainly appreciated these words of the indisputed master of digressions, among novelists of all times:

[. . .] the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, — and at the same time. [. . .]

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; — they are the life, the soul of reading; — take them out of this book for instance, — you might as well take the book along with them; — one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; — he steps forth like a bridegroom, — bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids appetite to fail [. . .] from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and I have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going [. . .].

(*Tristram Shandy* I, 22, 63).

Plagiarist by anticipation

In his introductory remarks to the meeting of hypertextual writers and web developers (“Technology Platforms for 21st century Literature”) held at Brown last year, Robert Coover had this to say about Calvino (whom he mentioned right next to Jorge Luis Borges among the literary prophets of hypertext in print): he would certainly have been a hypertextual author, had he had the chance and the tools. I would go a step further and include Calvino among those “plagiarists by anticipation,” (*plagiaires par anticipation*), celebrated by Oulipians, alongside such hypertextual precursors as Swift or Sterne or Borges himself. (The very idea of “plagiarism by anticipation” is consistent with the idea of hyper-writing as the “future perfect” of writing.) Calvino’s texts (his models for the hyper-novel) are not only prototypical hypertexts; they conceive, describe, and make visible a new writing space for hypertext. Yet, they do so following “the line,” and to some extent they are still prisoners of the line, struggling to free themselves from simple linearity. In other words, their driving force or energy is a fundamental anxiety, the anxiety of consistency (closure).³

Hypertextual author Michael Joyce and others have defined hypertext as “above all, a new visual form,” a new form of kinetic writing whose potential will be expressed in a new, hybrid type of poetic-narrative textuality, simultaneously employing different media. Hypertext, Joyce writes in his essay “What Happens as We Go,” “vindicates the word as visual image and reclaims its place in the full sensorium” (*Of Two Minds* 206). A few pages later in the same essay, he quotes Calvino himself from “the extraordinary 1967 essay ‘Cybernetics and Ghosts,’” a year after, Joyce reminds us, Glenn Gould’s claim in *The Prospects of Recording* that “indeed all the music that has ever been can now become a background against which the impulse to make listener-supplied connections is the new foreground” (215). “Electronic brains,” Joyce writes

³ I follow this line of interpretation in my forthcoming essay, “Le frecce della mente: Calvino, Arakawa e l’iper-romanzo,” to be published in the Proceedings of the International Symposium held in New York, April 1999 (Anna Botta, Milano: Mondadori).

paraphrasing Calvino, “provide a convincing model of the mind as network (in 1967 [Calvino] is reading Shannon and Wiener and von Neumann and Turing, seems aware of early AI work in chess)” (215). And here is the actual quote, from Calvino’s landmark essay:

Al posto di quella nuvola cangiante che portavamo nella testa fino a ieri [. . .] oggi sentiamo il velocissimo passaggio di segnali sugli intricati circuiti che collegano i relé, i diodi, i transistor di cui la nostra calotta cranica è stipata. [. . .] la nostra mente è una scacchiera in cui sono messi in gioco centinaia di miliardi di pezzi...

(*Saggi* I 209-10)

(In the place of the ever-changing cloud that we carried in our heads [. . .] we now feel the rapid passage of signals on the intricate circuits that connect the relays, the diodes, the transistors with which our skulls are crammed [. . .] our minds are chessboards with hundreds of billions of pieces.)

(*Uses of Literature* 8)

That the computer could provide more than just a metaphor but actually “a model for the mind” is a concept that evolves in Calvino’s work over the years. In “Cybernetics and Ghosts,” the focus (at least partially whimsical) was on the author’s (the subject’s) necessary obsolescence (“the I of the author is dissolved in the writing [. . .] it is the product and the instrument of the writing process,” a combinatorial writing machine capable of simulating — and liberating — the personality of any author). The ambivalence generated by this “discovery” is clearly formulated in the first person:

Vediamo qual è la mia reazione psicologica apprendendo che lo scrivere è solo un processo combinatorio tra elementi dati: ebbene, ciò che io provo istintivamente è un senso di sollievo, di sicurezza. Lo stesso sollievo e senso di sicurezza che provo ogni volta che un’estensione dai contorni indeterminati e sfumati mi si rivela invece come una forma geometrica precisa, ogni volta che in una valanga informe di avvenimenti riesco a distinguere delle serie di fatti, delle scelte fra un numero finito di possibilità. Di fronte alla vertigine dell’innumerevole, dell’inclassificabile, del continuo, mi sento rassicurato dal finito, dal sistematizzato, dal discreto.

(*Saggi* I 216-17)

(Let us see what my psychological reaction is when I learn that writing is purely and simply a process of combination among given elements. Well, then, what I instinctively feel is a sense of relief, of security. The same sort of relief and sense of security that I feel every time I discover that a mess of vague and indeterminate lines turns out to be a precise geometric form; or every time I succeed in discerning a series of facts, and choices to be made out of a finite number of possibilities, in the otherwise shapeless avalanche of events. Faced with the vertigo of what is countless, inclassifiable, in a state of flux, I feel reassured by what is finite, “discrete,” and reduced to a system.)

(*Uses of Literature* 17)

The quest for a system of systems (the hyper-novel) is inextricably linked for Calvino to “una specie di agorafobia intellettuale, quasi un esorcismo per difendermi dai vortici che la letteratura continuamente sfida. (*Saggi* I 217) (“some kind of intellectual agoraphobia, almost a form of exorcism to defend [him] from the whirlwinds that literature so constantly has to face” (17)). And more than a decade before *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Calvino's attention was already shifting toward “reader-supplied connections,” the reading process redefined as “the decisive moment of literary life,” an anchor against the risk of drowning in the sea of objectivity, a thread to hold on to, for the author, as a guard against losing oneself in the labyrinth of multiplicity. Conversely,

la letteratura è sì gioco combinatorio che segue le possibilità implicite nel proprio materiale, indipendentemente dalla personalità del poeta, ma è gioco che a un certo punto si trova investito d'un significato inatteso, un significato non oggettivo di quel livello linguistico sul quale ci stavamo muovendo, ma slittato da un altro piano, tale da mettere in gioco qualcosa che su un altro piano sta a cuore all'autore o alla società cui egli appartiene. La macchina letteraria può effettuare tutte le permutazioni possibili in un dato materiale; ma il risultato poetico sarà l'effetto particolare d'una di queste permutazioni *sull'uomo* dotato d'una coscienza e d'un inconscio, cioè sull'uomo empirico e storico, sarà lo shock che si verifica solo in quanto attorno alla macchina scrivente e sistono i fantasmi nascosti dell'individuo e della società.

(*Saggi* I 221)

(literature is a combinatorial game that pursues the possibilities implicit in its own material [. . .] but a game that at a certain point is invested with an unexpected meaning, a meaning that is not patent on the linguistic plane on which we were working but has slipped in from another level, activating something that on that second level is of great concern to the author or his society. The literature machine can perform all the permutations possible on a given material, but the poetic result will be the particular effect of one of these permutations on a man endowed with consciousness and an unconscious, that is, an empirical and historical man. It will be the shock that occurs only if the writing machines is surrounded by the hidden ghosts of the individual and of his society.

(*Uses of Literature* 22)

Ghosts, phantasms: collective convictions and emotional entanglements. It is the point of view reinforced in the essay “Prose et anticombinatoire,” published in the *Atlas de littérature potentielle*, in which Calvino explains how the help of the computer allowed him, the author of the *Fire of the Abominable House*, published in 1973, to rid himself of the chains of combinatorial possibilities, enabling him to focus entirely on the “digressions” which transform a text into a true work of art (*Atlas* 331). In the *Six Memos*, Calvino uses the Lucretian word *clinamen* to describe the unpredictable deviation, or digression, from the line which allows free will and destiny, or fate, to simultaneously coexist within the same universe. Here, expressing his own ambivalence toward new technologies of writing, Calvino is elaborating on what

one of his most beloved authors, Paul Valéry, another illustrious “plagiaire par anticipation,” wrote in 1928:

La machine n'en est encore qu'à ses essais. Un jour peut-être, un kaléidoscope électronique composera des figures musicales en quantité, inventera des rythmes, des mélodies en série. L'homme aura des machines à raisonner exactement, son rôle se bornant à choisir.

(*Cahiers* I 235)

([. . .] the machine is still tentative; perhaps one day an electronic kaleidoscope will compose musical figures in great quantity, will invent rhythms, melodies in series; man will possess machines for creation as there will be machines for reasoning correctly, his role will be limited to choosing.)

(*Cahiers* I 235; my translation)

Eighteen years after “Cybernetics and Ghosts,” this fundamental ambivalence toward the literary machine as a computational or combinatorial device and as a liberating creative tool is still the basis of Calvino’s musings on, as J. Usher has ironically called it, “informatique assistée” (by the author).⁴ Yet the focus has undoubtedly expanded to the multiplied levels and dimensions of an enriched and energized writing-reading process, activating meaning to a greater degree, perhaps a hyper-degree of structural complexity. As a writing machine, the computer embodies a sort of authorial will to power: the dream of a hyper-author (the equivalent of the mythical Father of Stories) who actually *knows* by heart or contains in his boundless memory, and thus is able to transcribe all the books that a simple author only dreams of writing. The writing machine embodies the “dream projections of latent power” of both the author (Silas Flannery) and his double, the Counterfeiter (Ermes Marana), with his shadow organization for the computerized production of apocrypha.

This fundamental ambivalence toward the output of the writing machine is already detectable in *Invisible Cities*, the network of imaginary cities that, in his memo on “Exactitude,” Calvino describes as “una struttura sfaccettata in cui ogni breve testo sta vicino agli altri in una successione che non implica una

⁴ Usher has analyzed the ambivalent inscription of the computer as Writer/Reader (or as my colleague George Landow at Brown would say, as Wreader) in *If On a Winter's Night*: “the computer as the completer of a work that remains unfinished because of the writer’s block of the author”; the computer as combinatorial machine, “generator of variants, taking the finite initial material as a set of elements for recombination . . . so creating an almost limitless quantity of fictions from a fixed number of initial items;” “the computer as a device for ‘deconstructing’ the text, reducing it from its organization as discourse back to its primitive state as a list of lexemes catalogued according to criteria of frequency, the pure constituent elements, and not the prejudiced organization of them by an author are the true bearers of ‘meaning’”; the computer as assembler of random patterns, producing at random the creative shock of disorder, or chaos out of order (44-45).

consequenzialità o una gerarchia ma una rete entro la quale si possono tracciare molteplici percorsi e ricavare conclusioni plurime e ramificate.” (*Saggi* I 689-90) (“a many-faceted structure in which each brief text is close to the others in a series that does not imply logical sequence or a hierarchy, but a network in which one can follow multiple routes, and draw multiple, ramified conclusions” (*Six Memos* 71)). As a model hyper-novel, a silicon-like, multifaceted architecture of discontinuity, *Invisible Cities* turns the anxiety implicit in the combinatorial cybernetics of the “literature machine” into the epistemological principle of its utopian designs. The same can be said of the *Castle* which turns semantic “aphasia” into a heraldic (and therapeutic) game of storytelling. Yet, even in the *Cities*, like in the chess game of Perec’s *Vie, Mode d’Emploi* (the ultimate model for the hyper-novel mentioned in *Multiplicity*), the sestina or the crystal-like structures which provide the patterns have loopholes, and the chessboard on which Polo and Kublai Kahn play their melancholy visual game is reduced to a single square of plain wood, a blank nothingness (*Invisible Cities* 123). The vast net of cities, woven out of fundamental discontinuities in both space and time, embodies a continuously oscillating state of being, a characteristic in-consistency. Each city, in other words, includes in itself its negative, its anti-matter and anti-model, an exorcised vertigo, or intellectual agoraphobia. Take, for example, Octavia, the spider-city: “Questa è la base della città: una rete che serve da passaggio e da sostegno. Tutto il resto, invece di elevarsi sopra, sta appeso sotto. [. . .] Sospesa sull’abisso, la vita degli abitanti d’Ottavia è meno incerta che in altre città. Sanno che più di tanto la rete non regge.” (*Romanzi e racconti* II 421) (“This is the foundation of the city: a net which serves as passage and as support. All the rest, instead of rising up is hung below. [. . .] Suspended over the abyss, the life of Octavia’s inhabitants is less uncertain than in other cities. They know the net will last only so long” (*Cities* 75)). Or take Ersilia, whose “inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses” to mark “a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency.” But “when the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the string and their supports remain,” and the city of Ersilia is reduced to “l’intrico di fili tesi e pali che s’innalza nella pianura [. . .] ragnatele di rapporti intricati che cercano una forma. (*Romanzi e racconti* II 422) (“the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain [. . .] spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form” (*Cities* 76)). Or take Phyllis, the fading city, “uno spazio in cui si tracciano percorsi tra punti sospesi nel vuoto [. . .] Milioni d’occhi s’alzano su finestre ponti capperi ed è come scorressero su una pagina bianca.” (*Romanzi e racconti* II 435-36) (“space in which routes are drawn between points suspended in the void. [. . .] Millions of eyes look up at windows, bridges, capers, and they might be scanning a blank page” (*Cities* 91)). I could go on. *Invisible Cities* contains in fact not one but multiple image-maps for the “hyper-novel,” a vast net of mental maps, models, and schemes, all linked or woven together as in a symbolic atlas,

a map of maps, model of models, down to the last city of cities, the "last landing place," the "future Berenice." The vertigo of space is multiplied by that of time:

Dal mio discorso avrai tratto la conclusione che la vera Berenice è una successione nel tempo di città diverse, alternativamente giuste e ingiuste. Ma la cosa di cui volevo avvertirti è un'altra: che tutte le Berenici future sono già presenti in questo istante, avvolte l'una dentro l'altra, strette pigiate indistricabili.

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 496)

(From my words you will have reached the conclusion that the real Berenice is a temporal succession of different cities, alternately just and unjust. But what I wanted to warn you about is something else: all the future Berenices are already present in this instant, wrapped up one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable.)

(*Invisible Cities* 91)

As a symbol of both simultaneity and reversibility, memory and forgetfulness (reminiscent of Borges's *Aleph*), Berenice recapitulates both the utopia and dystopia of Past and Future City; in its multiplicity, the end and the beginning coincide.

Hyper-If

This is the fundamental tension at work in Calvino's visionary writing: an attempt to overtake not only the conventional boundaries of the Novel (as a genre) but also the physical boundaries of the Book. ("Literature as a projection of desire" is the title of one of his essays on Northrop Frye.) Calvino writes about *Invisible Cities*:

(Un libro (io credo) è qualcosa con un principio e una fine (anche se non è un romanzo in senso stretto), è uno spazio in cui il lettore deve entrare, girare, magari perdersi, ma a un certo punto trovare un'uscita, o magari parecchie uscite, la possibilità d'aprirsi una strada per venirne fuori.)

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 1361)

(A book, I believe, is something with a beginning and an end (even if it is not a novel, strictly speaking); it is a space in which the reader must enter, get around, perhaps get lost, yet, at some point must be able to find an exit, or even many exits, the possibility of opening himself a road to get out.)

(*Romanzi e racconti* II, 1361)

This dual tension — the need to get lost in the narrative and the opposite need to find an exit, an escape from it — can be traced back at least to the *Cosmicomics*. Calvino's proto-hyper-novels all display the kinetic energy of hyper-writing clashing against the physical boundaries of the printed form. The prefix "hyper-" actually appears in the last tale of *tzero*, "The Count of Montecristo," at the precise juncture where the fortress If is described by the narrator Edmond

Dantès as a sort of hyper-written space. Dantès is trying to imagine the perfect fortress from which it is impossible to escape, because only such a perfect design can provide the clue, the loophole, the way out of the necessarily imperfect “empirical” fortress If:

[. . .] io partendo dal disordine di questi dati, vedo in ogni ostacolo isolato l'indizio di un sistema di ostacoli, sviluppo ogni segmento in una figura regolare, saldo queste figure come facce d'un solido, poliedro o iperpoliedro, iscrivono questi poliedri in sfere o in ipersfere, e così più chiudo la forma della fortezza più la semplifico, definedola in un rapporto numerico o in una formula algebrica.

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 350)

(I, setting out from the jumble of these data, see in each isolated obstacle the clue to a system of obstacles, I develop each segment into a regular figure, I fit these figures together as the sides of a solid, polyhedron or hyperpolyhedron. I inscribe these polyhedrons in spheres or hyperspheres, and so the more I enclose the form of the fortress the more I simplify it, defining it in a numerical relation or in an algebraic formula.)

(*zero* 144)

The secret formula to escape from If is the fortress's secret algorithm. Yet, this very cybernetic dream opens up into a paradoxical universe, or a series of parallel universes. The way out of the labyrinth is the same as the way in, only in the opposite direction. “Devo pensare la prigione [. . .] come un luogo che è solo dentro se stesso, senza un fuori — cioè rinunciare a uscirne [. . .]. Se fuori c'è il passato, forse il futuro si concentra nel punto più interno dell'isola d'If, cioè la via d'uscita è una via verso il dentro” (*Romanzi e racconti* II 351). (“I must conceive of the prison [. . .] as a place that is only inside itself without an outside [. . .]. If outside there is the past, perhaps the future is concentrated at the innermost point of the island of If, in other words the avenue of escape is an avenue toward the inside.”) The secret of If can be captured only in a map which is also a graphic of the mind: “Nei graffiti di cui l'Abate Faria ricopre i muri, s'alternano due mappe dai contorni frastagliati, costellati di frecce e contrassegni [. . .]. nei geroglifici di Faria le due mappe si sovrappongono fino a identificarsi” (*Romanzi e racconti* II 351-52) (“In the graffiti with which Abbé Faria covers his walls, two maps with ragged outlines alternate, constellated with arrows and marks”). One is the plan of If; the other the island of Monte Cristo where the treasure is hidden. “[. . .] in Faria's hieroglyphics the two maps can be superimposed and are almost identical” (*zero* 146). What is the focal point of both these maps? “[. . .] if one looks closely” in his frantic digging, Faria “is tending toward the same point of arrival: the place of the multiplicity of possible things.” Edmond Dantès: “At times I visualize this multiplicity as concentrated in a gleaming underground cavern, at times I see it as an irradiating explosion” (146). Mr. Palomar and its shadow, Mr. Mohole, are already written into the couple Faria-Dantès; In fact, practically the whole of Calvino's work is. Dantès: “[. . .] in qualsiasi punto io mi trovi l'ipersfera si allarga intorno a me in

ogni direzione; il centro è dappertutto dove io sono; andare più profondo vuol dire scendere in me stesso. Scavi scavi e non fai che ripercorrere lo stesso cammino" (*Romanzi e racconti* II 352) ("[. . .] in whatever point I find myself the hypersphere stretches out around me in every direction; the center is all around where I am; going deeper means descending into myself. You dig and dig and you do nothing but retrace the same path" (*tzero* 147)). Yet, the point of arrival, the landing site over the horizon in *The Count*, is inexorably the two-dimensional plan of the written (printed) page. The Book is the fortress; the challenge is to open its secret plan to its own inner hyper-dimensions. Dantès: "Le intersezioni tra le varie linee ipotetiche definiscono una serie di piani che si dispongono come le pagine di un manoscritto sulla scrivania d'un romanziere. Chiamiamo Alexandre Dumas lo scrittore che deve consegnare al più presto al suo editore un romanzo in dodici tomi intitolato *Il conte di Montecristo*." (*Romanzi e racconti* II 353-54) ("The intersections of the various hypothetical lines define a series of planes arranged like the pages of a manuscript on a novelist's desk. Let us call Alexandre Dumas the writer who must deliver to his publisher as soon as possible a novel in twelve volumes entitled *The Count of Monte Cristo* [. . .]" (*tzero* 147)). What A. Dumas in Calvino's "The Count of M.C." is writing (using the outlines and variants that his assistants, Maquet and Fiorentino, are providing him with) is an enormous "hyper-novel" (*iperromanzo* — here I would correct Weaver's translation, which, interestingly enough, reads "super-novel"; perhaps the prefix "hyper-" did not yet strike a cord when the translation came out). Dumas at work, in the hectic and anxiety-ridden universe of Calvino's story, is a perfect prototype for a disembodied and parodic, hypertextual author assisted by his two human computers:

Dumas sceglie, scarta, ritaglia, incolla, interseca; se una soluzione ha la preferenza per fondati motivi ma esclude un episodio che gli farebbe comodo d'inserire, egli cerca di mettere insieme i tronconi di provenienza separata, li congiunge con saldature approssimative, s'ingegna a stabilire un'apparente continuità tra segmenti di futuro che divergono. Il risultato finale sarà il romanzo *Il conte di Montecristo* da consegnare in tipografia.

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 354)

(Dumas selects, rejects, cuts, pastes, interposes; if a given solution is preferred for well-founded reasons but omits an episode he would find it useful to include, he tries to put together the stub-ends of disparate provenance, he joins them with makeshift links, racks his brain to establish an apparent continuity among divergent segments of future. The final result will be the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* to be handed out to the printer.)

(*tzero* 149)

What distinguishes the novel to be printed from the "hyper-novel" whose imaginary plan is contained in Calvino's story, which in turn contains also its own printed version as one of its multiple possibilities? The fact that it is destined to appear in print. As the mental model of a "hyper-novel," Calvino's

story struggles with precisely this insurmountable contradiction, a contradiction or paradox which gives its reader the true intellectual pleasure of the story, imagining a novel (a much shorter, quicker version of it) based on the fundamental algorithm of Dumas's monumental "super-novel" (the term is here appropriate). Yet, only the proto-hyper novel, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, pries open its own structure: and it does so by dramatizing the demise of the novel as *printed book*. This expresses not just the Author's ambivalent anxiety-elation over his own cunning disappearance, as in Silas Flannery's diary — something that Calvino, as we saw, had already welcomed as far back as 1967 in "Cybernetics and Ghosts" — but a more subtle anxiety for the future of narrative itself. It is the anxiety expressed not only by the computerized conspiracy of plagiarists led by Ermes Marana (the OEPHLW, the dark, americanized side of Oulipo?), but above all by a non-sequential, frustrated (or liberated) reading which translates into a *lectura interrupta* linked to the foreseeable end of print culture.

Thus, Calvino repeatedly imagines, within the physical boundaries of the book, a series of mental models for the "hyper-novel" which break free of the constraints of print. On the other hand, his *own* hyper-novels in print (*If On a Winter's Night* in particular) anxiously thematize the dangers hidden in the demise of print technology (most tellingly expressed in the metaphor of the labyrinth). And an additional anxiety looms between the lines of *Mr. Palomar*, an anxiety of obsolescence (as Jay Bolter has called it in his concluding remarks at the Brown conference), because authors want to be immortal and this they want from their tools, their writing, the tool of immortality. What hides behind Calvino's whimsical neutralization of Subjectivity is perhaps an even more fundamental anxiety of disappearance, not simply the disappearance of the author (the writer) but what Nick Negroponte has called "the end of words." If the book, the custodian of the word, is destined to lose its (symbolic) consistency and body to the randomness of "fotoni, vibrazioni ondulatorie, spettri polarizzati [. . .] elettroni neutroni neutrini particelle elementari sempre più minute [. . .] impulsi elettronici [. . .] flusso d'informazione, squassato da ridondanze e rumori." (*Romanzi e racconti* II 635) ("photons, undulatory vibrations, polarized spectra [. . .] electrons, neutrinos, elementary particles more and more minute [. . .] electronic impulses [. . .] flow of information, shaken by redundancies and noises" (*If On a Winter's Night* 26)), what will happen to the writer's virtual body, his work? What will happen to narrative art, conceived as an art of survival? The Reader's first impulse when faced, in chapter 2 of *If On A Winter's Night*, with the failure of print technology, is to "let it all be degraded into a swirling entropy" (26). The Reader's (and the Narrator's) most profound desire is endangered: "Quello che vorresti è l'aprirsi d'uno spazio e d'un tempo astratti e assoluti in cui muoverti seguendo una traiettoria esatta e tesa; ma quando ti sembra di riuscirci t'accorgi d'essere fermo, bloccato, costretto a ripetere tutto da capo." (*Romanzi e racconti* II 636)

("What you would like is the opening of an abstract and absolute space and time in which you could move, following an exact, taut trajectory; but when you seem to be succeeding, you realize you are motionless, blocked, forced to repeat everything from the beginning" (*If On a Winter's Night* 27)). Anyone who has had experience with hypertextual narratives knows that this is precisely the ambivalent feeling they provoke in an empowered Reader abandoned to his/her own freedom: the vertigo of entanglement, the attraction (and *horror vacui*) of erasure, the kaleidoscopic liberation from the constraints of closure, along with the aimless wandering of multiple, endlessly repeated "beginnings." This is precisely the game set up by *If On a Winter's Night*, a sort of narrative endgame in which the combinatory machine of the hyperplot (the system of systems, the frame that determines and is determined) is both exploited to its extreme and debunked. Electronic writing seems to embody Calvino's worst fears (by paradoxically disembodying the book/the novel into the information it contains/conveys)⁵ but it may also contain his most hidden desires for the future of narrative.

At the Beginning at the End

It is easy, perhaps too easy, to reach the conclusion that Calvino's premature death sealed as the last symbolic value of the series (his "last will") the only value which can to some extent "contain" (or at least express) all of these tensions, contradictions and (a)symmetries: multiplicity. The conclusion of "Multiplicity" — the memo which more than any other deals with the idea of the hyper-novel, "the novel as a vast net," wrapping up all the crossed destinies and entangled trajectories, beginnings and endings of life and fiction — can thus be read as a bridge toward the final, unwritten lecture:

⁵ See Hayles: "The text's [*If On A Winter's Night*] awareness of its own physicality is painfully apparent in the anxiety it manifests toward keeping the literary corpus intact. Within the space of representation, texts are subjected to birth defects, maimed and torn apart, lost and stolen. The text operates as if it knows it has a physical body and fears that its body is in jeopardy from a host of threats, from defective printing technologies and editors experiencing middle-age brain fade to nefarious political plots. Most of all, perhaps, the text fears losing its body to information [. . .]. Your anxiety about *reading interruptus* is intensified by what might be called *print interruptus*, a print book's fear that once it has been digitized, the computer will garble its body, breaking it apart and reassembling it into the nonstory of a data matrix rather than an entangled and entangling narrative [. . .]. Significantly the recuperation is syntactical rather than physical" (40-42). Significantly, Hayles takes literally Calvino's own idea of the "literature machine" as already disembodied from the subject; the anxiety, to her, belongs to the text itself, rather than the author.

Qualcuno potrà obiettare che più l'opera tende alla moltiplicazione dei possibili più s'allontana da quell'unicum che è il *self* di chi scrive, la sincerità interiore, la scoperta della propria verità. Al contrario, rispondo, chi siamo noi, che è ciascuno di noi se non una combinatoria d'esperienze, d'informazioni, di letture, d'immaginazioni? Ogni vita è un'enciclopedia, una biblioteca, un inventario d'oggetti, un campionario di stili, dove tutto può essere continuamente rimescolato e riordinato in tutti i modi possibili.

(*Saggi* I 733)

(Someone might object that the more the work tends toward the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the *self* of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But I would answer: Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable.)

(*Six Memos* 124)

The openness of this realization, the loss of the individual self in the multiplicity of life, is the paradoxical "consistency" Calvino (alias Palomar) was perhaps looking for as a cognitive end-value, compatible with "a work conceived from outside the *self*": that extremely unselfish "sense of connection" which allows us "not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perched on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic." *Mr. Palomar*, published by Calvino two years earlier, is a first approximation of this goal, a mini-encyclopedia of trifles — mere "nothingness" — and a discourse on method, a new, synthetic method for hyper-writing. We already know, as Mario Barenghi suggests in his meticulous endnotes, that "Consistency," Calvino's last, unwritten memo, would have referred, among other things, to Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. Mr. Palomar is perhaps Calvino's *Bartleby*. The silences of Palomar (the title of the book's last section) are indeed reminiscent of the silence of *Bartleby the scrivener*. Perhaps, one could even conjecture, Palomar's meditations are Calvino's own personal interpretation of *Bartleby's* thoughts, walled-in behind his silence, the logical conclusions of an "I" (Eye, the Watcher) who contemplates nothing (in particular) and "nothingness" (in general). Yet, one should not forget that between *Bartleby* and *Palomar* lies a series of literary avatars. Calvino's *Palomar* is a reincarnation not only of Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* (in whose name the connection between testing, or experimental thinking, and textuality is easily detectable), but also of George Perec's *Bartlebooth*, "a name which, as Calvino himself writes in a review of the Italian translation of Perec's masterpiece published in *La Repubblica* on May 16, 1984, sounds like an homage to two literary characters: *Barnabooth*, the billionaire of Valéry Larbaud [*A. O. Barnabooth: ses oeuvres complètes*, 1913] and *Bartleby*, the scrivener [. . .] [respectively] the man who would like to give

the void a form and the man who would like to identify with nothingness" (*Saggi* I, 1394).⁶

The vertigo of pursuit, or the pursuit of vertigo, amounts to an anonymous, combinatorial system capable of both summoning and exorcising the reader's most intimate "ghosts." Going back to our beginning, to Melville: both Ahab, defiantly pursuing his destiny, answering the call of his "siren," and Bartleby, stubbornly refusing to perform or complete his prosaic clerical duties, are indeed two opposite, ambivalent embodiments of an extreme consistency. Yet, in his refusal (or preference not to) Bartleby is also the paradoxical embodiment of "openness." Ahab and Bartleby are thus recognizable avatars of the Writer, nineteenth-century variations on the well known Calvinian series of St. George and St. Jerome, the Rider and the Reader, as the heraldic imagination of the Castle/Tavern of Crossed Destinies portrays them through their multiple, emblematic visualizations. The first, on his horse, is caught in the eternal act of spearing the dragon (or the Leviathan); the second is silently seated in his cell or study, absorbed in solitary contemplation against the backdrop of a wall receding into infinity. A question, though, looms: what about Bartleby's (St. Jerome's) "tamed" lion? The answer is easily found, in *tzero* again, in the book's title story. To be more precise, it is in an image, frozen on the printed page, which amounts, for our writer, also to a heraldic coat of arms, an image that sums up Calvino's art of concluding without closing, his art of being "at an

⁶ Calvino himself offers a pigeonhole to our interpretation in the conclusion of that piece entitled "Perec, and the knight's gambit" ("Perec e il salto del cavallo"). He writes that his favorite character in Perec's hyper-novel is a secondary character, which appears in chapter 60, Cinoc, whose profession is that of "killer of forgotten words" — a profession which cannot help reminding us of Bartleby the Scrivener's job in the Dead Letters Office in Washington D.C. Cinoc indeed strikes me as Bartleby's (cynical?) twin, his shadow. Yet, Palomar doesn't seem to bend sinister (although one should not forget that the book's original plan included also the musings of his dark twin, Mr. Mohole). Perec's *Life, Directions for Use* is defined by Calvino rather eloquently as "the last real event in the history of the novel so far" (*Six memos* 121). And of course, as such, a new beginning. Here are the reasons: "[. . .] il disegno sterminato e insieme compiuto, la novità della resa letteraria, il compendio d'una tradizione narrativa e la summa enciclopedica di saperi che danno forma a un'immagine del mondo, il senso dell'oggi che è anche fatto di accumulazione del passato e di vertigine del vuoto, la compresenza continua d'ironia e angoscia, insomma il modo in cui il perseguimento d'un progetto strutturale e l'imponderabile della poesia diventano una cosa sola." (*Saggi* I 730-31) ("[. . .] the plan of the *book* [italics mine] of incredible scope but at the same time *solidly finished* [italics mine]; the novelty of its rendering; the compendium of a narrative tradition and the encyclopedic summa of things known that lend substance to a particular image of the world; the feeling of 'today' that is made from accumulations of the past and *the vertigo of the void; the continual presence of anguish and irony together* [italics mine] — in a word, the manner in which the pursuit of a definite structural project and the imponderable element of poetry become one and the same thing" (*Six Memos* 121).

end in the middle and at the beginning at the end.” “Now that the arrow is hissing through the air and the lion arches in his spring, we still cannot tell if the arrowhead will pierce the tawny skin or will miss”; we still cannot know if the series, of which this second we inhabit is part, is open or closed:

Perchè se, come mi pare d'avere udito talvolta sostenere, è una serie finita, cioè se il tempo dell'universo è cominciato a un certo momento e continua in un'esplosione di stelle e nebulose sempre più rarefatte fino al momento in cui la dispersione raggiungerà il limite estremo e stelle e nebulose riprenderanno a concentrarsi, la conseguenza che devo trarne è che il tempo ritornerà sui suoi passi, che la catena dei minuti si srotolerà in senso inverso, fino a quando non si arriverà di nuovo al principio, pe poi ricominciare, tutto questo infinite volte[. . .]”

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 311)

(Because if, as I seem to have heard maintained sometimes, it is a finite series, that is if the time of the universe began at a certain moment and continues in an explosion of stars and nebulae, more and more rarefied, until the moment when the dispersion will reach the extreme limit and stars and nebulae will start concentrating again, the consequence I must draw is that time will retrace its steps, that the chain of minutes will unroll in the opposite direction, until we are back at the beginning, only to start over again, and all of this will occur infinite times [. . .].)

(*tzero* 99-100)

The Consistency of an Ending

The great concluding theme of *Palomar* is memory: memory as the essence of literature, but also as the only thing that can guarantee “survival” of both the species and the self. “Of course, it is also possible to rely on those devices that guarantee survival of at least a part of the self in posterity,” muses Palomar. The double helix of the mnemonic mechanism, as Palomar himself explains: the memory of the biological mechanism (the genetic heritage) and the memory of the historical mechanism (the cultural heritage). At the dawn of the era which Calvino announces with his musings, the era of the hyper-memory, both sides of memory seem close to a quantum leap, or loop. The DNA sequence has been thoroughly mapped and can be now manipulated. And we do possess a most powerful tool for storing and retrieving, or re-sequencing at leisure, our cultural memory. Thus, also the ultimate goal-destiny of the Writer/Reader seems set, his job redefined: re-read/re-write. To give speech to that which has no language, translating the world into words, re-writing the unwritten world, cell by cell, atom by atom, instant by instant, until the entire universe is nothing but the “written” memory of itself. Such re-writing (truly a hyper-writing) should not be lightly equated with the post-modernist credo that since everything has been said and told, the only conceivable thing left is parody or repetition; rather, this rewriting implies a serious ethical dilemma. What is the “value” of life when

both its fundamental “mnemonic” mechanisms can now be read and “re-written,” simply a background for future connections (as Gould put it)? If Beginning and End, Birth and Death, no longer pose limits to our human identity but are just conventional points in a virtually infinite series (tzero...t¹...tⁿ)? And yet, how to go on living if everything, our very being is *virtually* open to im-mortality? Simple: “learning to be dead,” while still alive.

For Mr. Palomar this is the paradoxical object of wisdom. Our renewed power over life, and fiction, will require us to re-learn how to die, how to confront, not escape, closure. Yet, learning to be dead is no easy task: “for Mr. Palomar being dead means resigning himself to remaining the same in a definitive state, which he can no longer hope to change” (125). Easier said than done, admittedly, for him (or anybody else): “Therefore, Mr. Palomar prepares to become a grouchy dead man, reluctant to submit to the sentence to remain exactly as he is; but he is unwilling to give up anything of himself, even if it is a burden.” (*Mr. Palomar*, 125). How to reconcile this contradiction? Our unwillingness to give up anything of ourselves, our past, and our need to constantly learn and grow anew? Only when the history of the universe and of one’s life is over can it be told again and again and again. Like Melville’s cobbler, Palomar’s job is “at the beginning at the end.” Yet, the wisdom that consistently and coherently sums up Palomar’s meditations and provides a new goal for prolonging his life is ironically and paradoxically linked to closure:

“Se il tempo deve finire, lo si può descrivere, istante per istante, — pensa Palomar, — e ogni istante, a descriverlo, si dilata tanto che non se ne vede più la fine.” Decide che si metterà a descrivere ogni istante della sua vita, e finchè non li avrà descritti tutti non penserà più d’essere morto. In quel momento muore.

(*Romanzi e racconti* II 979)

“If time has to end, it can be described, instant by instant,” Mr. Palomar thinks, “and each instant, when described, expands so that its end can no longer be seen.” He decides that he will set himself to describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all he will no longer think of being dead. At that moment he dies.)

(*Mr. Palomar* 126)

Only becoming entirely aware, i.e., admitting that our time has to end, allows the writer to begin the work of his life; de-scribing time, moment by moment, is the ultimate therapy for human vertigo. The irony, of course, is that at the very moment of this new beginning, the moment of maximum openness and consistency, when “the idea for the book came to him all at once, the beginning and end and the general outline,” when finally openness and ending, consistency and beginning seem to logically come together, the only *logical* conclusion that Palomar can reach is to die (closure). To be dead, in other words, is not “no longer thinking of being dead,” but “no longer thinking” *tout court*, the ultimate denial of (human) logic. End of Story.

Postscriptum: Ohio impromptu, or "I have listened to the Sirens' song"

“Cosa cantano le Sirene? Un’ipotesi possibile è che il loro canto non sia altro che l’*Odissea* [. . .] Ma quello che il testo dell’*Odissea* ci dice sul canto delle Sirene è che le Sirene dicono che stanno cantando e che vogliono essere ascoltate, è che il loro canto è quanto di meglio possa essere cantato.” (*Saggi I* 396-97) (“What do the Sirens sing? One possible hypothesis is that their song is nothing more or less than the *Odyssey* [. . .]. But what the text of the *Odyssey* tells us about the Sirens’ song is that the Sirens say they are singing and wish to be heard, and that their song is the best that can be sung [. . .]” (*Uses of Literature* 119)). The song of the Sirens is nothing more or less than a *story* — the *account* of their song that Ulysses brings back from the song itself. Calvino writes: “Una tale riformulazione forse ci permetterebbe d’inseguire il canto delle Sirene, l’estremo punto d’arrivo della scrittura, il nucleo ultimo della parola poetica, e forse sulle tracce di Mallarmé arriveremmo alla pagina bianca, al silenzio, all’assenza.” (*Saggi I* 397) (“Such a formulation might perhaps enable us to pursue the Sirens’ song, the ultimate point writing can attain, the final core of the written word, and perhaps in the wake of Mallarmé we would arrive at the blank page, at silence, at absence [. . .]” (*Uses of Literature* 119)). The story that reaches its end is also the end of all stories. “Little is left to tell,” goes the refrain of the old storyteller in Becket’s *Ohio Impromptu*. And yet, storytelling goes on: “Come abbiamo visto svanire l’io, il primo soggetto dello scrivere, così ce ne sfugge l’ultimo oggetto. Forse è nel campo di tensione che si stabilisce tra un vuoto e un vuoto che la letteratura moltiplica gli spessori d’una realtà inesauribile di forme e di significati.” (*Saggi I* 397-98) (“As we have witnessed the disappearance of the ‘I,’ the primary subject of the verb ‘to write,’ so the ultimate object eludes us. Perhaps it is in the field of tension between one vacuum and another that literature multiplies the depths of a reality that is inexhaustible in forms and meanings [. . .]” (*Uses* 119-20)). Will the literary machine survive its creators? If so, Ulysses may well be the name of a probe or a future Artificial Life form, bringing back from our story the *account* of our story, the memory of our species: that “[in-]human sort of wail” which sometimes causes machines to be mistaken for men, or women.

Brown University

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**Writers from the Margins
and the Canon in the Year 2000:
New Beginnings or Business as Usual?**

In few national traditions has the issue of the canon been as crucial as it has for Italian literature. The standard language itself in Italy is defined by reference to three canonical writers of Trecento Tuscany. Literary practice too, beginning in the Cinquecento, has followed the linguistic and stylistic examples of two of these “tre corone.” Partly because of powerful, centrifugal forces of cultural and linguistic autonomy at the local level, there has always been a countervailing pressure in Italian cultural exchange toward standardization. During the many centuries of political disunity, moreover, the literary canon served as the principal locus for definitions of Italian identity, a function that, to a lesser extent, it continues to fill today.¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, when changes began to be made in the canons of other national literatures, Italians began to rethink their literary heritage as well. In Italy, as in many other countries, women authors were identified, rehabilitated, and added to an extended list that determined what Italian literature was. But it was more difficult in Italy to discover excluded “others” than it was in the United States, for example, with its history of slavery, or in the post-colonial lands of the mostly defunct French and British empires. In Italy, a country without a history of either slavery or imperialism on an extensive (or very successful) scale, efforts have been made only recently to identify and rehabilitate the kinds of “others” that in different national literatures had come much earlier to the fore.

This rethinking of the nature of literature and culture in Italy has taken place during a period of enormous social changes. These have included redefinitions of women’s positions as cultural producers and increasing perplexity regarding the massive immigration to Italy, a historical source of emigrants to countries throughout the world. Such changes in Italian society have contributed to a

¹ For some indication of the issues surrounding the matter of the literary canon, see Hallberg. A slightly different form of this paper was presented in April of 2000 at the annual meeting in New York of the American Association of Italian Studies in New York. I would like to dedicate it here to the memory of Gaetano Morelli.

revamping of the ways Italians think about themselves and their literary heritage both of today and for tomorrow. Such concerns are evident in a number of books that have appeared in recent years in this country and Italy. Examples include Maria Ornella Marotti's *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, and *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*, Hermann Haller's *The Other Italy: The Literary Canon in Dialect*, and Graziella Parati's *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*. In the last few years, moreover, several studies by prominent Italian critics and cultural arbiters have addressed questions of the representation of national identity in Italian literature. Examples of work of this sort include Ezio Raimondi's *Letteratura e identità nazionale*, Alberto Asor Rosa's *Genus italicum. Saggi sulla identità letteraria italiana nel corso del tempo*, and, from a slightly different perspective, Remo Ceserani's *Lo straniero*.

One conclusion that can be gleaned from a consideration of these works on literary identity is that the Italian canon, over the years, has always been a remarkably hospitable one, at least in terms of genre (if not gender). Gianfranco Contini's *Letteratura dell'Italia unita. 1861-1968* — to cite one example of an authoritative, canon-defining survey — begins by anthologizing extracts from the memorialistic and historical writings of Francesco De Sanctis; it continues with passages from scholarly notes and articles by the philologists Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, Costantino Nigra, and Ugo Angelo Canello, going on only later to present more conventionally representative passages of poetry and prose by Carducci and pages from the fiction of Verga, Capuana, Fogazzaro, and De Marchi (3-202). In the same eclectic spirit, toward the beginning of his *Genus italicum*, Asor Rosa cites Galileo's *Dialogo intorno ai due massimi sistemi del mondo* as a true "opera letteraria" that during the latter part of the early modern period not only led to the realignment of scientific paradigms but modified literary history as well (6). The writings of Galileo and other scientists, of De Sanctis, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and other historians, of Cellini, Alfieri, and other autobiographers, of Giordano Bruno, Vico, and other philosophers, and of Petrarch, Aretino, Tasso, Leopardi, and Gramsci as letter-writers have long been considered exemplary of their respective eras of Italian literary history. In response to Philippe Lejeune's question, "Où s'arrête la littérature?"² the answer for Italy might be that, while it is not entirely clear where literature stops and something else begins, what is clear is that the outer limits of Italian literature lie somewhere beyond the bounds of poetry, fiction, and belles-lettres narrowly conceived.

The redefinitions of Italian literature that have been proposed in the past few years do not, it is clear, involve literary genre so much as they do authorship. As Gramsci so famously observed some years ago, Italian literature

² This was the title of a talk by Lejeune delivered at the "Ottavo Seminario Archivi della scrittura popolare" held at the Museo Storico di Trento in Rovereto in January of 1998.

has never managed to be both “nazionale” and “popolare” at the same time.³ The questioning that the canon in Italy has undergone in recent years can be seen as an attempt to join those two characteristics whose disjunction Gramsci so deplored. These proposed expansion of the canon involve not so much new kinds of writing as they do new definitions of who is authorized to define the national identity.

In what follows, I would like to survey three groups of writers whose works have been proposed as new components of the canon of Italian literature as it begins to take shape for the just concluded twentieth century. The first are “Italophone” authors, writers whose first language was neither Italian nor an Italian dialect. The second is that of the “unlettered,” writers without significant formal schooling who operate both in terms of their lives and their writings outside established cultural paradigms. The third category is that of the physically — often forcibly — marginalized. It includes prisoners, patients in mental institutions, street people, and others on the fringes of traditional society. Thanks to the efforts of Graziella Parati, Armando Gnisci, and others, and to an Italian reading public curious about the host of newcomers now in their midst, the “Italophone” or immigrant writers are perhaps the best known of those I have mentioned. Most of them — certainly those who might be described as belonging to a first wave of writers of this sort — are Africans, though not necessarily from the regions of east Africa colonized by Italy at the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Many such individuals, in fact, have come to Italy after a sojourn in France and have learned Italian through and after French. Some of the best known of this group include Pap Khouma, author of *Io venditore di elefanti. Una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano*, Nassera Chohra of *Volevo diventare bianca*, Mohamed Bouchane of *Chiamatemi Ali*, and the many others surveyed in such articles on this topic as Carla Ghezzi’s “La letteratura africana d’immigrazione in lingua italiana: la mia patria è la letteratura” and Gabriella Romani’s “Identità italiana e letteratura d’immigrazione.”

While the three writers named are (or were) Africans, in Parati’s new book, as in many of the other anthologies that have appeared in the last few years, Italophone writers from the Balkans, eastern Europe and other countries are represented along with the by now more familiar Africans.

A second group of writers are what I have called the “unlettered.” Descriptions of their work in Italian usually cast them as representatives of “la letteratura popolare.” They include members of the rural proletariat with little or no schooling who have nonetheless presented their life stories to the public in written form. Two outstanding autobiographical works of this sort from the Po valley are those by the naïf painter Pietro Ghizzardi, *Mi richordo anchora*, and the extraordinary *Gnanca na busia*, originally written on a bedsheet rather than

³ In *Letteratura e vita nazionale*. This essay has been reprinted several times in different formats.

sheets of paper by the elderly *contadina* Clelia Marchi of Poggio Rusco near Mantua.⁴ These autobiographies by Ghizzardi and Marchi can be seen as unwitting sequels to the life stories gathered by Danilo Montaldi in a now classic study of writing from the Valpadana by authors who have spent much of their lives “nella miseria, campando di espedienti.” All of these writings are the subject of renewed interest today, especially in the light of recent books by the highly sophisticated and far from “unlettered” contemporary writers, Ermanno Cavazzoni and Gianni Celati, to whose works I will return below.

The final category of writings I would like to touch on in this brief survey are those by people who are physically marginalized rather than disadvantaged culturally or in some other way. They include, for example, the authors of the memoirs, fiction, plays, and poetry written by prisoners in Rome’s Rebibbia prison that have been the object of recent, first-hand research by Maria Ponce de Leon, among others. There is of course a rich literature of prison letters and memoirs stretching back from Gramsci and other prisoners of the Fascist period to Cellini, Tasso, and even Marco Polo, among many others.⁵ Two recent anthologies of writing of this sort are *Fili blu. Lettere dal carcere* (Bompresmi and Gracci) and *L’eco del silenzio. Piccole storie nate tra le mura di un carcere* (Della Torre and Rumi). Other notable writing that has emanated from prisons in recent years includes the autobiographies *Princesa* by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Jannelli — now known to a wider public thanks to a treatment of this story by the late *cantautore* Fabrizio de Andrè in his *Anime salve* of 1996 — and *Ergastolo* by the ex-Red Brigadist, Nicola Valentino. The latter two works are among the many writings by prisoners and other marginalized individuals made available to a mass public by Renato Curcio through his publishing collective *Sensibili alle foglie*.

Other work by authors confined in what Irving Goffman called “total institutions” — in this case mental hospitals rather than prisons — includes the two recent anthologies, *Padiglioni. Racconti dal manicomio*, edited by the Associazione Franco Basaglia and the Cooperativa il Punto, and the remarkable and often quite funny . . . *i pazzi siete voi! Lettere dal manicomio*, edited by Angela Matassa. Curcio has also published the writings (often with illustrations) of street people and others marginalized for non-conformist behavior. A notable example of work of this sort is *Un uomo tra la schiuma. Poesie e altri segni di Claudio Parodi*. Another is the volume of drawings with commentary by “Sebastiano T.” published as *L’alfabeto di Esté*.

⁴ I am grateful to Davide Pariotti of the University of Chicago for having drawn my attention to these two works.

⁵ Some of these have been treated in my *Sentences. The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro*.

When Sebastiano T. first came to Curcio's attention, he had spent most of his life in an institution for the criminally insane while Curcio was serving a sentence in a conventional prison. But Sebastiano T. is clearly an "unlettered" writer similar in this sense to Pietro Ghizzardi or the authors whose works appear in Montaldi's *Autobiografie della leggera*. In a further blurring of the taxonomy suggested earlier for this kind of writing, some of the "italophone" writers I have mentioned could equally well be classified prison authors. Fernanda Farias, for example, originally from a small village in Brazil, wrote his memoir in prison with linguistic help from others sympathetic to his plight. The same is true for the life stories of Kouma and Bouchane, which were also created in collaboration with others. Since many of the "unlettered" writers in Montaldi's anthology, finally, were in and out of prison at many times during their lives and in many cases engaged in behavior of the sort common to writers from mental hospitals, there are clearly additional overlappings among the categories I have suggested. Even so, all of these writers share certain preoccupations. All of them write from a position of resentment at their marginality, whether this be as street-people, inmates of institutions for criminals or the mentally ill, or as culturally and economically disadvantaged. All of them, through their writings, are attempting to vindicate what might otherwise be their forgotten lives. All of them, that is, are writing, though in different ways, in order to save their lives.

Most of the works I have mentioned here are confessional or autobiographical, and their authors frequently insist that the stories they are telling are "the truth" rather than fiction. "Gnanca na busia nè par mi; nè ai lettori!!!" is Clelia Marchi's unequivocal claim in this regard (13). Within this confessional context, however, there are differences among the three groups of writers. The Italophones, for example, view their writings as an opportunity to explain and justify their new lives in Italy far from a home to which most of them can no longer return. Their stories describe their struggles to integrate themselves into mainstream Italian society while at the same time preserving their personal identities, as observant Moslems, for example. The "unlettered" autobiographers are also intent on providing documentation of lives that they consider extraordinary — if only because existences like theirs have all but disappeared today. This, indeed, is one reason for the enthusiasm and support for their writings by the editors and publishers who have seen their work into print. The prisoners and mental patients, in still a third variation on this theme, are writing to counteract the official identities imposed on them by the authorities confining them. Rather than unnatural beings unlike anyone else, for example, or dangerous political subversives, these writers insist that they are recognizable human beings even if not quite like everyone else, victims of a cultural hegemony blind to their true identities as individuals and/or political activists and revolutionary patriots. All of these writers from confinement would agree, I think, with the inmates of the Aversa hospital outside Naples that "i

pazzi siete voi” where the “voi” stands for the uncomprehending forces that have not only sequestered but wish to silence them.

In addition to these collections of stories by people who are not habitual writers, other kinds of collections of life stories and vignettes have been proposed in recent years to the Italian reading public. Although these collections were written or collected by professional writers or critics, the stories told in them are mostly by people who do not make a living from their writing. In the anthologies in which their work appears they are identified with their real names and professions or other occupations. Collections of this sort include the micro-narratives contributed by readers of the *Repubblica* newspaper and published as *Una frase, un rigo appena. Racconti brevi e brevissimi* (ed. Mauri). This volume contains 56 very brief narratives by amateur writers that are then followed, as if by contrast, in a second section of the book by another 27 equally brief texts by such well known authors as Kafka, Borges, and Pessoa.

Gianni Celati's *Narratori delle riserve* is a similar enterprise. The texts Celati has collected in this anthology were drawn from contributions submitted to *Il manifesto* and tend to be longer than the mini-narratives of *Una frase, un rigo appena*. He has described selecting the texts that appear in this collection from “racconti di narratori occasionali, manoscritti di gente che non aveva lettori a cui rivolgersi, libri stampati da case editrici sconosciute, testi di autori isolati e poco noti, e altri di autori più note” (9), that is by authors who in some cases are marginalized or even “unlettered,” though other authors in Celati's collection (Ermanno Cavazzoni, Nico Orengo, and Sandra Petrigiani, for example) must be considered members of the literary establishment. What is interesting about these two anthologies — and such similar works as Cavazzoni's *Vite brevi di idioti*, which is based on the author's research in the archives of the mental hospital at Reggio Emilia, or even Celati's fictional *Narratori delle pianure* — is the desire by these sophisticated men of letters to present texts to the general reading public that share the unpretentious qualities typical of writers from the margins.

At century's end and with so many things changing in Italian society, one might well ask what is happening here. Why this interest in texts that deliberately eschew what is usually thought of as literary? Are we meant to understand this as an attempt to create a literature that is truly “nazional-popolare”? Or is this interest in “anti-literary literature” another example of the sense of surfeit — of literary indigestion, if you will — experienced by many contemporary writers for a literary tradition felt as overwhelming, a reaction that has produced the parodies, citationism, and rewriting so typical of Italian postmodernism? Perhaps the age of the “classics” really has come to an end and is being replaced by what are either “anti-classics” or “counter classics” or pretend to be such.

In his last lecture before retiring from the University of Bologna, Ezio Raimondi spoke to this issue in remarks included in *Letteratura e identità*

nazionale. In this lecture Raimondi wondered if in the years to come “la critica e la storia letteraria possono ancora delimitarsi dentro uno spazio particolare o hanno bisogno di orizzonti più larghi” (204). The survey I have just presented of writers “from the margins” that are now being proposed to a mainstream public made up of readers of *La Repubblica* or *Il manifesto* or who buy books published by Feltrinelli or Einaudi suggests that there is a desire among Italian readers too for “orizzonti più larghi.” Perhaps this interest is connected with a desire to accord greater respect to the real individuals who live at the margins of present-day Italian society. In regard to the epistemological and ontological value of autobiographical texts in general, Antonio Tabucchi has commented as follows:

Credo che il mondo non esisterebbe senza la possibilità di essere narrato. O meglio, esiste proprio perchè è narrabile. Qualsiasi forma dello scibile umano è narrato o è narrabile. E se noi vogliamo parlare in un senso un po' più stretto, possiamo anche pensare che la vita sia una forma dello scibile. Cos'è una vita se non viene raccontata? Me lo sono chiesto spesso. Forse ci sono persone che vivono senza raccontarsi la propria vita. Ma è come se vivessero un nulla indistinto.

(Borsari 6)

What the publication of these writers from the margins has done is to make this “nulla” a little less “indistinto” in the ways described by Tabucchi. Perhaps this is nothing new. As Asor Rosa has pointed out in regard to the twentieth century, “non c'è dubbio che alcune fra sue maggiori novità espressive si possono individuare proprio là dove la ricerca letteraria si sfrangia, si decompone, entra in contatto con altri universi linguistici e comunicativi, e con questi si intreccia e si confonde” (*Un altro novecento* ix). In this sense, then, the proposed adjustment of the literary canon currently taking place in Italy is entirely in the spirit of this “fraying” and “decomposing”—and where can this happen except at the margins?—that is so typical of the literary innovations of that twentieth century that has recently come to a close.

The Ohio State University

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II.

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE TEXTS:

CLOSURE, OPEN-ENDEDNESS, NARRATIVE CYCLES

Dino S. Cervigni

From Beginning to End: Dante's Judeo-Christian Fourfold Mytho-Poesis*

1. Dante's Mytho-Poesis: From Beginning to End

Dante never employs the word myth (*mito*). Dante scholars, by contrast, often use this term, albeit not in the singular but in the plural. Accordingly, they analyze Dante's exploitation and transformation of classical myths, present primarily in the *Comedy*. Take for instance the recently published proceedings of a Dante seminar entitled *Dante: mito e poesia*.¹ In this volume myths are mostly studied individually and/or within the specific context in which Dante situates them. Throughout the whole volume, however, time and again there surfaces the issue of the relationship of both classical and contemporary myths (such as that of Ulysses and Florence, respectively) to the overall story, indeed myth, unfolding not only in the *Comedy* but in Dante's entire *oeuvre* as well. By contrast, where the term is employed as a collective singular noun, myth is studied, for instance, in its relationship with symbolism, as in Marthe Dozon's impressive study entitled *Mythe et symbole dans la Divine comédie*. Here the scholar seeks to interpret the Dantean myth on the basis not only of studies of myths and religions but also of cultural anthropology and Jungian psychology.

Both critical approaches are highly commendable, however different their results may be, and both also advance the scholar's understanding of myth in Dante. In proposing to study myth in Dante from a different perspective, which nevertheless surfaces repeatedly in both volumes, I intend to take stock of the results of the two different approaches outlined above. Thus, while relying on the research of individual myths conducted by Dante scholarship, I bear in mind the myths' role primarily within the *Comedy*, whose ultimate meaning can be

* A synthesis of this essay has appeared in *The Waters of Hermes*.

¹ The volume consists of loosely related analyses of specific myths in Dante (Dante and myths; the myth of Orpheus; the myth of Circe; etc.) as well as theoretical considerations on the function of myth. Some essays, however, focus more directly on the overarching presence of the Christian myth (Güntert, "Dante autobiografico: dal mito religioso al mito poetico"; Kleinhenz, "Mito e verità biblica in Dante"). In his introduction to the volume and his concluding remarks (21-32; 437-39), Picone suggests the possibility of viewing Dante's *oeuvre* from the all-comprehensive perspective of the Christian myth that I develop in this essay.

uncovered only through the understanding of medieval culture in its Christian perspective.²

At the basis of my approach lies a deeply felt personal conviction grounded on decades of familiarity with Dante, a notion shared, I believe, by most contributors to *Dante: mito e poesia*, by Marthe Dozon, and all those scholars who dealt with Dante as well. Accordingly, Marthe Dozon writes that the “I-narrator” of the *Divine Comedy* presents himself as the hero of a *fabula* that draws its models from classical myths, such as those of Hercules, Orpheus, Theseus, and Aeneas. All these myths are transformed by Dante’s poetic genius into the itinerary of a soul engaged in a spiritual quest (33). Moving along similar critical perspectives, in *Dante: mito e poesia* Michelangelo Picone writes:

Le verità più alte del mistero cristiano — la trinità, l’incarnazione di Cristo — sono chiaramente presentate come i nuovi miti moderni che hanno preso il posto dei vecchi miti della poesia classica. La riscrittura del mito classico può dirsi in questa maniera completata, esaurita. Il poema delle nuove metamorfosi cristiane — la *Commedia* — ha definitivamente sostituito il poema delle vecchie metamorfosi pagane, e Dante ha preso il posto di Ovidio.

(438)

I fully share Picone’s synthesis of the role of classical myths in Dante and of their total absorption into his notion of the Christian myth. At the same time, while pursuing a similar critical perspective, I would like to propose an even more comprehensive approach to Dante’s myth.

It is my critical belief, in fact, that the overall content and structure of Dante’s *oeuvre*, primarily his *Vita nuova* and *Comedy*, but all the other works as well, rest on the fourfold Judeo-Christian myth that fully describes every human being’s existence, individually and within the context of a universal community that unfolds along a temporal and historical axis: humankind’s creation, fall, renewal, and redemption. This complex *mythos* is capable of explaining not only the countless Judeo-Christian myths in Dante’s *oeuvre* but all classical, primordial, and contemporary myths as well. Furthermore, the Dantean fourfold Judeo-Christian myth explains the life of each individual and the community within which he/she lives from beginning to end: namely, from that specific moment that marks the beginning of humankind, as described in the first two

² Dozon’s *Mythe et symbole dans la Divine comédie* (pp. 632) is one of the most comprehensive treatments of Dantean myths. The volume treats virtually every aspect of the *Comedy* related to myth, allegory, and symbol: Part 1: The soul’s adventure (symbolic writing; the journey and salvation; the voyage toward knowledge); Part 2: Poets in agreement (Virgil; *Eneid*; epic scenes and characters); Part 3: The theater of the shades (landscapes of the afterlife; archetypal and mytho-poetic images; demons and marvels); Part 4: Itinerant man (cosmic symbols; fated words).

chapters of Genesis, to the concluding chapter of humankind's history, as announced in countless passages of the Bible and in its last book, Revelation or Apocalypse.

Within the strictures of this essay, I need deal only summarily with the meaning and function of myth in general, referring first to one of the most famous employers of the term in reference to poetry. In his *Poetics*, of the six elements making up tragedy, Aristotle considers *mythos*, i.e., story or plot, first and foremost. In the Aristotelian notion of drama, *mythos* corresponds to real life's action, which is understood not only as an external act but rather as an inward and rational process, encompassing, therefore, all those elements, both internal and external, working together towards a definite purpose. In brief, in a broader application of what Aristotle says of the term's function in reference to tragedy (*Poet.* vi. 14), *mythos* is the soul of literature.³

Understood in this manner, *mythos* goes also beyond another explanation of the term, according to which myth, quoting Vickery, "is a narrative or group of narratives which recount the activities of a culture's gods and heroes" (806). In fact, the term's full import may be best understood by means of Franco Ferrucci's terse claim that no fundamental difference exists between myth and literature. Thus, reversing Northrop Frye's definition of literature as "reconstructed myth," Ferrucci views myth as literature's primordial form, in accordance with some of the greatest contemporary scholars of myth criticism (513).⁴

Dante scholars know full well the extent to which such a Judeo-Christian myth pervades Dante's work. At the same time, only reluctantly do they approach Dante's poetic genius from this perspective because of a resistance to an approach often considered excessively religious. Dante's poetic genius, however, feeds itself and is grounded upon this Judeo-Christian myth, which forms the all-encompassing master narrative of his *oeuvre* and into which all pagan and contemporary myths are being grafted.

To circumvent such a critical resistance, while still doing justice to the Dantean fourfold Judeo-Christian myth, I would like to propose a theoretical and all-comprehensive approach that is equally founded on myth, and is based primarily, albeit not exclusively, on Northrop Frye's composite approach to literature and myth. To seek to read Dante's *oeuvre* by means of Frye's critical approach should, at first sight, surprise no one. In fact, just as Dante was

³ I have here summarized Butcher's analysis of Aristotle's notion of *mythos* (334-67).

⁴ I refer the reader to Ferrucci's essay, with extensive bibliographical notes, for a fundamental discussion of the notion of myth, in which he also deals with Dante. In English see pertinent entries (with bibliography) in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. In *Dante: mito e poesia* see especially Güntert's contribution. Neither the six-volume *Enciclopedia dantesca* nor *The Dante Encyclopedia* has an entry devoted specifically to *mito*.

influenced by the Bible more so than by any other book, Frye's literary analyses over the course of several decades have constantly revolved around the Bible, as he himself acknowledges explicitly (*The Great Code* xiv).

At the basis of Frye's critical method lies his claim that the scholar should not be concerned about uncovering poetry's truths or any relationships between literature and reality, but rather about revealing certain patterns that form a poetic universe of their own.⁵ Primarily in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye develops a fourfold approach to literature: 1) historical criticism, or theory of modes, including the fictional, the tragic, the comic, and the thematic; 2) ethical criticism, or theory of symbols, including the literal, descriptive, formal, mythical, and anagogic; 3) archetypal criticism, or theory of myths, according to the year's four seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, which correspond to literature's traditional four genres, respectively: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony and satire; and finally 4) rhetorical criticism, or theory of genres: epos, prose, drama, and lyric.

It is a truism that Dante's genius escapes easy definitions and synthesizing attempts. Nevertheless, judiciously employed and further enriched by other critical approaches, Frye's fourfold approach provides a comprehensive hermeneutical approach to Dante's poetic rendering of the fourfold Judeo-Christian myth onto which primordial, classical, and contemporary myth is being grafted.

Relying on principles laid out by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, Frye's criticism focuses on four narrative categories or generic plots, organized according to two opposite pairs and aimed at explaining literature as a whole: tragedy and irony or satire, on the one side, and comedy and romance, on the opposite side. Furthermore, Frye illustrates his fourfold archetypal myth by means of the four seasons marking the passing of human time: the mythos of spring as comedy, viewed as humankind's beginning; the mythos of autumn as tragedy; the mythos of winter as irony and satire; and the mythos of summer as romance.⁶

These different frames of reference — the Judeo-Christian *mythos* of humankind's creation, fall, renewal, and redemption, which incorporates all myths exploited by Dante, and Frye's fourfold archetypal myth — can be employed side by side to understand and explain Dante's art, which I would like to call mytho-poiesis. Within the proposed critical perspective, Frye's approach provides a composite hermeneutics capable of explaining Dante's employment and transformation of myths, while the Judeo-Christian approach offers the

⁵ On this issue of myth as fable vs. myth as truth I will return at the end of this essay.

⁶ This brief outline of Frye's fourfold archetypal myth bears out immediately his divergence from Aristotle's understanding of genres. For Aristotle, in fact, "Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life" (II. 4).

ultimate moral, intellectual, and teleological perspective pervading all religious elements, rituals, and beliefs at the basis of his *oeuvre*.⁷

Let us briefly present Dante's fourfold Judeo-Christian mytho-poiesis.

Just as in Christianity, Dante the poet's myth of beginning is twofold: man's primordial condition of innocence right after creation and before the fall, and, after the fall, man's restored condition of innocence through Christ's Redemption. By means of critical perspectives to be explained later in this essay, both stages of innocence can be comprised within Frye's mythos of spring and the genre of comedy.

Just as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Dante's myth of innocent beginning, a comedic phase, is tragically interrupted by the fall of the hero. The myth of the fallen hero, therefore, is that of autumn, which expresses a transitional phase; tragedy is the genre best suited to render the hero's fall caused by his moral wrongdoing.

Although fallen and thus turned almost into a villain, the Dantean hero is nevertheless allowed to resume his interrupted quest. Thus, like such biblical figures as Jonah and Christ and such classical heroes as Orpheus, Hercules, and Aeneas, he must undertake a journey through the underworld, the realm of darkness, sterility, and eternal suffering. As the perversion of what creation was intended to be, as exemplified by the spring-like myth of beginnings before the fall or Eden, the Christian underworld is best expressed through the myth of winter and the genre of satire.

After descending to the underworld as a *conditio sine qua non* for him to continue his quest, the hero resurfaces on the shores of Mount Purgatory, aware of having lost his way in the past and of finally resuming the right journey. Thus the purgatorial journey constitutes a new beginning after the fall. Once again, Dante the poet ushers in a story that begins somberly but leads to a happy ending. In archetypal criticism, the hero's ascent through the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory corresponds to that season in the year when nature leaves behind the lifeless winter and gradually, through early spring, readies for its rebirth. At the top of Mount Purgatory the Dantean hero enters the Earthly

⁷ The validity of the approach proposed above receives an indirect confirmation by what I read in a critic who can hardly be accused of Christian sectarianism; namely, Bakhtin, who, speaking of the fragmented temporality characteristic of certain novels, sees in them an axis that he describes as follows: "These temporal segments of episodes from everyday life are, therefore, arranged, as it were, perpendicular to the pivotal axis of the novel, which is the sequence guilt → punishment → redemption → purification → blessedness [...]" (128). Bakhtin also points out that a similar narrative pattern runs through what he calls "hagiographic examples," in which "the factor of metamorphosis is foregrounded (a sinful life → crisis → redemption → sainthood)." Furthermore, "The everyday-plane adventure is given in the form of an exposure to a sinful life, or of a repentant confession. These forms — and particularly the latter — already border on a third type of ancient novel" (129).

Paradise, where he experiences spiritual rebirth and inner transformation, best expressed through the myth of full spring and the genre of comedy.

Finally, the hero's ascent to heaven, in the company of Beatrice, cannot but belong to the myth of summer, with its brightest light and fullness of life. Properly adapted to Dante's *oeuvre*, romance expresses such a state of idealized experience, in which the hero ascends, and is in fact likened, to the gods.⁸

2. Dante's Myth of Innocent Beginning Before the Fall: The Mythos of Spring and the Genre of Comedy⁹

In accordance with the Judeo-Christian myth of beginning, Dante the poet creates a twofold myth. Conflating the creation of the universe with that of humankind,¹⁰ Dante the poet renders both in the two initial encounters of the hero and his lady (*VN* 2-3). After the hero's fall, which is then followed by conversion and atonement, Dante describes a second, dramatic encounter of the hero and his lady in *Purg.* 30-33 when he is reconciled with her and is saved through her intervention. The hero's initial condition of innocence before the fall is described at the beginning of the *Vita nuova*, when Beatrice first appears to the youthful protagonist at the approximate ages of nine and eighteen. At the end

⁸ In his introductory essay to *Dante: mito e poesia* (21-32), Picone makes succinct statements that corroborate the critical perspective I intend to develop here: "Se l'*Inferno* è la cantica che descrive la degradazione del peccatore verso forme di vita animale, vegetale e perfino minerale, il *Purgatorio* è invece la cantica che affabula il processo di recupero da parte del penitente di una forma di vita autenticamente umana. Dalla deformazione e perversione infernale si passa così alla *reformatio* e *conversio* purgatoriale" (27). "Passando dal *Purgatorio* al *Paradiso* la tematica della *reformatio*, del restauro dell'immagine divina dell'uomo, cede il posto alla tematica della *deificatio*" (30).

⁹ Frye thus describes the plot structure common to most myths of spring: "What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (163). Frye's plot structure can thus be adapted to the Dantean myth: A young man desires a young woman; his desire is resisted because it is misplaced, in that the lady represents a higher goal and good than the hero intends to pursue. Throughout the hero's quest, which involves failings (*Vita nuova*; some rhymes; *Inferno*), atonement, and transformation (*Purgatorio*), he is guided by his lady until, through her guidance, he finally attains the supreme goal of whose goodness and beauty she is nothing but a scintilla (*Paradiso*). In terms of the category of genres, Frye remarks that "As comedy blends into irony and satire at one end and into romance at the other, if there are different phases or types of irony of comic structure, some of them will be closely parallel to some of the types of irony and of romance" (177).

¹⁰ Dante's view of all issues concerning God's creation — the universe, humankind, *ex nihilo*, etc. — is complex and his references to it, in many of his works, are countless. Mellone's essay in *Enciclopedia dantesca* provides a useful synthesis of Dante's view with an extensive bibliography.

of the hero's quest for redemption, the second encounter occurs on top of Mount Purgatory, after he has already attained the middle of his life's journey.

The Judeo-Christian myth that pervades Dante's *oeuvre* provides the fundamental hermeneutical frame for interpreting Dante's twofold myth of beginnings. Placed in this world by his Creator (*VN* 1-3), the innocent hero, like Adam, must face a test, which he fails. Urged to pursue a second, spiritual encounter with his lady by virtue of the individual redemption made possible to him by divine mercy (*Inf.* 2:94-114), the hero, after a journey that takes him down to the depths of Hell and up the slopes of Mount Purgatory, is finally granted purification. This second and spiritual encounter with Beatrice marks the hero's symbolic rebirth and new beginning in life (*Purg.* 30-33).

Leaving the hero's rebirth and new beginning after the fall to a subsequent section of this essay, I would like first to examine how Dante renders the myth of beginning before the fall. In examining this myth, we must necessarily start with the Bible, which has provided Dante with even more literary images than classical antiquity.

The Bible, which has influenced western literature more than any other book, presents the myth of creation as humankind's beginning: the separation of the water above from the water below and of the earth from the water; the making of the sun, moon, stars, all inanimate nature, and the animals; and finally the creation of man and woman. According to the first biblical narrative of creation, the Elohist or Priestly account (P), God created man and woman at the same time:

Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram, et praesit piscibus maris, et volatilibus caeli, et bestiis, universaeque terrae, omnique reptili, quod movetur in terra. Et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam: ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos.

("Let us make a human being in our image and likeness to rule the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the animals, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth." So God created the human being in his own image; in the image of God He created the human being: male and female He created them.)

(Gen. 1:26-27)¹¹

By contrast, the second, or Yahvist, narrative (J) of creation makes the female subservient to the male. Most importantly for its influences upon Dante, it also provides the first encounter of man with woman:

Dixitque quoque Dominus Deus: Non est bonum esse hominem solum: faciamus ei adiutorium simile sibi. [...] Immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam: cumque

¹¹ All biblical quotations are from *Biblia vulgata*; English translations of the Bible and Dante are mine; all quotations from *Vita nuova* come from the bilingual edition quoted in the bibliography.

obdormisset, tulit unam de costis eius, et replevit carnem pro ea. Et aedificavit Dominus Deus costam, quam tulerat de Adam, in mulierem: et adduxit eam ad Adam. Dixitque Adam: Hoc nunc, os de ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea: haec vocabitur Virago, quoniam de viro sumpta est.

(Then the Lord God said: "It is not good for man to be alone. Let us create a partner for him." [...] And so the Lord God induced sleep into Adam; and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over it. The Lord God then built up the rib, which he had taken out of Adam, into a woman. He then brought her to Adam. And Adam said: "Now this is bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh. This shall be called woman [Eve], for from man was she taken.")

(Gen. 2:18; 21-23)

According to this second biblical narrative of creation, Adam's first glimpse of Eve constitutes the first encounter of two humans: the coming together of two creatures who, henceforth bonded for as long as they live and, in the case of the Dantean hero, even after her death, are innocent at this primordial stage.¹²

At the beginning of his earliest complete writing, Dante recasts the myth of that primordial encounter of man with woman in the condition of innocence:

Nove fiata già appresso lo mio nascimento era tornato lo cielo de la luce quasi a uno medesimo punto, quanto a la sua propria girazione, quando a li miei occhi apparve prima la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice li quali non sapeano che si chiamare.

(Nine times since my birth had the heaven of light returned to almost the same point in its orbit when to my eyes first appeared the glorious lady of my mind, who was called Beatrice by many who did not know her given name.)

(*Vita nuova* 2:1)¹³

Just as in the biblical account, man encounters woman not at the beginning of his biological life but "In that part of the book of *his* memory before which little could be read" (*VN* 1).¹⁴ The *Vita nuova* hero has no name, and in fact in this

¹² Among the many references to Adam and Eve in Dante's works, see primarily: *Par.* 26: 103-42 (Adam) and *De vulgari eloquentia* 1:4.2 (Eve, Adam, and human speech). The entries on Adam and Eve in the two Dante encyclopedias listed in the works cited provide all pertinent references.

¹³ In several passages of the *Comedy*, Dante describes the twofold aspect of God's creation as presented in the double narrative of creation of the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 2): the physical formation of a human being in the womb (*Purg.* 25) and the divine act of infusing the soul into the embryo (*Purg.* 25:61-75; 16:85-90; etc.).

¹⁴ The theme of innocent beginnings, represented through the protagonist's falling in love with his lady at a very early phase of his life, occurs or is referred to in other works of Dante as well: *Purg.* 30:40-42; *Par.* 30:28-29. In a poem to his friend and fellow poet Cino of Pistoia, Dante once again refers to his ninth birthday as the time he first fell under Love's rule (50a, CXI, vv. 1-2). It was a topos for poets to write that they had fallen in love at first sight, usually during their childhood (Foster-Boyde 2:93n57, with

youthful autobiography the male protagonist remains nameless throughout the entire account. As to woman, the name given to her, Beatrice, perfectly describes what she is: The one who bestows blessedness upon the beholder. She thus fulfills all of the male's expectations, just as Eve also does in the Bible, according to the first man's exclamation upon her appearance: "Now this is bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

As to the *locus* where this initial, primordial encounter of man and woman takes place in Dante's *Vita nuova*, the text offers no spatial indication. We know that it does occur, but we do not know where it happens, for not even such open or public space as a street, which characterizes their second encounter, is indicated here. And yet, in spite of this lack of spatial specificity, or perhaps precisely because of it, during this first encounter man's inner condition is one of bliss, not unlike that of Adam in Eden when he beholds Eve for the first time. The male protagonist's inner blissful condition — it can be argued — re-creates symbolically the *locus* of happiness represented and symbolized by the biblical Eden.

Furthermore, just as in Eden, also in *Vita nuova* no one but God witnesses man's encounter with woman. When they first meet, in fact, the male and female protagonists are alone. By contrast, their second encounter, nine years after their initial one, is witnessed by the two ladies who walk with Beatrice along the street.

Meeting for the first time all alone in an unspecified place, the *Vita nuova* man and woman do meet, nevertheless, *within* God's creation and at a time measured according to multiple references to it:

Nove fiate già appresso lo mio nascimento era tornato lo cielo de la luce quasi a uno medesimo punto, quanto a la sua propria girazione, quando [...]. Ella era in questa vita già stata tanto, che ne lo suo tempo lo cielo stellato era mosso verso la parte d'oriente de le dodici parti l'una d'un grado, sì che quasi dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me, ed io la vidi quasi da la fine del mio nono.

(Nine times since my birth had the heaven of light returned to almost the same point in its orbit when [...]. She had already been in this life as long as in her time the heaven of fixed stars had moved toward the East a twelfth part of a degree, so that at about the

references to such practice by troubadours but in contradiction to Capellanus' sixth rule of love: "Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity," 184; Trojel bk 1, ch. 5, p. 12; Battaglia 14-16). By following this poetic commonplace, however, Dante rewrites what he states in the canzone "E' m'incresce di me," which places his love on the day Beatrice was born (Contini 20, LXVII, vv. 57-60). Furthermore and perhaps more importantly, by setting his love within the all-encompassing cosmic category of *VN* 2:1, Dante provides an explanation for the protagonist's falling in love that goes beyond its immediate physical causes (gazing) and finds its ultimate cause in heaven, whence Beatrice is said to have descended (*VN* 26:6, vv. 7-8).

beginning of her ninth year did she appear to me, and I saw her at about the end of my ninth.)

(*Vita nuova* 2:1-2)¹⁵

Accordingly, the time of the *Vita nuova*'s male and female first encounter is set in reference to the cyclical and circular movement of the sun as well as the revolution of the heaven of the Fixed Stars.¹⁶

The second and only other unconditionally innocent encounter of the hero with the lady occurs exactly nine years after the first one, when both protagonists, therefore, have entered young adulthood, and it occurs in a public place and in the presence of two older ladies (*VN* 3:1-2). Just as in the first encounter, also during the second not only the lady (who is portrayed as innocent throughout Dante's work) but also the hero is still innocent.

Both initial encounters belong, therefore, to the myth of comedy. The season of the year is spring, the time is about three in the afternoon (the "ninth" hour of the day, *VN* 3:2), and the lady addresses for the first time the hero, who is consequently overwhelmed by such sweetness that he feels inebriated and seeks solitude.

Contrary to what occurs in the biblical Eden, where Adam speaks first (as Dante argues in the *De vulgari eloquentia* 1:4.2), it is the lady who in *Vita nuova* utters the first word ever. Although a mysterious verbal utterance, in that the text does not record her exact words, we know nevertheless her word's substance and effect upon the hero:

[...] per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande seculo, mi salutoe molto virtuosamente, tanto che me parve allora vedere tutti li termini de la beatitudine. ([...] in her ineffable courtesy, which today is rewarded in life everlasting, she greeted me with exceeding virtue, such that I then seemed to see all the terms of beatitude.)

(*Vita nuova* 3:1)

Beatrice's greeting is as ineffable as the courtesy that prompts her to speak. Her word, therefore, cannot but belong to the pre-lapsarian, Edenic, and therefore irretrievable moment of humankind's existence. Her greeting, therefore, counters what Dante writes in *De vulgari eloquentia* (1:4.2-3) but is in accordance with the explanation of language's origin and development that Adam offers at a later phase of Dante's poetic career (*Par.* 26:124-38).

¹⁵ These two encounters, and all other fundamental encounters of the hero, can also be studied as chronotopes, following Bakhtin's analysis of such a notion, as I have also proposed and expounded in the introductory essay to the bilingual edition of *Vita nuova*, where I employ also Benveniste's and Ricoeur's conceptions of time.

¹⁶ For a further elaboration of some of these themes see pp. 30-32 (for which I am responsible) in the introductory essay to the bilingual edition of *Vita nuova*.

I would now like to indicate very briefly the presence of the Judeo-Christian myth of an innocent beginning in two additional fundamental aspects of Dante's mytho-poiesis, which pertain equally to the hero's quest: namely, the linguistic and the civic. The unfinished treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* describes man's initial moment of existence as a linguistic one, since Dante theorizes that Adam addressed his Creator, calling Him by name ("Deus" 1:4.4), immediately after his creation: a happy, albeit brief, phase of human communication through the word, defined by Dante as a sign both "sensuale" and "rationale" (*DVE* 1:3.2).¹⁷ The *Purgatorio* further elucidates the origin of human language through the words of a redeemed soul, Statius, who explains that God Himself breathes the spiritual soul into the human embryo, thus transforming an "animal" into a "fante": a human being capable of expressing oneself linguistically (*Purg.* 25:61).¹⁸

According to the Judeo-Christian myth of humankind's beginning, the myth of a primordially happy community is short-lived.¹⁹ Adam's and Eve's primordial act of disobedience and Cain's murder of his brother Abel present mythically man's revolt against God and man's struggle against his peers, respectively. Dante's political concerns, primarily in the *Comedy* and *Monarchia*, aim at re-creating an ideal society where man's respect and love for God moves alongside man's respect for his fellow man.

Dante, therefore, creates a composite myth of a happy beginning, which involves first two individuals alone (*VN* 2) and then a small community, where one is capable of bestowing ineffable happiness upon the other (*VN* 3): a happy moment that is short-lived and that Dante seeks to recreate by several allusions to, and recreations of, the biblical garden of Eden (*Purg.* 28-33).

3. Dante's Myth of the Fall: The Mythos of Autumn and the Genre of Tragedy

After reaching young adulthood and being recognized and addressed publicly by his lady, the hero begins earnestly his quest for the love of his lady. As the story unfolds, the hero, inebriated with his love for the lady and obsessed with the desire to hide the treasure he had found, gradually falls into a trap laid out by his own desires and commits what Beatrice openly condemns as a fault. Thus, like

¹⁷ It is a well-known fact that Dante, through Adam's speech in *Par.* 26:124-38, re-writes what he had written previously about the immutability of the Hebrew language in *De vulgari eloquentia* 1:6.5-7.

¹⁸ This description of the creation of man as a human being capable of "speaking" is anticipated by Marco Lombardo's image of God the Creator smiling while beholding "l'anima semplicetta" shortly after its creation: another clear reference to man's primordial state of innocence and happiness (*Purg.* 16:85-90).

¹⁹ The primordial place of happiness is not Parnassus but the Earthly Paradise, as Matelda instructs Dante the pilgrim and the two Roman poets Virgil and Statius (*Purg.* 28:142-48).

the hero of many medieval narratives, the male protagonist of Dante's *Vita nuova* becomes also guilty of some wrongdoing.

Thus, leaving behind the romantic mode of the happy beginning with its spring-like atmosphere, he is denied access to summer's luminosity, thus entering the mythos of autumn with its tragic mode. The Dantean hero's fault finds its correspondent in the hero's *hamartia* in classical literature, despite the inherent difference of the notion of fault. In fact, scholars debate whether the Aristotelian notion of fault or *hamartia* implies simply an intellectual error or it also includes a moral flaw for which the hero is responsible. Frye views Aristotle's *hamartia* as "not necessarily wrongdoing, much less moral weakness" (38), for the hero does not "necessarily have any tragic hamartia or pathetic obsession" (41); rather, his fault "may be simply a matter of being a strong character in an exposed position" (38) or "he is only somebody who gets isolated from his society" (41). Developing a subtler analysis of the Aristotelian notion of *hamartia*, Butcher remarks: "Distinctions of motive — the moral guilt or purity of the agent — are not here in question. So too in tragedy those are doomed who innocently err no less than those who sin consciously" (321).

More so in the *Comedy* than in *Vita nuova*, the Dantean hero unquestionably commits a moral wrongdoing. In both works, Beatrice, a spokesperson for God, openly condemns this moral wrongdoing of the hero. In *Vita nuova*, as a consequence of the hero's first wrongdoing, Beatrice denies him her greeting, in which resided his beatitude and from which he also drew his "salute," namely, happiness and state of grace:

Appresso la mia ritornata mi misi a cercare di questa donna che lo mio signore m'avea nominata ne lo cammino de li sospiri; [...] in poco tempo la feci mia difesa tanto, che troppa gente ne ragionava oltre li termini de la cortesia; onde molte fiata mi pensava duramente. E per questa ragione, cioè di questa soverchievole voce che pareva che m'infamasse visiosamente, quella gentilissima, la quale fue distruggitrice di tutti li vizi e regina de le virtudi, passando per alcuna parte, mi negò lo suo dolcissimo salutare, ne lo quale stava tutta la mia beatitudine.

(After my return I began looking for that lady whom my Lord had named on the road of sighs; [...] in a brief time I made her my defense to such an extent that too many spoke about it beyond the bounds of courtesy; and this often afflicted me harshly. And for this cause, that is, for these excessive voices that appeared to defame me viciously, that most gentle lady, who was destroyer of all vices and queen of virtues, passing by a certain place, denied me her so dear greeting, in which was all my beatitude.)

(*Vita nuova* 10:1-2).

The same hero commits an even more egregious fault after his lady's death, resorting to the comforting glance of a compassionate lady instead of fixing his sight on the glorious Beatrice:

Io venni a tanto per la vista di questa donna, che li miei occhi si cominciaro a dilettere troppo di vederla; onde molte volte me ne crucciava nel mio cuore ed aveamene per vile assai. Onde più volte bestemmiava la vanitade de li occhi miei [...].

(I came to such a point through the sight of this lady that my eyes began to delight excessively in seeing her; so that I often became angry about it in my heart and considered myself base. Consequently, time and again I cursed the vanity of my eyes [...].)

(*Vita nuova* 37:1-2)

It is precisely this spiritual quest that links the *Vita nuova* youthful hero with the mature protagonist of the *Comedy* in his journey from fault to redemption. At the beginning of the *Comedy*, in fact, the Dantean Pilgrim is presented as a hero at fault, condemned to isolation away from God and from his redeemed creation, as we read in the most famous beginning of world literature, second only to the first verses of Genesis:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,
mi ritrovai in una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

(In the middle of our life's journey,
I found myself again in a dark forest,
for the straight path was lost.)

(*Inferno* 1:1-3)

In fact, the first sixty lines of the first canto of *Inferno* present primarily negative categories. The *Inferno* hero — lost, alone, and frightened — is shortly afterward pushed back into the dark forest by three fierce beasts. In the forest and wilderness in which he finds himself lost, darkness prevails over light, the animal world opposes the human world, and the human character finds himself in a condition of estrangement, isolation, and fear.²⁰ From that initial moment onward, throughout the first cantica, the *Comedy* hero's experience becomes increasingly problematic, as Northrop Frye succinctly summarizes:

²⁰ Fear or dread can be viewed as a presentiment of the presence of the sacred (*Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*) and the first step leading the sinful person to God (*Ricoeur* 29-33). (I would like to note here, incidentally, that Ricoeur's approach as outlined in *The Symbolism of Evil*, where he also quotes Dante, bears similarities with Frye's approach and can be exploited extensively in dealing with the notion of *hamartia*, whose primary symbols Ricoeur sees in defilement, sin, and guilt. For Ricoeur's understanding of Frye see Ricoeur's "'Anatomy of Criticism' or the Order of Paradigms." Likewise, Eliade's composite approach to culture, myth, and religion can add significantly to the approach I develop above.)

The downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe.

(*Anatomy of Criticism* 162)

Unlike the hero of classical tragedies, however, the Dantean hero is granted a special privilege intended to help him escape catastrophe: namely, a journey through the world of doom so that he may avoid it. Accordingly, the hero's downward movement through Hell contrasts two different experiences: that of the privileged hero who is affected by *hamartia* but holds the hope of redemption vis-à-vis the irreparable doom of the denizens of Hell. A tragic condition susceptible of being reversed, the former is best explained by the narrative mode of sunset, autumn, and the fall of the leaves; the condition of Hell's inhabitants, by contrast, cannot but be expressed through literature's condemnatory mode, satire and parody, and the mythos of death, or winter.

To describe appropriately the hero during his infernal journey, Dante the poet exploits biblical, Christian, and classical myths. Accordingly, the infernal hero is like Christ, who descends to Hell in order to conquer it (*Inf.* 4:46-63), and, like Christ, he too must die, albeit symbolically (*Inf.* 3:130-36; Cervigni, "L'Acheronte dantesco"). At the same time, the Dantean hero is unlike Christ, who descended into Hell and came out of it by virtue of his own power; rather, Dante the Pilgrim is like Theseus, who was delivered from Hell by Hercules, another Christ-like figure (*Inf.* 9:52-54). In fact, because of his precarious situation for as long as he is an itinerant voyager, the hero's journey is time and again viewed from the perspective of Ulysses' "folle vole" (*Inf.* 26:125), whose fate can be avoided only through divine intervention. Thus, the hero's fear during his descent on the back of the monster Geryon exceeds that of Phaeton and Icarus when the two youths, failing to heed their fathers' advice, plunged into their tragic catastrophe (*Inf.* 17:106-14). Even greater is the fear the hero experiences at the center of the universe upon beholding Lucifer (*Inf.* 34:22-27).

In brief, in describing the tragic hero who journeys through Hell, Dante the poet employs an overarching Christian perspective that incorporates all other motifs, including classical myths. The hero's Christian hope of leaving behind Hell, or the season of winter, which is described through low-mimetic or satiric modes, rests not so much on the power of Virgil, a figure belonging to the ancient world, but rather on the power of Beatrice. Sent by Lucy, Mary, and thus ultimately God, Beatrice in fact had summoned Virgil to help the hero out of the dark forest (*Inf.* 2).²¹ Precisely because the Dantean hero is situated within the

²¹ It is Christian hope, in fact, a virtue granted to humankind through Christ's Redemption, that distinguishes Dante's Christian hero from the classical tragic hero, who, as Frye expounds, "provokes enmity, or inherits a situation of enmity, and the return of the avenger constitutes the catastrophe. The revenge-tragedy is a simple tragic structure [...] often retained as a central event in the most complex tragedies" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 208-09).

Christian myth, the tragic destiny brought about by his *hamartia* can be turned into comedy, thus reversing the autumn of his life into spring, just as Manfred informs the hero at the beginning of his purgatorial journey (*Purg.* 3: 133-35).

The same hope, likewise, animates Dante in his endeavors to re-create humankind linguistically and socially, whence derive his attempts to forge a new language (as he outlines in *De vulgari eloquentia*) and to envision a just society (primarily in the *Comedy* and *Monarchia*) capable of helping man attain the eternal, happy destiny he has been called upon to attain.

4. The Dantean Myth of a Parodic Universe: The Mythos of Winter and the Genre of Satire

While in the tragic phase of his quest, corresponding to the mythos of autumn, the Dantean hero descends through Hell in the Christian hope of never remaining there. Just as God's creation belongs to the mythos of spring and its genre to comedy, Dante's Hell, by contrast, parodies God's creation by regressing to the primordial chaos conquered by God at the beginning of time (*Gen.* 1). As horrific and wicked as creation is good (*Gen.* 2), Hell thus belongs to the mythos of winter and the genre of satire. Through its darkness, fire or freezing cold, cacophony or absolute silence, the Dantean Hell parodies God's loving act in the creation of the universe, the angelic order, and humankind. Thus, what Frye writes about the tragic hero applies to Dante's satiric rendering of Hell and its inhabitants (but not to Dante's notion of *hamartia*):

In tragedy the titanic and demonic appear in the context of a self-destructive or anti-social impulse, of the kind expressed in Greek tragedy by the word *hubris*, the excessive action which is both conscious and mechanical, the result of *hamartia* or "flaw," which is not a moral defect but a situation so maladjusted that prudent or temperate action is impossible.

(*Words with Power* 282)²²

During his quest, or *agon*, and his conflict, death-struggle or *pathos*, the hero is thus confronted by an enemy, which, as Frye writes in *Anatomy of Criticism*, "is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life and old age [...]" Accordingly, the hero, who at the beginning of his quest is associated "with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" (187-88), must now journey through a hostile environment, which the Christian poet portrays as Hell. Frye further expounds the demonic aspects of this phase of the hero's journey. Accordingly, "The central form of quest-romance is the dragon-killing theme"; there are also monsters, such as the leviathan and behemoth, which "represent the fallen order of nature over which Satan has some control" (189).

²² In *Fables of Identity* Frye expounds further the mythos of winter: "The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, and Götterdämmerung myths. Subordinate characters: the ogre and the witch. The archetype of satire [...]" (16).

It is not the Dantean hero, who becomes an anti-hero because of his fault, but Christ, the hero par excellence, who descends to Hell and conquers Satan in the so-called harrowing of Hell (190).

To render such a horrific world, Dante the poet plunders classical and biblical myths. The Dantean Hell's guardians belong to ancient antiquity (Charon, Minos, Cerberus, Phlegyas, etc.) as well as Christian traditions (devils; Lucifer). At the same time, this world, fixed in a state of eternal catastrophe, perennial winter, and structured chaos, belongs primarily in the biblical and Christian mythology, since its king is Lucifer, who was thrown down from heaven because of his rebellious *hubris* (*Inf.* 7:10-12; *Purg.* 12: 25-27), and all souls condemned to Hell have been rebellious against the true God (*Inf.* 1:125). By the same token, in exploiting classical myths primarily in the *Inferno*, Dante the poet follows a poetic strategy that Northrop Frye describes effectively in *Words with Power*:

If Biblical myths were true and classical ones false [precisely as the Dantean Virgil states in *Inf.* 1:72], then the only way to account for the resemblances was to call the latter demonic parodies of Biblical ones, or, perhaps, fairy tales begotten by confused human memories after the Fall.

(*Words with Power* 145)

Again, for Frye Dante's Hell is

the representation of the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion; the world as it is before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden, has been solidly established; the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly.

(*Anatomy of Criticism* 147)

From a Christian perspective, Dante's Hell condemns an irremediably broken order through an act of divine justice. Likewise, in Frye's theory of myths, the righting of balance requires an act of revenge or *nemesis*:

[...] the agent or instrument of *nemesis* may be human vengeance, ghostly vengeance, divine vengeance, divine justice, accident, fate or the logic of events, but the essential thing is that *nemesis* happens [...].

(*Anatomy of Criticism* 209)

Contrary to classical traditions as Frye interprets them, however, the destiny of all those whom Dante condemns to Hell was not determined by "the omnipotence of an external fate" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 209). Rather, in contrast with the classical tragic hero, it is caused by "a violation of *moral* law, whether

human or divine" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 210). Thus, everyone condemned to the Dantean Hell is marked by *hamartia*, understood as a moral wrongdoing.

From this notion derives another, fundamental attribute of *Inferno*: Dante's Hell (just like its opposite, Paradise) is situated outside time, which humankind experiences in its itinerant condition after being expelled from the Earthly Paradise.²³ Hell's inhabitants, therefore, are eternally and irrevocably condemned to the mythos of a perennial winter (see the eternally frozen souls of Hell's Cocytus) and an irretrievable catastrophe. In contrast, having received the grace of journeying through Hell in order to be delivered from it, the Dantean hero, however, lives in time. Situated outside time, Lucifer, his minions, and Hell's denizens dramatize, by contrast, their rejection of Christ's loving and redeeming act and cannot but parody His sacrifice, as does most visibly Lucifer, stretched out like a cross in the deepest pit of Hell.²⁴

It is precisely with Dante's Hell that Frye concludes his treatment of the mythos of winter:

At the bottom of Dante's Hell, which is also the center of the spherical earth, Dante sees Satan standing upright in the circle of ice, and as he cautiously follows Virgil over the hip and thigh of the evil giant, letting himself down by the tufts of hair on his skin, he passes the center and finds himself no longer going down but going up, climbing out on the other side of the world to see the stars again. [...] Tragedy can take us no farther; but if we persevere with the *mythos* of irony and satire, we shall pass a dead center, and finally see the gentlemanly [*sic!*] Prince of Darkness bottom side up.

(*Anatomy of Criticism* 239)

The mythos of winter is best expressed through the genre of irony or satire. A tragic hero in that he experiences *hamartia*, the Dantean hero only visits the realm of satire, Hell, which in biblical terms constitutes the ultimate deprivation and the eternal condemnation of the creature that refuses its creator. Thus, more fortunate than the tragic Ulysses, who saw but never set foot on Mount Purgatory, the Dantean hero escapes the mythos of eternal winter, leaves behind the genre of satire, and enters a world characterized by spring-like dawns and sunsets. Starting, as it were, a new life and a new journey through atonement and participatory sacrifice marked by hope, the Dantean hero thus begins his purgatorial journey.

²³ Precisely as Frye remarks: "In Adam's situation there is a feeling, which in Christian tradition can be traced back at least to St. Augustine, that time *begins* with the fall; that the fall from liberty into the natural cycle also started the movement of time as we know it" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 213).

²⁴ Some of Frye's following remarks apply to Dante's art: "Anyone accustomed to think archetypally of literature will recognize in tragedy a mimesis of sacrifice. Tragedy is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 215).

Space allows me to add only a few remarks concerning the linguistic and civic aspects of this phase of the Dantean myth. Ancient and biblical stories record humankind's failure in building a city, whose inhabitants become unable of communicating because of their *hubris* or some other form of wrongdoing (*Inf.* 31:46-81). Accordingly, Dante's Hell is constructed not on love and order but on fear, hatred, and revenge; its ruler and guardians are tormentors as much as they are tormented; and its denizens are condemned to a parodic form of civic life. Thus, in parodic contrast with Beatrice's "ineffable courtesy" when she first spoke (*VN* 3:1), Hell's rulers and denizens either shout, shriek, curse, blaspheme or are plunged, like Lucifer, into an inscrutable silence, in a parody of God's *Logos*.²⁵

5. Dante's Myth of a Second Beginning after the Fall: The Second Mythos of Spring and Comedy Regained

In the Judeo-Christian tradition humankind's innocent beginning lasts but a brief moment, from the time of creation to the primogenitors' expulsion from Eden. Among the many biblical and patristic interpretations available to him, Dante the poet opts for one that emphasizes the brevity of that blissful primordial moment. In Paradise Adam thus answers the Pilgrim who inquires about the length of his Edenic sojourn:

Nel monte che si leva più da l'onda,
fu' io, con vita pura e disonesta,
da la prim'ora a quella che seconda,
come 'l sole muta quadra, l'ora sesta.
("On the mountain that most rises from out the wave,
was I, with life pure and disgraced,
from the first hour to that which follows,
when the sun changes quadrant, the sixth hour.")

(*Par.* 26:139-42)

According to the Dantean Adam, therefore, the primogenitors' innocent, primordial condition lasted no longer than seven hours.

The Dantean hero's return to the same mountain originally inhabited by Adam and Eve cannot but fill him with a nostalgic longing for a lost place of happiness briefly enjoyed only by the "prima gente" ('the primordial people'; *Purg.* 1:19-26). Precisely at the moment when Virgil and the Pilgrim begin the purgatorial journey, therefore, they are likened to "om che torna a la perduta strada,/ che 'nfino ad essa li pare ire in vano" ('one who returns to the lost way / and who thinks he goes in vain until he reaches it'; *Purg.* 1:119-20). Accordingly, having lost his way, the wayfarer eagerly walks in order finally to

²⁵ For a closer analysis of the significance of Lucifer's silence see my two essays listed in Works Cited.

resume the straightforward journey. His desire to return to that primordial, blissful, but lost place is emphasized time and again throughout his purgatorial ascent and is further enhanced by the knowledge that upon attaining Eden he will finally see Beatrice (*Purg.* 6:47; 27:35-36). Appropriately, therefore, Frye states: "The upward movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after. In Dante the upward movement is through purgatory" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 162).

Following Judeo-Christian traditions, therefore, the hero's quest for the lost innocence unfolds through two phases. First, according to what I would like to call the mythos of early spring, the purgatorial hero undergoes several rites of atonement and purification, which take him from the shores of the sacred mountain to the edge of the sacred forest on the mountaintop (*Purg.* 1-27). Second, according to what I propose to call the mythos of full spring, he is finally restored to innocence: not to that primordial innocence that can no longer be regained after it is lost, but rather to an enhanced condition of purity and life attained through a twofold fluvial drinking. Insofar as the purpose of the hero's purgatorial ascent is to be born once again, comedy, as the narrative of dawn, spring, and birth, may best express this phase of the hero's quest. Following his spiritual rebirth, the purgatorial ascent leads to his apotheosis and entering into Paradise (Frye, *Fables of Identity* 16) and thus it is best expressed through the genre of romance.

a. *Early Spring: The Judeo-Christian Myth of Conversion and Atonement*

Next to the Christian notion that man is affected by *hamartia*, an ethical fault at the basis of the individual's and society's disorderly and chaotic condition, lies also the notion of *metanoia*. According to this notion, the individual, and thus the society within which he lives, can be changed from bad to good, albeit not on one's own strength but through Christ's Redemption.²⁶ In developing the Judaic and Christian notion of the hero's inner transformation as he gradually

²⁶ Just as classical literature does not provide a comparable notion of moral wrongdoing, it does not offer, by the same token, the possibility of a moral conversion similar to Christian *metanoia*. The Aristotelian *katharsis*, which affects the spectators rather than the actors of ancient tragedy, in fact, plays a different function, as S. H. Butcher remarks: "Let us assume, then, that the tragic *katharsis* involved not only the idea of an emotional relief, but the further idea of the purifying of the emotions so relieved. In accepting this interpretation we do not ascribe to tragedy a direct moral purpose and influence. It does not make men better, though it removes certain hindrances to virtue" (269). In fact, ancient religious practices did not require the inner transformation attached to the notion of conversion, and only Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism developed the notion of *metanoia* and atonement developed here ("Conversion," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*; "Conversion," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*). (On the problematic nature of the Aristotelian *katharsis* see Sparshott.)

climbs Mount Purgatory's seven terraces, Dante the poet resorts to biblical and Christian myths oftentimes linked with world literature's archetypal motifs.²⁷

According to archetypal criticism, the narrative of ameliorative change and transformation belongs to the comedic genre, as Frye points out: "Unlikely conversions, miraculous transformations, and providential assistance are inseparable from comedy" (170).²⁸ Since the Dantean hero's transformation leads to his spiritual re-birth, in fact, comedy, and hence spring, describe better this phase of his quest, thus also evincing the Dantean comedy's peculiarities. In Dante, in fact, certain conversions (take that of Manfred or Buonconte) are unlikely only from a human perspective, for Redemptive grace works mysteriously. In any case, the Dantean hero who journeys through Purgatory must undergo a deliberately pursued inner transformation based on external practices as well.

The mythos of early spring, which leads from the dead of winter to rebirth and the luminosity of summer, is the narrative of atonement and purification. To it belong all those rituals that aim at the purging souls' and the journeying hero's inner transformation, from the moment they touch the shores of Mount Purgatory until they set foot on the Earthly Paradise, which is situated on the mountaintop (*Purg.* 28-33).

The Dantean mythos of early spring is characterized by a plethora of characters, narrative elements, and poetic motifs belonging to the classical world (such as Cato in *Purg.* 1-2), Christian beliefs or traditions (angels, the door to Purgatory proper, the souls' acts of purification, the purifying fire, etc.), or, at least in part, to Dante's poetic imagination (the twofold fluvial rite in *Purg.* 31-33). At the same time, all these elements are pervaded by a fundamental Christian notion: namely, the need for the hero to atone and transform himself in order to attain the desired happy ending characteristic of romance in Paradise.²⁹

Just as in the *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, in the *Purgatorio* the archetypal quest constitutes the master narrative uniting all the rituals of purification. Thus the motif of the journey becomes an ascent (contrary to what occurs in Hell),

²⁷ Frye further elucidates his notion of *metanoia*, in both the Old and New Testament, in *The Great Code* (130-31; 193).

²⁸ Frye returns to this notion of comedy time and again in this work and in others as well (*The Great Code* 197).

²⁹ Some of the most prominent elements of the mythos of early spring are: the cleansing of the Pilgrim's face with dew; the plucking of the rush, which, broken, springs up again (*Purg.* 1); the presence of angels throughout the purgatorial ascent, beginning with the angelic pilot of *Purg.* 2; the markings and deletions of the seven P's on the hero's forehead; the prayers as well as the willingly accepted rituals of purification in which all the souls engage throughout their purgatorial ascent; the rites of waiting in Antepurgatory and the rites of passage from terrace to terrace, etc. Just as in Hell or Paradise, all these elements are comprised within the all-inclusive metaphor of the voyage, which in the Dantean Purgatory is an upward ascent according to a clockwise, spiral movement.

although not directly upward (as it happens in Paradise), but rather according to a spiraling, clockwise movement.

Contrary to what happens in the *Inferno*, where the souls are consumed by hatred, the purging souls evince a desire to re-create, individually and collectively, a civic society based on a genuine Christian respect and love for each other and for all authority derived from God, as, for instance, the mysterious rite unfolding in *Purg.* 8 bears out.³⁰

Likewise, human language also undergoes a process of purification and transformation.³¹ For the souls are primarily engaged in atonement, prayer, mutual charity, and condemnation of their past unholy lives, as is clear, for instance, from the nine lines Dante the poet has Arnaut Daniel utter in condemnation of his past life, benevolent acceptance of his present suffering, and hopeful looking forward to the future paradisaical happiness (*Purg.* 26:140-48).

b. Full Spring: The Judeo-Christian Myth of a New Beginning

Although the Judeo-Christian narrative of a new beginning after the catastrophe may share some common traits with classical myth, the Christian hero's transformation through atonement and repentance assumes unique features. For the believer to enter the kingdom of Heaven, in fact, he must be born again, albeit not biologically (as it happened, in some fashion, to Naaman in 4 Kings 5:27; Luke 4:27) but rather spiritually, as Christ teaches Nicodemus (Jo. 3:1-22).

To begin with, for the hero to experience spiritual re-birth, he must repent, recognize his personal failure, and convert. Biblical *metanoia* entails an inner, total transformation and is often accompanied by external rituals. In the Hebrew Bible, David's repentance, emotionally expressed through Psalm 50, "*Miserere*" — the penitential invocation par excellence in western literature — emblemizes such a myth of conversion.³² In the New Testament the story of St. Peter's tearful repentance, after his threefold denial of Christ, best exemplifies the myth of conversion:

Et continuo adhuc illo loquente cantavit gallus. Et conversus Dominus respexit Petrum. Et recordatus est Petrus verbi Domini, sicut dixerat: Quia prius quam gallus cantet, ter me negabis. Et egressus foras Petrus flevit amare.

³⁰ Dante's desire to re-create society pervades the political treatise *Monarchia*, in which the function of the Emperor in secular matters corresponds to that of the Pope in religious matters.

³¹ Dante's attempt at purifying and enhancing the Italian vernacular is borne out by his linguistic attempt at establishing the *volgare illustre* evinced in his *De vulgari eloquentia*: a human, and thus only partially successful, effort to overturn the corruption inherent in all human endeavors, including language (*Par.* 26:130-38).

³² The story of David's repentance and conversion is narrated in 2 Sam. 12.

(At that moment, while he was still speaking, a cock crew; and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the Lord's words: "Tonight before the cock crows you will deny me three times." And going outside, he wept bitterly.)

(Luke 22:60-61)³³

The Dantean hero of both the *Vita nuova* and *Comedy* undergoes a similar experience as the initial step toward his inner renewal. In the youthful autobiography, the hero recognizes twice that he has transgressed and twice weeps over his transgressions.

When Beatrice is alive, as we have seen above, the hero employs twice the strategy of the screen lady to such an extent that he transgressed the "li termini della cortesia" ('the bounds of courtesy' *VN* 10:1) and is thus reproached silently by Beatrice (*VN* 10:2). After her death, he yields to a "desiderio malvagio e vana tentazione" ('a wicked desire and a vain temptation' *VN* 39:6; also 39:2) occasioned by the kindness of a "pietosa donna" ('a compassionate lady' *VN* 35:3). Beatrice then appears to him by means of "una forte imaginazione" ('a powerful imagining' *VN* 39:1) in the same crimson vestments in which he first saw her at nine, namely, the age of innocence shared by both. In both circumstances, certainly in *VN* 12:2 and arguably also in *VN* 39, the hero seeks a solitary place, weeps, and repents (12:2; 39:2-6).³⁴ In contrast with the Beatrice of *Vita nuova*, who reproaches the hero through her silence, she verbally reproaches the hero for forgetting her at the top of Mount Purgatory, calling him by name for the first and only time, and urging him to proclaim his transgressions *viva voce*. Dante the Pilgrim, after resisting silently the reproaches of Beatrice, who urges him verbally for six consecutive times to speak up and confess, finally avows amidst tears:

Piangendo dissi: "Le presenti cose
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose."
(I said weeping: "The present things
with their false pleasures turned my steps away,
as soon as your face became hidden.")

(*Purg.* 31:34-36)

³³ Matthew 26:75: "Et egressus foras, flevit amare" ('Having gone outside, he wept bitterly'); Mark 14:72: "Et coepit flere" ('He began weeping').

³⁴ In the narratives analyzed above, the verb "to repent" ("pentere") occurs only in *VN* 39:2. Both narratives contains additional terms that bear out unmistakably the hero's awareness of a moral fault and his inner repentance. The tears that the hero sheds in both stories constitute the external manifestation required of the repentant individual (Ricoeur 100-50), who, in fact, acknowledges his fault by means of a verbal confession in *Purg.* 31:34-36.

As we know from the Bible, God always accepts the sinner's words of repentance and leads him to his inner transformation.

Precisely in rendering the hero's transformation Dante the poet employs archetypal motifs common to world literature: the motif of the revitalizing power of water, specifically of the two rivers springing forth from the same divine source and effecting a twofold, convergent transformation in the penitent hero. Accordingly, the river Letè brings about the forgetfulness of all wrongdoing (*Purg.* 31) to such an extent that later the hero does not even remember ever having gone astray (*Purg.* 33:91-99). The second river, Eunoè, a typically Dantean creation, returns to the soul the memory of the lost good. The two rivers' combined effect upon the hero (just as upon all the purgatorial souls) is ultimately a new creation: a renewed creature is born out of the death of the old one.³⁵

As a consequence of the hero's re-creation and re-birth, society and nature also hold the promise of being re-created anew, as Frye also sees at work in the myth of comedy:

This latter movement [man's redemption and reconciliation with God] [...] cannot be achieved without a corresponding redemption and reconciliation of nature, something that moves in the direction of restoring the original paradisaical environment.

(*Words with Power* 141)

Dante's Earthly Paradise, in fact, not only restates poetically the presence of evil in the history of humankind, as evidenced in the apocalyptic scene described in the second half of *Purgatorio* 32 and Beatrice's prophecy in *Purgatorio* 33:31-78. It also, and more importantly, proclaims that salvation, by overcoming evil, re-enacts an even greater form of creation (Rom. 5:18-21; Ricoeur 227).³⁶ Thus the hero's renewal constitutes a spiritual re-creation. He has in fact reacquired more than the original innocence that Adam and Eve lost forever for themselves and all their descendants: namely, a renewed condition of grace, which exceeds humankind's original state, since he, like all Christians, attains it through Christ's Redemption (Rom. 5:12-21). The hero has thus totally overcome the

³⁵ It is a well known fact that Dante's Letè's is patterned after the Lithian waters of the Virgilian underworld; the river Eunoè, by contrast, is a typically Dantean creation based on biblical images and theological considerations (Cervigni, "The Eunoè or the Recovery of the Lost Good," especially 63-72).

³⁶ Next to the negative characteristic of water, which applies to Hell, Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism* 146) develops also the rejuvenating powers of water, which are present, side by side with its negative counterpart, in the Bible ("Eau," *Dictionnaire de théologie biblique*).

condition of neither death nor life into which he had plunged in Hell's nethermost pit upon beholding Lucifer (*Inf.* 34:22-27).³⁷

Dante the Poet renders the Pilgrim's transformation and re-creation through arboreal metaphors of springtime renewal. Thus, at the end of the second *cantica* the employment of arboreal metaphors (*Purg.* 33:143-44) fully explains and brings to closure the function of the reed with which the Pilgrim was girt at the beginning of his purgatorial journey (*Purg.* 1:94-95; 1:100-05; 1:133-36). As the symbol of humility, penance, and renewal, the reed, which is reborn as it is cut and girds the Pilgrim throughout the purgatorial ascent, fully discloses its spiritual meaning when his transformation is described through the metaphor of the renewed tree.³⁸ Totally transformed and renewed, the Dantean hero is thus ready to ascend, together with Beatrice, to Heaven, a realm inhabited by God and his god-like subjects.

The Dantean hero's rebirth ushers in the subsequent phase of his quest, the romantic mode, as Frye's archetypal criticism bears out in strikingly similar, albeit not perfectly identical, results:

The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it. The mythical comedy corresponding to the death of the Dionysiac god [which belongs to tragedy] is Apollonian, the story of how a hero is accepted by a society of gods. In Classical literature the theme of acceptance forms part of the stories of Hercules, Mercury, and other deities who had a probation to go through, and in Christian literature it is the theme of salvation, or, in a more concentrated form, of assumption: the comedy that stands just at the end of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

(*Anatomy of Criticism* 43)

Accordingly, in the Earthly Paradise the Dantean hero readies to become integrated into the heavenly society, which in fact, through the allegorical pageantry, descends from heaven to instruct him and prepare him for his heavenly ascension (*Purg.* 29-30). A Christian Hercules and Mercury, having undergone a probation period, he is ready to be assumed to Heaven. At the apex of his voyage in the afterlife, however, lies not the mythos of spring or the genre of comedy but rather the mythos of summer and the genre of romance. Very

³⁷ In *Words with Power* Frye develops further the theme of death, which he sees as a part of "a cyclical world in which every life ends in death, life being renewed only by metamorphosis in some other form" (230); Christ, in fact, conquered death, and Hell, through that metamorphosis called Resurrection (238-39).

³⁸ The reed, which has a specific function in the Pilgrim's purgatorial journey (*Purg.* 1, 94-105; 130-36) and then assumes a purely spiritual role at the end of the *cantica*, contrasts with the cord, which (unbeknownst to the reader) girds the Pilgrim throughout his descent of Upper and Middle Hell and then ambiguously disappears in the abyss of Malebolge (*Inf.* 16:106-36).

appropriately Frye thus writes about this myth of reconciliation and rebirth of the hero with the divinity:

Purgatory is the connecting link between earth and heaven, and has the form of a mountain with seven spiral turnings. The ascent of Purgatory is followed by a second climbing through the planetary spheres in the *Paradiso*.

(*Words with Power* 159)

6. Dante's Judeo-Christian Myth of Renewal and Sublimation: Frye's Mythos of Summer and the Genre of Romance

The Dantean hero ascends to Heaven in the company of Beatrice from the top of Mount Purgatory. Referring to *Purgatorio* (*Anatomy of Criticism* 204), Frye indicates precisely the mountaintop as the *locus* where "the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment, and which we propose to call the point of epiphany" (203).

From this mountaintop, therefore, earth's closest point to heaven, the hero ascends upward. Completing his inner transformation around noon, he flies upward with Beatrice when the day reaches the fullness of light (*Purg.* 33:103-05). The same time of day, with a reference to the sun's position, is once again indicated in *Paradiso* 1:43-48, just before the heavenly ascent truly begins. Just as the top of Mount Purgatory, the highest point of the sub-lunar world, stretches upward toward heaven, so the two canticas are linked thematically as one ends and the other begins with the theme of the hero's ascent around noon time. The hero begins his descent into Hell at dusk (*Inf.* 2:1-3) and his ascent of Mount Purgatory at dawn (*Purg.* 1:19-21). He also enters the Earthly Paradise early in the morning (*Purg.* 28:3), at about the same time when Adam was created (*Par.* 26:139-42). He completes his purification and prepares to ascend toward heaven at the approximate time when Adam was expelled from Eden (*Par.* 26:141-42). The hero's heavenly ascent is also patterned after that of Christ who, according to Dante, died at noon (*Inf.* 21:112-14; *Convivio* 4:23.10-11); noon is also the time he ascended into Heaven, according to some ancient beliefs (Guéranger, *Paschal Time* 3:152). In fact, among the countless narratives of heavenly ascents in the Bible, Christ's Ascension constitutes the archetypal motif at the basis of hagiographic writings that describe the saint's soul assumption into heaven, after which Beatrice's assumption into heaven in *Vita nuova* 23 and here the Dantean hero's ascent is also patterned.³⁹

In accordance with these biblical motifs, therefore, the hero begins his heavenly voyage when the sun shines at its brightest. In *Convivio*, in fact, Dante

³⁹ "Eduxit autem eos foras in Bethaniam, et elevatis manibus suis benedixit eis. Et factum est, dum benediceret illis, recessit ab eis, et ferebatur in caelum." ("He then led them out to Bethany, and he blessed them with uplifted hands. And it happened that, as he was blessing them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven." (Luke 24:50))

writes that the sun symbolizes God most worthily (*CV* 3:12.7). Thus in the *Comedy* the sun stands in sharpest contrast with Hell's darkness and symbolizes divine guidance (*Purg.* 13:16-21; 22:61) and even Christ (*Par.* 23:29).

In accordance with these biblical motifs, their exploitation by Dante the poet, and classical myths as well, the mythos of summer, and its corresponding genre, romance, are best suited to illustrate Dante's *Paradiso*.⁴⁰

Summer in fact is the season of the most intense heat and (together with spring) of brightest light. In *Paradiso*, light is the motif, which often assumes symbolic meaning, that Dante the poet exploits the most to describe Heaven, the saints and angels, and God himself (*Par.* 33:124-26; etc.). Summer brings about heat, warmth, and fertility, which likewise play a fundamental role in the mythological rendition of Dante's Heaven, just as we read in St. Bernard's prayer to the Blessed Virgin (*Par.* 33:7-12).

Just as the mythos of summer best describes the Dantean hero's ascent to Heaven, so romance is the most appropriate genre for the hero's paradisaic experience, according to what we read in the Epistle to Can Grande as well (13:31). By contrast, with its denial of light, freezing cold, but also burning fire, Hell, which the hero has left behind, is best represented by winter. Mount Purgatory appears suffused by a constant alternation of night and day from its seashore to its Edenic mountaintop. Thus the genre of romance, the idealized world of the successful quest, and the mythos of summer, the highest manifestation of warmth and luminosity, best explain the last phase of the Dantean hero's voyage.

For in Dante's *Paradiso* the hero has left behind conflict or *agon* and he now experiences a full understanding of himself and the world he aspires to attain permanently. Such an experience Frye calls *anagnorisis*, "or recognition of a newborn society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 192). In fact, always according to Frye and in harmony with my elaboration, "the quest-romance is the victory of fertility over the waste land," where "redeemed paternal figures are involved too" (193), as the case is with the Dantean Cacciaguida, whose encounter with his offspring occupies the central cantos of the *Paradiso* (15-18).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Less frequent than in the first two canticas, the classical myths in *Paradiso*, such as those involving flight or journey, redress their negative employment in *Inferno*. Thus in *Paradiso*, just as in *Inferno*, pagan myths may assume a parodic twist, as Frye suggests, for instance, in regard to Marsyas (*Par.* 1:20-21) and Glaucus (*Par.* 1:67-69): the first flayed alive for challenging Apollo to a contest in playing the flute, and the second turned into a sea-god for eating a miraculous grass. As Frye remarks, "the touch of grotesquerie in the same images still keeps a hint of negative analogy or demonic parody, their original context in the Christian view" (*Words with Power* 146): in my view, much more so in the case of Marsyas and much less so in the case of Glaucus.

⁴¹ It has become clear, by now, that certain elements of Frye's mythos of romance overlap with his conception of comedy. For Frye, in fact, it is romance that comes the

Inhabited by God, the saints, and the angels, Dante's heaven belongs in what Frye calls the "apocalyptic world," or "heaven of religion," which presents "the categories of reality in the forms of human desire, as indicated by the forms they assume under the work of human civilization" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 141). Accordingly, Dante's *Paradiso* develops, visually, intellectually, and metaphorically, the forms imposed by human work and desire. Through a process of transformation, the vegetable world becomes "the garden, the farm, the grove, or the park"; the animal world becomes "a world of domesticated animals, of which the sheep has a traditional priority in both Classical and Christian metaphor"; finally, the "human form of the *mineral* world, the form into which human work transforms stone, is the city." Thus, "The city, the garden, and the sheepfold are the organizing metaphors of the Bible and most Christian symbolism" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 141). Dante's Heaven is the ideal city (*Par.* 30:130), the *locus amoenus* par excellence, where the saints and angels are the eternally blooming flowers (*Par.* 26:110; 23:71; 31:97; 32:39, etc.), and the holiest of all holy sheepfolds (*Par.* 10:94).

In his attempt to create a poetic means capable of expressing the idealized form of spiritual reality he envisions in his *Paradiso*, Dante the poet exploits gazing, the most frequent verb in the *Comedy*, most dramatically in the third cantica. Here every saint, every angel, and finally the hero himself will fix his gaze upon God, as he does most intensely and dramatically in the instant that brings the hero's quest to its highest culmination:

Quella circolazion che si concetta
pareva in te come lume riflesso,
da li occhi miei alquanto circunspetta,
dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso,
mi parve pinta de la nostra effigie:
per che 'l mio viso in lei tutto era messo.
Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affigge
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond'elli indige,

closest to "the wish-fulfillment dream" (186), "a search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space" (186), the end-result of "the successful quest" (187), which we can easily see in the hero's ascent into heaven. Having situated the previous stages of the hero's quest, *agon* or conflict, and *pathos* or death-struggle, within the earlier phases of the Dantean hero's journey, he thus attains an unblemished, albeit temporary, bliss in *Paradiso*, a felicitous moment holding the Christian promise, which entails certitude, of becoming eternity. Romance is also characterized by that aspect of art that Frye calls high mimetic, in which "The central episodic theme of the high mimetic is the theme of cynosure or centripetal gaze, which, whether addressed to mistress, friend, or deity, seems to have something about it of the court gazing upon its sovereign, the court-room gazing upon the orator, or the audience gazing upon the actor" (Frye 58). The centripetal gaze characterizes all the saints, angels, and finally also the hero in the Dantean Paradise.

tal era io a quella vista nova:
 veder voleva come si convenne
 l' imago al cerchio e come vi s' indova;
 ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
 se non che la mia mente fu percossa
 da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.
 (That circling that, thus conceived,
 appeared in you as reflected light,
 by my eyes contemplated for a while,
 within itself, of its own color,
 seemed to me painted with our effigy,
 wherefore my sight was wholly absorbed in it.
 As is the geometer who wholly sets himself
 to measure the circle, and finds not,
 thinking, the principle that he needs;
 such was I at that new sight:
 I wanted to see how the image conformed
 with the circle and has its placed therein;
 but not for this were my own wings;
 save that my mind was smitten
 by a flash wherein its will came to it.)

(*Par.* 33:127-41)

Thus the hero attains his highest desire, and his quest and the poet's narrative are concluded.

Dante's *Comedy*, however, is open-ended. The Pilgrim must now return to earth, resume his earthly itinerary, and strive for that closure that will, hopefully and providentially, lead him once again to that blissful condition that he has glimpsed only momentarily in *Paradiso* 33.

7. Conclusion

This essay has sought to show, albeit briefly, how Dante the poet unfolds in his *oeuvre* the all-comprehensive Judeo-Christian myth of the twofold beginning (that of primordial innocence and that of innocence regained), fall, renewal, and sublimation, appropriating and transforming ancient, classical, biblical, and contemporary myths. I have thus proposed a composite approach, based on Frye's criticism, that incorporates several critical perspectives, from historical to religious, ethical, archetypal, and rhetorical criticism.

The critical *caveat* I have presented at the beginning of this essay needs repeating. Insofar as no single approach can possibly do justice to Dante's *oeuvre* in its totality, Frye's criticism, no matter how fertile, needs to be developed in conjunction with other critical perspectives as well. In fact, I have sought throughout to employ Frye's approach not as an end in itself but at the service of the fourfold Christian myth that, as an all-encompassing master narrative, pervades the totality of Dante's *oeuvre* by incorporating into a

coherent narrative structure ancient and medieval myths. I have also at times sought to show how Frye's criticism can be yoked with such approaches as Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological analysis, Mircea Eliade's anthropological and cultural studies, and M. M. Bakhtin's composite criticism as outlined in *The Dialogic Imagination*. I have also indicated how Dante's fourfold Judeo-Christian myth can be expounded from totally different critical perspectives, such as the one based on a rhetorical exploitation of words, names, and silence that I have begun to outline in my essays on Lucifer and Beatrice's act of naming on the purgatorial mountaintop.

The composite approach developed in this essay may also help better understand such fundamental issues as the genre to which Dante's *Comedy* belongs. Although the author of the Epistle to Can Grande, whether Dante himself or somebody else closely attuned to his poetics, explains the title in terms of comedy as it is traditionally understood, Dante's masterpiece can hardly be explained exclusively on the basis of one genre. This essay, by contrast, seeks to explain the *Comedy* as a work that comprises all the literary genres characteristic of western literature since its inception, from tragedy and satire to comedy and romance, thereby providing also a rhetorical frame of reference for Dante's *oeuvre* in its totality. The analysis I have developed, therefore, can proceed, back and forth, from an in-depth, or vertical, research of a specific myth, e.g., Lucifer, Hercules, or Orpheus, to a horizontal perspective aimed at situating the same myth within the totality of the hero's quest and Dante's *oeuvre*.

One may wonder, finally, to what extent this composite approach, and Frye's criticism in particular, can render justice to the *Comedy's* profoundly felt sense of justice and reconstruction of an ethical, moral world. In *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye derives the meaning of his ethical concern from the word's Greek origin, understanding by it what pertains to the ethos, or character, of the individual, apart from any truly ethical or moral framework. Moving slightly beyond this secular approach, in *Words with Power* Frye analyzes the function of what he calls, with Greek words, *kerygma* and *kerygmatic*, namely, prophecy and prophetic. Within this context Frye remarks that the kerygmatic writing requires a "mythical and metaphorical basis" (116), in line with his critical approach. One can also accept, I believe, that the kerygmatic is what we "identify with" and helps address the concern of those who ask: "'How do I live a more abundant life?'" (116). Frye then goes on to say that Dante and Shakespeare "do not attempt to provide the dimension of a model-myth, with its program for reordering the direction of one's life" (*Words with Power* 117), a thesis that may be acceptable for Shakespeare but not necessarily for Dante.

Unquestionably, in fact, Dante the poet makes it clear time and again that he takes his fourfold Judeo-Christian myth very seriously. The quest of the hero, who remains nameless throughout *Vita nuova* and who is first unnamed (*Inf.* 1-34 - *Purg.* 1-29) and then Christened again (*Purg.* 30-31) in the *Comedy*,

ultimately transcends totally the search journey of classical and even medieval literature. In fact, emblematic of every individual's life, the Dantean hero's quest is also kerygmatic in its biblical sense: namely, it is truly prophetic of the destiny that the individual and society as a whole are called upon to pursue in this life and to enjoy eternally in the next, according to Dante's deeply felt Christianity. Thus God's myth, as it has reached humankind through the Bible and history, has never had a more faithful servant and a greater poetic genius.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Ending in the Middle: Closure, Openness, & Significance in Embedded Medieval Narratives

During the past half century, critical debate about how narratives end and the meaning of those endings has become increasingly vexed. The flashpoint is, of course, the issue of literary closure. While many critics would agree with Barbara Herrnstein Smith's definition of closure as the "effect of finality, resolution, and stability at the end of a poem" ("Closure" 22), not all would agree with her that closure is "a generally valued quality" ("Closure" 22).¹ While Smith praises closure for enabling a reader to experience a poem as a highly organized sequence with a unique design (*Poetic Closure* 2), Umberto Eco indicts the closural ending for imposing "a range of rigidly preestablished and ordained interpretive solutions . . . [that] . . . never allow the reader to move outside the strict control of the author" (6). More recent critical writings have rejected authorial intention, and hence control; nevertheless, it is precisely the authority claimed by the ending, an authority vested in inimical historical contexts and patriarchal power structures, that renders closure and narrative itself so pernicious to many feminist readers.² Thus, Alison Booth writes, "Not only does closure . . . always appear duplicitous, but novelistic endings also have seldom been anything more than double or binary choices for most female characters. . . . free play appears to end for the objects of representation" (2).³

¹ The poet Donald Revell states emphatically: "All closure is repression" (qtd. Torgersen 23); more temperately, but in accord with Revell, Ira Sadoff writes, "a poem that solves or resolves feels to me — living at the end of this century — in some way to violate an historical truth" (13).

² De Lauretis, for instance, critiques narrative as yet another oppressive construction of a patriarchal society that must be mistrusted and rewritten (esp. 192-93). Friedman identifies the (female) lyric mode as disrupting the (patriarchal) power of narrative, and so subsuming the latter's linear direction into a circular timelessness (165). On this issue see also DuPlessis. In medieval scholarship, the view of closure as repressive has led to some very interesting readings of poetry that does not fall into such a category. Most recently, Rosemarie McGerr has studied Chaucer's "open endings" as emerging against larger cultural pressures. From a very different perspective, David Wallace views the ending of *The Clerk's Prologue and Tale*, more open than its Petrarchan source, as a vernacular translation dynamically confronting entrenched traditions of Petrarchan humanism inscribed with Visconti repression ("Whan She Translated Was" 205)

³ Booth does caution, however, that although narrative resolution is often aligned with repressive ideology, the converse is not necessarily true: "Recent studies of modernism, *Annali d'Italianistica* 18 (2000)

From critics who attack closure as repressive to those who question openness — Wayne Booth, for instance, denying the possibility of evading final resolution even for literature commonly classified as “open” — the range of critical perceptions concerning literary endings reflects, in part, assumptions regarding the nature of language. Derrida’s meditations on language in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” for instance, identify fixed, authoritative “presence” with the absent center or origin of discourse, the latter “a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified is never absolutely present outside a system of differences” (Rice and Waugh 151-52). If we think of this authorizing “center” as typified, in literary works, by the closed ending, that moment when the design of the text is unveiled, much of the debate over closure becomes clearer, if still unresolved.⁴ Accordingly, a literary critic such as Peter Brooks, influenced by Derrida, reads the “shaping ends” (19) of narrative as always promising and ever evading authoritative meaning: “Any final authority claimed by narrative plots, whether of origin or end, is illusory. . . . It is the role of fictional plots to impose an end which yet suggests a return, a new beginning, a rereading” (109).⁵

This revisioning of the ending has, however, further implications for endings in medieval narrative. Here texts seem obsessed with endings, not only moving toward a final, often conclusive resolution, but also returning repeatedly to “the end” before the end by means of intercalated narratives that themselves incorporate endings. In such structures the return, new beginning, and rereading characteristic of Brooksonian versions of narratives are multiplied to dizzying extents, with closure and openness revised as well.

This essay will visit the endings of three embedded narratives functioning at the border of openness and closure. These narratives successfully point toward final textual ends, even as they work as part of textual middles and, in their endings, negotiate textual beginnings, all the while playing with the significance which endings of traditional texts are thought to authorize. My examination of

for instance, suggest that experimental technique can be well adjusted to reactionary politics” (9).

⁴ Prominent among dissenters to a negative view of closure are Wayne Booth, Peter Rabinowitz, and Terry Eagleton, each from a very different perspective. Booth not only denies that any literary work *can* be wholly open, but asserts that open works vary as to the nature, effect, and purpose of openness. Rabinowitz argues that even the perception of closure relies upon a reader’s expectations, that these are directed by extrinsic matters such as critical reputation or the association of closure with certain periods or authors. Eagleton is most definite: “The idea that all closure is oppressive is both theoretically sloppy and politically unproductive. . . . It is not a question of denouncing closure as such. . . . But of discriminating between its more enabling and more disabling varieties” (67).

⁵ Compare Gayatri Spivak on the impossibility of writing a preface because such an enterprise presupposes the possibility of writing an ending (xii); see also Leitch 253-55.

the tale of Narcissus from Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*, the discourse of Pier della Vigna from Dante's *Inferno* 13, and the speech of a metamorphosed Fileno in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* suggests the extent to which medieval narratives incorporate and forestall endings, in the process negotiating an intimate, symbiotic relationship between openness and closure. The three texts studied here practice openness and closure to different degrees; all, however, negotiate between a too rigid closure and an equally perilous lack of closure, while sometimes incorporating both.

The sixty-eight lines of the *Roman de la Rose*'s tale of Narcissus (1437-1504) combines a careful design, an abundance of closural devices, and a startling openness. Here, when Amant finds the Fountain of Narcissus ("the Fountain of Love") and reads the dead boy's story, the tale's tripartite structure recalls the formulations of medieval treatises on poetry such as John of Garland's, which thought that an account should be "put straight . . . in the mind" (53) before its unfolding in the middle and conclusion.⁶ The story thus begins with four lines of summary naming the protagonist, "Narcisus," his antagonist, "Amors," and the pains Love gives him, which lead to the death of Narcissus, "qu'il covint a rendre l'ame" (1441) ["so that he had to give up his soul" (50)].⁷ The narrative middle describes the process by which Narcissus comes to his end at the fountain: his proud and disdainful treatment of the highborn Lady Echo; her death resulting from his rejection and her prayer that Narcissus, too, might know the pain of unrequited love; the fulfillment of her prayer in his coming to the fountain to satisfy his thirst and his seeing there the face of a handsome youth. It ends with a series of four endings: apparently, closure with a vengeance!

The tale finally ends with an exemplum inveighing against ladies who misuse their lovers, the kind of ending medieval rhetoricians suggested could be applied when illuminating the content of the poem.⁸ But in Guillaume's text, such an ending is anything but closural. To understand how curious this final but not conclusive termination is, we need to read his narrative middle quite

⁶ My summary of the structure in three parts should be compared with David Hult's analysis of the episode as divided into five parts. His first part (1423-36), what he labels, the "mise-en-scène," is concerned with the description of the fountain and its setting. I do not include it in my analysis of the narrative. We are generally in accord as to the next parts, though I combine the episodes of Echo and Narcissus as the "middle" and also combine into "conclusion" the parts that he divides into brief summary and moral application (269).

⁷ The Old French of Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose* is from Lecoy's edition, with translations by Dahlberg.

⁸ Thus the short *Documentum* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf notes, "An ending is taken from an exemplum, namely, when about to say something taken at the end of the matter we do not say that but we bring in something similar from which we draw understanding" (*Documentum* 95-96).

carefully, especially in view of the marked dissonance between its two halves and their different explanations of Narcissus' ending. As the introduction to the first half strongly suggests, the reason for the death of Narcissus, and hence the ending of his tale, may be found in the account of Echo's demise:

car Equo, une haute dame,
l'avoit amé plus que rien nee,
et fu por lui si mal menee
qu'ele dit que il li donroit
s'amor ou ele se mouroit. (1442-46)

[For Echo, a great lady, had loved him more than anything born, and was so ill-used on his account that she told him that she would die if he did not give her his love.]

Echo's story, itself a little narrative boxed within the narrative of Narcissus, mimics the form of Narcissus' tale in major respects. Just as five lines of summary introduce Narcissus's story, so five summary lines introduce Echo's tale; each summary opens with a name and gender reference ("Narcisus fu uns demoisiaus"/"Equo, une haute dame"); each ends by mentioning the lover's death ("qu'il li covint a rendre l'ame"/"ou ele se mouroit"). In between, the summaries link the deaths to love and the lover's speech. Thus while Narcissus' end is preceded by complaints and laments ("le fist plorer et plaindre"), Echo's is preceded by her petition to Narcissus asking for his love: "ele dit que il li donroit/s'amor." Both form and content emphasize a narrative tie between Echo and Narcissus, a tie continually stressed until the end of Echo's story, where instead of announcing her death, her narrative returns to the moments beforehand to record her prayer to God that Narcissus, too, might experience the pain of unrequited love. The end of Echo's narrative, like its beginning and middle, link her causally to the next sequence of the narrative, to Narcissus and his end at the fountain.

In the second half of the narrative middle, as Narcissus and the fountain come to the fore, Echo's role is effaced. Although the section begins with a line glossing Echo's prayer as "resnable" (1465) ["reasonable"] and a couplet stressing the link between Echo's prayer and Narcissus's approach to the fountain where he dies ["por ce la fits Dex estable;/ que Narcisus . . . a la fontaine . . . se vint" (1466-67, 1468, 1469)], thus apparently forming a causal link between the two sections, the first nine lines of the second half problematize the reason for Narcissus' coming to the fountain. First "Dex" ["God"] — and, by implication, Echo's prayer — is cited as the reason, but immediately after the text ascribes his coming to "aventure" (1467). The greater part of the section introducing his approach to the fountain (1467-75), however, attributes his motivation to bodily appetites associated with physical labor; he has been hunting, suffering "grant travail" (1471) and is consequently oppressed by thirst, heat and fatigue: "tant qu'il ot soif por l'aspreté/ dou chaut et por la lasseté/ qui li ot tolué l'alaine" (1473-75) ["he was very thirsty, what with the fierce heat and

the fatigue that had left him out of breath" (50)]. Having moved down a metaphysical chain of causation from God to "aventure" to physical appetite, the narrative tells Narcissus' approach to the fountain in three lines: "Et quant il vint a la fontaine/ que li pins de ses rains covroit,/ ilec pensa que il bevroit" (1476-78) ["and when he saw the fountain, covered by the branches of the pine, he thought that there he would drink" (50)]. Thus, by the time the text enters the middle of the second half, Echo's role, so important in the first half, is displaced in favor of Narcissus' appetite-motivated approach to the fountain.

The two halves of the narrative middle, then, are in such disharmony that any finish would find it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile them. For, while focusing on Narcissus at the fountain, the narrative has removed any sense of Echo's agency in Narcissus' end and thus obviated the need for the first half. The ability to make sense of the narrative, to interpret — a feature crucial to a closed ending — is a problem which becomes ever more prominent as the the end of this narrative approaches and the reader finds not one, but four endings lying in wait, each with its own reading of the narrative middle.

In its first ending, the most closural, the text attempts to settle Narcissus' accounts formally in eight lines. Whereas the previous lines had underscored his approach to the fountain ["a la fontaine . . . se vint" (1468-69); "il vint a la fontaine" (1476); "Sus la fontaine . . . se mist" (1479-80)], these final lines finish that movement through a fourth and last mention of the fountain with Narcissus, through his gaze, caught in it: "qu'il musa tant en la fontaine" (1491) ["he mused so long at the fountain" (50)]. The text winds up his life by connecting his look into the fountain to his death through the middle term of his loving the shadow he sees there. A summary couplet, "si en fu morz a la parclouse,/ c'est la some de ceste chose" ["(he) died of his love in the end. This was the outcome of the affair" (50-51)] underlines the closural nature of these lines, since a reader could hardly ask for vocabulary more indicative of narrative finality: "morz" ("death"), "parclouse" ("end" or "last word"), and "some" ("sum").

The first conclusion also closes the tale thematically, for it works to correct Echo's erasure and explain Narcissus' misreading of his image in the water, thereby creating a coherent and hence "closed" account. Thus the text invites a retrospective evaluation of Narcissus's death in light of the introduction to the narrative, which identified Amors as the antagonist of Narcissus. The avenging Amors is seen as the god ["Dex"] to whom Echo prayed, and an explicit connection is made between the process by which Narcissus looked, mused, loved and died in the second half of the narrative and his earlier pride in his own beauty, now referred to as his "grant orguil et . . . dangier" (1491). Echo, or at least the god to whom she prayed, is reintroduced and the text's reader can see it whole.

But the narrative is not finished. Instead, a second conclusion immediately shifts a reading of the whole from the revenge of Amors back to Narcissus, whose death is now identified as the outcome of a psychological process

originating in unsatisfied desire. This process is recounted in a grammar underscoring his undoing, negation by negation:

Car quant il vit qu'il **ne** porroit
 acomplir ce qu'il desiroit
 et qu'il estoit si pris par fort
 qu'il **ne** porroit avoir comfort
 en **nule** fin **ne** en **nul** sen,
 il perdi d'ire tot le sen
 et fu morz en poi de termine. (1495-1501; emphasis added)

[For when he saw that he could not accomplish his desire and that he was captured so inescapably that he could in no way take any comfort, he became so distressed that he lost his reason and died in a short time. (51)]

Like the first, this second closing invites a reappraisal of the whole narrative, but from the perspective of this different end the tale takes on a different meaning. Instead of focusing on Narcissus' death as merited, this finish reformulates his end in terms of frustrated desire. If the previous eight lines describe the young man's looking into the pool and subsequent death as Amors's reward for pride, this ending rereads that death in terms of Narcissus and what he "sees" after looking in the pool — his realization that he cannot achieve his desire.

While Echo seems completely absent from this second conclusion, she shadows all of it. For in emphasizing the process by which Narcissus dies, the text repeats the way in which she died. Hence, the text describes the stages leading to Narcissus' end, casting the first stage of his death in terms of his sense of sight. Echo, too, at the same point in a similar movement toward death, receives a message of unrequited love through the senses, although she hears rather than sees: "Quant ele s'oï escondire" (1451) ["When she heard him refuse" (50)]. Each lover next experiences great emotional upset, a loss of reason, and, at last, death. After hearing Narcissus' denial of her request for his love, Echo becomes sad and upset; in effect she succumbs to emotion and dies. Similarly Narcissus sees that he can never fulfill his desire, loses his reason through anger and dies. Thus, if the first ending reads the young man's death as caused by his response to Echo, this one understands his death as a psychological process replicating hers.

This second concluding passage treating Narcissus' end does not end his narrative either, however, for the text continues to a third though still not final conclusion, this one explicitly interpreting the death of Narcissus in terms of Echo: "Ensi si out de la meschine/ qu'il avoit devant escondite/ son guerredon et sa merite" (1502-4) ["Thus did he receive his deserved retribution from the girl whom he had scorned" (51)]. Yet again the text invites a rereading and reinterpretation of the earlier part of the text, for although the vocabulary echoes that of the first conclusion where Narcissus was well "guerredoné" by the god of Love (1490) for his "Grant orguil" (1488), this conclusion finishes by

constructing Echo (the “meschine”) as giver of payment for her vassal’s behavior in exchange for his earlier refusal of her, whereas in the body of the text she is constructed as the subordinate who makes her suit to a figure more powerful because possessed of the ability to fulfill or deny it.

It would be tidy but inaccurate to make these endings accord. To say, for instance, that these conclusions analyze the death of Narcissus at different levels of the medieval chain of being, with the first ascribing his death to the god of Love, the second to his own loss of “sen” or reason, and the third to Echo; or that at the same time each conclusion increasingly corrects the erasure of Echo from the text, with Echo completely absorbed into the abstract concept of Amors in the first conclusion, more present as Narcissus reenacts the process by which she dies, and finally most immediate as “la meschine.” Such readings would gloss over the fact that each ending asks its reader to reread the text as a whole, to see it from successively different perspectives that are not entirely in accord. The three conclusions overlap largely in that all use the conclusion as a moment to evaluate what happened to Narcissus at the fountain and to judge him negatively, whether as the one who receives just retribution, as one who denies reason, or as one who scorns a lady.

But it is precisely this fragment of agreement among the first three endings’ readings of Narcissus that leaves a reader unprepared for the final conclusion of the narrative. For the text finishes in an address to ladies which warns them against bad treatment of their lovers: “Dames, cest essample aprenez,/ qui vers vos amis mesprenez;/ car se vos les lessiez morir,/ Dex le vos savra bien merir” (1505-1508) [“You ladies who neglect your duties toward your sweethearts, be instructed by this exemplum, for if you let them die, God will know how to repay you well for your fault” (51).] In this moral, the one fact agreed on by the earlier conclusions, that a culpable male lover died, now twists itself into a lesson for women about mistreating men. The fact that in the body of the tale it is the lady who is scorned and who obtains justice from God is suppressed as the moral reverses the gender roles of the narrative to make its point; now female lovers who mistreat their lovers are told to take this example to heart and know that if they let these “amis” die, God will know how to repay them. The exemplum does not work, although it has lured readers of the text as careful as Félix Lecoy into taking it at face value.⁹ Rhetoricians would point out that the exemplum does not serve as a source of understanding for the narrative as it should. Rather, its meaning is subverted before it can even be framed by a text whose previous endings together wrest all logic and hence authority from this final interpretation of the tale.

⁹ Thus, comparing Guillaume’s narrative with Ovid’s version: “chez Ovide . . . l’aventure ne joue pas le rôle d’un avertissement, d’un *exemplum* destiné à inviter les dames à plus de douceur à l’égard de leurs amoureux” (274n1437-1508).

How then do we understand this multiplicity, this superabundance of endings, themselves emerging from a narrative concerned with ending, death, and interpretation? If these endings resist concordance and hence closure, they nevertheless disclose something about closure itself. The final ending which interprets the narrative as exemplum is an example of overdetermined closure imposed authoritatively — one peril for literary endings. By contrast, the example of the unsuccessful reader within the narrative, that is Narcissus, argues that a lack of closure is every bit as fatal to a text as too much of it. For Narcissus “sees” more than his own shadow; he “sees” himself as incapable of achieving closure, of inhabiting a narrative which is all desire and no completion, as we have read in the lines quoted above (1495-51).

David Hult has pointed out that those things which Narcissus sees he cannot do are associated with closure, starting with “acomplir,” semantically and figuratively associated with finishing or completion, to “en nul fin,” literally “end” (296): “Thus . . . the reason for Narcissus’s death is in some way related to an impasse of closure” (296).¹⁰ I would go further to say that his death is implicit in the juxtaposition of a lack of “fin” with a lack of “sen” — closure and meaning — in line 1499: no final closure, and thus no complete meaning. Here, when the desiring subject can find no possibility of finding adequate closure and hence meaning in the narrative which he sees as his life, he dies “en poi de termine”: in a short time. Hence, the narrative is cut short.

Thus, the narrative, like the lover, must avoid both complete openness and premature closure, even as it utilizes the closural devices promulgated by medieval rhetoricians — the multiple ending, the recapitulation or summary, the exemplum, the address to one’s audience.¹¹ In the hands of a writer like Guillaume, these techniques converge to undo closure as well as to enable his larger narrative to move on toward it.

Fittingly enough, the succeeding adventures of Amant steer among these dangers, and most explicitly avoid the mortal (“fatal”) sin of Narcissus, despair

¹⁰ While I am indebted to Hult’s careful reading of the Narcissus tale, I am less persuaded by his argument that the problems concerning Narcissus and closure in these lines find an answer in the summary of Narcissus death found seventy lines later and after the announced end of the narrative (see esp. 296-99).

¹¹ For a “multiple ending,” see Matthew of Vendôme’s conclusion to his *Ars versificatoria*, though he previously defines poetic conclusion first in terms of content and form (105), and afterward with examples of endings taken from Latin authors, a list summarized by Murphy as “recapitulation, petition for favor, apology for the work, pleas for glory, presentation of thanks, praise of God, and abrupt ending” (167). The short *Documentum* ascribed to Geoffrey of Vinsauf describes endings as coming “either from the body of the matter, or from a proverb, or from an exemplum” (95), a discussion echoed in John of Garland, who urges writers to fashion conclusions matching the content of the discourse, whether through “recapitulation,” “an example which contains a similitude,” “a proverb,” or through technical vocabulary (89).

of finding closure in life. My reference to despair, of course, comes ultimately from Christian moral theology. This theology is appropriated by the *Rose* in the conversation between Amors and Amant that occurs after Amant has himself looked into the well of Narcissus, submitted to Amors, and heard what great tribulations lovers undergo. At this point he asks how it is possible to live even one year, given such suffering (2579-80). Amors explains that the lover will have Esperance or Hope as his primary ally. It is Hope who enables even the most desperate prisoner to survive, anticipating a favorable outcome: "Esperance confort li livre,/ et se cuide voir delivre/ encor par aucune chanceance" (2601-03) ["Hope brings him comfort, and he always thinks that some change will see him free" (67)]. In explicitly contrasting itself to the lack of "confort" obtained by the desperate Narcissus, the text links hope with the expectation of "proper" closure, a link made even more apparent as Amant replies to Reason. Reason, of course, is antagonistic to Amors, and thus argues that most lovers fail to achieve the desired end. Says Amant: "Je me veil loer ou blasmer/ au daerrain de bien aimer" (3077-78) ["I want to be praised or blamed, at the end, for having loved well"]. While already anticipating an end to his own narrative, he views this end as an outcome analogous to a Christian teleology, with rewards distributed to the faithful on a final day of judgment, which evaluates as much as stops the narrative.

But closure is not simply a matter of reward (i.e., gaining the Rose, gaining eternity, getting to the end) but of belief and desire that in turn enables the narrative to move forward. Though this narrative's "day of judgment" remains beyond the limits of the *Rose*, unfinished at Guillaume's death, the lover's adventures which remain are sustained by Esperance, the motivating power in his movement toward the never-completed fulfillment of his quest.

Assimilated into this forward movement, the ending of an inset narrative such as the tale of Narcissus differs from the final closure of the overarching narrative in its temporary, provisional nature. It cannot provide an unambiguous evaluation of the narrative it finishes because it must open up to the larger narrative. To the degree it remains open, however, it establishes itself as a source of continuation instead of termination, and yet in that very openness anticipates and so confirms and helps to close the final ending.

This process may be traced elsewhere. Dante's *Commedia*, which like Guillaume's *Rose* describes a hopeful lover moving toward his beloved, also draws the inset narrative into the movement of the larger narrative, with the lover moving through a landscape showing how souls fare after their death and, especially in *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, what kind of closure they have already achieved.

Take for instance *Inferno* 13. The setting of Pier della Vigna's story stages radical closure and openness in its presentation of a suicide transformed into a thornbush, his narrative and its affective power barred from disclosure except as the bush is torn open. So when Dante the Pilgrim, at Vergil's urging, breaks a

branch, the thornbush cries out, afterwards revealing himself in two speeches, one carefully closed and following classical models, the other unfinished. The first answers Vergil's request that Piero tell who he was. In fact the speech reveals Pier della Vigna's attempt to construct himself and demonstrate his autonomy as a self-creating agent. But Piero's design is frustrated by Vergil's next questions, which break open Piero's discourse in a move paralleling the earlier breaking off of Piero's twig. At this point Piero is forced into openness and a different self-disclosure

Piero's first speech (13:55-78) is geared to defend him against the charge of disloyalty to Emperor Frederick II. It operates as a completed oration, its parts generally corresponding to the parts of the speech labelled in Cicero's *De inventione* as exordium, narrative, partition, confirmation, refutation, and peroration, though the middle parts are less clearly defined than the opening exordium and the closing peroration.¹² Piero's first tercet commenting on the sweetness of Vergil's words and his own consequent desire to speak (13:55-57) follows the standard teaching regarding the exordium, that it bring "the mind of the orator into a proper condition to receive the rest of the speech" (Cicero, 1.14.20). Similarly, the last two tercets of the speech follow Cicero's prescription for a conclusion. The speech winds up first with a summary contained in Piero's oath by his transformed self that "già mai non ruppi fede /

¹² The middle five tercets of the speech (13:58-72) illustrate, albeit sketchily, the central four sections of the speech, with the bulk of the passage, the next four tercets, recounting Piero's service as imperial counsellor, in his zeal losing "sonni e' polsi" (*Inf.* 13:63), and his enemy Envy who brings him down, a narrative which indeed provides an "exposition of events that have occurred" (Cicero 1.19.27) and which counters an accusation of betrayal with an assertion of loyal devotion as well as an attack on the real culprits, courtiers grouped and personified as the whole Envy (*Inf.* 13:64-69). Implicit in these four tercets is the partition. According to Cicero, one form of the partition illustrates both the degree to which the speaker agrees with the opposition, and "what is left in dispute" (1.22.31). Clearly enough, the description of Envy's deeds indicates Piero's conviction that the emperor's court was infiltrated, and Frederick betrayed. Unlike his accusers, Piero blames Envy for polluting the court. The fifth tercet of the narrative middle (13:70-72) proceeds to an account of Piero della Vigna's suicide, an act represented as the act of a person who was just until that moment and who became unjust because of that self-inflicted act of violence. Here, briefly, the speech incorporates confirmation and refutation, the former being "the part of the oration which by marshalling arguments lends credit, authority, and support to our case" (Cicero 1.23, 34) as well as a refutation of those who believed that his suicide was an admission of guilt. According to Cicero, confirmation should be supported by attributes of persons or of actions. In describing his suicide as a moral action, Piero uses both his defining action and his motivation to confirm his innocence with regard to Frederick, even as he admits having been unjust to himself: "ingiusto fece me contra me giusto" (*Inf.* 13:72). For a different reading of Pier della Vigna's proclaimed faithfulness to the emperor, see Martinez's and Durling's commentary.

al mio signor” (*Inf.* 13:74-75), and second it combines the last two elements Cicero identified with the peroration, “the *indignatio* or exciting of indignation . . . against the opponent” (1.51.98) and “*conquestio* or the arousing of pity and sympathy” (1.51.98). Piero thus ends by personifying his “*memoria*” (*Inf.* 13:77), fame, describing her as still lying where the villainous Envy attacked and left her, and imploring Dante the Pilgrim’s help in comforting her. By dramatizing his loss of fame as a crime against an innocent woman, Piero both rouses his audience against his antagonist Envy and moves Dante the Pilgrim to speechless sympathy, an emotional reaction figured in the text when Dante cannot even ask Piero a question, such is his “*pietà*” (*Inf.* 13:84).

As an oration, this first speech (*Inf.* 13:55-78) is complete, self-contained; its implicit message is to represent Piero as guided by the rational powers of the soul, not least in the opening tercet’s description of the soul as lured by Vergil’s “*dolce dir*” (55) to engage in a discourse, “*a ragionar*” (57). Piero’s following words continue the emphasis on his use of intellect. In treating his fall from Frederick’s grace, he paints himself as an active, thinking, speaking, faith-keeping agent, his agency and engagement emphasized by abundant first-person pronouns and verbs: four variations on “*io*” (56, 57, 58, 63) and seven variations of “*me*” or “*mio*” (55, 67, 70, twice in 72, 75, 77), as well as first person verbs. Similarly, Piero’s “*actions*” are mental ones, whether he is holding the keys of Frederick’s heart, withstanding the forces of the envious through “*L’animo mio*,” or keeping faith with his glorious office and lord.

Even the account of his suicide, an “*injustice*” against the body, is represented as an abstract process in which the mind becomes both agent and object: “*L’animo mio, per disdegno gusto, / credendo col morir fuggir disdegno, / ingiusto fece me contra me giusto*” (13:70-72). In these lines, the only ones in this first speech alluding to his suicide, he presents himself first as rational agent (“*L’animo mio*”) and last as a just one (“*me giusto*”), anxious to explain motivation (“*credendo*”) and acting purely at the mental level. Piero never describes the blow by which he committed suicide; instead, the one literal blow registered is delivered by envy against fame (“*memoria*”): “*la memoria mia, che giace / ancor del colpo che ‘nvidia lè diede*” (13:77-78). All violence in this speech seemingly occurs at the level of abstract mental qualities. Piero’s first speech, in sum, constructs the speaker’s persona entirely by references to intellectual faculties, entirely effacing the body against which he employed violence in a vain attempt to justify himself before Dante the Pilgrim and, ultimately, the lord who cast him out.

But Dante’s poem does not leave Piero to the rhetorical closure he desires. Thus, six lines after the first speech, Vergil asks Piero to explain how the souls of the wood come to be changed into thornbushes and whether any will ever be freed. Such a question disrupts the formal unity of Piero’s earlier speech, but it enables his discourse to have a different kind of structure, forming instead a chronological narrative of the major events in suicide. So in the first speech he

discusses the events leading up to his death; in the second speech, he treats what happened to him after death and ends with events yet to come.

The stages of this narrative, however, are discontinuous. For the two speeches construct the suiciding self in quite different ways, so that Vergil's questions in the *Commedia* elicit from Piero a divided account corresponding to the sinner's unfinished and fragmented status as well as to his sin of suicide, with its division of soul from body.

Accordingly, the second speech begins quite differently than the first, with its exordium. As Pier della Vigna responds a second time to Vergil, whose sweet words elicited Piero's earlier discourse, the suicide is more brusque, saying only "Brevemente sarà risposto a voi" (13:93), although this second speech will be longer than the first. Given the completed nature of the earlier speech, the fullness of the self-representation Piero provides through it, his veiled irritation at being asked to speak again is understandable. But his response to Vergil — a figure so often identified in the *Inferno* with Reason — now signals a new approach to rhetorical form and to self-representation. By contrast to the first speech, the second speech is divided into unequal halves and uses rhetorical modes quite different from those dominating the first speech. Thus, the active protagonist of the first speech is transformed into the less individualized and more passive soul of the second speech. An emotionally engaging allegorical narrative gives way to a narrative that elicits from its audience none of the sympathy accorded to Piero after the first speech. Most importantly, the second half has no clear end, so that until a new adventure attracts their attention, Dante the Pilgrim and Vergil wait for the thornbush to say more, to finish.

Answering Vergil's second query, Piero treats the fall of suicides into the seventh circle and their ultimate fate there, but his account is strangely at odds with the first half in its representation of the sinners guilty of suicide, including himself. Now the lively engagement signaled in the first half through first person pronouns and verbs is reversed as Piero responds to Vergil's question by depicting the fate of a seemingly generic "anima feroce" (13:94), displaced from its body yet appropriating corporeal function and weight. This soul in its materiality is quite unlike the "animo mio" presented in the description of Piero's fall from Frederick's grace, for its fate is described in terms of its association with the material world, that very world from which it tore itself. Like a grain of spelt, the soul is sown in "la settima foce" (13:96), a "mouth" where it is rerooted in the wood of the suicides, sprouting and growing, torn apart by harpies, and given grief and expression of that grief only as it exudes a quite material sap when it suffers violence to its material form.

Not until the last two tercets of this second speech, when considering his future, does Piero describe himself in the first person. However, the pronoun used is, strikingly, the first person plural:

“Come l’altre verrem per nostre spoglie,
ma non però ch’alcuna sen rivesta,
ché non è giusto aver ciò ch’om si toglie.
Qui le strascineremo, e per la mesta
selva saranno i nostri corpi appesi,
ciascuno al prun de l’ombra sua molesta.”

Inf. 13:103-08

Unlike the Piero who portrayed himself as so actively standing against the Envy-inflamed mob of the court, this Piero ends as part of a collective. Like the others he too will retrieve his sinned-against body and finally hang it on the thorny shadow-bush of his soul.

In just one line does the Piero of this speech construct himself — as he did in the first half — as a reasoning agent. Thus he renders a judgment — “non è giusto aver ciò ch’om si toglie” (13:105) — offering a final evaluation of his condition and deriving an authoritative ending from that perspective. But the impersonal statement of moral evaluation seems oddly removed from his own experience, especially given his earlier impassioned and involved self-assessment, “L’animo mio . . . ingiusto fece me contra me giusto” (70 . . . 72), which convincingly revealed the tangled imperatives of a mind struggling to understand where justice lies.

In pointing out the disjunctures between Piero’s two speeches I am pointing as well to a lack of closure. The second speech and its conclusion do not close off or make sense of the first; rather, it renders the whole account divided. Piero as rational soul is split from Piero as material body-like soul, and that polarity figures the final disjuncture or “end” of suicide, even though the act of suicide is itself a radically premature form of closure. Put another way, Piero chooses to commit suicide as a way of defining himself as “just” to those who doubted his probity, especially the Emperor Frederick, but his suicide leaves him eternally divided from himself, finally undisclosed and unknowable.

For what indeed is Piero’s end? His response to Vergil seems clear enough, and yet as critics from Boccaccio to Martinez and Durling have noted, Piero’s account “departs from orthodoxy” (Martinez and Durling 215n103-05) or seems to (Boccaccio, *Esposizione Litterale*, notes on *Inf.* 13:103-08) exactly at its “conclusion,” when it tells what will happen to the bodies of the suicides on the Day of Judgment. In excepting the suicides from the reintegration of souls with bodies at the Last Day, the text calls into question the doctrine of the resurrection which says that even the damned will regain their own bodies. Boccaccio’s commentary, for instance, focuses precisely on the question of Dante’s orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and ends by averring that the error is Piero’s, not Dante’s, especially given the latter’s other statements on the subject in *Paradiso*. For Boccaccio, Piero amounts to an unreliable narrator who indeed believes he will spend eternity

separated from his body, his self-deception contributing to an increase in the severity of his punishment.¹³

Whether or not Piero is reliable in his assessment of his end is not, however, simply a matter of the author's orthodoxy but rather a question of narrative authority. For if, as Peter Brooks (following Walter Benjamin) claims, "what we seek in narrative fictions is that knowledge of death which is denied to us in our own lives: the death that writes *finis* to the life and therefore confers on it its meaning" (22), surely Dante's tale, with its voices of the dead recounting their stories from beyond the grave, would offer a transparent example of such a knowledge of death and a sense of life as having organic unity.¹⁴ But the Piero episode suggests that the narratives of the dead in *Inferno*, voices speaking to a privileged wayfarer, are only partially authoritative, even though these dead are

¹³ Boccaccio analyzes Dante's presumed error in the following way. First he notes that poetic caution leads poets such as Vergil to put error into the mouth of a character while avoiding a direct statement of such error in their own voices. One could thus read Dante as following Vergil in having Piero deliver opinions contrary to truth. For Boccaccio, Dante's following such a tactic, ascribing error to a character, would have a kind of moral logic; in the case of Piero, for instance, those hearing Piero's account are to be drawn from the sin of despair. But, as Boccaccio notes, what might be conceded as morally proper for the "gentiles" is not allowed to the Christian poet who is held to a higher standard. Boccaccio saves Dante by explicating the suicide's punishment in terms of the difference between illative and privative punishment ("pena illativa" and "pena privativa"). The former consists in punishment directed against the person of the sinner, as when a hand or other member is cut off or the sinner killed; the latter in deprivation of things "exterior" to the sinner — goods, honors, status, citizenship. According to Boccaccio, temporal authorities have no way to punish suicides, for in depriving themselves of their own lives, they have already deprived themselves of every other thing. But divine justice, requiring punishment, inflicts illative punishment on the souls of the damned (i.e., Piero becomes a thornbush); beyond this God allows them to believe, however erroneously, that they are to be deprived of their bodies and thus permits them justly to suffer greater punishment — an imagined privative punishment — in holding this erroneous opinion. (*Esposizione Litterale, Inf.* 13:103-08). A modern reader could obviously eliminate all theological discussion by interpreting the suicides' separation from their bodies as Dante the poet's poetic license aimed at emphasizing the suicides' act of violence against themselves.

¹⁴ Or, as Brooks restates this case later in his book, "The further we inquire into the problem of ends, the more it seems to compel a further inquiry into its relation to the human end. As Frank Kermode has put it, man is always 'in the midst,' without direct knowledge of origin or endpoint, seeking the imaginative equivalents of closure that will confer significance on experience. I have already cited Walter Benjamin's claim that a man's life 'first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death.' Benjamin analyzes the implications of the common statement that the meaning of a man's life is revealed only in his death, to reach the conclusion that in narrative, death provides the very 'authority' of the tale . . ." (95).

sometimes, as in the case of Pier della Vigna, successful in moving their audience to tears of pity. As Minos tells Dante, “guarda com’entri e di cui tu ti fide” (5:19).

Time and again, souls in *Inferno* such as that of Pier della Vigna are untrustworthy because they are unfinished and fragmented, their persons like their narratives at best “sospesi” (*Inf.* 4.45), as in the case of the souls in Limbo, or left unfinished and open, as in the case of Piero. It is only the characters who are represented as alive, in both the *Rose* and the *Commedia*, who are able to seek the appropriate end, a satisfying narrative closure, because they are capable of hope. And such are obviously all the souls in Purgatory, who will ultimately attain the eternal happiness of Heaven.

In terms of narrative, Brooks’ comment on sub-plots is surely relevant here, that “the development of the subplot in the classical novel usually suggests . . . a different solution to the problems worked through by the main plot, and often illustrates the danger of short-circuit” (104). Certainly the Piero narrative from *Inferno* 13, like the Narcissus episode in the *Rose*, provides alternatives and parallels to thematic problems raised in the larger narrative. In the *Rose*, Amant will find Esperance or Hope his closest companion, and unlike Narcissus, he will hope for a happy outcome to his quest and so approach appropriate closure. Dante the Pilgrim’s journey, too, is from the beginning keyed to hope. In *Inferno*, Vergil tells him, he will hear those without hope [“udirai le disperate strida” (1.115)]; in *Purgatorio*, those content in torment because of hope [“color che son contenti / nel foco, perché speran di venire/ quando che sia a le beate genti” (1.119-20)]. Though the pilgrim and Pier della Vigna may mirror one another in many ways,¹⁵ they differ precisely in their ability to hope, for Piero killed himself because he could not imagine any escape except through death: “credendo col morir fuggir disdegno” (*Inf.* 13:71).

Dante’s presentation of Piero, more complex than the portrayal of Narcissus, suggests simultaneously many things about closure. Closure signaling self-definition is hubristic; at the same time, narrative openness, an incapacity to believe in an appropriate ending and thus to engage in bringing that ending about, is to be associated with despair, a negation of the appropriate closure sought in the larger narrative. In both texts, despairing openness is fatal, but closure is hardly positive, as Piero’s first speech, so tightly closed and yet so inadequate, shows. The wrong kind of closure forestalls the narrative and

¹⁵ As Robin Kirkpatrick puts it, “In choosing an example of suicide, Dante has taken a case — almost a mirror-image of his own in history — of a disgraced poet and politician, and has emphasised these correspondences by casting the scene in a wood of utter despair which clearly recalls the Dark Wood of *Inferno* I” (*Dante: The Divine Comedy* 60; see also his *Dante’s Inferno* 174-75). Piero, like Dante, was skillful in rhetoric, dedicated to the Emperor’s cause, like Dante “a lay intellectual cast out and condemned by his own city” (Martinez and Durling 214n84).

interpretive processes these texts associate with proper closure. Nevertheless, proceeding toward “good” closure requires the narrative to represent and thus embrace closure as a powerful means of countering both premature full stops and desperate, disjunctive openness.

Guillaume and Dante negotiate the dangers of endings in quite different ways. Guillaume figures the process of despair within his narrative of Narcissus and so contains it, while showing the problems of over-determined closure in a multitude of endings with contradictory readings of the narrative. Dante, by contrast, forms a disjunctive narrative of suicide from a doubled discourse, one tightly closed, one terminating without a proper conclusion.

But what of a formally unified embedded narrative that eschews both multiple endings and narrative doublings, the complications found in the texts of Guillaume and Dante. A formidable example of such a text is Boccaccio’s narrative of a transformed knight in Book 4 of the *Filocolo*. This carefully focused discourse recalls the *Rose*’s tale of Narcissus. In Boccaccio the lover is Filocolo, and the fountain embodies a knight named Fileno metamorphosed by love. But even more than the episode in the *Rose*, the intercalated narrative of Fileno clearly evokes Dante’s Pier della Vigna episode. Antonio Quaglio lists two parallels. First, the fountain’s lament when it has been disturbed by an intrusive “pilgrim” and it cries “fui uomo, sia ora fonte” (4.[2],4, n5) resembles Piero’s rebuke to Dante the pilgrim, “Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi” (*Inf.* 13:37).¹⁶ Second, Fileno’s telling his story in response to the lovely language of Filocolo’s request, spoken “con così dolci parole” (4.[3],1, n2), echoes Piero’s deciding to speak because of Vergil’s sweet words, “Si col dolce dir” (*Inf.* 13:55).

But the episodes have much more in common than these verbal echoes. In each a protagonist pilgrim enters a wild wood associated with the outlands of Italy — in Dante’s case, woods worse than the thickets between the River Cecina and Corneto (*Inf.* 13:7-9); in Filocolo’s, near Certaldo (4.[1],4, n13), a city located just north of the Cecina. Each pilgrim is surprised to discover there a metamorphosed soul who is roused to speak by the pilgrim’s mistreatment: Dante breaks off Piero’s branch and Filocolo/Florio agitates the water of Fileno’s fountain with a silver cup. In each case the interlocutor initiates the following speech by promising to restore the teller’s fame: Vergil promises Piero that in amends for wronging the plant by breaking off its twig, the pilgrim will restore the suicide’s fame in the world, “tua fama rinfreschi” (13:53). Filocolo makes a similar promise to Fileno: “per noi la tua fama risusciti” (4.[2],5). Finally, both accounts receive sympathetic hearings: Dante the Pilgrim is unable to ask Piero any questions, such is his “pietà” (13:84), while the listening Filocolo weeps “per pietà” (4.[4],1). Although Fileno, like Piero, is separated

¹⁶ Italian references throughout are to Quaglio’s edition. I cite the book, (chapter) and section number(s) of the Italian edition.

from the court he loves the most, Fileno's description of his situation as an "eterno essilio" would even more appropriately be applied to Piero; and Piero's statement of his tragedy, "che ' lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti" (13:69) follows exactly Fileno's descent from receiving the "onore" of the joust at Marmorina to his transformation into a weeping fountain. Most significantly, each narrator has suffered a metamorphosis, Piero to a thornbush and Fileno to a fountain.

Boccaccio's prose narrative thus borrows important elements from Dante's episode in *Inferno* 13 by means of a single unified speech that closes off the disjunctive openness of Piero's two speeches. Boccaccio's lover, Florio/Filocolo, unlike Dante's Vergil, packs all his questions into a single long sentence. The reply similarly comes in a single unit, the fountain/Fileno's account taking all of Section 3 of Book Four. In a largely chronological sequence, the tale proceeds from a beginning describing Fileno's victory in a joust because of the power of his lady's token and his own force of arms. From this victory Fileno undergoes a medieval fall from happiness to metamorphosis. A first-person account, the tale carefully recounts in three stages the process of increasing interiorization by which Fileno moves from honored knighthood to weeping fountain, an end caused, he tells us, by love.

In the first stage Fileno recounts his status as a young knight living in Marmorina, an ideal kingdom ("terra ricchissima e bella e piena di nobilissima populo") ruled by King Felice, where Fileno falls in love with Biancifiore, receives her veil in a joust celebrating the Feast of Mars, and by force of arms wins the prize — honor, "l'onore del giuoco." In this first part of the tale knighthood is balanced with love, and what Fileno receives under the sign he fights for, the honor of the joust, is stylistically equated with what he hopes to receive, and what is also signalled by the veil he has already received, her love: "Io ricevetti da lei, un giorno che la festività di Marte si celebrava in Marmorina, un velo col quale ella la sua bionda testa copriva, e quello per soprasegna portato nella palestra, sopra tutti i compagni per forza ricevetti l'onore del giuoco" (4,[3],3; *emph. mine*). Chivalry and love, public and private obligations, at this point, are balanced perfectly between what Fileno says he "received," the veil, signal of triumph in love, and the honor of the joust, symbol of his triumph as a knight.

In the next stage of the tale, he goes to Montoro and encounters Florio, to whom he recounts his tale of love ("amorosi casi narraï" [4,(3),3]), not learning until later of Florio's own love for Biancifiore. Warned in dreams by the goddess Diana that Florio intends to kill him, Fileno next tells the story of his dreams to a friend who confirms him in his fears. In this section, the narrative emphasizes the act of telling by its use of words derived from the verb "narrare." In addition to "narrai," variants occur three times: "narrate," "narrazione," and "narrandole."

Narrative here is disruptive and fragmenting. Accordingly, the emphasis on narration in this stage accompanies Fileno's retreat from knighthood. If his

happy first state was celebrated on the open battlefield, the misery of the second part emerges when the goddess Diana makes him experience in his dreams a losing battle against the swords of Florio and his friends. At this point, the battlefield of Mars is available only symbolically through a dream of battle which demonstrates the protagonist's fear — a reversal of the love-inspired courage and victory of the first stage, and one which leads him to depart into exile from the public space where he could serve a lord and exercise his public duty.

In the final stage of the narrative, as a result of the narratives of the second part, Fileno departs from Marmorina into “eterno essilio” (4,[3],3). Far from human habitation, he laments his loss of Biancifiore, begs the gods to let him die, and is transformed into a fountain, left only understanding and speech. The details of his transformation emphasize the loss of his hand, the member most associated with the performance of knightly duty: when he would wipe his body free of the sweat bathing and transforming him, “né la mano sentiva l'usato ufficio adoperare” (4,[3],3). His public office, accomplished as a knight through force of “arms,” becomes as impossible as wiping away sweat, usually a product of hard labor; now hands are transformed into tears and Fileno is quite literally disarmed, unmanned, undone. All that remains to him is Biancifiore's transformed veil, marking as well as hiding his loss of human form.

A number of the modern approaches to literary endings cited earlier can help understand this ending, although from any perspective it seems clear that this is a closed text. Its concluding summary statement, placed immediately after the identification of Biancifiore's transformed veil, constitutes, as Herrnstein Smith points out, an effective way of announcing closure thematically (*Poetic Closure* 60; 67): “Ora hai per le mie parole potuto tutto il mio stato comprendere, il quale io quanto più brevemente ho potuto t'ho dichiarato: non ti sia dunque grave manifestarmi a cui io mi sia manifestato — ” (4,[3],3).

The response to this request links Fileno's narrative to a framing narrative which encloses it even further and underlines the unity of the embedded narrative. To summarize: here, in Book 4 of the *Filocolo*, the machinations of his parents, the king and queen of Spain, have separated Florio, the lover and protagonist of the romance, from Biancifiore.¹⁷ Looking for her, Florio has taken the name Filocolo, left his home, and set out with a group of companions. Wandering across Italy, the group comes upon the site where Fileno had been transformed. Florio/Filocolo, then, is the lover who hears the fountain speak, asks it to tell its story, and to whom it responds. Before Florio learns the fountain's identity as his arch-rival, he promises to restore the fame of the one so changed by retelling his fortunes, “i tuoi casi narrando” (4.[2],5), and to excite

¹⁷ For a study of the versions and diffusions of the French story of Fleur and Blanche fleur as well as Boccaccio's use of them in the *Filocolo*, see Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, esp. Chapters 3 and 4.

pity for him by such a telling. With its repeated versions of the verb “narrare,” the request for the fountain’s tale is framed precisely so as to lead to the expectation of a complete narration, and Florio/Filocolo’s weeping assent to the tale’s truthfulness after the tale’s end indicates that the tale is indeed completed. A final “clinch” to the story is supplied by the group that accompanies Filocolo:

— O quanto è dubbiosa cosa nella palestra d’Amore entrare, nella quale il sottomesso albitrio è impossibile da tal nodo slegare, se non quando a lui piace. Beati coloro che senza lui vita virtuosa conducono, se bene guardiamo i fini a’ quali egli i suoi soggetti conduce. —

(4.[5],2)

This aphoristic language seals the narrative’s closure. From this comment, which invokes the start of the tale in its description of the outcome of Fileno’s adventures as a loss in the “jousts of love,” a reversal which underscores the undoing of the triumph implicit in his victory on the jousts celebrating Mars, we are invited to consider the tale an *exemplum*, one perfectly in accord with the matter of the tale.

Fileno’s narrative is thus a formally closed work, a medieval tragedy. However, the coherence achieved at the formal level, as Fileno constructs himself in terms of medieval tragedy, is pried open by the larger narrative which calls it into being. The embedded narrative’s very content is riven by discrepancies between the facts of Fileno’s account and situations recounted in the larger narrative. When he describes himself from Marmorina, for instance, he envisions himself as fallen from a kind of prelapsarian state imaged in a king whose name, Felice, contains the “fortunate” state of those who live in his land, “terra ricchissima e bella e piena di nobilissima populo” (4,[3],3). But Books 1-3 of *Filocolo* indicate that, unbeknownst to Fileno, the land is unfortunate. Its king has been deceived into murdering innocent Christian pilgrims, and, because he thinks Biancifiore unworthy of his son, has even trumped up charges of treason against her so as to have her burned at the stake. Marmorina is actually an “unhappy” state ruled by a corrupt king.¹⁸ The place from which Fileno represents himself as exiled is, from the perspective of Books 1-3, a pagan land which has yet to achieve the happy state of Book 5, in which the martyrs killed in Book 1 are properly buried, the king is converted, and justice returns.¹⁹

¹⁸ McGregor points out that King Felice is associated with mythological and historical enemies of Rome and Christianity; he is the antagonist in a providential history and hence bound to fail (26-28).

¹⁹ Furthermore, Fileno defines his status in Marmorina as happy because he believes in the meaning of Biancifiore’s veil as an indication of her love. But again the reader knows differently. The queen, complicit with her husband’s plots, though she eventually persuades the king to sell Biancifiore as a slave rather than kill her, pressures Biancifiore into giving Fileno the veil which he interprets as a sign of her favor and so wears at the

However self-deceived and ignorant of the identity of its audience, Fileno's tale strongly implies the power of narrative to destroy those who engage in it. So this tale includes narrative itself as a primary cause of the protagonist's downfall: telling his tale has caused Fileno to incur the hatred of a powerful rival, Florio. Enjoined once more to tell his story, Fileno does so, skillfully, without neglecting to include in the center of his tale the problematic nature of narrative, which can address the wrong audience and so arouse the wrath of the mighty. Narrating can lead a tale's teller into "eternal exile," and so separate him or her from the common good. A major concern of this tale, then, is the nature of narrative itself, its real potential for harm, especially in hierarchical contexts, with their inequalities of power.

More than the other embedded narratives we have studied, this one jousts with the larger narrative, which it critiques most obviously by representing Fileno, a lover and knight like Filocolo/Florio, as a mirror for his rival. At this point, Filocolo/Florio is beginning his own search for Biancifiore, and this tale serves as a warning, revealing the dangers love might hold in store. Furthermore, as Fileno's tale reverses the roles of protagonist and antagonist, it calls into question Florio's nobility and justice, and hence his ability to fulfill the end designed for him in the larger narrative, that of just ruler. That Fileno is ignorant of his audience's identity renders his lesson all the more clear and points to another narrative problem, that of audience. Fileno told his tale before, not knowing that his audience was his rival in love, and his telling led to his rival's hatred: the last thing he had intended. Here the text suggests that meaning is not constituted only by the author, but by a listening audience, especially in a social system organized hierarchically, where offended patrons have the power to silence, exile, or harm the author. Genre, too, depends heavily on hierarchical concerns: Fileno's narrative reminds us that Florio's comic ending — attaining Biancifiore — depends in part on the tragedy of his rival — Fileno's losing her.

The larger narrative responds to these difficulties on several levels. By exposing the self-deceptions of the intercalated narrative against an overarching providential history, it calls into questions other conclusions of the episode, particularly its response to established power. Indeed, before the intercalated narrative even opens, the larger narrative demonstrates its beneficence by requesting the telling of the inset narrative, as Florio, protagonist of the larger narrative, requests Fileno, protagonist of the inset narrative, to tell his story ("narrarci" [4.(2),5]), promising to restore the fame of and excite pity for its teller, "I tuoi casi narrando." In this perspective, the completed narrative has specific social benefits for its teller. If Fileno has retreated from the field of

joust. Fileno's self-deceit is perpetuated in the end of his narrative, when Fileno takes the veil into exile, covers himself with it at the point he desires death, thereby transforming it into a shroud; even here the veil fails to convey the meaning he desires, for death is as absent from Fileno as is also the love he so desired.

battle, where fame is normally to be won, his narrative *as it is retold* in the larger narrative will restore that fame. Eventually, the larger narrative completes its beneficence by assuming Fileno's tale into the dimensions of its providential history, restoring more than Fileno's fame. In Book 5 Fileno's metamorphosis is undone; he becomes a member of Florio's *brigata* in a turn that transforms his story from the tragedy he narrated into the comedy demanded by the larger tale.

More than Guillaume and Dante, Boccaccio seems aware of narrative's social dimension. Fileno's little tragedy involves his cutting himself off from court, friends, and going into exile; Florio's larger comedy entails a pilgrimage with a whole retinue of companions as well as his wise teacher Ascalon. Florio's narrative is thus a social process involving members of a society living in a hierarchical relationship one to another. The social dimension comes again to the fore in the appropriate endings Florio achieves. When he finds his beloved, he will at last consummate his love, but only in the context of marriage, an ending celebrating passion yet subordinating it to the demands of society and family. The marriage ending the romance of the fourth book will, in turn, be absorbed into the ending of Book 5, where Florio takes up Christianity and kingship and brings the knowledge of virtue and public life gained earlier into ever broader public spheres.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this essay, recent theory has reacted to the association of closural endings with textual authority, often by reading closure as a negative gesture, narrative death, an end of play. Medieval texts change the terms of this debate by suggesting that literary endings, and questions of closure and openness, need to be addressed elsewhere than at a textual finish. Especially if earlier parts of narratives incorporate endings (and the narratives which these finish) into the beginning or middle of longer narratives, the problem of closural endings becomes more complicated. Narratives such as Guillaume's, Dante's and Boccaccio's produce more than just one ending, in the process calling on a wide variety of closural techniques, sometimes using those techniques to represent the hazards of closure itself. Such conclusions may, of course, run counter to contemporary assessments of closed texts. In the inset narrative, for instance, a high degree of textual closure does not necessarily correspond to textual complicity with social hierarchies. Boccaccio's intercalated text, the most closed of the three studied, seems the most critical of the social system. While theorists who read these texts as closed are thus accurate in finding that medieval narratives often move toward closure, they have largely missed the degree to which over-authoritative closure and narrative openness attract the scrutiny of the inset narrative, which is, as it turns out, a locus of intense textual play.

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Cycles of Early-Modern Hodoeporics

Physical motion, perhaps the most elemental of human pursuits, has often been considered the symbol of an interior, non-spatial activity.¹ The image of the journey repeats the familiar patterns of the individual's endeavors from birth toward death, from the exile of this "lacrymarum vallis" to a glorious world of personal salvation.

Although motion could by no means be theorized as a part of the divine essence of the Trinity, for God (the *Motor Primus*), as immutable, is devoid of motion, the Second Person, Christ, the *Word (Verbum, Logos)*, who was with the Creator in the beginning ("In principio erat Verbum," *John* 1:1), defined Himself, in His humanity, as the *Way* ("Ego sum via," *John* 14:6). As the course that leads humanity to the Creator (*regressus ad Deum*), He is viewed by Augustine as a Goal and a Way ("quo itur Deus, qua itur homo"),² but remains a mysterious operation within the inscrutable relationship that defines the persons of the Holy Trinity. This *Via* is, therefore, an inexplicable, mystifying element that transcends our spatial and chronological perceptions. It embodies an eschatological convergence of all that is created into the historical event of a collective salvation and the path "in virum perfectum in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi" (*Eph.* 4:13), "the final Christ" ("le Christ Oméga") postulated by Teilhard de Chardin.

¹ See my essay in this bibliography and its adaptation in Italian, "Viaggio e scrittura: approccio ad un'analisi storica dell'odeporica," in *Bollettino del C.I.R.V.I.*, 14 (1993 [but published in 1997]), nos. 27-28, pp. 3-67; see also my "Travel and Travel Literature," *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1999), vi, 162-168. For an explanation of the recently-coined terms "odeporica" and "hodoeporics" (travel literature) cf. Monga 5.

² "Where you go is God, the way you go is the man" (*De civitate Dei*, xi, 2). Among the rare texts on the non Judeo-Christian notion of the journey as a metaphor for life and rebirth, we must at least mention Ming Laotse, an intellectual wanderer living a carefree, almost contemplative life, glorified in 16th-century Chinese literature by T'u Lung. A Chinese *picaro*, he wrote that "we travel without a destination and stop wherever we find ourselves. [...] If it is willed that our days are numbered, then there our journey ends. But if we escape [the dangers], then we go on as before" (*The Travel of Ming Liaotse* in Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937, pp. 341-342).

The journey, collective or individual, is a metaphor of human life, a sequence of footsteps never to be imprinted again, as in Machado's *senda*:

Al andar se hace camino
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar.³

One of the most engaging comments on travel in modern poetry, this *cuartete* emphasizes that the act of "making" the journey (*hacer camino*) is strictly self-referential, for *la senda* we see behind us can only be our own path. But the *camino* is also rigorously gnoseological (*se ve*, "one sees," and therefore "one knows") and implies the inescapable denial to set foot again on the same path (*nunca se ha de volver a pisar*).

Much poetry has focused upon the journey evoking the cycles of human life, the recurrence of beginnings and ends that mark the "cammin di nostra vita" (Dante, *Inf.* 1, 1), the "via" (*Inf.* 1, 3) leading to death, the "doloroso" (*Inf.* v, 114), "dubbioso," "estremo" or "fiero passo" or "il tempo del partire" (Petrarch, *Canz.* CXXVI, 22; CCCLXVI, 107; C, 9; CCLXIV, 117); and the subsequent "grand voyage"⁴ of death, the "passing" of the "departed." Our life and soul are, therefore, continuously moving, like Baudelaire's ship, in search of the elusive and ultimate *locus amoenus*, a landing in a Promised Land,⁵ or Rimbaud's errance, prodded by "an unstoppable demon."⁶ Travel is thus reaching a

³ Antonio Machado, "Proverbios y cantares," CXXXVI, 29. Machado was perhaps thinking of Horace's familiar quote, "calcanda semel via Lethi" (Odes, I, xxviii, 16). See "Travel as Metaphor for Human Life," Monga 7-9.

⁴ "Il nous faut tous faire le grand voyage," *Encyclopédie* (s.v. "Voyage"). The voyage of death completes the metaphor of life as a journey. The eschatological beliefs of many ancient religions required the departed ones to journey to the underworld. Classical mythology called for a coin to pay Charon for the passage across the Styx and food to appease Cerberus, the monster dog that guarded the entrance to Hades. In a 60 A.D. Egyptian papyrus we read this poignant lament of a deceased young woman about to sail away: "Place your hand in my hand, because I am going far away. My ship is making sail for the place of those who thirst; my vessel is going to the house of those who are parched" (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, "The Harkness Papyrus," 31.9.7). Among numerous other examples, a 14th-century fresco in Pisa's *Camposanto*, attributed to Bonamico Buffalmacco, shows a group of elegant horseback knights facing with astonishment three graves: an allegory of all humans riding ineluctably toward their death. And the *Viaticum*, the Communion of the Christian at the last rites, is the food provided for the longest journey humans must undertake.

⁵ "Notre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie" (*Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Voyage," 33).

⁶ That is how a 19th-century critic, Georges Rodenbach, described him in *Le Figaro* (August 12, 1898): "Il fut poussé par un infatigable démon! Nul repos. [...] Il faut qu'il

sequence of intermediate points between a relative *hic et nunc* and the Kingdom, either a geographic milieu or a sought-after region of the spirit, something akin to Petrarch's ascent to a sacred "Mont Ventoux," a metaphor for "iter illud cui diebus et noctibus suspiro," as in his letter to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro (*Famil.* IV, 1).

Travel also represents an initiation. The painful chore of motion⁷ has often been regarded as the path leading to a symbolic death, a termination endured in order to achieve a new birth.⁸ Such ending, a *regressus ad uterum*, becomes also a *regressus ad patriam*, an initiatory rite,⁹ a sort of *Bildungsreise*, that renews and re-creates a person.

The pedagogy of travel comes to mind as an intellectual initiation. The Grand Tour, that "Moving Academie, the Peripatetique School,"¹⁰ Shakespeare's "course of learning and ingenious studies" (*The Taming of the Shrew*, I, 1, 9), the *peregrinatio academica* and the *Kavalierstour* were cultural phenomena that engaged several generations of bright young men looking either at the whole Continent or at Italy in particular for a transforming experience their country could not provide.¹¹

Thus the constant motion that is at the foundation of Heraclitus's philosophy ("*panta chorei*," "everything moves") pervades all forms of human expression, leading Michel de Certeau, albeit with some generalization, to write that "tout récit est un récit de voyage."¹²

aille toujours, qu'il revienne, qu'il parte en d'autres lieux, sur d'autres eaux. Son ombre court plus vite que lui [...] et il faut qu'il aille où va son ombre."

⁷ The etymology of *travel* is related to *travail*; the Anglo-French verb *travailler*, with a double meaning of "to travel" and "to torment," came from the late Latin *tripalium* and *trepalium*, an instrument of torture made of three (*tres*) stakes (*pali*) (Monga 11-12).

⁸ This element could be linked to the existential anxiety that finds a sort of mental peace in our motions, as Lucretius expressed in his *De rerum natura*: "[...] et quaerere semper / commutare locum, quasi onus deponere possit" (III, 1053-1054). This "unloading" of a heavy burden is a striking image of a 20th-century solution to human struggles.

⁹ In the language of French Free-Masons, *voyage* is an administrative trial, "une épreuve que l'on fait subir à ceux qui veulent entrer dans l'ordre, ainsi qu'aux adeptes qui veulent passer d'un grade inférieur à un grade supérieur" (*Grand Dictionnaire Larousse du XIX^e siècle*, s. v. "Voyage").

¹⁰ James Howell, *Instruction for Forreine Travells* [1642] (reprinted: New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 13.

¹¹ A meeting place of nations and intellectual trends from the 12th to the 14th century, Paris was replaced by Rome and other Italian cities in the 16th century. Eventually, Rome lost her prominence in Europe, and Paris resumed as a training field for scholars and gentlemen through the 17th and 18th century.

¹² *L'Invention du quotidien: I. Arts de faire* (Paris: 10/18, 1980), p. 206. All narrative implies a spatial or chronological motion, and therefore, to a certain extent, could be considered a *récit de voyage*.

Rather than engaging in a philosophical or anthropological analysis of the various forms of motion through the centuries, I would like to limit this essay to an investigation of some travel cycles in hodoeporic texts and practices from the 14th to the 19th century. One must keep in mind, however, that the *récits de voyage* of the Renaissance are usually limited to the description of the bare facts of the journey: departure, arrival, sightseeing, and return. Explicit reflections on the travelers' innermost reactions and the analysis of their own feelings are rare occurrences before the 17th century, with the notable exception of Montaigne's *Journal*, one of the first instances of awakening to self-consciousness by a travel writer. Eventually, 18th-century intellectual curiosity and 19th-century *égotisme*¹³ gradually put the writer's *moi* in the center of the literary discourse; the voyage became a *quête de soi*, the discovery of one's own self and its relationship with the surrounding world, as Stendhal acknowledged: "Je ne prétends pas dire ce que sont les choses; je raconte la sensation qu'elles me firent" (XXXVIII).

One of the most basic components in the human psyche is the trust we put in our vital space, our *Heimat*, *Umland* (Turri 359) or "comfort zone," as it is called today. This centripetal trend, however, may also clash with another, equally human characteristic, the ambition to escape the boundaries of one's familiar surrounding. A leisurely walk into one's neighborhood can hardly be considered a journey, but self-confident individuals, curious, full of high expectations, determined enough to withstand the inevitable dangers and hardships of life away from home, can be thrilled by the challenge of a new and formidable experience. Hilarius Pyreckmair is adamant about the value for the intellectual (*homo studiosus et nobilis*) of leaving the coziness of his home, looking "forward to acquire knowledge of great things":

Quid enim turpius? quid homine studioso, praesertim nobili, indignius? quam semper domi sub tecto sedere, et ita in otio omni gloria et laude carente senescere, neque cogitare aliquando ex hoc tamquam nimis opaco et circumscripto domicilio ad rerum maximarum cognitionem acquirendam evolandum esse. Ad hoc autem suscipiendum animos liberales, ea, quae non mediocris est, utilitas invitare debet.

(2-3)

Although the length of the traveler's sojourn abroad varies according to specific considerations and circumstances, eventually, the hodoeporic cycle is

¹³ "Je parle éternellement de moi," wrote Chateaubriand in the preface to his *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (II, 702). And Stendhal, a master of *égotisme* throughout his whole literary production, showed his jealous irritation at Chateaubriand, "puant d'égotisme et d'égoïsme" (quoted by J. Boulenger, *Candidature au Stendhal Club*, p. 130, in Chateaubriand II, 1684).

brought to its conclusion by an instinctive inclination to return to one's familiar habits, the "désir instinctif de regagner l'abri des vieilles habitudes" (Camus 26).

After returning home, a repetition of the cycle can be triggered. The traveler often chooses to initiate another journey to new sites, when his unquenched thirst for knowledge prompts him to more challenging discoveries. Or, like Amerigo Vespucci, he¹⁴ decides to write about the journey just achieved in order to make others aware of his successes.¹⁵ In this case a literary form of journeying ensues. The traveler is now an author with an audience. His name (and Vespucci's case—the naming of America—is paradigmatic) becomes known outside the circle of friends who have witnessed his departure and enjoyed his return; the account of his travel will become the prototype of many other journeys.

Recent approaches to narrative analysis, mostly inspired by Gérard Genette's *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), have been generally considered effective in helping formulate abstract models of narrative texts. Several schemes, proposed by a variety of contemporary scholars, including V. T. Propp, Northrop Frye, and A. J. Greimas (order / transgression or disruption / return to order), have underscored the fundamental structures of travel narrative. My decision to limit this analysis to a series of probes based on thematic, ideological, historical, and even etymological approaches has proved to be

¹⁴ By and large, at least through the 17th century, the traveler has been a young male (Monga 29-33), a circumstance that can possibly be rationalized by the "male" apprehension of being confined. From biblical times to classical authors good women (the biblical "mulieres fortes" as well as Homer's models of domestic virtues) remained at home looking after family business and their husband's interests (*Prov.* 31: 10-13). A discussion of the Renaissance commonplace of man-traveler vs. home-bound woman would lead us astray here: Georg Loys suggested that only poor, lusty, and quarrelsome women engaged in traveling, for he considered even pilgrimage among *officia virilia* (*Pervigilium Mercurii*, no. 109) and Fynes Moryson despised "the masculine women of the Low Countries" who "make voyages for trafficke" (III, 349; also Silvestre-Valerio). This attitude endured through the 19th century even in Europe, limiting women's rare outings to pilgrimages (See, for ex., Chaucer's "worthy woman from Bath"; for an interesting exception, see Locatelli 260-263). In fact, as late as the middle of last century, women were often kept not only from the outer world, but even from literacy in order to prevent them from confusing reality with "fole, romanzi e delirii," as wrote Vincenzo Troya, a high official in Italy's Ministry of Public Education (quoted in Silvestre-Valerio 166).

¹⁵ "Io ho perduti molti sonni e ho abreviato la vita mia dieci anni; e tutto tengo per bene speso, perché spero di venire in fama lungo seculo, se io torno con salute di questo viaggio" (Amerigo Vespucci's letter from Capo Verde to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici [June 4, 1501] in *Il Mondo Nuovo: scritti vespucciani e paravespucciani*, ed. M. Pozzi. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1993, p. 76).

equally stimulating.¹⁶ Illustrating my points through less known hodoeporic texts of various European literatures has been a satisfying exercise in bringing together a better perspective on the elemental, yet complex world of travel cycles in the human experience.

A. PRELUDE

Before millions of middle-income travelers engaged in the well-organized activity of 20th-century global tourism, only wealthy and courageous individuals considered the idea of leaving their birthplace, and not without much trepidation. Most people were happy to settle in the *aurea mediocritas* chastized by Pырckmair and expressed by the noted Erasmian aphorism: “Nusquam commodius, nusquam liberius, nusquam lautius homini vivere contingit quam domi.”¹⁷ However, a morbid instability (*libido currendi*) had sent throngs of beggars, *clerici vagantes*, pilgrims, and craftsmen on the medieval roads, scattering *pícaros* of all sorts to roam the world. In fact, according to Montaigne, “inquietude” and “irresolution,” two of the most self-absorbed of human qualities (“nos maistresses qualitez, et praedominantes”), are at the foundation of our desire to travel. The travelers’ dreams and expectations are stirred by “cette humeur avide des choses nouvelles” and an “honeste curiosité de s’enquerir de toutes choses” (*Essais*, III, 9; I, 26),¹⁸ the “insaciable y desenfrenado deseo de saber y conoser que natura puso en todos los hombres” (Villalón 13). Baudelaire’s deep restlessness (“horreur du domicile”) reflects an ever-present morbidity, the urge to move from a contrived and *bourgeois* way of life to the creative excitement of total freedom.

¹⁶ Obviously, not all the cycles of hodoeporics I am considering in this essay apply to every journey. I am aware that many journeys had no return, many *réçits* were limited to a verbal account, and some returns had no impact at all.

¹⁷ Erasmus, *Adagia*, n° 2238, III, iii, 38. This *adagium*, however, is a classical commonplace (Horace, *Odes* II, 6), which does not necessarily express Erasmus’s own views on this matter, for Erasmus was indeed a well-traveled scholar. Even Goethe, another famous traveler, wrote: “Willst du immer weiter die Ferne schweifen? / Sieh, das Gute liegt so nah” (“Do you want to wander on into the far distance? Look, the good lies so close,” “Erinnerung,” I-2). The tension between going and staying is, perhaps, only a literary pretext. Pascal suggested that “tout le malheur du monde vient d’une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos dans une chambre” (*Pensées*, no. 136**–269**), for often one travels the world in search of something that it is eventually found back home, an existential anxiety (see n. 8). Such a domestic life, according to Du Bellay, who eventually regretted this utterance, is a rich, stupid, and happy one (*Regrets* XXIX).

¹⁸ “Vide [...] iudica: nec conquire solum haec talia, sed in ea inquire,” is the advice given by Justus Lipsius to his pupil Philippe de Lanoye in a famous letter of April 3, 1578 (reprinted in N. Doiron, *L’Art de voyager*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1995, p. 206).

Facing the fear of unknown dangers,¹⁹ voyagers are exalted by the thrill of knowledge and discovery that awaits them.²⁰ Thus, it is not unusual that they have a reasonably good idea of what they are going to find abroad.²¹ Timid travelers' unjustified hopes and naive excitement²² can be a good prelude to a positive experience,²³ as it was for Goethe when he arrived in Venice: "und

¹⁹ For the etymological and semantic relationship between "experience" and "danger," see Monga 24.

²⁰ "Heute habe ich abermals meinen Begriff von Venedig erweitert, indem ich mir den Plan verschaffte" (Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 30 September 1786, evening: "Today I acquired a map of Venice to widen my acquaintance with this city"). And Stendhal, in a footnote to his *Promenades dans Rome*, suggested to his readers: "Vous aurez beaucoup plus vite du plaisir à Rome, si avant de quitter Paris vous avez lu les descriptions de ces fresques de Raphaël en présence des gravures que Volpato en a données. Elles sont partout" (Stendhal 643, but see also his contradictory statement in the following note). Leandro Alberti's *Descrittione di tutta Italia* was a standard guidebook, quoted in many travelers' journals. His name appears frequently in the anonymous *Discours viatiques* (pp. 65, 89, 113, 127, 161, 181; see also the *Voyage de Provence et d'Italie*, p. 62). Georg Loys suggested a list of mostly German authors of guidebooks as "silent guides" (*muti domini*) to his readers about to depart: "Mutos dominos diligenter legat, eos cum primis qui de peregrinatione scripserunt, quales sunt: Zvvingerus, Bircckmaierus, Gratarolius et alii. Nec abs re erit, inspexisse libros monumentorum Italiae a Schadero editos et singulares observationes rerum memorabilium in Graecia, Asia, Aegypto, Arabia, etc. Pet. Belloni e Gallicis in Romanam linguam translatas a viro clarissimo mihique amicissimo Carolo Clusio" (*Pervigilium Mercurii*, n° 9). One of Montaigne's regrets in the course of his journey was that he had not brought with him Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia universalis*, one of the books "qui le pouvoient avertir des choses rares et remarquables de chaque lieu" (*Journal* 32).

²¹ Stendhal is, arguably, on the opposite side of this debate, favoring spontaneous sensations and emotions that would spring in the traveler's spirit as he reaches his goal: "Je dirais aux voyageurs en arrivant à Rome: [...] n'achetez aucun livre, l'époque de la curiosité et de la science ne remplacera que trop tôt celle des émotions. [...] Vous vous sentirez disposés à sentir *le beau inculte et terrible* ou *le beau joli et arrangé*" (emphasis mine: *Promenades dans Rome* 608). Stendhal also feared that keeping engravings of the paintings he had admired abroad would eventually destroy the personal excitement induced by his memory of the original: "Bientôt la gravure forme tout le souvenir et détruit le souvenir réel. C'est ce qui m'est arrivé pour la madone de Dresde. La belle gravure de Müller l'a détruite pour moi, tandis que je me figure parfaitement les méchants pastels de Mengs, à la même galerie de Dresde, dont je n'ai vu la gravure nulle part" (*Vie de Henri Brulard*, ch. XLIV in *Oeuvres intimes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1982, II, 939-940).

²² The reading of a travel journal may be an end in itself. Rather than being a prelude to a real journey, it can become a source of gratification for armchair travelers. Thus hodoeporics could replace actual travel (see below, the section on Writing).

²³ Hermann Kirchner concluded his "Oratio XVII" ("Italica peregrinatio fructuosissima") with an excited exhortation to leave: "Ibimus itaque, commilitones suavissimi, ibimus

weiss, dass ich, wenn auch einen unvollständigen, doch einen ganz klaren und wahren Begriff mit wegnehme" (*Italienische Reise*, 12 October 1786: "And I know that I [...] carry a picture away with me which, though it may be incomplete, is clear and accurate").

Young *abbé* Jean-Jacques Bouchard, leaving Paris for Italy on October 29, 1630, had carefully researched Rome's climate and dangers, and packed, accordingly, his clothes, money, documents, writing implements, a selection of books acceptable in Inquisition-controlled states, and an adequate medicine chest to protect himself from the venereal diseases harbored in the hot climates of southern lands.²⁴

Renaissance travelers sometimes prepared to start their physical journey by purging, either by clysters or emetics, and bloodletting (*purgatio ac venae sectio*).²⁵ Contemporary medical precepts asserted that "humors," moving more randomly and violently inside the body of a traveler during a trip, became corrupted, causing ailments and disorders. Excesses of such bad humors therefore had to be removed, since a tranquil and regular digestion was considered paramount to good health. The *concoctio* (digestion), a process which was more easily altered when the individual was engaged in energetic horseback riding, was frequently addressed in medical texts (*post prandium aut stabis aut lente ambulabis*, a traditional axiom of the *Schola Salernitana*, intimated rest or slow walking after meals). Practiced "indiscriminately and to

nulla amplius mora interclusi, in Italiam!" An English version of this *Oratio* appeared as a preface to Coryate's *Crudities*.

²⁴ "Les jambes doivent estre munies, outre les bottes, de gamaches, ou au moins de bones galoches, n'y ayant rien de plus delicat et de plus exposé à toutes injures que le pied. J'ameriois mieus porter mon espée à la ceinture qu'avec un baudrier, pour ce que le poids de l'espée, pour legere qu'elle soit, blesse à la longue l'espaule droite, là où pose le baudrier. [...] De plus, il munit ses poches de tablettes, d'escritoire, d'une monstre, d'un estui et d'un cousteau, choses estrangement necessaires par voyage. [...] Il ne se chargea point de livres, fors d'un petit Seneque et d'un Epictete: n'y ayant marchandise plus fascheuse à porter en lieux d'inquisition. [...] Pour tous papiers, il prit ses lettres de docteur en droit civil et canon [...], ses lettres de tonsure [...] et un passeport du roy [...] qui temoignast de la qualité de ses parens et de la sienne parmi les estrangers" (I, 41-42).

²⁵ "Es saludable consejo que el curioso marcante, ocho o quinze días antes que se embarque, procure de alimpiar y evacuar el cuerpo, [...] porque naturalmente la mar muy más piadosamente se ha con lo estómagos vazios que con los repletos de humores malos" (Antonio de Guevara, *Arte de marear*, ed. R. O. Jones. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1971, p. 48). And Cristóbal del Villalón acknowledged in his *Viaje de Turquía* (1547) taking raw garlic and wine "ajos crudos y vino" (p. 142) as stomach stabilizers ("bracero del estómago") before sailing from Greece to Italy. A renowned 16th-century Italian physician, Girolamo Cardano, however, offered no specific medical advice in his "De itinere" (ch. LXXVI of his *Proxenetá, vel De prudentia civili* in *Opera omnia*. Lyon, 1663, pp. 425-426), other than "Continens sis in cibo, et a Venere abstineas."

excess,”²⁶ phlebotomy was routinely prescribed even to healthy individuals for its promising prophylactic value.²⁷ Guglielmo Grataroli, a 16th-century Italian doctor specializing in travel medicine,²⁸ ordered that no physical exercise as arduous as traveling be performed by an “impure” body that had not undergone a drastic purge:

Exercitium non purgato vel impuro corpore factum nonnulla adfert mala seu morbos et symptomata, cum ex motu accendantur magis humores et ad varia corporis partes pro eorum situ ac natura defluent et currant.

(109r)²⁹

That is why the anonymous young travelers of the *Discours viatiques* were ready to start on their journey only after taking a rejuvenating purge:

Chacun, avant que de partir, s'estoit purgé et avoit fait provision de jeunesse et de sancté, par quoy on ne parloit que de rire, avecques deliberation de n'empirer rien d'un sy bon commencement.

(*Discours viatiques* 46)³⁰

²⁶ F. David Hoeninger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), p. 239.

²⁷ “Bloode lattyng in mesure it clerith thi thought, it closith thi bladder, it temperith thi breyn, it amendith thyn heeringe, [...] it defieth [digests] thi mete, it clerith thy voice, it sharpith the witt” (*A Leechbook or Collection of Medical Recipes of Fifteenth Century*, ed. W. R. Dawson. London: Macmillan, 1934, pp. 62-63).

²⁸ *De regimine iter agentium vel equitum vel peditum, vel navi vel curru rheda [...]* viatoribus et peregrinatoribus quibusque utilissimi (Argentorati [Strasbourg]: V. Rihelius, 1561), in particular pp. 109-133: “Cautelae quaedam in itinere atque hospitii habendae, deque curru seu rheda.” After a first edition in 1561, this manual was re-issued as *Proficiscentium, seu magnis itineribus diversas terras obeuntium medicina quibuscumque valetudinis incommodis depellendis apprime necessaria* (Cologne, 1571) and reprinted in Hilarius Pyrckmair’s *De arte peregrinandi* (Nuremberg, 1591).

²⁹ By the same token, breakfast (“il pranzo della mattina”) was considered essential (“almeno un paro d’ova fresche,” according to Giacomo Fantuzzi) to avoid the danger of not finding food later on the day (“ritrovarsi digiuno ne’ luoghi di poca buon’aria,” 176). But only a light meal was needed, for too much food was dangerous for the traveler. And Fantuzzi quoted Avicenna (“equitare non debet quis plenus, ne cibus antequam digeratur penetret aut sine digestionem labatur, aut propter inundationem corrumpatur”) and Galen (“quando motus sequitur cibum, descendit cibus de stomacho praeter digestionem suam et intrat venas sine mutatione, et adducit in epate opilationem et renibus et reliquis membris morbum,” 177).

³⁰ It is a rare occurrence to see 16th-century travel writers mention bodily functions. Following the example of Horace (*Sat.* I, v, 7-8), Erasmus acknowledged suffering frequent internal disorders on the rough roads of Germany and Switzerland. Montaigne, usually an exception to most hodoeporic rules, was criticized as late as the 19th century for making of his *Journal* “un bulletin fastidieux des remarques journalières sur sa santé

But, more than just a physical cleansing, purging is also a metaphor for a clean beginning, a new phase in life.³¹ As such, it has been widely employed, as recently as in post-World-War-II Europe, to give a good start to newly-drafted young soldiers or children freshly arrived in summer camps. Purging is also a symbol of a psychological and spiritual catharsis, a renovation, not unlike baptism, rooted in physical cleansing.³² Thus the traveler is transformed into a *homo novus*, a *tabula rasa in qua nihil est scriptum*, ready to assume a new identity, forget his past, and become a palimpsest on which a new experience can be inscribed. Leaving Paris on September 21, 1588, the young travelers of the *Discours viatiques* started their journey at their best, and took the coach to Chalons-sur-Saône “laughingly” (46). This is not necessarily a universal approach, for some members of the group, deeply attached to their lady-friends (and therefore still bound to their old ways), were unable to get a totally clean start (“toutesfois les ungs qui de nouveau avoient veu leurs maistresses souspiroient,” 46).

We must observe that the early modern travels were usually not solitary enterprises, for the dangers of the road were overwhelming.³³ Small groups of wealthy friends, accompanied and attended by intelligent servants,³⁴ usually embarked in a long journey:

et sur les effets des eaux minérales dont il faisoit usage” (Gilles Boucher de la Richarderie, *Bibliothèque universelle des voyages*. Paris, 1808, I, 293).

³¹ Before beginning a new course of studies with his ward, Maistre Theodore, Gargantua’s teacher, purged him “canonicquement [...] à ce qu’il considerast si possible estoit [le] remettre en meilleure voye, [...] et par ce medicament luy nettoya toute l’alteration et perverse habitude du cerveau” (*Gargantua* XXII). This operation was intended, according to Quintilian’s tenets (*Instit.* II, 3), to make him forget “tout ce qu’il avoit appris soubz ses antiques precepteurs”; after wiping away all traces of his previous education, Gargantua was ready, physically as well as psychologically, to engage in a new life.

³² See Thomas Hoccleve’s “Epistle of Grace Dieu” in *Hoccleve’s Works: The Regement of Princes and Fourteen Minor Poems*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: Paul, Trench, Tübner, 1897; “Early English Texts Society,” LXXII).

³³ “The loner bouncing back bigger than life” is a very modern concept: see Paul Theroux’s *The Old Patagonian Express: By Train through the Americas* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 3.

³⁴ The passport of Thomas Abdy, 23 years old, “eldest son to Alderman [Anthony] Abdy of London, to travell into forraine partes for the space of three yeares,” specified the permission to take one servant with him (see my essay “Thomas Abdy’s Unpublished Travel Journal through France and Italy (1633-1635),” *Bollettino del C.I.R.V.I.*, no. 7, 1 [1986], 61-98). The servant’s function in the Grand Tour was to act as a go-between, often charged with cooking, menial transactions with the local populace, and sheltering his master from unnecessary contacts with shopkeepers and food vendors.

Non deve fare il viaggio un solo, ed intendo solo uno che vada con uno o più servitori mercenari, ma presupponendo che questo tale sia facoltoso, che doverà a sue spese condurre seco uno o più amici alquanto a sé inferiori in alcuna qualità, acciò possano perseverare in sino alla fine del viaggio con quell'ossequio che si deve al principale che fa la totale spesa.

(Giustiniani 175)³⁵

According to Giustiniani, the most useful form of travel that opens up experience and prudence must be undertaken by choice and not by professional obligation, commercial interest or plain profit ("per mera elezione, non per necessità"). The free choice of the traveler implies a certain amount of leisure, ability to move independently whenever one elects to do so. In a nutshell, it is the chief activity of a well-bred, independently wealthy individual, cultured and open-minded ("che abbia in sé quella erudizione che conviene a questo effetto; che abbia larghezza di denari e che sia liberale per natura," Giustiniani 173).³⁶

B. DEPARTURE

From an etymological viewpoint, *departure*, like other related words in Romance languages (*partenza*, *départ*, *partida*, etc.), comes from the Latin term *pars*, implying a separation, a schism of some sort caused by the breaking up of a connection.³⁷ *Leaving*, on the other hand, from an Anglo-Saxon root, signifies forsaking someone, relinquishing and abandoning something.

³⁵ It is essential for a potential traveler to find a kindred spirit to come along on a long journey, as an anonymous French writer wrote in 1661: "Je cherchois une personne dont l'esprit et la curiosité eussent du rapport et de la sympathie avec la mienne pour entreprendre ce voyage, je la rencontrai enfin, nous liasmes la partie" ("Journal du voyage en Italie," Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr., Nouv. Acq., 4813, f 1v). Prior to his ascent of Mont Ventoux Petrarch had searched at length for a suitable companion ("de soto cogitanti [...] vix amicorum quisquam omni ex parte ydoneus videbatur," *Famil.* IV, 1).

³⁶ It is what 18th-century Englishmen called "Iter philosophicum." It was made "ad sapientiam acquirendam," and, if we believe an anonymous advertisement circulated in the British university community (written in Latin "ne ab illitteratis intelligatur"), most of "philosophical travelers" were young men in their late twenties, holding a master's degree from Oxford, speaking Latin and French, with some notions of Italian and a written knowledge of Greek and Hebrew (quoted by Ch. Batten 73).

³⁷ "Amor, s'eo parto, il cor si parte e dole," begins an unpublished *canzone* by Mastro Meliore, a 13th-century Florentine poet (Bibl. Naz., Florence: Cod. Palat. 418, f 72r). The *jeu de mots* of *partire* (to leave/to separate; as in today's informal "to split") continued through the 16th century, when Francisco de Figueroa illustrated this appealing element: "Triste de mí que parto, mas no parto: / que el alma, que es de mí la mejor parte, / ni partirá ni parte" (Monga 9). The anthropological experience of departure implies a traumatic separation from what is known and a confrontation with something extraneous to us, the "otherness," the unknown. Figueroa's underscoring the rich etymological play

Leaving behind one's home is also a form of death ("Partir c'est mourir un peu") and a dangerous enterprise. As Goethe wrote, departure (which is used metaphorically for death, as we saw in n. 4 above) is indeed a painful, foolish uprooting ("In jeder grossen Trennung liegt ein Keim von Wahnsinn," *Italienische Reise*, 22 March 1788: "In any departure there is a small amount of folly").³⁸ It could also be a blessed, long-sought change in pace and *milieu*, the rejection of a familiar or a boring scene,³⁹ a joyous feeling, as Stendhal felt on the blissful day he finally received permission to leave for Italy: "Que je suis encore fou à vingt-six ans!" (Stendhal 287)

St. Paul's words, often heard in the liturgical readings, must have rung in the memory of many people who were about to depart:

of *parte* and *partir*, is at the foundation of most lyric poetry. The lover's sadness (*triste de mi*), the result of his beloved's absence, triggers the need to recreate the absent's image, which brings about lyric poetry, for "l'amour parfait, wrote Colette, se raconte en trois lignes: 'Il m'aima, je l'aimai; sa présence supprima toutes les autres présences; nous fûmes heureux'" (*Bella-Vista* in *Oeuvres*, III, 1097). A detailed analysis of this point would lead us too far from our area of investigation.

³⁸ While bidding adieu to his brothers, John Whethamstede, abbot of St. Alban's, leaving England for the Council of Pavia (1423), was overwhelmed by great emotion: "ita singulti sermonem turbaverunt, quod vix se poterat fratrum precibus sub ullo intellectionis eloquio commendare" ("Annales Monasterii Sancti Albani" in *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1870, p. 121). To avoid the psychological travail of the day of departure, Giacomo Fantuzzi suggested leaving abruptly: "chi vuol partire senza molto dispiacere di lasciare i suoi più cari, parta all'improvviso qualche giorno prima del pubblicato" (177). This is what Goethe chose to do when he left Karlsbad for Italy at 3 in the morning, afraid that his friends would try to retain him. Flaubert, on the other hand, felt an overwhelming, youthful impatience; he could no longer wait for his departure: "Je ne devais partir que le surlendemain, et je résolu de partir tout de suite: je n'y tenais plus!" (*Voyage en Orient* in Flaubert 434). Beryl Markham confessed in her autobiography, *West with the Night* [1942], that a clean and sudden separation from one's past is a promise for future achievements: "I have learned that if you must leave a place that you have lived in and loved and where all your yesterdays are buried deep—leave it any way except a slow way, leave it the fastest way you can. Never turn back and never believe that an hour you remember is a better hour because it is dead. [...] The cloud clears as you enter it" (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983, p. 131).

³⁹ "J'ai quitté Paris et même la France, parce que la tour Eiffel finissait par m'ennuyer trop. Non seulement on la voyait de partout, mais on la trouvait partout, faite de toutes les matières connues, exposée à toutes les vitres, cauchemar inévitable et torturant." Tired of comparing the Eiffel Tower with the leaning Tower of Pisa, Guy de Maupassant complained that "aujourd'hui l'émotion séductrice et puissante des siècles artistes semble éteinte," and simply concluded: "J'ai senti qu'il me serait agréable de revoir Florence, et je suis parti" (Maupassant, *La Vie errante*. Paris: Ollendorf, 1889, in Hersant 230).

[...] ter naufragium feci, nocte et die in profundo maris fui, in itineribus saepe, periculis fluminum, periculis latronum, periculis ex genere, periculis ex gentibus, periculis in civitate, periculis in solitudine, periculis in mari, periculis in falsis fratribus.”

(2 Cor. 11:26)⁴⁰

The plunge into a space unknown, away from the warmth of one's *Heimat*, is a challenge that requires courage to brave the anguish of departure, before the invigorating thrill of adventure takes over:

Durant cette minute où la vapeur qui jette dans l'air son sifflement strident n'a pas encore communiqué au convoi son élan irréfrenable, mon coeur indécis se cabre en arrière: tout ce que j'y laisse d'aimant et d'aimé m'y rappelle et m'y retient; en cette seconde d'hésitation, j'entrevois toutes les possibilités du malheur. [...] Les hôtes les plus chers et les plus assidus de mon foyer abandonné me disent: Songe que tu peux ne plus nous revoir et ne plus nous entendre, au jour où tu reviendras. [...]

Après une heure de cette course précipitée à travers l'espace, je sens je ne sais quoi de vivace et de résolu succéder à l'abattement et à la timidité du départ.⁴¹

Exiting one's *Umland* is a palingenesis, a rewarding regeneration. That is why in the Christian tradition prayers and devotions were normal before engaging in a journey. While Protestants preferred reading the psalms,⁴² Roman Catholics had at their disposal a variety of *sacramentalia* and prayers “*ad proficiscendum in itinere*” or “*pro iter agentibus*.”⁴³ Sebastiano Locatelli celebrated masses and visited the shrines of the Virgin in Bologna, Reggio, and

⁴⁰ See my essay “Crime and the Road: A Survey of Sixteenth-Century Travel Journals,” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, xxii, 2 (1998), 5-17.

⁴¹ Louise Colet, *Les Pays lumineux; Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Dentu, 1879).

⁴² “Deus inprimis invocandus, quod nullus possit itineris esse comes expeditior et securior; atque pia huic devotioni inter alia precesque plurimum inservient Psalmi 91, 126, 127, et 139” (Paul Hentzer's *Itineraria Germaniae, Galliae, Angliae, Italiae. Noribergae*: A. Wagenmann, 1592). Nathan Cytraeus began in 1565 his *Iter Parisiense* with a solemn prayer: “Longum iter incipio, nec quo mea rata reducant / Tempore, quaeque meos maneat fortuna labores, / Praevideo: dux Christe, meos tu dirige gressus” (*Voyages en Europe*, ed. M. Bastiaensens. Brussels: Peeters, 1994, p. 74).

⁴³ Some of them are collected in the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum (Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli)*. Roma: Herder, 1960). Travel in the *Sacramentarium* is an obvious metaphor for the *regressus ad Deum*. Hence, the faithful asks God to direct the itinerary “in voluntate tua, ut te protectore et te perduce per iustitiae semitas sine offensione gradiat” (191) so that the traveler, “tua opitulazione defensus, iustorum desideriorum potiat effectibus” (192). For Muslim prayers and sacrifices before and during sea traveling, see *The Travels of Ibn Battuta [1325-1354]* (Cambridge: The University Press/Hakluyt Society, 1958), 1, 25-27; see also Diego de Haedo, *Topografía e historia general de Argel [1612]* (Madrid: Sociedad de bibliófilos españoles, 1927), pp. 154-155. Bouchard has a detailed description of the daily prayers aboard the Mediterranean galleys (1, 99-101).

Parma (pp. 58, 61, 63) before leaving for Paris. Yet Locatelli's trip to France was a reasonably short journey that had been commonplace among Italian merchants and bankers as early as the Trecento.⁴⁴

Departure was a solemn occasion to be observed with gravity and prayers, an opportunity to think of eternal values and ponder the fragility of human life.⁴⁵ Montaigne, however, the quintessential rational traveler, at times showed a strain of picaresque weakness or existential angst for aimless wandering ("Je sçay bien ce que je suis, mais non pas ce que je cherche," *Essais*, III, 9), but his attitude was only a proof of the extraordinary lucidity of an individual whose self-analysis was always cruelly objective. If there was excitement, it surely was not the Romantic élan of Walt Whitman for the "open road."⁴⁶ Normally, the early modern traveler does not mention "the *frisson* of escaping"⁴⁷ nor does he explicitly feel the poetic anxiety of Baudelaire ("Je serai mieux ailleurs que là où je suis"),⁴⁸ the restlessness of Paul Theroux or Jack Kerouac's attraction to

⁴⁴ Dante had already noted the frequency of his fellow citizens' transalpine travels, underscoring the happy time when "ancor nulla [donna] / era per Francia nel letto diserta" (*Parad.* xv, 119-120). Boccaccio's *Decameron*, with numerous *novelle* related to travelers, reflects a society of merchants constantly on the road between Italy, France; and the northern countries, while Petrarch's frequent journeys abroad are well documented in his epistolary. For a look into the Italian mercantile hodoeporics to Paris and the Low Countries in the 14th and 15th centuries, see "Viaggi sperimentati, viaggi raccontati: in Europa tra mercanti e novellatori" (Perocco 77-97).

⁴⁵ Seafaring, in particular, puts travelers, literally, "two inches away from death" ("così vicini al pericolo della morte, il quale è tanto propinquo, dicea Anacarsi scita, che due dita solamente, o poco più, ti puoi chiamar discosto dalla morte," Garzoni, II, 1403). Two inches ("due dita") is the normal thickness of the ship's hull.

⁴⁶ "Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road / Healthy, free, the world before me, leading wherever I choose" ("Song of the Open Road").

⁴⁷ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between Wars*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1980 (Leed 52).

⁴⁸ "Le Spleen de Paris," xxxi. This fondness for displacement is a commonplace in modern poetry, for, as Baudelaire confessed, "les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent / Pour partir" ("Le Voyage"). Gabriel Miró and Fernando Pessoa have expressed this idea in famous images (Monga 18). The Romantic obsession to pursue a personal itinerary, and the specific timing chosen for departure, is aptly described by Claude Pichois in his commentary to Nerval's *Voyage en Orient*: "Quitter Paris en touriste, au mois de novembre, c'est se refuser à l'observation d'un code de valeurs bourgeoises, sociales et morales, de valeurs apparentes et factices. Refuser la route officielle, la route droite pour aller à l'aventure [...] c'est n'avoir pas d'itinéraire, c'est se livrer au caprice du moment, donc au plaisir, condamnable, de la gratuité, c'est se laisser tenter par la route attrayante, [...] dédaignant ostensiblement les moyens de transport et les voies que l'Administration, dans sa sagesse, a mis à la disposition des voyageurs. Et partir sans un but défini: 'Tu ne m'as pas encore demandé où je vais: le sais-je moi-même?'" (Nerval, II, 1382).

the “purity of the road.”⁴⁹ A few travelers certainly felt a thrill, the expectation of reaching out to grasp and enjoy “todo lo bueno y el mejor del mundo,”⁵⁰ the mystery at the end of the road, the anticipation of experiencing something new (as in Montaigne’s “faim extreme de voir,” *Journal* 71) or profitable to their spirit (*Essais*, III, 9), perhaps akin to Du Bellay’s obsession to reach Rome.⁵¹

Some travelers set out because they were afraid to “waxe dull and even die, being included in the narrow bounds of their domesticall seats”;⁵² others escaped from the narrow-mindedness of their milieu under the sanctimonious pretext of “studying man.”⁵³ Other travelers left to steer clear of internal strife and civil war, like John Evelyn, forced to leave London on June 15, 1641, to avoid “the ill and ominous face of the publique at home” or, once again in July 1643, to escape from “the furious and rabid” mob who devastated the capital (I, 22 and 65). Others set out to complete their education, the usual goal for northern travelers, according to Hubert Vautrin, a Jesuit who wrote at the end of the 18th century that “l’éducation se termine, dans les contrées du Nord, par des voyages. Ils sont utiles aux Polonois dépourvus, dans leur pays, d’idées sociales et de modèles en tout genre.”⁵⁴

Searching for freedom and autonomy is not a specific goal of Renaissance travelers. Wordsworth’s evocation of the wanderer reflects an 18th-century preoccupation:

Whither shall I turn,
By road or pathway, or through trackless field,
Up hill or down, or shall some floating thing,
Upon the river point me out of my course?⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *On the Road* (New York: New American Library, 1957).

⁵⁰ Baltasar Gracián, *El discreto*, ch. xxv.

⁵¹ “Je me feray sçavant en la philosophie, / En la mathematique et medecine aussi; / Je me feray legiste, et d’un plus hault souci / Apprendray les secrets de la theologie; / Du luth et du pinceau j’esbateray ma vie, / De l’escrime et du bal [...] (*Regrets*, xxxii).

⁵² H. Kirchner, “Oration on Travel,” in Coryate, I, 129.

⁵³ “Je me plais à étudier l’homme en voyageant” (Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, VI, x. Paris: Plon, 1960, III, 227).

⁵⁴ *La Pologne du XVIII^e siècle vue par un précepteur français* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1966), p. 171, quoted in Hafid-Martin 13. Northern travelers considered Southern countries as the roots of their culture and their faith; they were also excited to find there sunshine, flowers, fountains, and luscious fruits (see my essay “Viaggiatori di lingua inglese a Napoli” in E. Kanceff, L. Monga, et al., *Napoli e il Regno dei grandi viaggiatori*. Roma: Abete, 1994, pp. 39-63).

⁵⁵ William Wordsworth, “The Preludes,” in *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), III, 12- 13. But Montaigne had expressed the same carefree spirit two and a half centuries earlier: “Ay-je laissé quelque chose à voir derriere moi? J’y retourne; c’est toujours mon chemin. Je ne trace aucune ligne certaine, ny droite ny courbe” (*Essais*, III, 9).

All this debate, understandably, involves journeys performed by intellectuals, for reasons other than business, discovery, or religion. It is evident that merchants and *conquistadores* rarely had the time or compulsion to write about their perception of the adventures of the roads they traveled. Missionaries and ambassadors were often required to give their superiors a written report of their mission. We are more concerned here with analyzing the new dynamics of the modern age than reporting on one's journey.

C. ON THE ROAD

By and large, Renaissance travel journals maintained a terse, crisp narrative style. Journeys were tedious and painful exercises, rarely intended as amusing activities,⁵⁶ and the method of traveling, according to Dr. Johnson, gave the traveler little time to observe and notice: "He that enters a town at night and surveys it in the morning, and then hastens away to another place, and guesses at the manners of the inhabitants by the entertainment which his inn afforded him" has very little to write about in his journal.⁵⁷

The voyager was cautioned to ride in silence in order to save his energies and protect himself from thirst: "Primum autem moneo ne cum iter faciatis multum loquamini. Inde enim sitis faucibus aridioribus contrahi solet" (Rantzov 97). A common form of relaxation, while traveling, witness Erasmus, was writing poetry, "sicut meus est mos, nescio quid meditans nugarum et totus in illis."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ It is rare to encounter in 16th-century hodoeporics an aesthetic interest in natural beauty; for a colorful exception see my essay "L'*Hodoeporicum* de Jacques Sirmond, s.j.: Journal poétique d'un voyage de Paris à Rome en 1590," *Humanistica Iovanensia*, 43 (1993): 301-322. Even in 1795 Ann Radcliffe confessed that it was hard to express to her readers "a repetition of the same images of rock, wood and water, and the same epithets of grand, vast and sublime, which necessarily occur," since they appear "tautologous on paper, though their archetypes in nature [...] exhibit new visions to the eye and produce new shades of effect on the mind" (*A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794 through Holland and the Western Frontiers of Germany*, quoted in Batten 102). The 18th-century travel journal clash between the "philosophical" sensitivity and the tendency to include chatty personal and anecdotal material is well discussed in Batten 9-19. In fact, the editor of Lady Miller's *Letiers from Italy* censored a large number of "matters of mere private concerns" which, in his opinion, were "by no means objects of information or entertainment to the public" (vi).

⁵⁷ *The Idler* [no. 97; February 23, 1760] (New York: W. Durell, 1811), pp. 339-340.

⁵⁸ Letter to Jacques Batt (n. 119, February 1500) in *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), I, 277. In 1506, during a journey to Italy, Erasmus wrote a "carmen alpestre," a long poem "De senectute" for "Gulielmus Copus medicorum eruditissimus." The trend, which followed the example of Horace (*Sat.* I, 9, 1-2), caught on: a Jesuit scholar, Jacques Sirmond, wrote a "Hodoeporicum" during a trip from Paris to Rome in 1590 (see my essay "L'*Hodoeporicum* de Jacques Sirmond," cit.) and Thomas Jones's *Memoirs* (43-36, 50).

The writer—unlike his Romantic *confrères*—was concerned mainly with the objective elements of spatial motion: the phenomena of departure and arrival. He rarely mentioned in his *récit* the personal components of his journey or anecdotes related to his private experience. Often the reader is not even privy to the reasons and goals of the travel. Laconic writers do not make great subjects for psychological or literary analysis.

Early modern travel was defined as a journey of study in a land partially unknown, an enterprise pursued by a prepared individual planning to use his personal improvement for the service of his country:

Est autem peregrinatio nihil aliud quam studium perlustrandi terras exoticas et insulas, ab homine idoneo suscipiendum ad artem vel ea acquirenda quae usui et emolumento patriae vel Rei esse publicae possunt.

(Georg Loys 3)

The common good was often the final goal of northern Europeans who made a journey to southern countries full of sun, art, and history. Italian travelers, traditionally more individualistic, were perhaps less sanguine about engaging in the service of their community. They were more interested in pursuing a combination of leisure and instruction, as was Francesco Vettori, a Florentine ambassador to Germany (1507): “Intra li onesti piaceri che possono pigliare li uomini, quello dello andare vedendo il mondo credo sia il maggiore; né può essere perfettamente prudente chi non ha conosciuto molti uomini e veduto molte città” (122-123).⁵⁹

A series of contradictions may ensue. If the joy of leaving home is admittedly a benefit (“Habet multum iucunditatis solis coelique mutatio”),⁶⁰ changing one’s milieu, indeed a frivolity, may also bring spiritual demise, particularly to the young traveler.⁶¹ In any case, the planning and preparation of

⁵⁹ Only two days after leaving Paris (August, 23, 1663), Jean de la Fontaine naively wrote from Clamart to his wife: “En vérité, c’est un plaisir que de voyager; on rencontre toujours quelque chose de remarquable. Vous ne sauriez croire combien est excellent le beurre que nous mangeons” (*Oeuvres diverses.*, ed. P. Clarac. Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 534). And Stendhal, who defined himself a “Milanese” and absorbed so well the Italian *Zeitgeist*, followed: “Je voyage non pour connaître l’Italie, mais pour me faire plaisir” (501). As for the knowledge acquired by traveling, Homer described Ulysses’s travails: “Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose minds he learned” (*Odyssey*, I, 3-4).

⁶⁰ Pliny, *Epist.* III, xix, 4. As a typical response to this maxim, another one, “Coelum non animum mutò, dum trans mare curro” (Horace, *Sat.* I, I, 30), was a favorite of Milton, who inscribed it on the album of Count Camillus Cardouin (10 June 1639), in *Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), xviii, 271.

⁶¹ Plato’s idea that only mature individuals should be allowed to travel in order to acquire knowledge (Monga 17-18) continues to the end of the 18th century: “L’âge du voyageur est celui où le jugement est formé et la tête meublée des connaissances requises. Sans ces deux conditions, ou l’on ne rapportera rien de ses voyages ou l’on aura

a journey can still be considered the best part of traveling, for in that stage one is never afflicted by bad weather, illness, unpleasant encounters with bandits or dishonest innkeepers. All the fears and anxieties of the prelude are brought to their climax once the traveler finds himself on the road.⁶² Travel, however, was and is, as Hieronymus Turler stated in 1575,

nothing else but a painetaking to see and searche forreine landes, not to be taken in hande by all sorts of persons, or unadvisedly.⁶³

In a cryptic passage, Camus mentioned the same pain, underscoring its ascetic value, claiming the austerity and self-denial of this kind of discipline:

Il n'y a pas de plaisir à voyager. J'y verrais plutôt une ascèse. [...] Le plaisir nous écarte de nous-même comme le divertissement de Pascal éloigne de Dieu. Le voyage, qui est comme une plus grande et plus grave science, nous y ramène.

(26)

As for the condition of roads and inns, the antics of mischievous touts, the encounters with bandits, the enticements of *vetturini* and *procacci*, everybody knew the picture. Tomaso Garzoni's tragicomic description of the inn gives a pale idea of the tribulations that the Renaissance traveler encountered on the road:

Un'ostaria tutta sfessa e smantellata, una camera sbuccata, ruinata e sustentata per forza di pontelli, ricetto di topi solamente; un solaro nero come la caligine de' camini; un lastricato di quadrelli mobili, che par che i spiriti l'abbian disfatto a posta; le mura spegazzate di mille disonestà e spurcizie che i forestieri per dispetto v'hanno scritto per tutto; le tavole più onte che quelle de' beccari, e tarolate dentro e fuori per la vecchiezza; le tovaglie sporche di vino e di brodo, [...]; i salini attaccati insieme col filo e con la cera; il bicchiere senza piede; i boccali col viso rotto; i fondelli con verderamo alto tre dita; i cucchiari brutti, i cortelli senza taglio, le forcine senza punta, le scutelle nere come i bafioti dei pellegrini francesi; e' sugamani stracciati come le tele de' ragni; i lenzuoli tutti

fait bien du chemin et dépensé beaucoup d'argent pour ne rapporter que des erreurs et des vices" (Denis Diderot, *Voyage en Hollande* [1775]. Paris: Maspero, 1982, p. 23).

⁶² As Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive" (*Virginibus puerisque, and Other Papers*. New York: Co-operative Publication Society, 1881). In contemporary literature the act of traveling assumes an independent value. Paul Theroux's *Old Patagonian Express* is just the journal of his travel, i.e., the physical and emotional notions from his departure in Boston to his arrival in Patagonia, where the book suddenly ends. In fact, as soon as he reaches his destination, Theroux returns home; as he confesses, he "was more interested in the going and the getting there, in the poetry of departures" (383).

⁶³ *The Traveiler* (London: W. How for A. Veale, 1575), p. 5 (reprint: Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1951).

ripezzati e carichi di brutture; i letti duri come strammazzi; i cossini puzzolenti più che l'orina guasta; i capezzali pieni di cimici; le coperte che san di tanfo per ogni banda; i letti con fornimenti da furfante polito quanto dir si possa, e in somma tutta l'osteria esclama da ogni parte pidocchieria estrema e infinita.

(II, 1133)⁶⁴

But it was aboard the ship that frequently a traveler emphasized his tribulations, for the ship was “a jail with a chance of being drowned”⁶⁵ or “un compendio dell’inferno,” as a Jesuit voyager defined it (Scaduto 336). The “pelagi metus,” Petrarch’s admittedly fear of seafaring,⁶⁶ which kept him from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, underscores our ancestral discomfort with the sea. That is why the dangerous storm at sea became a commonplace that supplied hodoeporics with a dramatic tension that travel by land usually lacked. Even the anonymous author of the *Discours viatiques*, normally a terse narrator, developed a more long-winded style in the description of his sea voyage; the drama of violent winds, torrential rain, and crashing waves is surely an effective device to capture the readers’ attention (164-165). The traveler of the *Voyage de Provence et d’Italie* recalled the sinking of several galleys with the loss of 1,200 men during a winter storm between Toulon and Villefranche (53), and Aurelio Scetti, a 16th-century galley slave, devoted a long, dark passage to a tragic tempest in the gulf of Marseille that destroyed a good portion of the allied fleet of Spain and Tuscany on April 19, 1569.⁶⁷ The travel literature of 16th-century shipwrecks is pervasive, from Erasmus (“Naufragium”) to Rabelais (*Quart livre*, XVIII-XXIV) to numerous private letters:

[...] l’acqua [...] con tanto impeto intrava [nella fregata] et faceva tanti gran monti che tutti eravamo bagnati et storditi; [...] e volendo voltar la vela da una banda a un’altra, si rompette certe funi de la vela; laonde tutti alzavamo le mani al cielo con ferventi orationi, temendo non esser fatti in quel giorno cibo de’ pesci. Tutti stavamo come sardelle sopresse l’uni adosso a l’altro, perché eravamo insino a cinquanta passeggeri in così picciola fregata.

(Scaduto 334)

⁶⁴ See also Erasmus’s amusing dialogue “Diversoria” (1523) for a detailed description of the dangers of the road and the inconveniences of inns.

⁶⁵ James Boswell, [*Dr. Samuel Johnson’s*] *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* [1774] (London: G. Bell, 1884 v, 249).

⁶⁶ *Itinerarium breve de Ianua usque ad Ierusalem et Terram Sanctam*, ed. A. Paoletta (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1993), pp. 54-57.

⁶⁷ L. Monga, *Galee toscane e corsari barbareschi: il diario di Aurelio Scetti, galeotto fiorentino (1565-1577)* (Pisa: CLD, 1999), pp. 96-101. Antonio De Beatis mentioned the loss of 300 sailors and soldiers (“corsari di gran tempo e di malissima vita”), when “una borasca o refulo de vento così subito e grande” sank a Genoese ship in the otherwise safe port of Villefranche in 1516 (*Die Reise des Kard. Luigi d’Aragona*, ed. L. Pastor. Freiburg im Breisgau, 1905, p. 167).

But the conditions of Europe's roads were also extremely poor. When the coach rented by Thomas Jones, a British landscape painter who was going from Rome to Tivoli on November 3, 1777, broke, one of his guests scornfully remarked that he "never in his life knew of an Italian coach that would last a journey throughout" (64). And Joseph Addison summarized his travels through Europe as "bruises upon land, lame post-horses by day and hard beds at night with many other dismal adventures."⁶⁸

Many contemporary travelers are happy to telescope their readers in the middle of things, beaching them in a foreign place without having first guided them there.⁶⁹ Paul Theroux admits that the act of moving through geographical details, "the lower slopes of Parnassus" (4), is essential to his travel writing: "[...] the progress from the familiar to the slightly odd, to the rather strange, to the totally foreign, and finally to the outlandish. The journey, not the arrival, matters; the voyage, not the landing" (5). So he decides, and this is a typical post-modern trend indeed, to end his book where other travel books usually begin.

D. ARRIVAL AND SOJOURN

After the trial of the journey, the arrival appears as the happy completion of a cycle that for many travelers has begun with readings by a starry-eyed adolescent (Montaigne, Du Bellay, Goethe, *et al.*).⁷⁰ It is an excitement⁷¹ not unlike an *innamoramento* for Stendhal, who chose this quote from Hazlitt's *Memoirs of the Late Holcroft* as the epigraph of his travel journal:

The smile which sank into his heart the first time he ever beheld her, played round her lips ever after: the look with which her eyes first met his never passed away. The image

⁶⁸ Letter to William Congrave from Paris [August 1699] in Addison's *The Letters*, ed. W. Graham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 4.

⁶⁹ Theroux quoted, among first sentences of travel books, Moravia's *A quale tribù appartieni?* (Milano: Bompiani, 1972): "From the balcony of my room I had a panoramic view over Accra, capital of Ghana" (3)

⁷⁰ See note n. 20.

⁷¹ The arrival is a crucial topos in hodoeporics. The enthusiasm of beholding for the first time the site of his youthful dreams is a milestone in the traveler's life. "I immediately began to visit the famous places of [Venice]; and travellers do nothing else but run up and down to see sights, that come to Italy," wrote John Evelyn in 1645 (II, 431). And Antoine Wiertz, a young Belgian painter, in his first letter from Rome to his mother (June 7, 1843), told her of his enthusiasm and anticipation: "'Rome! Rome!', s'écrie le conducteur. À ce mot de Rome, mon coeur bat avec force. 'Arrêtez, lui dis-je, arrêtez, que je contemple un instant!'" (quoted in Ch. Terlinden, "La Correspondance d'A. W. au cours de son voyage en Italie," *Bibliothèque de l'Institut historique belge à Rome*, V, 1953, p. 32).

of his mistress still haunted his mind, and was recalled by every object in nature. Even death could not dissolve the fine illusion: for that which exists in the imagination is alone imperishable.

(Stendhal 1)

The excitement of the arrival is epitomized by Stendhal's rush to La Scala, as soon as he set foot in Milan: As he would hasten to join a mistress,

[...] j'arrive, à sept heures du soir, harassé de fatigue; je cours à La Scala. [...] Tout ce que l'imagination la plus orientale peut rêver de plus singulier, de plus frappant, de plus riche en beautés d'architecture; tout ce que l'on peut se représenter en draperies brillantes, en personnages qui, non seulement ont les habits, mais la physionomie, mais les gestes des pays où se passe l'action, je l'ai vu ce soir.

(5 and 288)⁷²

Romantic imagination transfigures ever a dreadful reality into a world of dreams.⁷³ A nameless *hôtellerie* hidden in a dark alley behind Palazzo Corsini is the perfect *milieu* for young Lamartine to nurture his youthful dreams and prepare himself for his first encounter with his beloved Rome:

J'y fus logé dans une mansarde nue sous les toits, sans autre meuble qu'une couchette de fer, une table, une chaise et une cruche d'eau. Mais je ne fis pas même attention à la nudité et à l'indigence de cette hôtellerie: j'allais m'endormir et me réveiller dans la ville des grandes mémoires; c'était assez pour un jeune homme qui ne vivait que d'imagination.⁷⁴

This "return to childhood" (Leed 139), Lamartine's reduction to the "bare essentials," allows the traveler to address and challenge his memories and expectations and confront them with a drab reality. The excitement of discovery, enhanced by the knowledge he has previously acquired of what he now can admire, proves to be immensely valuable. He now feels at home, for he is familiar with the place, its literary allusions, and the characters of the play. Montaigne, who had learned Latin as a child, acknowledged: "J'ai eu

⁷² Stendhal's excitement continues long after his arrival in Italy: "Il m'arrive de me dire, à propos de rien: 'Mon Dieu! Que j'ai bien fait de venir en Italie!'" (May 24, 1817: Stendhal 99). Victor del Litto's annotated edition, however, established that Stendhal's itinerary was a complete invention: the French novelist attempted to create his own persona ("un mélomane passionné se rendant en Italie par amour de la musique et du *bel canto*," 1305), using disparate elements, confusing dates, and mentioning people he never met (1306-1311).

⁷³ "Memory," what the youthful traveler recalls, is also an aspect of the discovery of one's self in a foreign environment, for one's homeland (*patrie*) is also the place where, according to Stendhal, "l'on rencontre le plus de gens qui nous ressemblent" (98).

⁷⁴ *Cours familier de littérature*, quoted in Hersant 426.

connaissance des affaires de Rome long temps avant que je l'aye de ceux de ma maison: je sçavois le Capitole et son plant avant que je sceusse le Louvre, et le Tibre avant la Seine" (*Essais*, III, 9). A new life begins for the traveler. The dreams of his youth come back to him, at last, enhanced by familiar sites and well-known images: "Wohin ich gehe finde ich eine Bekanntschaft in einer neuen Welt, es ist alles wie ich mir's dachte und alles neu" (*Italienische Reise*, 1 November 1786: "Everywhere I go I encounter familiar faces in a new world; everything is just as I imagined it, yet everything is new").⁷⁵ Thomas Jones wrote in his *Memoirs*, that even the scenery of the Campagna Romana

seemed anticipated in some dream -- It appeared magick land -- In fact I had copied so many studies of that great man & my old master, Richard Wilson, [...] that I insensibly became familiarized with Italian scenes, and enamoured of Italian forms.

(55)

Not all travelers, however, rush impetuously to embrace the long-awaited images of their dreams. Often, alas, their first reaction is a sense of disappointment; Rome in particular has been for many years a pale image of her past greatness.⁷⁶ Their hopes, as Erasmus wrote, are shattered: "Roma Roma non est, nihil habens praeter ruinas ruderaque priscae calamitatis cicatrices ac vestigia."⁷⁷ Sixteenth-century Rome is a depressing, unkempt rural expanse where sheep roam freely among broken columns. Startled by the desolation of what he has accepted, naively, as the Eternal City, the visitor feels the pain of an exile.⁷⁸ At dusk, in particular, when "l'ora [...] volge il disio," the traveler's

⁷⁵ A few days earlier Goethe had noted in his journal the same reaction: "Es ist mir wirklich auch jetzt nicht etwa zu Mute, als wenn ich die Sachen zum erstenmal sähe, sondern als ob ich sie wiedersähe" (*Italienische Reise*, 12 October 1786: "It is true that now I do not see things as if it were the first time, but as if I saw them again").

⁷⁶ "[...] multoque prius nichil aliud quasi quam illius Rome veteris argumentum aut imago quedam esset, ruinisque presentibus preteritam magnitudinem testaretur" (Petrarch, *Senil.* x, 2).

⁷⁷ *Ciceronianus*, LB 1016. So did Du Bellay: "Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome / Et rien de Rome en Rome n'aperçois" (*Les Antiquitez de Rome*, sonnet III).

⁷⁸ The disappointment of finding Rome an ugly likeness of what the traveler had expected is a commonplace among visitors of any century. This reminds us of Du Bellay's deep unhappiness, expressed in Petrarchan terms (*Rime*, XLVII): "Malheureux l'an, le mois, le jour, l'heure, et le point, / Et malheureuse soit la flateuse esperance, / Quand pour venir ici j'abandonnay la France" (*Regrets*, XXV). Nathaniel Hawthorne remarked in his travel journals that the Eternal City offered "cold, nastiness, evil smells, [...] sour bread, pavement most uncomfortable to the feet, enormous prices for poor living, beggars, pickpockets, ancient temples and broken monuments with filth at the base and clothes hanging to dry about them, French soldiers, monks, priests of every degree, a shabby population smoking bad cigars" (*Passages from French and Italian Note-books*. Boston, New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1892, p. 54).

soul is crushed by homesickness and nostalgia;⁷⁹ like a pilgrim who hears a church bell ringing, Dante dreams of home and his far-away friends (*Purg.* 8: 1-3). So a lonely Du Bellay in Rome reminisces about the “naturel sejour” (*Regrets* XXXV) of his village and the warmth of his household (XXXI), where he should be resting “entre pareils à soy” (XXXVII) and walks alone on the banks of the Tiber, “la France regrettant, et regrettant encor / [S]es antiques amis, [s]on plus riche tresor, / Et le plaisant sejour de [s]a terre angevine” (XIX).⁸⁰ We are reminded of what a 16th-century German pilgrim, Dr. Johan Jakob Rabus, wrote about Rome: “Rom ist einem jeglichen das, das er [sich] selber ist” (“Rome is for everyone what he is for himself”),⁸¹ which essentially means that our perception of a place is influenced by our own biases and foibles. The traveler cannot express adequately the outside world without using known parameters. So an anonymous Milanese merchant who toured Europe at the beginning of the 16th century described all the cities he visited using familiar analogies with the towns in native Lombardy. The size of a city (“il circuito de li muri di Paris [è] tanto e mezo come il circuito de li fossi de Milano,” 59; Amiens “è spessa come Pavia di case,” 68; Tournai “è loco grande come Lodi,” 68), the style of a church (a chapel in Seville “è piccola come Santo Satiro de Milano,” 136), even the look of an individual (Cardinal Wolsey “rasomiglia uno poco a messer Jason del Mayno,” 86) are constantly related to what he and his readers know.⁸²

What one sees is also affected by one’s state of mind. A depressed Du Bellay underscored the superficial image of a decaying Rome, while Erasmus, who lived in the same reality a few years earlier, preferred to emphasize, nostalgically, pleasant walks and conversation with friends, in the soft light of

⁷⁹ The term *nostalgia* was coined by the German physician Johannes Hofer in his *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe* (Basel: Bertsch, 1678). J. Lieutaud accepted it in his *Précis de médecine pratique* (Paris: Vincent, 1759) as a form of the “désir mélancolique [...] qu’on appelle communément *la maladie du pays*” and made it a household term.

⁸⁰ Nostalgia takes many forms, and the dream of one’s home obfuscates even the most splendid scenery. Stendhal mentioned with surprise the repugnance of a French lady companion for the sunny climate of southern Italy: “Ce soleil toujours sans nuages me brûle les yeux; cette mer si bleue me fait regretter les bords de notre océan de Normandie” (1081).

⁸¹ *Rom; eine Münchner Pilgferahrt im Jubeljahr 1575*, ed. K. Schottenloher (Munich: Münchner Drucke, 1925), p. 136. After his tour of Germany, Michelet acknowledged the same syndrome in his travel journal: “Combien j’ai voyagé en Jules Michelet, plus qu’en Allemagne!” (*Journal*), ed. P. Villaneix. Paris: Gallimard, 1957, I, 457).

⁸² In Italo Calvino’s *Le città invisibili* Marco Polo acknowledges to the Khan: “Ogni volta che descrivo una città dico qualcosa di Venezia.” Everybody has a “città matrice,” a “mother-city,” which represents an unescapable paradigm, a “sguardo narratologico,” a “corredo genetico” that limits one’s vision as a deforming glass, an attempt to “tame” a foreign reality (Zatti) by adapting it to his own experience.

Roman sunsets.⁸³ At times, nostalgia could give way to physical illness, particularly when the traveler was young and unprepared. Such was the case of Lord Cranborne, sick in Padua, “his affections being so strangely set on his return homeward, according to the English ambassador in Venice, that any opposite is a disease.”⁸⁴

The newly displaced individual is forced to face the diversity of the locales and grasp his own identity. Obviously, the effect of considering one’s own differences and the trauma caused by such a realization varies with the different degree of spiritual inner strength and emotional independence the traveler possesses. While Stendhal is an unabashed lover who cannot but idolize what he sees abroad,⁸⁵ most of all in his cherished Milan, Montaigne is more analytical, and Du Bellay, moved by nostalgia, certainly resents every instant he must spend in a foreign city, surrounded by people who have lost any resemblance to their glorious ancestors.

E. RETURN

Etymologically, *return* (Lat. *tornus*, a turner’s wheel) suggests the completion of a circular motion, a *tour* brought to a conclusion, an entire *giro* (as in *giro d’Italia*, the Grand Tour) without which there can be no journey, for the journey is essentially self defined and *post factum*, as we saw in the momentous quote from Machado (*al andar no hay camino*). Thus return, *reditus* (Lat. *redire*, to go or come back, to turn around) is an exciting component of the travel cycle, Stendhal’s “étonnement du retour” (711). Plunging back into his family life, the new Ulysses receives the long-awaited prize of the possession of his wife and the accolade of his friends. At the moment of departure the male travelers were saddened by the anticipation of the absence of their *maistresses*, but they foresaw their return home and the loving encounter of their lovers and wives. This classical *topos* is at the foundation of the epic cycle of the *nostoi* (returns) to which the *Odyssey* belongs.⁸⁶ The traveler’s full cycle, triggered by

⁸³ See his letter to Cardinal Raffaele Riario (n° 333, 15 May 1515, and n° 2328, 14 June 1530) in Monga 23.

⁸⁴ Carleton’s letter to the young man’s father, Lord Salisbury (23 November 1610) is quoted by Howard (160).

⁸⁵ A Romantic curiosity excites the traveler looking for the *pittoresque* and the *couleur locale*. While passing by Verona, Théophile Gautier would have liked to stop and see a public execution, “cette exécution qui dans notre pays nous eût fait fuir, car en voyage la curiosité va quelquefois jusqu’à la barbarie, et les yeux qui cherchent le nouveau ne se détournent pas d’un supplice si le bourreau est pittoresque et si le patient est d’une bonne couleur locale” (*Voyage en Italie* 62).

⁸⁶ In fact, the return home can also be quite dramatic: Agamemnon is killed by his wife’s lover, Diomedes finds that his wife has taken a lover, Idomeneus’s wife is killed by her lover. Ulysses can finally rest, but only after killing Penelope’s suitors in a bloodbath. There is “a set of gender determinations: [...] the domestic(ated) woman, Penelope,

homesickness, often shows that the goal of his long search is precisely his return home. Such a return, at times, evokes negative memories of the journey, as an experience too sad to mention. The wayfarer has been far away, lost “entre les lous” (Du Bellay, *Regrets* IX), where he has acquired a bitter knowledge (“un sçavoir malheureux,” *Regrets* XXIX). More positively, like Dante’s Ulysses, the traveler sums up his experience, “del mondo esperto / e de li vizi umani e del valore” (*Inf.* XXVI, 98-99). He is happy to see, once again, “de [s]on petit village / Fumer la chemi nee” (*Regrets* XXXI) and to set foot in his home, a final *reditus ad uterum*.

Back home, among familiar surroundings, he is now ready to put his experience to use. He is expected to work for the common good of the State, to go abroad again and serve his country, teach young people at home or just enjoy the fruit of his hard-acquired knowledge. He should not, according to Bacon, “leave the countries where he hath travailed, altogether behind him, but maintaine a correspondence, by letters, with those of his acquaintance, which are of most worth” (58).

Some travelers, returning to their northern homes from sunny countries, consider their journey as “un de ces rêves du matin auquel viennent bientôt succéder les ennuis du jour” (Nerval II, 790). Others, like Pietro Della Valle and Sebastiano Locatelli, know well that, once back at home, they will regret the freedom of their beautiful adventure. If Della Valle is moved by a deep feeling of restlessness, the good *abate* Locatelli, who has enjoyed a great amount of freedom in France and is about to go back to the strict, boring life of his native Bologna, is apprehensive of being locked in by his city’s starchy and conventional morality. He is not about to forget the Parisian life, a life to be compared only to that of the mythical Fortunata Island:

Tutto è vago, tutto è caro, ma il colmo delle contentezze che vi si gode è il vivere che vi si fa con innocenti costumi, con voglie moderate, sempre in faccia a stupende bellezze, sempre in seno agli amori”

(250).

Locatelli, the starry-eyed young priest let loose in Paris with two unforbearing youngsters, is undoubtedly fearing the moment he will plunge from an ideal vacation into real life. And so is Thomas Jones, back in London. He appears to have forgotten many details of his own background; he feels different, afraid and surprised, just like a foreigner:

I was nearly in the predicament of a foreigner — Every thing appeared strange— The extravagance of the inns frightened me, and the rudeness of the vulgar — disgusted — I

maintains the property of the home against would-be usurpers while her husband wanders about” (G. Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as a Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, p. xxv; Monga 29-33).

was extremely mortified likewise at the contemptuous manner in which we were surveyed by the servants as well as the mistress of the house — Our dress and appearance were not calculated to command respect, and must seem to them rather outlandish, as the coachman expressed himself.

(138-139)

“Me voilà réinstallé dans mon fauteuil vert, auprès de mon feu qui brûle, voilà que je recommence ma vie des ans passés,” wrote Flaubert after his first trip to sunny Southern France and Corsica (331). But everything has already changed in his life. Now he is consciously ready to embark in new adventures; in fact, he is already setting aside the paper for his next travel journal: “Je réserve dix cahiers de bon papier que j’avais destinés à être noircis en route; je vais les cacheter et les serrer précieusement après avoir écrit sur le couvert: papier blanc pour d’autres voyages” (349).

The Romantic traveler returns home with regrets and ambition. From Nîmes, on his way to Paris, a depressed Nerval writes his father that he fears “le froid et le mauvais temps,” both a reality and metaphor of life in the Capital.⁸⁷ Back in his bureaucratic niche, surrounded by a throng of obtuse colleagues and superiors he despises (“sots à rubans” who will be universally detested within ten years), Stendhal can only rely on the nourishing memories of his “beaux jours d’Italie”: “C’est l’âme qui gagne,” he concludes. “La vieillesse morale est reculée pour moi de dix ans. [...] Je me sens rajeuni. Les gens secs ne peuvent plus rien sur moi: je connais la terre où l’on respire cet *air* céleste dont ils nient l’existence; je suis de fer pour eux” (161). For him, life in Italy was a formative experience!

F. WRITING

Machado has underscored that the journey does not exist during the motion itself, but only as a self-reference after it is accomplished, a self-conscious effort to describe it *post factum*: “Caminante, no hay camino, / se hace camino al andar” (CXXXVI, 29). The inducement for recording one’s quest is related to the motivations for engaging in the journey.⁸⁸ When only a very small number of

⁸⁷ In a letter of December 24, 1843, quoted in *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 1372.

⁸⁸ There is an extensive literature dealing with the relationship between travel and writing. I am not interested, however, in some post-modern attempts to identify essentially different activities such as writing, reading, and traveling. Therefore, in this essay I will refrain from pursuing the line of thought which has been developed by Gérard Genette and Michel Butor, among other theoreticians; namely, that “l’affirmation qu’écrire, lire et voyager procèdent de la même activité, au point de pouvoir s’identifier dans tous les sens” (Philippe Dubois, “Le voyage et le livre” in Ch. Jacob and F. Lestringant, eds., *Arts et légendes d’espace: Figures du voyage et rhétorique du monde*. Paris: PENS, 1981, pp. 149-201). Discussing the real travel (*le parcours réel*) of our eyes on the itinerary written in the book (*ces mouvements littéraires de la lecture dans l’objet-*

people embarked in traveling, their vicissitudes were considered extraordinary and praiseworthy. Having left home in order to emerge from a homebound mediocrity,⁸⁹ the travelers' pride and *virtù* are firmly established by their tales of a successful challenge. Their dangerous journeys earned them glory and *fama*; the account of their adventures and their impact on the readers are now integral elements of the quest itself. Talking (and writing) about their journeys, they express the necessity of sharing their feelings with others, as Jean Potocki (1761- 1815) wrote: "L'on ne voudrait pas de plus belle campagne du monde si l'on n'avait quelqu'un à qui l'on peut dire: voilà une belle campagne."⁹⁰

Often the writing cycle starts in the course of the journey itself. Letters written to friends and acquaintances are the first instances of autobiographical travel accounts. Written with the understanding that they will be shared among a loyal circle of friends and relatives, these Renaissance documents are the forerunners of the more elaborate epistolography of the 17th and 18th century. One of the chief examples of this literary trend is the correspondence of Erasmus, perhaps the most prolific letter-writer of the Renaissance. On his way from Basel to Louvain Erasmus sent Thomas More in England a copy of his letter to Beatus Rhenanus recalling the *tragicomoedia* of his journey; he shipped another version of the same letter to England to be read by Erasmus's correspondents who were not likely to see More's copy. The original to Beatus was sent unsealed so the messenger could show it to Erasmus's acquaintances whenever the courier stopped for the night.⁹¹

Many travelers took daily notes. Johann Heinrich Pflaumern acknowledged in his *Mercurius italicus* his habit of daily recording the events he witnessed:

livre) would lead us astray from our goal. I would prefer to insist that the writer, like the seafarer on the surface of the ocean, can choose on the blank page a virtually infinite number of paths.

⁸⁹ Ilaria Luzzana Caraci emphasizes that by and large Renaissance travel writers are interested in their self-improvement, "il desiderio di emergere dalla mediocrità e il bisogno di affermare la propria personalità" (*Scopritori e viaggiatori del Cinquecento e Seicento*. Milano: Ricciardi, 1991, p. IX).

⁹⁰ Jean Potocki, *Voyages en Turquie et en Egypte, au Maroc et en Hollande*, ed. D. Beauvois (Paris: Fayard, 1980), 151; Hafid-Martin 57. But writing a journal is also a means of self-analysis that will help one keep score of one's thoughts and better understand what surrounds the traveler. Regretting the fact that he kept no journal of his youthful trips, Rousseau acknowledged: "La chose que je regrette le plus dans les détails de ma vie dont j'ai perdu la mémoire est de n'avoir pas fait des journaux de mes voyages. Jamais je n'ai tant pensé, tant existé, tant vécu, tant été moi, [...] que dans ceux que j'ai faits seul et à pied" (*Confessions*, IV in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond. Paris: Gallimard, 1959, I, 162).

⁹¹ Letter no. 867 (October 15, 1518) in *Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), pp. 292-401.

Ferme institutum tenui ut in itinere obvia referrem in pugillares, dein, ubi commodum esset, saepe etiam in hospitio, dum prandium coenamve hospes appareret, excriberem observationes meas, tandem laxiore otio, horis subsecivis, conferrem cum melioribus rerum italicarum auctoribus.”

(n.p.)

Since the early days of human history, when Gilgamesh, after “a long journey,” decided to “engrave his entire story on a stone,” writing has been an option immediately considered by the returning traveler. Engraved on a stone, the story is for others to see. And travelers’s frequent assertions that their journey notes were just private exercises to be kept from the public, as Chateaubriand wrote about his *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (II, 700), ring very hollow.⁹² In fact, after serializing his “notes de voyage” in the *Mercure de France* (1806-1807) and publishing four editions of his *Itinéraire* (1811-1822), Chateaubriand showed at least a disingenuous streak when he wrote in the preface to his *Oeuvres complètes* (1826): “Je n’ai pas fait un voyage pour l’écrire” (II, 700). He was, indeed, another travel liar, particularly in his American travel journals, vaguely sketched, confused, extravagant, and virtually improbable, yet his French public, unlike the *American Quarterly Review* (I, 615), never suspected a hoax.

In hodoeporics, as in any autobiographical writing, perfect objectivity is virtually impossible and the existential gap between facts and their written representation is unavoidable. Travel liars stretch their credibility to the extreme, running the gamut from fictitious personal motivations and labile memory gaps to creative padding and simply fictional writing.

Formulating a report of one’s adventure is strictly connected to *memoria* and *sapientia*, and is geared to remembering one’s experience and setting it out for others to learn and enjoy.⁹³ William Lithgow, in his preface to the reader of his travel journal, defined his writing as “a peregrination of mind, in reviving the

⁹² The traveler’s reluctance to write a travel narrative is a commonplace. Francesco Vettori, “non volente,” was “costretto a scrivere” (13) what had happened to him, while Lady Miller’s “artless, ingenious narration” (vi) was said to have been caused by her friends’ insistence.

⁹³ Traditionally, wisdom (*sapientia*) was considered the daughter of experience (*usus*) and memory (*memoria*), as Stephanus Vinandus Pighius stated in the introduction to his travel narrative: “Recte atque vere finxisse veteres Sapientiae patrem Usus et matrem Memoriam esse” (*Hercules prodicius*. Anvers: Plantin, 1587, p. 134). Francesco Priuli, a young man who accompanied the Venetian ambassador Francesco Vendramin in an official journey to Madrid in 1792, wrote in his introduction that his account of his foreign travel (“il dar conto de’ siti e costumi esterni”) was written only for his own private use (“per mia particolar memoria delle cose vedute”), not for an arrogant desire of showing off his courage (L. Monga, *Due ambasciatori veneziani nella Spagna di fine Cinquecento*. Moncalieri: CIRVI, 2000, p. 189).

same [journey] in the Map of my own Memory" (Lithgow, n. p.), for travel writing, as most writings, is an attempt to re-create what one has lost (Monga 43). A line by Yeats, "I sing what was lost" ("What Was Lost," 1), and a similar one by Machado, "se canta [we could say "se escribe"] lo que se pierde" (CLXXIV, "Otras canciones a Guimar," VI, 2),⁹⁴ clearly suggest this idea. When Francesco Carletti, one of the first independent world travelers, lost his notes after a laborious journey ("tutte le mie scritture e memorie"), what was left was just "una poca di memoria travagliata dalle miserie occorsemi" (31), a small core of vague remembrances devoid of the details that would have enhanced his credibility and added entertainment value to his story.

Notes are taken in the course of the journey,⁹⁵ still sketchy and hastily written, have rarely survived; incomplete, short-handed annotations, often illegible to us, written at night, in the smoke-filled common room of a foreign inn, by the tired writer surrounded by drunk fellow customers after a long day horse-back riding.⁹⁶ These incomplete notes serve as blueprints for a more complete re-writing. The exegesis of Stendhal's *récits* about his Italian experience, for example, shows the extent of the writer's exploitation of his travel narrative. It is a political pamphlet, an analysis of post-Napoleonic Italy, a text published at the author's expense by a *dilettante* who pretends to write for his own pleasure and not to care about the marketing of his book, although he has invested a princely sum of money in it and hopes that it will be a popular

⁹⁴ See in Umberto Eco's *L'isola del giorno prima* the writer's effort to recount and/or re-create what he has experienced (Milan: Bompiani, 1994, pp. 10, 462; Monga 43). A haunting page in Colette's *Mes apprentissages* (III, 1011) mentions a tongue-in-cheek conversation with Paul Masson, then in charge of the cataloguing department of the Bibliothèque Nationale, who invented new cards in order to fill the gaps in the holdings of the Bibliothèque, listing important books that [...] should have been written!

⁹⁵ Hilarius Pырckmair strongly suggests a daily activity of note-taking: "Ad haec requiritur tabella quaedam ad excipiendum ea quae in itinere obiter soleant. Hominum enim memoria numquam tam stabilis tamque firma est ut illa omnia comprehendere et semper tenere valeant" (21-22). See a humorous account of the writing habits of fastidious German travelers in Saint-Évremond's comedy *Sir Politick Would Be* (Monga 46).

⁹⁶ See a reproduction of a hardly legible page, written, I assume, under similar circumstances in the introduction to the *Discours viatiques*. Erasmus offered a poignant, yet amusing, description of the interior of German inns in "Diversoria" [1523] (*Opera omnia*. Amsterdam: North Holland, 1972, I, iii, 334-337). In Perugia, on his way to Rome, Goethe complained: "Zwei Abende habe ich nicht geschrieben. Die Herbergen waren so schlecht, dass an kein Auslegen eines Blattes zu denken war" ("For two evenings I have not written. The inns were so bad that one could not even think to spread out a sheet of paper," October 25). On his way to Naples, Stendhal claims to have witnessed Gioacchino Rossini laboriously writing his music in an inn in Terracina: "il écrit sur une mauvaise table, au bruit de la cuisine de l'auberge, et avec l'encre boueuse qu'on lui apporte dans un vieux pot de pommade" (*Rome, Naples et Florence* 510).

success. A few years later, Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* conflated two different journeys and was exploited in a series of fictitious *lettres de voyage* (self-described as "journal naïf d'un voyageur enthousiaste," II, 176), written as short stories and published in various journals and newspapers. Eventually the material was published as a book, but the writer's itinerary maintained a vague chronology and still appears as the confuse congeries of translations of assorted travelers' accounts, artistic camouflages, and forged legends of various origin (Nerval II, 1376-1396).

Truth and lies are fundamental elements of the traveler's tale: "Si via sit dura, licitum est tibi scribere plura";⁹⁷ "Wenn einer eine Reise tut, so kann er was erzählen" ("When one travels, one has something to tell"); "A beau mentir qui vient de loin." These proverbs reflect an attitude expressed by Strabo in his *Geography*: "Everybody who tells the story of his own travels is a braggart: to this class belongs Menelaus, who went up the Nile as far as Ethiopia" (I, 2, 23). And William Langland in the prologue of *Piers the Plowman* wrote: "Pilgrymes and palmers [...] heddenleue to lyzen heere lyf aftir." Garzoni echoes many treatises of the Italian Renaissance: "Né mancano [i viaggiatori] d'aggiunger bugia a bugia, contando di mano in mano il viaggio pericoloso, insolito, nuovo, pieno di maraviglie e stupori c'hanno fatto, riducendosi alla memoria" (Garzoni, II, 1045).⁹⁸

So we are not surprised to see the writer twist the circumstances of his journey. And Thevet lied unabashedly that his account of the Atlantic crossing and the Brazilian natives was "tumultuairement compris et labouré par les tempêtes et autres incommodités d'eau et de terre" (305), when we know it was instead penned at home, with the help of Mathurin Héret, a young ghost-writer who provided Thevet with a host of starchy classical references to impress his readers. Eventually, in the Age of Enlightenment readers became dependent on travel literature "not only for facts about a world that was growing both larger and very interesting, but for entertainment—the adventurous, the exotic, the marvelous" (Adams 223).

The "degré zéro" of hodoeporic writing is the guidebook, the impersonal prose of Baedeker. It is a *vade-mecum*, a manual that provides the traveler with the essential information and supplies a vast array of dates, names, and measurements. At the opposite side of the writing spectrum there is "l'explosion discursive du langage poétique,"⁹⁹ a creative transformation of what has or

⁹⁷ Andreas Gartner in his collection of proverbs, *Proverbialia dictoria* (Frankfurt am Main: Engenholph, 1578).

⁹⁸ Even Saint Paul insisted on the difficulties and dangers he encountered in his journeys (2 Cor 11:26). In any case, the writer is forced to make a selection among the farrago of his memories: "Voilà ce qui m'a semblé plus digne d'être mis pas écrit" (Thevet 29).

⁹⁹ Olivier Bivort's "On ne part pas: L'illusion de l'ailleurs dans *Une saison en enfer*" in *Voyage imaginaire - Voyage initiatique* (Moncalieri: CIRVI, 1990), p. 123.

could have occurred. For, in order to enhance his story, the traveler, now a writer (and often a liar),¹⁰⁰ stretches the truth and embellishes a plain, often boring set of events.¹⁰¹ Naturally, he is proud of the originality of most of his observations and, above all, does not want to be caught restating what others have written. If Coryate makes a point of telling his readers new details about Venice's *cortigiane* ("I have related so many particulars of them, as few Englishmen that have lived many years in Venice can do the like," I, 407), Goethe in Venice confesses: "Von Venedig ist schon viel erzählt und gedruckt, dass ich mit Beschreibung nicht umständlich sein will" ("About Venice so much has already been said and written, that I do not wish to enter in details in my descriptions," 29 September 1786).¹⁰² Each traveler wants his unique approach to be remembered. We have been able to catch Locatelli red-handedly rewriting his first-draft travel narrative, adding new episodes, revising his naive perceptions of France and its people, pillaging guidebooks to give depth to his hasty descriptions of cities and their history (33-34). He confessed taking liberties with the truth in order to entertain his brother and his friends during the long summer afternoons in his country home (342, 65).

Locatelli's *modus operandi* is by no means unique. A few years earlier, in the introduction to his *Osservazioni nel viaggio*, Francesco Belli had openly admitted his reasons for embellishing the truth of his travel narrative:

Io non niego però che non sia lecito avvantaggiare ed abbellire un tal poco le cose con qualche aiuto di concetti e delicatezza di stile: non essendo cotali fregi più alla fine che gli ornamenti nelle donne, che non le rendono più belle in sostanza, ma più aggradevoli in apparenza. Per altro, sendo stato il viaggio continovo o pochissime volte interrotto, non sarà meraviglia che io tocchi appena gli oggetti e accenni gli avvenimenti. [...] Toccherò

¹⁰⁰ The literature on the "travel liar" is abundant: see Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars, 1660-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

¹⁰¹ Francesco Vettori felt the need to enhance his narrative of the bare facts and their unexciting repetitiousness; otherwise "in questi miei scritti non sia altro che giunsi, venni, arrivai, parti', cavalcai, cenai, udi', risposi e simil cose le quali, replicate spesso, a il lettore danno fastidio" (*Scritti storici e politici*, cit., p. 60). On Stendhal's "prétendue manie de la mystification," see Stendhal 1311-1312.

¹⁰² Venice, Rome, and Naples have been described in so many details by Renaissance travelers and guidebooks that often the writers left several pages blank in their journals, hoping to fill them after returning home. Two travel journals I have edited seem to indicate the writer's inability to describe these cities (*Discours viatiques* 86; Basire's *Travels* 90n, 100n). A 17th-century British visitor, Thomas Abdy, who spent months in Rome and Venice between 1634 and 1635, gave no reasons for his total silence about their monuments, but I suspect that he purchased guidebooks to use eventually in his final travel report (see my above-mentioned essay "Thomas Abdy's Unpublished Travel Journal through France and Italy," 86-88).

adunque le cose vedute e udite: e se talora introdurrò qualche cosa che paia diversa e lontana dalla materia, non sarà che per fecondar la sterilità della stessa.¹⁰³

A symbiotic relationship between travel and the writer's subjectivity was conceded with refreshingly good humor by William Combe in his poetic account:

I'll make a tour — and then I'll write it.
 You well know what my pen can do,
 And I'll employ my pencil too: —
 I'll ride and write, and sketch and print,
 And thus create a real mint;
 I'll prose it here, I'll verse it there,
 And picturesque it everywhere.¹⁰⁴

Travelers' claims to truthfulness became a required commonplace in their journals, witness Marco Polo's impressive apology in the foreword of his *Il Milione*:¹⁰⁵

Signori imperadori, re e duci, [...] vi conterà il libro ordinatamente siccome Marco Polo [...] le conta in questo libro e egli medesimamente vide. Ma ancora v'ha di quelle con le quali elli non vide, ma udille da persone degne di fede,¹⁰⁶ e però cose vedute dirà di veduta e l'altre per udita, acciò che 'l nostro libro sia veritieri e senza niuna menzogna.

(103)

¹⁰³ Francesco Belli, *Osservazioni nel viaggio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1632), pp. 1-2. I owe this quotation to Nathalie Hesther of the University of Chicago.

¹⁰⁴ William Combe, *Dr. Syntax's Tour in Search of the Picturesque, of Consolation, and of a Wife* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1890?), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁵ With false modesty, Francesco Carletti, like many other travel writers, claimed that, because of his "poca di memoria travagliata," he will try "meglio che mi sarà possibile [...] di riscorrere e d'andarmi rammemorando solo di quelle cose che ho fatte e viste in detti mia viaggi" (31). The writer of Ambassador Tiepolo's travel journey to Spain mentioned the care he took in measuring the two whales he saw on the beach of Bayonne, knowing well that his readers would have a hard time believing him: "Volsi nondimeno io, montato in una barchetta, accostarmici et prendere quelle misure che mi parvero più importanti, che per la verità non saranno intese con gran meraviglia" (L. Monga, *Due ambasciatori veneziani nella Spagna di fine Cinquecento*, cit., p. 98).

¹⁰⁶ This is the weak link of hodieporics (as well as history). Giovambattista Ramusio's preface to Marco Polo's book, facing the presence of "molte cose che pareno fabulose e incredibili," suggests Polo's lame acceptance of "quello che gli veniva detto" (*Navigazioni e viaggi*, ed. M. Milanese. Torino: Einaudi, 1980, III, 23; also Monga 46). But in his travel accounts Herodotus had already made a clear distinction between hearsay (*akoê*) and eyewitnessing (*ópsis*)

The traveler's "pact" with his reader allowed the Renaissance writer a certain leeway to enrich his *récit* with personal remarks, subjective details and cultural notes. These elements had an important role in the travel narrative of the Age of Enlightenment:

Je ne promets au lecteur qu'une chose, c'est de ne pas fermer les yeux. Tout ce que j'aurai l'occasion de voir, je le raconterai. J'y joindrai quelquefois des remarques qui, je me plais à imaginer, ne seront pas mal reçues, même des hommes instruits; car je les ai faites non en passant, mais dans un temps où je croyais que toute vérité concernant l'histoire de l'homme ou celle de la nature était si importante qu'on devait lui sacrifier volontier son repos et son plaisir.¹⁰⁷

Fantastic voyages à la Cyrano de Bergerac, *contes philosophiques* such as Voltaire's *Candide*, sea novels, historians' studies of comparative governments and religions, treatises of natural history and reports of explorations soon begin a trend which becomes extremely popular, to the point of overshadowing the newly established *roman* as a literary genre. In the early years of the 19th century, Stendhal used his *carnet de route* as the basis for so many re-writings and adaptations that his critics are still confused about the exact itinerary and time of his Italian journeys. Accused of making novels out of his travel accounts ("romancer les voyages"), he acknowledged searching for the "piquant" (the clever, catchy, charming elements), avoiding "what was common, what was not worth being said" (V. Del Litto in Stendhal, XXII-XXIII). Revising his own notes, he also set in motion a writing laboratory in which personal observations were mixed *pêle-mêle* with all sorts of material pillaged from guidebooks, magazine articles, anything the French writer read during and after his visits to Italy. Chateaubriand and Lamartine, Nerval and Dumas, Sterne and Heine began to compose "roman-voyages,"¹⁰⁸ "travel impressions" that were enormously influential. The path from a travel account to a novel is being defined. The traveler liar takes over, and the 18th-century reader, be he a *savant* or a bourgeois, is deeply influenced by a new, pervasive literary genre.

But now a new cycle has begun and other cycles are looming ahead. Potential travelers are lured into starting their own cycles. Interested readers will engage in vicarious traveling from the comfort of their homes, following Jacques de Villamont's suggestion, a sensible marketing ploy in the introduction of his guidebook to Jerusalem:

François, voyez ces peuples étrangers,
Sans changer d'air faites ce long voyage,

¹⁰⁷ *Voyages au Caucase et en Chine*, ed. D. Beauvais (Paris: Fayard, 1980), 31; Hafid-Martin 58.

¹⁰⁸ See Claude Pichois's discussion of the bibliographical background of this problem in his edition of Nerval's *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 1376-1382.

De Villamont en la fleur de son aage
 À ses despens vous tire des dangers.¹⁰⁹

Travel writing, however, is not just an editorial tactic to entice readers to make a journey painlessly and with minimum expense. This quiet, homemade journey, protected from dangerous adventures and performed in the silence of one's study (an activity akin to the non-travel of Saint-Exupéry's geographer in *Le Petit Prince*), accentuates the serenity of the reader who beholds his virtual motion on the map or reads about it in a book.¹¹⁰ By now, as Zatti stated, the real travel seems to disappear: "l'universo dei segni ha sostituito il viaggio fisico."¹¹¹ A new cycle has been completed, from the journey to its written description, a self-referential account in a map or book.

¹⁰⁹ *Voyages* (Paris: C. de Montr'oel and J. Richer, 1600). The literary travel ("à ses despens") as a financial bargain appears also in Ariosto's *Satire* and it is now a topos ("il resto della terra / senza mai pagar l'oste, andrò cercando / con Ptolomeo, sia il mondo in pace o in guerra," III, 60-62). Lodovico Guicciardini's remarked to his reader: "Vedrai [...], senza uscir di casa, in poco spatio et in poche hore, il sito, la grandezza, la bellezza, la potenza et la nobiltà di questi egregii et mirabili paesi; potrai conoscere la natura et la qualità dell'aria et della terra, quel che ella produce et non produce, sapere quante regioni, quante città et altre terre, [...] quanti fiumi et quanto mare [...], quante selve et quanti boschi d'ogni intorno li adornano; potrai haver notizia della natura et qualità delle genti che li habitano" (130). Whether a true travel journal or a description of a site, the explicit statement of the writer underscores his personal experience, "non havendo io perdonato a fatica né a tempo né a cosa alcuna [...] per vedere et investigare personalmente le cose occorrenti, comunicandole per tutto con huomini dotti et esperti del paese, acciocché l'opera venisse più purgata et approvata dall'universale" (*Ibid.*). This commonplace goes beyond the author's concern with the marketing of his book; it emphasizes the power of the written word and the frugal "chariot that bears the human soul," for "there is no frigate like a book / To take us lands away / Nor any coursers — like a page / Of prancing poetry — [...]," carrying readers to far-away realms, regardless of wealth and health, as in Emily Dickinson's poem (no. 1286).

¹¹⁰ Baudelaire, who would "leave for the sake of leaving" (see n. 44) and whose bitter journey had produced only an "amer savoir," described the curious child, bent over maps and books, as the ideal traveler/dreamer escaping into a world of fantasy: "Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes, / L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit. / Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!" ("Le Voyage"). Joseph Conrad recalled his youthful yearning for geography: "When I was a little child I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration" ("The Heart of Darkness" in J. C., *Complete Works: The Tales*. Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1992, III, 6).

¹¹¹ Sergio Zatti mentions Marino's suggestion that Galileo's exploration of the sky, made with a telescope "senza periglio e senza guerra," could be considered a sedentary voyage which represents a new way of traveling and discovering, the "viaggio in forma di metafora" (as in Marino's *Adone*, x, 43-45).

And the accessibility of the written word in the economy of this cycle allows all writing travelers to make use of what their predecessors have written: "Il y a des citations inévitables. Les voyageurs s'entreglosent" (Roudaut 65). Writing begets writing and influences the *récits* of more writers: "Le narrateur donne la parole à autrui, aux livres, aux voyageurs antérieurs et aux guides, aux informateurs qu'il rencontre" (Roudaut 60). The journey becomes, as Goethe pointed out, "ein Supplement aller übrigen [...] so muss dieses vorzüglich von Reiseberichten und Reisenden" ("a supplement of all others, [...] particularly of travel writing and travelers," *Italianische Reise*, 4, 5, and 6 June 1787).¹¹² Despite romanesque additions and a variety of influences, the travel writer usually maintains his own narrative rhythm, a healthy independence from his sources, the ability to crop, skip, and cut unnecessary details as he sees fit ("la tentation de l'ellipse," Roudaut 64).

G. POST-HODOEPORIC CYCLES

An experience that affects people in different ways, travel can lead to positive changes in one's philosophy of life or to one's rejection of his own traditions and cultural background. Milton's axiom *Coelum non animum muto dum trans mare curro* (see n. 53) underscores his attachment to the values of his forefathers. The paranoia of Rogers Ascham and John Howell was often justified, for many young Englishmen returned from the Grand Tour deeply changed, having wasted their time abroad and transformed themselves into "Italianfyd Inglischemen," as Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, sarcastically implied, or "affectate travellers," vain individuals, ashamed of their own language and speaking English through "[their] teeth, like [...] Monsieur Mingo de Moustrap."¹¹³

¹¹² As Charles L. Batten, Jr. observed for 18th-century English hodoeporic literature, Addison's casual *Remarks on Italy* creep into the letters and private journals of such travelers as James Boswell, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Horace Walpole, and Edward Gibbon, as well as into other travel books whose titles are often modeled after Addison's own title (Breval, Drummond, Johann Georg Keyssler, Samuel Sharp, Tobias Smollett, Anna Riggs Miller, Thomas Nugent, Hester Piozzi, *et al.*, in Batten 11-12).

¹¹³ Thomas Nash, *Pierce Penniless*, in *Works*, ed. A. B. Grosart (London: The Huth Library, 1883-1885), II, 27. Shakespeare chastised the "base imitation" of Italian manners that "tardy apish Englishmen" followed (*Richard II*, II, II, 1). The affectation of these Grand Tourists back in England hides not only their pretentiousness to show off an exotic traveling experience, but also a real hardship of readapting to a world left behind and, perhaps, the impossibility of becoming fully English again. The topos of the returning traveler who now cannot speak his maternal tongue without inserting a confusing mixture of other languages is an old one. Cristóbal de Villalón mentioned in his *Viaje de Turquía* [1557] the affectation of travelers back from Italy "quien nos rompen aquí las cabezas con sus salpicones de lenguas," yet they are still wearing the same shoes they had when

In general, hundreds of returning Grand Tourists affected not only the collective perception of the local cultural élite, their *Wanderlust* shaped the intellectual history of their country,¹¹⁴ for many people, unable to travel, were nonetheless affected by reading travel journals.¹¹⁵ The intellectual development of England and the United States was profoundly altered by the personal experience of their leaders who had lived for a while in foreign countries.

People like Richard Symonds and John Evelyn returned from the Continent to 17th-century London with rich portfolios of prints and drawings. Ships sailing from Italy carried to England their purchases of paintings, statues, and glass. Grand Tourists had their portraits painted in Rome or Venice, chose Delft tiles in Holland to brighten the fireplaces and floors at home, or looked out for cabinets of inlaid stone and polished wood to set beside their own old furniture as a novelty in fashion. Books acquired in foreign cities, occasionally annotated by the travelers, and even with faded flowers pressed between the leaves, were sometimes to remain for centuries on their library shelves. These visible tokens were certainly less important, though more easily identified, than the gradual response of the travelers' mind to overseas experiences. They learnt history, they learnt geography, they learnt politics (Stoye 327).

One could use the words of Christopher Wren's epitaph in St. Paul's Cathedral to illustrate this evidence: "Si monumentum requiris, circumspeice." The effect of travel and the sense of identity with ancient Rome and Renaissance Florence on the cultural life of the English-speaking world, from the *décor* of British country houses to Jefferson's Monticello and L'Enfant's Washington, needs no demonstration.¹¹⁶ The *virtuosi* who visited foreign countries

they left ("aún los mismos zapatos que te llevaste traes, y tan presto se te ha olvidado tu propia lengua?", p. 46). The Duke of Norfolk's contemptuous remark referred to one of his secretaries, William Barker, who under torture had implicated him in a plot to facilitate Philip II's invasion of England in exchange for marrying Mary queen of Scots. Norfolk was beheaded on June 2, 1572.

¹¹⁴ Even 20th-century military campaigns in Europe must be considered in terms of collective pedagogy. Joe Young's 1919 song, "How'ya gonna keep'em down on the farm (after they've seen Paree)," shows the effect that travel and war have had on the psychology of a generation of young American farmers, unable to return to the stillness of their home life after the excitement of their wartime experience in a large foreign city.

¹¹⁵ "He travels and expatiates, as the bee / From flow'r to flow'r, so he from land to land. [...] / He sucks intelligence in ev'ry clime, / And spreads the honey of his deep research / At his return—a rich repast for me" (William Cowper, *The Task* [1785], IV, 107-108, 111-113).

¹¹⁶ Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Gervase Jackson-Stops (ed.), *The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1985); William L. Vance, *America's Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 2 vols.; Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Lure of Italy: American*

discovered a widespread *locus amoenus* “whither the eyes and the heart of every artist turn, as if pictures could not be made to glow in any other atmosphere, as if statues could not assume grace and expression, save in the land of whitest marble.”¹¹⁷ Returning travelers preferred to underscore their positive experience, the discussions held, the written memoirs, even the artwork they gathered abroad. Their collective learning enriched the national consciousness and helped form a class of intellectuals more open to a global perception and more subject to suggestions from fellow scientists and *philosophes* from neighboring or far-away countries. Travel and travel writing, when travelers were sensitive and curious, have truly formulated our history which, like Thucydides’s “treasure forever” (*Hist.* I, 22), truly is a cornerstone to be reckoned with by future generations.

Vanderbilt University

Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914 (New York: Abrams, 1992). The value of the impact of the foreign experience in the artist’s career is exemplified in Pierre Mignard’s extraordinary success in France after a 22-year-long sojourn in Simon Vouet’s studio in Rome. Molière underscored this element, acknowledging that the painter had come back to Paris to “déployer les précieux trésors / Que le Tibre t’a vu amasser sur ses bords” (“La Gloire du Val de Grâce,” 21-22).

¹¹⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 47.

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When the O. Moves in the Heart: The Annunciation of the End in the *Journal of Saint Veronica Giuliani*¹

In the first book of the *Confessions*, recounting the first years of his life, Augustine poses a fundamental question to the divinity, that is, whether “*utrum alicui iam aetati meae mortuae successerit infantia meae. An illa est, quam egi intra viscera matris meae?*” (I, 6, 16). Augustine is aware of the fact that, as the book of Job confirms, “*nemo mundus a peccato coram te, nec infans, cuius est unius diei vita super terram (14:4-5 LXX)*” (I,7, 18-20). If human existence coincides with fall and exile, Augustine ponders, is there a lapse of time in which we exist, and thus sin, even before we actually exist? If I sin before I am, how can I possibly retrieve the memory of the crimes committed before coming to life? Although I may assess the crimes of my infancy by observing other infants, Augustine implies, comparison does not correspond to the recovery of an actual memory. Who will remind him of the sins of his infancy, he asks himself. The time he spent in his mother’s womb, he states, lies in the darkness of a complete forgetfulness:

Hanc ergo aetatem, domine, qua me vixisse non memini, de qua aliis credidi et quam me egisse ex aliis infantibus conieci . . . piget me adnumerare huic vitae meae, quam vivo in hoc seculo. Quantum enim adtinet ad oblivionis meae tenebras, par illi est, quam vixi in matris utero.

(I, 7, 22)

The narration of my fall and exile thus can never start from the beginning for there is always a beginning preceding any narrative beginning, a beginning marked at once by my fall and the complete oblivion of my fall. The story of my exile, one may say, opens when my story has already begun, and no one will

¹ The essential meaning of the “O” will become apparent in the second part of this essay. A second preliminary remark concerns the edition of the mystic’s journal. As Giovanni Pozzi underscores, the current complete edition of Veronica Giuliani’s *Diario* is extremely poor. Before completing this essay, I visited the convent of Santa Veronica Giuliani in Città di Castello, where, thanks to the kind support of the Mother Superior, I had a chance to consult the original manuscripts. For obvious reasons, I follow the most recent, albeit extremely questionable, edition of Giuliani’s *opera omnia*. This essay is the first chapter of my forthcoming monograph on Veronica Giuliani’s mysticism.

ever be able “to remind me,” as Augustine puts it, of what happened at the very beginning.

The beginning thus always lies in the past of an irretrievable memory, or better yet, in a memory that was never the present of an actual beginning, if by “beginning” one means the moment in which the “I” consciously opens the analysis and narration of one’s present existence.² As in psychoanalysis wherein the first dream signifies the patient’s present condition and thus marks the initial step toward some kind of hypothetical healing, the date placed at the top of the first blank page of one’s journal is already a reminder of the moment in which we decided it was time “to understand” before we actually took pen and paper and jotted down our inaugural notes. The first date on the first blank sheet is a sign (an “icon” à la Peirce) pointing to a temporal *mise-en-abîme*, at once the past of the entry (what happened *today*), the past of our initial need for writing, and that beginning (preceding any beginning) which harbors both the secret of our fall and our present exegetical practice (Peirce 104-07).

It is thus not surprising that the current, and unfortunately “deplorable,” edition of Saint Veronica Giuliani’s monumental journal does not open with its actual first entry (13 December, 1693), but rather with the third of her five autobiographies, which she wrote under her confessor’s direct order seven years after the beginning of her journal (sometime in 1700) (Pozzi 162; Courbat 1994, 9-40). According to Oreste Fiorucci, whose edition (1969-74) closely follows the version published at the turn of this century by Pietro Pizzicaria (1895-1905), those who embark on such a vast reading need an exegetical *vade mecum*, some kind of introduction or preface. Fiorucci believes that the third “relazione” (account), which he defines as second, best plays this preliminary role because it is “la più completa” but also, and more importantly, because Pope Pius IX held it for more than twelve years during the process of Veronica’s sanctification (from 1846 to 1858).³ For this reason, this third autobiography was then called “the volume of Pius IX” (“il volume di Pio IX”) and was regarded by the nuns of the Monastery of Città di Castello as a unique and holy specimen within the saint’s extensive texts.

Let us bear in mind that the almost illiterate Veronica Giuliani (1660-1727) was forced to learn how to write in order to provide the religious authorities, first of all her thirty-nine confessors, with textual evidence against her.⁴ As the visionary herself makes clear in a number of entries, for her the act of writing is a form of abjection, which she envisions as the core of her mysticism. Writing

² For an interesting analysis of consciousness in autobiography, see Blaise 201-09.

³ *Un tesoro nascosto, ossia, Diario di S. Veronica Giuliani*, 1:xi. Cf. Courbat 1995, 336-37. For a description of the religious context, see Ermenegildo Frascadore, “Contesto sociale e religioso in Italia al tempo di Santa Veronica Giuliani” in Iriarte 1:171-75.

⁴ See Lollini 351-67; Pozzi 163-64. For an analysis of Veronica Giuliani’s mystical language, see Cittadini.

equals humiliation not only because her syntax and her spelling are a mess, but rather because each entry of her journal reminds her that her being lies in abjection and was born in abjection, and that her language cannot help but speak abjection. It is thus evident that her five autobiographies, at once sections of and exegetical keys to her journal, are attempts to capture echoes or signs of her original call to humiliation, and to the suffering that it entails. If at the age of three or four she already felt an overwhelming attraction toward pictures of the baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary, at the age of five or six she started perceiving an irresistible vocation for suffering and physical humiliation (1:7-8). She pierced her body with needles, burned her hand, hit herself with nettles, walked on her knees, and “did the discipline” (1:8). She also enjoyed listening to hagiographic stories and tried to experience some of the sufferings reported in those books. Once, for instance, she inadvertently stuck a finger in a door. The blow was so intense that she could see the nerve through the running blood. But the pain turned into joy when she remembered that Saint Rosa of Lima had had a similar experience (1:14).

Veronica recognized that suffering signified a state of alertness. Both physical and mental pain was a reminder of “un so che della vita passata che mi dava fastidio” (1:34). To suffer was at once a sign (an icon) of a problematic, albeit forgotten, past and the inevitable consequence issuing from that very past. Even before entering the Capuchin convent in Città di Castello at the age of seventeen, Veronica understood that meditation (“orazione mentale,” 1:17) would be the primary way to respond to certain “secret invitations” (“segreti inviti”) coming from within her heart, and which manifested themselves as intense requests for suffering (1:29).⁵

When she became a novice, Veronica expressed these feelings to the Jesuit (probably Father Francesco Mazzagalli) who had been teaching her Saint Ignacio’s spiritual exercises. This Jesuit, Veronica states in her account, reminded her that, in order to answer God’s invitations, she had to pursue suffering with all her love (1:25-26). This dialogue between the mystic and the Jesuit is of extreme importance because it foreshadows Veronica’s forthcoming journal. Replying to the Jesuit’s words, Veronica states: “Oh Father, this is my sole desire.” But the Jesuit believes that Veronica speaks so fervently about pain because in fact she does not know what pain really is. Suffering is a life project; Veronica will understand later when pain visits her unexpectedly. Suffering is both a state of mind and a practical disposition toward life. “It is time,” she will tell herself then, “to practice what the Father told you.”

In a previous paragraph I defined the mystic’s concept of suffering as a form of mental alertness, in which the past of a vexing “something,” as she herself defines it, comes to her as the present of a physical disquiet. If the cause, that is, the beginning, is what is absent from consciousness, the present as

⁵ On the issue of suffering, see Rarricau.

suffering is the memorial of that initial absence, or better yet, suffering points to the instant immediately after what has withdrawn from presence. It is thus apparent that, in the analysis of Veronica's journal, what "begins" is what presents itself to the mystic as an instance of sudden awareness ("una certa cognizione di me stessa," 1:58), of "new" understanding, which for her always and exclusively identifies with a "new" suffering. Innumerable, in fact, are the entries in which Veronica reports the occurrence of a different, unusual, and thus insightful form of pain.

According to her "second account," the year 1696 marks a new beginning in her mystical life. Veronica confesses that for a long time she had had a barely controllable desire to inscribe the name of Jesus (I. H. S.) on her heart with a knife (1:53). This time her confessor gives her permission to open a wound over her heart. Back in her cell, Veronica has an "intellectual vision" ("una visione intellettuale") during which she sees herself taking her small knife and using its blade as a pen on her chest. This act of writing on oneself, this experience of reflection and division (seeing herself looking at her own body as a blank sheet) mirrors a new opening, whose extreme significance is confirmed by God's request for a new wedding and a promise of new insights ("lumi," 1:54). During this rapture, Veronica also writes a "statement" with the blood oozing from her wound, in which she announces to the Lord her complete abandonment to his will. She officially donates her heart to him, and accepts his proposition.

The significance of this event is twofold. On the one hand, it corresponds to the highest, the most symbolic expression of the mystic's active quest for suffering. We could in fact see the above event as the enactment of a basic metaphor (love = heart = pain). On the other hand, it also anticipates a forthcoming new kind of interaction between the divinity and the mystic in which suffering/love will come to her as a divine grace.⁶ It is not by chance that, after this annunciation, suffering visits her for the first time on Christmas night. While she is contemplating the crèche, Veronica enters a vision in which she sees the image of the baby Jesus holding a bow with an arrow directed at her heart (1:66). At that moment, the mystic feels an overwhelming pain and, regaining her senses, realizes that the wound over her heart is actually bleeding. If in the past by *opening* that wound Veronica *had opened* her heart to suffering, the divinity now *reopens* the wound in order to signify the *opening/beginning* of his graces to her.

It is also of crucial importance to note that suffering visits the mystic in the form of an emblem, whose figures are among the most typical components of baroque devotional imagery (an angel or the baby Jesus, the arrow, the heart).⁷

⁶ In a later vision, Veronica in fact hears the Lord telling her: "Sta posata, ché il tuo vivere sarà un continuo patire, e questo è il mio volere per confermarti a me tuo sposo crocefisso" (1:63).

⁷ I analyze the so-called "emblems of the heart" in "Visual and Verbal Communication."

Although seventeenth-century emblematic literature differs greatly from its original Renaissance form, some essential features link Christian devotional emblems to the sixteenth-century *impresa*. The most interesting representative of Renaissance theory on visibility is Alessandro Farra, the author of the strictly Neo-Platonic treatise *Il settenario dell'umana riduzione*, published in 1593 (Maggi 1997, 3-28). In this text, Farra holds that the act of visualizing an *impresa* is in fact a form of contemplation, which leads the viewer to a sudden and non-linguistic insight. Farra states that, moving through a seven-step process of mental and linguistic purification, the subject finally succeeds in retrieving the memory of a past knowledge, the remembrance of a divine visitation. In other words, what the subject learns *now* (when he is visited by the *impresa's* insight) is in fact what he knew *then*, when the divinity granted him what he is recovering *now*. However, the *then* of God's communication lies in a moment preceding any possible remembrance (the Augustinian existence before existence).

In Veronica Giuliani's *impresa*, an insight announces itself as the *opening* of her heart wound. Throughout her journal we read of the repeated *closing* (ending) and sudden *opening* (beginning) of this wound, even before the stigmata are inscribed on her body.⁸ As we shall see later, pain and blood are the signs marking both the beginning and the end of a divine communication in the heart. The basic structure of many of Veronica's *impresa* or emblems revolve around an act of substitution between the "cuore ferito" (the wounded heart) and the "cuore amoroso" (the amorous heart).⁹ As Veronica sees during an initial rapture in 1696, Jesus removes her bleeding heart and replaces it with a flaming, amorous heart (cf. 1:126). It is almost superfluous to remember that in the seventeenth century there are innumerable emblems based on these figures. We could say that Veronica Giuliani's immense journal is in fact a book of devotional emblems or *impresa*, which testify to the recurrent and repeated openings, or beginnings, of her mystical initiation.¹⁰ Both the wounded and the amorous/blazing heart visualize an act of awareness in that both hearts picture the moment in which the mystic perceives the void (or opening) distancing her

⁸ For the first description of how she received the stigmata, see 1:99-100.

⁹ I believe we should define these emblematic visions as *impresa* because of their private connotation. Let us remember that, unlike an emblem, an *impresa* is a personal message directed to a specific addressee.

¹⁰ In some specific cases, it is evident that her visions were inspired by the memory of some emblematic pictures. For instance, in 1695, Jesus shows her a shield (another typical form of emblematic language) and places it in her heart (1:457). A similar vision will visit her in 1697 (1:806). The same year, Veronica sees that the Lord is purifying her heart by squeezing pus and filth out of it (1:823; cf. 2:641-42). A variation of this emblematic rendition shows a press (*un torchio*) squeezing snakes out of the heart (for example, 2:1141; cf. 4:613).

from divine love. In some cases, the interaction between the two hearts is depicted as the sudden loss or removal of one of the two, and its subsequent return into the mystic's chest (contrast 2:125-26, 315; 3:127). Other entries in Veronica's journal clearly describe the two hearts not as two distinct organs, but rather as two temporal facets of the same experience: Jesus takes her wounded heart, cleanses it, and then shows that a flame is springing out of it (contrast 2:94, 102-03, 217). Whereas the wounded heart indicates a receptive realization (the absence of love as a bleeding wound), the heart on fire speaks of a subsequent, "ardent" response to the wound's *opening*.¹¹

However, it is essential to understand that these "emblematic events" do not distinguish between "heart" as the metaphorical repository of the mystic's soul and the physical organ. "Heart" and heart are mirrors of the same, initial *opening* of the mystic's wound/"wound." For instance, on December 20, 1693, Veronica sees the Lord taking hold of her heart, which starts "turning around" in her chest (1:179). The essential importance of the heart's movement will become apparent at the end of this essay. For the time being, it will suffice to highlight the reflection between mystical vision and carnal symptom. Her heart turns inside, bounces, beats so loudly that one can hear it from outside, or else it burns so intensely that her pain is barely tolerable. These excruciating reactions occur when her insight/wound is about to open/begin (for instance, 2:476, 521). Veronica often realizes that her heart's wound is in fact open again and is bleeding profusely. Pain itself is thus both physical and mental. On May 3, 1701, Veronica directly connects the pain in her heart with the pain brought about by a sudden and crystal-clear perception of her past as a seamless sin (2:896).

If the opening of the wound marks an existential void (the wounded heart), it also indicates that what is about to begin has both a future and a past nature. What *begins* is at once a forthcoming divine enlightenment (the burning heart) and the retrieval of the mystic's past. *Her past begins*, so to speak, when her heart opens *to* the wound which precedes any possible wound.¹² For this reason, she composed some of her "official statements" (*proteste*) with the blood coming out of her wounded heart.¹³ It is a fact that, after Catherine of Siena, blood has become of extreme importance in female mysticism. In Veronica Giuliani's journal, blood is the visible manifestation of that "void" flowing out of the wounded heart. Blood initiates an act of remembrance in that it is the ink with which the mystic at once recalls her past actions and summons the presence

¹¹ Veronica discusses the interaction between the two hearts in the entry of May 29, 1697 (2:87).

¹² See, for example, what Veronica writes on August 11, 1702 (2:1139).

¹³ Veronica mentions this practice in an entry of 1696. As the editor points out, most of her *proteste* were destroyed. Her convent still has two texts the mystic wrote with her own blood (1:560).

of an inaugural wound. For Veronica Giuliani, blood signifies her being as a fundamental fissure or opening. Blood is the memorial of a beginning, for blood is also Christ's blood, that is, it brings back the memory of the Lord's death due to our initial wound. Veronica writes that she has indeed tasted both the blood coming out of her heart's wound and, like Angela of Foligno, the sweet blood from Christ's open side.¹⁴ In one of the most disturbing pages of her diary, Veronica explains that during a vision the Lord recommended that she preserve the fluid leaking out of her heart's wound, which had just been pierced and reopened by the luminous rays descending from the Lord's five wounds. Three drops of this liquid, which tastes like honey and looks like a "clear blood" ("sangue . . . chiaro"), will serve as a private Eucharist, and will sustain her in her daily sufferings. It is evident that this "clear" fluid is a blood that has been "clarified" through an act of remembrance, that is, it is a blood that has been read *in light of* its origin/beginning: the fluids flowing from Christ's wounds. Her being aware of her blood's origin, so to speak, also "clarifies" her daily suffering in that she comes to perceive that her mental and physical disquiet, in fact, echoes the shedding of an original blood.

For Veronica Giuliani, suffering is indeed an echo, an act of reflection. As she reiterates in a number of entries, she believes that suffering is the quintessential expression of love, because suffering enables her to live the past of her beloved's original wound (Christ's sacrifice on the cross). But, as in every love relationship, suffering also brings to the fore the essential distance (the opening of the wound) between lover and beloved, between the past of Christ's death and the original past of human existence as crime, comparable to Augustine's existence before his memory of existing. If *at the beginning was suffering*, suffering also manifests the agonizing void that opens between its original (past) occurrence and its present reiteration. Suffering thus also marks a radical failure.

This essential failure is the core of Veronica's innumerable mystical "trials," which undeniably reproduce the humiliations she endured during her frequent confessions. Her countless "hearings" enact a similar setting. Entering a rapture, Veronica finds herself in a huge room at the end of which she sees the Lord sitting on a throne. An angel, often her guardian angel, is her usual prosecutor. Jesus orders her to keep silent and to refrain from any attempt to defend herself with some desperate and inconclusive declaration of love. On May 12, 1697, the mystic's trial opens with the Lord asking her to look at his bleeding side (2:26-32). When she "looks inside" his wound, Veronica understands that her trial has already begun. Her guardian angel, the mystic writes (March 31, 1697), enumerates all the thoughts that had crossed her mind from the moment of her birth (1:874). Veronica and all the creatures present at

¹⁴ Contrast 2:499 and 2:274. In the "seconda relazione," Veronica states that once, rapt in spirit, she bathed in Christ's blood (1:155).

her trial (the Virgin Mary, numerous saints, angels, and devils) are reminded of her original crimes. Veronica is so repugnant that the Lord, the saints, even her usually compassionate “mother” (Mary) cover their faces so as not to look at her (contrast 1:871; 3:461).

If the mystic’s numerous trials inevitably aim to unveil the origin of her being as crime, they also express an inherent sense of ending within Veronica’s vast journal in that they foreshadow the day of her death and her subsequent exposure to the divine judge. Veronica is aware of the fact that the full memory of her beginning as crime will reveal itself at the moment of her end. Just as the mystic’s trial opens with Veronica looking into Christ’s bleeding side, the Savior and his wounds often present themselves as a mirror in which the mystic has a sudden perception of her past as a narrative written once and for all.¹⁵ Veronica’s trials and humiliating confessions are in fact rehearsals of her possible final conviction. As we shall see in a moment, Veronica perceives her existence as a lapse of time, or an intermission, preceding the opening of her condemnation. In this regard, if suffering manifests itself as a series of emblems depicting the opening of a physical and spiritual wound, the emblems of suffering signify an act of contemplation upon the suffering which may be the mystic’s eternal fate. This is the explicit theme of Veronica’s most despairing trial, which took place on September 8, 1701 (2:958-60). At the beginning of this new hearing, Veronica sees all the crimes she has committed as monsters attacking her. All the confessors who, with their stern and humiliating behavior, had tried to convince her of her wretchedness, participate in the trial as judges. Even devils make their statements against her, adding false accusations. What she is experiencing, Veronica underscores, is “il giudizio particolare che ognuno avrà nel fine di presente vita” (2:958). Although she has read “tanti libri, sentito tante prediche sopra di questo punto del Giudizio, ma essi non dicono nulla, non spiegano niente di quello che veramente è” (2:959).

By listening to the countless reports detailing her crimes, Veronica understands that her existence up to that moment, before the beginning of her death, has been what her memory has failed to recall; that is, her existence has been a nothingness imposing itself as crime. I believe it is of essential relevance for our present analysis — the concepts of beginning and end in Veronica Giuliani’s journal — to understand what “nothingness” means for this seventeenth-century mystic.¹⁶ Veronica usually avoids theoretical analyses of her mysticism, opting for descriptions based on strings of emblematic representations. However, in April 1694, she is ordered to rewrite a “relazione” on her concept of nothingness, which she had burned without the permission of her confessor (5:793-95). This text was later given the title “The Torch of One’s

¹⁵ See, for instance, the following entries: November 1, 1702 (2:1200-01), January 2, 1712 (3:497). Contrast August 16, 1721 (4:515).

¹⁶ Contrast Lollini 357-59; Pozzi 183.

Nothingness" ("la torcia del proprio nulla"). The human soul, Veronica holds, exists as a constant remembrance of the distance from the supreme Good. Her perennial suffering reminds her of this essential "deprivation." The Italian verb "mancare" perfectly summarizes the mystic's introductory definition of the soul. As long as it exists, the soul "ha mancato," which literally means "she has lacked": the soul has sinned, or better yet, she has failed.¹⁷ At the *beginning* of the soul, Veronica believes, is this act of lacking, which coincides with the soul's presence in the created world. In other words, "the soul lacks" must be read as an intransitive verb, similar to "the soul thinks" or "the soul sins." The soul's "lacking," Veronica goes on to explain, is a complete darkness at once springing from the soul and suffocating the soul. The suffering due to this perfect exile and isolation translates itself into an inner torch ("torcia") whose fire is both devastating and invisible. The soul is unable to see this flame because in fact it has nothing to illuminate or to reflect. Being a nothingness, the soul cannot mirror itself in this inner flame. *Non sum*, Veronica writes on March 26, 1700 (2:608).

Veronica's "torch" certainly shares basic similarities with Meister Eckhart's notion of "spark" ("funkel").¹⁸ However, Veronica Giuliani's "nothingness" (nulla) and "torch" also have strikingly unique connotations. For the Italian mystic, "nothingness" does not refer to a radical not-being à la Meister Eckhart; it rather indicates that the soul exists as a burning reminder of her original inadequacy toward the divinity. In other words, unlike Meister Eckhart's "spark," Veronica's "torch" is a scorching torture in that it expresses the unforgettable memory of her initial "lacking." Veronica's torch is a persecution, which she identifies with the highest form of divine love for the soul. As she reiterates in 1695, every time she has granted a "certain enlightenment about myself," she sees her nothingness as something "abominable."¹⁹

We may infer that her inner "torch" is both the "dark flame" that lit up at the *beginning* of the mystic's existence (her being as denial of divine love's "bright flame") and the eternal flame which may burn her being at her *end*. Let me rephrase this essential point. Veronica envisions the soul as a persistent remembrance of a future occurrence, since for her the soul's original "lacking" heralds the fire marking her perennial end. In this regard, "torch" equals suffering, the soul's inner burning, which reflects, as an internal mirror, both the soul's beginning as crime and her end as perdition. In one of the most moving passages of her journal, Veronica remembers that her mother used to call her "fire" ("fuoco") because throughout her pregnancy she had felt a torturous flame

¹⁷ Contrast May 16, 1697 (2:42-43).

¹⁸ For example, Meister Eckhart, German sermon 76: "The soul has something in it, a spark of intelligence, which never goes out, and in this spark, as the highest part of the mind, one places the image of the soul" (327).

¹⁹ 1:443. Contrast 1:264; 1:763; 1:931; 2:59.

in her belly (February 8, 1700; 2:572). Echoing Augustine's *Confessions*, Veronica believes that the flame that persecuted her mother was the first manifestation of Veronica's sinful nature, even before her actual birth. It is, however, essential to bear in mind that, if suffering is what burns the soul as remembrance, it is also, and more importantly, what opens the possibility of a new beginning as expiation. Let us remember that Veronica clearly states that her almost daily journal is nothing but a form of humiliation (contrast June 2, 1721; 4:489).

Humiliation is what reminds the soul of her original beginning, which paradoxically coincides with her eternal end (the torch of the soul's damnation). If *at the beginning was the soul's end*, Veronica understands that, in order to mark a new beginning, her soul must first enact its end. In other words, the soul must "fore-live" her end. If the soul's existence unfolds according to the most traditional laws of narration (beginning, middle, end), the soul's "torch" enables her to shift middle and end, so that what is going to persist (the middle) in fact comes after the arrival of the end. Viewed in this manner, the middle of the soul's story turns into a new beginning in which the soul's "torch" is a reminder not of a past oblivion, a forgotten crime, but rather of a future oblivion: the soul's complete burning in the fire of God's love.

The act of "outliving" her end reveals itself in Veronica's numerous journeys both to hell and to purgatory. Veronica has a first revelation on the nature of hell in 1693. Taking her to the brink of the infernal abyss, a devil makes her hear lugubrious laments coming from below, smell the unbearable stench, and see Hell's devastating flames (1:177). Veronica knows that, if the devil pushed her down, she would fall among those sorrowful souls. She has a similar experience in 1702, when she finds herself walking on a narrow bridge. Looking down, she sees an infinite number of gallows and a throng of devils expecting her to fall (2:1030). But it is in 1720 that she actually visits the regions of hell for the first time. Witnessing the mystic's journey, the Virgin Mary reminds her that the souls' suffering "è un continuo principio, mai fine" (4:281). In hell, the souls suffer as if their pain "non fossero ancora cominciate."²⁰ Hell is the oxymoronic place where the soul's end is about to begin but it has not begun yet, in the sense that, as the Virgin Mary explains to Veronica, in hell pain does not develop as if it pointed toward a final climax or catharsis. The lost souls never really begin to end. They are, in fact, stuck in a

²⁰ Veronica visits Hell again in 1724. On this occasion, she is granted a detailed vision on Hell's different areas. If in the first circle lie Lucifer and the "followers of Jude," in the second are the Church's highest representatives. The subsequent circles are divided as follows: religious people in the third place; confessors in the fourth; judges and "governors of temporal things" in the fifth; the superiors of the religious orders in the sixth; and those who lived according to their flesh and private desires are punished in the seventh "place" (4:744). Veronica had had a less specific vision in 1720 (4:356-57).

stage preceding any possible beginning, which thus coincides with its perennial end.

But does not the infernal condition preceding its actual beginning mirror the Augustinian concept of being as a criminal existence preceding its actual existence? Is not crime what comes before the beginning of the soul? And is not hell a suffering that seems to announce, but always postpones, a revelation, the opening/beginning of a process of awareness? In her journal, Veronica Giuliani experiences both forms of pain, an infernal repetition and a purgatorial opening which, in fact, announces itself through the reopening of the heart's wound. On December 26, 1697, Veronica sees a group of souls kneeling down around God's throne. The Lord explains to the mystic that they had left purgatory the day before, Christmas, when he had reopened her heart's wound (2:329). It is thus evident that what makes the purgatorial suffering a "wound," a beginning, is in fact its being a response to the suffering of the other. Purgatorial suffering is indeed a dialogue, a reflection. In the act of enduring the constant opening of her wound, the mystic reflects and responds to both Christ's suffering for all of humanity and the pain arising as a request from the souls in purgatory.

The responsive nature of Veronica's purgatorial suffering is apparent throughout her journal. In 1700, the mystic hears the voice of a certain Father Vitale, who had passed away a few days before. "Aiuto! Aiuto!" are the first words he pronounces (2:740-41). Getting closer to her, Father Vitale asks her if she recognizes him ("Mi conosci?"). In 1708, she sees that two of her convent sisters who had died a few weeks before are now in purgatory (3:361-63). One of them is allowed to address Veronica with a request for help: "Have pity on me. No living creature could possibly understand how atrocious these pains are." In a series of subsequent raptures, Veronica will follow these two souls through their process of purification.

However, Veronica's participation in the purgatorial condition exceeds a mere sense of pity or concern. On November 26, 1700, Veronica realizes that, starting from that day, the divinity wants her to feel what the souls endure in purgatory (3:778-79). In other words, in order to be beneficial to the souls who visit her for help, the mystic's suffering will have to perform an act of substitution.²¹ From now on, her torments will begin and end according to a specific soul's necessity.²² As a consequence, her journal will register the

²¹ On this subject, see Dalledonne. It is evident that in this essay I refer to Lévinas's concept of substitution ("Ethics and the Face" 194-219).

²² It would be impossible to report every case of purgatorial substitution. I will limit myself to a few examples. In 1701, she visits a sister who had gone insane (2:921). When this sister dies, Veronica witnesses her fight with numerous devils who would like to drag her down with them. To save this sister's soul, Veronica accepts the pains she will suffer in purgatory (2:923). In 1718, during a mass, Veronica is told that she will have to suffer for sister Ottavia, a nun in Mercatello, who had died a few days before (3:1222). In 1722,

constantly renewed beginning of her pain in the name of the other. The story of the other will be inscribed in her physical disquiet and will be narrated in the pages of her journal. In the November entry of 1714, Veronica goes so far as to state: “*Laus Deo. Scrivo dal purgatorio*” (3:857).

To suffer on behalf of the other is an act of temporal exchange. By living the end of the other, i.e., what the other experiences after her conclusion, the mystic succeeds in “foreliving” her own forthcoming end. In other words, if the other has succumbed to the laws of a narration that posits crime (and thus its punishment) as a beginning before any possible beginning, Veronica has been granted the grace to reverse this narrative structure. Like Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi, Veronica Giuliani both visits purgatory and “feels” the purgatorial condition in her existence.²³ This essential narrative revision manifests itself through the suffering the two visionaries have been willing to undergo to rescue the other.

It is important to keep in mind that the experience of purgatory is a grace, a gift of suffering that comes to reside in the mystic’s heart. I have said that Veronica’s journal could be read as a book of baroque emblems, according to the so-called emblems of the heart. I have also mentioned the fact that the organ “heart” and its emblematic and contemplative visualization are two facets of the same mystical experience; for instance, the heart bleeds when the image of the heart is pierced by Christ’s sword. The emblem “heart” makes itself visible through the organ “heart.” What is of special interest is that Veronica’s emblems of the heart progressively become more and more abstract and elementary in their figurative elements. After her first journeys to purgatory and thus after the reversal of her existence’s narrative structure (the “foreliving” of her end), in her emblematic raptures the mystic sees the divinity inscribe three capital letters in her heart, first V. F. O., to which God will later add M. and I.²⁴ The basic distinction between the first set of three letters and the second of two lies in that, while the first letters speak of the three essential qualities the mystic must foster in her heart (*Volontà, Fedeltà, Obbedienza*), the last two correspond to *Mary* and *Jesus* (*Jesus*), the “letters” completing the first three’s workings in Veronica’s heart.

Although the mystic often feels that all five letters “move” in her heart as a response to a divine enlightenment, it is apparent that the O. embodies a particularly relevant meaning within her spirituality.²⁵ On August 8, 1712, *Mary*

Veronica helps a nun from the convent of Sain Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi to move from purgatory to heaven (4:590). I analyze this problem of mystical substitution in my forthcoming book *Satan’s Rhetoric*.

²³ Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi recounts the same experience in *Probatione*.

²⁴ In a footnote to the entry of October 4, 1722, the modern editor explains the five letters (4:630).

²⁵ See especially 3:1147; 3:1186; 3:1195; 3:1206; 3:1295-1302; 4:639.

orders the mystic “to obey” to V., F., and O., but she also stresses that the O. is where Veronica must stay: “Ti voglio in questo O” (“I want you in this O,” 3:593). A few weeks later, Jesus and Mary again confirm their request concerning the V., F., and O., “holding [the mystic] in the O” (3:604). Again in September 1712, Mary hugs Veronica when the mystic enter[s] the O.²⁶ Mary repeats: “Qui ti voglio.” In 1718, Veronica reiterates that “[L]e pene mi davano vita, mi confermavano nel V., F. ed O., specie nell’ O. che è la mia vita” (4:5).

Veronica distinguishes between the O. she sees as a figure of an emblematic rapture (the O. at the center of the image of the heart) and the O. she feels as a “sign” (“un segno”) moving within her physical heart.²⁷ Veronica’s confessor himself at times realizes that something inside of her body is restless. “Che cosa si è mosso?”, her confessor asks her in 1723 after she had taken communion. The O. did, Veronica replies (4:665). In the above quotation from 1718, Veronica makes it clear that the O. moves as a reflection of pain. If the O. is at the center of her heart, suffering is at the center of the O. and makes both the O. and her heart move. The active response of the O. also, and most importantly, signifies that the mystic must obey a request for substitution. When the O. moves in the heart, she is ready to take up the purgatory of the other. On January 4, 1722, knowing that Veronica’s O. has just moved, her confessor asks her to free a given soul from her purgatorial condition (4:557).

The O. is an empty circle manifesting an act of abandonment similar to Johannes Tauler’s concept of *Gelassenheit*. For Veronica Giuliani, at the center of the heart lies a void, a circular nothingness that exists as suffering. The O. is the essential wound, the opening to the divinity’s love as an unfathomable suffering. The end of the other *begins* when the mystic sees/enters her O. The O. announces that the end of the other is approaching. However, as a circle embracing a chasm, the O. reveals to the mystic living the purgatory/end of the other that her act of substitution will lead to a renewed beginning for both parts of this mystical transaction. As the soul is annihilated in God’s love, the mystic is granted the vision of what I called the beginning preceding any possible beginning. Indeed, on December 27, 1715, writing on a vision concerning “la comunicazione sopra la creazione dell’anima,” Veronica states that God had wanted “to renew” the creation of her soul (3:980-81). In other words, God wanted to lead her back to the origin of her identity before she had been conceived in her mother’s bosom. The mystic sees her soul swimming in the sea of divine love.²⁸ Like breezes or tides rippling the surface of the sea (“flussi e riflussi del suo amore”), God comes to the soul as a progressive enlightenment, which is in fact a moving backwards toward the place from which she had

²⁶ 3:610: “Quando fui nell’O. mi diede un caro abbraccio.”

²⁷ She explains this difference in the entry for May 6, 1718 (3:1289).

²⁸ “Pareva che la medesima, stando in quel mare di amore che Iddio le comunicava, vi nuotasse a guisa del pesce che nuota nel mare” (3:981).

departed in the moment of her conception. The soul understands that the O. placed in her heart is the mirror in which God reflects upon himself, that the end of a soul in pain is the retracing of an original and unknown beginning, a forgotten and silent wound, which opens and bleeds at the center of a void, an empty circle, an O.

The University of Chicago

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III.
BEGINNINGS & ENDINGS
IN
MODERN & POSTMODERN LITERATURE

**“That in Giving Me Life, You Still Remain Alive”:
Fetal Beginnings & Maternal Endings at Two Centuries’ Ends**

BEGINNING AND/AS ENDING

High and Low Culture at Our Century’s End

Is one’s beginning located in another’s end? Does someone’s birth imply someone else’s death? And more specifically, is the mother destroyed by the act of parturition — by that parting, pulling asunder, breaking up that takes place when one body becomes two? In the essay/lyrical meditation from which I took the first part of my title, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” (1979), Luce Irigaray laments the destruction of the mother, the end of maternal personhood, that goes along with the daughter’s birth. What she deplores is the mother’s metaphorical death, or ending, for at this century’s end, unlike at the end of the last, birth in the Western world no longer implies the very real prospect of physical death. So it is not with death that I will deal in what follows. But in a very real sense, becoming a mother still implies the death of one’s former self. This ending, necessary for another’s beginning, is often represented in literary, scientific, and other texts as deformity, as the end of one’s beauty; the change of shape that goes along with pregnancy and motherhood thus comes to stand for the existential transformation of one’s very self.

It is a fact of life (or is it?) that women lose shapeliness and desirability with age, and I find myself musing about the cultural and perhaps even physiological connection between the temporary “deformity” of pregnancy and the more lasting “deformity” with which motherhood is associated. What cultural pressures define maternal shapes as shapeless, the mother’s form-ing as de-forming? And on the other hand, where and how can we read the massive weight gain of pregnancy as appealing in an age that values thinness as the paragon of beauty? Is the pregnant body attractive or grotesque? Or, to use the now pervasive medical vocabulary, is this body healthy or sick, normal or pathological? This question haunts pregnant women today, at a time when aesthetic canons would prescribe almost-anorexic thinness. In this respect, the authors of *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*, probably the most popular pregnancy advice manual in the United States today, are kind and optimistic: “in the eyes of many beholders, a pregnant woman isn’t just beautiful inside but outside as well. Many women and their husbands consider the rounded pregnant

reflection to be the most lovely — and sensuous — of feminine shapes” (160). Not just pregnant women and their husbands feel this way if it is true that, as Yvonne Knibiehler writes, in the nineteenth century “pregnant prostitutes were particularly sought after by the customers of brothels” (332). But then, is the attractiveness of the maternal shape equivalent to a perversion?

Throughout these pages, I assume the body to be both a biological and a cultural entity, a signifier that is both corporeal and linguistic. As Susan Rubin Suleiman has written, “the cultural significance of the female body is not only (not even first and foremost) that of a flesh-and-blood entity, but that of a *symbolic construct*” (2). This double role of the body is especially evident in the case of the gestating woman, whose change of bodily shape also entails a change of meaning: like the pregnant belly, the signifier of pregnancy (be it literary or scientific) must swell in order to accommodate otherness and change. Significantly, the Italian dictionary definition of the verb “deformare” is dual (literal and figurative), and underlines the epistemological link between language and physical shape, between semantics and morphology: “1. Alterare nella forma . . . 2. fig. Alterare nel significato . . .”(Zingarelli 476). The pregnant shape undergoes an alteration that is both bodily and linguistic. Aesthetic distaste, if not repugnance and even horror, is a palpable effect of such alteration: from object of desire to reproductive apparatus, from shapely to shapeless, the pregnant woman in the texts I consider in these pages is repeatedly constructed as deformed, disfigured, at times even disgusting. The tensions and contradictions of the pregnant experience, the bodily and linguistic splitting proceeding from gestation, become especially visible if we allow a dialogue to take place between the literary texts of several turn-of-the-century women writers and scientific treatises of that time that would constitute themselves as matrices of motherhood, thus producing, as well as regulating, a proliferation of reproductive stories. In reading these treatises, we should keep in mind what Jacqueline Urla and Jennifer Terry describe as a “now almost commonplace axiom” in feminist and cultural studies of science, namely, that “the modern life sciences and medicine — and, indeed, popular perceptions to which they give rise — have not merely observed and reported on bodies; they *construct* bodies through particular investigatory techniques and culturally lodged research goals” (3).

So in these pages I oscillate between more than one beginning, multiple endings. Formally, my own essay has a beginning and an ending, which I playfully multiply, *à la* Calvino, so as to mirror in form the subject I have chosen. Temporally, the temptation to compare my area of expertise, the end of the nineteenth century, with the end of our own century was too strong to resist — and why resist it? I am about to move, then, from the end of the nineteenth century, to the beginning of the twentieth, to the ending of our own century, to a later beginning of the same. Existentially, the contrast and continuity of beginnings and endings point to the making and the unmaking of a female body,

and by contiguity of the female self, that finds its end in another's beginning.

But let me not give away the ending: this is just the beginning.

ENDING I

Il bacio d'una morta (1886)

At the end of nineteenth-century Italy, the looks of the pregnant woman are trapped in a cultural double-bind. If images of deformity and contamination are prevalent, so is a certain idealization — rooted in both the bourgeois cult of the angel of the household and in the Catholic veneration of the Madonna as bearer of the Word. As Clarissa Atkinson notes, "interactions between the history of Christianity and the history of motherhood have been intense and complicated" (5). This is especially true in a culture such as the Italian one, so permeated with both Catholicism and *mammismo*. In the germane words of Andrea Henderson, "the simultaneous spiritualization and corporealization of the middle class woman during the [nineteenth] century reflect the pressure of the middle class to distance itself from its modes of production (which it does by making its ideal woman 'aristocratically' spiritual, angelic) while restricting the power granted to women (through the common focus on the body in representations of women and members of the working class)" (109). Thus, in the Italian popular imagination of the nineteenth century (bourgeois and Catholic), the pregnant woman presumably acquires a supernatural beauty arising from her (pro)creative role, and her implicit association with Mary, mother *and* virgin. (Not coincidentally, perhaps, the dogmas concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary's beginning and ending have been proclaimed in 1854 — her Immaculate Conception — and in 1950—her Bodily Assumption into heaven.)

In *Il bacio d'una morta*, widely considered to be her masterpiece and an *antelitteram* mystery novel (endowed with an extraordinarily complicated plot), the prolific popular novelist Carolina Invernizio (1851-1916) depicts the beautiful protagonist's advanced pregnancy as conferring upon her a heightened attractiveness, described as ideal and angelic and thus pulled asunder from its bodily support: "La gravidanza di Clara era quasi al termine ed a misura che la giovine donna stava per diventare madre, la sua bellezza si faceva sempre più angelica, ideale" (158). No reference is made to other, less ethereal physical effects of advanced pregnancy — large belly, swollen extremities, increased fatigue, breathing difficulties, blotchy complexion, to name just a few. These signs instead figure prominently in the work of many women writers who were Invernizio's contemporaries, but who did not conform to the conservative structure of the *feuilleton* (whose essential function, critics remind us, is to

comfort and not to unsettle in any way the reader).¹ Thus, only an ethereal swoon, “una specie di svenimento” (130), discreetly alerts Clara’s husband to what is later modestly referred to as her “stato” (131; 136-37), the euphemism for pregnancy used throughout Invernizio’s *oeuvre*. However, when pregnancy takes place outside of marriage — a frequent occurrence in Invernizio’s work, and one usually brought about by the actions of deceptive and abusive men — things are different. The pregnant protagonist of the short story “La confessione d’una suicida,” pregnant by a man who abandoned her after their only sexual encounter (her first, of course), experiences an aesthetic demise that mirrors her moral one: “Intanto fra l’angoscia, il timore, la vergogna, la mia salute si era alterata, le guance avevano perduto il loro colore, un nero cerchio mi circondava gli occhi, che brillavano di uno splendore febbrile” (*Il delitto di una madre* 175).

Carolina Invernizio’s reproduction of pregnancy and motherhood in *Il bacio d’una morta* contrasts sharply with that of some of her more illustrious contemporaries, such as Neera, Ada Negri, and Grazia Deledda, insofar as it replicates the romantic stereotype of the pregnant woman as beautiful, delicate, content with a “state” that is seen to transcend the limitations of the flesh. Clara is Invernizio’s exemplary mother-to-be, a type that unfailingly, indeed perfectly (miraculously?) conforms to what turn-of-the-century society expects of her, leading a critic to describe her as “the Superwoman of Patriarchy” (Kroha 129). But, we may ask, is it only a coincidence that Clara’s husband falls in love (or better yet in lust) with the evil and beautiful Nara just towards the end of Clara’s pregnancy, a time of physical change (an alteration in shape, an alteration in meaning) as well as, in past times, of sexual interdiction? The connection remains unspoken in *Il bacio di una morta*, in the attempt perhaps to shield the reader from the tensions inherent in the reproduction of pregnancy and maternity, tensions that are at once literary, psychological, cultural, and that ultimately may arise from the difficulty of conceiving the experience of having an other inside one’s body, within one’s self. But the connection is made, and it is yet another way in which Invernizio’s tale deviates from the comfortable pastime which the *feuilleton* is meant to provide for its readers.

L’innocente (1892)

Gabriele D’Annunzio’s (1863-1938) novel *L’innocente* contains what can certainly be classified as one of the most misogynous perspectives on the pregnant body. In this novel, the horror caused by the changes in his wife Giuliana’s shape is doubled by the hatred the protagonist, Tullio Hermil, feels

¹ Although this is not the place to get into this question, feminist critic Elisabetta Rasy persuasively claims that sentimental novels discuss, in a culturally low language, the issue of women’s condition (97).

towards her (though not his) unborn child. As soon as he learns of his wife's adulterous pregnancy, Tullio begins to imagine her as being "difformata da un ventre enorme" (190). Although his mother describes her daughter-in-law's physical growth in positive terms as "un progresso" (284), Tullio only sees in his wife's bodily expansion a pathology, "una infermità mostruosa," "la parte difformata dal male incurabile" (262), "la difformità inferiore ignominiosa," "la sua ombra deforme" (272), a figure that "si difformava come quella d'una idropica" (265). His repulsed gaze keeps falling on her "ventre gonfio, l'effetto dell'escrezione di un altro maschio" (269). Tullio, in many ways an emblem of decadent estheticism, sees Giuliana's very reproductive ability, her fertility (she conceived a child after one extra-marital encounter), as a sign of inferiority, an animalistic prerogative of the lower-class "femmine calde" (11). Possessiveness towards his wife (though on one level Tullio claims to forgive her one indiscretion, given his own numerous ones), and above all towards his name, which Giuliana's son would inevitably usurp in becoming his heir (Tullio and Giuliana have two daughters but no son together), leads to fear. This fear, in turn, adopts a pseudo-scientific medical language of pathology ("infermità," "male incurabile," "idropica") in order to construct the adulterous pregnant woman as diseased and therefore as doubly repulsive.

Indicative of the inextricable conjunction of scientific and literary discourses, D'Annunzio's descriptions reflect and refract the problematic cultural reproduction of the pregnant body, an issue that was not to remain confined to decadentistic fantasies. Almost three decades after *L'innocente*, for example, the changed looks of the protagonist of Maria Messina's *Alla deriva* (1920), a novel to which I return below, still make her seem "ammalata" (131); and yet a rebellion against such a pathologizing view is very much a part of the discourse surrounding pregnancy and childbirth today. Nevertheless, because of the pervasiveness of the medical paradigm in our daily perception, the beautiful is seen as healthy, the ugly as unhealthy; and this belief is true of popular science and aesthetics today even more so than a century ago. In terms of a possible medical aesthetics of pregnancy, two examples of contemporary rehabilitations should suffice. The authors of *What to Expect When You're Expecting* state that "the concept of pregnancy as an illness, and of the pregnant woman as an invalid . . . is as dated as general anesthesia in routine deliveries" (189-90). Similarly, in a fairly recent issue of the popular Italian magazine for new and expectant parents, *Io e il mio bambino* (July 1996), we read that "La gravidanza non è una malattia" (Piazza 94). But the irony, of course, is that both texts burst with all sorts of medical advice and lifestyle norms for pregnant women. For as one of the numerous Italian misogynous proverbs claims, "La vita delle donne è una lunga malattia" (*Proverbi delle donne*, no page number).

La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale (1893)

A focus on physiology, on the body as the privileged site of difference, is exemplary of Cesare Lombroso's (1835-1909) method and was shared by many other nineteenth-century texts, scientific as well as literary and political, as the above quotations from D'Annunzio's *L'innocente* attest. Since biologically prescriptive normality dictates woman's need to give birth, the avoidance of bodily mothering — pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding — is seen as a dangerously deviant behavior in Lombroso's notorious treatise *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, where those women who display such behavior are diagnosed as "pazze morali" and locked inside insane asylums. A scenario set forth as rather typical of these morally mad women portrays newly married wives who selfishly avoid pregnancy and/or breastfeeding: "per evitare la gravidanza dimostrano un'aperta ripugnanza verso il marito; se hanno figli . . . li consegnano a cuor leggero alla prima nutrice per non alterare la propria bellezza" (606). Lombroso never mentions the reasons why a woman might want to avoid pregnancy, and therefore sexual relations with her husband, given the unreliability of available methods of family planning at the time, such as, not unreasonably, fear of death and/or disfigurement. He assumes motherhood to be even more than a social duty: "la maternità è quasi addirittura un bisogno fisiologico che, non soddisfatto, diviene fonte di malessere fisico e psichico" (532).

Nevertheless, pathological practices occur on a regular basis among what Lombroso defines as savage cultures, where their perceived normality reinforces the distinction between the higher and the lower races, the latter being for Lombroso biologically closer to pathology. In his discussion of abortion and infanticide, Lombroso notes that the causes of these crimes are often "la cura della propria bellezza e la gelosia." The examples he adduces constitute, according to his logic, irrefutable proof: "Le donne degli Abiponi nel Paraguay, non potendo aver rapporti col marito durante l'allattamento del figlio, uccidono il bambino per non vedere il marito con altre donne . . . alcune Indiane dell'Orenoco, credendo che la bellezza si alteri dopo parti frequenti, abortiscono . . . in Persia le donne cercano di abortire quando vedono, durante la gravidanza, i loro mariti correr dietro ad altre donne. . . . Nella Nuova Caledonia, a Tahiti, in Hawaii le donne abortiscono perché la loro bellezza sfiorisca più tardi . . . Anche le signore Romane abortivano spesso per non imbruttire" (201). Lack of maternal feelings, which makes them choose their own beauty over the life of their child, associates born criminals and prostitutes with savages and members of uncivilized cultures. Yet nowhere does Lombroso even attempt an analysis of the cultural and/or social forces that motivate the behaviors which he so abhors and which he convincingly transforms into perversions of healthy womanhood. By incorporating social assumptions into a vocabulary of physiology, Lombroso

underlines woman's atavistic tendencies (and therefore her solid link to criminals, prostitutes, and savages). At the same time, he also reveals a major paradox in his argument, the same paradox that more generally informs nineteenth-century scientific discourse on woman. For if lack of maternal feelings is posited in woman as a sign of degeneracy, on the other hand it is precisely maternity that prevents woman from achieving man's higher stage of development. According to Lombroso, "la intelligenza in tutto il regno animale varia in ragione inversa della fecondità; c'è un antagonismo tra le funzioni di riproduzione e le intellettuali . . . Ora, essendo il lavoro della riproduzione in gran parte devoluto alla donna, per questa cagione biologica essa è rimasta indietro nello sviluppo intellettuale" (179).

Fisiologia della donna (1893)

Yvonne Knibiehler rightly notes that, in the nineteenth-century view of female beauty, "value was . . . ascribed to signs of the natural reproductive function: round hips, ample breasts, well-fed flesh" (326). In his 1880 *Fisiologia dell'amore*, Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) had written: "Se certe curve hanno su di noi tanto e così subitaneo potere, è perché in esse noi cerchiamo, senza volerlo e senza saperlo, la buona madre e la buona nutrice" (91). Mantegazza develops this theory in his two-volume *Fisiologia della donna*. For example, at the very beginning of the chapter on breastfeeding, we read: "Il seno della donna è una delle sue maggiori bellezze ed è bello, appunto, perché gli è assegnata una delle funzioni riproduttive, cioè l'allattamento" (2: 81). And earlier in that book the author had admitted that even "L'uomo più pudico e più casto, al primo guardare una donna, punta gli occhi sui tre punti, che la affermano femmina, cioè al seno, alla vita e ai fianchi" (1: 220). Most unambiguously, Mantegazza develops an aesthetic theory based on the outward signs of female fertility, a theory worth quoting at some length because directly related to the author's double-edged perception of the pregnant body:

Le linee fondamentali della bellezza femminile sono tutte genitali, ed io le distinguo in *superiori e inferiori*; più importanti le seconde che le prime, perché queste indicano la buona madre, quelle la buona nutrice. Senza un ampio bacino, senza fianchi tondeggianti e opimi, la donna non può nutrire per nove mesi il frutto dell'amore, non può partorire; senza un seno rigido e abbondante non potrà dare al proprio figlio il latte del suo sangue. *Partorire e allattare*: ecco le due funzioni della vita sessuale della donna; ed eccole segnate nelle linee fondamentali della sua estetica.

(1: 315)

The female body is, in this passage, clearly divided into two parts, upper and lower, breasts and hips, physically separated by the waist (thin or pregnant), and

functionally divided by a watershed event: childbirth.²

Mantegazza's work on woman, although amply reductive and misogynistic, lacks that continuous sense of revulsion at the female body (a body that is always about to become deformed, debased, savage) that one reads instead throughout Cesare Lombroso's *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*. And it is also rather clear that, while Mantegazza (along with most other scientists) "justifies" woman's weaknesses and extols her qualities in the name of her maternal "mission," Lombroso never dabbles in the rhetoric that exalts maternity and woman's sensitivity. Thus, we can usefully compare the above definition of woman's beauty given by Mantegazza with the following by Lombroso, whose theory of woman's innate frigidity ("essendo dunque la donna naturalmente e organicamente frigida," 57) is anatomically confirmed by her lack of veritable sexual organs:

Se gli organi del sesso sono nella donna più complicati e numerosi (vulva, utero, ovaia, ecc.), in gran parte però essi non sono tanto genitali quanto maternali, e tanto più lo sono gli organi sessuali secondari, le mammelle, i fianchi, il cuscinetto delle Ottentotte,³ ecc.; tutti questi apparati, a differenza dei maschili, servono non all'accoppiamento, ma alla nutrizione e sviluppo del nuovo essere. E le mammelle, i fianchi, ecc., sono solo per l'uomo più raffinato nel tatto e nell'occhio apparecchi erotici perché lo eccitano indirettamente al coito; ma in sé non hanno tale funzione, come si vede percorrendo la scala biologica; ed anche nei nostri selvaggi . . . in cui le mammelle, ridotte così spesso ad una flaccida e lunga borsa che si ripiega sulle spalle, se giovano al bambino, non eccitano certo l'amante.

(125)

In some ways Lombroso and Mantegazza agree: the outward signs of fertility and, more generally, of maternity determine woman's ability to attract a mate. But Lombroso denies the very existence of woman's sexuality by progressively transforming her genital organs into exclusively maternal ones: at first "in gran parte," then "tutti" her organs are intended for the "nutrizione e sviluppo" of her child, and not for sexual intercourse.⁴ The author is unwilling to concede any intrinsic beauty to the female body (even her breasts, icons of sexual

² The practical value of Mantegazza's aesthetic theory is at least debatable: "All combinations of breasts and nipples have the capacity to dispense milk — the quantity and quality of which are not in the least dependent on outward appearance," we read in *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (266).

³ Lombroso is here referring to one of his "favorite" body parts (judging from the frequency with which he mentions it), the steatopygous backside of South African women. On this subject, see Fausto-Sterling.

⁴ The assumption that every aspect of female sexuality should be explained in terms of reproductive functions is still prevalent in science and has been persuasively undermined by Lloyd.

attractiveness for Mantegazza, are made repulsive by nursing in Lombroso's view), as woman's puzzling organs are so "numerosi" as to require three etceteras, so strange as to deserve the adjective "complicati," and thus frightful because ultimately unknowable. But also, such strenuous denial of women's sexuality clearly reveals a preoccupation with a desire which, if separated from its maternal aim, would jeopardize the already tenuous bourgeois family order.

Woman's beauty is precariously suspended between two poles. The less fertile she looks, the uglier she is: "La donna e l'uomo hanno un tipo diverso di bellezza, e quando se ne allontanano per avvicinarsi a quello del sesso opposto, diventano brutti. La donna magra, col bacino più stretto delle spalle, senza seno, senza fianchi, coi capelli corti, colla barba, è un mostro" (*Fisiologia della donna* 1: 305). Yet, paradoxically, the more fertile she is, the uglier she is going to become (not to mention stupid: fertility is incompatible with intellectual functions). Because ironically, once the promise of these fertile signs of beauty is realized — that is, once the potentially pregnant and therefore beautiful body is actually pregnant and, later, maternal — the effect upon the viewer is one of revulsion rather than attractiveness. Mantegazza himself must admit that "La maternità e l'allattamento sciupano ben presto molte fra le più peregrine bellezze della donna" (1: 307), and woman's beauty can only last until she is thirty-five years old, "quando la maternità non viene a sfiorare i petali più belli delle sue rose" (1: 324). But then, Mantegazza quickly discovers a socially expedient solution to this dilemma, when he describes as "non ultima fra le sue glorie quella di offrire in olocausto sull'altare di madre il primo tesoro, che è per lei la bellezza" (1: 307). Maternal love is the emotional replacement for sexual attraction, the sacrifice of her beauty, the proof of woman's competence in mothering. Motherhood and sexual attractiveness, as is clearest in pregnancy, are incompatible. But if woman is truly woman only when she is sexually attractive, where does that leave the mother in this bipartite division of genders?

BEGINNING I

Elias Portolu (1900)

The repulsed descriptions of Giuliana in *L'innocente* are perhaps the misogynous zenith of a configuration of gestation as deforming that is employed in more complex, less reductive ways by many women writers of D'Annunzio's own time. The abject, dangerous deformity of the pregnant woman, whose body becomes a prolific ground for siting gender differences, can be used both as a representational tool that fits well into that abundant turn-of-the-century repertoire of woman's evils, and as a literary strategy that ambivalently, at times even self-destructively, attempts to deconstruct traditional notions of female roles. The latter mode, which is never ideologically disengaged from the former, is prevalent in the literature of Italian women writers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; some of their work extends well into the era of Fascism

with its mystique of motherhood, as is the case for the later writings of Ada Negri. This is a profoundly ambivalent strategy, which in borrowing from the iconography of misogyny, often ends up reinforcing it, so that its subversive potential is continuously tamed by a bowing gesture towards the status quo. (It is also important to remember that this double stance of turn-of-the-century women writers is not limited to the representation of pregnancy and maternity but rather informs their writings about women at large.)

The ambivalent threat that childbearing poses to female beauty, even as it may temporarily exalt it, is outlined in Grazia Deledda's (1871-1936) novel *Elias Portolu*, first published in installments in 1900 and then as a complete volume in 1903. The slovenly future of the eponymous protagonist's beautiful lover Maddalena (his brother's wife and thus, for a future priest, a doubly forbidden object of desire) is foreseen in ominous terms by Elias's old and wise uncle: "Ella avrà dei figli, si sciuperà . . . diventerà come tante altre paesane madri di famiglia, sporca di vesti, vecchia, sciatta, brutta," to which Elias combatively replies, indirectly confirming the connection between childbearing and ugliness: "ella non avrà mai dei figli, si conserverà a lungo bella e fresca" (92). Maddalena's continued beauty is predicated on her not becoming a mother. Her pregnancy at first brings about for Elias an increase of love and a decrease in guilt. Thus, when Maddalena first tells him that she is pregnant with his child, Elias feels "perdutamente innamorato . . . finalmente felice" (129), and it is only with this revelation that he overcomes his incipient "disgusto e disprezzo" towards Maddalena as "la tentazione" (128). Yet, one wonders whether the sexual abstinence due to her pregnancy ("si separarono, decisi di non rivedersi intimamente fino alla nascita del bimbo," 129), is proleptically related to the perception of the pregnant woman as ugly and deformed, as no longer herself, and therefore as no longer lovable. Although this abstinence is caused by both medical prescriptions and ancient taboos, Deledda's novel seems to imply such an aesthetic and existential connection. Once again, deformity is an alteration of shape and of meaning, and the woman's beginning as mother marks her ending as lover and, more generally, as her former self.

At first, Elias thinks of the pregnant Maddalena "diversamente . . . castamente" (130). Ultimately, however, her multiple changes (of role, of shape) diminish his love for her: "il ritmo del suo cuore si rallentava di giorno in giorno," the narrator notes, and Elias himself muses: "Forse perché è in questo stato; ma, dopo nato il bimbo, tornerò ad amarla come prima" (132). Elias's diminished desire quickly escalates into "un intenso disgusto" (132). So despite Elias's forceful statement in his earlier conversation with his uncle that his love was not contingent on the beauty of Maddalena's body — "io non l'amo per la sua bellezza! La amo perché . . . è lei! . . ." (93) — the uncle's prophecy is fulfilled well before their child is born: pregnancy changes Maddalena to the point that for Elias she is no longer her former self. From an anthropological perspective, Anthony Synnot remarks in fact that "the identity of body and self is

perhaps most clearly illustrated by body-change. Self-concepts change, often dramatically, at puberty, pregnancy, and menopause. Body changes change the self" (2). The narrator thus observes about Elias's feelings towards his pregnant lover, whose body is visibly different: "Gli pareva di non amarla più, tanto più che essa era diventata quasi deforme, gialla e gonfia in viso" (135). Swollen and yellow-faced is Maddalena, no longer herself, and therefore no longer lovable to Elias who would love her "perché . . . è lei! . . ."? The deformity brought about by pregnancy is double: it is a bodily disfiguration as well as a change in meaning. Maddalena is no longer a beautiful lover but rather an ugly mother. And this double deformity is the first force capable of stopping, if only temporarily, the transgressive passion that alone animates the drama of this novel and that, as is characteristic of Grazia Deledda's work, neither sacraments nor vows had been able to halt.

"Elia" (1904)

Elia, the protagonist of Ada Negri's (1870-1945) eponymous poem (published in the collection *Maternità*, 1904), is presented as having killed the child she was carrying. The poet explicitly attributes Elia's action (an abortion, though the word is never mentioned) to the transgressive desire to preserve her shapeliness and beauty: "Premerà dunque il greve / travaglio, il peso enorme, / le sue scultorie forme, / la sua beltà di neve? . . ." (*Poesie* 252). On the one hand, preferring to keep one's beauty over one's unborn child is seen as perhaps perverse and certainly self-destructive; significantly in fact, although Elia does not physically die, she is described as having "uccisa / se stessa nel suo figlio" (253). On the other hand, the threat of pregnancy and childbirth is also represented as a real risk, a frightful option, rather than the biological fulfillment of her womanly destiny. Childbearing, in the lines cited above, entails a "greve travaglio," and a "peso enorme," and the pregnant woman's flesh "spasimerà . . . dilaniata, oppressa / da l'immortal tortura" (253). This is the torture of childbirth: "immortal" both because life-giving and because it will continue, matrilineally, for as long as the human race exists. But this is also the verbal torture of the woman writer, for whom the subject of maternity is fraught with contradictions. In contrast with the idealized representation of motherhood as the royal road to the institution of bourgeois womanhood, Negri's writings (particularly her prose) depict and exalt maternity in transgressive ways: independent of the father figure, beyond legal or sacramental bonds, sensually rewarding.

Lombroso's unidimensional case studies are blind to any social causation. Ada Negri's texts, on the other hand, repeatedly point to the psychological and social tensions which condition, if not determine, her characters' behavior. But the double-bind of the mother's situation cannot be solved, and ironically, Elia and Augusta (the latter is a character I discuss below) must physically destroy

their child's life (and whether literally or metaphorically, their own as well) in order to preserve their bodies, the intactness of their beauty. And indeed a striking aspect of several pregnancy texts by turn-of-the-century women writers is the frequency with which the pregnant woman is described as being deformed, even grotesque, with descriptions which often border upon or even draw from the iconography of misogyny. Is the pregnant, maternal body beautiful or ugly, sexy or disgusting? The answers remain ambiguous, as women's texts are caught time and again between "semiotic" subversion and submission to the "symbolic" (in Kristeva's and Lacan's sense, respectively), feminist re-evaluation and misogynous revulsion. As Squier puts it, "like all images that have cultural prominence, reproductive images serve not so much to articulate a single ideological position, as to provide a site on which positions can be contested" ("Reproducing" 118).

ENDING II

Newsweek (1996)

It is significant that Paolo Mantegazza's aesthetic theory of sexual attractiveness has been recently confirmed "scientifically" by a study that made the cover of *Newsweek* not that long ago (June 3, 1996). The title of the article was eloquent: "The Biology of Beauty: What Science Has Discovered About Sex Appeal." Beauty, equated with sexual attractiveness, has allegedly been shown — through methods which we would readily identify as scientific, unlike, say, Mantegazza's and Lombroso's — to be directly related to the outward signs of reproductive ability. Prominent among these are facial and bodily symmetry (genetically associated with health and resilience), and above all, the ratio between women's waist and hips. The latter is the most important feature in sexual selection, the article claims, for it displays a surprising stability throughout cultures and times: plastic Barbie dolls and those obese fertility icons we see in museums, although so apparently opposite in terms of aesthetics, share similar waist-hips ratios (as also do, for example, Twiggy's anorexic shapes and Rubens' opulent venuses).

Like Cesare Lombroso, *Newsweek* journalist Geoffrey Cowley starts with analogies drawn from the animal world. On the one hand, the evidence drawn from animals points to a greater interest on the part of females in their partners' looks, for Cowley's examples are all three of females' selection of males: female penguins prefer chubby mates, jungle bird hens favor brightly ornamented jungle bird cocks, female scorpion flies choose suitors with well-matched wings. On the other hand, Cowley claims that the connections between beauty and reproductive ability are especially crucial in the case of female bodies, because women's attractiveness is more important for men's sexual selection of a mate: "Studies from around the world have found that while both sexes value appearance, men place more stock in it than women" (65). This is explained in terms of — surprise, surprise — reproductive ability, so very limited in a woman's lifespan though not in a man's. The article, however, shows no awareness of the

contradictions between the animal and the human world. On the contrary, the alleged continuity between the two provides yet another proof for the scientificity of the thesis.

Thus, images of female humans (and not of men or penguins) prevail in the illustrations that accompany this text: there are twenty-six such images, as opposed to six pictures of males. And the reported findings highlight the primacy of women's sexual attractiveness in the human world, when for example we read, "almost anything that interferes with fertility — obesity, malnutrition, menopause — changes a woman's shape," more important than her face because more visible from afar (Cowley 65). Just as Paolo Mantegazza had claimed and just as reductively, the claims of popular science seek to naturalize a new field (the science of aesthetics, a subset of that *scientia sexualis* so popular at the end of last century) by rewriting myth. One hundred years after Lombroso and Mantegazza, popular science amusingly (or perhaps I should say frighteningly) confirms their findings: most of the features mentioned by Paolo Mantegazza (excessive thinness, pelvis narrower than shoulders, no breasts, no hips, beard — the only exception, perhaps, being short hair) also differentiate men from women in terms of hormonal production. The woman Mantegazza describes is a "monster" because she exhibits the effects of androgens rather than estrogens, the latter being necessary for female fertility. Analogously, Cowley wittily notes, "the tiny jaw that men favor in women is essentially a monument to estrogen — and, obliquely, to fertility. No one claims that jaws reveal a woman's odds of getting pregnant. But like breasts, they imply that she could" (65).

Julia Kristeva (1975-1980)

The bodily and linguistic alteration of the pregnant shape that recurs in the maternity texts analyzed thus far finds a parallel in Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, at the center of her 1980 book, *Powers of Horror*. Like the pregnant body, the preoedipal abject (that which threatens identity) hovers at the limits between self and other, inside and outside, beginning and ending; both are figures of liminality, which blur identities even as they produce them. Indeed, the abject is associated with the repressed body of the mother: the child, that is, must abject the mother as container in order to gain independence from her. Thus abjection, founded in the violent but necessary separation of birth, expresses both a division and a merging, a beginning and an ending. The division between the subject and the mother, which ends the bodily connection, marks the merging between the subject and the social sphere, the beginning of social bonds.

The maternal body is the explicit protagonist of Kristeva's essays "Stabat Mater" (first published as "Hérétique de l'amour" in 1977), and "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" (1975); motherhood is also a secondary subject in "Women's Time" (1979). In all of these texts, as in the turn-of-the-century texts analyzed thus far, the pregnant body is a signifier that is split, contradictory, heterogeneous. Pregnancy, a polyvocal discourse in Italian

women's fiction, where it is a topos that figures identity as it breaks down and the crisis of the female subject, is comparably described in "Women's Time" as "the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject," as "this fundamental challenge to identity" (206). In "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," similarly, the maternal body is "the place of a splitting" (238), and in "Stabat Mater" the mother is "a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language — and it has always been so" (254). Mothers exemplify the subject's position at the crossroads, at the junction of pain and pleasure, absence and presence, identity and difference, beginning and ending. Indeed, paradox and contradiction may line the only understandable and understanding path to the description of an experience that is not only other but that incarnates the very experience of otherness. "Pregnancy," as a theorist influenced by Kristeva, Iris Marion Young, argues (and a similar argument may be made more generally about bodily maternity, or the continuum of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding), "reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves" (46). In psychoanalytic terms, the subject is split, divided, separated, and this experience goes hand in hand with the dissolution of language.

Allegorized in turn-of-the-century pregnancy texts as bodily deformity, and perceived by the text as the abject maternal body, the dissolution of the self is represented as an alteration, as an experience of alterity and therefore of the difference which traverses the subject, the difference which is intrinsic to identity itself. Like pregnancy in the literary texts analyzed earlier, maternity is a figure of liminality, which functions, in Kristeva's discourse, for example, to point to that alterity that, by residing so conspicuously within the self, threatens (productively) the very notion of a unified subject. The subject-in-process is, I would claim, exemplified by the pregnant body in texts such as Negri's, Deledda's, and Messina's, where, furthermore, the configuration of the mother as "threshold of nature and culture" ("Stabat Mater," "Women's Time") points to multiple contradictions between, for example, transgressive pleasure and social conservatism, difference and identity, semiotic and symbolic. These apparent contradictions or dichotomies are in fact deconstructed by the mother's position at the threshold. Like the maternal body in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," these maternity narratives are "the place of a splitting" in terms of character, story, reader, and ideology.

BEGINNING II

Una giovinezza del secolo XIX (1919)

The paradox of pregnancy is repeatedly and painfully staged in the works of Neera, *nom de plume* of Anna Radius Zuccari (1846-1918). In the novel *Crevalcore* (1907), the protagonist's mother is "sfibrata dalle continue gravidanze" (82). Likewise, the eponymous protagonist's mother in *Teresa* (1886) is "pallida sempre, disfatta dalla sua recente maternità" (52), verbs

reminiscent of Kristeva's elaborations: the subject is torn apart, undone. In *L'indomani* (1890) the doctor's prolific wife is "una donnina né bella né brutta, col petto liscio, e il ventre sporgente, un profilo da madonnina invecchiata troppo presto" (35), and her husband cheats on her. The same is true of another doctor's wife (or is it the same character?) in Neera's *Il romanzo della fortuna*. Having borne five children in six years of marriage, and needing to economize at home in order to support her offspring, this anonymous woman "soleva in casa vestire assai dimessa con certe casacche molto idonee a nascondere il petto rientrante e l'addome sporgente delle donne logorate nella eccessiva maternità" (155). Far from exalting woman as Neera claims in her essays (see for example those collected in the volume *Le idee di una donna*), pregnancy and childbirth prematurely age woman, when they do not tear her apart and undo her. This disparity between Neera's theories of pregnancy and motherhood, positive and downright exalting, and the fate to which pregnancy and motherhood condemn so many of her characters can be read as an incarnation, if not *the* incarnation, of the disparity between Neera's self-professed antifeminism and the feminist tone which pervades her fiction.

In the autobiographical *Una giovinezza del secolo XIX* (published posthumously in 1919), Neera portrays her own mother, who dies, like Neera's grandmother, following the birth of her sixth child (64), with comparable terms of physical and psychical undoing. She is "la mamma già delicata, resa sempre più debole dalle frequenti gravidanze, ridotta a quello stato di nervosismo e di irascibilità . . . che ben conoscono le donne gracili quando hanno assolto il compito di conservatrici della specie in misura superiore alle loro forze" (20-21). It is worth noting that about 40% of Italian women born between 1851 and 1871 had seven or more children, and the average number of children women bore at that time was five. It is with women born between 1871 and 1886, the generation of Negri, Deledda, and Messina, that fertility begins to decline: "only" 25% have seven or more children (De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi* 353). Still the Darwinian periphrasis ("il compito di conservatrici della specie") cleverly allows Neera to underline woman's maternal mission and duty even as she notes its deleterious effects on woman's physical and psychological constitution: it is clear that her mother's predicament is not a personal problem but a social ill.

The fact that in this same book Queen Margherita di Savoia should become beautiful only with the experience of motherhood ("la maternità le portò anche il dono della bellezza," 128) reinforces in fact the exceptionality of the connection between a desirable beauty and a pathologizing maternity. A similar exceptionality may be found in the current emphasis on actresses and models whose pregnancy and breastfeeding have resulted in a sexier body: the cover of a May 1997 *People* magazine shows, for instance, Demi Moore and Madonna as two icons of such "ma-ma-ma-vooom." Hence the utter lack of realism, unusual for Neera's writings on this subject, characterizing the portrayal of the queen's maternal charm, described as "una bellezza tutta sua che sfuggiva all'analisi,

bellezza di luci e di colori come una fiamma accesa improvvisamente dietro la trasparenza di una immagine" (128). If a queen may derive an ethereal beauty from the experience of maternity, the fate of normal women is one of frailness and downright undoing.

Alla deriva (1920)

Although not openly feminist, the Sicilian writer Maria Messina (1887-1944) repeatedly denounces society's harsh treatment of women in her late-veristic works. The difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth figure prominently in Messina's writings, although the author herself never married or had children. In *La casa nel vicolo* (1921), for example, the second pregnancy of one of the main characters is identified with suffering, with the condition of married women in general and with paralyzing unsightliness: "Antonietta ricominciò a soffrire, come quando doveva nascere Alessio . . . Del resto, è questa la vita di tutte le spose. . . . Ci sarebbe voluta la serva per portare il bambino che non camminava ancora, una mantiglia nera per Antonietta che non poteva andare in mostra in quello stato" (40). Because of the expenses involved in these last two necessities, Antonietta's husband decides that she will not leave the house for the entire duration of the pregnancy. Problem solved.

Simonetta, the protagonist of the novel *Alla deriva*, is, like Grazia Deledda's Maddalena and Gabriele D'Annunzio's Giuliana, made ugly by the sickly coloring of pregnancy. Unlike Maddalena and Giuliana, however, Simonetta is pregnant with the son of a loving husband. But Marcello does not want children because of his continuous (even obsessive) economic worries, which eventually lead him to alienate himself from his wife. When Marcello's mother points out to him that children come from God and must be accepted with joy, Marcello lightheartedly replies: "Ma io non l'ò mica voluta per questo la mia Simonetta!" (117), an apparently liberating and emancipatory remark. According to Marcello, Simonetta is more than a reproducer. But is she in reality, for him, "less" than a reproducer? For when Marcello learns of Simonetta's pregnancy he is disappointed that his wife should share the bourgeois family ideal that his artistic soul holds in contempt (123). Antagonistically, he calls the child "*l'altro*" (123, 129), a jealous definition reminiscent of D'Annunzio's Tullio Hermil.

A few pages later in *Alla deriva*, we encounter a description of the pregnant body that subtly juxtaposes a female voice (the narrator's) and a male perspective (Marcello's), though there is no apparent clash between the two since both voices speak through a mediated free indirect discourse. While Marcello accords with the cultural paradigms expressed by the writings of Lombroso and Mantegazza, the narrator, in a gap that I believe figures resistance beneath a superficial complicity, proleptically grieves with and for Simonetta's

body.⁵ When the narrator notes, with some ambivalence, "Pareva che Simonetta fosse ammalata. Il colore delle guance prendeva una tinta scura e opaca, quasi livida, che la imbruttiva," the aesthetic commentary on the deforming effects of gestation is accompanied by an empathetic description concerning the physical and emotional difficulties Simonetta experienced with her pregnancy, what we would today refer to as fatigue, mood swings, and mild depression, significantly using a medical vocabulary: "Trascurava di fare le solite visite, e se usciva si stancava dopo dieci passi. Inoltre pareva aver perduto per sempre la sua serenità. Passava le giornate in ozio e gli occhi le si riempivano di lacrime per i motivi più futili" (131). This list is then followed by Marcello's perspective, which stops instead at his wife's loss of beauty and defensively interprets Simonetta's pregnancy difficulties as a personal affront: "Marcello cominciò a sentirsi offeso dall'atteggiamento ora rassegnato ora malinconico di sua moglie. Ella si richiudeva in se stessa, come una vittima, senza rendersi conto degli sforzi fatti per darle la felicità. O più tosto . . . sì, sì, era imbruttita dallo stato fisico in cui si trovava per la prima volta. Ecco le inevitabili conseguenze del matrimonio. Col tempo avrebbe somigliato a tutte le mogli del mondo!" (131).

While the narrator's tone and vocabulary avoid both pathologization and misogyny, Marcello's is harshly accusing. Being pregnant, becoming a mother, is identified in this bivocal paragraph as woman's lot: for the narrator's empathetic voice, a predicament epitomized by the difficulties of pregnancy; for the husband, a homogenizing experience, which debasingly associates his wife to all the women in the world, making her, like them, unattractive and worthy of the contempt of the superior, artistic being (though the narrator's sympathy for him tempers Marcello's representation as a self-centered and somewhat misogynistic snob). Most important, it is through Marcello's generalization that Simonetta's private experience is turned into a social ill, as her physical disfigurement anamorphoses the cultural perception of the pregnant woman as the mask of female ugliness. Not surprisingly, Simonetta's difficult pregnancy results in a complicated premature delivery, which in turn leads to her death — both a surrender to and an indictment of the social condition and cultural representation of women and/as mothers.⁶

Stella mattutina (1926)

If, as I discussed elsewhere (Mazzoni 1997), the mother's thoughts and behavior

⁵ Maria Di Giovanna notes that in the works of Maria Messina the difference between the author's and the narrator's perspective is minimal ("La testimone indignata," 339).

⁶ Motherhood and death are again linked by Messina in the novel *L'amore negato* (1928), in which the mother of the two women protagonists has, between her two daughters, "un figliolo dopo l'altro. Figlioli che morivano piccoli, di un anno, di due anni, come frutti che vanno a male" (42).

are held responsible for her child's deformity through the theory of maternal impressions, the reverse is more commonly the case, although the pregnancy itself (hence the peculiar functioning of the female body) and not the child is held responsible for the woman's deformity. Donna Francesca's daughter, Augusta (the protagonist of "Storia di Donna Augusta," contained in Ada Negri's autobiographical novel *Stella mattutina*), inherits her mother's beauty (as well as her lack of brains), and dies in part because she wants to preserve such beauty in spite of her illicit pregnancy. Thus, Augusta orders her maid to tighten her gown around her expanding waist to the point of cutting off the circulation, and after an evening of dancing Augusta collapses. When the gown is cut off, for untying its hooks had become impossible, "il povero ventre torturato, tumefatto, ne balzò fuori, dilatandosi, nudo come una confessione" (*Prose* 266). The pregnant body becomes an anthropomorphized speaking body, which finally "confesses" its deformed truth only when the woman is dying and her body almost a corpse.

In contrast (but at times also disturbingly in collusion) with the morbid, even abject reproduction of the maternal body in the writings of Gabriele D'annunzio as well as Paolo Mantegazza and Cesare Lombroso, the often ambiguous figurations of Neera, Grazia Deledda, and Maria Messina vacillate between sympathy for the condition of the pregnant woman and distaste for her altered looks, with a striking ambivalence that must constitute a symptomatic point of entry into the analysis of these women's texts. Thus also Ada Negri's writings are permeated with a complex, but ultimately empowering representation of the changes incurred by the maternal body before and after childbirth. The pregnant body is repeatedly described by Negri as heavy, and sympathetically perceived as the cause of physical hardships (breathing difficulties and fatigue, for instance), which the woman bears with an often admirable courage (*Prose* 123, 358, 369). Yet its change of form, although still a de-formity of sorts, does not necessarily imply disgust or even loss of erotic attractiveness. At times the very opposite is precisely the case, although Donna Augusta and Eliana, as we have seen, do not take the risk. In *Stella mattutina*, for example, the protagonist Dinin experiences contradictory feelings and reactions concerning the body of her pregnant sister-in-law: "Nell'intimo, le ripugna. Quanto è bella, se pur resa deforme dal suo stato! La sente d'un'altra razza: la razza delle donne dalla carne felice, che fan voltare gli uomini per via e li attirano nel solco del loro odore" (*Prose* 256). Even as she secretly feels repugnance for her young sister-in-law Daria, made "deformed" by her pregnancy, Dinin admires her beauty which, in contrast with the texts examined thus far, does not appear to be diminished by her change of shape. (Could it be that what "hysterically" disgusts Dinin is not Daria's pregnancy but rather her sexual attractiveness?) Indeed, Daria's pregnancy (she got pregnant before marriage) testifies to her beauty and erotic appeal, and her pregnant body is eloquently described as her "happy flesh" which makes heads turn and exudes an appealing "scent of a woman."

Pregnancy is the threshold between nature and culture, as Julia Kristeva and others remind us.⁷ If the bodily changes pregnancy brings about could conceivably be seen as "only" natural, their effects and interpretations, like the pregnant body itself, are practices obviously swaddled within our cultural discourses. In particular, as Susan Squier has argued in a different context, these writings "dramatized the gendered construction of the modern scientific project and the contrasting and complementary representations of reproduction articulated by literature and science" (*Babies in Bottles* 23). Daria's shape, her flesh, her smell would fade away from our very understanding if we imagined them within an impossible cultural vacuum. Dinin, like the pregnant women and their husbands evoked by the authors of *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, finds the pregnant shape (or at least Daria's pregnant shape), to be "beautiful, lovely, sensuous." Paolo Mantegazza and Cesare Lombroso clearly do not, though one of the effects of their silencing of the female body is, as Mary Poovey has convincingly argued about British doctors, "an excess of meanings, and the contradictions that emerge within this excess undermine the authority that medical men both claim and need" (152).

AN ENDING?

For writers such as Neera, Grazia Deledda, Maria Messina, and Ada Negri, to cite just the ones whose texts I have discussed in these pages, the literary reproduction of the pregnant shape is an occasion for staging the polyvocal imbrications of the female body — as sexual, as reproductive — within discourses that would flatten it into a socially expedient univocity. Hence the recurrence of paradox and contradiction in the texts I have just reflected on: male voices of female experiences; gestating wombs as selves and as others; pregnant bodies as beautiful and ugly; maternity as empowering and as self-destructive; the ending as beginning, the beginning as ending. This is an effective way for these writers to escape nineteenth-century essentialism concerning the nature of woman, to indict the dichotomy that would forever and impossibly divide the female body into reproductive *or* sexual, maternal *or* hysterical, deformed *or* desirable. And it is a literary practice that as we read allows us, impels us, even, to imagine bodily changes and related linguistic alterations as neither in need of discipline nor as deserving of destruction, but instead as demanding a dialogue concerning, for example, their beginnings and their endings. As deserving of that relation through which, according to philosopher, activist, and mystic Simone Weil, we create ourselves: that attitude of "attention" to others which lets them exist in their own right, as a beginning, rather than tries to dominate them and rush them to their ending. We become fully human by realizing the others' full humanity (*qua* beginning, *qua* ending)

⁷ Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual" (297); "Stabat Mater" (259); Pizzini 9.

and attentively reading and discerning them as such. "The spirit of justice and the spirit of truth," writes Weil poignantly, "is nothing else but a certain kind of attention" (333).

University of Vermont

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Writing for the Third Millennium: Gadda and the Unfinalizability of Life

Non è altro che questo, epigrafe funeraria, un nome. Conviene ai morti. A chi ha concluso [. . .] La vita non conclude. E non sa di nomi, la vita.

Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (223-24)

Perhaps the completely uneventful passing of the New Year 2000 should make us realize that the boundaries that we impose upon experience are but artificial constructs, fictions of beginnings and endings that we desperately seek in order to give a sense of origin and closure to our being in time and history. Yet, the acknowledgement that only a partial, limited understanding can be produced by our categories need not be read as symptomatic of cognitive weakness and epistemological failure. As Pirandello well says through the voice of the character of Vitangelo Moscarda, if the Name is a funerary epigraph, an inscription suitable only for that which has gone forever, the impossibility to Name is also a form of “truth,” a wisdom disclosing a vision of life as a space of endless possibilities and transformations.

Pirandello’s insight, read against the background of the fictional imposition of beginnings and endings, provides a starting point to assess the significance of Gadda’s narrative discourse in light of its real achievement. Gadda’s discourse, despite having been praised for its high degree of experimentalism by generations of critics, has traditionally been interpreted as the practice of an idealist, striving to order the complexity and temporality of experience but failing to do so because of the ever increasing complexity of his novelistic structures.¹ In this paper I intend to show that Gadda’s work is not symptomatic of a belated idealism, but challenges epistemological premises of a concordant

¹ This metaphysical interpretation was initiated by Giancarlo Roscioni who, in *La disarmonia prestabilita*, described Gadda’s writing as a Cartesian project of “Singula enumerare” in order to “Omnia circumspicere:” “Come i filosofi e gli scrittori che nel Cinquecento e nel Seicento avevano inseguito il mito dell’enciclopedia, Gadda è spinto dalla sua esigenza di descrivere e di definire verso una cultura che abbracci la totalità delle discipline e delle cognizioni” (63). Following Roscioni’s hermeneutic line, a number of critics have made analogous comments, and excellent samplings of this reception are available in the volumes edited by Ceccaroni and Patrizi. The few critics who have resisted Roscioni’s school of interpretation, and to whom I am much indebted, are Gianfranco Contini and Guido Guglielmi.

structure by articulating an understanding of experience as the unfinalizable space that remains untamable despite models of rhetorical intelligibility. The argument for this position begins with a discussion of *Racconto italiano di ignoto del novecento* and *Meditazione milanese*. While *Racconto* foregrounds the difficulty of translating experience into the finite structures available in the tradition of the classical novel, *Meditazione* seeks to give a philosophical underpinning to the notion of reality as a space of complexity and temporality irreducible to structures of opposition and finality. Subsequent sections of this essay describe how this philosophical conception engenders that discourse of paratactical accretion and open-ended inclusion that is one of the trade-marks of Gadda's style. Present as early as in *La meccanica*, but fully actualized in *La cognizione del dolore* and *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, this discourse forces the reader into an open-ended itinerary across beginnings, middles, and endings. As is well-known, the result is the anti-detective novel: a narrative that no longer consoles, but that forces us, as readers, to acknowledge the fictionality of paradigmatic form in relation to contingent reality.

If, however (as Bakhtin has suggested in regard to Dostoevski) the penultimate, non-absolute word is also a word of possibility for the world, Gadda's fictions suggest the openness and the potentiality inherent in our experience and in the symbolic forms that give it shape. Perhaps this is why Italo Calvino, in his last critical work, rightly included Gadda in the pantheon of writers for the next millennium.

Gadda's first attempt at a major creative endeavor dates from 1924. Responding to a 10,000-lire literary prize for a novel offered by the editor Mondadori, Gadda decided to write a story about the fall of a good character set against the background of a troubled, postwar Italian society:

Dal caos dello sfondo devono coagulare e formarsi alcune figure a cui sarà affidata la gestione della favola, del dramma, altre figure [. . .] a cui sarà affidata la coscienza del dramma e il suo commento filosofico (riallacciamento con l'universale, coro): potrò forse riserbarmi io questo commento-coscienza: (autore, coro). Carattere ed epoca del romanzo: Contemporaneità. [. . .] Topograficamente da svolgersi in Italia e Sud America, eventualmente e parzialmente in Francia.

(395)

As readers familiar with Gadda's bibliography well know, Gadda was never able to bring this narrative project to completion. Today all that remains of *Racconto* is a "Cahier d'études," comprising *studi*, or attempts at fictional composition, with a series of metafictional commentaries, or *note* (393), on the *studi* themselves. Despite its undeniable looseness, *Racconto* is a crucial work in the Gaddian corpus since it articulates with great clarity the difficulty that the author encountered with the forms available in the classical tradition of the novel. These are forms which depend on the assumption that narrative is a

model of coherence and intelligibility, allowing a self-identical subject to establish order and finality to the object in the mediating space of representation. For this reason, classical novelistic forms develop according to the stable perspective, or “point of view,” of the enunciative subject, and produce stable characterization and orderly, linear sequences of actions. A cursory reading of selected passages from *Racconto* testify to Gadda’s deep-seated incredulity towards these forms and the epistemological assumption upon which they rest. For example, in the second note, which immediately follows the promise of ordering the chaos of narrative material in the above-cited passage, Gadda admits to being unable to decide the perspective to be assumed in his story. His individuality, he comments, is pluralized into five voices to which correspond an equal number of worldviews:

Nota Cr 2. — (24 marzo 1924 — ore 16.30)

Tonalità generale del lavoro. È una grossa questione. Le maniere che mi sono più famigliari sono la (a) *logico-razionalistica*, paretiana, seria, celebrale - E la (b) *umoristico-ironica* [. . .] la (c) *umoristico seria manzoniana*. [. . .] Posseggo anche una quarta maniera (d) *enfatica tragica*, ‘meravigliosa 600’. [. . .] Finalmente posso elencare una quinta maniera (e), che chiamerò la maniera cretina, che è fresca, puerile, mitica omerica. [. . .]

(396)

In a subsequent passage, Gadda adds that he may actually have more than five voices and comments that if he were to describe them, he would need a very large painter’s palette: “non basterebbe nemmeno la mia propria tavolozza: ho il violetto e l’indaco, il bleu e il verde, ma mi mancano il cioccolato e l’arancione” (602).

Having thereby compromised the classical premise of a single, harmonious perspective, Gadda sets out to question the possibility of achieving unity of plot and character. Like Gadda’s kaleidoscopic subjectivity, characters cannot be defined according to the antithetical — and therefore unambiguous — attributes of “a, b, c” (464) but are open to permutation and change of roles. In Gadda’s words, characters are becoming “a e b” (464) and are revealing their nature as “omnipotenziali” (463), that is to say, capable of straddling a multiplicity of positions, including those of gender identity, as the following quotation suggests:

Noi intuiamo la donna quasi ‘sentendone’ i sentimenti. La donna ‘intuisce’ il maschio, credo quasi sentendone ‘i sentimenti e le passioni.’ Forse a noi appare di essere solamente maschi, ma in realtà, nei misteriosi fondi della natura, siamo semplicemente dei ‘polarizzati’ e ‘potenzialmente’ possiamo essere l’uno e l’altro. E di questa potenzialità, precedente il nostro sviluppo, ci siamo dimenticati.

(463)

This view of the self as “omnipotenziale” also bears upon issues of ethics, since characters, much like human beings, can situate themselves on the antithetical poles of evil and goodness at once: “possono tenere del bene e del male, di un sentimento e del contrario” (463). Given these considerations, it is perhaps inevitable that the unity and coherency of plot become an ideal beyond reach. More specifically, since an orderly, goal-oriented plot is a sequence of actions performed by characters endowed with definable or at least predictable qualities, such ostensive instability of being gives rise to a variety of contradictory events: “Ricordare l’andamento antitetico di tutti i motivi d’intreccio: non esagerare nei raccostamenti” (438). Several notes of *Racconto* reveal that this is precisely what occurred in the composition of the novel, which, from the initial narrative kernel of the fall of a good character set against the background of postwar Italy, expands to include romances, murders, Fascist intrigues, episodes of bourgeois life and more. The result, as an ironic meta-commentary puts it, is that of a narrative web of tangled, convoluted stories, “un romanzo psicopatico e caravaggesco” (411).

The representational impasse revealed in these theoretical notes and fictional fragments of *Racconto*, an impasse which Dante Isella in an introduction to the volume has described as “l’impossibilità del romanzo novecentesco di proporre ancora una volta [. . .] una rappresentazione globale, omnicomprendente della vita,” is also accompanied by sparse and yet very intriguing hypotheses of alternative models of fiction.² At one point, for example, Gadda notes that a tangled, complex model of representation would better translate the processes of transformations and combinations that make up the chaos of reality: “Che l’intreccio non sia di casi stiracchiati, ma risponda all’istinto delle combinazioni, cioè al profondo ed oscuro dissociarsi della realtà in elementi, che talora [. . .] perdono di vista il nesso unitario” (460). Elsewhere he declares his desire to give artistic expression to the “difforme molteplicità della vita” (547) by way of a “romanzo della pluralità” (462). As these comments suggest, then, Gadda foregrounds the possibility of writing a novel where a fluctuating, fragmentary enunciation would replace a stable point of view, where characters would straddle many positions, and where open-ended sequences of actions would overcome the unity of traditional plot structures. Nonetheless, *Racconto* falls short of actualizing such a work. Because the novel’s fluctuating point of view would engender accusations of “variabilità,

² Capobianchi has made the interesting point that *Racconto* coincides with the emergence of a number of influential theories of narrative, including Ortega y Gasset’s *Ideas sobre la novela* (1925), Thibaudet’s *Le liseur de roman* (1925), Muir’s *The Structure of the Novel* (1928), and Sklovskij’s *Theory of Prose* (1929). To Capobianchi’s list one can also add several of Bakhtin’s works. *Freudianism* dates from 1927, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* from 1928, and *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* from 1929.

eterogeneità, mancanza di fusione, mancanza di armonia, et similia” (461) and its plot “contraddizione!, incoerenza!, incertezza!, ecc.” (472), fear of criticism prevents Gadda from transforming *Racconto* into anything more than an early and yet crucial reflection on the impossibility of a classical, metaphysical mode of representation. Instead, in the years that follow the composition of *Racconto*, Gadda turns to the terrain of philosophical speculation, namely, to the pages of *Meditazione milanese* (1928), where he seeks to give a theoretical underpinning to his conception of life and the type of knowledge that it affords.

Although a detailed description of *Meditazione* falls beyond the immediate scope of this essay (Risset, Sbragia 30-43; Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, 43-49), it is important to recall that this work undermines the ontological categorization of the self and the other, while bringing forth an understanding of reality as a space of differentiation and becoming. More specifically, Gadda argues that since the human self participates in the complexity and temporality of the real, it cannot be thought of as a centripetal monad, but is composed of molecules that combine and recombine in multiple figurations, “un insieme di relazioni non perennemente unite” (649). Like the subject, the object is not only altered by chronotopic differentiation because of changes in time and space, but experiences the additional deformation brought about by the encounter with the knowing subject. To tell it with Robert Dombroski, for Gadda “[k]nowledge [. . .] is thus a *becoming* in the Bergsonian sense of *duration*, that is, a continuous enlarging of experience; simply stated, a process” (*Creative Entanglements* 45). When one considers the anti-foundational thrust of this work, it comes as no surprise that any systemic, structural representations emerge as illusory, constructed models of understanding. For this reason, Gadda proposes to replace all linear mappings of the world as a series of causes and effects with that of the rhizomatous network:

Cause ed effetti sono un pulsare della molteplicità irretita in sé stessa e non sono mai pensabili al singolare. La più semplice causa, un colpo di martello, presuppone l'incudine. E la forza non è mai sola: si manifesta polarmente. L'ipotiposi della catena delle cause va emendata e guarita se mai, con quella di una maglia o rete; ma non di una maglia a due dimensioni (superficie) o a tre dimensioni (spazio-maglia, catena spaziale, catena a tre dimensioni), si di una maglia o rete a dimensioni infinite. Ogni anello o grumo o groviglio di relazioni è legato da infiniti filamenti a grumi o grovigli infiniti.

(650)

The implications of this rhizomatous mapping are far-reaching, not only for theories of knowledge but also for theories of artistic practices. By critiquing traditional epistemologies and the structures of causal, linear understanding and explanation that they generate, *Meditazione* also comes to implicate the primary model of intelligibility constituted by the classical, traditional novel. Ultimately,

then, *Meditazione* gives theoretical justification to the novel of plurality alluded to, but never realized, in the pages of *Racconto*.³

One of the most basic and widely shared assumptions about narrative is that it fulfills a basic human need for order through plot and its sub-elements, characterization and setting. To tell it with the often-cited *The Sense of An Ending* by Frank Kermode, "Men, like poets, rush 'into the midst,' in *medias res*, when they are born; they also die in *mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems" (7). Peter Brooks has also made analogous comments. Building upon the insights of Kermode, Brooks opens his *Reading for the Plot* by stating that narrative is dependent on the desire to "recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work" (5). This need is not only exemplified in the early narratives of myths and folklore, but also in the stories we want to hear in the early stages of our development, when we, as children, tend to judge tales by their ability to provide an orderly plot sequence of beginnings, middles, and endings. Besides validating Kermode's insights, Brooks's work also proposes a viable rhetorical model for narrative intelligibility. By way of structuralist categories (Culler 189-238), Brooks argues that the ability of narrative to demarcate and establish limits depends upon a subtle interplay of metaphor and metonymy:

Plot is the structure of action in closed and legible wholes; it thus must *use* metaphor as the trope of its achieved interrelations, and it must *be* metaphoric insofar as it is totalizing. Yet, it is equally apparent that the key figure of narrative must in some sense be not metaphor, but metonymy: the figure of contiguity and combination, of the syntagmatic relation. The description of narrative needs metonymy as the figure of linkage in the signifying chain: precedence and consequence, the movement from one detail to another, the movement *toward* totalization under the mandate of desire.

(91)

According to this definition, then, paradigmatic form would be the product of a carefully regulated use of the tropes of similarity (or paradigmatic) and of contiguity (or syntagmatic). More specifically, while the analogical regress of metaphor would be aimed at identification and coincidence, the flow of metonymies would be restricted to relations of causality aimed at providing a final closure.

Brooks's model seems particularly valuable in describing the overall subverting effect displayed by Gadda's narrative discourse. This is a discourse

³ Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that the years immediately framing the composition of *Meditazione* represent a period of extremely intense activity for Gadda who authors *La meccanica* (1928-29), the three narrative fragments comprising *Novella seconda* ("Dejanira Classis," "Notte di luna," "La casa" 1929-32), and the essays "I viaggi, la morte" (1927) and "Le belle lettere e i contributi espressivi delle tecniche" (1929).

which, through an unrestricted amplification of metaphor coupled with an unregulated flow of metonymies, multiplies the attributes of characterization and setting, while preventing the unfolding of a linear, forward-moving plot.

An early, yet illustrative example of this type of fabulation shapes the characterization of Zoraide, in Gadda's *La meccanica*. Suggestively described while looking at herself in a mirror, which is, of course, an icon of specular refraction, Zoraide is initially introduced by the speech of her cousin Gildo as an object of crude, physical desire: "Cristo! L'avrebbe voluta rovesciare sul letto, strangolata, morduta" (476). However, through the languages of the intertext she also emerges as a figure of artificial, decadent sensuality: "Erano le proposizioni vive dell'essere, compiutamente affermate, che rendono al grembo come una corona di voluttà deglutitrice: fulgide per latte e per ambra si pensavano misteriose mollezze da disvelare per l'elisia e impudica serenità del Vecellio [. . .]" (471). Her portrait, however, does not rest with this double play of supplementary voices, but begins anew in subsequent paragraphs, where a naturalistic representation modeled after Emile Zola situates her against the background of a poor tenement building, which she shares with other women like herself and "qualche triste canarino, qualche mucoso marmocchio" (472). Other metaphoric associations further refract her character through Metastasian, pre-Romantic, and even Flaubertian *topoi*. When Zoraide goes to Duomo, for example, like the eponymous heroine of Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, her consciousness expresses itself in a language that juxtaposes sensuality and mysticism. Hence, the sight of a painting of the Virgin Mary by Giorgio Barbarelli becomes a palimpsest to read "l'amante carnale del Zorzòn [. . .] ella pensava 'l'amante': una misteriosa e torbida felicità, un peccato atroce e meraviglioso, l'amante, l'amante" (491-92). A quotation from the novel well summarizes the overall effect of this type of rhetorical amplification. The narrator suggests that if the mirror were to represent the portrait of Zoraide by a "novecentista," it would quite likely produce an image "catastroficamente sintetica" (472), that is to say, overdetermined and non-coincident, and therefore a foil to the characterization of Zoraide as a whole.

La cognizione del dolore participates in the unregulated use of paradigmatic associations illustrated by these passages of *La meccanica* and well illustrates what Dombroski, borrowing from Deleuze, defines as "narration as 'descriptive folds'" (*Creative Entanglements* 8). The novel's setting, ostensibly the city of Lukones, not only straddles a temporal continuum between 1925 and 1933, but it emerges in the ambiguous space of fiction and historical reality. Allusions to the economic profile of the Brianza region, coupled with reference to a war with a neighboring country and frequent mention of a coercive regime (6) render it a foil to postwar Italy under the rise of Fascism. Yet, by way of additional analogies, the representation of Lukones begins anew, causing the city to emerge as a mosaic of quotations from the literary intertext. Surrounded by a chain of mountains called "Il Serruchón" (18), and subject to the divine scourge

of droughts and hail, it is a hybrid of the Manzonian “Resegone” (20) and the mythical cities of the Old Testament. Further, it is also Yonville-l’Abbaye, from Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, with which it shares the “albergo del Leon d’oro” (17), country doctors, bourgeois merchants, and maimed peasants.

As in the case of the novel’s setting, characterization does not escape Gadda’s figural discourse and dramatically foregrounds the impropriety of “proper,” absolute, and final words. Hence, if medical reports and descriptions of malnutrition establish the people of Lukones as early-century immigrants from the Italian lower classes, allusions to the population’s trees of “nespola” (363) and its will to amass “roba o robba” (365) transport them into the intertext of literary “verismo,” notably the pages of Verga’s *I Malavoglia*. The impeded univocality of synonymic identification at work in this panoramic, scenic representation is extended to specific characters. Peppa is a “donna-uomo” (29), female drivers are “Argonauti-donne” (335), waiters “fracs-ossibuchi” (342), and the peasants “pitecantropi-granoturco” (319). In this pervasive absence of finality, the identity of the population is further clouded by an abysmal paronomasia. The washer woman, Peppino’s sister, is also known as Peppa. The seller of fish is Beppina, and the wife of the mortician is Pina, also known as Pinina del Goèpp, officially registered as Giuseppina (32). In a vertiginous labyrinth of signs, the guardian of Gonzalo’s villa is “José” (72), and the maid is “Battistina,” cousin of “Batta” (75). Mahagones is also “Manganones o Pedro,” “Gaetano Palumbo,” “Pietruccio,” and “Pedro” (21). As for the members of the bourgeoisie, one of Gonzalo’s ancestors, Gonzalo Pirobutirro d’Eltino, is said to have been one of the executors of decrees for the crown of Castille. Yet, his cruelty and desire to hang “certo Filarenzo Calzamaglia o, come dicevan tutti, Enzo [. . .] che gli aveva messo i manichini attorno ai polsi durante certi tumulti di San Juan” (103), locate him in the realm of Manzoni’s *Promessi sposi* and in the legendary cruelty of the Borgias (104). The official poet of Maradagàl, Carlos Caçoncelles, is also poised in the shifting space between fiction and historical reality. Like Gadda and the *scapigliato* Carlo Dossi, he bears the Christian name “Carlos” and practices an art of intertextual collage. We are told, for example, that Caçoncelles’s epic compares the freedom-fighter Juan Muceno Pastrufacio to George Washington, Marlowe’s Tamburlaine the Great, Giuseppe Garibaldi and even Byron’s Mazeppa. However, unlike the *scapigliato* Dossi and C. E. Gadda, Caçoncelles is a writer tending toward the horizon of absolute words. He shares the bombastic style and the prophetic rhetoric of Foscolo, Carducci, and D’Annunzio. In one more descriptive fold, Caçoncelles is also a figure of northern gothic literature. Rumors speak of him as a ghost, a monstrous figure, a spectral apparition (61). Like Caçoncelles, Elisabetta François is an ontological cyborg, a serial being of historical reference and literary words. In one of her forms, she is a French tutor who has lost a son (256), and therefore an autobiographical reminiscence of Gadda’s mother, the language teacher Adele Lehr whose younger son Enrico perished on April 23, 1918. However, in a

literary "itinérance," Elisabetta is Shakespeare's "Re Lear" (295), Livius's Veturia, Carducci's *nonna* Lucia from "Davanti san Guido," and Virgil's Creusa from the *Aeneid* (170). As the discourse progresses, additional associations increase the complexity of this already elusive characterization. For the population of Lukones, she is "la Signora" (118), the maternal and prodigal benefactress. However, in her son's speeches she surfaces as the victimizer who has chosen the objectification of an ideal — "la villa" (305) — over the wellbeing of her family. Endlessly moving from one trope to the next, on the night of her attack Elisabetta is a character from the naturalist era, covered, however, by a checkered blanket, as in the "tempo di Dickens" (466): "Un orribile coagulo di sangue si era aggrumato, ancor vivo, sui capelli grigi, dissolti, due fili di sangue le colavano dalle narici. [. . .] Gli occhi erano dischiusi, la guancia destra tumefatta, la pelle lacerata [. . .]" (467).

Likewise, Gonzalo is the product of a mercurial pen, the spiritual offspring of Hermes the Alchemist. The surviving son of Elisabetta, Gonzalo is a novelist-engineer like Gadda and therefore a partially autobiographical figure. However, he is also a tessellation of epic, novels, and drama. In what Eco would call a descriptive process of unlimited semiosis,⁴ he is described, like the Homeric Odysseus and the modernist Ulysses, as he attempts to free his Penelope from the suitors Antinoös and Blazes "Hugh" Boylan. The narrative also represents him as a character-cluster of the cruel Smerdiakov from Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov*, the idealist Quixano from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's Hamlet, and a comic hero from the French classical theatre of Molière (289). Additional speeches further unsettle Gonzalo's already tenuous consistency. Like Orestes from Euripides's *Oresteia*, he is said to harbor murderous impulses towards his mother. In another connection to classical tragedy, and specifically to Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Gonzalo suffers from an Oedipal complex and longs to be alone with Elisabetta: "Dentro, io, nella mia casa, con mia madre" (186). Other, more prosaic passages, contribute to this relativizing effect. For Doctor Figueroa, Gonzalo is a madman, so affected by what psychiatrists like Sérieux and Capgras call "delirio interpretativo" (210-11) as to be capable of actualizing the violence of his impulses. However, in a progression by paradox, the private, paternal voice of the doctor also represents him as a potential husband for his unmarried daughter, and therefore as a generally suitable son-in-law (73). When Gonzalo's speeches are reported, aporias continue to remain unresolved, since the space of writing undergoes further enrichment. Within a few pages, Gonzalo's language can render the rationality of a reader of Plato, the lamentation of a vengeful, almost bestial Other, and the cries of a child for

⁴ In his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* Eco distinguishes between dictionary and encyclopedic modes of representations. Whereas the former circumscribe definitions, the latter, in a process of rhetorical amplification, or "unlimited semiosis," open them to the regress and expenditure allowed by the archive of culture.

the absent mother. Significantly, the narrator comments that Gonzalo's physiognomy remains irreducibly incoherent: "ora saturnino, ora dionisiaco, ora eleusino, ora coribantico [. . .]" (217).

If an unbridled use of metaphoric associations prevents Gadda's narrative discourse from assigning stability and self-coincidence to characterization and setting, an unregulated flow of metonymies compromises the development of plot as an orderly, forward-moving sequence of actions. To tell it with Guido Guglielmi, the mobile "texture" of Gadda's mode of representation generates a retarded structure (*La prosa italiana del novecento* 15). *La meccanica*, for example, opens on Sunday, October 4, 1915, when Gildo Pessina knocks on Zoraide's door. However, before the reasons for Gildo's visit are disclosed, the narrative begins anew and provides another point of entry by focusing on the long description of Zoraide's physiognomy. When Gildo is finally allowed into the house, only fragments of conversation are reported, and the narrative begins to relate Gildo's background. Since he is a rogue, a muddled crime story about a theft of bicycles and gambling unfolds. An analogous unwillingness to arrest the flux of metonymies informs Chapter 2. In a series of "emboîtements senza fine," as a sentence from the novel comments (587), Zoraide's memories of her husband, the socialist Luigi Pessina, and of her lover, Franco Velaschi, are followed by an episode recounting the institutionalization and demise of "Società Umanitaria," but the chapter as a whole expands to include lengthy content-notes from the most disparate extra-textual sources. Chapter 3 opens with a description of Luigi Pessina's life to which are added, however, digressions on the year's political and military events as well as a romance between an admiral's daughter and "l'ingegnere Ulivi." Only at the end of Chapter 3 does the narrative return to Luigi and report his resigned response to the news that he has been drafted. The news itself is followed by a long, digressive description of a medical visit and its report. Chapter 4 begins by recounting the machinations of Velaschi's parents as they try to secure their son a job, so that he can avoid being enlisted. Chapter 5 describes the outcome of their efforts, but to the plight of Velaschi's father is added a story about a landowner's suicide, a portrait of Dirce Raspagnotti's son, and further narrative material.

The open-ended plot-structure of *La meccanica* unfolds in *La cognizione del dolore*, where the inclusion of many possible points of entry undermines the security of a stable origin and beginning. To reprise a self-reflexive comment, by allowing "una serie di fatti [. . .] scatu(r)ire come germoglio, e poi ramo, dal palo teleologico" (14), *La cognizione* is a novel built as a series of endless departures. Hence, from a panoramic opening on a country between 1925 and 1933, the plot folds back upon itself to relate a scandal in Lukones following the hiring of the veteran Pedro Mahagones, a story about lightning, the rise and death of the poet Carlo Caçoncelles, a number of episodes about Gonzalo Pirobutirro's life told by the fabulating community of José, La Battistina, la

Peppa, and others, Gonzalo's and Elisabetta's pathos, the mysterious attack on the latter, the poem "Autunno," and more.⁵ And since, to reprise Brooks, "the movement of *totalization* under the mandate of desire" depends upon a regulated use of figures of similarity and contiguity, Gadda's narrative discourse dramatizes countless contradictions and enigmas without, however, providing a resolution. Otherwise stated, in Gadda's narrative discourse the ending is affected by the same multiplying logic of beginnings, and therefore it becomes infinitely expandable through multiple extensions and interpretations. In *La meccanica*, for example, the muddled crime-story about the theft of the bicycles neither specifies the name of the guilty party nor of the merchandise stolen. Since Gildo might be implicated in the crime along with two other people, the identity of the criminal is never disclosed. The theft itself is presumably of four bicycles, yet anonymous voices speak of five, "chi diceva Stucchi e chi Bianchi" (473), and the investigators indicate the presence of various other stolen wares, ranging from ties and underwear to cosmetics and gramophones. In *La cognizione*, the mystery of the bolts of light which strike Villas Enrichetta and Antonietta remains unresolved amid multiple hypotheses. Initial investigations suggest that the lightning rod of Villa Maria Giuseppina has caused the damage, but this theory is weakened as others begin to surface. The mason of Villa Enrichetta argues that the cause of the lightning resides in the plumbing, while the meteorologists present differential equations to prove the contrary. Meanwhile, local folklore suggests the possibility of magic and explains the event by drawing upon the reservoir of such literature. As for the attack on the mother, the gossip of the population suggests that Gonzalo is the perpetrator. However, other voices point to Palumbo and the peasant Giuseppe as the guilty ones. Even the language of the victim's body contributes to the ambiguity of the mystery since the kinetics of Elisabetta's arms is an icon for the continuity of interpretation: "parevano protese verso 'gli altri' come in una *difesa* o in una *implorazione* estrema" (467; emphasis added). The final outcome of this infinitely expandable ending is of course the anti-detective novel, a form which, although present in an embryonic state in a number of episodes from *La meccanica*, *La cognizione*, and other stories,⁶ only achieves full actualization in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*.

⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that one of the typical procedures of Gadda's writing is to transpose narrative segments into other works. In *Accoppiamenti giudiziosi*, for example, the short stories "Cugino barbiere," "Le novissime armi," and "Papà e mamma" are taken from *La meccanica*, while "Una visita medica" e "La mamma" belong to *La cognizione*. In *L'Adalgisa* are also sections from *La Cognizione*, notably "Strane tristerie contristano i Bertoloni" and "Navi approdano al Parapagal."

⁶ A constant aspect of Gadda's work, the problematization of the detective convention is present as early as "Novella seconda," where in a compositional note Gadda voices his desire to be "Conandoyliano" (1317), but also suggests a "complicazione del tema" (1318) which would put to the test the conventions of the genre.

Confirming the belief of the detective-philosopher Ingravallo that “le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l’effetto che dir si voglia di un unico motivo [. . .] ma sono come un vortice, un punto di depressione ciclonica nella coscienza del mondo verso cui hanno cospirato tutta una molteplicità di causali convergenti” (16), the novel is a macroscopic dramatization of the impossibility of the hermeneutic solution, of the reduction of crime to one final name, one identity, and one story. Hence, not only does the novel double the crimes of murder and theft, but it short-circuits the process of investigation through a pluralization of the guilty. While initial investigations by Commissario Ingravallo point to Giuliano Valdarena and Remo Balducci as the murderers of Liliana Balducci, the Fascist regime identifies in *commendatore* Angeloni the thief of *vedova* Menegazzi’s jewelry. Yet, by the second half of the novel, Angeloni is freed and a number of other suspects enter the scene. These include Virginia, Ines Cionini, Camilla Mattonari, Assunta Crocchiapani, Enea Retalli, Diomede and Ascanio Lanciani. As the names of the possible perpetrators multiply, so does the process of investigation, which now includes, in addition to Ingravallo, also *dottor* Fumi and the *carabinieri* of Marino: *maresciallo* Santarella and *vicebrigadiere* Pestalozzi. By the end of the novel, the investigation falls back upon Ingravallo, who travels to Tor di Gheppio in the Roman countryside to interrogate Assunta Crocchiapani, the beautiful servant of the Balduccis. However, Ingravallo’s violent questioning — “‘Sputa ‘o nome, chillo ca tieni cà: o t’ ‘o farà sputare ‘o brigadiere, in caserma, a Marino: ‘o brigadiere Pestalozzi’” (276) — does not produce the hermeneutic truth of a confession, but just one more state of hesitation leading to further hermeneutic continuity:

‘No, sor dottò, no, no, nun so’ stata io!’ implorò allora la ragazza [. . .] ‘No, nun so’ stata io!’ Il grido incredibile bloccò il furore dell’ossesso. Egli non intese, là per là, ciò che la sua anima era in procinto d’intendere. Quella piega nera verticale tra i due sopraccigli dell’ira, nel volto bianchissimo della ragazza, lo paralizzò, *lo indusse a riflettere: a ripentirsi, quasi.*

(276; emphasis added)

Thus, in the open-endedness of its epilogue, *Quer pasticciaccio* finally reaches the same conclusion as *La cognizione* where, on Elisabetta’s violated body, a group of visitors witnesses what we, as readers of Gadda’s narrative discourse, have been experiencing all along: the constitutive impossibility of capturing the ephemerality and ambiguity of life in one, absolute name and story: “Nella stanchezza senza soccorso in cui il povero volto si dovette raccogliere tumefatto [. . .] parve a tutti di leggere la parola terribile della morte e la sovrana coscienza dell’impossibilità di dire: Io” (*La cognizione* 472).

What are the implications of Gadda’s subversion of the novel as paradigmatic form, of narrative as a textual structure of intelligibility? In a

commentary that provides an interesting supplement to Pirandello's polemic against the Name as funerary epigraph, Peter Brooks suggests that finite models of representation not only impoverish the multiplicity and complexity of experience, but also bring a closure to the hermeneutics of meaning, to writing as textual desire:

And here the paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making. If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end.

(52)

If we accept Brooks's suggestion that, by arresting continuity, paradigmatic writing is finally obituary writing, Gadda's unwillingness to produce a fiction of concords articulates a vision of life's complexity, to be sure, but also of life's potentiality and becoming. Bakhtin has termed this vision *nezavershennost*, or the unfinalizability of life. It is a vision that emerges when the word, having escaped the lures of metaphysical reassurance, remains at the penultimate stage, thereby evoking a sequel to life and the figures we employ to represent it.⁷ Fully actualized in Dostoevsky's polyphonic, open-ended novels, this word suggests that "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, (t)hat the ultimate word about the world has not been spoken, (t)hat the world is open and free, (t)hat everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (166).

I believe that the potentiality of discourse described in Bakhtin's notion of a penultimate word explains Calvino's inclusion of Gadda among the writers for the next millennium. Invited by Harvard University to deliver the 1985 Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures, Calvino certainly experienced the symbolic significance of the approaching year 2000.⁸ Yet, he decided not to

⁷ Compare also the following statement in Dombroski's *Creative Entanglements*: "It is by now a commonplace in Gadda criticism to regard the Gaddian text as wholly meta-linguistic [. . .] that language for Gadda is not a means of representing reality, but rather an attack on linguistic convention in behalf of the heterogeneity of the sign and the multiplicity of truth. [. . .] However true and inconvertible, such assertions tend to overlook how the linguistic and semantic aggregates are held together, what directs the meta-linguistic process, and what is its specific purpose" (107). I should note, however, that for Dombroski the effect of Gadda's discursive procedure is that of a strategic travesty, allowing the subject to recover identity: "the relative free play of language is a highly suitable means of restoring an identity to a subject inhibited and terrorized by history. It is a surrogate identity, a mask to hide behind [. . .]" (73). On the same issue, compare also the chapter dedicated to Gadda in Dombroski's *Properties of Writing*.

⁸ See, for example, the following: "Il millennio che sta per chiudersi ha visto nascere ed espandersi le lingue moderne dell'Occidente e le letterature che di queste lingue hanno

engage in apocalyptic musings on the death of the book and the end of literature in the technological, post-industrial society of cybernetic information. Instead, he expressed his faith in the ability of literature to endure by discussing a number of values which he felt were unique to literary writing. As we know, Calvino passed away before he could finalize his Norton project, and what remains of his lectures today are five essays on lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity. Significantly, the discussion of multiplicity opens with a quotation from the beginning of *Quer pasticciaccio*. In Ingravallo's conception of life as a web of tangled and expandable relations, Calvino situates Gadda's vision of the novel as an unfinished, open-ended encyclopedia. Since for Calvino this is a form which challenges the delimiting, demarcating discourse of science, it represents the ability of literature to endure by providing other, alternative forms of knowledge:

La letteratura vive solo se si pone degli obiettivi smisurati, anche al di là d'ogni possibilità di realizzazione. Solo se poeti e scrittori si proporranno imprese che nessuno altro osa immaginare la letteratura continuerà ad avere una funzione. Da quando la scienza diffida delle spiegazioni generali e delle soluzioni che non siano settoriali o specialistiche, la grande sfida per la letteratura è il saper tessere insieme i diversi saperi e i diversi codici in una visione plurima, sfaccettata del mondo.

(110)

In summary then, against the background of the ever-increasing realization of the fictionality of real endings and beginnings foregrounded most recently by the year 2000, the lack of completion of Gadda's narrative discourse can be assessed in light of its deeper significance. From *Racconto's* overt textualization of the limits imposed upon being by the rigid frames of classical paradigmatic form, to the rhizomatous writing of *La meccanica*, *La cognizione*, and *Quer pasticciaccio*, Gadda's discourse discloses a vision of life as a space of complexity but also of endless possibilities and transformations. And precisely because, as Calvino well said it, the future of literature will depend upon its ability to voice that which remains at the boundaries of scientific order, at the threshold of the third millennium Gadda's writings finally chart a path for the continuous role of narrative discourse in articulating our experience of being in the world of history and temporality.

University of Connecticut

esplorato le possibilità espressive e cognitive e immaginative. È stato anche il millennio del libro, in quanto ha visto l'oggetto-libro prendere la forma che ci è familiare" (1).

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From Start to Finish: Intertextual Roads of Reading between Manzoni, Tozzi, and Calvino

A beginning is an artifice and what recommends one over another is how much sense it makes of what follows.

Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*

This study of themes found in beginnings and endings in Manzoni, Tozzi, and Calvino centers around the premise that no beginning is isolated unto itself, that all beginnings in some way refer to or try to come to terms with what has come before. Calvino addresses precisely this nature of beginnings in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979), one of the texts under investigation in this paper: "Ma come stabilire il momento in cui comincia una storia? Tutto è sempre cominciato già da prima, la prima riga della prima pagina d'ogni romanzo rimanda a qualcosa che è già successo fuori dal libro. Oppure la vera storia è quella che comincia dieci o cento pagine più avanti e tutto ciò che precede è solo un prologo" (II, 761). This interconnectedness of beginnings, then, leads one to examine them as intertextual entities since, as Said puts it, "a beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both" (3).

Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1825-27, 1840-42), considered the cornerstone novel of Italian literature, begins with a scene renowned to all students and scholars of the Italian canon. Despite the familiarity of the opening sequence, it is worth quoting since this comparative analysis concentrates on precise images and motifs found in the work's initial pages. After the introductory explanation of the fake manuscript, the plot proper begins with a description of "quel ramo del lago di Como," and the narratorial point of view then hones in on don Abbondio walking along a road:

Dall'una all'altra di quelle terre, dall'alture alla riva, da un poggio all'altro, correvano, e corrono tuttavia, strade e stradette, più o men ripide, o piane [. . .].

Per una di queste stradiciole, tornava bel bello dalla passeggiata verso casa, sulla sera del giorno 7 novembre dell'anno 1628, don Abbondio, curato d'una delle terre accennate di sopra [. . .]. Diceva tranquillamente il suo ufizio, e talvolta, tra un salmo e l'altro, chiudeva il breviario, tenendovi dentro, per segno, l'indice della mano destra, e, messa poi questa nell'altra dietro la schiena, proseguiva il suo cammino, guardando a terra, e buttando con un piede verso il muro i ciottoli che facevano inciampo nel sentiero [. . .].

Aperto poi di nuovo il breviario, e recitato un altro squarcio, giunse a una voltata della stradetta, dov'era solito d'alzar sempre gli occhi dal libro, e di guardarsi dinanzi: e così fece anche quel giorno. Dopo la voltata, la strada correva diritta, forse un sessanta passi, e poi si divideva in due viottole, a foggia d'un *ipsilon*: quella a destra saliva verso il monte, e menava alla cura: l'altra scendeva nella valle fino a un torrente; e da questa parte il muro non arrivava che all'anche del passeggiere. I muri interni delle due viottole, invece di riunirsi ad angolo, terminavano in un tabernacolo [. . .]. Il curato, voltata la stradetta, e dirizzando, com'era solito, lo sguardo al tabernacolo, vide una cosa che non s'aspettava, e che non avrebbe voluto vedere. Due uomini stavano, l'uno dirimpetto all'altro, al confluente, per dir così, delle due viottole [. . .].

(7-8)

This encounter on a country road between the perambulating don Abbondio and the “bravi,” or local thugs, results in the two men threatening the spineless priest into not performing the marriage of Renzo and Lucia, by orders of don Rodrigo, who wants the young woman as his mistress. It is this key initial scene which sparks off a series of events leading to the separation of the betrothed, Renzo and Lucia, and after a number of misadventures, their eventual reunion and marriage.

I promessi sposi's plot cannot be seen as strictly linear, although it does follow events along a basic chronological order. The narrator often interrupts himself, embarking on digressions of an informative nature about historical events of the time of the novel's setting. This kind of interruption has intrigued the likes of Eco, who, in his 1993 Norton Lectures (published the following year as *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*), focuses on this initial scene of don Abbondio's meeting with the “bravi,” illustrating how Manzoni's delay tactics pique the reader's curiosity and incite her or him to continue reading:¹

Another writer might wish to placate our impatience as readers and tell us straight away what happens — might cut to the chase. Not so Manzoni. He does something that the reader may find quite incredible. He takes a few pages, rich in historical detail, to explain who the bravoes were. Having done this, he goes back to Don Abbondio, but he doesn't have him meet the bravoes at once. He keeps us waiting [. . .].

(52)

Eco then points out that once don Abbondio, and the reader, finally come face to face with the “bravi,” the author asks the question: “Che fare?” Manzoni's direct addresses to the reader, according to Eco, form part of his postponement

¹ Illiano has also remarked on the reader's role in Manzoni's *incipit*: “Ed è proprio l'inizio del discorso introduttivo, l'esordio *in medias res* che segue alla citazione-*incipit* del frammento della *Historia*, a sottolineare la problematica del trovare lettori che, compensando l'eroica fatica della trascrizione, durino l'altra fatica, quella della prima lettura dell'opera, attività che dà avvio alla diffusione e quindi alla fortuna del romanzo e del genere” (47).

technique which encourages the reader to take an "inferential walk" into the text:

What is to be done? Notice that this question is directly addressed not only to Don Abbondio but also to the reader. Manzoni is a master at mixing his narration with sudden, sly appeals to the reader, and this is one of the less sneaky. Readers [. . .] are invited to wonder what the two braves want with a man so innocuous and normal. Well, I'm not going to tell you. If you haven't read *The Betrothed*, it's time you did. You should know, however, that everything in the novel stems from this meeting.

(53-54)

Eco could not be more correct in stressing the fact that *I promessi sposi*'s entire plot is unleashed by this introductory sequence. Unlike Eco, however, I have to discuss how the novel ends (readers will already be familiar with it in any case), since both its ending and beginning resurface in the other two authors' works. The intertextual echoes among Manzoni, Tozzi and Calvino to be examined here pivot around the initial image of don Abbondio walking along a road, as well as the motif of the journey, and the convention of the "happy ending," that is, marriage. These images and motifs, along with the writers' manipulations of them, question the structure of the text and the act of reading itself.

Once *I promessi sposi*'s protagonists have been divided (an event which occurs early on in the text), the plot follows the individual characters' travels separately, only to have them meet up at the end. A great deal of the novel consists of different journeys, either on foot, on horseback, or by carriage, and, of course, on all sorts of roads. That these journeys occur separately means that the narrative focus must shift from one character to another. Frequently, references which engage the reader are employed in order to facilitate this transfer, references which I, unlike Eco, do not consider particularly sly or sneaky, but rather, explicitly self-conscious. For instance, Manzoni provides an analogy when describing this mechanism of retrieval of characters:

Ho visto più volte un caro fanciullo [. . .] affaccendato sulla sera a mandare al coperto un suo gregge di porcellini d'India, che aveva lasciati scorrer liberi il giorno, in un giardinetto. Avrebbe voluto fargli andar tutti insieme al covile; ma era fatica buttata: uno si sbandava a destra, e mentre il piccolo pastore correva per cacciarlo nel branco, un altro, due, tre ne uscivano a sinistra, da ogni parte. Dimodoché, dopo essersi un po' impazientito, s'adattava al loro genio, spingeva prima dentro quelli ch'eran più vicini all'uscio, poi andava a prender gli altri, a uno, a due, a tre, come gli riusciva. Un gioco simile ci convien fare co' nostri personaggi: ricoverata Lucia, siam corsi a don Rodrigo; e ora lo dobbiamo abbandonarè, per andar dietro a Renzo, che avevam perduto di vista.

(163)

And so the narrator immediately takes us back to the adventures of Renzo which

begin, like don Abbondio's, along a road:²

Dopo la separazione dolorosa che abbiám raccontata, camminava Renzo da Monza verso Milano, in quello stato d'animo che ognuno può immaginarsi facilmente. Abbandonar la casa, tralasciare il mestiere, e quel ch'era più di tutto, allontanarsi da Lucia, trovarsi sur una strada, senza saper dove anderebbe a posarsi; e tutto per causa di quel birbone!

(163)

Once again, the Manzonian narrator is inviting the reader to take an inferential walk along with the character and attempt to imagine Renzo's feelings as he sets off on his way along the unfamiliar route.

In *I promessi sposi* the characters travel along all sorts of different types of roads (main streets, alleys, paths, country roads) at different times of day, and under a variety of climatic conditions. Roads, while taking the various characters to their destinations, also harbor danger, in particular the threat of the "bravi." (This is true not only for don Abbondio, but also for Lucia who is kidnapped as she is walking along a deserted country road.) They are, according to Ernesto Travi, the place where characters come into contact with society.³ But what can a road signify? Often it implies making a choice or decision, as Eco points out. The semiotician uses the notion of the path and places it in the woods, the symbol of the text:

To use a metaphor devised by Jorge Luis Borges [. . .], a wood is a garden of forking paths. Even when there are no well-trodden paths in a wood, everyone can trace his or her own path, deciding to go to the left or to the right of a certain tree and making a choice at every tree encountered.

² Manzoni's retrieval of characters clearly has Ariostesque overtones, although the Renaissance epic poet's preferred metaphor for the same exercise is that of the weaving of various threads.

³ Travi points out both the metaphorical and the more literal attributes of the trope of the road in Manzoni: "Si è voluto, insomma, precisare fin d'ora che nella strada è da ritrovare anche la componente del divino tra gli uomini, ma che essa è, anzitutto, il luogo dove proprio gli uomini daranno testimonianza di sé, mettendo a nudo la validità o la negatività delle proprie scelte a paragone con quelle della società che per le strade del mondo si documentano, favorendo od opponendosi a quelle individuali, al di fuori di ogni eventuale collaborazione provvidenziale, che a sua volta può identificarsi essa pure in 'provvida sventura.' Allo stesso modo s'intende raccomandare di saper distinguere la 'strada' del romanziere, che è la sua narrazione, ('Ma riprendiamo la strada') da quella naturale, cioè dei luoghi dove gli uomini un giorno o l'altro devono confrontarsi tra di loro, e da quella infine che è la vocazione individuale, anche se, nella diversità dei significati dell'identica metafora, le due ultime testimonianze sono talora così interrelate che a volte pienamente si confondono fino a costituire un'unica realtà" (250). The road representing the path to perdition or salvation clearly has a much earlier antecedent in Italian literature: Dante's epic journey undertaken "nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita."

In a narrative text, the reader is forced to make choices all the time.

(6)

Every step of the way along the path of reading the text, the reader, obliged to make an interpretive decision, is made aware of this process by Manzoni through his direct appeals to his audience. Borges's different paths stand for the varieties of possible interpretations or the subjectivity of meaning, a theme important to Calvino as well, whose debt to Borges is evident, as Martin McLoughlin and others have demonstrated.⁴ In Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths", the character named Stephen Albert, who has been pursuing the elusive text of Ts'ui Pên, explains how he has figured out its existence:

I had questioned myself about the ways in which a book can be infinite. I could think of nothing other than a cyclic volume, a circular one. A book whose last page was identical with the first, a book which had the possibility of continuing indefinitely. I remembered too that night which is at the middle of the *Thousand and One Nights* when Sheherazade (through a magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the *Thousand and One Nights*, establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus on to infinity.

(51)

Clearly these works, in their preoccupation with metafictional meaning and questions of reading and interpretation, illustrate the polysemantic nature of the text. While Borges's and Eco's texts use the image of the forking path as implying interpretive choice, *I promessi sposi's* opening sequence also uses a divided path as indicating a different sort of choice, that is, don Abbondio's decision as to whether he will marry the young couple, or not marry them, thus giving in to don Rodrigo's threat. The two roads are joined by a wall with a tabernacle depicting souls in purgatory, engulfed in flames, and indicate, moreover, the paths to salvation and damnation, as Travi has observed.⁵

How does Federico Tozzi view the act of reading and how can his thoughts on this process hold relevance in an analysis of Manzoni's and Calvino's beginnings and endings? Tozzi's novels such as *Con gli occhi chiusi, Il potere*,

⁴ Of course the forking paths in the forest is a familiar trope in Ariosto and other epics, and the Renaissance poet's influence on Calvino's *oeuvre* is evident.

⁵ "Senza soffermarci più che tanto sull'evidente dato simbolico dei due itinerari, il primo dei quali sale al monte dove sta la 'cura' [. . .] mentre l'altro precipita a valle, sarà pure da notare come il romanziere accenti la sua attenzione sul loro confluire [. . .]. Il curato, che s'era avviato per la sua 'stradicciuola', modesta nell'ampiezza eppur gradita e piacevole, si trova ora davanti ad un bivio, e per di più di 'viottole', cioè di scelte affrettate da affrontare, l'una e l'altra direi senza scampo se ambedue conducono ad un esito di affanni e di tribulazioni che quell'immagine al centro del loro confluire accentua, lo si noti, per sottolineata volontà dei pittori, ma anche della comunità di quel luogo" (Travi 252).

Tre croci, *Gli egoisti*, like Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, are full of passages which could be seen as digressions but are actually integral parts of the text. However, in his fiction, he does not address the reader directly in Manzoni's manner, probably because his narrator often seems more involved with the characters depicted, thus making it more difficult to achieve the kind of detachment (and even sense of humor) that enable the writer to comment self-consciously on the narrative strategy itself. His piece of writing of significance to this comparative examination is not one of his novels, but rather an article entitled "Come leggo io," written in 1919, shortly before his death, and published in 1924 in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*. This essay reveals how Tozzi approaches the reading of a text, how certain types of writing catch his eye and are thus viewed as valid:

Ai più interessa un omicidio o un suicidio; ma è egualmente interessante, se non di più, anche l'intuizione e quindi il racconto di un qualsiasi misterioso atto nostro; come potrebbe esser quello, per esempio, di un uomo che a un certo punto della sua strada si sofferma per raccogliere un sasso che vede, e poi prosegue per la sua passeggiata. Tutto consiste nel come è vista l'umanità e la natura. Il resto è trascurabile, anzi mediocre e brutto.

Don Abbondio che incontra i bravi è indimenticabile, perché è rappresentato con quell'evidenza così completa che da quel che egli pensa e fa soltanto in quei brevi minuti noi possiamo scorgere, con una occhiata, tutta la sua esistenza e tutti gli elementi che la distinguono.

(1325)

Tozzi selects a seemingly (excuse the pun) pedestrian scenario, that of a man walking along a road and stopping to pick up a stone, and deems it mysterious, and therefore worth narrating. The first example of a convincing narration he immediately furnishes is that which opens *I promessi sposi*, and while he does not mention don Abbondio actually *walking* along a road, the reader knows full well that the priest *is* doing so when he meets up with the "bravi." Furthermore, while don Abbondio does not stop to pick up a stone along the way, he does kick pebbles aside ("proseguiva il suo cammino, guardando a terra, e buttando con un piede verso il muro i ciottoli che facevano inciampo nel sentiero"). Don Abbondio's gesture may not be particularly mysterious, but it does provide the reader with some insight on his character, the aspect of Manzoni's narration which Tozzi appreciates most. It reveals his wish to avoid any thing (or person or situation) which can be seen as an impediment to his existence, any thing which does not allow him to lead the placid life to which he is accustomed.⁶

⁶ Travi views this gesture in a slightly different manner: "Don Abbondio, che perfino su questo tracciato in disparte, e però non al di fuori dal mondo, ha come unica preoccupazione di scartare con il piede i pochi e perfino piccoli ciottoli, unici ostacoli al

In "Come leggo io," Tozzi also relates how his reading methods subvert the order of the text:

Apro il libro a caso; ma, piuttosto, verso la fine. Prima di leggere (prego credere che non c'è da ridere troppo) socchiudo gli occhi, per una specie d'istinto guardingo, come fanno i mercanti quando vogliono rendersi conto bene di quel che stanno per comprare. Finalmente, assicuratomi che non sono in uno stato d'animo suscettibile a lasciarsi ingannare, mi decido a leggere un periodo: dalla maiuscola fino al punto. Da come è fatto questo periodo, giudico se ne debbo leggere un altro. Mi spiego.

Se il primo periodo è fatto bene, cioè se lo scrittore l'ha sentito nella sua costruzione stilistica, mi rassereno. Ma il periodo può esser fatto bene a caso oppure ad arte. Questa differenza la conosco leggendo il secondo periodo; e, per precauzione, leggendone altri, sempre aprendo il libro qua e là. Se questi periodi resistono al mio esame, può darsi ch'io mi convinca a leggere il libro intero. Ma non mai di seguito. Mi piace di gustare qualche particolare, qualche spunto, qualche descrizione, dialogo, ecc. Sentire, cioè, come lo scrittore è riuscito a creare. Se leggesi il libro di seguito, io non avrei modo di giudicare quanto i personaggi "sono fatti bene."

Io li devo interrompere, li devo pigliare alla rovescia, quando meno se l'aspettano; e, soprattutto, non lasciarmi dominare dalla lettura di quel che essi dicono.

(1324)

Tozzi presents himself as a reader who puts texts through a test mechanism before deciding to read them, so as not to be easily seduced by narrative, thus demonstrating, as Eduardo Saccone has pointed out, his characteristic diffidence.⁷ His tests consist of reading first a sentence from towards the end of the book, and then reading other sentences haphazardly throughout the text. Even when he finally decides to read the entire book, he never settles down to do so straight through; rather he reads it in snatches, so as to take the narrative by surprise. Tozzi goes on to declare that he ignores plots completely since they are of no use to him. He then explains how his reading technique works:

Con il mio sistema, che del resto è soltanto per mio uso e consumo, io scompongo intuitivamente qualunque libro; e posso, senza scomodarmi, tener d'occhio lo scrittore in tutti i suoi elementi. Così, ci vuol poco anche a sentire quanto "pensiero" c'è dentro; perché il temperamento di un qualsiasi scrittore si conosce soltanto mettendolo a prove

suo cammino. Come possono essergli concesse le grandi strade se anche nelle piccole, e disusate, trova continui problemi da superare?" (252)

⁷ Saccone comments on Tozzi's attitude towards mediocre texts in "Come leggo io": "Ne consegue che resistere al fascino pericoloso di tali strutture, di queste ingannevoli e teatrali superfici — col 'sospetto', la 'diffidenza,' o addirittura 'l'ostilità' — diventa un obbligo addirittura morale. 'Io li devo interrompere, li devo pigliare alla rovescia, quando meno se l'aspettano; e, soprattutto, non lasciarmi dominare dalla lettura di quel che essi dicono. Bisogna che li tenga sempre lontani da me, in continua diffidenza; anzi, ostilità'" (2).

decisive.

(1325-26)

As a reader, then, Tozzi, dis-orders, one could even say, deconstructs, the text in order to evaluate it and decide if it is worth reading.

Calvino, too, especially in *Se una notte d'inverno*, engages in a dis-ordering of the text, but in his case he does so as the writer who plays with the notions of reading, as well as of reality and fiction.⁸ The primary plot sustained throughout revolves around the "Lettore" and the "Lettrice" and their various frustrated (and frustrating) attempts to read novels which never get past the beginning. The adventures of the "Lettore" and "Lettrice" are recounted in the numbered chapters — the frame narrative or "cornice" — while between these numbered chapters one finds each new beginning of the novel which they (and we, the "real" readers) are endeavoring to read. What results is a spatial and temporal fragmentation of the text, a postmodern pastiche of beginnings which tantalize the reader in a kind of *Thousand and One Nights* à la Calvino.⁹ The reader is left to fill in not merely the kind of gaps formulated by Iser, but rather virtually all except the first chapter of each imaginary novel begun in *Se una notte d'inverno*.¹⁰ Furthermore, the text itself openly confronts the act of reading, in particular in Chapter 1, where the narrator speaks to the reader who is about to start *Se una notte d'inverno* using the second person singular, thus setting off the whole mechanism of interpellation around which much of the work is based. This self-conscious discourse also alludes to the temporal disruption found in

⁸ Critics such as Mazzoni and Lucente have touched on the ludic and parodic aspects of the text. Lucente, for instance, says "*Se una notte d'inverno* is not just a reflection but also a parody of the issues at stake in current academic and intellectual exchanges in Europe and America, not just the exposition of a theoretical *parti pris* but also, in more practical terms, the scene of a merry chase through the labyrinthian forests of reading" (287).

⁹ Calvino's fascination with Sheherazade as an analogon for metafiction and embedded texts is seen not only in *Se una notte d'inverno* but also in his essay "Cominciare e finire" where he cites Benjamin: "'Il ricordo' — dice Benjamin — 'crea la rete che tutte le storie finiscono per formare fra loro. L'una si riallaccia all'altra, come si sono sempre compiaciuti di mostrare i grandi narratori, e in primo luogo gli orientali. In ognuno di essi vive una Sheherazade, a cui, ad ogni passo delle sue storie, viene in mente una storia nuova.' Poco più avanti Benjamin accenna all'importanza che hanno avuto i mercanti nell'arte di raccontare, con le loro 'astuzie per captare l'attenzione degli ascoltatori' e come essi 'hanno lasciato un'orma profonda nelle *Mille e una notte*'" (*Saggi* I, 744).

¹⁰ André Brink takes the concept of gaps in *Se una notte d'inverno* even further, positing that the Reader's "presence dramatizes the gaps in the text; he becomes 'the' gap in the text — as well as, through the act of reading, the plug that fills the gap" (324).

the novel itself:¹¹

Sei nella tua stanza, tranquillo, apri il libro alla prima pagina, no, all'ultima, per prima cosa vuoi vedere quant'è lungo. Non è troppo lungo, per fortuna. I romanzi lunghi scritti oggi forse sono un controsenso: la dimensione del tempo è andata in frantumi, non possiamo vivere o pensare se non spezzoni di tempo che s'allontanano ognuno lungo la sua traiettoria e subito spariscono. La continuità del tempo possiamo ritrovarla solo nei romanzi di quell'epoca in cui il tempo non appariva più come fermo e non ancora come esploso, un'epoca che è durata su per giù cent'anni, e poi basta.

(618)

Certain aspects of this passage seem to echo both Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* as well as Tozzi's description of his reading methods. For instance, where the narrator refers to long novels belonging to a period in which time was neither static nor dispersed — the latter condition typifying our post-modern experience today — most Italian readers could easily take *I promessi sposi* as a classic example of this genre, not only in terms of its temporal aspect but also in terms of sheer length. The reader opens the book not at the beginning, but rather at the end, in order to check the number of pages, a gesture reminiscent of Tozzi the reader's first attack on a literary work. This disrupted style of reading is also described in Chapter 11 of *Se una notte d'inverno*, where one of the readers in the library declares: “[. . .] la lettura è un'operazione discontinua e frammentaria. O meglio: l'oggetto della lettura è una materia puntiforme e pulviscolare” (II, 864). Calvino's text expresses just how multifarious modes of reading can indeed be in our post-modern era, for, in Graham Allen's words, “Intertextual reading encourages us to resist a passive reading of texts from cover to cover. There is never a single or correct way to read a text, since every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences” (7).

How does Calvino visualize the start of a novel? In the essay “Cominciare e finire,” included in *Lezioni americane* as an unfinished version of what was to be part of his Norton Lectures, he explains his concerns about beginnings (and endings):

La storia della letteratura è ricca d'incipit memorabili, mentre i finali che presentino una vera originalità come forma e come significato sono più rari, o almeno non si presentano alla memoria così facilmente. Questo è particolarmente vero per i romanzi: è come [se]

¹¹ Mazzoni discusses *Se una notte d'inverno*'s opening and the temporal: “Although this explosion of time, central to the atemporality of the unconscious, engenders a multiplicity of stories and therefore also of beginnings, there must nevertheless be in the text *one* unquestionable beginning which constitutes the justifying referent of narrativity, even though it may not quite correspond to that absolute beginning which the reader expects” (55).

nel momento dell'attacco il romanzo sentisse il bisogno di manifestare tutta la sua energia. L'inizio d'un romanzo è l'ingresso in un mondo diverso, con caratteristiche fisiche, percettive, logiche tutte sue. È da questa constatazione che sono partito quando ho cominciato a pensare a un romanzo fatto di inizi di romanzo, quello che è diventato *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*.

(Saggi I, 750)

Similar issues regarding the potentiality of beginnings are developed in Chapter 8 of the novel, in a supposed excerpt from the diary of the fictitious Irish writer, Silas Flannery. The author — obsessed to the point of literary paralysis with his poster of Charles Schulz's Snoopy typing the infamous *incipit* "It was a dark and stormy night [. . .]" — outlines his ideal literary construction:

La fascinazione romanzesca che si dà allo stato puro nelle prime frasi del primo capitolo di moltissimi romanzi non tarda a perdersi nel seguito della narrazione: è la promessa d'un tempo di lettura che si stende davanti a noi e che può accogliere tutti gli sviluppi possibili. Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un *incipit*, che mantenesse per tutta la sua durata la potenzialità dell'inizio, l'attesa ancora senza oggetto. Ma come potrebb'essere costruito, un libro simile? S'interromperebbe dopo il primo capoverso? Prolungherebbe indefinitamente i preliminari? Incastrebberrebbe un inizio di narrazione nell'altro, come le Mille e una notte?

(II, 785)

Of course the solution to the writer's metafictional musings on how to protract the text's beginning (using, significantly, *A Thousand and One Nights* as a model for comparison) is embodied by *Se una notte d'inverno* itself, with its repeated false starts. As a consequence, the reader also experiences a series of delayed gratifications, leaving him/her not fully satisfied by the end of the text.¹² Calvino's postmodern playing with the continuity and discontinuity of time and of the text in *Se una notte d'inverno* should not be surprising; it is typical of the kinds of binary oppositions so common to his fiction, oppositions such as order versus chaos or reality versus fantasy.

In order to accommodate these dualistic schemes Calvino opts for a compromise. In *Se una notte d'inverno*, too, we find the metaphor of the road — in this case, divided — implying a decision between two options:

Allo scrittore che vuole annullare se stesso per dar voce a ciò che è fuori di lui s'aprono due strade: o scrivere un libro che possa essere il libro unico, tale da esaurire il tutto nelle sue pagine; o scrivere tutti i libri, in modo da inseguire il tutto attraverso le sue immagini parziali. Il libro unico, che contiene il tutto, non potrebb'essere altro che il testo sacro, la parola totale rivelata. Ma io non credo che la totalità sia contenibile nel linguaggio; il mio

¹² While many critics (Orr and Mazzoni, among others) have discussed or at least mentioned Calvino's parallel of reading and desire, i.e., the pleasure of the text, the most cogent and thought-provoking study remains De Lauretis's feminist analysis.

problema è ciò che resta fuori, il non-scritto, il non-scrivibile. Non mi rimane altra via che quella di scrivere tutti i libri, scrivere i libri di tutti gli autori possibili.

(II, 789-90)

The structure of Calvino's novel offers a solution to the conundrum of either writing an integral, unified whole or else an endless variety of texts; it consists of the interweaving of false beginnings of all sorts of different types of books, with chapters which focus around a single plot: that of the relationship between the "Lettore" and the "Lettrice" and how it evolves. This literary composite is based, of course, on intertextuality, both in the relationship between the invented texts themselves contained within the work as well as in any allusions they may make to other texts outside the novel. This intertextuality is also witnessed in Calvino's attempts to copy a number of different literary genres and styles, all around the model of the text within the text. As Kathryn Hume has observed: "Calvino's designs were so compellingly different each from each, that the sameness of plot eluded critics," and, she adds: "As usual, critics have been drawn to the variety rather than the sameness. Orengo quotes Calvino on various authors he is supposed to have imitated — Borges, Nabokov, O'Brien, Grass, Singer, and Boris Vian among others" (119).¹³

Calvino's reluctance to avoid categorization is evident also in his preface (taken from a lecture given at Columbia University in 1983) to *Le città invisibili* — another work which stresses the act of reading — where he discusses beginnings and endings as fundamental concepts for his book:

[. . .] un libro (io credo) è qualcosa con un principio e una fine (anche se non è un romanzo in senso stretto), è uno spazio in cui il lettore deve entrare, girare, magari perdersi, ma a un certo punto trovare un'uscita, o magari parecchie uscite, la possibilità d'aprirsi una strada per venirne fuori. Qualcuno di voi mi può dire che questa definizione può valere per un romanzo a intreccio, e non per un libro come questo, che si deve leggere come si leggono i libri di poesie, o di saggi, o tutt'al più di racconti. Ebbene, voglio appunto dire che anche un libro così, per essere un libro, deve avere una costruzione, cioè vi si deve poter scoprire un intreccio, un itinerario, una soluzione.

(VI)

In these comments, which hold relevance for his other works, in particular *Se una notte d'inverno*, Calvino outlines his credo of reader-response and voices his objection to assigning his work to a particular genre, or to adhering to pre-set codes or modes of interpretation.¹⁴ Yet, at the same time, he maintains that a

¹³ Nuccia Bencivenga's study does in fact draw many convincing parallels between the various false beginnings themselves and the numbered chapters.

¹⁴ Barenghi highlights this aspect of Calvino's writer-persona: "Pochi autori hanno come Calvino un senso così acuto e direi quasi doloroso della scelta, che pervade l'attività della scrittura: della necessità cioè di scegliere di continuo fra diverse alternative possibili,

text must have some sort of structure through which the reader can travel.

In the above passage the familiar *topos* of the road emerges in association with the reader's choosing meaning in his/her interpretive wandering through the text; the road reappears as well in *Se una notte d'inverno*, where it is linked also with the voyage and beginnings. Without delving into the theme of the journey — clearly significant for a text with the noun 'viaggiatore' in its title — I would like to examine more closely the end of the novel, in Chapter 11, where several fictional readers comment on their various responses to reading. The sixth reader puts together the titles of the numerous false beginnings and comes up with a sentence that makes sense and sounds somehow familiar:

"Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore, fuori dell'abitato di Malbork, sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa senza temere il vento e la vertigine, guarda in basso dove l'ombra s'addensa in una rete di linee che s'allacciano, in una rete di linee che s'intersecano sul tappeto di foglie illuminate dalla luna intorno a una fossa vuota, — Quale storia laggiù attende la fine? — chiede, ansioso d'ascoltare il racconto."

(II, 868)¹⁵

He then goes on to say:

Il guaio è che una volta cominciavano tutti così, i romanzi. C'era qualcuno che passava per una strada solitaria e vedeva qualcosa che colpiva la sua attenzione, qualcosa che sembrava nascondere un mistero, o una premonizione; allora chiedeva spiegazioni e gli raccontavano una lunga storia [. . .].

(II, 868)

These comments, while stating what perhaps might seem evident about the morphology of the story, bring to mind nonetheless both Tozzi's observations on what constitutes good literature, as well as the beginning of Manzoni's novel. Tozzi, writing in 1919, saw a mysterious act, such as a man pausing along a road to pick up a stone, as being worthy of narration, a concept echoed by Calvino

tutte inesorabilmente relative e parziali, tutte destinate ad essere prima o poi scartate o superate (di qui, anche, la sua volontà di non lasciarsi mai ingabbiare dagli schemi, smentendo quasi per puntiglio le definizioni dei critici)" (159).

¹⁵ McLoughlin observes that Calvino's novel uses such devices in order to postpone closure: "This avoidance of closure is reaffirmed when the male reader notices that the ten titles of the fragments he has read themselves form an enticing opening sentence of a novel [. . .]. Here again a kind of vertigo is hinted at, since if this process is reversed, the implication is that each opening sentence we read in any novel may contain ten other novels beneath it, and even the concluding words of Calvino's novel may contain further stories in the interstices. Once again Calvino forestalls closure" (123). While it is in fact the "Sesto Lettore" in the library and not the male reader who discovers that the fragments put together make up an opening sentence, McLoughlin's remarks on the infinite possibilities of interpretation portrayed in Calvino's text are apt.

several decades later in his usage of the same image of a person walking on a road and noticing something mysterious. Both novelists' words evoke, directly or obliquely, the solitary figure of don Abbondio walking along the road, the best-known beginning of the tradition of the Italian novel. Paul Kottman, too, has indicated this sense of mystery in association with the Calvino text's *incipit*:

In Calvino, invece, la vita, il mondo, le persone, le idee [. . .] tutte le cose che entrano nella nostra percezione d'ogni giorno, sono un testo, qualcosa che è *letto*. Calvino dimostra che vivere vuol dire, dopo tutto, leggere.

Bisogna dire che questa tesi è forse troppo semplice, dovrei aggiungervi alcune riserve, però mi sembra meglio lasciarla così per vedere dove ci porta. In questo modo possiamo, come scrive l'"autore" all'inizio del romanzo, confrontare qualcosa di misterioso, di ampio, senza saperne la destinazione; "è il libro in sé che t'incuriosisce, anzi a pensarci bene preferisci che sia così, trovarti di fronte a qualcosa che ancora non sai bene cos'è."

(55)

In Kottman's analysis of Calvino's quote, he sees the actual beginning of the novel as mysterious, and the book itself becomes an object of curiosity, thus inciting the reader's interest.

And what of a story's ending? Just like beginnings, endings, too, are intertextual and denote continuity, as Calvino explains in his (unfinished) essay, "Cominciare e finire":

[. . .] qualsiasi sia il momento in cui decidiamo che la storia può considerarsi finita, ci accorgiamo che non è verso quel punto che portava l'azione del raccontare, che quello che conta è altrove, è ciò che è avvenuto prima: è il senso che acquista quel segmento isolato di accadimenti, estratto dalla continuità del raccontabile.

(*Saggi I*, 748-49)

Giulio Ferroni, in *Dopo la fine*, draws a parallel between beginnings and endings and their debt to their precedents and antecedents: "Inizio e fine, ingresso dell'opera nel mondo e sua interruzione, definiscono i luoghi concreti della sua inserzione nella finitezza, nella precarietà, nella casualità del vivere: atti culturali che chiamano in causa materialmente il rapporto dell'opera sia con la cultura da cui sorge e a cui è destinata sia con la natura che la determina" (33).

The self-reflexive discourse found in relation to beginnings in *Se una notte d'inverno* crops up again in terms of their opposite,¹⁶ where the seventh reader

¹⁶ There exist several studies which discuss Calvino's beginnings and/or endings (see Works Cited). In "The Horizon of Literature: Epistemic Closure in Calvino's *I nostri antenati*," Rushing comments on the rapport between the two: "For Calvino, the beginning of the text is, ironically, a moment of closure. It is the moment in which all of the stories that could have been told begin to be eliminated. One might then expect the ending to be the logical result of this reduction of possibilities: a total void of possibility, in which meaning becomes fixed or frozen. But this is not necessarily the case" (213-14).

in Chapter 11 explains characteristic endings: "Lei crede che ogni storia debba avere un principio e una fine? Anticamente un racconto aveva solo due modi per finire: passate tutte le prove, l'eroe e l'eroina si sposavano oppure morivano. Il senso ultimo a cui rimandano tutti i racconti ha due facce: la continuità della vita, l'inevitabilità della morte" (II, 869). After hearing this, the original male reader, or "Lettore," makes a predictable decision in favor of life, as the narrator tells him in the second person singular: "Ti fermi un attimo a riflettere su queste parole. Poi fulmineamente decidi che vuoi sposare Ludmilla" (II, 869). Marilyn Orr examines the theme of death in relation not only to the plot of the "Lettore" but also in the beginnings and endings of the stories:

The Reader experiences "this uncertainty between life and death," reading it in every story [. . .]. The ten narrators whose stories the Readers begin are all concerned with the urgent question of origin and end. Each of them begins a story, only to find that he cannot begin but only become involved (or not) in a story that has already begun before he arrived. In each case the writing is an attempt to articulate a beginning, only to find itself enclosed in a network of lines that enlase and intersect.

(214)

In chapter 12, on the novel's final page, the "Lettore" and the "Lettrice" (Ludmilla) are presented as a married couple, in bed and about to turn off the light as the "Lettore" finishes reading *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*.

While original in its self-consciousness and open-endedness (the reader is still left with the unsatisfied desire to know how the numerous mysterious false beginnings actually end), the novel finishes under the most conventional set of circumstances: the hero and heroine's marriage (reinforced by their final depiction in a typical conjugal scene). In an article published in *Alfabeta* in 1979 and cited by Bruno Falsetto in the notes to the novel, Calvino explains his reasoning behind the inclusion of such a traditional conclusion: "ci ho fatto molta attenzione [. . .] calcolando tutto in modo che il "lieto fine" più tradizionale — le nozze dell'eroe e dell'eroina — venisse a sigillare la cornice che abbraccia lo sconquasso generale" (*Romanzi e racconti* II, 1390). If one is to think of a classic ending in the Italian prose tradition which could constitute a potential source, then of course Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* springs to mind, since it concludes with Renzo and Lucia's wedding.¹⁷ Their union is possible

Rushing proceeds to draw interesting conclusions on the openness of some of Calvino's novels' self-referential endings.

¹⁷ In his essay "I Promessi Sposi: il romanzo dei rapporti di forza," Calvino outlines Renzo and Lucia's roles as hero and heroine: "non esiste racconto più funzionale della fiaba in cui c'è un obiettivo da raggiungere malgrado gli ostacoli frapposti da personaggi oppositori e mediante il soccorso di personaggi aiutanti, e l'eroe e l'eroina non hanno altro da pensare che fare le cose giuste e ad astenersi dalle cose sbagliate: come appunto il povero Renzo e la povera Lucia" (*Saggi* 334).

only after the providential death of don Rodrigo as a result of the plague, a fate which could easily have befallen the couple themselves (but does not). The binomial marriage/death does indeed present itself in *I promessi sposi*'s final pages, where don Abbondio, happy to learn of don Rodrigo's demise, says:

"[. . .] si può anche ringraziare il cielo, che ce n'abbia liberati. Ora, tornando a noi, vi ripeto: fate voi altri quel che credete. Se volete che vi mariti io, son qui; se vi torna più comodo in altra maniera, fate voi altri [. . .]. In quanto alla cattura, vedo anch'io che, non essendoci ora più nessuno che vi tenga di mira, e voglia farvi del male, non è cosa da prendersene gran pensiero: tanto più, che c'è stato di mezzo quel decreto grazioso, per la nascita del serenissimo infante. E poi la peste! la peste! ha dato di bianco a di gran cose la peste! Sicchè, se volete [. . .] oggi è giovedì [. . .] domenica vi dico in chiesa; perchè quel che s'è fatto l'altra volta, non conta più niente, dopo tanto tempo; e poi ho la consolazione di maritarvi io."

(530-31)

And so, the lovers' marriage is finally performed, in part thanks to the plague's lethal force which has eliminated the man who was attempting to prevent it. This happy ending is not, however, truly stereotypical, since it is followed by the account of Lucia's reception in her new hometown, and her being perceived as less beautiful than imagined, a fact which dampens Renzo's joy. Guglielminetti reminds us that in these last chapters "si deve pur riconoscere lo sforzo continuo dello scrittore di non cedere alle lusinghe sentimentali e decorative del 'lieto fine' e d'ironizzare il più possibile le modalità" (404).

What I have wanted to explore here is obviously not merely if Tozzi and Calvino were acquainted with Manzoni's major opus, since, as modern Italian writers and readers, they would have found it impossible not to be. What instead has interested me is to examine the intertextual links between them and what they show us about the structure of their texts. Both have reworked Manzoni's image of the road and formulated visions of the text which subvert its order and encourage us to rethink the relationship between writing and reading, authors and interpreters, beginnings and endings.

National University of Ireland, University College Cork

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Principio senza fine: l'iper-romanzo di Italo Calvino

“Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un incipit, che mantenesse per tutta la sua durata la potenzialità dell’inizio, l’attesa ancora senza oggetto. Ma come potrebbe essere costruito, un libro simile? S’interromperebbe dopo il primo capoverso? Prolungherebbe indefinitamente i preliminari? Incastrerebbe un inizio di narrazione nell’altro, come le Mille e una notte?”

Dal *Diario di Silas Flannery*¹

L’ultimo Calvino, nella sezione conclusiva delle *Lezioni americane*, avvertiva il lettore sul costante rifiuto della narrazione lineare nel XX secolo e sulla costruzione “enciclopedica” presente nei grandi romanzi del secolo — ormai non più nostro — concepiti come “metodo di conoscenza . . . connessione tra i fatti, tra le persone, tra le cose del mondo” (Calvino, *Lezioni americane* 116), e per questo immagine di un reale andato in frantumi. Il romanzo contemporaneo, al contrario della letteratura medievale, nasce “dal confluire e scontrarsi d’una molteplicità di metodi interpretativi, modi di pensare, stili d’espressione” e in esso, nonostante il “disegno generale . . . minuziosamente progettato, ciò che conta non è il suo chiudersi in una figura armoniosa, ma è la forza centrifuga che da esso si sprigiona, la pluralità dei linguaggi come garanzia d’una verità non parziale”. Poiché ormai “non è più pensabile una totalità che non sia potenziale, congetturale, plurima” (127).

“Molteplicità” si configura, per questo verso, come una vera “apologia del romanzo come grande rete” (134), analizzando i precedenti forniti dalla tradizione letteraria, non sempre italiana — Gadda, Musil, Proust, Joyce, Goethe, Flaubert, Balzac, ma soprattutto Borges e Perec — e proponendo, per il nostro millennio, quello che verrà chiamato dallo stesso Calvino “l’iper-romanzo” (131), e definito come “campionatura della molteplicità potenziale del narrabile”, “compendio d’una tradizione narrativa” e allo stesso tempo “summa enciclopedica di saperi che danno forma a una immagine del mondo”. Quindi,

¹ Calvino, *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* 177.

un romanzo capace di mostrare non solo “la compresenza continua d’ironia e angoscia”, ma “il senso dell’oggi”, fatto di “accumulazione del passato e di *vertigine del vuoto*” (132; il corsivo è nostro).

La sperimentazione svolta da Calvino dalla metà degli anni Sessanta nel campo del narrare e sulla letteratura come strumento di rappresentazione del reale porterà l’autore — in contatto diretto con l’avanguardia francese e come parte integrante dell’Ou.li.po. dopo il 1973 — ad evidenziare il carattere certamente artificiale della macchina narrativa (Daros in AA.VV., *Italo Calvino*), la sua essenziale condizione di *fiction*, in fin dei conti. Con tutto, Calvino approda nella sua opera compresa nel decennio fra il 1969 e il 1979 — cioè, fra *Il Castello dei destini incrociati* (con la seconda edizione arricchita notevolmente dalla “Taverna dei destini incrociati”) e *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* . . . — non solo a una narrativa di stampo nettamente combinatorio a base addirittura matematica, ma a una vera decostruzione del romanzo tradizionale attraverso l’uso della macrotestualità. Essa s’impone progressivamente, svolgendosi dalla breve pluralità delle voci narranti presente già nel *Barone rampante* e dall’uso dell’ipodiegesi nel *Cavaliere inesistente*. In un primo momento, appare con *Castello*, dove il lettore si confronta con la pluralità dei piani narrativi; in seguito con la complessità dei piani e voci narranti esplorata nelle *Città invisibili*, e finalmente con *Se una notte* dove la macrotestualità si presenta non solo come costruzione narrativa per eccellenza, ma dove lo stesso narrare viene tematizzato (Bonsaver).

Il macrotesto presiede, del resto, gran parte degli scritti calviniani sul narrare di quegli anni: un macrotesto visto come struttura integrante dei vari microtesti che comprende, seguendo un preciso disegno logico al servizio sempre di un ordine testuale superiore, o cornice straniante, che cerca di ricomporre o riordinare il caos del reale. Lo stesso caos che troviamo evidenziato nell’opera di Calvino nelle abbondanti immagini di crollo o di smarrimento presenti già in momenti anteriori, come nella trilogia *I nostri antenati*, e persistenti in opere posteriori, come in *Palomar* (Milanini). Questo è, però, un discorso che non esclude la parodia delle tesi strutturaliste e semiologiche alla moda², e nemmeno il paradosso implicito in una concezione progettuale “aperta” del romanzo che raggiunge invece, particolarmente in *Se una notte*, un grado massimo di “chiusura” ed organicità interna. Da questo punto di vista, non è improprio indicare come la macrotestualità assume in Calvino, alla fine di quel decennio, il ruolo di unica costruzione narrativa possibile di un edificio — letterario, culturale, epistemologico — previamente demolito o in “demolizione scrupolosa” (Milanini, XXIX). Il romanzo così concepito corrisponde, per questo verso, alla frammentarietà e molteplicità che si scopre nella visione moderna del mondo, mentre l’evidente recupero del

² Lo stesso Calvino lo confessava nell’intervista con Maria Corti (“Autografo”, ottobre 1985).

romanzesco a lei connessa porterà implicitamente e inevitabilmente un profondo discorso metanarrativo (AA.VV., *Da Verga a Eco*) che non solo "s'interroga, narrando, sul proprio narrare" (Milanini), ma intraprende sistematicamente il finale smontaggio di tutti i componenti del romanzo tradizionale (voce narrante, Costantini 81-111, protagonista, tempo, spazio, intreccio e favola, tecniche narrative, stilemi, ecc.), così come s'interroga e mette in questione tutte le istanze dell'istituzione letteraria (autore, narratore o narratario (Prince; Booth; Rousset; Chatman), lettore, editore, critico, traduttore, mercato, e persino la figura del *ghost-writer* e del copista di altri secoli).

I. Incipit o romanzo

Con il precedente macrotestuale delle altre opere del Calvino semiotico *Castello e Città*, il terzo romanzo, *Se una notte* (1979), consolida la rottura della continuità narrativa tradizionale in favore della frammentarietà e della mancanza di conclusione in un'opera che si presenta come il susseguirsi di dieci incipit romanzeschi diversi, scritti ognuno *alla maniera di*, e integrati in una cornice narrativa che diventa a sua volta una storia tradizionale, con un suo narratore onnisciente, vari personaggi (Lettore, Lettrice, Traduttore-Falsario, Lotaria, Imerio, Autore, Editore, professori universitari, ecc.), e una dinamica narrativa propria, in rapporto di opposizione e complementarità con i vari microtesti che essa integra.

Frammentarietà e discontinuità narrativa sono, d'altra parte, dalle primissime pagine del libro, un tema chiave, reso esplicito grazie al commento della voce narrante anonima che presenta e controlla il materiale sul piano macrotestuale. Il TU³ al quale si rivolge inizialmente il narratore eterodiegetico che appare nella prima frase del Capitolo primo — in un modo tale che noi stessi, lettori, ci troviamo subito coinvolti nella narrazione — impara immediatamente come deve regolare le proprie aspettative di lettura, dal momento che la percezione della nova temporalità ha distrutto e alterato definitivamente il modo di narrare del romanzo tradizionale:

I romanzi lunghi scritti oggi forse sono un controsenso: *la dimensione del tempo è andata in frantumi, non possiamo vivere o pensare se non a spezzoni di tempo che s'allontanano ognuno lungo una sua traiettoria e subito spariscono*. La continuità del tempo possiamo ritrovarla solo nei romanzi di quell'epoca in cui il tempo non appariva più come fermo e non ancora come esploso, un'epoca che è durata su per giù cent'anni, e poi basta⁴.

Il nuovo mondo post-eisensteiniano esige, quindi, un nuovo modo di narrare

³ Vedi lo stesso procedimento in M. Butor: *La modification* (1956). D'altra parte, Bonsaver ha rilevato che pure Ovidio, nelle *Metamorfosi*, opera che Calvino prologò proprio nell'edizione italiana del 1979, si rivolge a un "Tu".

⁴ Calvino, *Se una notte* 8. Il corsivo è nostro.

dove non conta più la mimesi tradizionale⁵: una nuova narrazione con conseguenze non solo sul piano dei rapporti tradizionali fra favola e intreccio, fra tempo narrato e tempo reale, ma al livello di tutte le istanze narrative. La revisione comincia dalla voce narrante e il suo problematico — e tematicamente problematizzato, in questo romanzo — rapporto con il lettore, il quale verrà coinvolto nella narrazione grazie all'uso della metalessi, che diventa straordinariamente largo lungo tutto *Se una notte*. Con il costante mescolarsi e sovrapporsi del mondo scritto e il mondo reale si lascia il lettore in una costante *suspension of disbelief*. Gli incipit o “frantumi” di tempo narrato che “si allontanano ognuno lungo una traiettoria” e che “subito spariscono”, si presentano come rappresentazione di un nuovo modo di narrare, il quale procederà necessariamente per biforcazioni e “minime alternative ben circoscritte” (20) con il proposito di offrire la possibilità di vivere più vite contemporaneamente (147)⁶, sempre alla ricerca di una effettiva alterazione delle leggi della consequenzialità sul piano narrativo così come sul piano reale, sia risalendo il corso del tempo, sia cancellando le conseguenze degli avvenimenti accaduti, oppure facendo girare indietro gli orologi (22), nel desiderio, in fin dei conti, di restaurare la condizione iniziale (16). È l'immagine di una narrativa che cerca di confrontarsi con la “disseminazione nello spazio e nel tempo” (134) che caratterizza il nostro mondo, nella quale si incrociano “tutte queste linee oblique” che “dovrebbero delimitare lo spazio dove ci muoviamo” e che, finalmente, dovrebbe essere quello spazio dove la “storia possa affiorare dal nulla” (79).

Non a caso, dall'inizio del romanzo Calvino s'istalla sottilmente nell'ambito del paradosso, in un modo che, benché tangenziale, risulta rilevante nel suo cenno ironico — un vero ammicco al lettore — a Zenone d'Elea (17, 23) e alle sue note aporie spaziali-temporali. Discontinuità e divisibilità paradossali dell'essere nell'apertura di spiragli, infiniti nella sua infinita frammentarietà, in uno spazio ormai incommensurabile e un tempo effettivamente esploso e potenzialmente illimitato nella *mise en abîme* che si insinua ad ogni istante. Tempo all'interno del tempo, *ad infinitum*, come lo stesso narratore eterodiegetico del macrotesto ci scoprirà più tardi nello stesso atto della lettura (156), che è, del resto, metafora della comunicazione per eccellenza per i due protagonisti del macrotesto, Lettore e Lettrice-Ludmilla.

Detto questo, non sorprenderà che la narrazione proceda non linearmente,

⁵ Il superamento dell'istanza realistica della tradizione narrativa nel susseguirsi di livelli di realtà nella letteratura, fino all'infinito, prevedendo la sparizione dell'io o soggetto scrivente, così come quella dell'oggetto scritto, è ben presente in un altro testo di Calvino, *I livelli della realtà*.

⁶ A proposito della sovrabbondanza delle istanze narrative in questo romanzo, dove appare un caleidoscopio di punti di vista e di orizzonti epistemici diversi, vedi anche Greimas.

ma per ipotesi e verificazioni, prendendo sempre in considerazione il grado massimo di potenzialità del reale. Così nelle ipotesi di lettura (3) o di tutti libri possibili e catalogabili (5-6), nelle varie prevedibili situazioni di un telefono che squilla (incipit 6, 136), nei vari casi di censura (238). Il tema della molteplicità ipotetica si ripete persino sul piano dell'argomento. Ad esempio, nei vari passati che confessa il narratore autodiegetico dell'incipit 5 (105-107), nelle infinite immagini che si rifrangono e divergono nel gioco degli specchi dell'incipit 7 (167) o, ironicamente, nell'accennare agli appunti per un saggio di Ukko Ahti, l'autore di *Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa*, sulle varie incarnazioni di Budda (69). Per non parlare dell'istanza narrativa del TU nella cornice testuale, concepita sempre solo come uno dei vari TU possibili, così come l'IO che narra sarà solo uno dei tanti IO possibili (147 a 148). Del resto, lo stesso ragionamento della voce narrante — sia del macrotesto che degli incipit — procede abitualmente per ipotesi, in un modo che tante volte si rende nettamente esplicito dall'uso molto frequente di "forse", "se", o "oppure" (vedi solo, come esempio, il caso chiarissimo di 174 e 175, all'interno del fondamentale Capitolo ottavo). A ben guardare, lo stesso titolo del romanzo, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore . . .*, racchiude in sé stesso una ipotesi da verificare, in un modo che il lettore scoprirà, alla fine del libro, che comprende l'insieme degli incipit nell'ipotesi di un nuovo romanzo, corrispondente all'inesistente, ma progettualmente accennato, incipit numero undici dell'ultimo capitolo del libro. Molteplicità e potenzialità del reale, ipotesi da verificare che restano, però, in gran parte irrisolte, senza una completa e soddisfacente conclusione, come gli stessi dieci incipit del romanzo, contraddicendo quella apparente linearità temporale e felice conclusione da *happy ending* di favola presente nel macrotesto, dove non a caso il matrimonio finale fra Lettore e Lettrice restaura l'ordine narrativo e allo stesso tempo concettuale. E, in effetti, il macrotesto si presenta, per tanti versi, molto più tradizionale nel modo dei narrare dei vari microtesti da lui compresi.

La discontinuità ricorrente e ampiamente diffusa nell'opera si pone sempre al servizio della macrotestualità, in questi e in altri numerosi momenti lungo il romanzo. Sono numerosi gli esempi, ma vogliamo sottolineare in questa sede specialmente quando il narratore eterodiegetico commenta al lettore: "Adesso sono le storie che vivi a interrompersi al momento culminante: *forse* ora i romanzi che leggi ti sarà concesso di seguirli fino alla fine . . ." (221; il corsivo nostro).

Lo stesso uso dei puntini sospensivi, questa persistente mancanza di conclusione della frase che è uno stilema frequente nel libro, dovrebbe avvertirci di un elemento importante e ricorrente: e cioè non della mancata veracità dell'enunciato, in sé ipotetico, ma della — forse — impossibile verifica finale dell'ipotesi, così come di ogni ipotesi, vero segno dell'aporia della conoscenza del reale alla quale approda l'ultimo Calvino, in questo e altri romanzi.

Ora, discontinuità e mancanza di conclusione raggiungono, nonostante tutto, una valenza nuova in questo romanzo tutto incardinato sull'atto del narrare. La si scopre di nuovo tangenzialmente all'interno dell'importante Capitolo sesto, dove si assiste a una rescrittura, parodica nella sua inversione, del tema di Sherezade e delle *Mille e una notti*, presente nel personaggio della Sultana non già narratrice, ma vorace-e-insaziabile-lettertrice-di-romanzi. D'altra parte, nello stesso capitolo viene esplicitato il progetto narrativo di Ermes Marana, il Traduttore-falsario, di un romanzo che, a ben guardare, è in sostanza lo stesso *Se una notte* (124 e 125). Così come è proprio la caduta di tensione che segue inevitabilmente la fine di ogni romanzo il momento più pericoloso per il complotto che minaccia il governo del Sultano, orchestrato da sua moglie. Così, nell'alternanza fra tensione narrativa e distensione si articola parodisticamente l'argomentazione per un romanzo progettualmente capace di sostenere l'interesse e le aspettative di lettura *ad infinitum*: un romanzo, cioè, necessariamente inconcluso e perpetuamente ricominciato. L'idea verrà ragionata dallo stesso Autore, Silas Flannery, vero alterego dello stesso Calvino, nel centrale Capitolo ottavo del libro, presentandola come tecnica narrativa ormai necessaria per mantenere intatta la "fascinazione romanzesca . . . allo stato puro", come si dà *solo* — e vogliamo sottolineare il "solo" — "nelle prime frasi del primo capitolo di moltissimi romanzi". E in effetti, leggiamo: ". . . è la promessa d'un tempo di lettura che si stende davanti a noi e che può accogliere tutti gli sviluppi possibili" (177).

È, in fin dei conti, la promessa non solo di un inizio, ma dell'Inizio in sé, completo e illimitato, che comprende l'intera capacità potenziale di tutti i suoi sviluppi susseguenti, "molteplici, inesauribili" (176), e perciò previ alle limitate alternative delle sue eventuali realizzazioni posteriori. Un Inizio capace di mantenere quell'"esaltazione" dell'"attesa" motivata dalla potenzialità, e quella "facilità" sempre rinnovata "dell'entrata in un altro mondo", che significa ogni romanzo da cominciare, anche se questa attesa non è altro che "un'illusione" (176): l'illusione dell'Origine, il quale tutto comprende e al quale, in fin dei conti, tutto approda.

E ancora, nelle parole di Silas Flannery, l'Autore di *best-sellers*:

Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un *incipit*, che mantenesse per tutta la durata la potenzialità dell'inizio, l'attesa ancora senza oggetto. Ma come potrebbe essere costruito, un libro simile? . . . Incasterebbe un inizio di narrazione nell'altro, come le *Mille e una notte*? (177).

La tradizione orientale offre in questo e in altri aspetti, sia a Silas Flannery nel suo Diario che a Calvino nel suo romanzo, non esattamente una soluzione, ma una via di soluzione per il nuovo romanzo costruito su una base temporale e con le aspettative di lettura nuove, poiché punta a una struttura tendente a sovrapporre, su questo universo discontinuo e frammentario post-eisenteiniano,

un qualche disegno e ordinazione, benché finzionale, benché provvisoria, benché semplice illusione. Dal momento che, come avverte la voce narrante della cornice testuale, la cosa che esaspera di più il Lettore — forse tutti noi — “è trovarti alla mercé del fortuito, dell’aleatorio, del probabilistico, nelle cose e nelle azioni umane, la sbadataggine, l’approssimatività, l’imprecisione” (27). A questo riguardo, “ristabilire il corso regolare degli avvenimenti”, e quindi l’ordine, sarà, in fin dei conti, la scelta del Lettore nello sposare finalmente la Lettrice, come nelle storie tradizionali, quando una volta “passate tutte le prove, l’eroe e l’eroina si sposavano oppure morivano” (261). Con tutto, pure li si offriva una scelta possibile, un’alternativa: “la continuità della vita, l’inevitabilità della morte” (261), dinanzi alla quale bisognava sempre prendere parte.

L’alternanza caos/ordine viene tematizzata, a ben guardare, in molti altri passi del libro⁷. Come è già stato rilevato, la crisi del mondo contemporaneo causata non da un eccesso di razionalizzazione ma a un difetto di ragione, e il susseguente bisogno di un disegno ordinante del caos labirintico, è una costante calviniana di quegli anni (Milanini, XIX); se vogliamo, un qualche residuo illuminista, persistente, nonostante tutto, negli anni Settanta. Esemplare a questo riguardo il borgiano incipit 7 — non nello stile, bensì per il motivo centrale dello specchio e il labirinto di immagini nel quale l’identità del soggetto si perde *ad infinitum* — dove affiora di nuovo il paradosso della molteplicità dell’Uno e l’univocità del Molteplice, con un’allusione non affatto gratuita alla tradizione ermetica dello specchio, elemento capace di riflettere l’immagine di Dio e di tutto il creato (165, 166): come il punto che comprende l’intero universo, la totalità delle cose, l’Aleph (Segre, *Se una notte*), origine di tutto.

II. Vuoto e assenza

Fascinazione narrativa e aspettative di lettura si vedono ripetutamente ricominciare in *Se una notte* dopo ogni frustrazione (ora per un motivo, ora per un altro) dell’interruzione subita alla fine di ogni primo capitolo di ogni nuovo romanzo. La discontinuità irrompe alle volte violentamente nella linearità della narrazione, ma persino nella corporeità della lettura, preceduta dal tagliacarte che “apre” fisicamente il libro. E così, nei momenti più decisivi, s’impone il vuoto: “Ed ecco che, nel momento in cui la tua attenzione è più sospesa, volti il foglio a metà d’una frase decisiva e ti trovi davanti a due *pagine bianche*” (41).

⁷ Come nell’immagine del caleidoscopio che presiede l’intero incipit 7 (161 e ss.), dove la pluralità speculare viene ulteriormente accresciuta dalla smania di collezionismo di caleidoscopi del suo narratore autodiegetico, in preda a una sorta di paranoia. È una delle rappresentazioni della ricerca di un ordine possibile nella infinita moltiplicazione della propria immagine con la quale il soggetto perseguita la sua effettiva occultazione.

Il vuoto della pagina in bianco⁸, dell'assenza di significato⁹ e del libro stesso come promessa mancata di un qualunque significato¹⁰; il vuoto della comunicazione fallita fra i personaggi¹¹ (persino *in extremis*¹²), o semplicemente interrotta, ma in qualunque caso sempre problematica, paradigmaticamente indicata dalla mancata comunicazione fra narratore autodiegetico (maschile in tutti gli incipit) e personaggio femminile¹³, in un modo che solo troverà

⁸ Ricorderemo solo qualche esempio fra i molti possibili: il "*bianco* crudele come una ferita", "ecco che questo romanzo così fittamente intessuto di sensazioni tutt'a un tratto si presenta *squarciato da voragini senza fondo*, come se la pretesa di rendere *la pienezza vitale rivelasse il vuoto che c'è sotto*" (41 e 42); "ci si slancia a scrivere percorrendo la felicità d'una futura lettura e *il vuoto si apre sulla carta bianca*" (176 e 177). Il corsivo è nostro in tutti i casi.

⁹ Vedi, fra i vari esempi, il mondo pieno di segni mancati di significato di Imerio, l'antiletore (48), oppure tutto l'incipit III, di tono apocalittico, dove il mondo appare pieno di messaggi indecifrabili: "messaggi che mi sarebbe difficile comunicare ad altri, definire, tradurre in parole, ma che appunto perciò mi si presentano come decisivi" (53); "messaggi che interpreto come un richiamo della notte" (59); "l'oggetto racchiudeva un messaggio per me, e dovevo decifrarlo" (61); "certo vi si nascondeva un significato che mi sfuggiva" (62), ecc.

¹⁰ Così il "libro andato in pezzi", sia dalla critica, sia dal lavoro caotico del mondo dell'editoria e dell'azione del traduttore-falsario (capitolo V): "libri che cominciano e non continuano" (97), risultato del disordine che ha conquistato la casa editrice: "il disordine s'estende, il caos si apre sotto i nostri piedi . . . quando ci penso mi vengono le vertigini", afferma l'editore "perseguitato dalla visione di miliardi di pagine, di righe, di parole che vorticano in un pluviscolo" (98), ecc.

¹¹ Vedi, fra i molti esempi, l'incomunicazione installata paradossalmente nel *campus* universitario, nell'incipit VI: "Ci incrociamo sui sentieri fruscianti di foglie e qualche volta ci diciamo: 'Hi!', qualche volta niente perché dobbiamo risparmiare il fiato. Anche questo è un *vantaggio* del correre rispetto agli altri sport: ognuno va per conto suo e non ha da rendere conto agli altri" (135). E ancora: "e di nuovo sono lacerato tra la necessità e l'impossibilità di rispondere" (135), il che provoca una particolare nevrosi nel protagonista: "c'è una telefonata che mi sta inseguendo", "precipito in una smania assurda", "sono prigioniero d'un cerchio al cui centro c'è il telefono", "nell'assurda logica che lavora dentro di me", "questo disagio risvegliato in me", ecc. Il corsivo è nostro.

¹² Lo stesso diario del "superstite" dell'incipit III si intravede come una comunicazione fallita: a "*message in a bottle*" mancato, non solo perché è visto come carente di destinatario ("queste pagine che non so se qualcuno leggerà mai", 60), ma perché è un messaggio *indecifrabile*: "la mia scrittura forse troppo nervosa perché un futuro lettore possa decifrarla", "forse questo diario tornerà alla luce molti e molti anni dopo la mia morte, quando la nostra lingua avrà subito chissà quali trasformazioni e alcuni dei vocaboli e giri di frase da me usati correntemente suoneranno desueti e *di significato incerto*" (60). Il corsivo è nostro.

¹³ Vedi gli incipit II (nel rapporto con Brigd, contaminato dal ricordo di Zwida: "temevo di non poter più stabilire rapporti con nessuno e con niente . . . quella che cercavo era una

soluzione effettiva nella cornice testuale del romanzo e grazie allo stesso libro, istituito come l'unico canale di successo per la comunicazione fra Lettore e Lettrice¹⁴.

Vuoto, quindi, dell'incomunicazione umana e, per estensione, dell'insufficienza di ogni comunicazione letteraria¹⁵. Lo stesso tema troverà eco nella auto-cancellazione del soggetto presentata come suicidio reale¹⁶, oppure occultazione di sé, si tratti del protagonista (come nell'incipit VII), dell'autore¹⁷

figura bifronte: una Brigd-Zwida, come ero bifronte anch'io", 38 e 39), III (fra la voce narrante e la signorina Zwida), IV (fra il protagonista e Irina: nel loro dialogo, si aprono non a caso "intervalli di vuoto . . . tra una battuta e l'altra", e persino "potrebbe interrompersi", 83 e 84), V (fra il narratore e la donna, per estensione, tutte le donne, dopo l'assassinio del rivale, 111), VI (tra il protagonista nevrotico e la studentessa Marjorie), VII (fra il narratore e la moglie/amante nella situazione triangolare accresciuta *ad infinitum* dal gioco degli specchi: "un occhio e un sopracciglio d'Elfrida, una gamba negli stivali aderenti, l'angolo della sua bocca dalle labbra sottili e dai denti troppo bianchi . . . tra tutti questi frammenti stravolti della sua figura s'interpongono scorci della pelle di Lorna, come paesaggi di carne. Già non so più distinguere ciò che è dell'una e ciò che è dell'altra, mi perdo, mi sembra d'aver perduto me stesso . . . 168), VIII (dove riappare lo stesso triangolo, anche se questa volta fra il protagonista, la madre e la figlia), oppure X (la voce narrante "cancellatrice" del mondo circostante e Franziska), ecc. Lo stesso capitolo VIII su Silas Flannery, fondamentale e inizialmente centrale nel libro, propone il tema della problematica comunicazione Autore-Destinatario, che si presenta appunto come Lettrice: "forse la donna che osservo col cannocchiale *sa* quello che dovrei scrivere; ossia *non lo sa*, perché appunto aspetta da me che io scriva quel che *non sa*; ma ciò che lei sa con certezza è la sua attesa, quel vuoto che le mie parole dovrebbero riempire" (171).

¹⁴ Il libro gli permette, in effetti, di "comunicare ancora con lei attraverso il canale scavato dalle parole altrui", e diventa, quindi, come osserva il narratore onnisciente, "un linguaggio, un codice tra voi, un mezzo per scambiarsi segnali e riconoscervi" (148). Il corsivo è nostro.

¹⁵ Fra i molti esempi, vedi l'incipit VI: "dubito che le parole scritte possano darne un'idea anche parziale" (133); "c'è sempre qualcosa d'essenziale che resta fuori dalla frase scritta" (203), ecc.

¹⁶ D'altra parte, il suicidio è un tema ricorrente in *Se una notte*. Ricorderemo solo qualche esempio: Ukko Ahti, autore di *Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa*, ha avuto tre tentativi di suicidio e ancora un quarto riuscito (69); un commento del narratore onnisciente sul professor Uzzi-Tuzzii dice: "forse si sta impiccando alla lampada del soffitto" (70), ecc.

¹⁷ Sul tema importantissimo dell'occultazione della figura dell'autore, vedi il capitolo V, in particolar modo a proposito dei commenti sull'editore Cavedagna, lettore per vocazione e deformazione professionale: "lui ha a che fare con loro [gli autori] tutti i giorni, conosce le loro fissazioni, irresolutezze, suscettibilità, i loro egocentrismi, eppure gli autori veri restano quelli che per lui erano solo un nome sulla copertina, una parola che faceva tutt'uno col titolo, autori che avevano la stessa realtà dei loro personaggi . . . , che esistevano e non esistevano allo stesso tempo. . . . *L'autore era un punto invisibile da cui venivano i libri, un vuoto percorso da fantasmi, un tunnel sotterraneo che metteva in*

o del narratore¹⁸. Ora, andrà notato che alla cancellazione del soggetto corrisponde la cancellazione del mondo esteriore¹⁹ e, in fin dei conti, anche la cancellazione del testo, che verrà occultato a sua volta²⁰.

Non solo sono vari gli incipit che puntano direttamente sul tema del vuoto, in un modo reale o figurato, ma persino il vuoto come motivo letterario è altamente ricorrente lungo tutto il romanzo²¹. E, a ben guardare, la stessa storia

comunicazione gli altri mondi col pollaio della sua infanzia . . .” (101 e 102). Il corsivo è nostro. Il tema raggiunge il suo momento culminante, però, con le riflessioni del Diario di Silas Flannery sul desiderio di cancellazione della personalità (come soggettività, visione del mondo e anche stile) dell'autore: “Come scriverei bene se non ci fossi! . . . Lo stile, il gusto, la filosofia personale, la soggettività, la formazione culturale, l'esperienza vissuta, la psicologia, il talento, i trucchi del mestiere: tutti gli elementi che fanno sì che ciò che scrivo sia riconoscibile come mio, mi sembra una gabbia che limita le mie possibilità. . . vorrei annullare me stesso” (171); e ancora: “Qualcosa in me è venuta meno: forse l'io; forse il contenuto dell'io. Ma non era questo che volevo? Non è la spersonalizzazione che cercavo di raggiungere?” (192). È la funzione dell'Autore ciò che è in gioco, sia dal complotto degli apocrifi del traduttore-falsario Ermes Marana — “Come fare a sconfiggere non gli autori ma la funzione dell'autore, l'idea che dietro ogni libro ci sia qualcuno che garantisce una verità”, “Ermes Marana sognava una letteratura tutta d'apocrifi, di false attribuzioni, d'imitazioni e contraffazioni e pastiches”, grazie a una letteratura che instaurasse “un'incertezza sistematica sull'identità di chi scrive”, che impedisse al lettore di abbandonarsi con fiducia” (159) — che dal progetto di una letteratura degli apocrifi e della mistificazione ideata da Silas Flannery — “Forse la mia vocazione vera era quella d'autore d'apocrifi, nei vari significati del termine” [e cioè “libro segreto” e “testo falso”] (193).

¹⁸ Nella pluralità e ubiquità del soggetto che narra, come il protagonista dell'incipit VII; oppure nella molteplicità dei sosia, come si scopre alla fine dell'incipit IX.

¹⁹ Tutto l'incipit X e ultimo è sul tema della cancellazione. Proprio all'inizio, il narratore autodiegetico racconta: “camminando per la grande Prospettiva della nostra città, cancello mentalmente gli elementi che ho deciso di non prendere in considerazione”. E così decide di “abolire completamente” il mondo perché “aggrovigliato” e “sovraccarico” (247). Abolirà e cancellerà tutto quanto, fino a ridurre il mondo esterno a un paesaggio da apocalissi: una “sconfinata pianura deserta e ghiacciata”, “solo una distesa piatta e grigia di ghiaccio compatto come basalto” (250), “una superficie vuota che è il mondo” (251). Questo mondo apocalittico verrà significativamente ridotto a “un foglio di carta dove non si riescono a scrivere altro che parole astratte” (254): un mondo referenziale abitato dal nulla e dall'assenza di significato.

²⁰ Così il testo più rappresentativo della letteratura cimberica (una letteratura, non a caso, di una lingua sulla soglia dei morti): si tratta del romanzo incompiuto di Ukko Ahti, *Sporgendosi dalla costa scoiotesca*, rappresentativo “per quel che manifesta e ancor più per quel che occulta, per il suo sottrarsi, venir meno, sparire . . .” (69; il corsivo è nostro).

²¹ Solo a titolo di esempio, l'incipit III conclude in questo modo: “Sentii subito che nell'ordine perfetto dell'universo s'era aperta una breccia, uno squarcio irreparabile” (66). D'altra parte, l'incipit IV si presenta come un romanzo sul vuoto e sulla percezione

narrata verrà definita come forma, figura ordinante del caos, e quindi come un qualunque "disegno" capace di conferire significato all'informe e "affiorare dal nulla"²². Da questo punto di vista, la scrittura si propone non solo come "ponte sul vuoto"²³, ma sorge addirittura da questo stesso sentimento del vuoto, che essa cerca, anche disperatamente, di riempire²⁴, si confronta con questa angoscia²⁵, per approdare alla fine al nulla della pagina in bianco o dell'insieme

del vuoto: " — Il vuoto, il vuoto, là sotto, — diceva, — aiuto, la vertigine . . . " (81); "sento tutti questi passi . . . avanzare nel vuoto, precipitare, una folla che precipita" (82); "ogni vuoto continua nel vuoto, ogni strapiombo anche minimo dà su un altro strapiombo, ogni voragine sbocca nell'abisso infinito" (82); "il vuoto di cui non voglio accorgermi" (82); "un dialogo costruito sul vuoto . . . sotto ogni parola c'è il nulla" (83); "il capogiro" o "tentazione" che attrae verso il vuoto (83), "le vertigini sono dappertutto", "sembra un pozzo senza fondo. Si sente il richiamo del nulla, la tentazione di precipitare, raggiungere il buoi che chiama . . ." (86); "l'orrore del vuoto" (87), ecc. Pure il borgiano incipit IX s'incardina nel tema della fossa vuota in un ovvio *remake* della fine del racconto *El Sur* (234, 235). Mentre che l'incipit X vede, alla fine, "aprirsi delle fessure, dei solchi, dei crepacci" sul suolo, fino al punto che fra i due protagonisti si frappone non solo un muro d'incomunicazione, ma "un abisso" vero e proprio, e si scopre "in basso . . . solo il nulla che continua giù all'infinito", mentre restano solo "pezzi di mondo sparpagliati nel vuoto" (254).

²² "Tutte queste linee oblique incrociandosi dovrebbero delimitare lo spazio dove ci muoviamo io e Valeriano e Irina, dove la nostra storia possa affiorare dal nulla, trovare un punto di partenza, una direzione, un disegno" (79; il corsivo è nostro).

²³ In effetti, "forse è questo racconto che è un ponte sul vuoto, e procede buttando avanti notizie e sensazioni e emozioni per creare uno sfondo di rivolgimenti sia collettivi che individuali in mezzo al quale ci si possa aprire un cammino . . . coprono un vuoto di cui non voglio accorgermi" (82). E ancora: "per il racconto il ponte non è finito: sotto ogni parola c'è il nulla" (83); "il racconto riprende il cammino interrotto . . . non lascia nessuno spiraglio all'orrore del vuoto" (87).

²⁴ Dal diario di Silas Flannery: il libro è "quel vuoto che le mie parole dovrebbero riempire" (171). Il corsivo è nostro. Ma già nel Capitolo III: "questo romanzo . . . si presenta squarciato da voragini senza fondo, come se la pretesa di rendere la pienezza vitale rivelasse il vuoto che c'è sotto" (42). La dicotomia vuoto e pienezza articola, in più, il discorso del questionamento della comunicazione letteraria accennato qui dall'uso del tempo verbale. Ma il libro propone ancora un altro rapporto fra scrittura e mondo referenziale: esso "non dovrebbe essere altro che l'equivalente del mondo non scritto tradotto in scrittura . . . la sua materia dovrebbe essere ciò che non c'è né potrà esserci se non quando sarà scritto, ma di cui ciò che c'è sente oscuramente il vuoto nella propria incompletezza" (171, 172).

²⁵ Così leggiamo: "Ci si slancia a scrivere percorrendo la felicità d'una futura lettura e il vuoto si apre sulla carta bianca" (177). È l'angoscia mallarmeana della pagina in bianco che s'impone all'autore e blocca la scrittura, la stessa angoscia che suscita l'invidia dell'autore per il copista medievale: "il senso e il fascino d'una vocazione ormai inconcepibile: quella del copista. Il copista viveva contemporaneamente in *due*

di segni mancati di significato. E in effetti, il mondo apocalittico che si profila alla fine dell'incipit X verrà presentato come una pagina in bianco, in un mondo descritto ormai sull'orlo dell'abisso, dove s'impone la discontinuità assoluta fra segno e significato²⁶, il vero squarcio dove affiora il nulla, oppure dove si concentra il tutto e la verità assoluta, occulta nel fondo del vortice²⁷.

La tensione verso il vuoto, l'abisso, la disgregazione dell'identità nel soggetto e della consistenza e solidità nell'oggetto, nel mondo referenziale, l'assenza, in fin dei conti, è fortissima in tutto il libro, anche se di solito parodiata o persino ironizzata e, per questo verso, svuotata di drammatismo. Tranne in certi passi relegati agli incipit, presentati come una scrittura *alla maniera di* che svigorisce il forte carattere apocalittico dell'insieme, ben presente, d'altra parte, nella stessa idea del romanzo ideale integrata nel sogno del Capitolo Decimo:

Il libro che cerco . . . è quello che dà il senso del mondo dopo la fine del mondo, il senso che il mondo è la fine di tutto ciò che c'è al mondo, che la sola cosa che ci sia al mondo è la fine del mondo (245).

Apocalissi e integrazione (come quella presente nella restaurazione dell'ordine del *happy ending* macrotestuale) è, per questo e altri motivi, un asse esegetico rilevante nel romanzo, benché alle volte sotterrato e mascherato. Origine, del resto, della crisi di scrittura che pervade l'Autore di *best-sellers*, Silas Flannery, alter-ego calviniano. Non è questo certo l'unico referente a Umberto Eco²⁸, come sappiamo. La stessa nozione della letteratura come comunicazione, come *fiction* (*Trattato di semiotica generale*), il coinvolgimento del lettore nella narrazione (*Lector in fabula*), la nozione "aperta" dell'opera (*Opera aperta*) o la valorizzazione dell'assenza (*La struttura assente*) sono referenti molto evidenti per le sperimentazioni narrative svolte da Calvino in quegli anni fra i Sessanta e i Settanta. L'intera trilogia semiotica dell'autore è

dimensioni temporali, quella della lettura e quella della scrittura; poteva scrivere senza l'angoscia del vuoto che s'apre davanti alla penna" (178). Il corsivo è nostro.

²⁶ "Il mondo è ridotto a un foglio di carta dove non si riescono a scrivere altro che parole astratte, come se tutti i nomi concreti fossero finiti" (254).

²⁷ Non solo perché, come crede il primo lettore del capitolo undicesimo, poche pagine possono aprirci una immensità di mondi — "quelle poche pagine racchiudono per me interi universi, cui non riesco a dar fondo" (256) — ma perché, come sostiene il secondo lettore, "l'oggetto della lettura è una materia puntiforme e pluviscolare . . . come le particelle elementari che compongono il nucleo dell'opera . . . Oppure come il vuoto al fondo d'un vortice, che aspira e inghiotte le correnti. È attraverso questi spiragli che, per lampi appena percettibili, si manifesta la verità che il libro può portare, la sostanza ultima" (256, 257).

²⁸ Ovviamente, facciamo riferimento a Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*.

articolata in gran misura, non solo sulle sollecitazioni di Perec e Queneau²⁹, ma sulla riflessione sviluppata prendendo come punto di partenza questi nuovi contributi della critica. Come è già stato rilevato (Bonsaver), *Se una notte* e l'intera trilogia puntano, nei suoi vari componenti, sul tema del vuoto e intorno alla sua rappresentazione, sia essa lo spiraglio abissale che si apre quando irrompe la discontinuità temporale-spaziale, sia il non "spazio" dell'evanescenza del pieno significato, o l'irruzione dell'assenza, che sveglia l'ansietà del nulla ma comprende simultaneamente la massima potenzialità significativa, perché irrealizzata: un vero buco nero dell'universo del significato³⁰.

III. L'autore plurimo e infinito

La poetica dell'incipit di *Se una notte*, e cioè del romanzo come del principio mancato di conclusione, evidenzia non solo la discontinuità narrativa sviluppando l'alternanza vuoto/pienezza, esegeticamente funzionale nell'opera, come abbiamo visto, ma tende allo smontaggio di un elemento basilare della narrativa tradizionale: l'autore o, meglio ancora, la funzione autorale. Certamente, le nuove tecnologie e le sperimentazioni avanguardiste degli anni Sessanta sono alla base del problema. D'altra parte, andrà osservato che l'intervento della computerizzazione sulla creazione letteraria, in sostituzione del lavoro dell'autore, è ben presente in quest'opera in certi momenti della narrazione³¹, offrendo effettivamente una via di superamento del soggetto esistente tradizionalmente dietro alla scrittura. Questa dissoluzione della figura autorale si proietta in ultima istanza sul piano della critica, ad esempio nella parodia delle concordanze, presente alla fine del Capitolo nono³², in un modo che troverà un ecco puntuale pure nel rifiuto — di stampo crociano — alla critica degli scartafacci.

Lo smontaggio della funzione autorale raggiunge livelli ancora più significativi nel libro. E non solo perché si trova all'origine della stessa idea del romanzo *Se una notte*, come leggiamo nel diario di Silas Flannery, il cui grado

²⁹ Sul rapporto di Calvino con Queneau e con l'Ou.li.po., Fusco...

³⁰ Vuoto e pienezza, visti come due volti della stessa realtà non è solo una idea che racchiude una importante aporia della conoscenza, ma è anche una delle lezioni della tradizione buddista.

³¹ Il computer è visto, ad esempio, come un aiutante per l'autore in crisi creativa e, allo stesso tempo, un suo sostituto: "ero riuscito a convincere il vecchio autore di thrillers ad affidarmi l'inizio del romanzo che non riusciva più a portare avanti e che i nostri computer sarebbero stati in grado di completare facilmente, programmati come sono per sviluppare tutti gli elementi d'un testo con perfetta fedeltà ai modelli stilistici e concettuali dell'autore" (118). Il corsivo è nostro.

³² In effetti, dovuto a "un'istantanea smagnetizzazione", il libro viene ridotto a "un pluscolo delle parole sciolte: il il il, di di di di, da da da da, che che che che, incolonnate secondo le frequenze rispettive. Il libro è sbriciolato, dissolto, non più ricomponibile, come una duna di sabbia soffiata via dal vento" (221)

di “veracità” viene effettivamente verificato lungo la lettura del libro³³, ma anche perché l’obiettivo che lo scrittore di *best sellers* si propone di raggiungere non è altro che l’eclissamento, lo svuotamento di sé. È così che si formula la poetica dell’incipit, rivolta all’“impersonalità di quell’incipit” scritto *alla maniera di un altro* (176). Il proposito sarà di restare fedele alla sua vera vocazione, e cioè la vocazione di *ghost writer* (180) o semplice “mano scrivente” delle esistenze altrui. Solo in questo modo gli riuscirà possibile la sua aspirazione a una reale “oggettività di pensiero”:

dire non ‘io penso’, ma ‘pensa’, come si dice ‘piove’ . . . Potrò mai dire: ‘oggi scrive’, così come ‘oggi piove’, ‘oggi fa vento’? Solo quando mi verrà naturale d’usare il verbo scrivere all’impersonale *potrò sperare che attraverso di me s’esprima qualcosa di meno limitato che l’individualità d’un singolo* (175-76; il corsivo è nostro).

Il problema, lo si constaterà senz’altro, è che, a ben guardare, non è la funzione autorale l’istanza individuale per eccellenza nella comunicazione letteraria, ma quella del lettore³⁴. Le implicazioni critiche di tale proposizione sono indubbiamente di importanza estrema, e in particolar modo per la stesura di questo romanzo. Da osservare, sempre in sede di analisi narratologica, l’occultazione del narratore, sia il narratore degli incipit che quell’altro, di vago stampo sterniano, della cornice testuale. Al contrario, sulla Lettrice — “lettrice ideale” per Silas Flannery, come sappiamo, e indubbiamente per Calvino stesso — riusciamo a conoscere nome e cognome, scappando essa alla dissoluzione generale del soggetto nell’anonimato. A un livello più aneddótico ma non irrilevante, andrà ricordato l’intero complotto degli apocrifi, che semina nel libro un insieme di dubbi sull’identità finale degli autori dei vari incipit. Di qui che l’alternanza falso/autentico è un altro degli assi esegetici fondamentali nel

³³ Il progetto per *Se una notte* è esplicito già nel diario di Silas Flannery: “Vorrei poter scrivere un libro che fosse solo un *incipit*, che mantenesse per tutta la sua durata la potenzialità dell’inizio, l’attesa ancora senza oggetto. . . . Incastrerebbe un inizio di narrazione nell’altro, come nelle Mille e una notte?” (177). Poche pagine più avanti, Flannery concreta la proposta per il nuovo romanzo: “M’è venuta l’idea di scrivere un romanzo fatto solo d’inizi di romanzo. Il protagonista potrebb’essere un Lettore che viene continuamente interrotto. Il lettore acquista il nuovo romanzo A dell’autore Z. Ma è una copia difettosa, e non riesce ad andare oltre l’inizio. . . . Torna in libreria per farsi cambiare il volume. . . .”

“Potrei scriverlo tutto in seconda persona: tu Lettore . . . Potrei anche farci entrare una Lettrice, un traduttore falsario, un vecchio scrittore che tiene un diario come questo diario . . .” (197), e così *ad infinitum*, con uno scrittore che tiene un diario come quel diario, che ha un’idea per un romanzo, con uno scrittore che tiene un diario come quello, che ha un’idea per un romanzo, che . . .

³⁴ In effetti, “. . . la lettura è un atto necessariamente individuale, molto più dello scrivere. . . . L’universo esprimerà se stesso fin tanto che qualcuno potrà dire: ‘Io leggo dunque *esso* scrive’ (176).

romanzo, il quale raggiunge il suo culmine nell'opposizione fra Ludmilla (la Lettrice insubornabile e sempre incuriosita, uno dei cui attributi è, non a caso, "che riusciva a scoprire verità nascoste nel falso più smaccato, e falsità senza attenuanti nelle parole che si pretendono più veritiere", 242) e il Falsario (che "voleva dimostrarle che dietro alla pagina scritta c'è il nulla: [che] il mondo esiste solo come artificio, finzione, malinteso, menzogna", 242). La falsità degli apocrifi (72) arriva, come sappiamo, al grado di congiura universale (241), e trova un eco divertente nella mistificazione e reificazione del libro introdotta dai giapponesi (178-79). Ma è in più riscontrabile nel processo di falsificazione generalizzata che pervade tutti gli elementi della vita di Ataguitania e della sua falsa rivoluzionaria Corina-Ingrid-Sheila-Alexandra (213-21). In modo che si presenta persino come auspicabile nel "capolavoro della falsità come conoscenza" che alcuni fanatici dicono di aspettare dai "fabbricanti di romanzi in serie" (130). Come lo è, del resto, in tutto quanto circonda e tocca Ermes Marana, vero "Agente della Mistificazione" universale (130), intravisto in certi passi come il Serpente del Male. Il tema comporta, come era da aspettarsi, un notevole sviluppo, un cumulo di immagini e motivi disseminati lungo il romanzo. Una delle affermazioni più rilevanti resta, però, quella di Ermes Marana quando sostiene che la stessa differenza tra il vero e il falso non è altro che un "nostro pregiudizio" (153), poiché in un mondo in dissoluzione, ormai "nessuno può essere sicuro di ciò che è vero e di ciò che è falso" (213).

Ora, su di un piano completamente diverso, e in sede di analisi pragmatica, il libro, dalla prima frase fino all'ultima, si propone come enunciato "vero", il quale, grazie all'uso larghissimo della metalessi, e quindi con la sovrapposizione fra mondo scritto e mondo reale, realizza esattamente ciò che formula³⁵. Da questo punto di vista, è paradossalmente un libro del tutto "vero" su un complotto di libri falsi; un libro che insiste, una volta dopo l'altra, sulla sua concretezza mentre tratta dello sgretolarsi del mondo referenziale e dell'irruzione del nulla: un libro, per ultimo, che raggiunge finalmente una conclusione, ma che è composto sulla base di una serie di libri mancanti tutti di conclusione.

Che significa, in fin dei conti, avere un finale, una qualunque conclusione? La domanda non sarà certo oziosa, e il problema, almeno in partenza, è di ordine narratologico. Significa, fra le altre cose, puntare alla risoluzione degli elementi narrativi messi in gioco, conferire un qualunque disegno, forma o figura all'enigma o problema proposto, ristabilire un ordine inizialmente minacciato, sconvolto o alterato, approdare al punto verso il quale tende, dal primo

³⁵ Dagli abbondantissimi esempi di questo effetto di importanti conseguenze sul piano narratologico, vogliamo ricordare qui solo due casi: l'inizio, "Stai per cominciare a leggere il nuovo romanzo *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* di Italo Calvino" (3), e la conclusione, "Ancora un momento. Sto per finire *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* di Italo Calvino" (263).

momento, la linearità della narrazione, circoscrivere le varie funzioni narrative e soddisfare le aspettative di lettura inizialmente svegliate. *Se una notte* si presenta, però, come una perpetua frustrazione di queste aspettative: le funzioni narrative vengono messe in questione fin dall'inizio e nel loro insieme, le aspettative di lettura si sovrappongono di continuo, la linearità, continuità narrativa e consequenzialità restano sospese. Il romanzo si propone piuttosto come un riflesso del cambiamento avvenuto nella sostanziale alterazione della percezione temporale-spaziale. Da qui la risposta al problema acquista una dimensione epistemologica di conseguenze irreversibili, e punta a stabilire una relazione con il mondo referenziale radicalmente nuova, che immette il lettore nelle aporie della conoscenza tanto care a Calvino.

Volgendo ora lo sguardo indietro, all'inizio del presente saggio, va ricordato che nell'insieme della produzione semiotica di Calvino, il libro che si proponeva come esempio in "Molteplicità" era appunto *Se una notte*. In quell'occasione, non si trattava, però, di rievocare *tout court*, nella sua programmatica mancanza di conclusione, l'apertura narrativa dei romanzi di Gadda, e meno ancora la sua barocca espressione, riflesso di un soggetto in perpetua collisione con l'esterno. Al contrario, la poetica dell'incipit si proponeva di conferire volontariamente — forse con la stessa disperazione di Gadda — un ordine, un'armonia, un disegno al caos: di ricomporre, *sub specie* letteraria, il mondo andato in frantumi. È nella tradizione delle Mille e una notte dove Calvino trova una via di soluzione, e cioè nella macrotestualità, nell'uso di una cornice testuale che comprende e integra *ad infinitum* tutte le varie storie possibili nelle quali si dissolve finalmente in un'assoluta potenzialità la voce narrante come funzione narrativa (Segre, *Punto di vista*). L'iper-romanzo calviniano verrà formulato, per questo verso, come un insieme di storie perpetuamente ricominciate, dove la tensione narrativa persiste, le aspettative vengono ripristinate e mai effettivamente realizzate-frustrate, dove nell'impersonalità finalmente raggiunta di un autore plurimo e di-personalizzato, sbarazzato di quello "scomodo diaframma che è la sua persona" (171), il libro riesce finalmente a dare voce al non scritto e a ciò che non avrà mai una voce: al narrabile che nessun IO racconta.

In questo modo, alla problematizzazione del finale corrisponde necessariamente la problematizzazione dell'inizio. Così, nel suo drammatizzato rapporto con i vari personaggi, il narratore onnisciente della cornice testuale confessa:

(Cominciare. . . Ma come stabilire il momento esatto in cui comincia una storia? Tutto è sempre cominciato già da prima, la prima riga della prima pagina d'ogni romanzo rimanda a qualcosa che è già successo fuori dal libro. Oppure la vera storia è quella che comincia dieci o cento pagine più avanti e tutto ciò che precede è solo un prologo. Le vite degli individui della specie umana formano un intreccio continuo, in cui ogni tentativo d'isolare un pezzo di vissuto che abbia un senso separatamente dal resto . . . deve tener

conto che ciascuno dei due porta con sé un tessuto di fatti ambienti altre persone, e che dall'incontro deriveranno a loro volta altre storie che si separeranno dalla loro storia comune) (153-54).

L'iper-romanzo di Italo Calvino risponde non solo alla poetica dell'incipit, del principio senza fine. Nel suo mettere in questione tutti gli elementi della narrazione tradizionale, arriva ad interrogarsi persino sull'inizio, risolvendosi nell'infinità potenziale di una rete di intrecci infiniti di fili, senza principio né fine: una rete che tutto comprende, ma che è, a sua volta, una costruzione sul nulla.

Università di Barcellona

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Prodromi di una fine: Una rilettura de *Le stelle fredde* di Guido Piovene

1. *Prolegomena*

Le stelle fredde, pubblicato nel 1970 fra gli unanimi consensi di critica e di pubblico,* si situa sugli scorcì del declino umano di Piovene; sono infatti di quell'anno le "prime avvisaglie" (Bettiza LXX) del male che lo avrebbe stroncato quattro anni più tardi.¹ Penultimo di una teoria di romanzi nei quali lo

* Il libro fu vincitore del premio Strega nel luglio del medesimo anno. Si ritiene qui opportuno fornire uno schematico ragguaglio di trama. L'anonimo protagonista — sotto il cui trasparente *déguisement* s'indovina lo stesso Piovene — è un riuscito ideatore di slogans pubblicitari per una compagnia di aviolinee, inurbato in un grande centro industriale del Nord. Ad apertura d'opera (*in medias res*) Ida, la sua compagna (e già moglie d'un altro) lo ha appena lasciato. Colto gradualmente dal 'male di vivere,' "Anonymus" (Catalano 409) decide di partire, di ritornare, in una *quête* regressiva, nei luoghi della sua infanzia: un'imprecisata casa nell'entroterra veneto-venetino, in primavera. Qui, dopo uno scontro col padre e l'incontro/ritrovamento con l'amatissimo albero di ciliegio fiorito che domina il giardino (e che verrà quasi immediatamente abbattuto dal padre, perché troppo vicino alla casa) il protagonista viene accusato, ingiustamente, dell'uccisione del marito di Ida. Il filo della storia si dipana, a partire da questo punto, in deviazioni continue ed imprevedute: si assiste al breve ma intenso sodalizio di Anonymus con Sergio, figura paterna e consolatrice di poliziotto-filosofo, che vaga con lui nella campagna. La seconda repentina e accidentale apparizione è quella di uno scrittore assai caro all'immaginario dell'io-narrante, Fëdor Dostoevskij, risalito (redivivo, attraverso una crepa lasciata dal ciliegio) dal regno dei morti (che egli descrive come una squallida discarica di corpi semivivi e indeboliti, costretti ad una sfiante marcia attraverso una landa desolata, non approdante ad alcuna salvezza). A conclusione del romanzo, dopo la morte del padre e lo scagionamento dall'accusa di omicidio, Anonymus sancisce la propria morte civile recludendosi nel conchiuso universo della casa e del giardino, immerso in una nuova forma di esistenza, il cui scopo principale è quello di catalogare, su schede infinite, gli oggetti *in praesentia* e *in absentia* e i morti, indelebili nel suo ricordo. Sul paesaggio domina il ciliegio, ormai spento, ma che con la sua chioma ancor fulgida diffonde su tutto il suo biancore.

¹ "La sclerosi laterale amiotrofica ('Motrone disease' o 'maladie de Charcot') che colpì Piovene nell'estate 1970 e lo fece morire dopo quattro anni tragici, kaskiani [. . .] è ancora oggi [David scrive nel 1994] un enigma eziologico. Definita come degenerazione

scrittore aveva sempre occultato assai poco velatamente l'evolversi dei suoi *itinerari* interiori, esso si pone come l'opera in cui il vicentino, facendosi l'epigono di una tradizione illustre, dalla quale si sente ampiamente avallato e sorretto, conferisce un'estrema preminenza al "personaggio io".² Libro notissimo e discusso, forse il più famoso dopo le *Lettere di una novizia*, esso si è prestato, attraverso gli anni, a plurime chiavi di lettura, da quella esistenziale a quelle semiologica e psicoanalitica. La presente proposta interpretativa, nata dall'inesaurita fascinazione che il romanzo ha esercitato su chi scrive, sin dall'epoca del suo primo apparire, intende incamminarsi (anche servendosi di riflessi speculari intertestuali) per sentieri poco battuti — almeno nel caso di quest'autore e di quest'opera — e di proiettare *Le stelle fredde* nei territori magmatici e cangianti della "postmodernità" (Biasin 173).

2. La morte dell'umano: fra condizione postuma ed entropia

L'*incipit* del romanzo si configura come desolato annuncio di una fine: è una riflessione sulla condizione postuma della mitografia occidentale, canto rituale sull'agonia degli archetipi simbolici di un plurimillenario ciclo culturale ormai spezzato e ristrutturatosi nella forma di una "descending slope,"³ disseccato simulacro che non rimanda più all'*altrove*:⁴

progressiva dei motoneuroni del cortex e del tronco cerebrali che priva il malato della forza muscolare e quindi del respiro, pur lasciando intatta la mente, non ha origine virale, e sarà, forse, con la nuova parola-miracolo, 'genetica'. È da ieri che se ne annuncia, non la guarigione, ma il rallentamento, con un farmaco nuovo, il 'riluzolo'. Purtroppo Piovene morì nel 1974" (David 230).

² "Nessuna obiezione può esistere contro il personaggio 'io,' quand'esso è svolto e raccontato con lo stesso distacco, la stessa obiettività di un personaggio che prenda il nome di Giulio o di Mario. I maestri moderni della narrazione in prima persona, da Rousseau a Gide, i grandi lirici compreso Leopardi, non riferiscono se stessi, ma quasi inventano inesauribilmente se stessi: creando un personaggio 'io' che in alcuni è costante, in alcuni mutevole, secondo gli estri e le segrete ispirazioni della vita: ma tali sempre che solo per leggerezza si potrebbe accostarli agli scrittori gretti ed egoisti, il cui scrivere è solo un modo di più di ammirarsi e che ritengono di beneficiare la gente pubblicando una specie di quotidiano bollettino dei loro umori, ricordi e pettegolezzi" (Piovene, *Spettacolo di mezzanotte* 41-42).

³ "Whether modes of orientation in the world or more specific scientific insights are concerned, geometric imagery seems to be an indispensable support for the human intuition. Social systems, without discernible dynamics of development, confine their geometric images to cosmomythologically stabilized models of the world. A well-known example of such a closed representation is the hermetic universe of classical Greek culture, where the circle was an unrivalled idol and ideal, transforming the myth of eternal return into a straightforward geometrical figure. But with the coming of industrialization and Enlightenment, the closed circular line of prehistory is cut and the curvature straightened out. Supported by the blooming idea of progress, a new figure of geometrical imagery gets into the centre of interest: the straight line. [...] Parallel to this

Quello [...] era il mondo umano, il grande mondo umano che non c'è più. Sparito come Urano, come Saturno, come i giganti e gli dei mitologici, come i centauri e le sirene. Ne restano i simulacri, esseri umani finti ma condannati a credere che esista ancora. Sorpresi dall'avvento delle stelle fredde, inaspriti dal gelo in cui stanno morendo i loro ultimi avanzi. Hai mai visto una mosca quando ronza furente perché il freddo la fa morire? Lo stesso loro, i caratteri, i personaggi, i morali, i fanatici, i missionari, i predicanti, i passionali, i credenti, i sinceri. Orribilmente falsi. Orribilmente ebeti. Orribilmente spettri. Disgustosamente parlanti. Mi ripugnano e io ripugno a loro. Che risposta puoi dare? Non esiste risposta. È come parlare con esseri di un altro tempo proiettati dagli astri. Ma la cosa peggiore è che li portiamo anche dentro. Anche in noi, estinzioni furenti. Ci fanno male perché soffrono molto, dentro le nostre viscere, negli spasimi della fine.

(Le stelle fredde 623-24)

Il compianto per la "necrosi" (*Verità e menzogna* 30) ineluttabile di un *modus sentiendi* e la "furia" con cui Piovene denuncia l'emergere del lato subumano dalle rovine del passato, riecheggia, per certi versi, l'appassionato lamento nietzschiano;⁵ ma dalla scorza della meditazione filosofica erompe,

project, attempts at description of social dynamics appear representing progress either by an ascending straight line or more ingeniously by a helix, subordinating circular structures to the verve of irresistible linearity. The cosmic interconnectedness of man and nature ties early models of human history to the processes of development in nature. As a result of this tight connection, the first modern concepts of time-development in nature were unscrupulously transfigured into models of human history. But Laplace's predetermined mechanical world-machine, the culmination of this daring transfer, was finally subverted by thermodynamic theories toward the end of the 19th century: the positive ascent of the straight line is transformed into a descending slope, the mechanical world-machine decays into a thermodynamic combustion engine" (Klähn 419).

⁴ "[...] Jung, in many passages, has drawn a distinction between the terms 'sign' and 'symbol,' as he employs them. The first, the sign, is a reference to some concept or object, definitely known; the second, the symbol, is the best possible figure by which allusion may be made to something relatively unknown. The symbol does not aim at being a reproduction, nor can its meaning be more adequately or lucidly rendered in other terms. Indeed, when a symbol is allegorically translated and the unknown factor in its reference rejected, it is dead" (Campbell 127).

⁵ "Il timbro radicale, impaziente, aspro che [si riscontra] nelle pagine finali del narratore, sul quale il pensatore prevarica, contiene in sé i germi non sistematizzati di una teoria critica della cultura che, per più di qualche motivo, avvicina stranamente Piovene a una parte dell'opera di Nietzsche, [...] quella più interna, immersa nella rievocazione erudita e dolente della classicità primordiale perduta. [...] Qualcosa del Nietzsche filologo e psicanalista inconscio della crisi di una civiltà, già erosa nelle fondamenta verso il tardo Ottocento, si risente nella furia devastante con cui Piovene ne attacca gli ultimi valori giunti a putrescenza verso il tardo Novecento" (Bettiza LV). Si veda, riguardo alle stesse tematiche, Vattimo 39-47.

veicolato da termini scabri ed essenziali, il nucleo concettuale che conferisce al romanzo un'angolazione completamente nuova rispetto al panorama della narrativa italiana dei tardi anni Sessanta. Da sempre attratto dagli spazi siderali e dall'immagine ancora mitico-platonica dell'uomo-stella,⁶ Piovene compie qui un salto/scarto dalla concezione idilliaco-paesaggistica all'esposizione lapidaria di una secca verità scientifica, introducendo il concetto di evoluzione stellare:⁷ le "larve" (*Le stelle fredde* 623) dell'umanità moderna in progressiva estinzione sono paragonate ad astri morenti che, diminuendo il loro nucleo, acquistano densità e pesantezza e perdono il loro calore, trasformandosi in *black holes*, agglomerati di energia che diviene progressivamente fredda, perché soggetta alla seconda legge della termodinamica, a cui soggiace, del resto, l'intero cosmo.⁸

⁶ Oltre all'idea dell'uomo-costellazione (*Le stelle fredde* 803) vi sono, in tutta l'opera di Piovene, fittissimi riferimenti agli astri e alla malia che i cieli stellati hanno esercitato sul suo immaginario. Sin dalla prima infanzia la memoria siderea si stampa indelebile e ritorna nella rievocazione narrativa antropomorfa che ha toni da leggenda: "Era sopraggiunta la notte e si spalancò ai miei occhi un memorabile stellato. Appartiene alla serie di quei grandi cieli stellati che vidi allora, poi vent'anni ancora e dopo non vidi mai più: era una facoltà di distinguere gli astri a uno a uno, come persone, ciascuno col suo colore diverso, e nel tempo medesimo di sentire raccolta in un attimo solo tutta l'immensa vita del firmamento, nella sua verità e nella sua palpitazione" (*Spettacolo di mezzanotte* 112-13). Interessante notare come il fascino dei cieli notturni abbia catturato Penelope Lively, scrittrice postmoderna, che fa ampio uso del concetto di entropia nel suo romanzo *City of the Mind*: "Night. Lights on. The lights that glide in jewelled columns, [. . .] and in the sky, the dead and dancing sky, there are million yesterdays" (1).

⁷ Il concetto, espresso da Piovene con estrema e precisa sinteticità, ricalca fedelmente la nozione scientifica di evoluzione stellare: la generale suddivisione delle stelle in due categorie, giganti e nane, indica chiaramente come avviene la trasformazione di un astro. I dati raccolti portano a credere che il diametro delle stelle appena 'nate' sia molto grande e che il corpo celeste abbia, in questa fase, scarsissima densità. A mano a mano che la stella invecchia la sua densità aumenta, il diametro e la temperatura diminuiscono, per cui essa diventa sempre più piccola e densa. Una stella ad altissima densità può soggiacere ad un completo *collasso gravitazionale*, ed avviarsi verso lo stadio ultimo della sua esistenza, divenendo un *bucò nero*.

⁸ *Entropia* è voce greca (da *en* = dentro e *tropè* = rivolgimento). Il principio scientifico così denominato fu scoperto da Sadi Carnot (1796-1832) che pubblicò, nel 1824, un opuscolo dal titolo: *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu*. Fu poi Rudolf Clausius (1822-1888) che nel 1850 "lo applicò alla termodinamica. [. . .] Si definisce entropia la 'caduta' di calore tra una fonte calda (la caldaia) e una fonte fredda (il condensatore che serve a condensare il vapore). Si deve essere molto precisi a tale riguardo: con il termine 'caduta' non si intende una perdita o un consumo di energia calorifica, ma piuttosto la sua degradazione, *degradazione produttrice di lavoro*. L'entropia è dunque il grado di variazione di una funzione di stato, il grado di cambiamento nello stato di un sistema. Ora questa modifica genera *oscillazioni che — occorre notarlo — sono indeterminate*. *La produzione di lavoro si ha solo a partire dall'instaurazione di uno stato di disordine*

La “sensibilità doppia di Piovene, [. . .] conservatrice da un lato, ma dall’altro vigile, mobilissima, tentata dal nuovo e dal rischio purché fertili” (Bettiza XXXI), appare nel romanzo assai vicina all’universo di stelle alla deriva di Teilhard de Chardin⁹ di cui aveva certamente avuto modo di assorbire la visione cosmologica sia nei soggiorni parigini che in quelli americani.¹⁰

In questo spazio einsteiniano, che ha soppiantato quello di Galileo e di Newton e dove tutto è in perenne disordine, si sancisce la sconfitta dell’idea di *humanitas* rinascimentale. L’uomo non è più il *nodus et copula mundi*, non incide più sulla realtà, è stato spostato in una delle tante periferie, senza possibilità di riscatto, perso nel gelo dell’inverno cosmico, paralizzato dall’appressamento subdolo della dissoluzione:

Oggi l’uomo grigio [il sistema nervoso periferico] è in pena. Il Gran Simpatico è in pena. [. . .] Si sente morire, come tu dici. È stato il padrone del mondo ma adesso è declassato e perde importanza. Sta uscendo dalla scena, almeno rispetto al cervello. Il cervello riceve sempre meno i suoi invii e soffre anche lui a modo suo: non domina, non trasforma, non esprime più nulla. [. . .] Che cosa vuoi rispondere? Che cosa vuoi ascoltare? Come

(il cui massimo grado è difatti l’errore catastrofico letale — la morte” (Regard 27-28; la traduzione è personale). Si confronti, sullo stesso argomento, Lewicki: “[Entropy] in terms other than strictly physical, is defined as ‘the ultimate state reached in the degradation of the matter and energy of the universe: state of inert uniformity of component elements: absence of form, pattern, hierarchy, or differentiation, [. . .]’ the irreversible tendency of a system including the universe, toward increasing disorder and inertness; also the final state predictable from this tendency” (71).

⁹ Ci si riferisce alla postuma *La vision du passé* (1957). Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Alvernia, 1881, New York, 1955), controversa figura di gesuita, teologo dissidente, scienziato, filosofo, estese la sua riflessione scientifica all’area cosmologica dando vita ad un’originale “teoria evolucionistica” dell’universo da lui concepita come tendenza della materia originaria (che contiene in sé la pre-vita ed è già cosciente del suo principio organizzativo) verso lo spirito.

¹⁰ È a partire dal 1947, anno della “straordinaria primavera [. . .] dei mughetti” (Bettiza LXVI), trascorsa in compagnia della futura moglie Mimy, che Piovene risiede a intermittenze a Parigi, come in una patria culturale d’elezione, fino al 1958. Lì stringerà legami profondi d’amicizia con Camus e Mauriac e lì probabilmente subirà l’“attrazione”/“repulsione” (Bettiza XXXIX) per le teorie del *nouveau roman* propugnate da Alain Robbe-Grillet (delle quali, con la tendenza all’ossimoro a lui consueta, Piovene sosterrà, nel 1965, sia l’insostenibilità che l’utilità parziale, “come richiamo a una certa durezza, secchezza del rappresentare, a una certa atmosfera poco conciliativa che, non respingendo l’umano, ne rifiuta la retorica” (Bettiza XL). Due sono i soggiorni americani di Piovene. Il primo ha luogo sul finire dell’estate 1950 e dura quindici mesi; frutto di tale permanenza sono una serie di articoli giornalistici organizzati in seguito nel volume *De America* (1953). Il secondo avviene dopo più di una decade e dà vita a tre articoli dal titolo unico: *Ritorno in America undici anni dopo*.

rispondere agli spasimi del Gran Simpatico furente perché sta morendo? E domani non ci sarà più niente.

(*Le stelle fredde* 626-27)

L'amara consapevolezza di appartenere a un mondo e ad un "codice culturale" (Chardin 13) sugli orli della fine, dove il corpo umano, divenuto un sistema chiuso è attaccato, in maniera lenta ma irreparabile dalla mancanza d'informazione dall'esterno e dall'incapacità di elaborare i dati all'interno,¹¹ inquadra *Le stelle fredde* in un contesto assai più vasto e magmatico rispetto alla produzione narrativa italiana di quegli anni e lo collega idealmente alla frangia della prosa americana che, pressappoco nello stesso periodo storico, s'era appropriata del concetto scientifico di entropia e lo aveva, con un "transfert metaforico", (Duperray 7) applicato alla letteratura. La percezione dissacratrice di Piovene collima, per molti versi, con la *Weltanschauung* di un autore americano assai noto e discusso, Thomas Pynchon, da molti considerato come il padre del romanzo entropico statunitense. Attento agli innumerevoli fermenti che da svariate decadi si agitavano nella cultura nordamericana, già satura di naturalismo e irresistibilmente attratta dalle novità scientifiche,¹² Pynchon

¹¹ Nella teoria dell'informazione (che rientra nel novero delle scienze matematiche ed è devoluta a chiarire la natura e l'interrelazione dell'informazione e della comunicazione) l'espressione matematica per i contenuti dell'informazione appare molto simile alla formula dell'entropia in termodinamica. Più copiosa è l'informazione, tanto minore sarà la sua casualità, il suo livello di rumore; e quindi tanto minore risulterà l'entropia. Nella teoria dell'informazione, quindi, l'entropia è costituita dallo scarso indice di informazione contenuta da un segnale.

¹² "The notion of entropy has permeated American fiction to a very high degree. [. . .] Some explanation [. . .] can help us understand the role of entropic imagery in the course of American fiction. Probably the most "literary" explanation is connected with the duration and influence of another American literary phenomenon, naturalism. While it was never the only mode of expression, [. . .] naturalism can easily be found in almost all American fiction written through the 1940s, which is not the case anywhere else. This long-lasting fascination [. . .] made American writers more receptive to notions related to natural science [. . .]. Another important factor that helped elevate entropy to its dominant position in the American consciousness and in American literature in the second half of the century was a general knowledge of, and fascination with, science, markedly higher than in Europe. [. . .] The publication of Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings* also contributed to this general awareness of scientific achievements. The book, which laid down the foundations of cybernetics, appeared in 1950, and while its treatment of entropy was rather limited, the second edition of 1954 provides probably the best introduction to the general implications of the notion. The book has since become in Tanner's words, "something of a modern American classic and may well have been read by many of the [contemporary] writers" (Lewicki 75-76).

diviene il raccogliitore di queste istanze, rimaste fino ad allora *in nuce*¹³ e le innalza, come postmoderno vessillo, nei suoi tre romanzi più famosi.¹⁴ Ad una messa a fuoco dell'opera prima di Pynchon e de *Le stelle fredde* emerge, rinserrata nell'ordito di due moduli stilistici e d'intreccio alieni l'uno all'altro,¹⁵ un'identica strategia retorica: pur essendo la componente di base che permea nelle loro più intime fibre luoghi, oggetti, personaggi di ambedue i romanzi, il termine *entropia* non è mai usato; ma, a guisa di un *deus absconditus* e innominabile, viene veicolata da perifrasi-*senhals*, disseminate e ripetitive. In Pynchon, così come in Piovene, tali circonlocuzioni acquistano un tono impersonale, oscillante tra l'aforistico e l'apodittico; là dove Piovene li semiocculta con uno stile che procede per cenni, nello scrittore statunitense si avverte una più marcata tendenza a parafrasare i termini scientifici con maggior linearità.¹⁶

Decadence, decadence. What is it? Only a clear movement toward death or, preferably, non-humanity. As Fausto II and III, like their island, became more inanimate, they moved closer to the time when like any dead leaf or fragment of metal they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics. [. . .] This sort of arranging and rearranging was Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death.

(V. 321, 298)

Se Pynchon distrugge l'impalcatura narrativa facendola erompere in una babelica confusione di frammenti, un accavallarsi di trame e di generi, e frequenti spaccature cronologiche,¹⁷ in Piovene l'atto stesso dello "scriba" ormai degradato¹⁸ si fa metafora triste dello *scapegoat*, attraverso l'ultima capacità espressiva che s'appresta a divenire silenzio.¹⁹

¹³ Si pensi, ad esempio, alla produzione di Nathanael West (1904-1940) e in particolare al suo *The Day of the Locust* (1939), patente esempio di romanzo pre-entropico.

¹⁴ I tre romanzi sono rispettivamente: *V.* (1963); *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966); *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).

¹⁵ La scrittura di Pynchon — franta, caotica, rutilante in un variopinto e sfaccettato tessuto verbale — è assai lontana dalla levigatezza del vicentino che si muove ancora nell'alveo classico-illuministico e prende a volte la veste aristocratica di un *ornatus difficilis*.

¹⁶ Si ricordi che la prima formazione universitaria di Pynchon reca un'impronta scientifica. S'iscrive, inizialmente alla facoltà di "Engineering Physics" dell'Università di Cornell, per poi passare al dipartimento di Inglese; inoltre tra il 1960 e il 1962 lavora come "engineering aide" presso la compagnia Boeing di Seattle.

¹⁷ "Pynchon further maintains ambiguity with low puns, parodies, allegory, poetry, and even his use of punctuation; with multiple overlapping plots and chance interconnections; and with gross disruptions of chronology, all of which keep his readers unsure about what is real and what is not, what is truth and what is not" (Chambers 13).

¹⁸ "E lo scriba chiamato artista, ieri chiamato a esprimere tutto l'umano, non doveva ora ucciderlo per coscienza della verità? I personaggi-aborti non erano un canale [. . .] per

Il luogo era come una pagina che avrei dovuto riempire di parole scritte e che mi incuteva spavento. Lì avrei dovuto agire, lì compiere un lavoro senz'atti né strumenti la cui idea mi rimaneva indistinta. Ne vedevo alcuni passaggi, senza conclusione, slegati, come tratti di un film del quale s' ignora la trama. [. . .] Se avessi incontrato qualche ricordo? Dovevo farlo morire come ricordo e trasformarlo in altro, una spoglia nella natura, un simulacro inerte.

(*Le stelle fredde* 665)

Da sempre refrattario all'influenza del realismo corale del grande romanzo ottocentesco e conscio del "decesso, cioè dell'inarrestabile esaurimento creativo rappresentato dal corpo dilaniato [dell'] opera d'arte novecentesca", Piovene scarnifica, fino a renderlo essenziale, il *corpus* della fabulazione e confina il suo "antipersonaggio" in uno spazio ristretto; lo fa vivere "di una vita ultima, già prossima all'aldilà," che comincia "quando" di solito "i personaggi di romanzo smettono di raccontarsi considerando l'azione chiusa alle loro spalle" (Bettiza XXIV). Voleva il vicentino 'uccidere' il genere, come già nell'immediato dopoguerra Elsa Morante s'era provata a fare?²⁰ La posizione di Piovene si rivela, anche in questo caso, meno recisa nel momento stesso in cui, attirato dall'orlo del precipizio, sta per cadervi, egli si ritrae,²¹ offrendo alla sua creatura

cui si palesava la fase iniziale e più ingrata di una morte-rinascita, della quale anche lui era pregno"? (*Verità e menzogna* 85).

¹⁹ "La narrativa del Novecento, specie nella sua forma più aperta e ambiziosa, quella del romanzo, solcata dalla scissione della persona e dalla disintegrazione dei linguaggi, aspira anch'essa in molti modi a porsi come 'ultima:' sono numerose le opere che si presentano sulla scena pubblica come a voler chiudere, riassumere, abolire in se stesse la tradizione del romanzo. [. . .] Tra avanguardia e tradizione, [. . .] le grandi narrazioni del nostro secolo tendono a manifestarsi come l'ultima prova prima della fine della narrativa: e sono travagliate dall'ambizione tragica di chiudere i conti, di raccogliere tutto in quell'ultima prova, sia che si aspiri a un'impossibile sintesi del passato esaurito, sia che si miri a una sua risolutiva disintegrazione" (Ferroni 83).

²⁰ "Con [*Menzogna e sortilegio*, 1948] la Morante cercava 'l'evocazione magica, stregonesca, dell'idea, dell'archetipo del Romanzo' sentito come 'una forma artistica gloriosamente inattuale:' esso era per lei 'l'incontro di un'urgenza morale inderogabile e drammatica. [. . .] Con un'ambizione estrema e suprema: quella di resuscitare, nella sua pienezza luminosa, una forma-romanzo che stava per essere sepolta [. . .] nelle necropoli della tradizione letteraria." Proprio a proposito di *Menzogna e sortilegio* la scrittrice dichiarò di aver voluto fare, rispetto al "genere" del romanzo, "quello che per i poemi cavallereschi ha fatto Ariosto: scrivere l'ultimo e uccidere il genere. Io volevo scrivere l'ultimo romanzo possibile, l'ultimo romanzo della terra, e, naturalmente, anche il mio ultimo romanzo" (Ferroni 83-84).

²¹ "Talvolta, scherzando, Piovene usava alludere ad una peculiare capacità dei veneti di "arrestarsi sull'orlo del precipizio." L'osservazione valeva anche per lui che di continuo travasava quella battuta di vita nell'opera, elevandola a una norma superiore di condotta

una scappatoia che possa garantirne la sopravvivenza: “Una metamorfosi? Prima di ogni metamorfosi c’è un’agonia e una morte” (627).

Alterata dagli spasimi del mutamento, libera da gravami di natura epistemologica, la scrittura de *Le stelle fredde* segue, nella sua seconda parte, i percorsi fortuiti dell’erranza, parla “una lingua diversa” [per] “ascoltatori diversi” (778), chiedendo “alla morte una forma di vita” (Catalano 458). S’avverte, incalzante tra le pagine, la volontà di “epurare” il romanzo dalle scorie delle “civetterie psicologiche” (Catalano 455) in cui l’autore s’era così lungamente indugiato. Ora egli vuole “giustiziare in maniera consapevole il suo vecchio mondo poetico” (Bettiza XXIII) per creare il vuoto che dovrà ospitare nuove, possibili forme.²² Strumento prediletto per attuare codesta *pars destruens* è un gioco elegante d’ironia corrosiva, (da sempre a lui congeniale) ma che si fa qui parodico cachinno degli archetipi letterari più amati dall’adolescente e maturo Piovene e suona come beffa irriverente dei nodi esistenziali più dibattuti nel corso della sua esistenza. La prima vittima di questa furia dissacratoria è il Dostoevskij-personaggio de *Le stelle fredde*, spogliato impietosamente dei suoi attributi di genio e di credente, trasformato in un patetico rifiuto umano dalla mente in brandelli, inviato nei tristi tropici di un aldilà da fantascienza distopica, dal quale torna ateo ed inebetito; per poi fuggire repentinamente dal romanzo così come v’era precipitosamente entrato.²³ Dotato di “straordinarie capacità mimetiche” che gli consentono di “riprodurre i connotati degli scrittori frequentati” (Catalano 448), Piovene s’intrica in un ibrido *pastiche* di stilemi trafugati;²⁴ e con la sua proposta di un aldilà — “immondezzaio dove sono

culturale e artistica. Un profondo istinto d’autoconservazione, forse d’origine castale, aristocratica, gl’imponessa un certo rigore incorruttibile proprio nei movimenti più fantastici e più irrazionali dell’invenzione” (Bettiza XXXIII-IV).

²² “In quegli stessi anni di vorace autoepurazione culturale, Piovene s’era messo a parlare del romanzo totale, che descriveva come un’opera polifonica, una sorta di proliferazione spontanea dello spirito quasi contrapposta alla vita. Doveva essere impastata di frammenti misti di realtà e di visionarietà, di pensiero e di sogno, di saggio, poesia, filosofia, memoria” (Bettiza XXIII).

²³ “Questo è un libro pieno di esecuzioni, di giustizie sommarie, di vendette (anche lo stesso Dostoevskij, grande amore antico di Piovene, è un giustiziato)” (Bettiza in Catalano 454). Si senta lo stesso Piovene: “Dostoevskij era stato lo scrittore che avevo amato di più in vita mia, ma ormai da qualche tempo non ci pensavo più e non ero disposto a sacrificargli il sonno” (*Le stelle fredde* 722).

²⁴ Si confronti l’ammissione-ossimoro dello stesso Piovene (riportata in Catalano 450) a proposito del suo debito con Voltaire: “Voltaire no, non sono affatto un voltairiano. Ma siccome Voltaire è un autore che io ho amato, evidentemente penso che nel dialogo tra Dostoevskij e il teologo [che con la sua intransigenza sarà la causa della ‘fuga’ del personaggio] un po’ di Voltaire ci sia, se non altro formalmente. È un ingrediente in un miscuglio.”

scaricati i corpi per finire di estinguersi” (*Le stelle fredde* 767)²⁵ — liquida con gioia feroce millenni di iconologia letteraria del sacro: dal biblico “giardino piantato ad oriente” ai “paradisi” di Dante e di Milton.²⁶

Dalle macerie “fumanti” (Bettiza XIX) del libro esplosivo, dove la funzione catartica della *katábasis* ha consumato tutti i “residui del passato” (*Le stelle fredde* 675) riemerge l’io-bambino di Piovene;²⁷ e anche la scrittura si libera dalle tensioni centripete che l’avevano irretita e diventa intensamente poetica e allusiva:

Niente poteva scavalcarmi, perché il mondo si presentava eterno, splendente e concluso. Se qualcos’altro vi doveva accadere, vi era già dentro, solo arrivava da più lontano, come la luce di quegli astri che non vediamo, perché sta ancora percorrendo lo spazio prima di giungere ai nostri occhi. Il bambino era dentro i tempi, nel mio passato.

(802)

Dalla catastrofe che tutto ha sommerso il bambino si è salvato perché spogliato della memoria individuale dell’adulto e immerso, oramai per sempre, nell’universo della casa-giardino, schedatore-custode del “repertorio di tutte le cose esistenti” (781), riappropriatosi della conoscenza attraverso il processo mentale basilare del “framing and naming” (Hoede 317). L’inventario minuzioso della realtà, “chiave per dominare l’eterogeneità del mondo” (Cannon 102) è antesignano della *enumerazione* del Calvino di *Palomar*²⁸ e sembra, in un primo

²⁵ L’immagine dell’oltre-mondo-pattumiera ricorda tanto l’allucinata atmosfera di *The Crying of Lot 49*: “Riding among an exhausted bus full of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts all over the city, she [Oedipa] saw scratched on the back of a seat, shining for her in the brilliant smoky interior, the post horn with the legend DEATH. But unlike WASTE, somebody had troubled to write in, in pencil: DON’T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN” (121). Sorprendentemente contigue all’immagine di Piovene sono le riflessioni di Baudrillard (197-201). Non sembra inopportuno, nel caso della figurazione di Piovene, ipotizzare reminiscenze neognostiche che lo scrittore avrebbe potuto facilmente mutuare dalla cultura francese degli anni Cinquanta che ne era profondamente imbevuta.

²⁶ “Mi sembra che ci sia anche nei confronti della tradizione letteraria, [. . .] filosofica, biblica, una vendetta totale con il recupero di qualcosa che non è detto in modo esplicito ma qua e là è accennato” (Bettiza in Catalano 454).

²⁷ “Questo compagno tanto giovane non apparteneva ad un mondo che avrebbe continuato dopo di me” (*Le stelle fredde* 802).

²⁸ Si noti la quasi identica strategia schematico-paratattica dell’enumerazione nei due autori. “La scheda diceva: Poltrona al centro del salotto. Ha i braccioli divaricati come a forza di braccia per rendere più ampi sedile e schienale (piatto, leggermente inclinato). Orlo di legno chiaro scannellato sotto il sedile e intorno allo schienale, come di materia elastica torta e stirata per seguire le curve. Stoffa rosa, con un grande strappo da cui esce l’imbottitura (*Le stelle fredde* 780). “La forma vera della città è in questo sali e scendi di tetti, tegole vecchie e nuove, coppi ed embrici, comignoli esili o tarchiati, pergole di

tempo, ancora soggiacere al “démon de l’analogie” di surrealistica memoria (*Nadja* 126-28); ma, a mano a mano che ci si avvicina all’*explicit* esso assume i caratteri di una pristina complessità:

Abbozzavo una scheda, e andavo a rifinirla in camera mia. [. . .] Non volevo aggiungere nulla all’oggetto che descrivevo; se mai [. . .] trasportarmi dalla sua parte. [. . .] Vivevo dentro un movimento di soli-lune-alberi-piogge-esseri vivi e morti-eventi vicini e lontani, — ma dalla loro parte; catalogavo tutto; ricuperavo tutto. Di qualunque cosa parlassi, della fessura di uno stipite, del riflesso su un vetro, parlavo sempre di me stesso, senza esserci né nominarmi mai, perché ero dalla parte loro. [. . .] Quella era casa mia, ma anche una cosmonave partita per un viaggio senza fine e senza ritorno: e io, pensiero delle cose sopra se stesse, seconda faccia delle cose.

(*Le stelle fredde*, 779, 782-83)

Riconoscere attraverso la correlazione di somiglianza non basta più al catalogatore: nello sforzo di entrare nel “cuore delle cose” (777) e nascondersi, egli elabora una strategia assai vicina alla nozione matematico-biologica dell’*isomorfismo*, che postula l’idea della similarità, dell’identità, tra due categorie eterogenee.²⁹ Molta critica ha insistito a suo tempo sul carattere “suicida” o quantomeno comodamente passivo e “reazionario” (Catalano 467) di questo “censimento” (*Le stelle fredde* 779),³⁰ mentre esso è, al contrario, per ammissione dello stesso Piovene, “tentativo” di *ex-sistere*³¹ in una dimensione

cannucce e tettoie d’eternit ondulata [. . .]. Separati da golfi di vuoto irregolari e frastagliati, si fronteggiano terrazzi proletari con corde per i panni stesi e pomodori piantati in catini di zinco [. . .]” (*Palomar* 56).

²⁹ Termine adottato in più d’una disciplina. In chimica e in mineralogia definisce e accomuna composti diversi che hanno però lo stesso pattern di struttura reticolare. In matematica e logica si chiama isomorfo il collegamento tra rapporti omogenei di due o più termini. In linguistica l’isomorfismo è una corrispondenza parallela perfetta tra i due livelli della forma e del contenuto. In psicologia (e in particolare nella *Gestaltpsychologie*) il termine descrive la correlazione di forma e di struttura fra la percezione della coscienza e le zone di stimolazione cerebrale.

³⁰ “[Secondo Bettiza] nella follia catalogatrice del personaggio c’è una specie di suicidio bianco” (Catalano 451). E ancora: “Pedullà insiste sulla sclerotizzazione pseudo-razionale e sostanzialmente borghese sottesa al “disegno reazionario di fredda catalogazione” del protagonista “che si accontenta del repertorio degli oggetti di un mondo senza interrogativi, né cause, né scopi, un mondo protettivo, conciliante, esile, pianeggiante, che è anche monotonamente comodo da descrivere, agonia della narrativa e della letteratura” (458).

³¹ “[. . .] Nella risposta data a Zanzotto da Piovene [quest’ultimo] in particolare distingue circa la parentela-differenza riconosciutagli con Borges: ‘Io ammiro molto lo scrittore argentino: forse mi piace come nessun altro scrittore contemporaneo. Però è diversa la biblioteca di Babele di Borges da questa mia specie di catalogazione universale, che vuol essere un tentativo di vita’” (Catalano 457).

non più euclidea che situa il recupero degli oggetti e quello dei morti nella vita quotidiana, in una *coincidentia oppositorum*:

Dalla parte dove sto adesso mi accorgo che [i morti] non sono morti e che non sono fantasie. Sono veri come gli oggetti, vivono senza pause, non vi è nella loro esistenza nemmeno un attimo d'indugio o di sospensione. [. . .] Li pareggia l'autorità della cosa che esiste e ormai è solo esistenza. Compaiono infinite volte, e ogni volta si fissano in una posa, un gesto che nessuno ha distrutto. [. . .] Non penso più a distinguerli. Esistono potentemente nell'insieme e in ciascuno dei loro atti.

(787)

Nella sua figurazione di un flusso di spazio che è tempo,³² le memorie di Piovene si materializzano, vivide e slegate, improvvise ed ellittiche, in un'atmosfera che ricorda molto le sequenze finali del quasi contemporaneo *Odissea nello spazio*.³³

Cado dentro il cerchio di luce che isola quegli oggetti e non riesco più a fermarmi, come se non avesse fondo. Scendo e mi viene incontro, in una sensazione di dolcezza e di nevrastenia tanto forte da diventare spasimo, qualcosa di smisuratamente grazioso. Mi perdo nella sensazione del mondo antemillenneovecentoquattordici, affondato nel tempo, coperto da strati di tempo, che trova ancora un varco per mandare su come bolle in questa camera gli ultimi suoi richiami.

(790)

Innumerevoli personaggi e situazioni-frammento si materializzano *in limine* al curvo universo de *Le stelle fredde*. Ubiqui ed "eterotropici" (Musarra-Schroeder

³² "Dans tout discours d'inspiration entropique, la structure est pensée comme étant essentiellement *au travail*, ou, pour rappeler une expression fameuse qui parlera aux anglicistes littéraires, 'work in progress.' Or ce travail ergodique est également devenu le seul critère d'écoulement objectif du temps. Nous sommes loin, ici encore, des anciennes prétentions du déterminisme, de l'univers de Galilée, de celui de Newton, de la fameuse Dimension 3 mesurée par la géométrie euclidienne, du Temps irréversible, [. . .] du Temps et de l'Espace pensés comme indépendants l'un de l'autre. *Le temps est ce qui travaille la structure*. Il n'y a de structure que parce qu'il y a du temps. Ou encore, en termes scientifiques: l'entropie est le logarithme d'une probabilité de la structure. En bref, il n'y a plus l'espace d'un côté, le temps de l'autre: l'entropie est un espace-temps" (Regard 32-33).

³³ Ci si riferisce a uno dei capitoli finali del romanzo fantascientifico di Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Il protagonista del viaggio spaziale, dopo aver oltrepassato la soglia di un monolito cosmico, si trova nella realtà di un buco nero e rivive in maniera estraneata situazioni del suo passato sulla terra, prima di divenire, attraverso un processo metamorfico, "bambino delle stelle." Si ricordi come Piovene considerasse la "fantascienza una prescienza" (*Spettacolo di mezzanotte* 163) e non disdegnasse di presiedere la giuria dell'ottavo festival internazionale del film di fantascienza, tenutosi a Trieste nel 1970.

16), microuniversi in 'caduta libera' di una potenziale opera ancor tutta da scrivere, essi sono sparsi in *distribuzioni nomadi* (Deleuze 356) tra le sequenze. Compagno tra gli altri, nell'inventario, il padre di Anonymus, ormai malinconico spettro errante ai bordi dell'umano, la madre giovinetta con "gli occhi [. . .] serrati" che vuol "tornare all'inizio della sua vita e crescere un'altra volta, cambiandosi, di giorno in giorno;" (791) la "vecchia signora linfatica, con gli occhi azzurri e il labbrone pendente, che scrive endecasillabi sciolti;" la "donna grassa che si lucida le scarpe col salame avanzato alla sua ingordigia;" il "cane grande come un uomo, [. . .] dolce, selvatico e timido;" il "giovane di quindici anni fatto prigioniero dai Mori [che] trema in tutte le membra" (787-88). Sottili ma tenaci tegumenti strutturali, incastonati nel disordine dell'intreccio e figli di esso, miniature dell'impalcatura disintegrata del romanzo, essi non sono più

larve, ma realtà risolte, momenti fermi di esistenza, anche nel dolore, nel pianto, nell'agonia, nella sciocchezza, nel disastro, nell'inettitudine, nella semidemenza.

(789)

Tali figure, che sono punti fermi nella presenza e fluidi nella loro essenza di movimento, appaiono come la *condicio sine qua non* per instaurare un nuovo tipo d'ordine nelle secche, ormai senza sbocco, della narrazione;³⁴ e ricordano molto la definizione scientifica che in un sistema entropico viene data dei

³⁴ Klähn, p. 425: "In his books *Self-Organization in Non-Equilibrium Systems* (1977) and *From Being to Becoming* (1980), Ilya Prigogine paved the way for a fundamental theory of these counter-entropic structures. [. . .] The main goal of this ambitious conception is a plausible explanation for the omnipresence of evolutionary structures on this globe — facts that mark a flagrant contradiction to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The last two decades have brought about new quantitative models of description, allowing an exact simulation of dissipative systems during transition from ordered to apparently disordered or chaotic states. [. . .] A first step to a deeper understanding of 'chaos-theories' begins with a revision of the classical notion of entropy for realistic systems that absorb and emit energy and are therefore called 'dissipative.' Prigogine succeeded with an astonishingly simple line of reasoning, by differentiating between inner and outer system processes, the former obeying classical entropic standards, the latter the sophisticated thermodynamics of entropic exchange. The total amount of entropy change (dS) for an open non-equilibrium system can thus be formulated as the sum of internal entropy production ($dS[\text{int}]$) and external entropy flow ($dS[\text{ex}]$): $dS = dS[\text{int}] + dS[\text{ex}]$. If those permanent flows of energy result in stable patterns, a stationary state is a basic requirement, i.e., the overall entropy of the system must be constant ($\Rightarrow dS/dt = 0$). It follows directly that the amount of absorbed entropy must be negative [neg-entropy]; hence the simple conclusion: open systems obtain their potential of order from outside resources" (Klähn 425).

frattali, unità minimali di una struttura caotica esaminata nella sua profondità, replicantisi nella differenza come mondi dentro mondi, senza fine.³⁵

Nato dalla paura dell'annientamento ed alle soglie di esso il romanzo si chiude con la speranza di un dopo, di un esile ma visibile germoglio di principio. La "stella in corsa"-Piovene (*Romanzo americano* 63), giunta alla fase culminante della sua traiettoria, si è evoluta in ultimo in costellazione, è divenuta parte della "memoria del mondo", compartecipe del disegno unitario di un universo cosciente "che sostituisce Dio ma anche gli somiglia" (*Le Furie* 605) che filtra, inventaria, "trattiene tutto" e salva in questo modo anche l'essenza dell'umano:

L'estate era già passata da un pezzo. Era giunto l'inverno con i grandi stellati freddi. Nel guardarli per metterli nel mio inventario riflettevo quanto v'era di giusto nelle idee degli antichi, per esempio che alcuni uomini diventino costellazioni. Era probabilmente questo il loro modo di rappresentare l'idea di una lastra o pellicola universale che lavora a trattenerne tutto. Non esiste niente e nessuno che non vi cada dentro, persona, cosa, suono, odore, pensiero. Io, Ida, i morti che catalogo, siamo come Ercole, Orione, Andromeda, e l'immensa folla degli altri il cui nome è rimasto oscuro. È passato un anno da quando sono tornato qui. Il catalogo ha invaso un'altra stanza della casa. [. . .] So che il mio è lo stesso lavoro che fa il mondo, lo scopo stesso della sua esistenza. Lavorando così, mi sprofondo nella sua memoria, e vi trovo una sensazione di sicurezza e di realtà.

(*Le stelle fredde* 803)

³⁵ In the next step Prigogine demonstrates how a straightforward consideration of the dynamics of such systems results in patterns of order, far beyond entropic stagnation. [. . .] During the last two decades the latter path of investigation has been pursued in a rather unsystematic style surprisingly leading to a largely coherent scientific discourse under the name of 'chaos-theory.' [. . .] Years of tentative efforts in the field of non-linear differential equations have led experimental mathematics to a fascinating conclusion: building up recursive loops, by using the numerical solutions of a given non-linear equation as new initial values leads to pseudo-randomness with embedded, well-hidden uniform structures. [. . .] These elementary structures show a basic quasi-geometrical similarity. [. . .] The functional basis for chaotic structuring is systematic recursiveness, usually dependent from interacting elements of a given system. [. . .] In transition from ordered to chaotic behavior these systems develop a penchant for period doubling, i.e., an adequate graphical representation [. . .] shows branching graphs, bifurcations. A further acceleration of this doubling process finally leads to genuine disorder. [. . .] A second glance at those enclaves discloses an interminable depth of structural networks, wherein any enlargement of an arbitrarily chosen detail results in a miniature version of the original pattern. Endlessly incapsulated self-similar structures of this kind are called 'fractals'" (Klähn 426). La teoria del caos, applicata con successo alle scienze sociali, è stata sempre più usata, nell'ultimo decennio, come strumento critico per l'analisi della letteratura postmoderna.

Superati i 'tristi tropici' della negazione disgregante, la voce postuma di Piovene si eleva in un inno d'amore per la vita che, con tutte le sue contraddizioni,³⁶ si fa veicolo di un desiderio di eternità:³⁷

Non arriveremo mai in fondo, ma so che potendolo fare l'universo ci apparirebbe semplice come la mente di un bambino. Mi sembra che scoprire la più piccola di quelle leggi sia la più grande gioia possibile per un uomo, la più somigliante all'amore, ed anche la speranza per cui cerco di riservarmi. [. . .] Rifletto che l'universo è intelligente, di questo ne sono sicuro, cosciente della propria vita. L'intelligenza non può essere morta, ma deve conoscere e ricordare, e conosce e ricorda anche la nostra storia, come noi ricordiamo il nostro passato, che non c'è più ma che resta nostro. La vera morte avviene non quando mutiamo, ma se la memoria si estingue. Io conto su quella memoria, precisa, energica, fedele, che registra senza stupirsi tutto.

(*Romanzo americano* 61-62)

A riconciliazione avvenuta l'*humanitas* prorompe, rinovellata in una ritrovata comunione dell'uomo col mondo, in un cosmo ridivenuto amico, sereno, antropomorfo. È questa l'ultima pagina di Piovene, la più suggestiva, che lo restituisce intatto al suo nitore formale e alla sua ansia d'infinito:

Il mondo e l'uomo si rimettono insieme, la notte ricompono la sua unità intorno all'uomo ed alla casa, la terrazza si è spalancata ad un panorama nuziale; le costellazioni riprendono per Michele e Giovanna il disegno perduto dall'angolo inumano della terra straniera; ognuna è ritornata una storia, una figura ed una faccia. Il cielo si divide in tre, la luna vicina, le stelle che bruciano e scappano, ed in mezzo, metà dell'uomo e metà del mondo, i pianeti tranquilli, grandi esseri ancora affettuosi che conciliano l'amore e il sonno.

(128-29)

3. Postilla

Il bianco del ciliegio. L'archetipo arboreo tra principio e fine.

Nella multiforme dissonanza de *Le stelle fredde* una figura si staglia luminosa ed intatta: l'albero di ciliegio in fiore che con l'evanescenza delle sue corolle

³⁶ "Io vivo ormai solo al punto d'arrivo, senza amare i passaggi necessari per giungervi, aiutando, recalcitrante, perché siano varcati. [. . .] Subirò ancora l'ossessione dei mostri, nella paura di catastrofi astratte che non verranno mai e nell'aria sospetta di un avvenimento in sospeso. Sento però che il mondo assorbe, consuma, dissolve le mie paure, le priva d'ogni verità. Che cosa rimane nel fondo? Non più le mie paure ma l'anima profetica del vasto mondo che sogna le cose future" (*Le Furie* 606).

³⁷ "Dovevo invadere dal rovescio, come creandole, tutte le materie del mondo, i frutti, i fiori, gli astri, le pietre preziose, [. . .] tutti i giorni, le notti, le albe, i tramonti possibili in paesaggi diversi, gli scatti della storia, le distruzioni delle civiltà e degli imperi, la genesi, i cataclismi, indietro fino al caos anteriore alla vita e avanti fino alle innumerevoli ipotesi sulla fine del mondo" (480-81).

serrate ha costellato fin dagli esordi l'intera narrativa di Piovene. Questa musa inquietante e "polimorfa" (David 231) concentra su di essa tutte le emozioni e gli slanci vitali apparentemente assenti nel romanzo³⁸ e assume il valore di desiderata epifania;

I rami, esili e serrati, formavano una cupola, e i fiori bianchi erano così fitti da non lasciar vedere nemmeno un pezzetto di cielo. [. . .] Quella era la cosa vivente che amavo di più in casa mia, che avevo spesso ricordato, e da cui mi piaceva essere ricevuto dopo una lunga assenza.

(*Le stelle fredde* 642-43)

L'archetipo arboreo, che già sin dal suo primo apparire nel romanzo aveva assunto un ruolo nodale per la trasformazione del Sé,³⁹ si fa portatore di un altissimo indice di ambivalenza. Nume sconosciuto ed eterno, misterioso e insondabile, si rivela, come nelle culture arcaiche, *axis mundi*, nella sua duplice e unica essenza di guardiano della vita e custode della morte (Coomaraswamy 14-19); e diviene l'emblema del processo trasformativo del cosmo, simbolo della doppiezza e della potenza dell'entropia col suo gioco smisurato di forze positive e negative:

³⁸ Sulla simbologia vitale e androgina del ciliegio, assunto da Piovene come "luce poetica" che trasfigura ed eleva la materia, si veda David (231 e sgg.).

³⁹ "Non fu una fantasia, perché ero come vuoto e non pensavo a nulla, interamente in quell'oggetto [un cartellone pubblicitario] che viveva al mio posto. [. . .] Il segno del trapasso fu una sensazione di stordimento somigliante a un attacco di sonnolenza. La rete delle righe chiare cominciò a confondersi e a diventare nebulosa. Mi trovai come in quel momento intermedio tra la veglia e il sonno, quando si assiste ancora lucidi a un proliferare d'immagini nelle quali non è possibile intervenire perché non sembrano provenire da noi. [. . .] Sparirono i due riflettori che mi offendevano la vista lasciando solamente un leggero disagio. Non lo sentivo in me, ma nel fondo della matassa buia di oggetti ancora informi che prendeva profondità e s'immergeva nell'aria di una vera notte. La rete si era annebbiata, ma era rimasta ben visibile, e ora si dilatava. [. . .] Disegnava il fantasma di un uomo grigio, o ancora meglio di un albero vaporoso, ma così umanizzato da lasciare incerti. Quest'albero-uomo, staccandosi interamente dal disegno d'origine, mi apparve trapiantato nella natura. [. . .] Quello che restava di me si trovava davanti a un albero enorme e fumoso, la cui cima era nella nebbia. [. . .] D'un tratto mi accorsi che si muoveva come un albero vero al vento. Ero insensibile ma quell'essere sfilacciato, tutto buchi, soffriva, spandeva sofferenza, e io soffrivo in lui. Il movimento, prima muto, produceva adesso un rumore come lo stormire di un albero, e di scatto, come se un'altra fonte di rumore si fosse aperta, un altro mormorio confuso irruppe dal basso e dal fondo. Alcune voci come grida cercavano di formarsi in quel grande fruscio, ma non riuscivano a resistere; non appena accennate, il vento le portava via. Finalmente una voce si precisò: 'Dolore.' [. . .] Dopo, udii sillabare distintamente un verso, come un preludio: 'Io sono quel che tu chiamasti umano'" (*Le stelle fredde* 634-36).

Emanava una grande, quasi smisurata energia, trasmetteva una vibrazione invisibile come le onde eteriche che giungono fino alle stelle; era l'energia degli dei, dei grandi animali e dei morti.

(*Le stelle fredde* 643)

Con la sua "luce chiara, fredda", di "un bianco [. . .] assoluto" che chiude come "sotto una campana" (643) il protagonista, l'albero richiama alla mente in modo suggestivo la figurazione "d'estrema bellezza" di un *buco bianco*, doppio rovesciato del buco nero, emergente con la sua materia assorbita dalla stella (Regard 31) *in un altro lato* della realtà cosmica, che può opporsi al niente assoluto.⁴⁰

Col colore bianco, elemento pivotale dell'immaginario di Piovene,⁴¹ si chiude l'ultima immagine de *Le stelle fredde*, laddove il ciliegio, assorbita la quintessenza dell'umanità⁴² e restato comunque "albero di luce" (Coomaraswamy 35) è anche nodo di transizione "dalla voce enunciata alla voce silenziosa"⁴³ e dilaga col suo bianco su situazioni, personaggi e infine

⁴⁰ "La découverte de ces trous noirs est, on l'imagine immédiatement, considérable pour l'histoire de l'épistémé et pour la constitution de nos 'discours.' D'un côté, nous sommes assurés désormais de la place centrale d'un Inconnu Absolu, dont le secret restera à jamais irréductible à nos savoirs. [. . .] D'un autre côté cette inconnue permet à l'homme d'*imaginer* l'univers en des termes d'une poésie inouïe: on pense aujourd'hui, le plus sérieusement du monde, que ces trous noirs seraient doublés de 'trous blancs,' sortes d'anti-trous noirs, qui expulseraient la matière 'de l'autre côté' des trous noirs. Un trou noir serait donc composé de deux feuilletts distincts et symétriques, qui confèreraient à notre univers une apparence de fontaine, où la matière absorbée dans l'effondrement gravitationnel de l'étoile donnerait également lieu à un jaillissement gravitationnel, un jaillissement blanc" (Regard 31).

⁴¹ Il colore bianco è stato, nella vita e nell'opera di Piovene, un referente continuamente oscillante tra una bipolarità simbolica; si veda il valore positivo della "pelle bianca" di Mimy (*Le Furie* 599), l'amore della quale è per lo scrittore come uno "schermo bianco" (601); o la personale crescita intellettuale, sentita come "un disinfettarsi, un imbiancarsi [. . .] con la stessa dolcezza di un albero che emette le gemme in primavera" (493).

Lo stesso colore assume valenze entropiche in *Romanzo americano*: "Quel ridursi allo zero, al bianco assoluto, che ambiva, per poi ripartire e ripensare tutto" (30). Frase, questa, che rimbalza, con sorprendente identità, qualche anno più tardi nel Pynchon di *Gravity's Rainbow*: "[. . .] a sour smell of rolling-stock absence, of maturing rust, developing through those emptying days brilliant and deep, especially at dawn, with blue shadows to seal its passage, to try to bring events to Absolute Zero" (3-4).

⁴² Platone definisce l'uomo una "pianta celeste" (*Timaios* 90 e sgg.).

⁴³ "Abbatte l'Arbre ou prendre son envol au sommet de l'Arbre nécessite qu'à l'habituelle *via affirmativa* l'on ait substitué la *via remotionis*; la grande transition implique un passage de la Voie énoncée (*shaiksha mârگا*) à la Voie non-dite (*ashaiksha mârگا*), du Verbe proféré au Verbe silencieux" (Coomaraswamy 54). Si veda lo stesso Piovene: "Insistendo con il mio sguardo, d'improvviso m'accorsi che l'albero parlava,

sull'autore, coprendo i segni e divenendo glifo "di luce" (Coomaraswamy 30) di una fine che è, già in se stessa, un inizio:

La migliore fotografia del ciliegio è davanti al letto, e la vedo svegliandomi. Adesso sarebbe il momento della sua massima bellezza. So che affacciandomi non potrò più vederlo, ma quasi ogni mattina lo scorgo dietro la finestra [. . .] distanziato dai vetri che si frappongono tra noi. Ondeggia lentamente, questo morto dei morti, come riflesso su quei vetri, ma è integro, non vi manca nulla. È stranamente silenzioso. [. . .] Nella matassa dei suoi rami contiene anche chi lo ha ucciso; impregna tutto del suo bianco.

(803-04)

State University of New York, Albany

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con un linguaggio suo che non mi era intelligibile. I petali erano segni, parti di una scrittura che formava parole collegate in un numero infinito di combinazioni. Io potevo, partendo da uno di quei piccoli fiori, sviluppare una frase, passando con l'occhio su un altro, e poi su un altro e un altro; e poi ancora seguire una diversa via, o saltare da un petalo a un petalo non contiguo, come in una corsa tra gli astri che sono infiniti di numero, e che può essere pensata come un parlare. L'albero aveva espresso un immenso vocabolario, ma la meraviglia maggiore era che tutti i suoi vocaboli vi erano già collegati in infiniti modi, tutti i pensieri detti in uno stesso istante, anche se io potevo percorrerne solamente qualcuno senza capirne il senso: lo stesso avviene con i sogni, con gli animali e con i morti" (*Le stelle fredde* 643-44). Per la simbologia dell'albero come libro si veda Guénon (151).

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Il finale del *Partigiano Johnny**

1. La chiusa del *PJ* ha creato molti dubbi fra i commentatori¹. Il testo è il seguente: “Johnny si alzò col fucile di Tarzan ed il semiautomatico . . . Due mesi dopo la guerra era finita” (863).

Vari critici (n. 1) hanno supposto che i puntini siano un segnale di incompletezza, e che il testo sarebbe stato integrato con vicende narrate nell'*Ur-PJ*, successive alla battaglia di Valdivilla del 24 febbraio 1945, cui si riferisce il testo citato: così avvenne nella prima stesura conservataci del *PJ*.

A ciò si oppone il fatto che nello schema inviato a Livio Garzanti il 12 settembre 1958 si dica esplicitamente che “Johnny cade nello scontro di Valdivilla (tardo febbraio 1945)”². È vero però che spesso Fenoglio sembra modificare sensibilmente i progetti delle sue opere, e dunque non si può considerare questa più che una prova indiziaria. Tuttavia, se esaminiamo i finali di altre opere fenogliane, ci accorgiamo che la morte del protagonista appare in alcuni casi evidente, e comunque necessaria nella logica del racconto.

Nessuno pone ad esempio in discussione la morte di Johnny alla fine di *Primavera di bellezza*, secondo l'edizione del 1959, seguita e autorizzata dall'autore: “Johnny percepì un clic infinitesimale. Girò gli occhi dal tedesco al vallone. Vide spiovere la bomba a mano del sergente Modica e le sorrise” (421).

Da un punto di vista tecnico, questo finale è molto simile a quello del *PJ* sopra citato: in primo piano viene posto il protagonista, il quale si trova al centro

* Per le citazioni dal *Partigiano Johnny* (= *PJ*), pubblicato per la prima volta postumo nel 1968, ma elaborato fino al 1958, si segue l'edizione a cura di Dante Isella, del quale sostanzialmente si accetta la ricostruzione della complessa vicenda compositiva; per il testo del cosiddetto *Ur-PJ* e per gli apparati critici e i documenti si ricorre all'edizione diretta da Maria Corti. Gli *Appunti partigiani* sono citati dall'edizione a cura di Lorenzo Mondo, mentre per le altre opere di Fenoglio si fa riferimento ancora all'edizione Isella. Per i riferimenti storici, fondamentale è Pavone.

¹ Isella, 1397 ss.; 1492-5, in cui viene affermato che il protagonista muore, ma sono anche riassunte le posizioni di Maria Corti, Bianca De Maria e M. Antonietta Grignani, che sostengono l'incompletezza dell'opera. Si veda, oltre al volume di Bigazzi, Saccone 196-200, e Petroni 141-2 (su *Una questione privata*).

² Saccone 152-3, n. 13, e 198.

di uno scontro a fuoco ormai disperato, e tutto fa pensare che la morte sia inevitabile, anche se non viene esplicitamente narrata. Si noti poi che questo procedimento è presente anche in altri romanzi di guerra: ad esempio, ne *I giovani leoni* di Irwin Shaw, uscito in traduzione italiana da Bompiani nel 1958, si legge: “Guardò l'americano alzare il fucile e premere il grilletto”, cui segue un breve commento.

Se leggiamo invece i capitoli conclusivi dell'*Imboscata* (o *Frammenti di romanzo*), notiamo che l'uccisione del nuovo protagonista, Milton, è assolutamente certa:

Milton riemerse, Reggiani lo vide e lo rafficcò nella schiena affiorante. Milton ricolò giù e il soldato esaurì il caricatore nel punto in cui l'aveva visto riaffondare [. . .]. Milton era riaffiorato per un attimo, poi si era risommerso nel pieno della corrente principale.

(1003)

Il commento che segue al cap. 20 è piuttosto lungo, ed è svolto in forma di dialogo tra un barcaiolo e un contadino, che, mentre parlano delle ultime vicende della guerra, all'improvviso vedono passare il corpo di Milton, tentano di raggiungerlo senza riuscirvi, e alla fine si chiedono: “E chi sarà stato? Uno di questi che si fanno la guerra? - Può darsi [. . .]. Per quanto mi sia sembrato in borghese [. . .]. Ad ogni modo, è uno che non vedrà come andrà a finire” (1008).

Il cadavere di Milton non viene nemmeno riconosciuto con certezza come quello di un combattente, e in ogni caso viene amaramente sottolineata l'inutilità del suo sacrificio. Lo strazio del corpo dello sconfitto è *topos* epico, derivante dal finale dell'*Iliade*, ma in questo caso viene aggravato dalla perdita completa della gloria che la morte in battaglia doveva riservare agli eroi.

Risulta allora più che probabile che i finali di *PJ* e di *Una questione privata* (anch'esso considerato problematico: vd. *infra*) alludano alla morte dei protagonisti, come peraltro si può confermare considerando i segnali interni al testo che ne scandiscono la logica narrativa³.

2.1. La sensazione propria di chi sperimenta la morte compare più volte nell'esperienza di Johnny. Ciò viene mirabilmente indicato già dopo il primo scontro a fuoco che lo vede coinvolto:

[Johnny] posò il moschetto e si sedette su un tratto libero del muretto, altissimo. La stanchezza l'aggrediva, subdola e dolce, e poi una rigidità. Poi nella sua spina dorsale si spiralò, lunga e lenta, l'onda della paura della battaglia ripensata. Anche agli altri doveva succedere lo stesso, perché tutti erano un po' chini, e assorti, come a seguire quella stessa

³ Propongo qui alcuni spunti che vengono esaminati più in dettaglio in Casadei, *Romanzi di Finisterre*, in cui è presente una più ampia bibliografia. Si terrà implicitamente conto del quadro d'insieme offerto da Falaschi. Per altri riferimenti bibliografici, Rizzo e Ioli.

onda nella loro spina dorsale. Una battaglia è una cosa terribile, dopo ti fa dire, come a certe puerpere primipare: mai più, mai più. Un'esperienza terribile, bastante, da non potersi ripetere, e ti dà insieme l'umiliante persuasione di aver già fatto troppo, tutta la tua parte con una battaglia. Eppure Johnny sapeva che sarebbe rimasto, a fare tutte le battaglie destinate, imposte dai partigiani o dai fascisti, e *sentiva* che si sarebbero ancora combattute battaglie, di quella medesima ancora guerra, quando egli e il Biondo e Tito e tutti gli uomini sull'aia (ed ora apparivano numerosi, un'armata) sarebbero stati sottoterra, messi da una battaglia al coperto da ogni battaglia.

Gli uomini erano così immoti ed assorti, così statuari pur con quella percorrenza dentro, che i figli dei contadini entrarono tra loro, taciti e haunted, come in un museo

(PJ 516-7).

Poco oltre, egli rischia di essere ucciso in un'imboscata, nella quale muore il partigiano Tito: immediato il confronto: "Johnny si sentiva una subdola, lunga corrente nella spina dorsale, *tal quale dopo la battaglia*, ma infinitamente più subdola e lunga. Tremenda era l'aperta battaglia, ma infinitamente di più l'imboscata" (524, corsivo nostro). Ancora più avanti, dopo altri scontri a fuoco e dopo la morte del compagno Biondo, pare che quel sentimento tenda a smorzarsi: "Stava facendo l'abitudine al doporischio-mortale, non avvertiva più, come sempre prima, quell'onda corsa elettrica, lunghissima, nella sua spina dorsale" (552). A questo punto, la morte non è un evento eccezionale, ma un destino inevitabilmente segnato:

E poteva pensare al Biondo in termini di perfetta, quieta naturalezza. – Era la sua fine. Prima o poi –. E allora la constatazione si riversò su di lui, gli si adattò come un anello d'acciaio. – Anche per me, sarà la mia fine. Altrimenti, che debbo pensare di me? È solo una questione di date.

(552)

In pochi giorni di esperienza partigiana la vita di Johnny è cambiata radicalmente, è diventata una vita da eroe epico, che combatte sotto il segno della morte, perché il destino del partigiano è la morte:

Johnny lo [un altro partigiano] seguì con gli occhi fin che poté, leggendogli sulla magra schiena [. . .] come sarebbe *morto* in una particolare vicenda partigiana che non sarebbe più stata comune al partigiano Johnny.

[Johnny] aveva fatto un'imboscata ed aveva sicuramente ucciso: era un passo in avanti ed un rimerito verso e della sua propria morte

(556, 594)

Portiamoci ora nella parte finale del testo. Dopo che l'azione centrale del PJ (la conquista, la difesa e la perdita di Alba) si è interamente compiuta, Johnny e due compagni, Ettore e Pierre, si ritrovano isolati e braccati dai fascisti. I segnali

della morte imminente si fanno progressivamente più forti⁴, fino al momento in cui essa sembra arrivare davvero:

Johnny correva e si chiedeva quando, quando sarebbe arrivata la prima pallottola. Arrivò, ed altre ancora, infinite altre [. . .]. Johnny correva, correva, le lontane creste balenanti ai suoi occhi sgranati e quasi ciechi, correva ed il fuoco diminuiva al suo udito, anche il clamore, spari e grida annegavano in una gora fra lui e loro.

Correva, correva, o meglio volava, corpo fatica e movimento vanificati. Poi, ancora correndo, fra luoghi nuovi, inaccessibili ai suoi occhi appannati, il cervello riprese attività, ma non endogena, puramente ricettiva. I pensieri vi entravano da fuori, colpivano la sua fronte come ciottoli da una fionda. – Pierre ed Ettore sono morti. Ettore aveva il mal di ventre, non poteva correre come doveva. Li hanno uccisi. Io sono vivo. Ma sono vivo? Sono solo, solo, solo e tutto è finito.

Era conscio del silenzio e della solitudine e della sicurezza, ma ancora correva, non finiva di correre, il suo cervello si era riannerito e la sua sensibilità fisica ritornò, ma solo per provare angoscia e sfinimento. Il cuore gli pulsava in posti sempre diversi e tutti assurdi, le ginocchia cedettero, vide nero e crollò.

(779)

È significativo che questo passo sia stato rielaborato nel terribile e stupendo finale di *Una questione privata*, in cui però si può ipotizzare che il protagonista Milton perda davvero la vita (il “crollò” chiude l’intera opera, almeno nello stato in cui ci è pervenuta)⁵. Si tratta cioè di una prova generale della morte, questa volta sentita come non mai sul proprio corpo, mentre la fisicità tutta di Johnny giunge ai limiti estremi della sua sopportazione, all’annerimento e allo sfinimento, tanto che poco oltre egli commenterà: “Enough, enough, today I’ve had enough” (780).

E che la morte fosse vicinissima lo conferma non solo la falsa convinzione che “Pierre ed Ettore [fossero] morti, uccisi, oggi” (780), ma anche la quasi immediata scoperta del cadavere di un partigiano:

⁴ “Non preoccuparti. Sento che non potrei chiudere occhio nemmeno per un attimo –. E subito tremò, perché aveva ripetute tal quali le parole del sergente, e presso un campo minato come allora, e per la prima volta in vita sua la superstizione l’afferrò e lo sconvolse” (727). “Sentiva tutto il suo corpo felicemente vivo e perfettamente funzionante, come non mai, eppure una pallottola, prima di molto, l’avrebbe bloccato e poi corrotto. Cuore e polmoni, testa e mani. Guardò il sole, con la consapevolezza che stavolta non l’avrebbe visto tramontare” (741).

⁵ Ecco il testo di *Una questione privata*: “Come entrò sotto gli alberi, questi parvero serrare e far muro e a un metro da quel muro crollò” (1127). Qualche dubbio potrebbe permanere, ma resta il fatto che, se si mette questo finale in serie con i precedenti, la conclusione dell’opera non sembra possa essere diversa. Si noti oltretutto l’aggiunta, rispetto al *PJ*, dell’immagine del ‘muro’ costituito dagli alberi, che pare metaforicamente alludere ad un limite ormai invalicabile.

La valletta si incassava, la vegetazione anneriva, in essa era più tardi di ore che sulle alte colline, e così il viottolo già sfumava, e così sfumavano le esterrefatte facciate dei rudi cascinali. Così solo all'ultimo passo si accorse del fardello che ostruiva la strada.

Johnny si sedette a fianco di esso, sull'erba rigida, inaffiata di sangue. La sua faccia era glabra e serena, i suoi capelli bene ravviati ad onta dello scossone della raffica e del tonfo a terra. Il sangue spiccato dai molti buchi nel petto aveva appena spruzzato l'orlo della sua sciarpa di seta azzurra, portata al collo alla cowboy, e che era l'unico capo di una certa quale e shocking lussurità, in quella generale povertà di partigiano apprestatesi all'inverno. Johnny ritrasse gli occhi dalla sua intatta faccia, poi glieli riposò su all'improvviso, quasi a sorprenderlo, nella pazza idea che il ragazzo socchiudesse gli occhi e poi ripiombasse le palpebre alla sua nuova attenzione. Giaceva in sconfinata solitudine, accentuata dalla univocità del rivo vicino. L'avevano spogliato delle scarpe, Johnny esaminò le sue doppie calze di grossa lana bucherellata. E pensò che Ettore e Pierre giacevano esattamente così, qualche milione di colline addietro.

(780-1)

L'oggettività quasi cinematografica della descrizione colpisce duramente, specie nell'ultima parte: la morte è uguale ovunque, si può equiparare l'ignoto partigiano giustiziato agli amici Ettore e Pierre, creduti morti e ormai lontanissimi ("milioni di colline addietro"). Dopodiché Johnny è spinto di nuovo a pensare alla sua stessa fine: "E pensò che forse un partigiano sarebbe stato come lui ritto sull'ultima collina, guardando la città e pensando lo stesso di lui e della sua notizia, la sera del giorno della sua morte", ma anche alla necessità di continuare la battaglia sino all'ultimo: "Ecco l'importante: che ne restasse sempre uno" (782). L'essere consapevole del proprio destino coincide insomma con una profonda scelta etica: "Mi sono impegnato a dir di no fino in fondo, e questa [il ritirarsi] sarebbe una maniera di dir sì" (844).

Quando la fine giungerà, non dovrà nemmeno essere descritta. Bastano ormai dei puntini di sospensione per indicare tutto ciò che il lettore deve sapere. Ma il commento, apparentemente neutro — "Due mesi dopo la guerra era finita" — più di ogni altro possibile certifica l'inutilità di quella stessa morte. Non che le motivazioni della lotta non fossero giuste; ma nessuna giusta causa, a posteriori, sembra più sufficiente per accettare il destino dell'eroe.

2.2. Vanno notati anche altri elementi che consolidano l'analisi appena svolta circa le tracce del destino di morte nel romanzo fenogliano. Propria di Johnny sembra la condizione di solitudine profonda e di imminenza di un destino fatale. Essa è sintetizzata in una delle numerose immagini-simbolo del *PJ*, quella delle "tenebre che avvolgono". È un'immagine che ricorre spesso, ma la sua frequenza aumenta a mano a mano che ci si avvicina alla fine: "Poi, prima di lui, [Elda] fuggì via, la sua figurina un'inezia per le capacità divoranti della notte" (725); "Mezz'ora dopo, al colmo del buio, Nord partì per settimane e forse mesi, tanta era la tenebra che dopo un metro non sapevi più dire se avesse preso per nord o

per sud" (790); "Era buio pesto, onnistringente [si noti il calco epico]" (829); "E Johnny entrò nel ghiaccio e nella tenebra, nella mainstream del vento" (833); "Dietro la porta la gelida notte attendeva come una belva all'agguato [. . .]. Tutto, anche la morsa del freddo, la furia del vento e la voragine della notte, tutto concorse ad affondarlo in un sonoro orgoglio" (844-5; segue l'affermazione: "Io sono il passero che non cascherà mai. Io sono quell'unico passero!", che permette di accostare Johnny ad un eroe in lotta contro il suo destino epico-tragico).

Questo eroe si muove in un tempo che non è solo quello della natura (vista nei suoi aspetti più grandiosi)⁶, bensì anche quello della possibile morte in battaglia, un tempo senza tempo, il *tempo della guerra*: "[Johnny] grattò via il fango dall'orologio e lesse 11,10 ed ancora una volta si astrasse completamente nella brevità e nell'interminabilità del tempo di guerra. Poteva benissimo aver cominciato a sparare un attimo fa e appena intaccato un caricatore, o, indifferentemente, star sparando dal principio del mondo" (701). È il tempo in cui è in gioco la sopravvivenza, e quindi non conta più il normale fluire, la durata, la coscienza.

La lotta partigiana è dunque costituita da una continua alternanza di vita e morte, e conduce verso una profonda solitudine. Giustamente Galaverni (130) sottolinea, impiegando il saggio di Carl Schmitt *Teoria del partigiano*, la differenza fondamentale tra la guerra tecnologica e quella partigiana, in cui si hanno ancora singoli combattenti, fuori degli schemi di ogni esercito ("irregolari") e difensori della propria terra ("tellurici" secondo Schmitt). Sono combattenti costretti a lottare in condizioni terribili: la seconda guerra mondiale è diventata, in Italia, guerra civile e fratricida, condotta negli stessi luoghi della vita borghese, spesso *contro* amici o fratelli⁷.

3.1. Nessun altro autore che ha scritto sulla Resistenza italiana è riuscito a esprimere il senso della morte imminente come Fenoglio. Anche in diari e

⁶ Si veda Beccaria, "Il tempo grande" 120-30, e anche *La guerra e gli asfodeli*.

⁷ A volte persino le azioni contro i nemici paiono senza onore. Ad esempio, l'ultima uccisione compiuta da Johnny è quella di una spia fascista (846 ss.): per quanto si tratti di una giusta punizione, resta pur sempre il ribrezzo per aver dovuto sparare ad un prigioniero. Possiamo qui osservare che la guerra di Johnny è molto diversa da quella di trincea, tipica del primo conflitto mondiale, sia che si prenda a riscontro la testimonianza di Remarque (*Niente di nuovo sul fronte occidentale*), sia quella di Jünger (*Nelle tempeste d'acciaio*). In specie, rispetto all'eroismo di Jünger, all'insegna della volontà di potenza, proteso alla vittoria e capace sempre di trovare nuove energie per la lotta, quello di Fenoglio appare come un eroismo non solo all'insegna della sofferenza, come poteva accadere nell'epica antica secondo Platone, ma anche della consapevolezza riguardo l'inutilità di ogni azione bellica. Per altri spunti su questo tema, si veda Battistini.

resoconti di grande intensità la rappresentazione della morte risulta un elemento fra i tanti da ricordare, e non quello ormai essenziale nella vita del partigiano. Scrive ad esempio Mario Spinella nel suo *Memoria della Resistenza*:

Attendiamo, a lungo, se qualcuno si muove. Ma si odono solo gli scoppi del carico di benzina, l'avidio contorcersi delle fiamme. Quando scendiamo, più tardi, sulla strada, tutto è compiuto: una macchia nera e riarsa, qualche striscia di sangue, i volti contratti dal terrore.

L'esperienza mi ha reso, purtroppo, familiare alla morte, e sono io che frugo per trovare un portafogli, una lettera, un segno di riconoscimento.

(170-1, corsivo nostro)

La familiarità con la morte impedisce l'orrore, e anzi spinge a gesti consueti: niente di straordinario, dal momento che la *memoria* ha ormai eliminato ogni tratto enfatico. Quando si vuole dare risalto ad una morte, la si avvolge nel silenzio: "a un filare di alberi, nitidi nell'oculare, i corpi di nove partigiani, in fila, pendevano impiccati. Intorno a loro era il silenzio, ed il vuoto, della lontananza" (155-6).

Anche Pietro Chiodi, insegnante di filosofia (e grande esperto di quella esistenzialista) nel liceo frequentato da Fenoglio, descrive nel suo diario dal titolo *Banditi* numerose morti, che però entrano in un catalogo drammatico più che in una sfera di eccezionalità. La funzione della morte ingiusta di persone innocenti può essere invece quella di spingere all'azione senza più dubbi:

Un terribile pensiero mi prende. Perché mi sono impegnato in questa lotta? Perché sono qui quando tanti più sani e forti di me vivono tranquilli sfruttando la situazione in ogni modo? Ripenso alla mia vita di studio, al mio lavoro su Heidegger interrotto. Perché ho abbandonato tutto questo? Mi ricordo con precisione: una strada piena di sangue e un carro con quattro cadaveri vicino al Mussotto. Il cantoniere che dice: - È meglio morire che sopportare questo -. Si è allora che ho deciso di gettarmi allo sbaraglio.

(41)

In questa prospettiva etica, l'altro romanzo sulla Resistenza che tratta frontalmente il tema della morte è *La casa in collina* di Cesare Pavese, in cui però il protagonista Corrado è un professore che ha volutamente evitato di entrare nella lotta, e ha riflettuto da lontano, dalla sua casa in collina, su quanto avveniva a Torino e in Italia dopo l'armistizio. Nel finale dell'opera, tuttavia, quando è costretto ad attraversare il fronte di combattimento per tornare al suo paese natale, egli vede direttamente cosa significa morire in guerra, tanto che nel penultimo capitolo (xxii) si ritrova in mezzo ai cadaveri di un gruppo di fascisti, e ne rimane profondamente colpito. Il suo desiderio è ancora quello di ritornare alla casa paterna per trovare una nuova pace, per fuggire alla furia della guerra, e alla fine pare riuscirci. Ma nell'ultimo capitolo (xxiii) Corrado capisce di non essere comunque più immune dalle uccisioni perpetrate intorno a lui:

È qui che la guerra mi ha preso, e mi prende ogni giorno. [. . .] Ho visto i morti sconosciuti, i morti repubblicani. Sono questi che mi hanno svegliato. Se un ignoto, un nemico, diventa morendo una cosa simile, se ci si arresta e si ha paura a scavalcarlo, vuol dire che anche vinto il nemico è qualcuno, che dopo averne sparso il sangue bisogna placarlo, dare una voce a questo sangue, giustificare chi l'ha sparso. Guardare certe morti è umiliante. Non sono più faccenda altrui; non ci si sente capitati sul posto per caso. Si ha l'impressione che lo stesso destino che ha messo a terra quei corpi, tenga noialtri inchiodati a vederli, a riempircene gli occhi. Non è paura, non è la solita viltà. Ci si sente umiliati perché si capisce — si tocca con gli occhi — che al posto del morto potremmo essere noi: non ci sarebbe differenza, e se viviamo lo dobbiamo al cadavere imbrattato. Per questo ogni guerra è una guerra civile: ogni caduto somiglia a chi resta, e gliene chiede ragione.

(215-6)

Il brano proposto, al pari dell'intero finale del romanzo, costituisce uno dei punti più alti della riflessione sul senso della guerra e delle morti, che segnano anche chi voleva risultare estraneo alla lotta (non-colpevole piuttosto che innocente). Altrove (Casadei 76) sono state sottolineate le consonanze tra questa visione della lotta e quella di uno scrittore di tradizione ebraica quale Elias Canetti: il passato reclama giustificazione e riscatto, specie della morte ingiusta. Ma è evidente che pure nel caso di Pavese la rappresentazione della morte non costituisce, come nel *PJ*, il fondamento stesso della narrazione, il nocciolo duro che si scopre sotto ogni avvenimento bellico, persino quelli vittoriosi.

3.2. Per Fenoglio, la condizione del partigiano è quella 'limite' di chi scommette ogni istante sul suo destino. Questo nucleo profondo si sostanzia nell'uso di uno stile assoluto, il grande stile di una nuova epica di cui ha parlato Beccaria. Ma è necessario precisare che non intendiamo qui l'epica come espressione di un mondo conciliato, bensì come forma propria della ricerca oggettivata della (modernamente: di una) verità. La tensione verso la scoperta di una sostanza dietro gli eventi bellici si esprime attraverso uno stile che qui per comodità si definisce grande (sebbene si possano generare equivoci, data la notevole estensione del concetto nietzschiano): si tratta in ogni caso di uno stile che aspira ad essere assoluto, perché "mira a una rivelazione delle cose"⁸ (Guglielmi 143).

Tuttavia, si sarà ormai compreso che l'autobiografia è antecedente indispensabile di questa epica. Ma quale tipo di autobiografia? Non certo quella

⁸ Elementi epici non mancano in altri romanzi sulla Resistenza, ad esempio in *La Quarantasettesima* di Ubaldo Bertoli; tuttavia, la loro presenza è di solito limitata ad alcuni passi esemplari sui *topoi* dell'epica classica (come il funerale dell'eroe). Di ben diversa portata è la *ri-creazione* dell'epica attuata nel *PJ*, su cui si veda Casadei 61-88.

del diario o della cronaca (Saccone 70 e 89-94), ma l'*Erlebnis*, l'esperienza riletta con diversa consapevolezza.

È opportuno proporre un rapido confronto con un importante antecedente del *PJ*, gli *Appunti partigiani* recentemente ritrovati (1994). Scritti senza dubbio nel 1946, essi costituiscono una prima elaborazione narrativa dei ricordi bellici, cioè del materiale raccolto nei famosi quaderni neri, usati durante la lotta da Fenoglio per le sue memorie, ma purtroppo perduti. Questi *Appunti* si presentano in gran parte come un racconto al presente e in prima persona, e sono infarciti di episodi di cronaca, perché risentono ancora scopertamente delle emozioni e dei sentimenti della guerra.

La grande differenza che interviene tra questa fase e quella del *PJ* sta nell'aumento della consapevolezza riguardo all'esperienza vissuta. Vediamo un passo degli *Appunti* relativo ad uno scontro a fuoco:

Fu mezz'ora dopo questo fatto di Riri [un partigiano che si nasconde in una tomba] che provammo lo spavento degli spaventati. Camminavamo ai piedi della collina, avendo a destra, a cento passi, il torrentaccio Belbo. E Cervellino mi dà del gomito, guardo insù e in cresta spuntano elmetti come funghi e poi tedeschi s'affacciano a persona intera. Noi e loro stiamo un attimo a fissarci, come conoscenze da un marciapiede all'altro, a vedere chi saluta per primo. Poi noi [i] voliamo quei cento passi e intanto i tedeschi sparano i maledetti sputafuochi e noi non incassiamo neanche un colpo in tre, che era come non bagnarsi nella pioggia. E ci tuffiamo di pancia in quelle due spanne d'acqua e strisciamo all'altra sponda e ci acquattiamo sotto l'erbaccie. E aspettiamo che i tedeschi scendano a farci fuori all'umido. Ma quelli tirano via, e Cervellino dice che l'abbiamo scampata per un pelo di pulce. E mentre ci inginocchiamo nell'acqua e ci aggrappiamo all'erbaccie della sponda per uscire a secco, sull'altro versante sfilano altri tedeschi e gettano a valle bombe a mano, una ogni cinque metri. Di bomba in bomba arrivano su noi. Piccàrd bisbiglia che se non moriamo adesso di piombo moriamo poi tiscì. Basta, ci siamo coricati sulla pancia e sentivamo emergere il sedere. Una bomba scoppia a monte di noi e fa un tatuaggio sulla scorza d'un albero. La seconda a valle. I tedeschi proseguono e gettano bombe che non ci riguardano più.

(Appunti partigiani 48)

Non è solo il tono, in buona misura umoristico-comico, ad essere diverso dal passo corrispondente di *PJ* (522-3). È il senso stesso della pagina che ha un segno opposto, vitalistico, rispetto a quello negativo e mortuario del *PJ*:

La prossima [bomba] era la buona, la storica,... ma esplose troppo a valle, morse basso il tronco d'un pioppo, Johnny stared al dilaniamento.

La morte sarebbe dunque venuta dal secondo passaggio sulla ripa opposta, ma non accadde [...]. Johnny gli [al partigiano Fred] vedeva, oltre il vestito lordo, il corpo violentato dallo spasimo e dal terrore, infinitamente più miserabile e lurido del vestito. Ed egli era come Fred, identico.

(523, corsivo nostro)

Negli *Appunti*, il protagonista sente di essere il sopravvissuto, nel senso dato al termine da Canetti in *Massa e potere*, colui che, dopo la lotta, resta vincitore e detentore di ogni potere, del potere sulla morte. Il suo racconto è quello di chi può raccontare con gioia. Ma, dopo gli anni penosi del dopoguerra, dopo cioè che la battaglia della Resistenza si è rivelata inutile, è l'esperienza della "morte vissuta" quella che davvero segna la narrazione delle vicende del partigiano Johnny.

È da passi come questi che si può evincere la forte rielaborazione subita dai materiali cronachistici raccolti da Fenoglio durante la Resistenza. Il passaggio principale è evidentemente di tipo stilistico, e si fonda in primo luogo su un' "arte del levare", che conduce all'eliminazione degli elementi connettivi fra le azioni: i movimenti fisici e psicologici vengono drasticamente ridotti perché i paragoni tranquillizzanti, le battute, la gioia per lo scampato pericolo non importano più nulla. Ora tutto si basa su una metafora violentissima quel "morse basso il tronco" che costituisce la versione tragica del "fa un tatuaggio sulla scorza d'un albero" degli *Appunti*. E opposto è l'atteggiamento dei personaggi: nel testo del 1946 si legge che le bombe "non riguardano più" né Beppe né i suoi amici, mentre Johnny (da solo) "stared al dilaniamento", e poi osserva la morte nei suoi compagni, "infinitamente miserabile" perché sa che la sopravvivenza non può essere che momentanea.

Non è quindi solo l'elemento autobiografico a motivare la grandezza del *PJ*, ma la sua diversa lettura nella prospettiva dell'*Erlebnis*. È appunto il sentimento della necessità della morte che, come sosterrebbe Benjamin, spinge il narratore a ricercare il senso dell'esistenza del suo protagonista, ossia del se stesso trasposto. L'esperienza della morte è l'evento e insieme la verità riconosciuta nell'epica del *PJ*. La continua alternanza fra la vita e la morte è rappresentata come un'esperienza fisica e psicologica estenuante, perché la condizione della guerra è quella segnalata subito a Johnny da Cocito: "La vita del partigiano è tutta e solo fatta di casi estremi" (*PJ* 447).

Fenoglio riesce a trovare un senso per la vicenda di Johnny soltanto nel suo non-senso, e il finale, così rapido e insieme così tragico, conferma la duplicità della vicenda stessa, epica ma inutile. Dunque, il finale del *PJ* parla di una morte necessaria, della morte di un eroe che, nonostante la giustezza della sua lotta, non può trovare altro che la propria fine.

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**The Unending Process of Subjectivity:
Gendering Otherness as Openness in Pasolini's *Decameron***

In a recent assessment of Pasolini criticism of the last two decades, Robert Gordon distinguishes between "the semi-hagiographical critical initiatives" that followed Pasolini's death in 1975, and other, "more rigorous, more traditionally based" academic analyses of his work after 1980. Both critical camps share, however, in the critic's estimation, an ingenuous approach to Pasolini's opus as either "a coherent entity to be decoded" or a vessel of some "unified meaning of Pasolini." For Gordon, both sides have failed to acknowledge "the extent to which he [Pasolini] refuses to serve as a receptacle of 'innocent' or 'authentic' sets of meanings" and in particular, the extent to which Pasolini's "discursive practices emanate a complex, centripetal force of gravity which draws in and distorts dependent discourses [. . .]" (41-42).

These discourses contribute to the ongoing construction of meaning in Pasolini's written and visual works. Gordon's characterization of Pasolini's self-construction as a dynamic process is crucial in this context because it presents an open-ended rather than closed, "coherent," or "unified" structure of subjectivity. Moreover, his observation of the "absolute importance assigned in Pasolini's value system to selfhood, and to the potentially overwhelming expressivity of the self and its desires," (42) suggests that one ought to examine the numerous subject figures in Pasolini's works to understand the relational network between selfhood and desire. While his construction of self generally centers on the otherness embodied and projected by marginalized male subjects, many female figures in Pasolini's poetry, prose, theater, and cinema factor into his concept of alterity. And because these women often personify origins or a potential source of renewal, they perform a vital function within a value system that is both cyclical and regenerative.¹

¹ For Gordon neither authenticity nor inauthenticity should be taken at face value in Pasolini. He states that it is the "rhetoric of authenticity, the poetics of expressivity and the expressivity of the poetic which govern the economy of selfhood in Pasolini's work"(44). And although he acknowledges Fortini's view on the effect of authenticity in Pasolini as a product of its exact opposite, that is, "of a masquerade-like pretense of exposing the self," Gordon finds Pasolini's unceasing attempts to make his presence felt indicative of "a centrifugal dynamic, a sublimation of the void at the center of the self-in-language into a pathologically fantastic construct" (44-46).

Gordon describes the Pasolinian subject as built upon various processes of self-knowledge and self-expression, and discerns three predominant “operations” of subjectivity that correspond to three different written genres: Pasolini’s poetry displays textual strategies for self-construction through self exposure and repetition; his journalism builds subjectivity through its regular shifts from private contemplation to public intervention; and his screenplays exemplify subjectivity operating in “a space constantly projected forward” (46), that is, alluding continually to another work, the film yet to be made.²

In this paper I extend Gordon’s definition of subjectivity as a process by adding a fourth artistic genre or “operation” to those outlined above: Pasolini’s cinema. This genre is unique in that it comprises the others. In the particular case of the *Decameron* (1971), for instance, Pasolini-the-Artist is present within the film in the guise of Giotto’s best pupil.³ He visualizes quite literally the progressive construction of self in a given work of art, because his role as Artist places him in direct relations to poetic figures deemed authentic or inauthentic, places that are public or private, and timeframes indicative of the past or the “ancora da farsi.” My main focus with respect to this fourth genre is the female figure who epitomizes selfhood grounded in alterity. Pasolini’s own construction of self in this film can then be viewed as a gendered discourse. It issues forth from the subtle, yet exceptional subjectivity of three female figures within the Artist’s tale, which frames the second half of the *Decameron*. The Artist, that is to say, identifies a creative source of vitality in these women — one that allows him to avoid restrictive conclusions and definitive endings in his life and in his works.

Pasolini — poet and ideologue — inscribes the self into a web of visual relations with his past, expressed by the autobiographical characters in the first half of the film (played by Sergio Citti and Ninetto Davoli), and his future, expressed by a series of female protagonists in the second half of the film, namely Caterina, Lisabetta, and the Madonna. These visual relations are confirmed structurally in the film, through editing and *mise-en-scène*, and narratively, through dialogue, actions, and metaphoric references. The gradual construction of self, I maintain, becomes visible through a transition in Pasolini’s identification with an intangible past, characterized primarily by the

² The “ancora da farsi” (still to be made or done) is a phrase coined by Pasolini himself in “The Screenplay as a ‘Structure that Wants to Be Another Structure’” (*Heretical Empiricism* 187-96). This essay is helpful in understanding the notion of subjectivity-as-process, both textually and ideologically. Pasolini presents the screenplay as unique literary genre given its constant allusion to another, future work. He claims that this form of writing compels the reader to project his vision forward, imagining the visual representation of what he is now reading in another time and space. In his film *Decameron*, the Artist’s triptych with its third blank canvas alludes to the idea of a future creation or unfinished work.

³ I shall refer to “Giotto’s best pupil” as “the Artist.”

interactions of spirited male youths, to an open-ended and multiform approach to future identity, as denoted by his focus on certain females in the second half of the film. I will illustrate this by discussing the shift in frames from Ciappelletto's tale (1:1) to the Artist's tale (6:5). It mirrors the transition well, as does the Artist's "framing" function within the second half of the film. Within the latter context, I will explain how Pasolini weaves his discourses of alterity into two of Boccaccio's tales, joining scenes of male bonding with those that celebrate female subjectivity: Caterina's (5:4) and Lisabetta's (4:5). Finally, I will show how in the second of Pasolini's *tableaux vivants*, featuring the Madonna, the Artist's vision of the archetypal female unites his notions of selfhood and desire with the symbolic "unfinished masterpiece" of the last sequence.

The role of female-gendered spaces, characters, and events is an aspect of Pasolinian subjectivity that has received little attention to date. Pasolini criticism lacks a comprehensive discussion of female figures, despite the contributions of some, such as Viano, Carotenuto, and Casi who discuss certain female figures within the context of Freudian psychoanalysis and homosexual desire.⁴ Yet throughout his life and his poetry in particular, Pasolini portrayed the female other as a vital force capable of challenging, by virtue of her being, oppressive social codes. The image and ideal of a youthful mother-figure, based on personal associations with Susanna Pasolini, was the foundation of the poet's existence. Her presence was sacred and to be preserved at all costs because it provided the marginalized male subject with a genuine source of self-knowledge. Woman, in this respect, as symbol of origins and locus of return, needs to be studied as an

⁴ Carotenuto discusses the role of negative mother-figures and prostitutes in the trajectory of Pasolini's male youths, such as Ricetto, Alduccio, and Baglione in *Ragazzi di vita*. However, his discussion of the female other with whom the male homosexual must contend internally focuses primarily on the suffering of male homosexuals, rather than on the role this contact or confrontation with the female other might have in the representation of selfhood in a given artwork. Viano, on the other hand, lends some attention to the female subject in *Medea*. Yet his disappointment with the film's attempt to convey mythical realism, and with Callas's interpretation of the leading role, are so great that he actually dismisses Medea-Callas as a point of interest. He emphasizes, instead, the myth-*manqué's* pathological moments and Pasolini's decision to underscore the father's pain for the loss of a son. Diversely still, Casi delineates fragments of gender specific moments in certain films by Pasolini, which, if treated in greater depth, could contribute to a more comprehensive study of female figures in Pasolini's cinema. Casi considers, for instance, the female look when it fails to encounter that of the male in scenes of heterosexual love-making, denoting a general lack of trust and ability to communicate that one can discern, instead, in the exchange of homosexual gazes (52). He also makes a keen observation regarding Medea (*Medea*) and Caterina di Valbona (*Decameron*), two women who observe their male lovers as if they were landscapes (54). See also Calabrese's discussion of *Medea* within the context of the sacred.

integral part of the male subject in a continual state of construction, and never lacking in ideology.⁵

Female subjectivity, at the heart of a gender discourse present in a large part of Pasolini's works, is nestled within a broader ideological framework that incorporates various forms of otherness. Consequently, female representations coincide and are often overshadowed by more predominant *others* such as sub-proletariat males, the persecuted homosexual, or the civil poet mourning an irrecoverable past. One notes, for example, that Sergio Citti and Ninetto Davoli in their roles as Ciappelletto and Andreuccio, dominate the first half of the *Decameron*.⁶ Interestingly, however, Pasolini and certain females, including Silvana Mangano, dominate the second half. This change in frame characters and supporting protagonists illustrates the passage from a past hypothetical of a reality no longer attainable — in this case, identification with contemporary subproletarian cultures in Italy — to a present hypothetical situation in which the construction of self, via multiple discourses of alterity, may be possible. The transition from one hypothetical timeframe to the other, as visualized in the *Decameron*, is quite intriguing. It begins with Ciappelletto's confession and funeral, the moment in which one could, according to Pasolini's own theory of death and montage, bestow meaning upon a person's life. However, it is just then that Ciappelletto's other "sins" are revealed: one learns that he is homosexual from the chortling comments of the two men hosting him, and that he is excessively devoted to his mother. Not by chance, then, his final image is that of motherhood and the womb ("per nove mesi mi ha portato nel grembo [. . .]").⁷

⁵ Susanna Colussi Pasolini was the matrix of this mental image he created as a child and maintained as an adult. She was the youthful, yet marginalized Mother whose mere presence could save the martyr-Son from annihilation and death.

⁶ Pasolini's nostalgic tie to the past, as mentioned, comes forth through Citti-Ciappelletto, whose presence throughout the first half of the film articulates the authentic (innocent, pure) and the inauthentic (false, deceptive) aspects of this reality. Appearing in the dark, unknown location of the opening sequence, he uses a heavy object to kill an unknown male character. He then puts the body in a bag, carries it to a cliff, hurls it into the abyss, and spits after it. Just before dying, however, the frightened victim shouts out from the body bag, "Non hai capito!" The desperate exclamation connects a lack of vision with a lack of understanding, and recalls other well-known Citti-characters such as Accattone, who asks to be brought from the dark part to the light part of the cemetery when envisioning his own death in a dream. Or it might recall the self-blinded Edipo, whose actions denote either an unwillingness or inability to "see" the truth.

⁷ Pasolini, *Trilogia* 43. Ciappelletto's death scene borders on the comical because we know he is bluffing. Nonetheless, it is interesting because crosscut editing between confessor and penitent likens the two under the sign of dishonesty and complicity. The confession routine consisting of "Yes! No! Yes! No! Say it! I can't! Do it!" swells to a climax and then culminates when Ciappelletto reveals the heinous "sin" of having cursed

From Ciappelletto's deathbed there is a cut to the crypt where his funeral ceremony is taking place. Still, this death scene does not impose a decisive conclusion on the tale. Thanks to the creative confession that aims to erase Ciappelletto's sins just prior to his death, the funeral assumes a syntagmatic function. The white burial vesture, like swaddling clothes, restricts but also preserves the male subject. It presents him in the form of a *tabula rasa*, open to inscription and interpretation.⁸ Given the paradoxical openness of this death scene, any meaning or truth value attributable to the sinner's life must be constructed anew.⁹

This abstruse allusion to a subject *ancora da farsi* during the funeral is followed by a dynamic moment in which Pasolini-the-Artist first appears. It is as if Ciappelletto's death permits the birth of the Artist, who emerges gradually from a heavy rainstorm. The Artist's travel sequence opens the second half of

his mother once. The response of the humble clergyman, his trembling voice, sweat and tears all abet the sinner's plan to lie his way to absolution. When he dies, his mother is his final thought. For further insight into this scene see Marcus, *Filmmaking* 155.

⁸ Pasolini's theoretical writings on cinema from the mid-sixties, which connect cinema with human life (one's actions) and death (one's final action), also indicate a fundamental correlation between the construction of a subject and the potential renewal and reconstruction of meaning for that self. The meaning of one's life, according to Pasolini, remains open to change until death allows or even compels others to formulate a montage-like assessment of that life (*Heretical Empiricism* 236-37). Within the *Decameron*, however, Pasolini is paradoxically challenging this notion of being able to assign a fixed meaning to one's life or work upon completion. By joining several lives with brusque, often unpolished cuts, and by meshing tales, days, times, and places, he creates a series of internal beginnings and endings that revitalize the whole. The first sequence of this film, in which we see Citti-Ciappelletto throwing a dead body off a cliff, for example, is just as ambiguous as the last one in which the Artist asks us to ponder the beauty of an unfinished work of art.

⁹ Pasolini re-writes Ser Ciappelletto (1:1) and Giotto (6:5) with an autobiographical bent, using them to replace the well-known bucolic *cornice* of Boccaccio's *Proemio*. Each comprises a frame tale that weaves in and out of four other internal tales. The Ciappelletto frame features the creator of persuasive speech and the Giotto frame, the creator of visual images. Played by Franco Citti and Pier Paolo Pasolini, these characters represent interesting pairs: the Liar and the Artist, or Accattone and the Autobiographer. Through the juxtaposition of the lowlife criminal who epitomized the beginning of Pasolini's film career (1961), and the renowned Artist who, at the end of the *Decameron*, contemplates the beauty of unrealized dreams, the filmmaker reveals various strategies through which he has constructed his own subjectivity in the cinema over the last ten years. He bemoans the loss of an authentic people, such as the postwar Roman sub-proletariat and effects continuous returns to the public sphere, as denoted by the Artist's scouting for inspirational figures in the market square. And finally, he makes the dynamic and renewable nature of self-representation in art visible by recreating the unfinished triptych in Santa Chiara.

the film and thus complements antithetically Ciappelletto's earlier journey: the southern trickster traveled northward to then die, but the northern artist journeys southward to live, work, and dream.¹⁰ The Artist's first appearance is also momentous because it portrays him among a group of men. The laughter and camaraderie that characterize the travel scene will echo in two scenes of male bonding that follow, though these scenes differ from one another in their depiction of authentic versus inauthentic ties to the past. One is a genuine moment of shared happiness among male companions, the other a deadly trap. The all-male scenes also differ in that the first is external to the Boccaccian tales while the second is embedded within one. Moreover, within the second half of the film, the male relationships are strategically inserted between stories of heterosexual love, such as that of Caterina and Riccardo, or of Lorenzo and Lisabetta. Female agency, as we shall see, joins structurally and thematically with the notion of male desire. But as to the interconnections between gender, agency, and desire, especially within the second half of the film, let us first turn our attention to Caterina.

While scouting for interesting subjects in the crowded Neapolitan market-square, the Artist finds Caterina between his viewer-like fingers. This moment of discovery and inspiration is followed by a cut to a scene in Santa Chiara in which the Artist contemplates his work-to-be-done, and then another cut to the wedding feast at which Caterina plays hide-and-seek in a field with her friends. In the midst of this game she meets Riccardo, a handsome youth who implores her to host him in her room that night. Caterina, willing and desirous, devises a plan to realize their amorous goal. By comparing her own "hot blood" with that of her middle-aged mother, she gains her parents' permission to sleep outdoors without arousing suspicion:

Caterina: Uffa, che caldo! Ah, mamma mia... ah... (rivolgendosi alla madre) Mamma, lo sapete che l'altra notte non potete chiudere occhio?

La madre: Dove sta, Caterina, tutto questo caldo? Fa quasi fresco...

Caterina: Eh, mamma, ma voi avete a pensà a quanto sono più calde le guaglione di voi femmine anziane!

¹⁰ While the first half of the film opens and closes under the solemn sign of death and potential closure, the second half begins and ends under the antithetical signs of cheerful hypothesis and imagination. This fact is best exemplified by the very first utterance in the Artist's frame tale. The carriage driver ponders the surprised reaction of townsfolk if they were to see the world's greatest artist in his present rain-soaked condition: "Maestro [. . .] tu credi che se ci venisse incontro uno straniero che non ti conoscesse (*ride*) e ti vedesse combinato così, potrebbe mai pensare che tu sia uno dei più bravi pittori del momento?" (*ride*) (Pasolini, *Trilogia* 132)

La madre: Eh, proprio così, figlia mia! Ma che ci posso fare?

Caterina: Se papà e voi siete d'accordo, io mi farò fare un lettuccio in copp'ò balcone, sopra il giardino, che io dormirei là... e all'aria aperta, sentendo cantare l'usignolo, col fresco io dormirei anche meglio che nella stanza vostra.

Caterina's choice of the balcony as *locus amoenus* links the public garden space with her private sleeping space. Likewise, her words join the authentic notion (in a Pasolinian sense) of carnal desire with an inauthentic means of satisfying it: through her strategic deployment of words and actions, Caterina succeeds at creating a private realm of pleasure for herself on the family's terrace. Her language and actions are, in fact, the vehicle through which Pasolini shows his own desire to be tied up in that of the female subject. The climactic moment of this tale, in which the two lovers are found sleeping together, elucidates the conflation of these desires in two ways. First, erotically, when Caterina sits up to admire Riccardo's naked body and then takes his beautiful male member in her hand, and second, ideologically, when she is filmed in contrast to her clothed, stern, and opportunist parents the morning after. Knowing that it is their right to kill Riccardo, her parents opt instead to take advantage of his social status and make him marry Caterina:

Lizio: Fammi vedere un poco come la nostra Caterina ha dormito stanotte col suo usignolo.

Il padre guarda allibito la figlia nuda, addormentata presso l'amante, che stringe fra le mani il sesso di Riccardo. Rientra precipitosamente in casa.

Lizio: Giacomina, Giacomina, vieni a vedere tua figlia Caterina che ha preso il suo usignolo e se lo tiene in mano!

Lizio: Ssst [. . .] Statte zitta. Perché se lei l'ha preso, sarà suo. Riccardo è un ragazzo bravo, e di buona famiglia [. . .] con un gran patrimonio [. . .] e con lui non possiamo avere che una buona parentela [. . .] La casa nostra è piena di servi armati, e se vorrà andarsene sano e salvo, bisognerà che se la sposi e senza fare tante storie [. . .] Così avrà messo il suo usignolo nella gabbia sua, e non in una gabbia altrui.

Rather than conclude with the materialistic success of a bourgeois father, however, Pasolini recalls our attention to the young lovers brought together by the "usignolo," both the signifier and the signified, the object and its positive metaphoric meaning. Caterina and Riccardo betoken innocence and new life, thanks to their simple nakedness and instinct-driven desires. They stay immersed in this self-constructed, very candid environment, and the scene ends with a medium-close shot of their tender kiss and smiling faces.

After Caterina and Riccardo's happy ending, there is an abrupt cut to Santa Chiara where the Artist is at work. Late for a meal, he dashes into the dining hall where the monks begin to eat with great composure. As their guest, the Artist should join them in peace and prayer, but instead is struck by an idea that makes him quicken his pace of eating, as if miming the rhythm of his thought process, until it finally reaches a climax.¹¹ He then leaps from his chair, flees back to the painting, and calls his male apprentices to work. Obviously pleased by this creative impulse, the Artist includes the workers in his felicitous moment by making a symbolic stroke with blue paint on the nose of one teen. The men, young and old, observe their maestro and chuckle heartily; it is a brief interlude to celebrate the creativity born from the Artist's immersion in this environment.

This light-hearted scene of male friendship gains even greater significance when viewed in contrast with the scene of inauthentic male bonding in the following tale. Cutting from one interior setting to another, that is, from the horizontal grandeur of the monastery to the vertical expanse of the Artist's *atelier*, one finally penetrates the small, private domain of Lisabetta's bedroom. Here, after a night of intimacy, she asks Lorenzo to stay a bit longer.¹² Although he knows this delay to be risky and bids her farewell, he is seen upon leaving by one of Lisabetta's brothers. Outraged, the brother runs to tell the others that their sister has been bedding with "the Sicilian workhand."¹³ The male siblings then devise a plan to avoid public shame and save their family honor. The next day, that is, Lisabetta's brothers invite Lorenzo for a boyish romp in the country. The order of events during this lengthy pastoral escapade is as follows: first, the young men urinate together, as if to display their common manhood and, hence, break through the social boundaries that have hitherto divided them; second, they run through the woods, pause for refreshments, and have a second run, which is more like a hunt, since they incite Lorenzo to run faster and faster; finally, the brothers pause a second time to restore Lorenzo's faith in them, and then urge him to leap over a gap, thus connoting Lorenzo's death.

Beyond a conscious will to defend their family reputation, the brothers lure and coax Lorenzo throughout this sequence, rendering their motivation for murder somewhat ambiguous. The first pause halfway through the chase, for example, has an aura of sexual foreplay, as the brothers tease and entice Lorenzo, and then combine the notions of male desire and violence in their

¹¹ Enhanced by fast motion editing, the sequence gives a light sense of slapstick comedy to the ritualistic event.

¹² In Boccaccio, Lisabetta visits Lorenzo's room. Pasolini, instead, makes Lisabetta's room the predominant site of their amorous relations.

¹³ Pasolini, *Trilogia* 139. Note the double use of the possessive "nostro," indicating the men's "ownership" of both the woman and the workhand: "Nostra sorella Lisabetta è stata con il nostro garzone siciliano. [. . .] L'ho vista io con gli occhi miei che usciva dalla stanza sua ancora spogliata [. . .]."

communal act of eating grapes. As if fattening up a beast before slaughter, the brothers make Lorenzo watch as one symbolically forces a large bunch of grapes at once into the mouth of another. Their collective laughter in this moment is a morbid foreshadowing of an impossible love among them.

Lorenzo's death in this campestrial setting reveals Pasolini's ideological intent, for it bespeaks a willful annihilation of poor southern or subproletarian populations in Italy.¹⁴ Pasolini, that is, changes Lorenzo's identity from *pisano* to *siciliano* so as to charge the scene with not only a North-South distinction, but also a condemnation of a middle class concerned solely with reputation and unable to nourish unconscious desires.¹⁵ Lorenzo's death articulates the equivocal nature of self-identification through singular or monolithic notions such as class conflict, nostalgia for the past, or homosexual desire. At the same time, Lisabetta's presence suggests hope — an alternative approach to subjectivity by way of fragmentation and plurality. Her agency, therefore, as represented in this tale, restores the autobiographical subject under construction.

Parallel to the oppressive story of Lorenzo — persecuted, hunted down, and killed — is the more promising account of Lisabetta's survival through creativity. Coupled this way, Lorenzo and Lisabetta salvage the Pasolinian ideal of spirited youths who express themselves through untainted instincts and desires. Together they represent a personal poetics, which by 1970 was quickly dissipating. The teens' joyful secret of reciprocal love is revealed by the exchange of smiles in shot, reverse-shot close-ups of Lorenzo in the street and Lisabetta at her window. But this happiness is ephemeral; Lorenzo soon disappears and a suspicious Lisabetta takes action. The sequences visualizing her reaction to Lorenzo's death, in fact, are spatially dynamic, shifting from the indoor setting of her room to the lively square in front of her home. Through this juxtaposition of internal and external spaces, one notes the young woman's gradual movement away from her role as object of patriarchal command to that of agent with a specific agenda. Although she cannot disregard her prescribed social position, a keen sense of vision, through her window and in her dream, empowers and eventually liberates her.¹⁶

One night shortly after the murder, Lorenzo appears to Lisabetta. In this oneiric vision he explains how he died and where his corpse is buried. He then tells Lisabetta not to expect his return and disappears. Lorenzo's second "death" or disappearance effects the transfer of primary subjectivity in this tale to the

¹⁴ At the same time, by means of Lorenzo's death, the filmmaker could depict the obscure nature of his own sexual escapades with the lower-class boys from Rome.

¹⁵ Boccaccio's Lorenzo was from Pisa. For further discussion see Bondanella 288 and Marcus, *Filmmaking* 142.

¹⁶ The rigid social structure is disclosed, for instance, when Lisabetta confronts her brothers about Lorenzo's disappearance. They respond brusquely and from a very high-angle shot that underscores their superiority.

female figure, who responds to a painful fate by creating an alternate reality for herself within the privacy of her room. First, she obtains permission to go walking with her servant woman. Then she finds Lorenzo's corpse, severs the head, and preserves it in a sweet-smelling basil plant. Contrary to Boccaccio's tale, in which Lisabetta cries incessantly and finally dies from despair when her brothers discover the head and take it away, Pasolini appropriates Lisabetta's desire and makes hers a story of creative triumph. Like the Artist of the frame tale, she produces an image of beauty with fragments of the past. In this case, by salvaging Lorenzo's head she manages to reconstruct the "other" through whom she came to learn about herself and her own desires. Though somewhat gruesome, the tale ends when Lisabetta can embrace Lorenzo's head in a thin ray of sun that enters her room from a small, high window. The window of this final shot not only denotes the space where the lovers will continue their silent communication, but also connotes the female's ability to transcend boundaries by actively shunning the finality that Lorenzo's death would have otherwise implied.

There are many instances in the *Decameron* wherein death and definitive conclusions are avoided in favor of ambiguity, openness, or new beginnings. This open-ended narrative approach involves the incorporation of agency from various sources. Ciappelletto's funeral, Caterina's marriage, and Lisabetta's saving Lorenzo show how Pasolini materializes parts of the self within and at the conjunction of these tales: each narrative subject, like the Artist, invents a "story" in order to create a space, a link, or a possibility for future living. The prospect of renewal recurs thematically throughout the film and culminates visually in the second live tableau, an homage to Giotto's *Last Judgment*.

Pasolini inserts the *Last Judgment* into the final Boccaccian tale (7:10) just after Tingoccio brags about having an affair with his *comare*. Although Meuccio counsels his friend to renounce the sinful habit, Tingoccio is not concerned with negative consequences or future repercussions. On the contrary, he falls asleep quite easily, after which we cut to the Artist who, conversely, sits up from his sleep position and envisions the afterlife, as in a dream. "È una visione frontale, ingenua, ma pure terribile e affascinante," writes Pasolini. "Al centro la Madonna tiene fra le braccia il Bambinello, alla sua destra e alla sua sinistra Angeli in coro e beati che la contemplano" (*Trilogia* 46). This editing choice not only shifts the discourse of desire from Tingoccio's depraved anecdotes to the contents of the Artist's dream, but it also connects the two halves of the film thematically. Just as the dying Ciappelletto invoked his mother in the penultimate segment of his confession, the Artist's creative experience in Naples will conclude with a vision of the maternal matrix. Both frame tales and both frame subjects, therefore, reveal an invincible tie to origins, a female-gendered notion for Pasolini. In this way the author seizes a reality that transcends any true/false values and any authentic/inauthentic distinctions. The Mother is an

ideal and a symbol with a sacred value, for she guarantees the possibility of return to a place and time that can foster new beginnings.

In this live tableau the Madonna and child are situated on a superior plane, with singing children in the guise of angels to the left and to the right of her. Beneath them are various inhabitants of Hell enacting their punishments. The frontal filming of this sequence not only renders the shots more like the frescoes that inspired them, but also reveals the poignant sincerity that Pasolini associated with this plastic, mannerist positioning. Although this second tableau complements the insertion of Breugel's *Battle of Lent and Carnival* in the first half of the film, it differs from the earlier, lugubrious tribute, thanks to its open ending. Whereas the Breugel citation ends with a close-up of a bare skull, the Giotto reference closes on the serene expression of mother Mary.¹⁷

The most dominant element of the latter composition, however, is the choice of Silvana Mangano to replace Christ as judge and protagonist. This choice compels the viewer familiar with Pasolini's films to consider its multiple layers of meaning. One recalls, for instance, the same actress playing both the autobiographical mother and the mythical Jocasta, in *Edipo re* (1967).¹⁸ Her presence at this particular point in the *Decameron* appears very strategic, because it joins Pasolini's nostalgic vision of the past with the psychological implications of the mother-figure. Denoting at once the pivot point in the Oedipal triangle that binds the male subject in a struggle for separate identity, and the inviolable source of human creation, the mother-figure is the vehicle through which discourses of homosexuality and female subjectivity, origins and future meanings, are brought together in the representation of self.

It is clear that the Madonna is no simple addendum to Giotto's work of art. This gender-specific substitution takes place at the level of visual representation and of meaning. With the father-figure "removed" completely from this picture, the mother becomes, if only momentarily, monarch and martyr, creator and judge. She embodies the Pasolinian subject born from the fusion of multiple rhetorics, spaces, and timeframes. Moreover, by engendering the vision of the Madonna in his subconsciousness — by creating the image of her — the Artist actually *en-genders* his own subjectivity, in the sense that he puts gender into it. Pasolini assimilates the male self to the female other in this tableau via their common role as creative fonts central to human existence. As a result, Mangano's iconographic presence corresponds to Pasolini's own iconographic presence as the Artist within the film.

The female substitution for Christ may confound one's remembrance of previous Christ-figures in Pasolini's cinema such as Accattone (*Accattone*, 1961), Ettore (*Mamma Roma*, 1962), Stracci (*La ricotta*, 1963), and Gesù (*Il*

¹⁷ For an insightful discussion of both tableaux, see Lawton, "Theory and Praxis."

¹⁸ Silvana Mangano also appeared with Totò and Davoli in Pasolini's short *La terra vista dalla luna* (1966), and played the bourgeois mother, Lucia, in *Teorema* (1968).

Vangelo secondo Matteo, 1964). The uniqueness of the Madonna in this final dream sequence underscores the Artist's simultaneous desire for difference and renewal. As symbol of candor and salvation, she subsumes aspects of the nostalgic, the psychological, and the creative into her subjectivity, and therefore contributes most completely to the construction of self in the *Decameron*.¹⁹

This distinctive approach to self-representation in the *Last Judgment* ends with a frontal close up of the Virgin's halo-rimmed face, after which one links back to Tingoccio's funeral scene, and then to the final sequence in which the Artist observes his masterpiece with the clergymen and apprentices. "La pittura è stata ultimata," writes Pasolini. "Gli operai portano via le ultime impalcature. Giotto guarda compiaciuto l'affresco. I frati, tutt'attorno sono felici" (*Trilogia* 121). As the men raise a glass to their master, he turns to the camera and asks: "[. . .] perché realizzare un'opera, quando è così bello sognarla soltanto?" The Artist's final utterance unites his mother-centric dream with the unfinished artwork, leading one to believe that the vision had a direct influence upon his decision to leave the last portion of his work white. It is a triptych painting "composed of a gothic, heaven-directed arch in the first panel, an anthropocentric rectangle whose top line is perfectly horizontal in the second panel, and a third panel which is completely blank." (Lawton, *Storyteller's* 220).

Needless to say, the imperfect triptych has attracted the attention of scholars, among whom Lawton, who claims that Pasolini retrieves the past through Boccaccio and Giotto, but uses them predominantly as a springboard to "vault into the contemporary world."²⁰ "Pasolini," says Lawton, "presumes to have done no more than this, and he has no simplistic answers for the future; thus, the blank third panel" (220). Of course Pasolini, by now greatly disillusioned, had no simplistic answers for the future, especially in light of the "anthropological homologization" he perceived and denounced in Italy at the turn of this decade.²¹ However, his decision to represent the final segment of the fresco as blank also reveals a personal itinerary for self-construction thanks to the patterned interplay of various discourses that frees him from narrow or limiting conclusions.

This tableau, for one, is a meta-reference to the film as an artwork in the making. The blank panel breaks the *Decameron* into chronological segments that portray the Artist at work in the present with respect to a familiar past and unknown future. Prior to beginning the painting, in fact, we see the Artist

¹⁹ Marcus offers a different take on this sequence. She asserts that the centrality of the Madonna gives "clemency a priority over punishment" (*Filmmaking* 155). Ricketts also provides an analysis of the Madonna claiming that Pasolini's homosexual discourse works against narrative coherence in this film (157-64).

²⁰ See also Rumble 126-27; Marcus, *Filmmaking* 148-49.

²¹ See "Acculturazione e acculturazione" and "L'articolo delle lucciole" in Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* 22-25 and 128-33.

contemplating the small fresco to be restored. His vision of the old version is then transposed onto the large empty space behind the scaffolding. Shown in parallel to the three church windows above it, the scaffolding, too, is divided into three segments. To the left we see one young apprentice, in the center, a blank place to be assumed shortly by the Artist, and to the right (future position of the third, blank panel) a group of three young men, indicating a future plurality. Pasolini is literally shown in the midst of constructing the "certain realism" that bound him physically and ideologically into relations with others.²² Yet in the *Decameron*, Pasolini revisits his past and repropose nostalgic ideals largely in bad faith. He combines the ideal of the youthful sub-proletariat spirit with the blatant depiction of genitals and sex acts throughout the film, and thereby contradicts his initial claim to have made the *Decameron* as "a pure film and a pure act of narration" without explicit ideological intentions.²³ The purely poetic potential of the candid genitals was quickly overshadowed by the tremendous commercial draw they inspired. As a result the film earned a superficial, consumerist popularity, the quintessential example of inauthenticity for Pasolini.²⁴

The blank portion of the fresco also unites the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity in its recollection of Ciappelletto's white funeral vesture. The concluding images of both halves of the film, therefore, do not connote finality, but rather its opposite. As mentioned above, Ciappelletto's life became knowable only upon his death, when those around him in the public sphere could assign meaning to it according to their understanding. Similarly, the unfinished painting shown at the end of part two portrays the Artist engaging his audience in the construction of meaning. Yet, this too is achieved while simultaneously exercising control over the creation. In fact, as the Artist invites both the internal (diegetic) and external (movie-going) audiences to contemplate this visual representation, he maintains an independent stance as creator. He clinches his ability to renew the vision and multiply its potential meaning by not completing its interpretive key.

A third aspect of the blank panel is its reference to absence and lack. In addition to the lack of a definitive narrative conclusion, the public display of the Artist's intimate, subjective vision will always entail an element of narrative ambiguity as spectators assign meaning to it.²⁵ Equally intriguing is the fact that

²² Viano uses this phrase of Pasolini's in the title of his book. It makes reference to Pasolini's position with respect to the more classic use and understanding of the term "realism" in Italian cinema.

²³ For additional statements made by the author regarding his intention to make a non-ideological film, see Bachmann.

²⁴ As to the commercial success and imitations of the *Decameron*, see Bondanella 291.

²⁵ In her introduction, Marcus comments on the ideological nature of the film's inconclusiveness. "The *Decameron*, however," she says, "cannot be about the art of

the allusion to lack works syntagmatically to unite the multiple discourses of selfhood in this film: nostalgia, homosexual desire, and female regeneration. For one, Pasolini denounced in contemporary Italy the lack of any sub-proletariat group whose physical reality could regenerate his intellectual and libidinal attraction as in previous decades. Second, the panel draws into its interpretation the Oedipal triangle, as insinuated in the Artist's dream sequence. In Freudian cases, the female figure would be perceived as "other" with a biological lack, thereby allowing the male subject to develop a notion of self. The *Decameron*, instead, presents the subversion of such order via the substitution of the Virgin Mother for Christ. Consequently, it reverses the notion of symbolic lack to celebrate, first, the female subject and second, the male subject as not wholly distinct from her. Finally, the blank panel makes reference to the oppressed status of female figures in traditional narrative representations, wherein they are identified as inscribable only by desiring male subjects. Although Pasolini depicts the female as object of male desire in many instances, a strong discursive undercurrent of alterity leads him to portray woman in certain episodes as an agent, whose actions comprise one of several angles from which his own subjectivity is built.

The construction of self in Pasolini is a dynamic process that becomes meaningful precisely at the points where the aforementioned discourses come together. In the case of the *Decameron*, Pasolini further complicates the notion of selfhood and its visual representation by being present in the film and actualizing, in his diegetic role as Artist, the ongoing process of creation. The ultimate materialization of such is indeed the triptych, which mirrors the constructed self in the form of an incomplete artwork, open to new inscriptions and new meanings. In giving the film and the painting open endings, Pasolini defied critics who sought to understand his work in a holistic, unified fashion. Like a huge fresco, the *Decameron* necessitates a collage-like viewing experience. The story being told can be broken into segments and re-constructed to formulate a satisfying, even if fleeting, message.²⁶ The beginnings and endings of each segment, whether disturbing or delightful, impel the viewer to take an active role as constructor of meaning as both creator and judge. The Artist's final remark — "[. . .] perché realizzare un'opera, quando è così bello sognarla soltanto?" — captures the essence of the whole, for it is a self-referential, almost rhetorical question asserting that creation is a rewarding process as long as one actively eschews its end.

storytelling without also being about the creation of a public capable of appreciating that art. [. . .] It is in this refusal to give the text formal closure that Boccaccio's allegory of form offers its most compelling lesson. The absence of an ending which will perfect the work in the etymological sense opens up the entire text to ambiguity, placing the burden of interpretation on the reader [. . .]" (*Filmmaking* 9).

²⁶ The term "film-fresco" is explored at length in Rumble 35-37.

The Artist and the triptych within the *Decameron* represent the dynamic operations of subjectivity that Gordon identifies in Pasolini's poetry, journalism, and screenplays. In addition to these written forms, the film comprises a fourth genre through which the processes of self-construction in art become visible. However, the sum of cinematic reality in this case does not "attenuate the plurality of signifying practices," as Gordon suggests, because they are "dispersed along different spatial and hermeneutic accesses, along which the language of subjectivity [. . .] was built" (62). Rather, the sum of cinematic reality recombines and repropose visually the poetic patterns, public spaces, and allusions to future forms and meanings that comprise the open nature of Pasolinian selfhood. Through his sense of vision, whether in the market-square, in the church, or in his dream, the Artist identifies Caterina, Lisabetta, and the Madonna as regenerative sources that support his own desire to parry restrictive conclusions or singular, comprehensive meanings. Thus, it is through the Artist's appropriation of female agency and desire in this film that Pasolini represents the never-ending process of self-creation, and makes the transition from an intangible past to a newly inscribable future possible.

University of Notre Dame

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IV.

AN INTELLECTUAL'S WANDERINGS
AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

Divagazioni di fine millennio

1. L'immediatezza e l'inattualità

Il mondo contemporaneo inaugura l'attualità. Mentre nel passato la memoria dei fatti che caratterizzano il processo di esplicazione della realtà si evince dalla consapevolezza della dinamica dell'esistenza, nella presente condizione umana si palesa come inevitabile una sorta di culto dell'oblio. La ricerca delle cause che determinano i fenomeni si flette nel presente con una forza così remissiva da alterare tutti i vincoli che la genesi delle parole, delle affezioni, considera nell'immediatezza alternativamente plausibili e improbabili. La conoscenza coniuga l'archeologia e l'avventura mentale in modo da elidere dall'argomentazione la consecutività e la coerenza. La congettura scientifica e la divulgazione (più o meno ideologizzata) si compendiano nell'ordito della spettacolarità. L'universo mondano è dimessamente laico: non coltiva credenze inderogabili, ma religioni dalla rappresentazione scenica. Il culto e l'abrasione del tempo liturgico s'identificano. Il «valore» di un pensiero, di un gesto, di una testimonianza, è propedeutico a uno scempenso ideale, è sinonimo di una lesione storica: l'abbreviazione di qualcosa di assoluto nel quale è quanto meno improvvido continuare a fare affidamento. La casualità sostituisce precettisticamente l'occasionalità e la rende refrattaria a ogni ingerenza da parte dello spirito collettivo. Tutto ciò che accade nel pianeta si addensa sul palcoscenico della storia momentanea, che è globale, ma effimera. Il ricordo ha il corso forzoso delle idiosincrasie domestiche, delle irriducibili funzioni esponenziali di un Io imperterrito di fronte alla scenografia artificiale dei grandi agglomerati urbani, che spesso includono nel loro emiciclo espositivo anche i resti delle epoche del tempo liturgico, di quelle gesta con le quali si interrogano le comunità umane nel loro corso storico. L'ordine mondiale si configura nella sua disordinata confusione di idee, propositi, azioni. Rimane a misurarne la temperie mercuriale la fotografia, l'insieme di fotogrammi, che l'immaginazione collettiva si propone involontariamente (inconsapevolmente) di omologare secondo un ordine di grandezza non ancora delineato. L'osservatore propizia l'esistenza di una controfigura di sé e del mondo alla quale, se per avventura se ne presentasse la necessità, affidare la responsabilità di un responso. L'oracolo di Delfi si mimetizza nelle spoglie di un turista sventato, che guarda smarrito le traiettorie dei viaggiatori, dei viandanti, raccolti illusoriamente nell'eremo della memoria.

La scomparsa di Atlantide, finora consegnata da Platone alla mitologia occidentale con il fine di assecondare la nostalgia per tutto ciò che si configura come un'arca di Noè nella quale soltanto alcuni argonauti trovano posto, lascia presagire una sua riedizione, una sorta di nuova mitizzazione di un evento, in apparenza indecifrabile, ma sostanzialmente concatenato con le volute mentali del genere umano. Riammettere l'esistenza di una forza incontenibile che, dalle viscere della terra, si riversi sul pianeta per contestargli la fine, significa relativizzare i codici di apprendimento, che le culture nella loro multiforme interazione generano continuamente. Si rinnova il timor panico come il bradisisma di un pianeta che si prepara a una collisione con gli altri corpi celesti in una successione di cause, nella quale si compendia anche quella che si evince dall'uso sconsiderato della tecnica e dal mancato rispetto per lo scenario naturale. La dinamica della perdizione non è così fraudolenta da suscitare vasti complessi di colpa. Al contrario,

essa riflette l'imponderabilità – quindi la gratuità – del male, con il quale l'esegeta della natura e il riformatore sociale dialogano metaforicamente dalla fine del secondo conflitto mondiale. L'esperienza personale assume una connotazione talmente assolutizzante da renderla fine a se stessa. Se nella saggezza popolare l'esperienza è soltanto abbreviativamente trasmissibile, nel mondo contemporaneo sembra non avere alcun diritto di cittadinanza. Per questa ragione, gli accorgimenti tattici, con i quali si esplica la trama dei rapporti interindividuali e comunitari, sono in prevalenza di ordine precariamente consuetudinario. Il rischio calcolato, implicito in ogni proposizione espositiva, in ogni atto che concorra a determinare un evento, ha un'incidenza sociale di breve durata: le modificazioni geopolitiche del pianeta soggiacciono a un'azione contaminante, che adombra le direzioni del vento e le direttive dei profeti dell'istantanea (come nelle fotografie) o della rigenerazione universale (come nei frammenti biblici).

La libertà garantita dalle società di assicurazione è il vagabondaggio: il viaggio commisurato alle disponibilità economiche di quanti s'immedesimano del «vuoto assoluto», artificialmente riprodotto, nell'ambito delle responsabilità civili, dalle agenzie, che in ogni parte del pianeta impiantano stazioni riceventi, terminali di una centrale dei *loisires*, capaci di illudere sulle future, inevitabili, missioni dell'uomo nel cosmo. La ricognizione degli eventi passati, attuata avventatamente dalle controfigure degli arconti e degli argonauti, riedita con momentanee suggestioni anche il tempo remoto e lo allega a quello imponderabile del futuro. Il desiderio e il piacere magnificano l'inconsistente atmosfera degli itinerari tracciati dai profeti dell'avventura. Le masse si distribuiscono in gruppi e i gruppi ostentano una consapevolezza inversamente proporzionale alla temerarietà e all'ardimento necessari per violare i confini occitanici degli emisferi culturali della leggenda e successivamente della storia.

La sedentarietà, che dal settimo al quarto millennio a. C. rappresenta l'avvento dell'agricoltura, della città, dell'aritmetica, della geometria e del concetto come la forma dell'interlocuzione argomentata, si trasforma edonisticamente in nuovo nomadismo, caratterizzato dalla razza culturale. I gruppi organizzati dalle agenzie di viaggio si illudono di esaltare le vestigia del passato, di legittimarne l'eredità culturale. L'Ebreo errante raffigura paradigmaticamente lo spirito dei tempi, l'attitudine di chi impersona l'apprensione per il nuovo e la divagazione, la responsabilità e l'alienazione. La Terra, in quanto ordigno demonico di una costellazione energetica, fa da contrafforte a quanti coltivano l'inquietudine per giustificare – artisticamente – la melopea, la suggestione per gli spazi siderei, per le abissali metamorfosi del cosmo. Le città ospitano i periscopi degli argonauti, che ambiscono decollare nei liberi cieli della fantasia per sovvertire i principi dell'ordinamento urbano, tutelari della giustizia distributiva, dell'equità, dell'inventiva e dell'imprenditorialità individuali. La Terra, che ospita i primi geometri, i primi esecutori testamentari della volontà comunitaria, da laboratorio ideale si trasforma progressivamente in una rampa di lancio per gli esegeti del cosmo, i nuovi viandanti nei plessi del tempo e negli interstizi delle energie latenti nell'universo. A conforto di una tale tendenza si esplica la mancata interconnessione delle comunità che, sebbene vicine, non si evolvono nell'alveo della stessa struttura idiomantica e delle stesse regole di convivenza. L'inquietudine contemporanea si spiega proprio con le premesse con le quali il genere umano si consolida nei suoi ordinamenti in modo differenziato negli stessi ambiti naturali. Le leggende, i riti, si succedono ai miti per temperare l'incongruenza fra quanto esaltante appare il cielo stellato e quanto contingente e conflittivo lo spazio effettuale. La scrittura, inventata separatamente in Egitto, dai Sumeri e in Cina, resa

flessibile dall'uso fenicio dell'alfabeto, conferisce una maggiore consistenza alle lingue, che privilegiano gli aspetti allo stesso tempo correnti e più inquietanti del pensiero umano. Per un verso, le lingue consentono l'elaborazione concettuale e disquisitiva del convincimento e la promozione dello stesso a livello didascalico e normativo; per un altro verso, la consuetudine espressiva e la tradizione idiomatica conseguono alla differenziazione culturale, politica ed economica, degli insediamenti umani nelle diverse aree del pianeta. La correlazione fra cultura e territorio non può considerarsi un presupposto logicamente sostenibile in ordine alle intese o alle collisioni fra popolazioni, che ambiscono a differenziarsi per esercitare una sorta di egemonia sull'ambiente: un'egemonia tanto più forte e pervasiva quanto più allettante appare la sua espansione. La conoscenza diviene il sapere nelle sue amplificazioni e nei suoi adattamenti pratici. Le comunità stanziali si propongono di conseguire uno stato di grazia, in virtù del quale agire con maggior libertà di quanto non sia consentito quando l'egida del bisogno condiziona tutte le propensioni o le scelte politiche che si dimostrino praticabili e legittimamente plausibili. La geografia si manifesta come la rappresentazione della geometria ideologica, in grado di stabilire le quote di potere spettanti a ogni sodalizio istituzionalmente organizzato e operante.

La scrittura sorregge in una trama concettuale le stesse contraddizioni del mondo. «La scrittura» scrive Robert Fossaert «è valorizzata dagli scriba degli Stati e dai sacerdoti delle religioni del *Libro*, non importa quale sia questo libro. Così si stabiliscono le probabilità di una lunga sopravvivenza del sanscrito, dell'ebreo, del latino, dell'arabo, ecc. Le *élites*, che si formano alle dipendenze delle Chiese, utilizzano lingue sacre che trasformano in lingue della saggezza, cioè adeguate per trattare argomenti che sono al di sopra delle capacità delle lingue ordinarie. Alcune lingue si trasformano allora in vettori universali, a scala dei loro mondi. Lì, dove diversi mondi si interconnettono temporalmente, l'alta cultura si riconosce dalle grandi biblioteche e per gli studi dei traduttori e dei copisti, soprattutto ad Alessandria (fino all'incendio finale del 645), a Cordova (fino alla *Reconquista* spagnola del 1236), a Bagdad (che un figlio di Gengis-Khan saccheggerà nel 1258), ecc. In questo modo si stabilisce una gerarchia mobile: dall'indiscriminato apporto dei dialetti abituali si evince una *élite* di idiomi scritti sotto la preminenza di alcune lingue sacre e sagge, conservate da diversi apparati ideologici» (Fossaert 21). La sacralità dell'espressione si coniuga quasi contemporaneamente con la fisioterapica impellenza del commercio. L'eguaglianza religiosa si realizza per gradi, a partire dalla constatazione delle differenze di rango e delle diversità etniche, conferendo credito all'azione imprenditoriale. Il mercante trasforma lo scriba nel depositario di una volontà, che si esercita nell'azione, che si esplica nel convincimento e nel condizionamento. Le idiosincrasie dell'uno e si riflettono sulle ostentazioni dell'altro: entrambi agiscono come imbonitori della storia. «I costruttori di muraglie e di fortini, i meccanici, gli architetti navali e gli ingegneri delle macchine di posizione si valgono del favore dei principi. Ma le vere innovazioni nell'arte della guerra sono originate più dalla organizzazione che dalle strutture. Fecero epoca l'impiego degli archi nubiansi, la partecipazione degli opliti e, dopo la creazione delle legioni romane, l'impiego della cavalleria leggera da parte degli arabi e dei mongoli» (Fossaert 22). La tattica e la strategia militare costituiscono l'ampliamento scenico dei risultati conseguiti dall'elaborazione concettuale dei geometri e dei riformatori sociali, di quanti ritengono di propiziarsi lo spirito dei tempi per il loro tornaconto e per il benessere generale: una contraddizione destinata a insidiare tutto il percorso storico delle comunità socialmente

consolidate e in grado di elaborare un sistema normativo. La legge, che regola i rapporti interpersonali, fa necessariamente riferimento al potere tutorio che, nelle formulazioni di Platone e Aristotele, corrisponde alle previsioni logicamente sostenibili sulla scorta dell'esperienza acquisita nelle aree urbane e sotto il pericolo di un violento processo di sottomissione da parte dell'impero macedone, antesignano in senso disfunzionale dell'impero romano, dotato di risorse culturali e organizzative tali da connotare con gli istituti del diritto l'evoluzione della condizione umana, gravata fino all'epoca contemporanea della problematica relativa alla schiavitù. Finché i plettri non saranno meccanizzati, la forza-lavoro schiavistica – afferma Aristotele (Aristotele, *Politica*, III, 9, 1281 a 2 - 4) – è inevitabile. La *mimesis* con la natura comporta l'accettazione del regime di dipendenza energetica fino a che la *prothesis* non ne invalida la funzione, assicurando al lavoro manuale il sussidio di un ordigno meccanico.

La liberazione dell'uomo dalla fatica e dal lavoro meccanico e ripetitivo comprende la parte più significativa della cultura occidentale. Le religioni del *Libro*, emancipando l'umanità dalle pratiche magiche e dai rituali astrologici, inducono a delineare una morale, che sorregga l'aspettativa dei meno agevolati dalla sorte. Il monoteismo costituisce il superamento di quel rissoso sinedrio pagano, nel quale gli dei agiscono come paradigmi dei mortali. L'epopea omerica è una fertile propaggine della miscredenza nelle tribunizie confabulazioni dell'Olimpo. Il cristianesimo, che si evince dalla disgregazione dell'impero romano, ne eredita la lingua e con la lingua l'imperioso istituto dell'equità, un contributo di eccezionale importanza alla determinazione individuale, alla consistenza genetica della propensione da parte degli esseri viventi a convertirsi in osservatori sempre più attenti della natura e in artefici della storia. La società civile e la società politica si compendiano secondo un ordinamento giuridico, che trova nella conformazione della lingua il suo riscontro concettuale. «L'islamismo, un altro aspetto del monoteismo del Vicino Oriente, comincia con l'assorbire molti elementi degli imperi anteriori, dalla Siria alla Persia e dall'Egitto alla Spagna, per edificare, in poco più di un secolo, un impero che, di fatto, si dividerà così rapidamente come si realizza, ma che perdurerà per la perseverante estensione di una rete mercantile, mediante la quale l'islamismo conquisterà l'India, l'Insulindia e perfino le Filippine. Una volta che siano debitamente considerate tutte le varianti, sono sorprendenti le connessioni esistenti fra gli imperi e le religioni universali... Tutte le religioni universali sono dominate da un clero specializzato, la cui formazione e la cui attività si evincono da un pressante apparato... Gli Stati non ignorano questi apparati ecclesiastici. Spesso li incorporano a fianco dei loro eserciti. In tutto il mondo antico, la religione involve l'universo mentale degli uomini. Sottomette alla sua egemonia le rare attività intellettuali specializzate e la vita pratica» (Fossaert 26) del consorzio civile e politico. Il *miles* e il *sacerdos* si compendiano: l'imponderabilità del potere evoca la saggezza provvidenziale. L'ordito del mondo riflette gli imperscrutabili disegni divini. Il tribalismo tradizionale si nobilita nell'istituzione imperiale, anche se non dismette quelle caratteristiche distintive in virtù delle quali s'identifica nella morfologia istituzionale. Le diversità culturali concorrono a dare significanza all'impresa normativa, che il potere politico cerca di realizzare in forma adeguata rispetto alle aspettative delle popolazioni interessate e in una prospettiva storica nella quale si rifletta una tensione esegetica del mondo. L'immagine dell'impero universale – dell'impero senza fine – suggestiona le menti di quanti ambiscono a collocarsi all'interno di un processo che non ammetta alternative, che si configuri come la sintesi del sapere consolidato e dell'esplicazione dello stesso nel pensiero comune e nelle

regole della convivenza. La tradizione si delinea pertanto come il progressivo consolidamento della fantasia imitativa negli stilemi della condotta considerata rappresentativa dell'umanità. L'ampliamento della lingua (del latino) si giustifica, anche quando si palesano le contestazioni localistiche e settoriali, con l'accreditamento degli enunciati cognitivi e degli statuti normativi, che concorrono a delineare le aree di competenza intellettuale e operativa di un sempre maggior numero di persone. La centralità e la periferia romana tendono a una sintesi grazie all'osmosi, che le guerre, i commerci e il *cursus honorum* rendono inevitabili.

La cultura è il risultato del «contagio» fra popolazioni spesso in conflitto fra loro per il reciproco contenimento della forza di espansione. Il genere umano, sebbene ambisca alla stabilità, è quasi sempre indotto dalle circostanze a salvaguardare l'equilibrio instabile della sua perseverante precarietà. Nel mondo antico la diversità di situazioni economiche rende tangenzialmente conflittuali le aree interessate; nel mondo contemporaneo, la contiguità territoriale è inincidente. La trama delle relazioni sociali è complicata dal fatto che il nazionalismo e il colonialismo del XIX e del XX secolo rendono un servizio all'espansione economica dei centri metropolitani nelle aree periferiche quando fra i due emisferi non esista una tensione ideologica e politica originata proprio dalle passate interazioni. I sistemi politici, infatti, non sono necessariamente sintonici con gli effetti del potenziale culturale dagli stessi promosso e tesaurizzato. Il liberto di origine greca Polibio scrive la storia di Roma; e Roma elabora e diffonde gli esiti della grande stagione dell'arte e del pensiero greci, che dal V secolo s'irradia nell'intero percorso storico della cultura occidentale. Agli *enclaves* economici, che rappresentano gli antefatti della internazionalizzazione delle merci e delle culture, fanno riscontro gli insediamenti veri e propri, con il compito di agevolare il flusso delle derrate da un continente all'altro, secondo una progettualità escogitata per concludere nel Mediterraneo il dominio sul mercato europeo (soprattutto sul mercato dell'Europa anseatica e continentale) durante tutto il periodo, che va dalla fine dell'impero romano all'avvento dell'epoca moderna, all'inizio dell'Umanesimo. Il Rinascimento registra la crisi delle repubbliche marinare, la tendenza del capitale monetario a concentrarsi nelle sedi istituzionali con minore instabilità e quindi propenso ad assecondare le iniziative degli imprenditori economici. Il monopolio si configura inizialmente come una protezione per quegli attori che rivendicano una più oculata politica nazionale nei riguardi degli interessi che si costituiscono a livello internazionale con le sole garanzie previste dalla solvibilità sul piano etico e comportamentale. L'economia monetaria determina effettivamente la trasformazione delle tecniche di scambio con le modalità dell'impresa, che si fonda sulle variabili del mercato. La lettera di cambio deregionalizza l'economia e consente agli operatori del mercato di mantenersi rigidamente legati a un codice di comportamento originato dalla necessità e vaticinato dall'efficienza. La lettera di cambio diviene uno strumento di interazione fra attori economici impegnati in ordinamenti istituzionali differenziati. L'amicizia e la solvibilità degli operatori commerciali vanificano, sia pure entro certi limiti, le perimetrie normative dei singoli Stati e anticipano gli esiti delle relazioni politiche fra gli stessi mediante l'intensificazione delle transazioni commerciali. L'economia monetaria influenza notevolmente la condotta degli operatori economici e precostituisce un'etica creditizia, suscitatrice di una letteratura di stampo latamente borghese. Alle capacità operative fanno riscontro le capacità inventive e, fra queste, la propensione al compromesso e all'accordo. In un clima di contenuto entusiasmo si delinea l'esigenza di un ordinamento politico, che

faccia salvi gli interessi dei singoli individui e garantisca fra di essi una accorta competitività. Una volta ammessa l'esigenza di nobilitare la concorrenza, si rende indispensabile stabilire i limiti – giuridici – entro i quali è consentito affrontare il prossimo senza degradarlo di rango sfruttandolo ignominiosamente.

La filosofia della natura riassume un ruolo preponderante nella concezione economica dell'esistenza. Le leggi che regolano la «catena degli esseri», sebbene siano temperate dalla *pietas* e dalla solidarietà, sembrano sottrarsi a ogni condizionamento etico perché abbiano efficacia e contribuiscano al benessere – e forse al miglioramento – della specie. La natura appare un immenso scenario energetico, nel quale soltanto i mistici rinvergono tutte le risorse delle quali professano il bisogno. Per gli altri componenti il genere umano, la dinamica delle forze che rendono comprensibili le cause dell'esistenza prescinde da ogni considerazione provvidenziale e rende conseguente la reazione umana quando si esplica nella ricerca di vantaggi altrimenti inattuabili. L'astuzia, vaticinata da Niccolò Machiavelli come un sussidio del riformatore sociale, si configura come una risorsa naturale (giacché, nell'immaginario collettivo, si accredita alla volpe) utilizzabile nell'arengo politico. La sfida, che ogni azione individuale rivolge al contesto comunitario, può essere indiziata, non soltanto come compromessa settorialmente, ma anche come interagente algebrico delle energie silenziose e in attesa di essere attivate. L'artefatto si configura pertanto come un beneficio e un'insidia: libera dal bisogno e scatena il desiderio di sopraffazione. La compensazione di questi due fattori non può che estrinsecarsi in un «patto» o in un «contratto», che salvaguardi le individuali determinazioni. Il pensiero è per così dire influenzato (se non addirittura funestato) dall'esigenza di rendersi partecipe delle caratteristiche e delle esigenze del presente. L'universo mercantile si differenzia, infatti, da quello feudale, per l'inferenza della pratica nella riflessione e nella deduzione mentali. Il nuovo «spazio-tempo» è una concezione concreta, che riflette le espressioni della fantasia imitativa degli individui, impegnati a riscattarsi paradossalmente dal servaggio istituzionale dalle caratteristiche impietose o implacabili, come quelle che si ipotizzano essere proprie della natura allo stato originario, elementare.

L'epoca delle navigazioni (che si compenetra improvvidamente con l'epoca delle scoperte) rappresenta l'ampliamento della conoscenza fisica del pianeta da parte degli europei, che s'interrogano eufemisticamente sui fondamenti della cultura occidentale quale compiuta manifestazione della curiosità umana, soddisfatta con l'ausilio della tecnica e della poetica dell'avventura. Il mare, che raccoglie, dalla navigazione di Ulisse a quella di Colombo, le ansie terrestri dei suoi esegeti, si trasforma in una palestra di ardimento, in una disciplina degli istinti, in un cenobio di iniziati alle intemperie, alle bonacce, alle levigate bizzarrie del vento. La natura diventa una scuola di entusiasmo, un continuo smarrimento per quanti la osservano con atteggiamento bonario e lievemente indagatorio. Essa appare sillogisticamente magniloquente, ricca di sorprese, avventurata nell'emiciclo dell'universo come i pensieri degli uomini. La sua umanizzazione, seppure apparente, riceve il conforto di quanti le dedicano l'esistenza, la blandiscono per affrontarla di soprassalto e carpirne qualche «segreto». La mancata conoscenza delle risorse della scienza da parte dei «conquistatori» del Nuovo Mondo rende quanto meno increscioso il loro rapporto con le tradizioni culturali consolidate. I Maya e gli Aztechi hanno raggiunto un grado di conoscenza scientifica tale da delineare una cosmologia non difforme da quella elaborata, nell'età post-rinascimentale, da Galileo Galilei. La mancata intesa fra le due rive del Mediterraneo, a causa – come sostiene efficacemente José

Ortega y Gasset per le circostanze dell'epoca contemporanea – della cultura dogmatica iberica, estranea alle convulsioni dottrinarie europee e soprattutto preclusa a ogni modalità di interazione naturale tale da non degradare l'umanità a semplice forza muscolare. La schiavitù, la tratta degli uomini e delle donne di colore, la loro utilizzazione nelle varie forme di sudditanza fino alla guerra di secessione americana e oltre, sono manifestazioni, non soltanto di implacabile sfruttamento dell'uomo nei confronti del suo simile, ma anche dell'assenza delle cognizioni necessarie per convertire la forza-lavoro umana nella forza-lavoro meccanica: in altre parole, la schiavitù contrasta con la scienza, sia sotto il profilo etico, sia sotto il profilo economico. E, contestualmente, promuove una sorta di resistenza alla religione del quietismo e della sottomissione. La Riforma luterana e tutte le altre manifestazioni d'insofferenza nei confronti del potere dogmatico del cattolicesimo romano, contrassegnato peraltro da una tradizione temporale tutt'altro che edificante, dimostrano l'insofferenza da parte dei singoli individui per tutto quanto concerne la fede nella sua intima determinazione. Questo doppio regime – foro interiore e foro esteriore – già adombrato nelle riflessioni di sant'Agostino, consente a ogni cittadino di concorrere alla vicenda sociale senza necessariamente impegnarsi come a un dogma di fede. La mondanizzazione dell'esistenza si riflette sull'attuazione delle leggi elaborate per dirimere i conflitti esterni, per indirizzare il comportamento collettivo e per rendere partecipi i cittadini dei loro diritti e dei loro doveri nei riguardi dello Stato. L'intimità rimane esclusa dall'ingerenza sociale e consente di praticare i culti e di associarsi secondo le libere scelte individuali. La persona assume un ruolo nel concerto comunitario proprio in relazione agli impegni, che è in grado di assumere e di onorare con le proprie risorse. La religione sociale è un eufemismo: rispecchia la «necessaria convinzione» che la sicurezza è garantita dal concorso che ogni cittadino si propone di assicurare al consorzio sociale. Il policentrismo culturale – le città mercantili, i centri residenziali – è un effetto di questo processo di mobilitazione, che rivendica una nuova concezione della territorialità, sia per quanto concerne la proprietà privata, sia per quanto attiene la proprietà pubblica (che si rafforza nella extraterritorialità delle navi e delle ambasciate). Il territorio costituisce un fattore importante, ma non esclusivo della morfologia nazionale, tant'è vero che la dinamica migratoria rappresenta, in misura più o meno consistente per i diversi Stati europei ed extraeuropei, una parte considerevole di quell'insieme culturale, nel quale si esplica l'identità dei popoli nella loro storica determinazione.

Il policentrismo è successivamente riaccordato in una trama economica sorretta dalla macchina. L'industrializzazione delle risorse naturali e delle energie umane consente di dare rilevanza allo spirito imprenditoriale, sia perché produce beni necessari alla comunità, sia perché occupa nell'impresa economica quanti sono in grado, acquisendone i prodotti, di sostenerla. Il capitalismo, poderoso produttore di ricchezza, genera gravi disequaglianze. Il mercato esercita una funzione onnicomprensiva di tutte le attività pubbliche e private. Le stesse strutture statali rispecchiano le esigenze dei gruppi economici in ascesa, che ambiscono utilizzare la tecnica per orientare, con il loro ingegno, le scelte politiche e culturali delle comunità nelle quali gravitano e nelle quali operano. L'aumento dell'orario lavorativo e la riduzione del salario consentono l'adozione di prezzi concorrenziali per prodotti che il mercato assimilerebbe con crescente difficoltà. Il monopolio e peggio ancora l'oligopolio sono le deformazioni che assume il mercato quando la competitività si attenua e il sistema della convenienza si coniuga con quello della corruzione. Lo scambio ineguale fra i diversi fattori della

produzione provoca, all'interno delle strutture nazionali, gravi scompensi, che si riflettono ideologicamente sulla legittimità istituzionale, e che denunciano la presenza di antiche ricchezze non ancora scontate dall'apparato mercantile e concorrenziale. L'artigianato non contrasta l'industria, ma l'industria non è ancora in grado, nel XVIII secolo, di stabilire con l'artigianato un regime di complementarità. Soltanto nel XIX secolo s'instaura fra l'una e l'altra categoria produttiva una reciproca interazione, intesa a conferire alla funzionalità meccanica una gradevolezza estetica, che è propria della fattura manuale. Il XIX secolo costituisce l'ente di separazione fra il «passato» e l'«avvenire»: fra la concatenazione degli eventi e dei fattori della produzione e l'avventura della ragione. «Il secolo nasce con il semaforo e termina con il telefono e la radio [con le invenzioni di Antonio Meucci e Guglielmo Marconi]. Le pubblicazioni diventano illustrate; la fotografia si anima nel cinema; la parola e la musica si lasciano fonografare. La stampa trae profitto da queste novità. Successivamente, si creano imprese capitalistiche, in Inghilterra (1859) e poi in Francia (1866). A completamento della società anonima, la libertà di associazione si sintonizza con quella dell'industria. Le Casse di mutuo soccorso, le mutualità e i sindacati si sostituiscono alla solidarietà artigianale» (Fossaert 89). La rete della comunicazione e dei servizi si diversifica, contribuendo così ad ampliare gli spazi operativi di quanti si propongono, non soltanto di realizzare delle imprese economiche, ma anche di conseguire il consenso per tutte quelle attività che si prospettano utili allo sviluppo delle cosiddette condizioni oggettive. La scuola svolge il ruolo un tempo monopolio della Chiesa e condiziona implicitamente le scelte che la società civile si prefigge di realizzare. La fabbrica riunisce più persone della bottega artigianale e i quartieri industriali, sempre alla periferia dei centri storici, costituiscono dei potenziali socialmente afflittivi e ideologicamente conflittuali. La morfologia della città industriale assume un'influenza determinante nella progettazione dei quartieri residenziali. La differenza di ceti è come nascosta di giorno (perché i lavoratori sono assemblati in fabbrica) e palese di notte. La letteratura inglese del tenore di *David Copperfield* o di *E le stelle stanno a guardare* registra, con rassegnato stupore, le componenti energetiche dei minatori, degli operai e degli impiegati di un'epoca identificata come una immensa fucina, della quale si presagiscono quanto meno gli effetti secondari del sacrificio, della militanza ideologica, della solidarietà di categoria e, in linea generale, della comprensione umana. Il disagio dell'esistenza si sconta nella rigenerazione del consorzio civile.

La curiosità si delinea come una categoria conoscitiva, della quale tutti possono valersi perché incide soltanto sulle notazioni più insindacabili della condizione umana. In quanto fattore liberatorio, essa autorizza le più sfrenate manifestazioni del pensiero e, per molti aspetti, dell'azione, che i contraenti il rinnovato patto sociale immaginano di aver ratificato. La curiosità è un'ambizione forzosa del senso, che si vale della ragione per legittimarla come attitudine naturale e contestualmente culturale. La società del XIX secolo inaugura un'«avventura sedentaria», nell'intento di ipotizzare una partecipazione massiva ai grandi eventi, che la scienza e la tecnologia presentano come provvidenziali. Queste spinte propiziatrici di un concerto comunitario, fondato sull'immaginazione, sul costume, sulla lingua, fanno parte integrante di un fenomeno politico, la nazione, destinato a svolgere un'influenza determinante nell'assetto geopolitico del pianeta. La coscienza di classe si esplica in un contesto nel quale si presuppone operante una coesione sociale. Il rivendicazionismo politico e sindacale ha senso se lo scenario di riferimento è sensibile e reattivo. Se non fosse ideologicamente permeabile, il processo

produttivo esulerebbe dagli schemi consuetudinari, ancorati agli interessi della collettività che li ha preventivamente elaborati. La classe media, la borghesia, si configura pertanto come un ente di transizione fra i gruppi egemoni e i deseredati secondo un modello conoscitivo e operativo che si materializza nella sintesi della doppia morale: di quella individuale, ispirata ai principi della lealtà o del timore reverenziale; e di quella collettiva, continuamente sottoposta a controlli interconnessi e variabili. La personalità borghese come la cultura borghese sono invenzioni artistiche e letterarie, che però riflettono una stagione della dinamica sociale difficilmente connotabile, in modo particolare in Francia, in Inghilterra e in Germania, con gli stilemi del passato. Il borghese si profila pertanto come un paradigma in grado di esplicitare i profondi sconvolgimenti sociali sfociati nelle due guerre mondiali. Esso non è soltanto una figura simbolica di un'epoca di transizione, ma è anche un testimone oculare delle innovazioni culturali e dei sommovimenti intestini a tutti i conglomerati umani contraddistinti da una carica istituzionale, tendente all'autolegittimazione internazionale.

L'avvento del capitalismo, garantito nella sua prima istanza dal nazionalismo, si esplica nella stessa atmosfera ideologica nella quale si dibattono i fondamenti del diritto patrimoniale e dell'eguaglianza di fronte alla legge. Sebbene il diritto metropolitano contemperi le esigenze dei gruppi economicamente egemoni con le esigenze dei gruppi emarginati o semplicemente sacrificati dalla supremazia del profitto, la tendenza degli Stati nazionali a rinvenire nei mercati stranieri la soluzione delle loro contraddizioni interne si espleta nel colonialismo, nella sottomissione di popolazioni ancora irredente dalla tecnologia e quindi inadeguate a rispondere alle sfide (economiche e istituzionali) della modernità. Il pianeta si divide ancora una volta in centro e periferia, ma con la differenza che, nel XIX secolo, la sottomissione da parte del centro nei riguardi della periferia ha una continuità evidente, grazie a una propulsione mercantile, che trova il suo laboratorio nelle fabbriche, negli apparati di produzione e di distribuzione dei beni capaci di soggiogare le masse di tutti i continenti e, all'interno degli stessi, secondo il diverso livello di esplicazione e realizzazione dello «sviluppo». La cultura come strumento di superfetazione della conoscenza contrasta con le figurazioni propagandistiche della civiltà. Le *Confessioni di un impolitico* di Thomas Mann sono un magistrale contributo alla dilemmaticità del mondo borghese, tendente ad affermare la sua supremazia con la «ragione delle armi». La civiltà, che assimila alla sua funzione anche il diritto di piegare le coscienze alla logica dell'irreversibilità del progresso, rinnega i principi ispiratori della cultura e consente ai poteri forti di agire senza scrupoli. Il borghese, che ambisce alla ricchezza e al rispetto, trova, nella drammatica descrizione dell'intimità, un ulteriore motivo di sconforto e di rassegnazione. La gratuità del male, del quale scrive Hannah Arendt, consiste nel ritenere oggettivamente ineludibile il processo produttivo (e afflittivo), in virtù del quale l'iconoclastia religiosa, morale, scientifica è permessa se produce effetti evidenti con la rapidità dell'immediatezza. L'attualità giustifica la sofferenza inferta dai più forti nei riguardi dei più deboli. Le cifre, che quantificano questa tendenza, sono impressionanti: le due guerre mondiali infliggono all'Europa milioni di morti e la depauperano di una quantità di risorse in grado di sostenere la modernizzazione tecnologica delle aree meno sviluppate. Le comunicazioni, le rappresentazioni e le determinazioni degli Stati del secondo dopoguerra non possono fare a meno di descrivere la realtà secondo dei principi tutori, che giustificano le dottrine economiche e politiche mediante le quali i popoli si apparentano o si combattono con le armi della tecnica e con l'ideologia. L'arsenale bellico ha prevalentemente una funzione

dissuasiva. Tuttavia, l'entità delle risorse economiche, impiegate dal fronte occidentale e dal fronte orientale (tanto per esemplificare terminologicamente i due blocchi ideologici emersi dalla conferenza di Yalta), sono tali da adombrare un regime di guerra non combattuta se non sul piano economico dalle collettività inermi e disarmate. «Privato delle guerre e delle rivoluzioni centrali, questo mondo lascia il campo libero ad altri dinamismi. Le economie statal-socialiste raggiungono il record della crescita estensiva, prima di essere frenate per disposizioni di Stato. L'accumulazione capitalista si sviluppa più poderosamente che mai e tende a dissolvere i mercati nazionali in un mercato mondiale, nel quale le crisi sono di dimensioni mondiali, come prima le guerre. Ma, per la maggior parte dei popoli, i successi industriali delle principali potenze sono meno fruttuosi di modelli e di aiuti che generatori di svantaggi difficili da superare. L'intrinseca dislivellazione delle società capitalistiche, la gerarchia strategica delle potenze e l'autocentrismo delle società statal-socialiste si coniugano per mantenere un sottosviluppo, al quale i popoli periferici non possono sottrarsi se non a costo di sforzi giganteschi, come quelli realizzati, nel XX secolo, dalla Germania e dal Giappone». (Fossaert 128) La periferia del mondo si presenta come una zona eruttiva, in condizione di propagare i suoi effetti devastanti in tutte le aree limitrofe, nelle quali si presagisce un «minimo» di salvezza. I flussi migratori, alcuni dal tono biblico, sono delle vere e proprie fughe da una realtà incandescente verso altre realtà meno insidiate dalla miseria ma non necessariamente toccate dallo stato di grazia.

La dissuasione (introdotta nel lessico politico dalle potenze nucleari) esercita una forte attrattiva nei confronti di quanti minacciano di impiegare la forza per convincere gli interlocutori dell'opportunità di recedere dalle loro posizioni nell'intento di promuovere una più moderata soluzione delle rispettive vertenze. La moderazione influisce sulla dialettica interlocutoria perché si ristabilisce un *modus vivendi* che non tolleri l'intemperanza o peggio l'insofferenza e l'estremismo. Il pericolo latente di una catastrofe tecnicamente incontrollabile induce le diplomazie – dalla fine della seconda guerra mondiale – a considerare il fungo di Hiroshima e Nagasaki del 1945 come il fattore che pone fine al conflitto, ma che instaura una stagione di incertezze destinate a provocare, oltre che focolai di tensione in diverse aree del pianeta, la diffusa consapevolezza di un tempo recondito della condizione umana da connotare con un nuovo tipo di feticismo. L'industria civile, infatti, si avvantaggia degli esiti conseguiti dalla ricerca militare per raggiungere quote di benessere, concretizzate nei manufatti e negli artefatti, con i quali affrontare l'epoca delle incertezze. Le installazioni nucleari, che per l'incerto ottimismo di coloro che sovrintendono alla loro manutenzione a tratti si palesano con la loro funesta realtà, servono a tutelare quanto meno le potenze detentrici, mentre si propagano le intemperanze etniche e nazionalistiche quali effetti sedimentari di una politica discriminante o intimidatoria. La preminenza dell'economia sulla politica comporta l'ingerenza della logica finanziaria in tutti gli ambiti culturali nei quali il mercato, che pure si esplica nella più spietata concorrenza, fa da antidoto alla guerra belligerata, alla mobilitazione nel significato più accreditato dalla tradizione. La geografia è in continua modificazione: dalla crisi del colonialismo alle grandi turbative ideologiche, che incombono sulle federazioni socialistiche dell'Est, la carta geopolitica del pianeta si presenta così variegata da rendere insondabile la coesione istituzionale. La parcellizzazione nazionalistica se, per un verso, riabilita antiche, inveterate culture, per un altro verso, rende ingovernabile la stabilità regionale. L'esempio macroscopico d'instabilità nel quadro di un diffuso sentimento comunitario è l'Europa, un'entità

culturale differenziata fin nelle più rarefatte concezioni comunalistiche (com'è l'Italia), che si determina in un nuovo assetto istituzionale, più conforme alle esigenze del mercato, della circolazione delle idee e della forza-lavoro secondo un modello inedito di complementarità e di reciproco sostegno fra gli Stati e, all'interno degli Stati, delle regioni che elettivamente ritengono di coordinare le loro risorse con quelle più propense a dare efficacia alla loro tradizionale o innovativa dedizione produttiva.

Il lavoro intellettuale e manuale è ipotizzato come un fattore emolliente, necessario per gli interventi strutturali e occasionali, facendo ipotizzare alle autorità responsabili del «nuovo corso europeo» un cambiamento di notevoli proporzioni nella concezione dell'esistenza. Mentre nell'Europa della tradizione la cultura è considerata la premessa per ogni impresa conoscitiva e operativa, nell'Europa contemporanea è il mercato, una categoria sempre più impellente, che determina le occasioni di lavoro e conseguentemente le energie necessarie per renderlo produttivo. L'azione ha una velocità maggiore di quanto non sia celebrata la dinamica del sapere. L'acquisizione di nuove tecniche risponde a esigenze che il mercato ritiene ineludibili, sia che si manifestino liberamente, sia che si celino nell'inconscio collettivo. La pubblicità non ha più il compito di comunicare e commercializzare un prodotto, ma quello di rendere esigibile la preventiva accettazione del compratore, del compratore di beni, che successivamente il sistema distributivo consente di fruire. La professionalità, richiesta alla scuola di ogni ordine e grado, risponde alle esigenze del Moloch economico, la cui preminenza su tutti gli altri possibili Leviatani politici è data dall'apparente e, per certi aspetti, reale consistenza benefica della sua azione. L'ampliamento dell'apparato produttivo, infatti, è condizionato dal potenziamento del sistema ricettivo, che s'identifica con gli aumenti salariali, con l'assicurazione contro ogni tipo di rischio e con la conclamata affermazione dei diritti inalienabili del cittadino, garantiti peraltro dai tribunali internazionali e dalle Corti di Giustizia di livello regionale o mondiale. La fisionomia del cittadino contemporaneo sarebbe paradigmatica se non fosse insidiata dalla stessa «filosofia» del mercato e del benessere, che introduce, sia pure deformando gli effetti benefici del diritto alla felicità, tutte quelle tendenze trasgressive del buongusto, del senso comune e perfino della sicurezza. A fronte del benessere per tutti si delinea una schizofrenia individuale, che connota di incresciose inquietudini l'esistenza dell'uomo contemporaneo. La divaricazione fra il cittadino (della rivoluzione francese) e l'uomo tecnologico si evince dal discredito di quest'ultimo per l'inermità degli sforzi compiuti per affermare il senso dell'esistenza secondo principi etici o semplicemente dotati di un adeguato criterio dell'equilibrio e della misura. A sopperire a questa esigenza, si moltiplicano le associazioni benefiche, religiose, con il fine di contemperare le sfide della modernità con le spinte solidaristiche.

Il macchinismo industriale non dà tregua: sia gli apparati produttivi, sia i sistemi di distribuzione, soggiacciono a un'accelerazione che adombra un circuito emotivo, capace di esorcizzare il *bellum omnium contra omnes*, almeno così come se lo figura Thomas Hobbes. L'automatismo tende a emarginare il lavoro umano. All'impresa umana è richiesto di sublimare il potenziale tecnologico, di renderlo rispondente alle esigenze che la propaganda e la pubblicità s'incaricano di evidenziare. La cultura maieutica si postula nei manifesti, negli *spot* pubblicitari, in tutte quelle forme apparentemente indolori di dialogazione nevrotica, con le quali si rappresenta il «progresso» o quanto meno le sue manifestazioni più iconoclastiche rispetto alla tradizione, al «passato». «Il computer, pensato per finalità militari, è impiegato all'inizio per il calcolo delle traiettorie o delle

reazioni nucleari, poi si estendono le sue applicazioni alla fatturazione, alla gestione del personale... Il transistor e il circuito stampato, subito miniaturizzati, si riducono di volume e incrementano la loro capacità. Parallelamente, l'esperienza acquisita nella programmazione delle diverse aree di attività consente di estendere in ogni direzione i benefici del calcolo informatico» (Fossaert 157-158) La costituzione delle banche-dati, delle reti di telecomunicazioni e di tutte le forme di rappresentazione visiva delinea il mercato, nel quale ogni segmento produttivo tende al monopolio nella prospettiva di assicurarsi, con la sopravvivenza, le risorse finanziarie necessarie per migliorare il prodotto e condizionare l'«apparato acquisitivo», cioè la società, nella quale aspira a influenzare il sistema decisionale.

L'informatica svolge un ruolo determinante nel sistema delle relazioni e delle interazioni sociali, liberando gli individui dal peso della memoria e del suo connubio con l'inconscio collettivo. Tutto ciò che è rappresentabile è vero: l'inesplorato si configura come pertinente e complementare al già noto. L'invenzione, nel suo significato recondito di scoperta, disvelamento di eventi non ancora presenti alla consapevolezza umana, non ha più senso. Lo sviluppo tecnologico è considerato implicito – insito – nel processo telematico. L'applicazione dei tecnocrati è vincolata a una «coerenza ideologica», che non può essere disattesa senza rieditare (e riabilitare) la barbarie, cioè il disordine, la scomposta evasione in un universo informe. L'evasione, infatti, è considerata nefasta ai fini della solvibilità sociale, mentre la divagazione si accredita con i canoni del viaggio, della distrazione ludica e latamente culturale. Il tempo libero è comunque controllato da un apparato falsamente divinatorio, che è implicito nei programmi turistici, nelle saghe, nelle convulse adunate sonore e canore di un «popolo» illusoriamente primigenio.

L'illusorietà si assiepa nei fertilizzanti emotivi dei gruppi che si avventurano nelle «rovine» delle città come in una landa sconosciuta. Il passato remoto sembra flettersi a una mimesi, a un surrogato delle convinzioni consolidate. I fotogrammi delle registrazioni visive si predispongono a diventare delle prove d'autore: ogni scatto del teleobiettivo scandisce una notazione esistenziale con un circuito affettivo difficilmente contenibile nei limiti della normale comprensione. La realtà è come presa d'assalto da masnade di predoni, che si accontentano di collezionare reliquie. La maniacale propensione a fotografare l'esistente si giustifica – forse – con la tendenza a modellare la realtà secondo le folgorazioni della retina, che recepisce dai centri nervosi gli impulsi necessari a immanentizzare il pensiero, a ratificare meccanicamente l'«individuale visione» delle cose. Gli oggetti si animano sotto lo scatto del teleobiettivo perché l'occhio del turista-viaggiatore li interpella inconsciamente nel proposito di assicurarli alla sua «riserva di caccia», al suo «personale feudalesimo», al suo «virtuale dominio» di quanto si esplica nella territorialità dell'esistenza. Gli oggetti testimoniano le innumerevoli pretese di comprensione-acquisizione di quanti affollano lo scenario del mondo quasi in apnea, sorretti dalla convinzione di differenziarsi dai loro simili soltanto per l'intraducibilità dei fotogrammi inseriti nelle loro macchine da presa. L'individualità s'identifica con il clic, che differenzia un'inquadratura da un'altra secondo l'estro, lo stato d'animo, le sensazioni dei singoli osservatori della realtà. L'obiettivo si configura come il laboratorio mobile del turista, di un viaggiatore coinvolto nelle confortevoli trame del progresso, nell'intento di assecondare le esoteriche tendenze di un'epoca piuttosto che di confutarle. Egli è il protagonista di una ritualità priva di effetti sonori, tutto risulta nel segreto del teleobiettivo, che nasconde quanto non riesce a rendere palese perché estraneo o escluso alla sua sfera d'incidenza. La fotografia «riprende» una parte

della realtà senza deturparne l'insieme. La frammentazione della stessa a opera del fotografo consentirebbe virtualmente di immaginare una rappresentazione del mondo in forma sintonica, distonica o disfunziva, rispetto a quella considerata, di norma, come consolidata. La rappresentazione di un universo diversificato per gradi espositivi – come i tasselli di un immenso mosaico – darebbe vita a un virtuale circuito conoscitivo di qualche suggestione o comunque tale da rendere percettibile l'arbitrarietà funzionale del sistema conoscitivo nelle sue memorazioni e applicazioni pratiche. L'immenso palcoscenico della fotografia ha ancora poco a che vedere con la realtà, ma è destinato a soppiantarla presentandole o proponendole un'altra «faccia», una sorta di maschera facciale, capace di incrementare l'interesse per gli archeologi del futuro e per i novelli poeti trovadori del presente.

I ritmi espressivi, con i quali i gruppi partecipano agli avvenimenti che i centri del potere decisionale decidono di promuovere, sono sempre accompagnati dalla visione, da una sorta di rappresentazione globale, della quale ogni individuo s'illude di condizionarne gli effetti. La vista ha una supremazia sugli altri organi sensitivi perché ne prospetta gli ambiti esplicativi. Aristotele sostiene, infatti, che la visione consente di acquisire la maggior parte della conoscenza. I filosofi greci ed ellenistici affermano che la luce proveniente dagli occhi si proietta sugli oggetti e li tocca «come le dita degli esploratori», secondo l'espressione di Richard L. Gregory (*passim*). Alla metà del X secolo, il pensatore arabo Ibn al-Haytham ritiene invece che l'occhio sia un ricettore e non un emittente di raggi luminosi. Ma è soltanto nel XVII secolo che si delinea la dissociazione della luce propriamente detta dalla vista. Conseguentemente, il processo visivo si esplica in tre livelli: nella percezione della luce, nella trasmissione di questa informazione al cervello e nella rappresentazione mentale degli oggetti. La luce che circonda l'osservatore della realtà, emessa dal Sole, è un raggio elettromagnetico che si diffonde in tutte le direzioni. Il suo spettro, molto ampio, comprende le onde radio, i raggi infrarossi, i raggi ultravioletti, i raggi X e i raggi gamma. L'occhio umano percepisce soltanto una parte di questa irradiazione: quella compresa fra il violetto e il rosso. Protetto dalle palpebre, l'occhio umano si comporta come un apparecchio fotografico: la cornea assicura la focalizzazione della luce sulla retina; l'iris modifica il diametro della pupilla e modula la quantità di luce che penetra nell'organo; il cristallino permette la messa a punto; la retina funge da placca fotografica, dove l'immagine si riflette all'inverso. La «messa a fuoco» della retina consente alle cellule del nervo ottico di trasmettere l'informazione verso la regione visiva primaria del cervello. «Per analogia con l'informatica» – sostengono Annie Monot e Françoise Viénot, del laboratorio di fotobiologia del Museo nazionale di storia naturale di Parigi – «si può paragonare la retina a un microprocessore, il nervo ottico a un condotto di connessione e la corteccia cerebrale a un ordinatore centrale» (Galus 16). Ma il processo cerebrale, in virtù del quale si esplica l'unificazione percettiva è ancora sconosciuto. La costruzione a colori della realtà si palesa come un'attitudine dell'osservatore, che soggiace alle suggestioni dell'artificio, del quale è responsabile e dal quale è irrimediabilmente soggiogato. «Una cosa è sicura: il mondo che noi vediamo è una costruzione del cervello. Una costruzione a colori, che “non esiste nel mondo fisico”, sottolinea Jean Le Rohellec, specialista di scienze cognitive al Museo nazionale di storia naturale: “Non vi sono colori senza esseri viventi, senza la possibilità di costruire il colore”. Si sa, dopo centocinquanta anni, grazie ai lavori di Bénédicte Prévost, che si possono creare colori soggettivi che dipendono dagli osservatori, facendo alternare una *surface* chiara e una *surface* oscura... “L'astrazione

dell'immagine strettamente viva è messa in relazione con la rappresentazione interna del mondo reale. Qui intervengono l'attenzione, la motivazione e la memoria visiva"» (Galus 16). La visione della realtà si interconnette con le forme dell'artificio, con l'esperienza promossa dall'osservatore con l'ausilio della strumentazione tecnologica. Nel primo secolo dell'era cristiana, Seneca utilizza dei globi pieni d'acqua per ingrandire le dimensioni dei testi che consulta; nel XIII secolo appaiono i primi rudimentali occhiali fino a diffondersi nel XVII secolo, nelle forme del *pince-nez* e del *face-à-main*, per poi consolidarsi alla fine del XVIII secolo nelle montature. Contestualmente alla diffusione degli occhiali, nel XVI secolo, in Olanda, si inventano, sia i primi microscopi ottici, che costituiscono i presupposti dei microscopi elettronici, con i quali si investiga nell'emisfero dell'infinitamente piccolo, sia i telescopi, con i quali si scrutano i corpi celesti. L'applicazione a scopi terapeutici delle strumentazioni connesse con l'osservazione viva consente di rendere complementari i processi conoscitivi rispetto all'esperienza. La scoperta del radar, infine, costituisce la prima applicazione delle cognizioni relative alla composizione energetica dell'universo e un efficace contributo all'«unificazione sensibile», evocata come necessaria e giustificatrice delle elaborazioni teoriche conseguenti all'inquietudine e al disagio propri della condizione umana. L'«infedeltà» di un senso si coniuga per così dire con la «complicità» di un altro senso secondo una concezione, sia pure complessa e contrastata, che il genere umano si propone di realizzare come un'avventura, nella quale sia il progettista e l'esecutore di un piano casuale o provvidenziale, a seconda delle convinzioni recondite ed esplicite, contenute nella sua turbata consapevolezza.

L'automatizzazione delle attività umane si giustifica con il presupposto che nascondano delle finalità, che saranno rese esplicite nella loro utilizzazione o che nella loro utilizzazione dirimono il loro quoziente di plausibilità. Si agisce per consentire alla tecnica di magnificare il suo potenziale sistemico o per conferirle un ruolo suppletivo rispetto a quello che il genere umano potrebbe realizzare se fosse sorretto da quelle spinte emotive che si evincono dalle religioni paniche. L'informatica, infatti, vanifica la figura del lavoratore, inteso nel significato aristotelico di «macchina animata», di «tessitore» di trame e di «sostenitore» di catene (di montaggio). Il lavoro si compendia sempre più nell'osservazione: nella percezione mentale dei meccanismi necessari per «inventare», «manipolare», «gestire» la realtà. L'«iniziazione» all'automazione e all'informatica comporta la dequalificazione del macchinismo industriale e la riproduzione a finalità memorative dei rituali del passato. Il folklore appaga la propensione ludica di quanti simulano una felicità istituzionale, qual è quella «promessa» dai costituzionalisti americani, dell'America anglosassone e sportivamente impegnata a glorificare l'aspetto fisico della realtà e del mondo. Lo scenario naturale, in effetti, è completamente modificato rispetto a quello proprio delle società agrarie, nelle quali i contadini ritengono ineludibili la fatica, il disincanto (dovuto prevalentemente agli inganni del Cielo, cioè ai fattori meteorologici), la spietata insolvenza dei tutori dell'ordine. Attualmente, i parchi naturali, le «riserve auree» delle vegetazioni e dei cosiddetti polmoni planetari, sono figure simboliche, acquisizioni letterarie di un'improbabile manifestazione della natura, com'è ipotizzata nell'Empireo, nelle dimensioni della memoria e dell'illusione della specie, nelle evocazioni del tempo liturgico, del tempo degli «inizi» e della «fine», secondo i glossari consolatori dei precovitori di ere, degli affabulatori, dei profeti e dei programmatore mediatici dell'età moderna.

La geografia della produzione e del consumo riflette, almeno nelle forme più

sclerotizzate, le contraddizioni di un'epoca, che ambisce ad assicurare la sopravvivenza delle «moltitudini bibliche» e la difesa del pensiero individuale. Il mercato ripristina la «virtuale naturalità» nel circuito cognitivo dell'acquisizione dei beni, che la produzione in serie propina al genere umano come una «volontà superiore» distribuirebbe il pane quotidiano. La periferia del mondo si identifica con le aree non completamente assimilate all'economia finanziaria, che si esplica in tutta la sua energia al di fuori delle tradizioni e delle convenzioni (di livello nazionale) consolidate. La gerarchia fra gli Stati è soltanto il riflesso condizionato della concentrazione del capitale investito in un processo in continua modificazione tecnologica, in modo da evitare che il fruitore degli oggetti si affezioni personalizzandoli, come avviene nel passato, estraniandolo dal presente per un illusorio (anche se probabile) mondo a venire. Il viaggio di ricognizione, inaugurato nel Settecento inglese con il *grand tour*, si trasforma nell'apoteosica approssimazione del presente. La solarità, l'opacità e la dilemmaticità delle situazioni tradizionali si compendiano nella perdita perseveranza per tutto quanto attiene al passato. La posmodernità concilia l'inettitudine e l'iperattività: due timbri distonici in una prospettiva egualitaria, che esalti virtualmente le componenti esegetiche del mondo. A queste appartengono l'osservatore, il ricercatore o semplicemente il dissidente: quanti non fanno parte del rango dei disillusi e non confluiscono in quello degli esagitati eversori delle allegorie del primigenio. Si prevede la reticenza per tutto quanto si protende alla sperimentazione perché soltanto questa attitudine funge da iniziazione (reiterata, costante) a un modo d'essere dagli effetti imprevedibili e tuttavia premonitori.

2. L'ineluttabilità e l'evidenza

La cosiddetta vertiginosità del progresso trova un antidoto nell'apatia sempre più diffusa, che costituisce – forse – l'antefatto storico di ogni processo di mediazione fra componenti esoteriche del mondo e aspetti esponenziali della fattibilità, della concreta realizzazione. La razionalizzazione della realtà effettuale s'identifica paradossalmente con la discriminazione di chi sa e di chi non sa, di chi è in grado di affrontare i rigori della natura e di chi non ne ha le capacità. Alla più ampia concezione della libertà fa riscontro la dottrina della selezione naturale. Il test, che contraddistingue la società dell'ultimo secolo, si riferisce al potenziale immaginativo e propulsivo dei singoli, dei gruppi e delle comunità, in un ordine politico e sociale che non può essere completamente affidato alla libera iniziativa individuale senza provocare gravi discriminazioni, condannate peraltro dalla tradizione giudaico-cristiana. Alla concezione, che esalta la competitività, si oppone la dottrina della solidarietà e, in ultima istanza, la *pietas*, quella idea che attraversa la storia dell'Occidente come la freccia del tempo. Essa ispira il sentimento religioso e lo rende meno opaco rispetto all'inveterato personalismo, salvaguardato dalla dottrina dell'egoismo sociale, quale fondamento delle comunità impegnate a migliorare le loro condizioni oggettive. Nella tradizione occidentale la *pietas* ha la funzione di ricordare la vanità degli sforzi profusi per assecondare l'istinto di sopraffazione sul prossimo e sull'*habitat* naturale. Il prossimo si configura come un'entità reale, impegnata peraltro a conferire all'insieme comunitario le caratteristiche di un sodalizio, che nella religione, nel costume e nella lingua trova il suffragio della testimonianza e della memorazione. La *pietas*, infatti, si esplica nel ricordo, nella consapevolezza che tutte le azioni umane soggiacciono a un giudizio, che non può essere eluso senza compromettere la stessa dignità di quanti le attuano. Il postulato che l'avvalora consiste nel presupposto di un'unità del genere umano, nella convinzione – più o meno diffusa – che soltanto la sua

intesa lascia presagire la sua salvezza. Il conforto s'identifica con la speranza, con l'attesa di un evento, che tutti riconoscono nel declino dell'esistenza, e che forse è il riflesso condizionato di un disegno che sopravanza la stessa vicenda individuale. L'esiguità dell'individuo contrasta con i cosiddetti movimenti globali, con le propensioni più o meno consapevoli, prima delle «masse», e successivamente degli aggregati umani, di volta in volta coesi o meno, a seconda delle suggestioni provocate dal mercato, da un'entità metafisica, destinata a sovvertire le successioni e le coerenze del passato. L'intrusione di una *vis destuens* a livello economico comporta l'accettazione di canoni comportamentali, non soltanto mobili, ma spesso anche illusori.

La divisione del pianeta si configura in maniera binaria: i paesi ricchi e i paesi poveri costituiscono l'aspetto omogeneo di un sistema molto più complesso per l'esistenza, all'interno degli stessi, delle variabili ideologiche (liberalismo, socialismo, conservatorismo, autoritarismo) con le quali si caratterizza enfiteuticamente lo scenario politico. La transizione ideologica dal XIX al XX secolo avviene in maniera esplicita e subdola perché l'industrializzazione e il capitalismo finanziario fanno astrazione, sia pure entro certi limiti, dei presupposti concettuali sui quali si fondano le istituzioni nazionali. L'alleanza che si crea fra la cosiddetta globalizzazione economica e la frammentazione ideologica è responsabile paradossalmente dell'incontrollabilità dell'apparato geopolitico del pianeta. La rivendicazione del benessere e contestualmente la proclamazione dell'identità nazionalistica sono inconciliabili e tuttavia fertili di ambigue soluzioni politiche. Il proselitismo religioso assume valenze normative, destinate a promuovere o a sovvertire gli equilibri, che la tradizione e le risorse regionali consentono di ritenere persistenti. La precarietà invece è una categoria compensativa degli artifici strategici, con i quali la diplomazia o comunque l'arte della gestione dei popoli cerca tradizionalmente di attenuare i contrasti e attutire gli scompensi economici, che inevitabilmente si determinano. La «globalità» delle risorse economiche impone, al contrario di quanto si verifica nel passato, una netta discriminante fra le aree utili alla produzione e le aree «non ancora» ritenute in grado di inserirsi nel processo produttivo. L'incognita è costituita dalla capacità da parte dei due emisferi contrapposti di modificarne la costituzione. La caduta del muro di Berlino è l'evento più eloquente di quanto la strategia del liberalismo economico riesca a realizzare con la complicità delle forze politiche operanti all'interno delle singole formazioni istituzionali.

La drammatica connessione della produzione e del consumo esonera progressivamente gli attori sociali dall'essere coerenti, sia in senso ideologico, sia in senso etico. La concezione teleologica dell'economia globale non ammette se non manifestazioni di dissenso nel suo significato di dissacrazione ereticale. L'unica forma di salvezza che si delinea per il genere umano risponde alle esigenze più angoscienti e spregiudicate di una religione panica, che non consente attenuazioni o alternative alla mobilitazione del genere umano per il conseguimento di una condizione edenica indipendentemente dalla «promessa» propria della tradizione giudaico-cristiana. La beatitudine umana si configura come una sfida realizzata con le armi più confacenti al suo stato elementare. L'accettazione da parte dei cosiddetti riformatori sociali dell'«evidenza» come una epifanica configurazione divina induce il consorzio umano a soprintendere a tutte le decisioni propiziatricie del benessere, sovvertendo il terminale dell'esistenza dall'aldilà all'aldiqua. La terra, intesa come un corpo celeste gravitante nell'economia del cosmo, si costituisce a laboratorio scientifico e tecnologico nel proposito di intercedere con le energie dell'universo e di utilizzarle. L'impegno

dell'*homo thecnologicus* è quello di giustificare e vanificare le sue azioni per tema di scompensare le coordinate esistenziali di un numero sempre crescente di esseri umani. L'immanenza non pregiudica la fede nella risurrezione, ma la rende allegorica e perfino profanatrice dei disegni dell'Uomo in quanto artefice dell'esistenza artificiale, di un modo d'essere considerato irreversibile rispetto a quelli suffragati dalla teologia imperante o comunque da una credenza carica di remissività trascendentale. In questa prospettiva, è plausibile immaginare, non tanto la «fine della storia», enfatizzata dall'omonimo libro di Francis Fukuyama, quanto la disattivazione (o devitalizzazione) del conflitto. In un «ordine mentale», nel quale il benessere generalizzato è pensato come un balsamo per i mali che affliggono da sempre l'umanità, anche la competizione verrebbe meno per l'estinguersi dell'istinto autoreferenziale e di conservazione. In un mondo completamente artificiale, la vicenda umana sarà regolata telematicamente e non potrà che rispecchiarsi nell'ozio, inteso nell'accezione latina di libera esplicazione del pensiero e della volontà creatrice. L'autostima, il prestigio e perfino la gloria sono apposizioni di un'epoca remota, che difficilmente si raffronta con quella presente, i cui enunciati fanno esplicito riferimento al guadagno, a quanto un individuo realizza sulla base di un tacito accordo con i suoi simili, intenzionati a seguirne le sorti.

Il capovolgimento dei fondamenti concettuali dell'epoca contemporanea consiste nel fatto che tutti possono ottenere tutto purché concorrano il caso e la necessità: la fortuna di Niccolò Machiavelli si coniuga con l'abilità dello stratega e del visionario. La rivalità è un arcaismo, che non può trovare nessuna giustificazione in un universo metamorfizzato mediante un sofisticato sistema di informazione e di comunicazione. «Viviamo» scrive Juan G. Atienza «in un momento nel quale si stanno utilizzando come moneta dal corso legale le parole e le idee astratte che fanno parte del contesto simbolico dell'essere umano. Ma le applichiamo a realtà che nulla o molto poco hanno a che vedere con il loro significato originario, anche se sostituiscono e, in apparenza, realizzano ciò che prima era una speranza più o meno ultraterrena della mente collettiva. Per volontà di coloro che le impiegano come forma di propaganda, esse convertono in *atto* tutto ciò che non superava i limiti della *potenza*. E, nel farlo, non tergiversano su una realtà che non è mai esistita, ma stabiliscono le dimensioni di un'altra realtà, inventata per il loro esclusivo beneficio» (Atienza 51). I concetti associati alle parole non sono rispondenti all'impianto ideale che le contraddistingue. L'interpretazione, l'esegesi e la deformazione dei significati dei termini impiegati per rappresentare la realtà *in fieri* sono evidenti. La velocità, con la quale si prospetta il presente, non consente – almeno finora – di avvalersi di un dizionario adeguato. L'ipertrofica concezione dell'immediatezza vanifica la stratificazione dei significati. L'etimologia, così come la concepisce Isidoro di Siviglia, ha un significato archeologico: riflette un itinerario espressivo già concluso e difficilmente utilizzabile in un contesto storico assiepatato di eventi di breve durata, ma spesso di grande efficacia. L'abrasione del parlato sulla scrittura riduce ulteriormente la morfologia delle parole, alle quali è richiesto, non tanto di designare, quanto di alludere perché sia consentito un ampio registro interpretativo e – progressivamente – disfunzionale.

La «sacralità» della parola si trasforma nella «funzionalità» della stessa per il conseguimento di risultati concreti, impropriamente omologabili nel compendio conoscitivo. La comunicazione e la manipolazione del linguaggio per ottenere un consenso o un *audience*, che giustifichi l'invasione semantica del locutore, si confondono. L'effetto, che si persegue, non è quello di conferire nobiltà concettuale all'enunciato, ma al contrario di raggiungere il più immediatamente possibile un obiettivo

concreto, che s'identifica con il consenso. Convincere e conseguire la legittimazione (di quanto si dice) sono due aspetti complementari dell'attività comunque realizzata. La connotazione etica o ideologica di ogni atto compiuto per il raggiungimento di un beneficio prescinde dalla sua fase storica: si erige momentaneamente sull'adesione del pubblico dei fruitori dei prodotti e dei servizi. I nomi delle cose sono precari: per questa ragione si inventano i loro sostituti. Le lingue nazionali, infatti, se non interferiscono nel processo creativo e produttivo a livello mondiale, finiscono per acquisire le caratteristiche della reminiscenza, di custodi di un patrimonio esigibile soltanto con il concorso della stravaganza e dell'estemporaneità.

D'altro canto, l'apparato produttivo si serve di operatori intercambiabili, la cui personalità è per così dire irrilevante ai fini del successo imprenditoriale. La convinzione rinascimentale che sia la persona, con il suo potenziale inventivo, a determinare il corso della storia permane nel codice genetico di un'umanità esposta in continuazione a tutte le metamorfosi (le mutazioni) ritenute necessarie dal contesto economico. È improponibile un dissenso scriteriato, non organizzato e non praticato nell'ambito delle disquisizioni preventivamente concordate dalle parti in contesa. La disamina, che nel passato opera una suddivisione di ruoli e di interessi, attualmente può proporsi come uno strumento di mediazione senza produrre degli effetti duraturi o incontrovertibili. Il dispotismo contemporaneo non ha volto, è anonimo, e quindi intercede in maniera riflessa fra strati differenziati di popolazione attiva e passiva. L'anomia e l'inedia si traducono nell'ozio forzato o nel tempo libero: in una dimensione temporale nella quale il peso delle obbligazioni (intellettuali, materiali) si stempera nell'imprecisato collettivo. La gente sostituisce il popolo, che rimane irrimediabilmente compromesso con le istanze moderniste, nazionalistiche, e insieme mitiche e razionali. L'archetipo del sognatore si trasforma nell'archetipo del diffusore di speranza se non addirittura del mercenario dell'afflato ludico e sensitivo. Il contrasto fra i pareri si declina nella molteplicità (dialettamente incontrollabile) delle opinioni. L'atomizzazione delle relazioni umane preserva il potere tutorio, anch'esso labile ma rapsodicamente forte, dal «contagio» con una teleologia che lo approvi o lo preservi. L'echimosi del potere tradizionale si riflette sul successo dell'impresa economica, che non riconosce remore etiche e normative, e che considera legale tutto quanto venga accettato come utile.

L'informazione, esplicita con gli strumenti della diffusione (la radio, la televisione, internet), tende a rafforzarsi, sia pure per un periodo di tempo ridotto e contrastato dalla sua stessa costanza fluviale, in una sorta di totalitarismo fonico, in un ordinamento sintattico e grammaticale, capace di modificare continuamente gli atteggiamenti dei suoi fruitori senza appagarli mai e soprattutto senza provocare in loro una convinzione. Paradossalmente, la profluvie di informazioni rimanda continuamente «ad altro da sé», che nella logica estemporanea con la quale si manifesta è quasi impossibile, non soltanto delineare, ma neanche auspicare. Il flusso delle informazioni fa presagire il rituale di un processo non avente una fine seppure dotato di una flebile o momentanea finalità. La suggestione, alla quale soggiacciono i fruitori del flusso di informazioni concerne la simultaneità dei fattori espressivi e cognitivi: tutto ciò che viene detto o che appare sullo schermo è vero fino alla prova del contrario, difficilmente diagnosticabile come plausibile per il susseguirsi degli eventi. La continua presenza dello spettatore sullo scenario degli accadimenti lo esonera dal parteciparvi con quel senso critico che tradizionalmente allietta o conforta il giudizio. L'assenza di una pausa (sonora o visiva) per la formulazione del giudizio concorre provvidenzialmente ad alimentare le opinioni,

che assumono un'evidenza, spesso perfino drammatica (com'è il caso dei diritti civili, della pena di morte), quando diventano numericamente consistenti. Come succede per la *New Age*, il mercato cerca di convertire gli aspetti più inquietanti della pacificazione etnica, religiosa e perfino artistica, creando degli artefatti, mercificando il pensiero – se c'è un pensiero che alimenta il movimento di idee sulla nuova realtà – e sterilizzando alcune componenti innovatrici o riformatrici dell'ordine vigente.

L'opinione assume un fascino occasionale e perentorio insieme, soprattutto quando le è concessa una sovrapposizione, una sottolineatura, con gli strumenti audiovisivi, mediatici. Essa non è considerata una categoria espressiva, degna di essere valutata nell'ambito di un ipotetico teorema, destinato a trasformarsi in un teorema reale, sulla base delle rilevazioni statistiche, effettuate ai fini di una teleologia, di una versatilità sociale. Al contrario, l'opinione è esaltata come una notazione incandescente di un'individualità indisturbata, che al massimo interviene nel dibattito sociale o comunitario per conferirgli un'impronta folkloristica. Ogni evento è sottoposto all'opinione pubblica, non tanto per corredarlo di una apposizione democratica, quanto piuttosto per sottrarlo alla superficialità delle risoluzioni, che effettivamente provengono dal fruitore delle immagini sonore radiotelevisive quando è ripreso nella sua spasmodica quotidianità. L'apparato mondiale delle comunicazioni risponde a esigenze per così dire oggettive, ma indimostrate, se per indimostrate s'intendono quelle frasi captate al volo dal microfono e dal teleobiettivo fra la gente alla quale si riconosce un diritto di prelazione che in effetti non ha. Sebbene la rappresentazione di un evento o di un fenomeno si rafforzi con lo struggimento, l'apprensione o lo smarrimento più o meno drammatico o gioioso, la congruenza cognitiva delle cause che lo determinano è estranea agli intervistati. Questi testimoniano quelle reazioni nevralgiche che si presume debbano avere gli esseri umani di fronte a un disastro naturale, a un crollo finanziario, alla perdita della ragione, al desiderio di sopravvivere alle intemperie politiche e sociali. Ma la loro autenticità è talmente manifesta e immediata da apparire irreali. Ed è proprio questa falsa partecipazione agli eventi che genera le opinioni che, per essere tutte plausibili, si elidono reciprocamente, lasciando il campo al produttore del servizio radio-televisivo che, spostando l'obiettivo per un istante su un oggetto o sottolineando un termine dell'argomentazione, finisce con il «condurre» le impressioni nel peristilio del giudizio senza, ovviamente, avere il modo, in un tempo successivo, di manifestarlo.

L'informazione si configura come una serie di opzioni, che difficilmente si riesce ad accettare per la loro intrinseca validità. In effetti, la capacità informatica di introdurre il fruitore nelle piste delle notazioni cognitive, non consente a queste, proprio per la loro complementarità, di avvalersi di alcuna particolare agevolazione rispetto al sistema etico, morale, sociale, che pure in qualche modo evocano o addirittura adombrano. In virtù delle piste dell'informazione, la velocità di contemperare diverse esigenze consente di assecondare, non tanto la curiosità nel suo significato tradizionale, quanto piuttosto il desiderio di manifestarla. «Grazie a esse, possiamo leggere il giornale, metterci in contatto in un istante con chi vogliamo, ricavare l'informazione che necessitiamo su ogni materia, conoscere le ultime novità mondiali in fatto di libri e spettacoli, captare qualsiasi messaggio che altri abbiano voluto lasciare per noi o per tutta la grande famiglia degli adepti, canalizzare il nostro ozio o analizzare il nostro oroscopo, scommettere alla corsa dei cavalli, accedere in tutti quei posti che ci interessano, come visitare un museo o vedere una rappresentazione teatrale o ascoltare in diretta un concerto che si sta tenendo nell'altro lato del pianeta, conoscere i termini di un'opzione politica o scegliere gli

esercizi ginnici che desideriamo praticare per ridurre la nostra curva della felicità» (Atienza 128). Il capriccio individuale e la sistematicità tecnologica si compendiano secondo un ordine di fattori non più armonizzati fra loro da una successione o da una congruenza valutativa. Le impressioni, che la contemperanza di innumerevoli apporti informativi determina, non possono essere a loro volta comunicate con l'immediatezza e la familiarità del passato, ma soggiacciono a una individuale elaborazione perché, se necessario, siano introdotte nelle piste informatiche dopo che i codici espressivi e le caratteristiche dei diversi programmi si siano armonizzati fra loro. La cosiddetta solitudine dell'*homo telematicus* è arguita come tale dal punto di vista di uno spettatore disimpegnato, di colui che ambirebbe penetrare metaforicamente nei meandri della mente umana per saggiarne le reazioni ed evidenziarne gli effetti. In realtà, anche la solitudine, così come si evince dalla tradizione letteraria, è interconnessa con l'arteriosa proliferazione degli antidoti depressivi: a ogni impressione corrisponde un'altra impressione di segno contrario.

La caratteristica fondamentale della dimensione telematica è la sua controvertibilità: tutto ciò che è rappresentabile può essere facilmente vanificato dal suo opposto o da una variante dello stesso, che non provochi la sensibilità o non susciti evocazioni, memorazioni, ricordi, che abbiano relazione con il «remoto passato», con il tempo nel quale alla mente è affidato il compito di collegare la «catena degli esseri» con i suoi improbabili significati. La trasformazione del pianeta in una immensa «zona di servizio» suggerisce il proposito di individuare quali sono i soggetti e quali sono gli oggetti che realizzano o animano la rappresentazione. Sebbene la trama delle comunicazioni sia così fitta da consentire qualsiasi manifestazione del desiderio, non si può non rilevare che alcune aree del pianeta beneficiano per così dire di un grado di autonomia gestionale che le altre aree non hanno. Il «villaggio globale» di Herbert Marshall McLuhan è diviso in due ambiti: quello dei privilegiati, che possono assistere in ogni momento a ciò che accade nel mondo, e quello dei diseredati, che fanno parte occasionalmente delle tematiche della rappresentazione. Il privilegio consiste quindi nell'essere dalla parte di qua della macchina da presa e la discriminazione consiste nell'essere ritratti come fenomeni naturali dalla stessa macchina da presa. Il macchinismo industriale, dopo il fallimento e il declino dei millenarismi ideologici, è responsabile dell'ultima, consistente, suddivisione del mondo. Ed è, grazie o a causa di questa divisione, che ogni fenomeno d'intolleranza o d'insofferenza etnica, religiosa, istituzionale viene addebitato allo squilibrio economico del pianeta. La strategia impiegata per superare tale squilibrio comporta l'attivazione di complessi meccanismi compensativi del semplice aiuto in termini monetari. La programmazione mondiale per fronteggiare i focolai d'insofferenza, che continuamente infiammano le aree meno protette dall'equa utilizzazione delle risorse, implica la consapevolezza di uno scriteriato sfruttamento delle capacità realizzatrici di una parte considerevole della popolazione del pianeta. Le risorse, che costituiscono il patrimonio naturale dei popoli periferici, vengono sfruttate dai popoli egemoni, i quali sono anche i responsabili dell'attivazione del consenso, cioè dello scenario delle comunicazioni. «Così com'è previsto dallo schema generale che pretende dominarci, un piano disegnato per conseguire il potere assoluto sul pianeta necessita il controllo di tutte le contingenze che possano contribuire a consolidare tale dominio senza che neppure una sfugga alla vigilanza che deve ottenere che nulla si attui né che nulla si sviluppi al di fuori delle istanze dell'ente controllore. Il nostro sistema lo ha quasi raggiunto, il che suppone che il suo dominio assoluto, tanto a livello generale quanto a livello individuale,

è prossimo a realizzarsi. Se ciò avverrà, la nostra crisi esistenziale avrà toccato il fondo e il mondo si troverà prossimamente in condizione di accettare senza opporre resistenza il Nuovo Ordine preconizzato dal liberalismo selvaggio, che si va appropriando del pianeta» (Atienza 153). La cosiddetta omogeneizzazione non è, in effetti, una realtà e tanto meno un programma d'attuazione. È piuttosto una manifestazione algebrica, un modo di intendere il percorso della storia come alternativa alla vanificazione degli impegni assunti dai centri dei poteri decisionali (prevalentemente economici) nel contesto della transizione dalla realtà ideologica e dei regimi a quella della corsa telematica: nel profilo del nuovo ordine sociale s'intravede una notazione empirica, che sconfinata nell'entropia, nel disordine naturale, tanto più incisivo quanto più bisognoso di forze contudenti.

La sicurezza, che la elaborazione dottrina rinviene – da Niccolò Machiavelli a Thomas Hobbes, a John Locke, a Jean-Jacques Rousseau – nella disquisizione, nell'argomentazione e quindi nell'accordo, viene meno per lasciar adito a uno «stato di necessità», nel quale soltanto il feticismo (l'acquisizione e la strumentalizzazione degli artefatti) può costituire un antidoto o un freno. Il primitivismo, contenuto nelle forme espressive e rappresentative del tecnicismo, rinuncia per così dire a tutte le mediazioni – ivi incluso, ovviamente, il linguaggio articolato, l'espressione – e rigenera come codici di comunicazione gli algoritmi, i cripticismi del passato. Una nuova corrente sapienziale insidia le ondulazioni di frequenza dei discorsi argomentati, spesso pleonastici, con i quali la letteratura transenna gli aspetti discricati dell'esistenza e li consegna alla perturbata consapevolezza dei lettori, dei traduttori, di quanti sono in grado di agevolare il compito dello scrittore, dell'artista, impegnato a dare una consistenza simbolica anche agli interstizi dell'esperienza. La vicenda umana tende a estraniarsi dall'esemplarità con la quale, quasi necessariamente, sarà compendiata nei codici espressivi della telematica. L'ideario dell'immediato futuro si conforma con le prerogative della comunicazione, che ambisce a rimuovere gli ostacoli della incomunicabilità mediante l'iniziazione a una religione panica, che raccorda e sintetizza brani dell'esperienza individuale perché possano fungere da stilemi espressivi a livello generale. Nel frattempo s'interconnettono con le istanze globali le proposte dei movimenti religiosi a carattere prevalentemente millenaristico. «Questi movimenti – inclusi quelli che si considerano come pericolosi manipolatori delle coscienze – si proclamano oppositori dell'utilitarismo ideologico e del problematico progresso proposto dal liberalismo e propongono una pratica dell'esistenza, che sostengono essere più sintonica con quanto reclama la parte più pura dell'essere umano, anche se nella maggior parte degli individui rimane allo stato di latenza» (Atienza 154). L'emancipazione dal Nuovo Sistema Globale comporta l'accettazione dello stesso e la perpetuazione delle sue forme di condizionamento operativo ed espressivo. L'umanità è chiamata da un demone eversore ad assoggettarsi remissivamente a tutte le regole che il Sistema Globale pone in essere a seconda degli incentivi che riesce a generare. L'autonomia di giudizio risulta sempre più pregiudiziale rispetto ai termini, che si utilizzano per consentire all'apparato imprenditoriale di essere efficace e, per alcuni aspetti, salvifico. Il messianismo è incognito, non promette e non nega alcuna prospettiva, che possa modificare, seppure in parte, il modo consolidato di intendere la realtà o di presagirla le sorti.

La mancanza di una linea di indirizzo e l'inedita condizione dell'irregolarità di tutte le iniziative comporta l'accettazione di una filosofia delle incertezze, che promette nell'immediatezza il soddisfacimento di tutte le aspettative più impellenti delle

generazioni contemporanee. L'improbabile è il remoto, il passato e il presente meno manifesto di quello che pretestuosamente viene indicato come già passato, già consumato. L'esperienza dell'attualità concerne tutte le possibili manifestazioni dell'esistenza con l'unica, drammatica, alternativa, che s'identifica con la sua stessa vanificazione. Il «vuoto pneumatico» che si addensa nelle coscienze e che le rende retrattili a ogni anfibia sollecitazione fa pensare a un momento aurorale, a una iniziazione collettiva da un demiurgo metallico che, per ora, si nasconde nelle pieghe delle adunanze, dei raduni, dei *meeting*: di tutte quelle forme di associazione nelle quali la protesta si trasforma nel mito canoro dell'*homo oeconomicus*, che rivendica qualcosa senza averne la piena consapevolezza.

Il rivendicazionismo, infatti, prescinde quasi integralmente dalle postulazioni concettuali per assumere significati liminari e ultimativi in merito alle condizioni elementari dell'esistenza: quando gruppi di lavoratori, ormai quasi tutti impegnati in imprese tecnologicamente sofisticate, decidono di rivendicare l'applicazione di una norma contrattuale o il rispetto di un diritto acquisito, nella manifestazione di protesta si valgono di slogan che fanno riferimento alla loro condizione di sfruttati, sfrattati, pregiudicati. Fra i motivi, razionalmente redimibili dalla fragranza sloganistica, s'inerpicano sempre espressioni nevralgiche, che fanno riferimento alle mimesi del potere. Essi esprimono, non tanto esplicitamente quanto enfiteuticamente, le ragioni che perseguono deformando finzionicamente l'«avversario». Le frasi che adottano fanno pensare ai disegni di George Grosz, alle figure allegoriche dell'autoritarismo, dell'ottusa arroganza del potere tutorio ai tempi del fascismo e del nazismo europei. Lo slogan modifica il contenuto della dizione, non tanto per rendere più palese la causa determinante, quanto piuttosto per soddisfare il desiderio di irridere tutte le forme di manifestazione occulta del potere. Ed è questa inconscia tendenza alla derisione di tutto ciò che non può essere contenuto nelle coordinate mentali dell'*homo oeconomicus* che facilita il consenso e al contempo il discredito di tutti i sistemi normativi e decisionali. La stravaganza consiste nel conferire alla protesta un tono meno coerente con la richiesta settoriale e più aperta all'insoddisfazione – più o meno latente – generalizzata. Le marce, i cortei, le occupazioni, le postazioni sono moniti per un processo verbale, che generalmente viene rimandato, se non sfocia nell'aperto diverbio o addirittura nella sollevazione. La rivolta non può essere spiegata, dialettizzata: si serve di poche cifre espressive, nelle quali gli iniziati o gli adepti si riconoscono e agiscono di conseguenza. Un sentimento ancestrale riedita il primigenio della specie e lo rende per così dire solvibile con il principio vitale, che le culture si propongono – da sempre – di neutralizzare razionalizzandolo. L'influenza propagandistica appiana i contrasti perché li proietta in un illusorio regno dei fini, della cui realizzazione sono responsabili, non soltanto i gruppi (economicamente e politicamente) egemoni, ma anche quelli «periferici». L'identità indifferenziata di chi invia un messaggio e di chi lo riceve si evince dall'insondabilità concettuale del contenuto dello stesso messaggio, «messo a fuoco» sull'onda emotiva di uno stato d'animo collettivo. La propaganda preordina tentacolarmente le reazioni di quanti o si affidano alle sue risorse o se ne servono o le metabolizzano nell'intento, più o meno consapevole, di far parte così di una nuova genia, di quell'immensa moltitudine di esegeti del «nuovo», che non si profila all'orizzonte come tale, ma come pura e semplice necessità.

L'intesa fra gruppi eterogenei, sia pure sotto il profilo ideologico, si esplica nella trascendenza, nella proiezione metastorica dei significati delle parole impiegate per

designare il disagio dell'umanità nel mondo contemporaneo. La nuova teologia ha una componente idolatrica, che non ricusa la ragione, almeno quello stilema della ragione, che giustifica sia le coerenze e sia, per converso, le incoerenze, che si manifestano nell'esperienza individuale e comunitaria. La nuova teologia ricusa l'*horror vacui*, sebbene lo contempi nelle sue terapeutiche determinazioni: l'agire con continuità, l'oziare con remissività, l'espandersi dell'essere in tutte le dimensioni del pianeta (metaforicamente rappresentato dal turismo di massa) contrastano con ogni alternativa contraria. Il nulla, che è una categoria della filosofia greca e dell'antropologia romana, se può essere raffigurato nella società contemporanea con i ritrovati dell'arte e della scienza, s'identifica con una metafora, con una forma del vuoto mentale, che non trova alcun riferimento concettuale per essere espresso e rappresentato. Il Maligno, che nel Medioevo svolge un'opera di dissuasione così avvincente da essere continuamente assimilato all'incubo di Dio, nella società contemporanea si palesa mitigato nei suoi propositi e soprattutto effigiato in modo improprio o approssimato. L'orrore e la disperazione sono sostituiti dal disagio e dall'insoddisfazione, intesi come componenti chemioterapiche di una diagnosi in apparenza radicale. Gli oscuri presagi del lontano passato si presentano nell'attualità come semplici congetture, destinate a essere confermate o confutate dalla quotidianità. L'immensa ragione storica è quella dell'*Ulisse* di James Joyce, che si stempera e si conclude in una giornata. L'entità temporale, contratta nelle dimensioni di un giorno, implica la compressione sintattica, linguistica, espressiva. La decomposizione e la ricomposizione (forzosa) della disquisizione, della dialogazione e dell'argomentazione dimostrano la difficoltà di rendere la narrazione acquisibile con la tecnica testamentaria del passato. Quanto più ristretto è il circuito temporale, entro il quale si svolge l'azione, tanto più impietose e inclementi sono le parole, indotte dal bradisima concettuale a svolgere un'azione sussultorea in grado di scompaginare l'insieme narrativo per accreditare paradossalmente un'enfasi afonica. La narrazione sperimentale, se efficace, in prima istanza ricusa l'autenticità di quanto rappresenta e, in seconda istanza, lo ricupera a futura memoria. In altri termini, l'implosione dialogica e la sovrimpressioni tematica sono utilizzate per rendere, con il lessico dell'uso corrente, figurazioni dell'indicibile o dell'inesprimibile in una fase archeologicamente epifanica. L'*Ulisse* fa pensare a un evento che può essere accaduto o può ancora accadere sebbene la sillabazione delle sue componenti esoteriche non si siano ancora (ben) delineate. La narrativa fluisce come un torrente equinoziale, che media fra la cripticità silente e l'assordante gestazione di nuovi suoni, di recondite reminiscenze emotive, tenute a battesimo dal destro del visionario, cioè dello scrittore.

L'inganno della scrittura è nell'esorbitante variazione dei suoi costrutti espressivi, nelle sue congetture foniche, semantiche, nella sua estrinseca esplicazione di quanto si manifesta nella mente dell'osservatore della realtà quando è indotto dalle circostanze a parlare, a formulare concetti, a esprimere idee, che siano in grado di autogenerarsi senza che provvidenzialmente abbiano un riferimento o un referente organico. Il terminale della narrazione dell'*Ulisse* non si rinvia nella trama dei fatti, delle vicende, degli stati d'animo, che rappresenta, ma in una apoteosica impresa istintiva, che ne compenetri altri non ancora enucleati e difficilmente congetturabili con le parole con le quali normalmente si esplica l'esperienza. Il letargo della coscienza e l'iperattività si compendiano in uno spettacolo di suoni, allegorie, pretese finzioniche, che simulano le confessioni, gli accordi fra persone-personaggi, propensi a disperdersi nei rivoli dell'inconscio collettivo.

La conversione del microcosmo nel macrocosmo costituisce la fonte della responsabilità, che è individuale e collettiva insieme, perché si evince dalle vicende nelle quali la spazialità e la temporalità si compendiano. «La società umana, alla quale si fa riferimento in questo contesto, ha un destino interattivo. A grandi linee, rileviamo questa funzione nella città, nei paesi, nei villaggi, nella massa continentale e nella totalità del pianeta. Facciamo parte di un insieme differenziato di sistemi di vita e siamo, al tempo stesso, un sistema intermedio composto da parti intimamente correlate. Siamo una entità che coincide con ciò che il pensiero tradizionale ha chiamato microcosmo, comparandola con il macrocosmo, che presuppone la totalità dell'universo. E, in questo livello microcosmico, abbiamo il dovere – la responsabilità – di conoscere il nostro intorno e assumere con il massimo grado di conoscenza che non sia possibile a tutte le identità – istituzioni, discipline e comportamenti – che fanno parte dello stesso paradigma al quale ognuno di noi appartiene e che, nella sua espressione superiore, costituisce l'intero pianeta. In effetti, il sistema ora in crisi, per esercitare il suo dominio, ha avuto come maggiore alleato la rottura di questa obbligatorietà. Con la scusa del cosiddetto progresso, proclamato ineludibile, ha suddiviso la conoscenza e ha creato tutta una serie di compartimenti stagno per il sapere e l'agire, fino al punto che essi costituiscono delle monadi isolate di una coscienza atomizzata o, meglio, di molteplici, specifiche coscienze che nulla o poco credono di dovere alle altre manifestazioni della coscienza che le circonda» (Atienza 203). La settorializzazione del sapere e l'atomizzazione delle coscienze riducono il perimetro della consapevolezza intesa nel suo significato di responsabilità, che si evince da una concezione generale, da una visione delle cose e del percorso dell'esperienza. La «fine della storia», intesa nel suo significato metaforico di assenza di memoria e di responsabilità, comporta l'adesione sempre più incresciosa e spericolata al «particolare», al frammento, ai percorsi limitati della conoscenza, per lasciare ampi spazi all'imprenditorialità, che si realizza, almeno anzifizionicamente, in una sorta di terra di nessuno, nella quale peraltro, sempre anzifizionicamente, non dovrebbe incontrare ostacoli o resistenze.

Il frammento ha l'apocalittica consistenza di un indizio, di un segno del declino di una vicenda umana, che si conclude nel momento stesso nel quale si tenta di tenerla in vita con il ricorso a una terapia di rianimazione. La poetica della seconda metà del Novecento predilige il frammento alle ampie elaborazioni della prima metà: questa si declina nelle volute esoteriche di Ezra Pound e nelle visioni allegoriche di T.S. Eliot. L'importanza del frammento si rende più evidente dopo il secondo conflitto mondiale, quando le schegge della guerra feriscono le coscienze in contumacia, quando il dialogo si smorza nel monologo o nel vaniloquio di Bertold Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco. L'occasionalità assume un rilievo imprevisto e inedito: tutta la narrazione si presagisce sincopata dal senso di colpa: quello che ispira le pagine del *Tamburo di latta* di Günther Grass. Nel frammento la ricostruzione della realtà avviene per gradi, fra loro non necessariamente coerenti. Negli interstizi fra un frammento e l'altro a ognuno è dato di immaginare l'irrealtà, che è il corrispettivo poetico dell'antimateria e di tutte le antiparticelle del microcosmo. La correlazione, che si stabilisce fra il microcosmo e il macrocosmo, è retta dall'occasionalità, dall'entropia latente in ogni sistema energetico complesso. La segmentazione dell'esistenza discende dalla obnubilazione a fini conoscitivi di tutto il macrocosmo. Nella scienza e nell'arte contemporanee confluiscono queste due forze contrapposte: da una parte, la visione sempre più ampia dell'universo fisico; da un'altra parte, la concezione sempre più ristretta, se non addirittura più angusta,

dell'emisfero individuale. Il punto di sutura è una sorta di *hybris*, di allegra scompagine del patrimonio acquisito e di appannata concezione delle facoltà acquisitive dei fruttoriosservatori dell'esperienza mediatica, in virtù della quale apparentemente lo scenario cosmico e quello sociale sono in sintonia. L'idea del viaggio, che vanifica le affezioni in funzione delle apprensioni costituisce una variabile tanto più instabile quanto maggiore è il grado di insolvenza degli strumenti tecnologici inventati per appagare il «gradimento», la propensione ludica, il desiderio del giuoco e dell'intrattenimento. Il viaggio di iniziazione sociale – il *grand tour* – del Settecento si trasforma nel «merigiare pallido e assorto» di montaliana memoria: nel camuffare l'interesse per un impegno, nel perlustrare in comitiva le regioni popolose e impervie del pianeta alla ricerca di uno stato di grazia, che naturalmente è lungi dal manifestarsi. L'epopea del viaggio organizzato, di gruppo, esalta la solidarietà passeggera, la notazione di colore, il gesto manierato o gli scarti di umore di una comunità esigua e a tempo determinato.

L'incrocio delle lingue, l'innesto dei modi di dire e d'intendere concorrono a configurare una *koiné*, che si perde nel tempo o che rimane immacolata nella filmografia, nell'archivio di quanti si propongono di esibirla in un'occasione fortuita e forse improbabile. Il viaggio del ricordo si trasforma nel vagito della memorazione. Le impreviste difficoltà e le scomodità delle trasferte spesso neutralizzano l'iniziale entusiasmo e la conseguente nostalgia. Nelle conversazioni, che s'intessono durante il viaggio, si profilano o si nascondono le personalità, le vicende vissute o quelle che si adombrano come ancora realizzabili. Rimane l'accento di un codice espressivo, surrogato dai gesti, che non soddisfa le esigenze presenti e che semmai fa capolino nel ricordo come una notazione perduta nelle ipertrofiche esigenze dell'attualità. Si discorre, durante il viaggio, senza la cognizione del tempo, con la consapevolezza di non impegnare né la veridicità né la verifica di quanto si afferma. Il discorso diventa così una confessione senza costruito, un fallimentare esercizio della fantasia, che non è chiamata a rispondere né delle proprie affermazioni né delle proprie negazioni. Una sorta di laconicità avvolge le parole e le rende in traducibili nei contesti nei quali, suscitando la memorazione, potrebbero influenzare i pensieri, generare le suggestioni, che apparentano o dividono terapeuticamente gli esseri mortali. Il viaggio commissionato presso le agenzie, organizzato in modo che l'eterogeneità delle presenze non costituisca un nocumento per quanti vi partecipano con l'intenzione di abbandonare il luogo della consuetudine per dedicarsi a uno scautismo comodo, rassicurante e predicatorio. L'omogeneizzazione di gruppo è esigua e precaria, ma sostenuta dal pericolo che si corre insieme e insidiata dai benefici che si ricevono individualmente in modo sottilmente competitivo e perfino subdolo. I viaggi contemporanei adombrano le confraternite del passato con un più basso livello di vocazione da parte degli adepti. Il loro percorso è calcolato al millimetro e la minuto: l'inizio compendia la fine, che s'immanentizza o nel desiderio di rinnovare un'analoga esperienza o nel proposito di immunizzarsi dal virus dell'evasione. L'abbandono del luogo di origine o di residenza significa anche la dimenticanza, seppure momentanea, non soltanto degli obblighi propri della sopravvivenza, ma anche dell'affabulazione necessaria per renderla accettabile. Le consuetudini espressive riducono il loro raggio d'inferenza allo stretto necessario (agli accompagnatori e a coloro che siano in grado di intenderle), mentre si corrompono, almeno in parte, per cogestire quelle «frasi d'insieme», con le quali sia consentito assoggettare il consenso o suscitare il dissenso senza pregiudicare l'esito del viaggio. Questo, in definitiva, si risolve in una serie di accorgimenti verbali, con i quali si

connotano gli eventi per renderli in qualche modo accettabili.

L'ottimismo è pertanto mitigato dalle inevitabili intemperanze verbali, dalla suscettibilità di alcuni viaggiatori nei confronti di altri. Il contrafforte emotivo del viaggiatore s'identifica con la sua solitudine o con l'umor nero, con la drammatica constatazione dell'incomprensibilità del genere umano: di quell'entità fenomenica, che adotta il linguaggio, perfeziona le lingue, le utilizza per rendere maggiormente coesa l'identità comunitaria, e che, per converso, ne riconosce l'inefficacia nei momenti più significativi e drammatici dell'esperienza. L'inanità degli sforzi, impiegati per assicurare al linguaggio un empito coesivo, si estingue per così dire nel ridotto spazio di un sedile semovente, di una cabina, di una camera d'albergo, dove l'estraneità si concilia con l'atmosfera ombratile e tentacolare del purgatorio dell'esistenza, dell'attesa di un esito indiziario dell'impegno profuso per conferirle un senso. Il viaggio ha infatti delle zone d'ombra, che possono essere popolate dai fantasmi della mente. La fantasia imitativa proietta sui finestrini, negli specchi, nelle ante delle finestre le immagini che allietano il ricordo o quelle che perseguono l'angoscia e lo smarrimento. L'immaginazione si esercita a inventare profili e tracciati di improbabili esistenze nell'illusione di esserne il garante. La fantasia rimuove le pregiudiziali conoscitive, le prevenzioni sociali, e si accredita il compito di fustigare la specie umana perché difforme dallo stilema con il quale soggiace al giudizio. La prerogativa della libera esplicazione della confessione per immagini mentali consiste nel rendere perentorio ogni atteggiamento che si ritenga ineludibile per il buon esito dell'esperienza comunitaria, sia pure di un'esperienza comunitaria illusoria, che il viaggio, quale categoria dell'incontro dialogico, può trasformare in autenticamente realizzabile. L'attualità si configura così come il sortilegio prestato dalle parole alla sindrome della consequenzialità. «L'ombra, per Jung, è composta da tutti gli impulsi, i desideri, le tentazioni e le speranze, che il nostro intorno sociale e morale ci obbliga a respingere o a tacitare fin dagli albori della nostra coscienza personale. Riflette un insieme di repressioni, che abbiamo immagazzinato e che crediamo di aver dimenticato nella parte più recondita dell'incoscienza, per presentare di fronte alla società una immagine di noi stessi in conformità con quanto si spera da noi. Facciamo parte di una collettività omologata da leggi che, non soltanto minacciano coloro che le trasgrediscono, ma soprattutto si delineano come imprescindibili e istintivamente giuste nel contesto della nostra esistenza e della nostra convivenza, senza che qualcuno si azzardi a domandarsi chi beneficiano in pregiudizio di una comunità umana che non è in grado di valutare quanto le succede intorno» (Atienza 223). Il conformismo sociale è il corrispettivo delle divagazioni mentali, agevolate spesso dal viaggio, sia reale, sia immaginario, che consentono di sottrarsi illusoriamente all'asseveratività della norma e alla elaborazione e formulazione della stessa. I codici di condotta e i codici espressivi si conciliano nell'affabulazione, in quell'area intermedia, nella quale il convincimento comunque ottenuto – anche mediante le suggestioni e i condizionamenti subliminari – raggiunge il livello della consensualità e della legittimazione.

Il viaggio ha anche una connotazione terapeutica: serve per ridurre i conflitti interiori mimetizzati nei ridotti circuiti espositivi, dei quali ogni viaggiatore dispone nei lunghi e medi percorsi effettuati sotto l'interattiva vigilanza degli altri. In quanto palestra del pregiudizio, la mobilità tempera tutte le affezioni psicologiche con le aspettative salvifiche della condizione umana. «Liberare i fantasmi dell'ombra, dopo averne riconosciuta la naturalezza dei contenuti, significa liberare noi stessi, anche se quest'atto può apparire una caduta libera nel pozzo dell'irrealtà. Ma in questa liberazione si fonda la

nostra unica possibilità di sottrarci ai condizionamenti e di collaborare alla liberazione del nostro intorno. Conoscere la natura delle nostre repressioni e farne affiorare mediante un'analisi cosciente le autentiche dimensioni ci aiuterà a comprendere quelle degli altri... Ci daremo conto allora che non siamo soli. E che ci affidiamo a una corrente, che si estende per i sentieri della marginalizzazione e della desautorizzazione ufficiale da alcuni secoli. In ogni caso, oggi, senza dubbio, abbondano i solitari uniti dal comune cordone ombelicale dell'urgenza di un profondo cambiamento delle strutture mentali e morali, quale unico mezzo per tentare di trasformare anche il paradigma con il quale siamo caratterizzati» (Atienza 224). Un contributo di particolare rilievo alla responsabilità comunitaria è dato dalla compresenza nelle abitudini e nelle attitudini più diffuse, anzi, generalizzate, di un aspetto vagamente religioso (la solitudine, l'estemporaneità di alcune impressioni connesse con il viaggio), e di un aspetto irrimediabilmente laico. Il timor panico della solitudine si coniuga, infatti, con la spettacolarità canora, sonora, illusoria. La difficoltà di gestione di queste due tendenze contribuisce a rendere più fragile il tessuto connettivo dell'espressione e della rappresentazione.

L'indifferenza, che nella letteratura italiana degli anni Venti (*Gli indifferenti* di Alberto Moravia) si configura come una turbativa dovuta all'insolubilità dei problemi sociali, conseguenti alla prima guerra mondiale, nel mondo contemporaneo assume le caratteristiche di una terapia. Mentre nell'Europa del periodo che precede l'avvento del totalitarismo, l'apatia presagisce l'esorcismo di un demiurgo, capace di risollevare le sorti dell'umanità (o almeno di una parte di essa), alla fine del secondo millennio, essa si presenta come una protesta, ricorda il dissenso diffuso in tutto il pianeta, nell'intento di provocare la reazione dei «signori del benessere» perché contemperino le spietate leggi della competizione economica con quelle meno enfatiche ed esaltanti della solidarietà. L'apatia fomenta pertanto l'autoritarismo, la reazione che i gruppi economicamente e politicamente compromessi intendono perseguire per contenere gli effetti per loro devastanti di quanti s'indignano remissivamente. I totalitarismi si arrogano il diritto di scuotere le coscienze, di indirizzarle al conseguimento di un terminale che le nobiliti. Il fascino, che esso esercita sulle coscienze, è pregiudizialmente quello della certezza, dell'affidabilità della forza, dell'organizzazione, dell'espansione e del dominio. Il totalitarismo è una forza demoniaca, che non esonera nessuno dall'azione: l'apatia e l'indifferenza sono dei reati, che vanno perseguiti e puniti esemplarmente. La propaganda è foriera di avventure: i guerrieri, incolonnati e mobilitati da un ectoplasma, si contendono il destino del mondo. La cultura che rende possibile una scenografia del genere ha un fondamento di sistematicità e organicità universalmente riconosciute.

Mentre nei paesi nei quali la trasformazione dell'economia agraria nell'economia industriale stenta a realizzarsi il futurismo di Filippo Maria Marinetti ha presa sull'immaginario collettivo (con gli *slogan* sulla velocità, sulla macchina, sulle parole in libertà), nell'Europa continentale il meccanismo espressivo, la propaganda, sembrano portare alle estreme conseguenze il contenuto messianico di una cultura, che ambisce ad armonizzare il mito delle origini con la razionalità più assoluta. Il pensiero di Friedrich Nietzsche e la scienza delle energie latenti nel cosmo e nell'intimità della persona, rispettivamente rappresentate da Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud e Richard Wagner, si possono paradossalmente rappresentare anche con un ectoplasma, che l'abilità cinematografica di Charlie Chaplin rende efficacemente anche sullo schermo. Le parole si contendono un terreno di espiazione e di espansione come le legioni romane si contendevano i territori da federare nel sistema imperiale. L'immagine e la parola si

agglutinano in una ostinata resistenza a ogni forma di interrelazione, che le renda refrattarie, non soltanto alla contaminazione, ma anche alla complementarità e alla corrispondenza. Il proclama, a suo tempo rivolto alle nazioni europee da madame de Staël, riguardo alla provvidenziale esigenza delle traduzioni, viene meno e si profila, con la cosiddetta «pulizia etnica», l'omogeneizzazione della cultura e della sua rappresentazione simbolica. L'egoismo di facciata si assiepa sui bastioni delle grandi potenze, che intercedono presso gli idoli dei predoni e dei prevaricatori di un ritrovato Olimpo orgiastico e tentacolare.

L'omeostasi del male scompagina le regioni, prima dell'Europa, e poi del mondo intero. La propaganda sottace le ragioni che la sottendono e amplia fonicamente – come osserva Aldous Huxley – il suo raggio d'inferenza fino a suggestionare oltre misura le coscienze inquiete. Un incentivo che continua a influenzare ancora oggi, alla fine del millennio, la stabilità emotiva delle comunità economicamente consolidate, soprattutto per l'avvento dei flussi immigratori dalle aree più povere del pianeta. La propaganda, anche quella meno ideologicamente influenzata, costituisce un fattore discriminante fra chi ha e chi non ha, fra quanti sono in grado di inserirsi nel mondo del lavoro e quindi della produttività e del consumo e chi ne è escluso. L'esclusione dai processi produttivi è sempre fomite di perturbazioni sociali, che nel XX secolo si camuffano da intolleranza etnica e da persecutività religiosa. Il rivendicazionismo nazionalistico trova il suo terreno di cultura nella protesta di coloro che ambiscono a differenziarsi dal contesto geopolitico ed economico nel quale tradizionalmente gravitano. Dalla crisi del colonialismo della fine della seconda guerra mondiale alla deflagrazione ideologica e istituzionale delle federazioni o consociazioni del socialismo reale, la frammentazione della carta geopolitica del pianeta trova un antidoto nel consociativismo più o meno legale di natura economica. Le aree del dollaro, del marco, dello yen, ecc. influenzano le «unioni» istituzionali in modo da garantire l'internazionalizzazione dell'economia e l'ampliamento del mercato. Al nazionalismo delle istituzioni politiche, che si emancipano dalla gravitazione ideologica, economica e militare del passato, fa riscontro una sorta di «convergenza d'interessi», che prescinde dalle consolidate propensioni regionalistiche. L'impresa economica, nella sua globalità, cerca di rimuovere tutti gli ostacoli che si frappongono alla sua estrinsecazione. La propaganda disciplina per così dire la dinamica e il volume delle risorse in modo che non si determinino, preventivamente alla loro attuazione concreta, delle resistenze tali da sfociare in focolai d'insofferenze o in veri e propri conflitti regionali. La propaganda di questo tipo non vaticina *sic et simpliciter* l'acquisizione di un prodotto né promuove soltanto un tipo di atteggiamento di fronte agli eventi sociali, ma piuttosto si esplica nella stessa dinamica politica all'interno dei paesi per così dire non egemoni, anche se non ne sono esonerati quelli ad alto livello d'industrializzazione e di sviluppo. Il declino degli apriorismi riguarda, sia l'esperienza conoscitiva, sia la pratica attività. L'aspetto più inquietante della propensione cognitiva della società contemporanea è quello relativo all'incoerenza, all'utilizzazione della *praxis* come una categoria, che si sottrae a qualsiasi valutazione morale o etica, pur di conseguire i condizionamenti capaci di essere oggettivati, di tradursi cioè in componenti del mercato. L'operatività può assoggettarsi ad alcune norme soltanto nello stato iniziale, ma non può sottoporsi ad alcun apprezzamento probativo allo stato finale, quando cioè s'identifica con la produzione. Il successo o meno della produzione non si armonizza necessariamente con i criteri ispiratori della comunità che la realizza e tanto meno con i registri espressivi che la giustificano. La crisi delle lingue nazionali o come si dice la

Babele delle lingue è propedeutica alla globalizzazione economica, che si serve della sobrietà delle lingue veicolari, standardizzandone, per motivi pratici, la stessa capacità evolutiva e creatrice.

Dalla fine del secondo conflitto mondiale, la creazione di una sorta di *koiné* idiomatica, che faccia salva la preponderanza delle lingue veicolari, è cointeressente con il processo di «uniformazione economica» del pianeta. «Nella misura in cui il processo seguiva il suo corso naturale,» scrive Noam Chomsky «tese verso la globalizzazione dell'economia con le relative conseguenze: la globalizzazione del modello di società dei due terzi proprio del Terzo Mondo, coinvolgendo anche il nucleo delle economie industriali e un "governo mondiale *de facto*" che rappresenta gli interessi delle transnazionali e le istituzioni finanziarie che gestiscono l'economia internazionale. Frattanto, il sistema mondiale si converte in una forma di "mercantilismo imprenditoriale", con la centralizzazione della gestione e la pianificazione delle interazioni commerciali nel quadro dell'internazionalismo liberale, elaborato su misura delle necessità del potere e dei benefici, sovvenzionato e aiutato dall'autorità statale. Le "nazioni povere" e il Terzo Mondo Interno, che i potenti possono disfare a volontà, si vedono obbligati a seguire le dottrine del neoliberalismo» (Chomsky 243-44). La privatizzazione dell'impresa economica tende a trasformare paradossalmente lo Stato in un «comitato d'affari». Mentre la disaffezione per la pratica democratica, come le elezioni politiche, tende a diffondersi, la partecipazione collegiale a tutti gli organismi economici e amministrativi è massiva. L'egemonia economica sulla politica diventa sempre più incisiva al punto di spostare gradualmente l'assetto propedeutico della legittimazione e del consenso dal piano ideologico e disquisitivo a quello compromissorio e asseverativo, promosso dalla pubblicità e dalla propaganda, quali antesignane di un processo acquisitivo, sia intellettuale, sia pratico, che si esaurisce nel consumo degli artefatti e dei prodotti da *status symbol*. «Le regole fondamentali dell'ordine mondiale sono quelle di sempre: l'impero della legge per il debole e quello della forza per il forte; i principi della "razionalità economica" per i deboli, il potere e l'intervento dello Stato per i forti. Come nel passato, il privilegio e il potere non si sottomettono volontariamente al controllo popolare o alla disciplina del mercato e, pertanto, tendono a debilitare la vera democrazia e adattare i precetti del mercato alle loro specifiche necessità. La cultura della rispettabilità continua a svolgere la sua funzione tradizionale: rifare la storia passata e presente secondo gli interessi del potere, esaltare gli alti principi che sponano noi e i nostri superiori, dissimulare le manchevolezze della storia connotandole come buone intenzioni sbagliate... Chi non è disposto ad accettare questo ruolo, ha da svolgere un ruolo tradizionale: sfiduciare e smascherare l'autorità illegittima e impegnarsi per debilitarla e ampliare l'ambito della libertà e della giustizia» (Chomsky 334)¹. La politica degli artefici del benessere, teorizzata da Adam Smith in un'epoca ancora soggiogata dall'idea del progresso per l'avvento della rivoluzione industriale, si giustifica, nel mondo contemporaneo, con la generalizzazione dei criteri produttivi, cioè con la globalizzazione economica. L'esercizio dei diritti tradizionali non può contrastare l'itinerario dell'impresa produttiva, sia sotto il profilo normativo, sia sotto il profilo geopolitico. La trasformazione del mondo s'identifica con la sua artificiosità. Le soluzioni economiche e finanziarie predisposte per garantire un sostegno all'impresa produttiva sono contraddittorie perché sono volte, indifferentemente, a fare la

¹ Vedansi: Castells; Aguirre e Ramonet; Barón; Cansino; Alford.

fortuna dei governi totalitari o a incoraggiare le istanze equitative dei paesi democratici. «Un nuovo mondo si sta delineando in questa fine del millennio.» scrive Manuel Castells «Ha avuto origine nella coincidenza storica, verso la fine degli anni sessanta e la metà degli anni settanta, di tre processi indipendenti: la rivoluzione della tecnologia dell'informazione; la crisi economica tanto del capitalismo quanto dello stalinismo e delle sue successive ristrutturazioni; la manifestazione di movimenti sociali e culturali, come l'antiautoritarismo, la difesa dei diritti umani, il femminismo, l'ecologismo. L'interazione di questi processi e le reazioni che hanno scatenato hanno creato una nuova struttura sociale dominante, la società rete; una nuova economia, l'economia informazionale/globale; e una nuova cultura, la cultura della virtualità reale. La logica implicita in questa economia, in questa società e in questa cultura soggiace all'azione sociale e alle istituzioni di un mondo interdipendente» (Gregory, *passim*). La rivoluzione tecnologica dell'informazione provoca un profondo sommovimento economico, che prescinde dalle condizioni nelle quali i popoli e i singoli detengono sempre più virtualmente le loro caratteristiche distintive. La progressiva perdita dell'identità nazionale e individuale non pregiudica il processo produttivo e soprattutto non trova rispondenza nel livello di benessere, che invece connota le società tradizionali. Le nuove tecnologie generano un capitalismo flessibile e dinamico. L'informazionalismo si configura come una linea di tendenza, caratterizzata da una alquanto latente irresponsabilità sul piano legale e comunitario e da un forte accento competitivo, quasi fosse il preludio di una virtuale guerra di tutti contro tutti in un crescendo temporale, difficilmente contenibile negli schemi operativi della condizione umana. Il «Quarto Mondo» si fonda su una perversa connessione degli strumenti interattivi, dai quali sarebbero definitivamente esclusi i popoli, i ceti, i gruppi, che attualmente si denominano emarginati. La criminalità globale, infatti, è il risultato di tale esclusione e la sfida demoniaca lanciata dalla tecnologia all'universo civile e pacifico.

Le telecomunicazioni instaurano una rete di rapporti fra gli attori sociali che, almeno in apparenza, prescindono dai condizionamenti culturali. Le traversie e le incongruenze dell'economia finanziaria falcidiano e rivitalizzano interi settori della produzione senza che il singolo osservatore del fenomeno sia pure pienamente consapevole della sua incidenza. L'occasionalità, debitamente intercettata dai sistemi cognitivi e rappresentativi, si presenta come una giustiziera, come l'estremo retaggio dell'Olimpo pagano. La sovranità, quale categoria imperativa dell'autorevolezza, sia personale, sia statale, è definitivamente obliata. Nessuna personalità e nessuna entità pubblica rappresentano le traiettorie, sia pure immaginarie, della vicenda contemporanea.

3. L'enfasi e il presagio

L'enigma della libertà appare tanto più evidente quanto più improbabile si manifesta la sua conciliazione con l'eguaglianza. Nel 1939, Thomas Mann considera questo teorema una «questione umanitaria aperta», un impegno morale che, secondo l'espressione di Michael Walzer, rimane affidato alla riflessione e alla discussione del genere umano. *Il disagio della civiltà*, espresso nell'opera omonima di Sigmund Freud, pubblicata a Vienna nel 1929, compendia la relazione esistente fra il desiderio di agire, di dare libero corso alle pulsioni, e la necessità di regolare il comportamento individuale (mediante la repressione degli istinti) nell'ambito di norme collettivamente elaborate perché trovino la loro giustificazione nella garanzia che assicurano a tutti i membri della cosiddetta comunità civile. La lotta per il predominio naturale si attenua e si sublima nella norma,

che è fondamento della *Kultur*, intesa appunto come una traiettoria ideale che l'umanità si assicura contraddicendo perché in parte riducendo il desiderio di fruire delle occasioni e delle circostanze per così dire naturali, cioè non ancora «visitate» dalla ragione e omologate nel patrimonio dei sistemi sociali.

L'affidabilità di un rapporto così strettamente legato alla funzione applicativa della libertà e della necessità (che è, in fondo, la sicurezza) è legata a un processo di mediazione di ordine culturale (cioè spirituale). La solidarietà, infatti, non comporta l'esplicazione di un calcolo delle convenienze giacché esonera i suoi sostenitori dal protendersi verso il prossimo più bisognoso spinti dalla previsione di un beneficio non ancora quantificabile. La solidarietà nella cosiddetta società post-moderna prescinde dalle stesse valutazioni economiche o dottrinarie, che potrebbero non giustificarla, per il semplice fatto che non assume quasi mai connotazioni rilevanti: rimane uno stato d'animo prorompente dall'inquietudine di quanti non riconoscono nell'assetto geopolitico del pianeta le premesse di un equilibrio stabile. Sebbene il compromesso fra libertà individuale e stabilità sociale sia sempre *in fieri*, non si può rilevare, alle soglie del terzo millennio, che la libertà individuale costituisce il punto di riferimento per tutte le elaborazioni dottrinarie. L'esperienza – totalizzante e drammatica – di una sorta di recessione della libera determinazione a favore di una garanzia (certezza) di ordine monolitico e millenaristico è deficitaria in modo talmente evidente da enfatizzare, per converso, la *deregulation*, l'abbrivio degli osservatori della realtà, che esultano all'idea di poter convenire nella concordia, nell'univocità delle loro convinzioni, sia pure dopo aver deliberato dialogicamente di realizzare l'impresa di essere consensuali. «La voce della coscienza,» scrive Zygmunt Bauman «che è la voce della responsabilità, è percepibile solo nella discordanza di suoni dissonanti. Il consenso e l'unanimità preannunciano la tranquillità del cimitero (la "comunicazione perfetta" di Habermas, che misura la propria perfezione sulla base del consenso e dell'eliminazione del dissenso, è un altro segno mortale che propone una cura definitiva ai mali della libertà); nel cimitero del consenso universale, la responsabilità, la libertà e l'individuo esalano il loro ultimo respiro» (Bauman 15). La libertà di disquisire non presagisce, infatti, la supremazia di un'opinione o di una convinzione su di un'altra, ma la plausibilità entro limiti configurabili come mobili di entrambe. Se questa caratteristica venisse meno, il dialogo non avrebbe senso e perderebbe il suo costruito propositivo proprio in quanto ritenuto un sussidio per ogni proposizione, che ambisca a configurarsi come utile ai fini conoscitivi della comunità culturale e linguistica nella quale si esplica. «Una politica post-moderna, che aspiri alla creazione di una comunità politica vitale ha bisogno di essere guidata (come ho suggerito nelle conclusioni di *Modernity and Ambivalence*) dal triplice principio di Libertà, Differenza e Solidarietà; la solidarietà è la condizione necessaria e il contributo collettivo essenziale alla vitalità della libertà e della differenza. Nel mondo post-moderno i primi due elementi della formula hanno molti alleati, alcuni palesi e altri meno visibili. Uno dei più importanti è la forte spinta alla *deregulation* e alla "privatizzazione" esercitata dall'espansione del mercato globale. Ciò che invece il mondo post-moderno non è in grado di generare da solo – cioè senza un intervento politico – è la solidarietà; ma senza solidarietà... nessuna libertà è sicura, mentre le differenze e il tipo di "politica dell'identità" che tendono a sviluppare conducono, non di rado, a una interiorizzazione dell'oppressione, come ha sottolineato David Harvey» (Bauman 23). La solidarietà non può identificarsi con un ideale, perché in questo caso perseguirebbe obiettivi prestabiliti e utilizzabili a fini pratici e quindi per profitti privati o pubblici, né può costituire un

incentivo sociale perché trasformerebbe il «patto» o il «contratto» sociale in un istituto facoltativo se non addirittura pleonastico. Essa è pertanto la manifestazione dell'«incompiutezza» dello Stato e della condizione di incertezza dell'individuo in un mondo che si evolve apparentemente verso l'omogeneità e l'indifferenziazione. È una provvidenziale contraddizione sotto il profilo istituzionale, che però consente allo Stato di sopravvivere e di custodire per così dire il senso della testimonianza e della storia.

L'ambivalenza di Douglas Kellner si riferisce alla «costruzione e ridefinizione» dell'identità, cioè del significato biologico e legale della persona, di una corrispondente del consorzio civile prima ancora di postularsi come facente parte di una comunità sociale. Ma mentre nel passato l'identità costituisce una conquista politica e una categoria interpretativa dei dilemmi della condizione umana, nel mondo post-moderno essa assume una connotazione simbolica. Nella personalità l'individualità simula o esterna una sua vocazione protettiva mediante l'ausilio di accorgimenti concettuali o mediatici, mediante i quali sia possibile convincersi e convincere sulla necessità-opportunità di un determinato atteggiamento e di un conseguente comportamento. L'irriducibilità del foro interiore a quello esteriore continua a rafforzare la convinzione che si possano ottenere dei benefici negoziando soltanto l'individuale consenso alla realizzazione di un programma di portata collettiva. «Il principale motivo d'ansia dei tempi moderni, collegato all'identità, era la preoccupazione riguardo alla durabilità: oggi riguarda invece la possibilità di evitare ogni impegno. La modernità è costruita in acciaio e cemento. La post-modernità in plastica biodegradabile» (Bauman 28). L'individualità prescinde dalle condizioni oggettive anche se le subisce perché non è in grado di modificarle. Se le condizioni oggettive, intese come una limitazione rispetto alla libertà assoluta, non esistessero, anche l'aspirazione all'individualità verrebbe meno e si confonderebbe con le innumerevoli energie del cosmo. L'aspirazione a delimitare – a misurare – l'azione perché dia dei risultati più o meno conformi alle aspettative di chi la promuove costituisce un correttivo, se non addirittura una trasgressione a quanto istintivamente l'individuo sarebbe portato a fare. Ma anche questa previsione non trova suffragi nell'esperienza mentale e storica dell'umanità: neanche l'istinto, infatti, è dotato di uno statuto autonomo tale da configurarsi con chiarezza. L'istinto, come la ragione, trova la sua definizione nel correttivo o nella delimitazione che uno dà dell'altra e viceversa, secondo un'unità di misura – il concetto socratico, riflesso nel dialogo platonico – che è compito della *Kultur* elaborare e continuamente aggiornare per renderlo conseguente e coerente con il discorso che s'intende argomentare. Il postulato di ogni proposizione è un'intesa, prima intuitiva, poi esplicita, fra quanti intendono disquisire intorno a un argomento. E, per paradossale che possa apparire, è sempre l'argomento a giustificare e rendere comprensibile il dialogo. Il paradigma del dialogo è quello platonico, che presagisce e predetermina gli argomenti. Senza questa «condizione iniziale», ogni tentativo di intendersi è per sua natura fallimentare.

L'identità è pregiudiziale per ogni proposito operativo: chi agisce nell'ambito ben delimitato del villaggio, della città, della metropoli, non può che invocare per sé quella delimitazione dello spazio, che rende possibili le interazioni individuali nella loro occasionalità e contingenza. Essa contrasta con ogni altra espressione della libertà, che non ammetta anche la sua negazione. «Il deserto è l'archetipo e la serra della libertà viva, nuda, primaria e di base che è l'assenza dei legami. Quello che gli eremiti medievali provavano nel deserto così vicino a Dio era proprio la sensazione di essere simili a Dio: slegati da abitudini e convenzioni, dai bisogni dei propri corpi e da quelli delle anime

altrui, dalle proprie azioni passate e presenti. Con le parole dei teorici odierni, si potrebbe dire che gli eremiti sono stati i primi a fare l'esperienza dell'essere *sradicati* e *sgravati*. Essi erano simili a Dio, perché qualsiasi cosa facessero la facevano *ab nihilo*. Il loro pellegrinaggio verso Dio era un esercizio di autocostruzione di sé (questo è il motivo per cui la Chiesa, volendo essere l'unica linea che unisce a Dio, ha sempre manifestato resistenza nei confronti degli eremiti – e subito ha fatto di tutto per forzarli all'interno di ordini monastici, sotto lo stretto controllo di regole e *routine*)» (Bauman 31)². L'obsolescenza delle cose evoca, nel mondo post-moderno, il deserto medievale, la dimensione della sabbia, la precarietà delle orme e la proditorietà del vento. La mutabilità dello scenario artificiale, che richiama alla mente quella del deserto, rende increscioso il proposito di sconfiggere il tempo con la resistenza opposta dalle singole individualità. «Nella vita-come-gioco dei consumatori post-moderni, le regole del gioco cambiano continuamente nel corso della partita. La strategia più ragionevole è quindi quella di chiudere ogni partita velocemente – in questo modo il gioco della vita, affrontato con intelligenza, porta a dividere la grande sfida onnicomprensiva, dalle enormi poste in gioco, in una serie di partite veloci e brevi con piccole poste in gioco. «La determinazione di vivere alla giornata» e «il raffigurarsi la vita quotidiana come una successione di piccole emergenze» diventano i principi guida di ogni condotta razionale» (Bauman 36). La concomitanza di molteplici fattori determinativi della realtà squalifica ogni vocazione localistica, ogni affezione, che comporti l'attaccamento a un regime di vita commisurato alla consuetudine e alla tradizione. Il controllo sullo scenario operativo è pressoché inesistente: serve soltanto a illudere l'osservatore della realtà che non lo contamina l'ansia di disincagliarsene.

La precarietà delle situazioni supera la precarietà delle volizioni: quasi sempre gli scenari sociali mutano più rapidamente di quelli mentali. Ed è proprio questa anomalia concettuale che grava sulla consapevolezza dell'osservatore contemporaneo. Egli non si chiede impietosamente per quali motivi la sua personalità si adegua con una certa riluttanza alle innovazioni che, almeno finzionicamente, contribuisce a determinare. «A quale scopo mai potrebbe servire la strategia dell'avanzare del pellegrino in questo nostro mondo? In questo mondo, non solo sono scomparsi i lavori che durano una vita, ma le professioni e i mercati, che hanno acquisito l'abitudine disorientante di apparire dal nulla e di svanire nel nulla, possono difficilmente essere vissuti come vocazioni weberiane – e per mettere il dito nella piaga, la domanda di particolari qualità per praticare tali professioni spesso non dura tanto quanto il tempo che ci si mette ad acquisirle. I posti di lavoro non sono protetti, certamente non più della stabilità dei luoghi dove sono svolti» (Bauman 37). E le variabili, imposte dalla tecnologia, sono selettive sul piano sociale: l'impiego della forza-lavoro umana si riduce all'esercizio della progettazione. Anche i più sofisticati processi produttivi si privano di tutte quelle condizioni accessorie, quali la propaganda e la pubblicità, che agiscono in maniera determinante nella diffusione e nella distribuzione dei prodotti. L'esito della contrattazione fra apparati produttivi e sistemi di consumo s'identifica con la contrazione dei posti di lavoro e l'amplificazione delle strutture tecnologiche. L'estemporaneità e l'indifferenza si coniugano per rendere meno inquietante la distonia fra la progettazione del presente ampliato fino alle propaggini di un improbabile futuro e l'attuazione di una regola che lo abiliti all'ulteriore prosecuzione.

² «Il Medioevo è un'età del tutto inventata per alludere al presente e leggere dentro al moderno» (Fumagalli 11).

«A mio avviso, come il pellegrino era la metafora più adatta per la strategia della vita moderna, preoccupato dal compito inquietante di costruire un'identità – il *flâneur*, il vagabondo, il turista e il giocatore, presi insieme, offrono la metafora della strategia post-moderna generata dall'orrore di essere legati e fissati. Nessuno dei tipi/stili elencati sono invenzioni del post-moderno – erano conosciuti prima dell'avvento dei tempi post-moderni. Eppure, così come le condizioni moderne hanno dato nuova forma alla figura del pellegrino ereditata dal cristianesimo, il contesto post-moderno dà nuove qualità ai tipi noti in precedenza – e lo fa in due modi cruciali. Primo: gli stili un tempo praticati da persone marginali in periodi marginali e in luoghi marginali, sono ora praticati dalla maggioranza, nel fiore degli anni, e in posti centrali; sono ora diventati, pienamente e veramente, degli stili di vita. Secondo: nonostante siano quattro... la vita post-moderna è troppo disordinata e incoerente per essere afferrata da un unico modello coerente» (Bauman 39). La stravaganza e l'estemporaneità compensano il rigore e la coerenza: lo stile di vita post-moderno evoca tempi e mode incoerenti con il presente e le ostenta in maniera vistosa, chiassosa, come una turbativa di poco momento e di cattivo gusto. La simulazione è una componente esoterica dell'estraniamento, che consente di legiferare *a contrario* rispetto ai canoni consolidati ma perenti. Il vagabondo e lo stravagante sono figure retoriche, suscitano al tempo stesso la compromissione e lo sdegno e inficiano la propedeuticità di tutte le risorse della società omologante del consumo. Il vagabondo e lo stravagante sembrano sottrarre la responsabilità dei contemporanei rinverdendo stilemi amati e osteggiati nel passato, quando l'insidia della sfida tecnologica e industriale si adombra come inevitabile. L'ipertrofia dell'io scenico ha di mira la compassata belligeranza dei tutori dell'ordine (economico, politico) del passato e li ridicolizza. E in quest'impresa presume di coinvolgere anche i fautori del nuovo ordine mondiale, inteso come l'estrema conseguenza di un processo volto a selezionare l'umanità mentre ne presagisce la moltiplicazione, sia sul piano numerico, sia sul piano dell'influenza decisionale. L'ironia, che operazioni letterarie-teatrali del genere sprigionano dal Medioevo, non compensa le frustrate aspettative di un numero, anch'esso purtroppo crescente, di emarginati. L'osservazione della natura non ha l'inquietante indolenza dell'abbandono alla deriva: al contrario, costituisce la lunga, calcolata iniziazione allo sfruttamento a scopi pratici delle sue componenti. L'agnosticismo medievale (se è possibile definire così un atteggiamento apparentemente remissivo rispetto alle autorità costituite) è una lunga pausa di riflessione da parte di quanti – le numerose generazioni che si succedono dalla caduta dell'impero romano all'età rinascimentale – aspirano a contravvenire alle soporifere dottrine della sofferenza e della rigenerazione.

L'incubazione della rivolta, della sovversione dei precetti didascalici e dei motivi ispiratori del comportamento individuale e collettivo, si manifesta nella neghittosità dei marginati, di coloro che non intendono assecondare il corso dei tempi ridicolizzandolo. Il vagabondo non è soltanto uno sfaccendato sociale, che si muove ai margini della città o del borgo per sfidare con la sua stessa presenza la potestà gerarchica e i canoni espressivi con i quali la si rappresenta, ma è un discreto «disturbatore della quiete pubblica», il mimo di una condizione oggettivamente transeunte e tuttavia permanente in alcune aree, particolarmente insidiate dalla miseria morale e materiale. Anche se, come il mimo, il vagabondo non raggiunge il rango del riformatore sociale, ne propizia quanto meno l'avvento. La ribellione non s'identifica quindi necessariamente con una causa immediata, che può essere drammaticamente rimossa, ma con un «paradigma» mentale e comportamentale (tanto per usare un'espressione accreditata da

Thomas Kuhn), che costituisce un vero e proprio impedimento per la stessa flebile evoluzione della società arcaica nel suo complesso. La lotta all'indifferenza non ha un quartiere particolare nel quale esplicitarsi: ogni contrada offre il destro al sarcasmo o perfino alla sottile ironia di chi è in grado di cogliere il contrasto fra la partenogenesi della speranza (propria delle gerarchie e delle società a circuito chiuso) e l'indissolubilità della perdizione. Il rapporto fra l'attesa dell'avvento di un mondo migliore e l'iniquità del presente è all'origine di quel lento sussulto interiore che, nell'Europa moderna, si estrinseca nelle sommosse, nelle sollevazioni, nelle guerre e nelle appassionanti stagioni della ricostruzione e del rinnovamento. La «grammatica del vivente» (Onians; Fimiani) è sempre ricollegabile a uno spazio critico, quale premessa della sfida alla trasformazione, propria della modernità. L'apparenza, che nel Medioevo esonera, entro certi limiti, dall'introspezione, nell'epoca moderna si trasforma nella gestazione del «nuovo», di quanto può manifestarsi in maniera antagonica rispetto al convincimento consolidato.

L'apparenza, così atona e inquisitrice nel passato, si delinea, nell'età moderna, come un condotto d'interiezione fra ciò che è possibile dire, manifestare, confutare, e ciò che genera il consenso o il dissenso rispetto alla plausibilità di un proposito o di un'azione. Il gioco mimetico dell'apparenza consente di prevedere le reazioni di un ipotetico interlocutore senza pregiudicare le effettive manifestazioni di quello autentico. La realtà si configura come una delle «versioni» dell'apparenza considerata più confacente al buon esito delle iniziative, che le varie componenti delle comunità sociali si propongono di realizzare. L'apparenza è il «luogo» della gestazione del disordine, nel quale sia possibile penetrare lo sguardo per supposizioni, apprensioni, controverse congetture. Ed è proprio questo disocratico parallelismo fra la stravaganza del vagabondo senza fissa dimora e autosottrattosi a ogni manifestazione esponenziale del potere costituito e la natura nella sua compagine energetica che rende in qualche modo comprensibile, oltre che il kantiano smarrimento di fronte al cielo stellato, l'imponderabilità della norma elaborata a fini certamente edificanti. «Un conto» afferma Leszek Kolakowski «è dunque il desiderio di ozio totale e un altro il trovare il modo, per mezzo del nostro impegno, di risparmiarci fatiche inutili. Gli uomini hanno inventato la ruota, l'arco, l'aratro ed altre cosette un po' più complicate (comunque, le invenzioni citate sono sicuramente opera di un genio fuori del comune). Vista la quantità di fatica fisica che esse ci hanno permesso di risparmiare, possiamo ben definirle come splendidi frutti della pigrizia. In questo senso la nostra civiltà è tutto frutto della pigrizia. Invece le invenzioni che risparmiano la fatica mentale sono quasi esclusivamente un prodotto del nostro secolo, per quanto alcuni modesti e utilissimi precursori fossero stati inventati molto prima dei computer, come i regoli calcolatori e le macchine calcolatrici» (Kolakowski 129). Gli «artisti dell'ozio», quando si professano autentici, inducono a considerare *a contrario* l'impegno nella sua economica essenzialità, considerata come una categoria privilegiata ai fini dell'inventiva e della concretezza. L'ozio, enfaticamente stigmatizzato come la (madre) matrice di tutti i vizi, in effetti, condiziona l'impegno alla sua pratica utilizzazione e lo sottrae contestualmente a ogni enfatica ispirazione (divina o diabolica). L'ozio ha implicitamente irrisolto il dilemma della presenza divina nel mondo: se sia improvvido o meno affidarsi alle leggi teologali della presunzione che effettivamente possa riversarsi sul genere umano il giudizio divino. Ma è il dubbio che anchilosa la mente dell'ozioso, di colui che crede spasmodicamente nel lavoro e che, proprio per questo, si ostina a contraddire tutti coloro che lo esaltano come fertilizio di umanità. L'ozioso addirittura considera il suo atteggiamento una disciplina perché

contrae le sue risorse conoscitive all'«essenziale», che per approssimazione è il limite della sopravvivenza.

Le «province del significato» abrondono gli spazi semoventi dell'immaginazione: tutto ciò che appare chiaro è tale perché l'affanno iniziatico dell'osservatore l'ha reso possibile. Se la concezione del reale fosse avulsa dalla fantasia imitativa, il percorso della conoscenza sarebbe rigido, consequenziale ma contraddittorio. In effetti, la contraddizione, che è implicita nelle metodologie escogitate e impiegate per esercitare la riflessione, è apparente: se fosse reale, si risolvrebbe in una tautologia. Ammettere la contraddizione è, infatti, contraddittorio: la contraddizione non può essere manifestata; al massimo può essere paventata. Le anomalie possono essere supposte ma non rilevate. Per tutte le contraddizioni è fatto salvo l'esercizio propedeutico alla loro individuazione e alla loro «condanna». «L'«oggettività» in se stessa,» scrive Isabelle Stengers «la neutralità non spiegano gran che, o niente del tutto. È a ogni tipo di pratica scientifica che bisogna chiedere cosa voglia dire, per essa, “essere oggettivo”, cioè quali siano gli argomenti accettabili, che cosa faccia da “prova”, che cosa conti in quanto “fatto”. E sta a noi, non scienziati, imparare a rispettare certe pratiche, a temerne altre, a ridere di altre ancora. Ma mai e poi mai dobbiamo accettare con fiducia assoluta l'argomento d'autorità...» (Stengers 22). Tuttavia, non si può negare che la scienza possa dimostrare che tutto ciò nel quale si crede è falso o almeno è falso a partire da un determinato periodo di tempo in poi: così è per la cosmologia moderna (eliocentrica) rispetto a quella antica (geocentrica). Ma è il grado di falsità che costituisce il referente oggettivo della scienza. Quanto maggiore è l'accettazione del processo conoscitivo, tanto maggiore è la rispondenza fra la ricerca scientifica e il senso comune. I cosiddetti punti di vista si uniformano per una linea di tendenza che, seppure inizialmente accidentata, si profila come ineludibile: è come assistere a una sorta di «pensiero oggettivo» che, a periodi ricorrenti, si ridesta e diventa carico di prospettive. Il corso del tempo è tale perché si compenetra nella consapevolezza più o meno esplicita di quella che passa per essere la *melior pars*, sia sotto il profilo quantitativo, sia sotto il profilo funzionale, del genere umano. L'accettazione da parte di una notevole maggioranza delle comunità sociali delle sfide della modernità e delle risposte approntate dalla scienza adombra qualcosa di irrevocabile, che l'esperienza s'incarica di confermare o di confutare.

La distanza, che si stabilisce fra gli individui a livello affettivo, rispecchia, sia pure in modo approssimato, la refutabilità di ogni convinzione acquisita. In altri termini, la genetica inconsistenza di ogni certezza provoca effetti devastanti in tutti gli ambiti (intellettuali, affettivi, relazionali) nei quali la mutevolezza e la conseguente adattabilità sono considerate necessarie e praticabili. «L'incapacità politica degli uomini e delle donne post-moderni ha la stessa origine dell'incapacità morale. La distanza estetica, preferita da e dominante in tutte le strategie post-moderne, si differenzia da altri tipi di distanza sociale (come quella morale o cognitiva) dal momento che non sceglie come suoi punti di riferimento e orientamento i tratti e le qualità possedute da o ascritte agli oggetti della distanza, ma gli attributi del soggetto che distanzia (come l'interesse, l'eccitazione, la soddisfazione o il piacere). Come ha osservato Jean-François Lyotard, “gli oggetti e i contenuti sono diventati indifferenti. L'unica domanda riguarda il loro essere “interessanti”. Il mondo si trasforma in un insieme di oggetti potenzialmente interessanti, e il compito è quello di spremere da essi tutto ciò che d'interessante essi contengono» (Bauman 50-51). La condizione necessaria e sufficiente perché gli oggetti non dequalifichino le aspirazioni del gusto è che la produzione in serie si avvantaggi,

entro certi limiti, delle elaborazioni estetiche promosse o prodotte dagli stessi produttori-fruitori di artefatti. La trasgressione, da individuale, si predispone a essere oggettiva. Gli sperimentalismi artistici – evidenziati dalle avanguardie nella pittura e nella scultura – sembrano sintonizzarsi con la «linea» estetica impressa ai prodotti in serie nell'intento peraltro di attenuare o addirittura vanificare l'insofferenza e il disagio tradizionalmente responsabili delle ricorrenti «rivoluzioni culturali». A mano a mano che la stravaganza preconizzata dell'arte entra nel patrimonio espositivo della produzione tecnologica, il pericolo di un sommovimento sociale viene meno. I focolai d'insofferenza, infatti, si radicano nelle regioni impervie, sia all'arte, sia alla tecnologia. L'apparenza del disordine aggiunge un grado di ebrezza all'enfasi del conformismo. L'irriducibilità del dissenso al contrasto promuove un tono di stravaganza negli abbigliamenti e negli atteggiamenti che aggiunge una nota – perfino scordata – al folclore standardizzato e reso funzionale dal Grande Meccanico e dall'Impresa Industriale. Il dissenso, che si esaurisce nelle strade delle metropoli, fa parte ormai del colore locale e adombra un clima di permissività che in effetti può essere soltanto di facciata. Queste forme di permissivismo urtano la sensibilità e il buon gusto, sia dei conservatori, sia dei progressisti, perché offrono il fianco alla critica più mordace nei riguardi dei costumi. La condanna del primitivismo di maniera, cioè di quello artefatto per eccesso di esibizionismo, che si allinea con il fantasma del novello bardo, si manifesta rapsodicamente, ma genera per affinità qualche risentimento di ordine etnico, che insidia la tolleranza e la pluralità linguistica e culturale.

La resistenza alle provocazioni sociali si manifesta generalmente sul piano estetico. Le fogge dei vestiti, i tatuaggi, le compromissioni con il metallo sono tutte espressioni di libertà incondizionata: mutuano dal localismo orientale o dal tribalismo africano le intercessioni, che si stabiliscono fra le comunità umane e l'ambiente naturale. In ogni caso, questi camuffamenti stanno a testimoniare il *revival* di stagioni culturali e comportamentali, allora riservate a un esiguo gruppo di protagonisti, e ora attualizzate dalla nostalgia. L'esibizionismo è una forma alquanto scontata di comunicazione sociale: esso affida allo *shock* che provoca nelle persone alle quali è diretto il compito di suscitare delle reazioni, non necessariamente positive, ma in ogni caso tali da rendere pertinente l'egemonia del fisico su tutte le altre forme di sussidiarietà. La fisicità, che il romanticismo esalta nella sua sublimazione ideale, si propone come una categoria teologica, come una cognizione dell'essere, che non può essere condizionata ad alcuna finalità. Essa dispone di un valore assoluto, difficilmente convertibile nell'allegoria evangelica di un bene che, se sottovalutato, può assicurare un premio nell'apogeo dell'eternità. La fisicità si presenta come lo spettro dell'immanenza e perciò non può essere oggetto negoziale di alcuna dottrina della salvezza eterna. Nella sua caustica riduttività intende propiziare l'accettazione, da parte dei mortali, della finitudine dell'esistenza come il riscontro concreto della disillusione e dell'illusorietà.

La precarietà è considerata, infatti, irresolubile e permanente: una condizione, nella quale la consistenza genetica del pensiero disquisitivo e problematico si confronta con gli stessi risultati della sua indagine, della sua riflessione. La visibilità del disordine contribuisce a rendere accettabile l'incertezza, la propensione di segno opposto all'ottimismo sociale, in una fase di continua transizione. Gli svantaggi, che tale condizione determina, sono quelli che si evincono da una grazia negata. Paradossalmente, la mondanità e il laicismo sociale, quando non riescono a conseguire i benefici connessi con la dottrina dei diritti positivi, dell'eguaglianza potenziale fra tutti i membri delle comunità politiche, denunciano una sorta di tradimento ideale, che è assimilabile a uno

dei principi metafisici combattuti come fonti di corruzione morale. La gradevolezza dell'esperienza è una finzione scenica: serve, infatti, per sgravare le coscienze dal peso del peccato di omissione in un sistema che, in linea di tendenza, si professa garantista e attualizzatore. La rimozione dei drammi ereditari dell'esistenza induce a santificare l'attualità, che si concentra su alcuni eventi, ritenuti significativi e provvidenziali per il ripristino dei rapporti interindividuali su basi convenzionali e quindi perentori rispetto a quelle del passato. La libertà in termini assoluti cede il posto alla libertà in termini relativi in modo che, con particolari accorgimenti, sia possibile modificare la morfologia e gratificarla di tutte quelle funzioni sistematiche con le quali si accreditano le prospettive comunitarie nella realtà contemporanea. Nella relativa attuazione delle potenzialità individuali si compendiano le attitudini della comunità nel suo insieme: per svolgere un'opera di propulsione, è necessario, infatti, che tutti i membri di un consorzio sociale ignorino le autolimitazioni in virtù delle quali si espleta l'inventiva e se ne raccordano gli esiti per il benessere collettivo. La complementarità degli apporti individuali prescinde dalle capacità di adattamento dei singoli e soprattutto dalla loro origine etnica e dai loro convincimenti politici e religiosi. La complementarità, infatti, è una categoria ambigua, ma efficace: cerca di sintonizzare, secondo il principio dell'immediatezza e della necessità, gli apporti delle diverse componenti istituzionali, che intanto garantiscono l'equilibrio sociale in quanto sono diversi fra loro. La diversità (di provenienza etnica, linguistica, ideologica e di destinazione politica, istituzionale) non adombra un potenziale conflitto se a darle consistenza economica e rilevanza culturale provvedono le consuetudini, suffragate dal calcolo e dall'interesse.

L'eterofilia è una manifestazione dell'epoca moderna utile ai fini di un meno increscioso risentimento sociale. La presenza di un numero crescente di stranieri nelle società progredite genera pulsioni di rigetto, che vengono attutite da una preventiva propaganda a favore del «diverso», al quale vengono conferiti, in linea potenziale, delle risorse in grado di risollevarne le sorti del *milieu* culturale, nel quale s'inserisce. La volubilità dei gruppi egemoni nelle comunità progredite è addebitabile all'incertezza che li assale ogni qual volta assistono all'immissione di manodopera clandestina, ma con propensioni legali, nell'apparato produttivo di modeste dimensioni e non bisognoso di una particolare competenza tecnologica. La diversità è, pertanto, non soltanto tollerata, ma addirittura esaltata come garanzia di equilibrio sociale. Il riconoscimento del diritto alla diversità come premessa per la realizzazione di un sistema produttivo, bisognoso di apporti differenziati, evita che il contrasto fra gruppi etnici, religiosi e linguistici si saldi alla discriminazione sociale in atto, più o meno in forma camuffata, in tutti i paesi progrediti. In altri termini, la tolleranza fondata sulla complementarità consente di esorcizzare la «saldatura» fra gruppi emarginati interni e gruppi stranieri desiderosi di inserirsi nell'apparato produttivo. La diversità consente di evitare quelle «fusioni», che la cultura consolidata propende continuamente ad attuare, sebbene non trovi sempre riscontro nella reattività dei benpensanti e dei chierici vaganti di tutte le religioni sociali. La cultura occidentale si professa liberale, rispettosa dei diritti umani, e in quanto tale non razzista e non segregazionista. Tuttavia, rigurgiti d'insofferenza razziale affiorano di tanto in tanto in superficie, lasciando presagire l'esistenza, in profondità, di energie eversive, magari meno incidenti di quanto il timore ancestrale e la propaganda possano fare immaginare. L'ambivalenza delle prospettive, se per un verso provoca un iniziale smarrimento, dall'altro garantisce quell'ambito di libertà, nel quale non sia effettivamente possibile al potere – qualsiasi potere – di penetrare e di condizionarne le decisioni e le

scelte. La razionalità s'impone di salvaguardare tutto quanto è acquisito dal patrimonio culturale per renderlo problematico, ai fini di un revisionismo critico, capace di conciliarlo con le turbative intellettuali e affettive della contemporaneità. Lo straniero contribuisce a ridurre il grado di uniformità e di monotonia, che è contrario alla propensione dinamica, necessaria per superare nell'operatività, le disparità idiosincratiche del metabolismo sociale contemporaneo. Se le comunità contemporanee riuscissero a vincere le resistenze nei confronti dello straniero, il loro inserimento nella cosiddetta economia globale sarebbe più indolore perché rifletterebe le variabili culturali delle quali ognuna di esse sarebbe portatrice. E, in prospettiva, la stessa globalizzazione sarebbe meno totalizzante di quanto attualmente non appaia.

A parte l'aspetto romantico che lo straniero (dall'Ebreo errante al protagonista dell'omonima opera di Albert Camus) assume nell'immaginario e nella letteratura dell'Occidente, la sua conformazione mentale eredita dal Medioevo una concezione traslata dell'esistenza. Mentre la proprietà, l'attaccamento (peccaminoso) ai beni terreni, sono considerati, dall'antichità fino a Feodor Dostoevskij (di *Delitto e castigo*), un radicamento, il baricentro degli individuali interessi vitali, contestualmente una tradizione millenaria, riscattata dal Medioevo e dal Romanticismo, esalta il transito (il vagabondare) sulla superficie delle cose, quasi a significare il latente desiderio nell'inconscio della condizione umana di «ritornare» a quella dimensione edenica, dalla quale, per presunzione, sarebbe «caduta». La negazione della proprietà si palesa, in termini mitopoietici, nell'apprensione della folla, del flusso dell'umanità, che si muove con moto inconsulto e che sembra dichiarare in maniera scomposta la sua insofferenza. Nelle cosiddette società complesse, il numero scardina le dimensioni, le perimetrie della proprietà per renderle sempre più virtuali, lasciando presagire, anche in termini finanziari, l'esistenza di un bene quasi inaccessibile, che affascina e conquide le menti dell'uomo contemporaneo. Il vagabondo e il finanziere si contendono – forse senza accorgersene – lo stesso beneficio, la stessa parte di Cielo. La libertà di immaginare è proditoriamente assicurata dal volume delle presenze, che nello spazio reale simulano le particelle infinitesime della materia e dell'energia adombrando il profilo del caos primordiale. L'entropia sociale rispecchia artificialmente quanto si presagisce che accada nei plessi della natura. L'origine dello smarrimento è da ritrovarsi nello scenario sociale, nel quale si agitano i volti che il tempo differenzia nelle varie regioni del pianeta per renderli compassionevoli o tracotanti rispetto a una «maschera intermedia», chiamata a giusto titolo l'aspetto della civiltà. L'occasionalità degli incontri, il connubio delle finzioni, anche se artificiali, fanno pensare a una strategia, che il committente contemporaneo non è in grado di regolare. Egli si trova quindi smarrito su una accattivante, compromissoria, «valle di lacrime», che non vorrebbe abbandonare senza aver prima saggiato la vacuità o l'improponibilità di quella celeste. La frammentarietà delle impressioni contribuisce inoltre a vanificare ogni tentativo volto a rinvenire nel tormentato frastuono degli esseri una causa e un terminale. La convinzione degli osservatori della realtà, se compendia i propositi dell'immediatezza, non contempla alcuna prospettiva futura. L'inessenzialità del presente ha una forza propellente, capace di generare in contemporanea il piacere e lo scontento. Il ritmo binario dell'esistenza non consente di pensare ad alcun conforto che faccia da balsamo alla sofferenza perché questa è il presupposto organico di quello, che appare un precipitato storico dell'artificio, della stravaganza e dell'imprenditorialità.

La superficie delle iniziative (la strada, la piazza, la casa, il mercato, il teatro, la scuola, la chiesa, l'ospedale) è talmente evidente da rendersi indispensabile una forma di

delegittimazione concettuale perché le cose, gli oggetti, facciano pensare sempre più alla «finzione» dalla quale promanano e che corroborano con la loro rinnovata presenza. La molteplicità delle presenze finzioniche è l'unico aspetto volutamente non contingentato dell'esperienza. La realtà è quanto si vede, si guarda, si osserva e si modifica, più un grado dell'insoddisfazione, che la rende continuamente rispondente a un'aspettativa trascendentale. Quanto maggiore e ingombrante è la fisica della partecipazione collettiva, tanto più invadente è la metafisica dell'abnegazione individuale. Il timore di smarrirsi ha la suggestione dello stato di grazia, della condizione aurorale, nella quale l'irresponsabilità è un dono di natura, non un artificio della ragione. Lo smarrimento si configura come il declino fisico: la corrispondenza, che viene stabilita dall'esperienza fra il dominio delle forze e lo scadimento dello stesso, anche per l'usura e l'abrazione sociali, rende ancora più incessante il desiderio di abbandonarsi alle suggestioni artificiali, alle dolenti peregrinazioni della mente, alternativamente in stato di eccitazione e di depressione.

La devianza, che nel sistema produttivo tradizionale, cioè nella fabbrica caratterizzata dal lavoro cronometrato, è un fattore devastante, nella società tecnologicamente sofisticata, non soltanto non compromette l'apparato produttivo, ma addirittura lo gratifica di qualche suggestione, utile ai fini di un più incisivo condizionamento acquisitivo e comportamentale. Ogni stravaganza trova un corrispettivo nel processo produttivo, nella convinzione che rappresenti una parte, più o meno consistente, di fruitori-consumatori di beni. La difformità esistente fra metodologie inventive (progettuali) e metodologie correttive (provenienti dall'emisfero del consumo) non influisce negativamente sul mercato. Anzi, appare quanto meno sorprendente che i consumatori, sia pure suggestionati dalla pubblicità e dalla propaganda, influiscano sulle caratteristiche della produzione secondo segmenti, tracce, di preferenze già *in itinere* o comunque incubate dalla mentalità corrente. La passività per così dire non è mai tale, perché influenza per vie normali e subliminari i piani regolatori delle grandi imprese produttive. L'itinerario orgiastico del mondo è segnato da un'implicita tendenza esorcizzante e purificatrice: le scelte sbagliate sono pagate da coloro che le pongono in essere, le esaltano e le condannano. L'afflizione del consumatore è quotata in Borsa: i mercati riflettono le pulsioni imprenditoriali e l'apatia (l'inadeguatezza) dei consumatori. «In ogni caso, l'individuo moderno sfrattato dalla condizione di "abitatore" del Panopticon in cui assumeva il ruolo di *approvvigionatore di beni*, si è ritrovato nella condizione di consumatore di merci, in cui assume il ruolo di *collezionista di piaceri*, o più precisamente di *cercatore di sensazioni*. I due ruoli citati rimandano a due differenti metodi (collettivi e privatizzati) di contrastare la paura dell'incertezza generata da quel grande processo di "sradicamento" chiamato modernità. I due ruoli rimandano anche a due differenti agenzie (collettive e privatizzate) cui spetta il compito di applicare tali metodi. L'unica cosa che rimane immutata, o meglio incolume, in questo "cambio della guardia" è proprio la paura dell'incertezza, sebbene ora abbia preso le sembianze di "paura dell'inadeguatezza" piuttosto che "paura della devianza"» (Bauman 111) Le inquietudini post-moderne, riassunte nel timore dell'inadeguatezza, trovano il loro appannaggio nobiliare in un lessico ricco di suggestione. Molto prosaicamente, si può affermare che l'inadeguatezza si propone come una depressione psicologica o morale, mentre, in effetti, è l'impreparazione a reagire alle sollecitazioni della realtà per lo scarto creatosi culturalmente fra il livello di trasformazione tecnologica e il livello di acquisizione scientifica. Il laboratorio e il crocicchio dello stregone, ai fini della

responsabilità consiliare, s'identificano.

La mente, che attiva l'istinto, porta l'individuo a uno stato di schizofrenia, derivante dal distacco che egli esercita per programmare uno spettacolo del quale ambisce ad essere anche spettatore. L'indifferenza e l'iperattività si compendiano sul piano spettacolare, dove è possibile sostenere due parti, fra loro in contrasto, e tuttavia sorrette da uno statuto che ha di mira il potenziamento del preterito della condizione umana perché sia sempre più giustificato il ricorso alle raffinatezze del protesico. La trascendenza s'immanentizza nella sfida dell'umanità contemporanea alla finitudine e al declino. Nella religione panica, che pervade la contemporaneità, il premio s'identifica con l'autoconsolazione. La solitudine individuale comporta l'improvvida frammentazione delle forze individuali nel circuito potestativo della società, considerata come un organismo in grado di trascendere i suoi componenti dopo averli utilizzati a fini pratici. In questo contesto, si spiegano e in parte si giustificano le modalità bioetiche adottate volontariamente dagli individui nel proposito di liberarsi dell'imperfezione e dall'anormalità. Le turbative sociali, che le imperfezioni e le anormalità comportano, pregiudicano, almeno sotto il profilo organizzativo, il normale percorso istituzionale quando la loro entità supera il livello di guardia, storicamente determinato dal sentimento di solidarietà e dalla connessione pietistica. La malformazione congenita si configura come una sconfitta della biologia, che ha il potere, non soltanto di programmare le nascite, ma anche quello di esorcizzarne l'avvento se ritenute non completamente adeguate ad affrontare i rigori dell'esistenza. Questa cruda concezione dell'essere è per così dire somministrata dalla scienza della salute, che considera preminente evitare il dolore piuttosto che curarlo. Il dolore e il sudore della fronte non impreziosiscono neppure i discorsi edificanti di quanti si affidano alla fede per gratificare il Creatore delle risorse, che autonomamente decidono di dedicare alla creazione, nell'intento di renderla più confacente alle aspettative di un sempre maggior numero di donne e di uomini.

Il credito, del quale la stragrande maggioranza dell'umanità intende valersi, s'identifica con l'autoaffermazione, con la fama, che ogni individuo, a vari livelli, persegue. «La gente» scrive Leszek Kolakowski «insegue la fama per se stessa indipendentemente dai vantaggi che possono derivarne, come insegna l'immortale esempio di Erostrato, che incendiò il tempio di Artemide solo per diventare celebre... La fama, per sua natura, tocca a pochi; la rarità fa parte integrante dei suoi attributi. È nota la battuta, credo di Andy Warhol, uomo famoso, secondo il quale in futuro ognuno avrà il suo quarto d'ora di celebrità. Ma si tratta di un'assurdità» (Kolakowski 12-13). L'invidia e la vanità svolgono una funzione sociale, fra l'altro, come correttivi di un'infatuazione generale per personalità prive del carisma necessario per conferire un minimo di continuità alla gloria mondana. Per evitare che si indulga a un esercizio corrosivo, che peraltro non raggiunge quasi mai un effetto concreto, è necessario accordare alla tolleranza una funzione esornatrice, che non trova corrispondenza nella tradizione politica, in quanto limitata all'aspetto etnico, religioso, consuetudinario. «Notiamo pure che spesso si esige tolleranza nel senso di indifferenza, di mancanza di una posizione o di un'idea precisa, talvolta addirittura di approvazione per tutto quanto ci capita di vedere negli uomini e nelle opinioni. Ma questo ha un significato completamente diverso. La richiesta di tolleranza in questo senso fa parte della nostra cultura edonistica dove niente ha veramente importanza; si tratta di una filosofia di vita priva di responsabilità e di principi» (Kolakowski 30). L'attuazione della tolleranza comporta, infatti, un'autodisciplina, che ripristina la corrispondenza umanamente esistente fra persone e

gruppi etnicamente, religiosamente o economicamente differenziati. Essa si ispira al principio della precarietà dell'esistenza e dell'inermità degli sforzi umani per affermarsi prevaricando i diritti altrui. È una categoria religiosa perché costituisce perennemente un invito a sottrarsi ai meccanismi appoderativi, abrasivi, dell'istinto. L'idea che si possa guardare ai difetti altrui senza reagire energicamente è una prova di autocontrollo in grado, qualche volta, di sovvertire gli effetti temuti. La tolleranza parte dal presupposto che tutti i mortali sono fallibili, che la loro azione non possa superare alcuni limiti senza incidere sulla dignità umana, che è una caratteristica latente e manifesta in tutto il percorso storico delle comunità socialmente organizzate. La norma trova nella tolleranza un credito che la sottrae alla persecutività. In sintesi, la tolleranza riflette l'approssimazione, la relatività del convincimento. Essa parte dal presupposto che l'ordinamento umano, quale che sia, non può vantare un livello di asseveratività che non ne pregiudichi la critica e la riformulazione. Se la stessa creazione umana risponde a esigenze di adattamento alla realtà, e si giustifica nella contingenza, non si può non ammettere un'accettazione condizionata della stessa. Ed è proprio questo condizionamento che caratterizza la tolleranza come disciplina del giudizio e dell'argomentazione a fini edificanti. La tolleranza, nei casi più controversi della persecuzione razziale, religiosa, politica, sessuale, si ostina giustamente a confutare le azioni con le opinioni.

La confidenza, che ispira la tolleranza, è una caratteristica tipicamente umana. Nasce dal desiderio di non prevaricare e di considerare l'esistente come una testimonianza, che può essere rimossa dall'ulteriore riflessione sul corso degli eventi. È un organigramma che consente di realizzare una trama di rapporti, senza necessariamente incidere sulla loro finalità. In quanto stagione di tenui entusiasmi, la confidenza corrobora un brano dell'argomentazione sul «destino» delle cose e contrasta ogni manifestazione di fanatismo. Essa rappresenta l'epilogo a livello emotivo di un lungo itinerario del genere umano che, dalla condizione ferina, si eleva a quella della responsabilità e consapevolezza, nell'intento di fortificarsi e quindi sottrarsi il più possibile alle pulsioni originarie, elementari, caratterizzate dalla mancanza di remore. «È stato più volte osservato che le virtù praticate e proclamate in modo assoluto e rigoroso diventano rapidamente insopportabili o dannose sia per la persona virtuosa che per le altre. Il coraggio può degenerare nella bravata sciocca e avventata; la giustizia praticata troppo rigidamente, senza tener conto delle complessità della vita e delle circostanze attenuanti di molte nostre trasgressioni, può trasformarsi in crudeltà e in un paravento alla superbia compiaciuta del giusto; la sincerità può diventare una forma di brutalità e di indifferenza per i dispiaceri e le sofferenze del prossimo; perfino l'intelligenza può trasformarsi in un espediente per evadere dalla vita e dai suoi inevitabili conflitti; e il lodevole principio di non dispiacere nessuno può diventare pretesto per un'illimitata indulgenza verso il male» (Kolakowski 39). La tolleranza e la confidenza, infatti, si fondano sulla misura, su una pregiudiziale fenomenologica, cioè di dimensioni spaziali e temporali, che intrinsecamente ammettono la presenza degli altri, del prossimo. La pratica di un criterio di partecipazione al «convivio» sociale implica l'accettazione di alcune regole, espresse dal buon senso, una costante referenziale in termini di collaborazione, intesa, integrazione e autocontrollo.

L'autocompiacimento è la sindrome dell'insuccesso, che viene ostentato come un immeritato castigo, dovuto quasi sempre all'incomprensione del prossimo, alla diffusa iniquità, al malriposto senso del dovere. In quanto giudizio ostentato con pretesa di

risarcimento, l'autocelebrazione comporta un minimo di discredito da addebitare quanto meno all'insensibilità altrui. L'autocompiacimento si giustifica spesso con la disattenzione da parte delle «immediate circostanze» – per usare un'espressione di José Ortega y Gasset – nei riguardi di quanti rivolgono loro una particolare attenzione. L'autocompiacimento e l'ingratitude si compendiano in una realtà prefigurata come atona e insensibile a tutte le gratificazioni di ordine morale, sociale, istituzionale. E, tuttavia, questa stessa ipertrofica concezione delle possibilità individuali è a fondamento delle garanzie contro i crimini e le discriminazioni moderne. Se non si fosse argomentato enfaticamente sulle prerogative dell'io, sarebbe difficile contrastare sul piano dei principi l'uso sconsiderato della forza e il ricorso alla violenza per la risoluzione dei conflitti. «È facile dire di volere un mondo senza violenza: fino ad oggi però nessuno ha fornito una ricetta pratica per realizzarlo. Condannare indiscriminatamente ogni violenza significa condannare la vita stessa. Non sarebbe però irragionevole cercare di realizzare un mondo dove la violenza venisse applicata solo contro la schiavitù, il crimine, l'aggressione e la tirannia. No, non sarebbe irragionevole, anche se nutriamo gravi e ben fondati dubbi che un mondo del genere possa mai esistere» (Kolakowski 60). L'improponibilità del male assoluto consente di ipotizzare, sulla base dell'esperienza storica, quali forme di violenza sono tollerate e quali bandite dal consorzio umano. A seconda delle finalità da conseguire, che riflettono il corso dei tempi, l'uso della violenza assume connotazioni conseguenti rispetto alla nozione in quanto tale. Sul piano delle categorie conoscitive, la violenza scompare dopo aver prodotto dei risultati: il *Principe* è, in questo senso, l'opera che meglio rappresenta il transito del male assoluto al male relativo per l'abilità degli uomini, di coloro ai quali madre natura ha conferito il compito di valutare le modalità di utilizzazione delle risorse energetiche operanti nella realtà. L'opportunità di impiegare le propensioni naturali per la realizzazione di programmi edificanti s'identifica con la dimensione che assume la libertà nelle varie regioni del pianeta e nelle diverse epoche storiche. L'idillio con la libertà, declamato dai riformatori sociali, può trarre in inganno e può far pensare a una società priva di norme, dove a ognuno è consentito di agire come gli aggrada nella presunzione, peraltro, di non nuocere al prossimo. In effetti, la libertà civile e la libertà politica sono il risultato di una disamina all'interno dei sistemi comunitari, che ambiscono soddisfare le esigenze dei loro cittadini perseguendo una sorta di filogenesi sociale, cioè un itinerario nel quale le generazioni possano identificarsi e del quale serbare la memoria.

L'invidia sociale, che svolge un ruolo tutt'altro che secondario nella vita dei popoli e delle nazioni, è uno strumento di misurazione economica, serve cioè a stabilire quale è il livello propedeutico al soddisfacimento di beni ritenuti di pubblico dominio. «D'altro canto, l'avidità, per quanto moralmente riprovevole nonché responsabile della maggior parte dei crimini commessi, è anche all'origine (a pari merito con la pigrizia) dei più brillanti ritrovati della tecnica, che rendono tanto più facile, comoda e lussuosa (in senso moralmente neutro) la nostra vita; mentre i tentativi d'abolire l'avidità con mezzi istituzionali conducono a una massa di sofferenze e di miserie senza fine» (Kolakowski 70). Tuttavia, non è moralmente raccomandabile l'avidità se la si presuppone essere una delle molle, forse la più forte, del processo di accumulazione responsabile, grazie anche alla dottrina calvinista, dell'avvento del capitalismo, che non è riprovevole né colpevole delle ineguaglianze e delle sperequazioni sociali. La constatazione relativa a un atteggiamento deviante o edificante della condizione umana non per questo lo legittima, tanto più che, almeno nell'epoca contemporanea, si nota l'incoerenza fra l'uno e l'altro.

La caducità dei convincimenti si evince dal contrasto, sul piano etico, di due propensioni diverse e perfino contrastanti, che assicurano complementariamente la risoluzione dei problemi più inquietanti – come quelli relativi alla ricchezza e alla povertà dei popoli e delle nazioni – che insidiano l'equilibrio del pianeta. La *deregulation* è l'effetto, sul piano normativo, di un dato di fatto, ritenuto «universalmente» utile nella sua sconcertante ambiguità, come conseguenza del conflitto ideale, concettuale, dal quale si evince un bene ritenuto necessario per le sorti del genere umano. In altri termini, la convinzione sempre più diffusa, anche se sulla base dei principi non sempre sostenibile, è che dal male nasca il bene e viceversa e che il controllo – l'alchimia – di questi due termini, se negli Stati-nazione è attuabile, negli Stati-regione dell'epoca contemporanea non è verificabile (e quindi improponibile). La labilità delle cosiddette formule di compromesso, elaborate a livello regionale (cioè di aree geografiche che comprendono più paesi fra loro collegati dagli stessi obiettivi culturali, economici, strategici, come può essere l'Unione Europea), si deve alla difficoltà di regolare i processi cognitivi, produttivi e acquisitivi, sotto il profilo etico e ideologico, dopo aver conseguito un grado accettabile d'integrazione. Questa si attua, spesso, a dispetto delle previsioni e più spesso in conformità con le premonizioni dei riformatori o dei visionari sociali, che riscattano nelle loro elaborazioni dottrinarie una tradizione negativa e la «rovesciano», neutralizzandola, al positivo (esempio tipico, il conflitto fra Germania e Francia per la Rhur, e il superamento dello stesso mediante formule associazionistiche come la Comunità europea per il carbone e per l'acciaio dei primi decenni del secondo dopo-guerra).

La causalità si confronta – non soltanto nella fisica e nelle altre scienze sperimentali – con la casualità, con tutto ciò che appare imprevedibile e che si dimostra effettuale (da qui la definizione piuttosto efficace ma stramba della notizia, giornalmisticamente e radiotelevisivamente «fondata»). Alla tradizionale occasionalità fa riscontro la mutazione, un accorgimento della natura per sorprendere gli osservatori e per riconfortarli eclissandosi nel «vuoto». Definita come un fenomeno imprevisto e imprevedibile, che influenza il corso di un processo naturale, si accredita nell'ambito delle probabilità statisticamente rilevabili. Il caso è come irretito dalla magia dei numeri, che lo trasformano in una previsione razionalmente utilizzabile a fini scientifici, etici, sociali. «Tuttavia, da quando i pitagorici – sia nella loro dottrina che nelle loro azioni – attuarono forse per primi l'unità della matematica e della mistica, dichiarando che i numeri erano le "basi" o addirittura le "cause" o componenti delle cose (come dice Aristotele), in filosofia si è più volte affacciato il sospetto che i rapporti matematici, non solo possiedano una specie di esistenza autonoma, non sostenuta da niente, ma che siano addirittura il materiale specifico con cui il mondo è stato "definitivamente" formato e che rispetto ad essi i fenomeni non possano avere che un'esistenza secondaria o derivata» (Kolakowski 78-79). L'idea che sia necessario preordinare gli strumenti dell'esperienza perché questa dia dei risultati conforta l'«avventura mentale» del secolo XX. Tutto ciò che può essere immaginato, può essere realizzato, con l'intrepida costante dell'arbitrarietà di ogni postulato capace di far convergere sull'inedito della creazione l'ambizione scopritrice dell'osservatore della natura, cioè della realtà (giacché la natura si rifugia sempre più nei meandri e nei paradossi del convincimento). Questa «avventura» comporta la «visione» di una condizione della realtà, che può essere contemplata o meno dall'esperienza. Il reale non è soltanto ciò che si vede, ciò che si sente, ciò che si tocca, ciò che si odora, ciò che si gusta, ma tutto ciò che lo precede o lo segue, secondo i postulati riflessivi della matematica e i canoni dichiarativi della mistica. «La matematica sublima l'astrazione fino

al punto in cui essa appare l'ultima realtà del mondo fisico; la mistica invece elimina ogni astrazione e sublima l'esperienza fino al punto in cui ciò che è sperimentato coincide con la realtà ultima. Da entrambe le parti, o anche in entrambi i campi dello sforzo umano, si verifica l'annientamento di corpo, spazio e tempo, perlomeno nel senso in cui conosciamo tali realtà dall'esperienza quotidiana, o le stabiliamo concettualmente come denominatori fondamentali di tale esperienza. Quando si giunge al limite esse spariscono, oppure perdurano come manifestazione o espressione dell'unica realtà veramente reale. Dio è senza tempo, senza spazio e senza corpo, come le creazioni matematiche e geometriche. Sia l'una che l'altra, la matematica e la mistica, ci aprono una strada sulla quale ci sembra di poter sfuggire alla casualità storica del nostro esistere, alla temporalità, alla ristrettezza spaziale e all'incerta, fragile condizione della nostra corporalità» (Kolakowski 80). Proprio per questa doppia natura dell'intercessione dell'osservatore nel mondo, la morale colma – in maniera alquanto arbitraria – l'indifferenza che lo sorregge. Se si palesasse l'indifferenza per tutto quanto accade nella realtà e il concorso, sia pure drammatico, dell'osservatore si camuffasse da nirvana della storia, l'intrepida insolvenza del mistico e del matematico sarebbe irrilevante. E, invece, essi imprinono *a contrario* all'osservazione una spinta divina e demoniaca insieme, la cui diversità si manifesta spesso sotto le mentite spoglie dell'allegoria o della finzione.

L'allusione a un inveterato convincimento circa il regista dell'universo e l'origine delle cose implica necessariamente che si facciano salve le ragioni teologiche e pratiche che sono all'origine del disagio e della soddisfazione di esistere. Sebbene nel XX secolo si proclami la morte di Dio e cioè di quelle connessioni concettuali mediante le quali sia possibile argomentare coerentemente sui postulati a fondamento dell'esistenza, rimane quel diffuso sentimento della nostalgia a colmare le distanze esistenti fra gli enunciati dei mistici e le dissolvenze serioterapiche dei matematici. A ogni infedeltà dinastica fa riscontro per così dire il tumulto dell'eversione. «I resti di una fede estinta possono perdurare a lungo dopo la sua morte, pur ignorando la propria origine. A lungo, ma non per sempre. I canoni della nostra civiltà, con le sue radici cristiane e bibliche, continuano ancora ad esigere rispetto per ogni essere umano. Ma una civiltà completamente dominata dallo spirito del razionalismo e dello scientismo non sarà in grado di conservare a lungo le manifestazioni di santità. Pur non affermandolo in questi termini, riterrà di poter ridurre la persona umana alle sue funzioni, nel senso che ognuno di noi sarà assolutamente sostituibile. Sarebbe la fine dell'umanità quale la conosciamo. Per il momento il pericolo è scongiurato dalla convinzione che il massimo bene e il massimo valore del mondo sia il piacere» (Kolakowski 90)³. La propensione a permanere nella realtà, oltre a configurarsi come un piacere, si delinea sempre più come una sfida.

³ La biologia evolutivista delle emozioni sostiene che ogni tratto umano è correlato con un vantaggio derivante dalla selezione delle alternative di adattamento. Tale disciplina si serve della terminologia darwiniana (competizione, selezione) non in modo asseverativo, ma in modo propedeutico alla circostanzialità. Ed è proprio questa connotazione della scienza *in fieri*, e non della scienza *già fatta*, che implica la responsabilità delle nuove generazioni. Alla democrazia latente o effettiva spetta il compito di rendere palesi i rapporti di forza, i conflitti di interessi, che qualificano e orientano i vari progetti scientifici. La ricerca è il tracciato in diagonale di situazioni contrapposte, i cui fattori dirimenti sono la consapevolezza individuale e l'onere economico che tale consapevolezza individuale comporta nel comunitario sistema organizzativo. L'onere della prova si coniuga con quello della pertinenza (cfr. Kripke).

L'ingegneria genetica raccoglie si direbbe le farneticazioni dell'umanità sul concetto della congruenza dell'essere secondo dei fini o alla mercè del caso e si risolve per la passione inventiva, per l'incresciosa elaborazione di proposte emotive, che tendono a rendere giustizia della fragilità e arbitrarietà di quanto circonda l'osservatore. L'aspirazione alla permanenza non concerne l'eternità, riflessa semmai nel brusio degli atomi, nella più dissoluta prigione dell'essere che, dai tempi di Epicuro a quelli di Lucrezio e di Niels Bohr, redige protocolli a futura memoria, nella falsa consapevolezza di ingannare anche il tempo, la più ingegnosa astrazione dell'uomo da quando persevera nella consapevolezza di ragionare, ricordare, obliare, nelle fenditure del cosmo e nei terrapieni degli spazi mitologici e tentacolari.

L'ambiguità (per alcuni, una persona è un terrorista, per altri, un patriota) svolge una funzione terapeutica nella realtà contemporanea. Mentre in apparenza denuncia un'assenza di «valori», il venir meno di una scelta di campo, l'attitudine conciliatrice di tematiche oppostive dimostra la «debolezza» di ogni convinzione per l'ingegnosità del sistema percettivo, per l'artificiosità degli strumenti di rilevazione, che lasciano poco spazio alla problematicità umana. Il caso si profila come un espediente dialettico, capace di rivalizzare il dilemma, il dubbio, il rullo compressore delle contraddizioni e dei disinganni. Il senso di colpa, impreziosito dalla tradizione religiosa e sottoposto a uno spietato esame introspettivo, fa da emolliente genetico a tutta una serie di attività, che si estrinsecano come manifestazioni creative della persona fisica, condannata ad agire in un universo dominato dalle restrizioni morali. Lo scrupolo di coscienza è, infatti, una prova irrefutabile della libertà di decidere e di agire. Nell'ambito di alcune autolimitazioni si manifestano le determinazioni (positive e negative): a favore o contro le stesse. Nella convivenza civile, l'interdizione, infatti, è una categoria dichiarativa, che funge da propellente, sia per asseverare la limitazione, sia per esorcizzare la trasgressione. Rimane, tuttavia, la facoltà di decidere per un tenore comportamentale e non adeguarvisi: la contraddizione è un momento indiziario della problematicità non ancora completamente acquisita nel novero delle strumentazioni dispositive. Se l'incertezza è gravata dal dubbio e dalla facoltà di non deliberare, l'astensione dal giudizio, sebbene non incontri la generale approvazione, è quanto meno tollerata. Tutto ciò che si può dire non concerne soltanto tutto ciò che si può fare, ma anche tutto ciò che non si deve fare per convenzione e comunque per un periodo di tempo, per quanto durano cioè le riserve mentali tacitamente ammesse o palesemente dichiarate dal senso comune, dal corso delle cose. L'ammissione, l'adesione, l'accettazione o l'adeguazione si delineano come il peristilio dell'autonoma determinazione: si possono intendere come le fasi di un processo conoscitivo, che non rinviene nell'azione alcun terminale degno di interagire con il patrimonio consolidato. L'innovazione non si vale sempre di «salti quantici», di prospezioni immediate nel circuito della conoscenza; spesso si dipana – come la crisalide – da una serie di tentativi, legati insieme da un nesso di necessità o dall'inferenza del caso. Anche l'arbitrio, quando è riconducibile a un fine, che può essere metabolizzato nel processo conoscitivo, funge da propellente genetico. L'esitazione di fronte agli eventi è un connotato del pensiero, che calibra le sue potenzialità prima di affrontare l'«avventura della ragione». La vulnerabilità delle convinzioni, infine, si coniuga con la dinamica della ricerca, della riflessione e dell'esperienza. L'agire raggiunge una quota di legittimazione quando non propelle da un incontenibile proposito individuale, ma da una calcolata congettura intorno al modo migliore di approfondire o di sovvertire il percorso storico della conoscenza,

intesa come un generico interrogativo intorno alla natura delle cose e conseguentemente intorno alle cause che promuovono l'itinerario espressivo del genere umano. Il cosiddetto potere della spiegazione si flette all'onda d'urto delle circostanze umanizzandole, conferendo loro una connotazione suggestiva, capace di smaltire le riserve mentali nei riguardi di quanto accade nel mondo senza una causa conosciuta e in maniera impreveduta. L'epitalamio dell'esistenza si riflette nelle figure appena accennate dalle parole, che non si protendono in alcuno scenario reale e che si contendono, almeno così è ipotizzabile, un regesto recondito nelle pieghe della mitologia, della poesia, dei silenzi sonori degli inizi e forse della fine della specie. L'esperienza sembra divaricarsi in due ambiti: in uno profondamente radicata nella concretezza e quindi nella fruizione generale e diffusa di quanto riesce a realizzare; in un altro allusivo, nel quale permangono come virgulti di una pianta millenaria i ricordi, le passioni secondarie, che i singoli individui vivono nella speranza che lascino qualche traccia, come l'impronta lunare degli astronauti, per un improbabile cantore di gesta irrisolte, ammantate nella polverosa atmosfera dell'anonimato.

4. L'evocazione e la persistenza

L'evocazione della natura ripristina in modo al tempo stesso arruffato e neghittoso l'instinguibile propensione dell'uomo per un *habitat* protettivo, carico delle suggestioni della memoria e dell'immaginazione. In un'epoca, che non riconosce alcuna attrattiva al ricordo, l'attaccamento al passato obnubila il timore per l'avvenire. L'archeologia non risponde alle esigenze della curiosità, ma alle affezioni della fantasia. La vicenda terrena sembra obliterare ogni postulazione trascendentale, che la ripaghi delle imperfezioni, incompiutezze, responsabili del disagio dell'esistenza. Le premonizioni si esauriscono nell'immediatezza, nel circuito rappresentativo del provvisorio e del perente. Tutto ciò che soggioga il pensiero dell'attualità non consente alcuna allegoria della mente, che proietti in un indistinguibile «altrove» il mendace calcolo della sedentarietà. La permanenza terrena si priva il più possibile delle affezioni, anche di quelle mentali, nell'intento di surrogare il giardino dell'Eden con quello accarezzato dal vento prospiciente lo sguardo immaginario e cioè l'obiettivo di una macchina fotografica. La «ripresa» dell'afflato biblico è subitanea, non compendia le elucubrazioni, i pentimenti e le aspettative del passato, non sollecita altra reazione che quella della rinuncia all'eternità. La propensione di «riprendere» l'ovvietà, cioè tutto quanto si dispone casualmente sotto gli occhi, si giustifica con la convinzione che siano i frammenti della realtà che, come i protoni, i neutroni, i neutrini e le altre particelle elementari agenti all'interno del nucleo atomico, riflettono o adombrano un brano della permanenza, di quell'energia cinetica, in virtù della quale le cose si compongono e si scompongono per ingannare e disingannare l'osservatore. Sotto la lente profilattica dell'apparecchio da ripresa la natura si manifesta a tratti, seguendo le orme di un movimento intestino, difficilmente comprensibile dall'inizio alla fine. Del resto, la stessa fine temuta per la natura è un aspetto antropomorfo, una notazione categoriale della maniera di intendere l'esistenza degli enti nelle loro multiformi manifestazioni. Il percorso dell'ente, che influenza l'osservazione, ha qualcosa in comune con l'osservatore per il semplice fatto che si perturbano reciprocamente e, nella perturbazione, paradossalmente si nascondono l'uno all'altro.

La transitorietà degli enti è la loro stessa essenza. E, tuttavia, la facoltà di accedere al recondito, all'epopea che ne sostiene la trama ideale costituisce il filo conduttore con il

quale la ragione cerca di dare una spiegazione, per quanto confutabile, delle propulsioni intestinali alla realtà così come si configura con gli strumenti impiegati dall'osservatore per rappresentarla, per renderla in qualche modo familiare e quindi conoscibile. «La parola "evoluzione",» scrive Thomas Henry Huxley «con la quale in generale si indica oggi il processo cosmico, ha una storia singolare e si usa in vari sensi. Presa nell'accezione corrente significa sviluppo progressivo, ovvero mutamento graduale da una condizione di relativa uniformità a una di relativa complessità; ma il suo significato si è esteso fino a comprendere i fenomeni di metamorfosi regressiva, ossia di progresso da una condizione di relativa complessità a una di relativa uniformità» (Huxley 5-6). La tendenza al mutamento è pertanto una strategia della natura, che consente agli esseri viventi di predisporre, selezionandosi, alle variazioni dell'ambiente e contestualmente a sostenerne l'efficacia. Quanto appare competitivo ed escludente nella natura, per un verso, colpisce il sentimento della continuità e della perpetuazione, così come le religioni e le ideologie ipotizzano e vaticinano, per un altro verso, soddisfa le postulazioni concettuali, i criteri esplicativi della ragione. «La fede fondata sulla conoscenza trova il suo oggetto in un ordine eterno, il quale produce un mutamento incessante, in un tempo e in uno spazio infiniti, mentre l'energia cosmica alterna le proprie manifestazioni tra fasi di potenzialità e fasi di dispiegamento. È possibile, come vuole Kant, che ogni magma cosmico predestinato a evolversi fino a costituire un nuovo mondo sia stato a sua volta il punto terminale non meno predestinato di un predecessore ormai scomparso» (Huxley 7). L'evoluzione è una congettura, che trova la sua esplicitazione nelle rilevazioni compiute con gli strumenti dell'osservazione. Le cosiddette ipotesi iniziali, proprio perché postulazioni coerenti con i risultati dell'osservazione, non sono oggetto di confutazione, se non *a posteriori*, quando l'esperienza, divenuta patrimonio conoscitivo, le rifiuta come inoperanti. Ogni ipotesi, che abbia effetti concreti nell'osservazione e quindi nell'esperienza, deve soggiacere al principio della non esplicitabilità razionale o al principio della validità intuitiva. Nelle culture antiche, la premonizione e l'intuizione sostituiscono, in termini di coerenza e consequenzialità, le relazioni causali con le quali la dimostrazione si rende oggettivamente plausibile ed efficace. La ricomparsa, nella scienza contemporanea, del caso ripristina, sotto mentite spoglie, le antiche postulazioni filosofiche. Al credito conseguito dalla ragione nei periodi di profonde trasformazioni sociali, come l'Illuminismo, fa riscontro l'imperiosa consistenza del disordine cosmico, che però si configura come un emisfero ugualmente congetturabile dalla strategia della ragione mediante l'impiego delle tecniche di rilevazione fondate sui «valori» statistici.

Si rende evidente pertanto un doppio registro interpretativo della natura: da una parte, le si riconosce un potere intestino, che soltanto l'abilità dell'osservatore riesce a rappresentare nelle forme mimetiche dell'artificio; dall'altra, la destrezza umana si misura con quelle manifestazioni della natura che più efficacemente si armonizzano con i pensieri reconditi della continuità e della gratificazione divina. L'artificio trova il suo fondamento e la sua superfetazione nell'opera d'arte, in quei ritrovati dell'intelligenza nei quali si compendiano in forma distonica la fiducia e la disperazione del genere umano. L'arte, che più efficacemente riflette questa apparente contraddizione, trasforma l'uniforme nelle forme capaci di appagare o soddisfare le aspettative subliminari dell'osservatore. Se l'arte effettivamente riflette l'inutilità, la sua natura si riflette in un percorso simbolico, in grado di illudere, come di fatto illude l'archeologia, le generazioni che si succedono sulla terra e che si legano fra loro nel ricordo. «Si riconoscerà che il giardino è un esempio di opera d'arte, ovvero di artificio, non meno calzante di altri.

L'energia insita in determinati corpi umani, guidata da intelletti analogamente collocati, realizza qui una disposizione di altri corpi materiali che nello stato di natura non potrebbe prodursi. Questa descrizione si applica a tutte le opere create da mano umana, dall'utensile di selce alla cattedrale e al cronometro; e perciò noi chiamiamo artificiali tutte queste cose, le definiamo opere d'arte, o artifici, per distinguerle dai prodotti del processo cosmico, operante al di fuori dell'uomo, che chiamiamo prodotti naturali, o opere della natura. La distinzione così tracciata fra le opere della natura e quelle dell'uomo è universalmente riconosciuta ed è, mi sembra, utile e giustificata insieme» (Huxley 8). Il giardino rispecchia l'immagine sedimentaria dell'Eden terrestre, di un luogo originario, nel quale le esigenze della competizione, proprie del cosmo così come si manifesta all'osservatore, non hanno alcun senso. Esso pertanto ha una fungibilità didascalica, serve per confermare nell'osservatore il convincimento che egli disponga di una risorsa negata agli altri esseri della realtà, per i quali la spietatezza selettiva può adornare le caratteristiche di una religione panica.

L'antagonismo fra il naturale e l'artificiale è per così dire di maniera: è inautentico, ma funzionale all'operatività e all'applicazione dell'ingegno umano. Ogni artefatto è perente perché declina nella natura, ma è da questa che trae le risorse per manifestarsi nelle forme d'uso e di scambio. La natura sonnecchia in ogni elemento fabbricato dall'uomo e lo domina fino alla sua corruzione. L'annientamento delle forme operanti negli oggetti può essere costantemente verificato, ma non l'obliterazione delle stesse. Il paradosso della comprensione umana consiste nel fatto che le forme (i simboli dell'arte e della scienza) si perpetuano indipendentemente dai sistemi strutturali utilizzati per conferire loro il corrispettivo concreto. Il giardino e il vaso sono le forme nelle quali la fantasia umana si sbizzarrisce nella convinzione che compendiano la reminiscenza (vera o presunta) dell'Eden e la misurazione (geometrica) della realtà naturale, di quella regione «decaduta» dell'Eden, che può evocare l'infinito e l'eternità. L'interazione fra queste due aree speculari della conoscenza si evince dall'osservazione: tutto ciò che si configura come necessario si coniuga con quanto appare superfluo. E spesso il superfluo è un'appendice del godimento estetico, di una timida espressione dell'arte. «Nel giardino, fra la moltitudine di piante che occupano lo stesso posto e sono sottoposte alle stesse condizioni esterne, possono nascere varietà: quelle che tendono verso una determinata direzione saranno conservate, le altre distrutte. Lo stesso processo si applica alle nuove varietà, finché – per esempio – la brassica selvatica diventa un cavolo cappuccio e la *Viola tricolor* dei prati una *pensée* da concorso a premi» (Huxley 11). La natura qualche volta sembra assecondare le propensioni estetiche dell'osservatore nell'intento – forse – di non arginarne la vena inventiva. La sfida, che la natura lancia all'osservatore, non comprende soltanto i fallimenti di quest'ultimo, ma anche i suoi successi. Se effettivamente si ipotizzasse un *entente cordiale* fra la natura e l'uomo, i risultati dell'impresa di quest'ultimo non dovrebbero contraddire la propensione della prima. Ma un'ipotesi del genere è imprescrittibile perché conferirebbe alla natura un calcolo mentale da realizzarsi con il braccio dell'uomo. La cultura, che si richiama alla coltivazione e quindi al giardino, tende a differenziarsi dalla natura, non tanto per contrastarla, quanto per comprenderla e introiettarla. Il terminale dell'impresa umana dovrebbe identificarsi con la conoscenza delle componenti (organiche e inorganiche) della natura. Quando questo inseguimento a distanza avrà termine, il mondo non esisterà più e nelle atmosfere paradisiache o infernali si celebrerà l'amplesso fra l'umano e il suo paradigma, fra l'epigono di un universo e l'avvento di un altro universo quale alternativa

o sublimazione del primo.

La proiezione verso un ideale è comunque adombrata dalla selezione. Sebbene essa s'identifichi con un'impetosa determinazione in favore degli organismi più idonei al cambiamento ambientale, del quale in parte sono responsabili, il suo itinerario è comunque salvifico: assicura la sopravvivenza e il miglioramento funzionale delle specie, concorre a modificare il metabolismo geofisico e conseguentemente il metabolismo geopolitico. In altri termini, è quanto meno plausibile che l'ordinamento culturale, corrispondente ai vari insediamenti umani, sia dipendente dalle modificazioni ambientali. Non è possibile stabilire una diretta rispondenza fra *habitat* naturale e organizzazione politica – come pronostica (Charles-Louis de Secondat) Montesquieu – ma è ragionevole ammettere una relazione, difficilmente quantificabile, fra la struttura naturale e l'apparato artificiale, all'interno del quale si manifestano tutte le diverse alternative proposte dalla conoscenza. Il fatto che ogni membro debba attenersi alla linea di condotta, deliberata a livello comunitario, dimostra che il genere umano non persegue soltanto il criterio più efficace per sopravvivere, come avviene per l'alveare e il formicaio, ma la norma più idonea a consentire il cambiamento nelle interazioni individuali pur di salvare una teleologia, che le religioni, le filosofie e le ideologie perseguono e che il genere umano asseconda con più o meno esplicita convinzione. L'immutabilità e la ripetitività dei meccanismi operativi istintivamente adottati da alcune comunità di animali contrasta con la duttilità e l'imponderabilità delle propensioni e dei desideri umani. La struttura organica del genere umano consente di rendere meno imperiosa e asseverativa la predestinazione e di conseguenza di ritrovare all'interno del percorso ideale i codici interpretativi della natura. L'umanità si riconosce il potere di pensare e quindi di ipotizzare le coordinate congiunturali dell'emisfero organico e di quello inorganico, nell'intento di surrogarli con gli apporti inventivi omologabili nei dettami della ragione, della (divina) possibilità di parlare, disquisire, dubitare e obliare. Paradossalmente, anche la dimenticanza si serve delle parole per manifestarsi o giustificare la sua inadempienza o comunque la sua non rispondenza alle sollecitazioni del ricordo e alle suggestioni della memoria.

Se per il genere umano non si esplica quella stessa predestinazione, che la conoscenza accredita agli altri enti della natura, il problema della responsabilità è quanto meno una categoria congenita, capace cioè di interferire nell'*habitat* per modificarlo secondo delle traiettorie storicamente considerate ineluttabili e necessarie. La conoscenza pertanto si delinea come un compito naturale e l'artificio del quale si serve un complemento della sua plausibilità. «Inoltre, pur nella massima disparità di doti naturali, gli uomini concordano su una cosa: nel desiderio innato di godere le gioie della vita e di sfuggirne i dolori, in breve di non far altro se non ciò che gli aggrada, senza la minima preoccupazione per il benessere della società in cui sono nati. È questo il retaggio (la realtà su cui si fonda la dottrina del peccato originale) trasmesso dalla lunga serie di progenitori, umani e semiumani e bruti, ai quali la forza della spinta innata all'autoaffermazione assicurava la vittoria nella lotta per l'esistenza. Sta qui la ragione di quella *aviditas vitae* – l'insaziabile appetito di godimento – comune a tutta l'umanità, che è una delle condizioni essenziali del successo nella guerra con lo stato di natura all'esterno: e tuttavia, se fosse lasciata libera di agire all'interno della società, ne provocherebbe di certo la distruzione» (Huxley 18-19). Le relazioni interpersonali, le affezioni, le simpatie, le goethiane affinità elettive rendono lo scenario umano talmente differenziato da non giustificare alcun criterio di omologazione che non sia

traumaticamente imposto dal potere tutorio. Queste relazioni, tuttavia, spesso conflaiono con il senso di giustizia, che pure le comunità umane elaborano nell'intento di assicurarsi un ordinato insediamento nel *milieu* culturale nel quale s'impegnano a operare. L'«uomo interiore» di Adam Smith è una personalità artificiale perché combattuta da una doppia carica emotiva: da un lato, persevera nei suoi rapporti affettivi, non sempre armonizzabili con le norme comunitarie; dall'altro, s'impegna a ratificare le leggi che legittimano un tipo di condotta piuttosto che un'altra, nel rispetto di quel senso comune nel quale risiede l'equilibrio sociale. La simpatia equivale a una forma mediana di accettazione fra «diversi». Essa consente alle potenziali comunità di eguali di affermarsi legalmente, di deliberare intorno agli intendimenti da adottare per risolvere problematiche di comune interesse, di proporre una serie di accorgimenti con i quali esorcizzare i contrasti e i conflitti. A questi accorgimenti appartengono la scienza e l'arte: tutte le manifestazioni dell'abilità umana, volta ad allontanare il Male o comunque a devitalizzarlo per le parti che siano pregiudizievoli per il consorzio comunitario.

La simpatia è all'origine della consapevolezza, che è il fondamento della responsabilità. Le religioni e le filosofie connotano questa evoluzione naturale con il nome di coscienza. La riflessione sugli esiti delle azioni compiute per ordire la sopravvivenza e per organizzare il sistema comunitario implica la presenza di un atteggiamento da parte del genere umano che non lo esoneri dalla realizzazione di quegli adempimenti ritenuti necessari per il consolidamento della specie e per il rafforzamento dei vincoli culturali connessi con la conoscenza della realtà. La longitudine della coscienza è l'aspetto inquietante della condizione umana. «Nella misura in cui coopera ad accrescere l'efficienza di una data società di uomini nella lotta per l'esistenza, contro lo stato di natura o contro altre società, il processo etico agisce in armonico contrasto con il processo cosmico. Ma in quanto la legge e la morale sono restrizioni imposte alla lotta per l'esistenza nell'ambito degli uomini associati, è nondimeno vero che il processo etico si oppone al principio del processo cosmico, e tende a reprimere i caratteri più adatti ad assicurare il successo in quella lotta» (Huxley 20-21). Questo «equilibrio dei poteri» naturali e sociali dell'individuo non può tuttavia vanificare la lotta che lo determina. Paradossalmente, in tanto funge da equilibratore in quanto ne rammenta e ne convalida la necessità. Si deduce pertanto che, se i precetti moralistici compendiate nel «Fai agli altri quel che vorresti fosse fatto a te» venissero applicati alla lettera, la validità della norma verrebbe meno. Ogni trasgressore della stessa «vorrebbe» non incorrere nelle pene previste e quindi vorrebbe che i tutori dell'ordine si esimersero dal chiedergli ragione del malfatto. La presenza per così dire del Male, che la letteratura europea introduce nella narrazione nel periodo più fertile e sistematico di condotta contraria a ogni sua possibile manifestazione, dimostra quanta parte essa abbia nella costituzione endemica della cultura. Dal *Decameron* di Giovanni Boccaccio ai *Demoni* di Feodor Dostoevskij e al *Doctor Faustus* di Thomas Mann – tanto per esemplificare – la cultura occidentale si gratifica del compito di interferire in quella zona d'ombra, nella quale si presagisce da sempre di non poter penetrare senza preventivamente disporre l'animo a cementarsi con il demoniaco, con quel bradisima intestino, che agita le menti e le inquieta fino al punto da trasformarle in processi indiziari della sua penetrazione nella mentalità mondana.

La cultura occidentale è pervasa, fin dal suo esordio, dalla presenza del demoniaco o comunque di quelle forze estranee al consolidamento delle leggi umane, dell'autonomia del genere umano nel vaticinio della speranza e della rassegnazione. Anche l'epopea omerica, che segna il transito dalle nebulose convulsioni dell'Olimpo alla realtà così

come appare sotto lo sguardo e ai sensi dell'osservatore, introduce, non soltanto la violenza allo stato brado e la vendetta fra gli uomini che si contendono la gloria sul campo di battaglia e che ambiscono alla rimembranza dei superstiti, ma anche la dialettica conflittuale con le potenze titorie che, rissose, si contendono il favore e la devozione dei mortali. L'*Iliade* è il poema della forza allo stato puro, delle passioni violente, che esplodono come i turbamenti dei montoni alla minaccia del temporale. È il drammatico preludio all'incontenibilità del Male, il funesto presagio di una sua costante inferenza nei pensieri dell'uomo, anche di quello più agguerrito per contenerne gli effetti o per vanificarli con l'animo turbato dalla precarietà dell'esistenza. Molti episodi dell'*Iliade* sono dedicati alla «gratuità» del male – per usare un'espressione di Hannah Arendt – e tuttavia all'inevitabilità con la quale l'umanità lo condiziona agli eventi mondani. In contrasto con tutto ciò, ma soltanto come condizione propedeutica al dissolvimento delle tenebre o delle atmosfere ombratili nelle quali le turbe della violenza s'insinuano nei pensieri e nei gesti dei mortali, nell'*Odissea* il percorso dalla naturalità alla fraudolenza del Male è reso palese mediante la capacità iniziatica di Ulisse, il personaggio capace di costringere i sensi alla perseverante cognizione della ragione e di protendersi verso le regioni dell'autodeterminazione. L'esperienza durata dieci anni fra le insidie della natura (e che James Joyce nell'opera *Ulisse* raccorda in un giorno) offre il destro a un'ulteriore perlustrazione nell'intimità delle persone per carpirne la fedeltà, la coerenza e, sia pure nelle manifestazioni latenti, la coscienza operante. Il tutore dell'ordine, a Itaca ritrovata, è lo stesso Ulisse ingentilito e incattivito dalla constatazione del Male, che è necessario combattere organizzando un'offensiva comunitaria, fatta di precetti, leggi, coerentemente finalizzati a dare una più nobile rilevanza alla tradizione e al concerto simbolico di un sodalizio rinnovato dalle fondamenta, dai convincimenti diffusi e pervasivi, espressi dalle personalità paradigmatiche, esemplari. Il percorso civile dell'isola s'identifica con l'esperienza mondiale di un numero sempre più ampio e ragguardevole di individui. E, tuttavia, la vendetta – il castigo inflitto ai reprobì – permane come segno distintivo di una condizione naturale, che non si nobilita se non in prospettiva, peraltro difficilmente ravvisabile nelle sue concrete conclusioni. Il proposito di Ulisse di trasformare l'isola di Itaca in una città retta da norme, ispirate al costume di un popolo di vincitori e sotto l'imperio di un tutore che ne perpetui il valore, si risolve in una giustizia sommaria, in un atto di premeditazione e di severa condanna. L'esperienza sui mari e per terre lontane induce il vincitore di Troia a perseverare nella funzione catartica piuttosto che in quella pietosa, alla quale è improvvidamente contrario anche per l'intervento di Atena. Egli è ancora a metà del guado: fra il contrasto delle posizioni e degli interessi e la percezione di uno stadio intermedio, fra la caducità delle gesta eroiche e il conforto dei propri simili. L'imperiosità del comando, che si addice in guerra, lascia il posto alla comprensione e al soccorso in tempo di pace, quando si estingue la frenesia dei campi di battaglia e si accreditano le affezioni per le cure della famiglia e della comunità. La vita sedentaria, l'allevamento del bestiame e le coltivazioni si configurano come un'alternativa meno minacciosa e inconsulta rispetto a quell'empito di ferinità, nel quale si riverberano l'audacia, la persecuzione e il sopruso (sia pure camuffato da austuzia luciferina). Il successo è nell'accettazione della quotidianità: nelle opere e nei giorni di Esiodo.

Il Bene, tuttavia, non contrasta il Male perché non ne è l'antidoto, ma l'anticorpo. Tutto ciò che può essere realizzato a beneficio del genere umano non è necessariamente immune dal discredito, che la trama della conoscenza rende evidente in una fase

successiva. Il relativismo sociale è pervaso di negatività allo stato latente, che diventa effettiva quando se ne siano individuate le cause e non si sia provveduto a neutralizzarle. L'accettazione di processi conoscitivi, concatenati fra loro dalla necessità e dalla rassegnazione, comporta la perspicace respicenza di ogni membro della comunità che abbia a cuore i suoi interessi e le sorti dei suoi simili. In questo modo si consolida la cosiddetta società dell'artificio, che globalmente si confronta con il cosiddetto processo cosmico. La socialità si configura pertanto come uno stato d'animo – o uno stato di grazia – per il mantenimento del quale si rende necessaria la perseverante collaborazione di tutti i membri del sodalizio comunitario nel quale si determina. L'umanità si dispone a vivere così fra due cuori, in due emisferi semoventi, speculari fra loro: nella dimensione dell'inventiva e in quella della necessità. Il genere umano può organizzarsi in modo da trarre dei vantaggi dal mondo naturale in cui opera senza accettarne fino in fondo le linee di tendenza e le leggi dell'inevitabilità. La propensione mimetica costituisce un ausilio di fondamentale importanza per argomentare come se fosse palese il regno della giungla e fosse pregnante il compito di fronteggiarlo ad armi impari, cioè con le risorse dell'intelligenza e dell'immaginazione. La *mimesis* rappresenta la fase preliminare di ogni azione destinata a contenere «protesicamente» gli effetti dirompenti della natura. Con queste categorie operative si esplica la cultura umana: dai primi graffiti delle grotte di Altamira al teorema di Kurt Gödel. La letteratura, in tutte le sue forme ed espressioni, ha senso se rappresenta queste inquietanti interferenze fra la propensione mimetica e la tattica protesica: fra quanto il genere umano si propone di ricevere direttamente dalla natura e quanto s'industria di modificare perché la sua influenza sia sempre meno incisiva e determinante. L'ambigua inferenza di queste due attitudini umane sono continuamente rielaborate perché si adeguino alle esigenze delle generazioni che si succedono nel tempo e che ambiscono a descrivere la storia. Nel Novecento questa interferenza categoriale è manifesta negli scrittori destinati a lasciare una traccia insondabile nell'architettura (formale e concettuale) delle loro opere. Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Michael Bulgakov, rappresentano l'incongruenza e l'affidabilità degli strumenti cognitivi, con i quali si evidenzia il sistema del potere, la crisi di un'epoca, la perturbabilità del demoniaco, la consistenza genetica dell'immaginario, la falsificazione delle affezioni e dei disinganni.

Se la letteratura cosiddetta secondaria si occupa degli experimentalismi formali è perché non attinge ai significati delle cose. Sorvola sulle ibridazioni delle parole o addirittura sulla scompaginazione dei periodi, sulle peregrine liberalità dei profeti della velocità e dell'interdizione museale. Le avanguardie letterarie sono spesso fugaci esemplificazioni dell'insofferenza: crepuscoli antelucani di tentazioni mimetiche senza l'aggancio con il propellente protesico, nel quale si riflettono le profonde trasformazioni epocali. La letteratura, che opera un'autentica finalità terapeutica, propizia la conoscenza per stati d'animo, atmosfere recondite, ordite da imprese messianiche e mistificatorie. L'opera d'intrattenimento mentale all'Agatha Christie contribuisce a conferire all'espedito protesico un grado di malleabilità che adombra la propensione mimetica. L'assassino è uno sconosciuto che vive in mezzo alla comunità, che sguazza come un pesce nell'acquario dell'esistenza fino al momento in cui il *viator* (come nel *Moby Dyck* di Herman Melville e nel *Vecchio e il mare* di Ernest Hemingway) non lo trae in salvo e lo assicura allo sconcerto generale. La malattia del pensare corrobora l'imperscrutabilità degli inizi e l'incertezza della fine delle cose. «Ma proprio l'acuirsi dei sensi, il sagace affinamento delle emozioni, che avevano prodotto tanta dovizia di piaceri, si

accompagnavano fatalmente alla crescita proporzionale della capacità di soffrire; e la divina facoltà dell'immaginazione, mentre creava cieli nuovi e terre nuove, li corredeva di appropriati inferni dove regnavano il vano rimpianto per il passato e l'angoscia morbosa per il futuro. Infine, l'inevitabile castigo dell'eccesso di stimolo – l'esaurimento – apriva le porte della civiltà al peggior nemico di quest'ultima, la noia: la scialba e vieta lassitudine in cui l'uomo non trova alcun diletto, e la donna neppure; in cui ogni cosa è vanità e molestia; e la vita non sembra meritare di essere vissuta, se non per evitare il fastidio di morire» (Huxley 35-36). Questa constatazione rigenera la «misura», il fondamento della geometria, che condiziona gli effetti dell'operato umano al soddisfacimento del desiderio e delle aspettative dichiarate lecite dal «patto» (sottaciuto o esplicito, emotivo o razionale), che intercorre fra i membri della comunità sociale in un periodo storico ben determinato sulla base di un modello ideale subliminarmente consolidato. L'illeicità e la colpevolezza si conformano a un ordinamento che, seppure le condanna, ne salvaguarda per così dire la presenza nella vicenda comunitaria. Nella prospettiva il principio della retribuzione della pena dovrebbe risolversi in un virtuale riconoscimento di adesione a un processo globale, che per sua natura non ammetta nessuna consistente resistenza o contrarietà. «Quindi l'idea di giustizia subiva una graduale sublimazione: dalla punizione e ricompensa in base alle azioni compiute si arrivava alla punizione e ricompensa in base al merito; in altri termini, in base al movente. La rettitudine – ossia l'agire rettamente motivato – divenne non soltanto sinonimo di giustizia, ma componente positiva dell'innocenza, il cuore stesso della bontà» (Huxley 37). La facoltà di giudicare gli eventi è l'aspetto più aberrante della condizione umana. Il fatalismo di maniera e il rigido razionalismo si equivalgono quanto a inefficacia interpretativa della realtà. Perciò si esalta la capacità di mediazione come pratica dei riformatori sociali, di quanti si propongono di rendere accettabile l'esistenza collettiva, contrassegnata da un grado di coerenza e di solvibilità. L'indifferenza morale della natura autorizza il riformatore sociale a legiferare e a ipotizzare a fondamento della norma giuridica la propensione più o meno esplicita da parte del genere umano a darsi una ragione di vita che esuli dal necessarismo naturalistico. I miti, le religioni, le narrazioni fantastiche, l'edonismo e il fatalismo conferiscono una sorta di convalida storica agli strumenti formali utilizzati per rendere coesi i sodalizi umani. La storia, protervamente definita come *magistra vitae*, in effetti è una categoria rappresentativa della realtà depurata il più possibile di tutti quegli accidenti che non sono razionalmente giustificabili. La stessa scenografia dimostra quanta immaginazione sia necessaria per riprodurre *a posteriori* eventi accaduti in un contesto che può essere soltanto evocato. L'analogia fra dottrina della trasmigrazione e dottrina dell'evoluzione si giustifica con il mutare delle circostanze che la rendono comprensibile. Il percorso conoscitivo si serve di alcune categorie sostanzialmente immutabili conferendo loro connotazioni e nomi diversi. Il precipitato storico della differenziazione s'intravede nelle realizzazioni concrete e si evince dall'esperienza.

L'aforisma e la metafora influiscono nell'esplicazione del pensiero problematico, consentono agli aspetti più complicati del processo conoscitivo di simulare fantasiosamente i loro simulacri perché siano più facilmente comprensibili. Il dolore e la sofferenza si palesano come il corrispettivo del bene, che viene fruito dall'umanità grazie all'accorgimento con il quale si stabilisce il peso di ogni gesto umano. La parola – il Verbo – assume un rilievo particolare nell'ordito della creazione e quindi della codificazione protesica perché agisce sui sensi e sull'intelletto, armonizza le

manifestazioni distoniche della realtà, recepisce le incomprensioni e le dissolvenze e trasfigura il Male nelle forme più adeguate alla respinzione dello stesso. L'impegno profuso per individuarlo e camuffarlo come contrafforte emotivo delle aspirazioni difficilmente realizzabili è parte integrante dell'esperienza quotidiana. La milizia civile implica il riconoscimento di un tributo alla «virtù» proprio in ragione del contenimento del Male, del successo riportato dall'impresa umana nel rispondere alle sollecitazioni e ai condizionamenti naturali. Le idiosincrasie, che alimentano molta parte della letteratura intimistica, si delineano come le intercapedini surrettiziamente erette dall'intelletto per evitare di aderire alle suggestioni della natura o per aderirvi pervicacemente. La vicenda dei personaggi che rapresentano didascalicamente le idiosincrasie è costellata di riferimenti antropologici, filosofici, congetturali. La loro rassegnazione viene ereditata dagli stoici, da quei pensatori serioterapici, che intercettano le vibrazioni del cosmo come regole di comportamento generalizzanti. Ma la loro concezione del cosmo, intesa come scuola di virtù, depotenzia la stessa ragione, che si configura come un'appendice di qualcosa che è palese ed evidente ai più accorti e sfuggente ai semplici di spirito. Questa constatazione, destinata ad alimentare le affinità e le filiazioni fra lo stoicismo e il cristianesimo, è attenuata e perfino vanificata da una riconversione in senso etico: i più avvantaggiati sono i semplici di spirito e i reietti quanti sono impegnati a comprendere o a decifrare la realtà naturale.

A stabilire una ideale linea divisoria fra la natura e l'artificio provvedono per così dire l'ottimismo e il pessimismo: l'illusione di vivere nel migliore o nel peggiore dei mondi possibili. Queste categorie interpretative degli stati d'animo degli osservatori della realtà influenzano il pensiero e compensano gli scarti di umore che, in tutte e due i casi, sembrano propellere dall'ambiguità del creato. Il fatto che ogni individuo si trovi a conflagrare con quanto si evince dall'esperienza dimostra l'impermeabilità dei significati reconditi di ogni azione, anche di quella meno evidente e significativa, che si esplica nella quotidianità. L'esperienza è un eufemismo per accreditare la competitività, che è assicurata, oltre che indotta dalla necessità, dall'aumento della popolazione del pianeta e dalle forme della redistribuzione della ricchezza. Il pianeta è perlustrato in lungo e in largo per consentire all'apparato industriale di sopperire alle esigenze, che si manifestano nelle dimensioni geopolitiche nelle quali si divide e si organizza. La struttura globalizzante del mondo contemporaneo implica la regolamentazione delle risorse e delle imprese idonee a far fronte alle richieste di sostentamento e di miglioramento economico, che si determinano in tutte le regioni del pianeta. La disparità economica e l'ingiustizia sociale si compendiano quali che siano le forme di governo con le quali si rendono esigibili. La ricerca di una strategia internazionale per ridurre la miseria nel mondo, oltre a configurarsi come un compito umanitario, rappresenta una garanzia di stabilità, che i flussi emigratori e le sollevazioni intestine delle aree più povere del pianeta mettono continuamente a repentaglio. La filantropia si coniuga con la geopolitica in misura sempre più concreta. Le affezioni climatiche e le difficoltà tecnologiche inducono una parte del pianeta a vivere ai margini dell'emisfero progredito e tentacolare. La divisione in blocchi rispettivamente dei paesi avanzati e dei paesi arretrati costituisce un'insidia all'equilibrio mondiale, soprattutto a seguito della crisi delle ideologie per il debilitarsi di quella funzione coesiva che, nel bene e nel male, esplicano nel mondo contemporaneo. La libera organizzazione politica dei paesi in via di sviluppo non si armonizza spesso con un adeguato grado di coerenza istituzionale. La corruzione e la disfunzione amministrativa rendono ancora più precarie le condizioni, nelle quali anche gli interventi

esterni (non sempre desiderabili) possono attuare. Quando tali interventi esterni si verificano, si propalano opinioni contrastanti circa il grado di autonomia politica e istituzionale che i paesi, sconvolti dai conflitti intestini, si presume che continuino in qualche modo a salvaguardare.

La cosiddetta ineguaglianza naturale non giustifica, a livello globale, la discrasia economica e istituzionale che si verifica nelle varie aree del pianeta. L'estrema libertà d'impresa contrasta con i suoi principi ispiratori, fondati sulla destrezza e sulla competizione umane. La farisaica concezione della necessaria disparità di prospettive pratiche oltre che ideali della condizione umana si giustifica con una provvidenziale presenza imperante di natura occasionale o permanente. La «mano invisibile» di Adam Smith ha il compito di non estremizzare gli empiti imprenditoriali di quanti accettano la sfida del mercato, di un arengo innaturale, nel quale si concentrerebbero i bisogni e le risorse dell'umanità. La concezione di un processo imprenditoriale come camuffamento e sublimazione degli impulsi conflittivi da parte degli individui nei confronti dei loro simili denota una spietata introspezione antropologica. Il pessimismo della ragione è contraddetto da tutta una serie di eventi e di circostanze, nei quali l'operosità umana si ammanta di un moderatismo, che è effetto del timore ancestrale, del dubbio e dell'esiguità degli intenti con i quali si propizia una sorta di continua rigenerazione. Le stesse postulazioni mentali circa il grado di conflittualità, insito nella natura umana, sono plausibili anche per accreditare la solidarietà e l'amicizia. Gli individui si associano fra loro per assicurarsi una incontrastata sfera di operatività dopo aver assecondato la tendenza – anonima, estemporanea – di riconoscere l'oggettiva necessità della non-belligeranza. Se tutti fossero in lotta contro tutti, come appare nell'amplificazione sociale, il discredito del consorzio umano si paleserebbe in tutta la sua consistenza. E, invece, è proprio il credito solidaristico, che quanto meno viene simulato nella civivenza sociale, a dare vigore e legittimità alla competizione e alla concorrenza. Paradossalmente l'«innaturalità» è insita nella lotta a oltranza fra individui intenzionati a conseguire un obiettivo che, se non viene preventivamente ammesso come legittimo, è per definizione talmente precario (perché soggetto alle brame altrui) da non configurarsi come una conquista. Si deduce pertanto che è il conflitto un'astrazione concettuale, in grado di giustificare quelli reali, che hanno in sé congenito quel limite della «mano invisibile» di Smith nel quale consiste la caratteristica distintiva della condizione umana.

La convenienza, sebbene da Jules Quesnay e da Éleuthère-Irénéé Dupont de Nemours si configuri come una risorsa naturale dell'uomo, in effetti è un artificio della mente, che opera come il volano dell'economia e della storia. Se si dovesse definire nelle sue concrete dimensioni rappresentative, si arriverebbe al paradosso di connotarla come una visione strettamente soggettiva. Ma è imprescrittibile il fatto che una notazione del genere sia, non soltanto dotata di una carica sociale, ma propensa a disputarne l'entità, la gravidanza, in chiave comparativa. Non si può affermare *sic et simpliciter* la funzionalità della convenienza: essa risponde a un'esigenza afflittiva (nei confronti dei rispettivi contendenti) e a una precettistica impositiva (nei riguardi dei singoli attori sociali). L'imperiosità, con la quale si presume che ogni individuo la persegua per magnificare o esaltare la propria inventiva, contraddice l'enunciato che la pone in essere: la convenienza di alcuni non può esplicarsi ai danni di altri perché muterebbe il suo costruito argomentativo. Se è socialmente consentito arricchirsi, non è per pura convenienza di chi di fatto riesce a consolidare in proprio una serie di benefici. La possibilità di agire implica necessariamente che i suoi esiti non compromettano l'ulteriore

esplicitazione dell'umana ricerca della felicità. La strategia espressiva contrasta – dai fisiocratici, contrari all'avvento della tecnologia, ai naturalisti contemporanei – con i significati delle dottrine che inducono gli individui ad agire in modo da soddisfare le loro esigenze senza contrastare palesemente quelle *in fieri* dei propri simili. La stessa idea di «progresso» si fonda sulla consapevolezza che la concorrenza non interdica l'«accordo» sociale, ma lo renda addirittura più coesivo estendendo, ampliando le occasioni dello scambio ineguale fra i membri del consorzio sociale.

La sacralità dei diritti naturali è contraddetta dalla salvaguardia dei diritti morali e positivi, che ogni comunità elabora nell'intento di assicurare, con la propria sopravvivenza, uno scenario di esplicazione. L'equità, fonte di equilibrio, che dal diritto romano s'irradia in tutte le più moderne giurisdizioni, si configura come il riconoscimento di un inalienabile diritto individuale, che non contrasti, ma anzi corrobora il diritto oggettivo, con il quale l'ordinamento sociale si consolida e contribuisce all'esplicazione del giudizio storico. La morale corrente, infatti, non risponde soltanto alle sollecitazioni razionali ed emotive del periodo nel quale si manifesta, ma anche alle correnti di pensiero, che investono un arco temporale presuntivamente più ampio di quello nel quale si compendiano le esperienze delle singole generazioni. L'astuzia e il ricorso alla strumentazione – e quindi all'imprenditorialità – sono le risorse con le quali il genere umano ambisce alla sopravvivenza e a contrastare tutte le insidie e i pericoli del *milieu* naturale nel quale opera. La sua opposizione alle tendenze naturali degli animali e l'utilizzo del patrimonio minerario nel processo di attuazione dei suoi propositi creativi sono conseguenti a una scelta di fondo, che contraddice le attitudini degli altri enti della realtà. Il genere umano, infatti, elabora principi, criteri, ordini di condotta, per raggiungere degli obiettivi che altrimenti stenterebbe a conseguire: accetta cioè come ineludibili i freni e le rinunzie, ai quali fa ricorso pur di poter contare sulla libertà politica e morale quale garanzia di continuità rispetto a quella naturale, che presagisce di poter fruire soltanto precariamente e in forma per così dire sincopata.

La risposta alle sfide naturali elaborata dall'uomo ha un'influenza talmente generalizzata da non concedere quasi nulla alle tendenze istintive sulle quali sembrano fare esclusivo affidamento le altre specie animali. Ed è proprio questa peculiarità dell'*homo faber* che giustifica e legittima la morale sociale quale «ente di separazione» fra la natura volgarmente intesa come scenario dell'azione dissoluta e la natura subliminalmente rappresentata come l'universo energetico in grado di assecondare – almeno in parte – i progetti dell'uomo e le sue propensioni a collegare gli spazi del pianeta nell'intento di renderli fra loro complementari. «Ciò che in alcune società sarebbe tirannia vietare, in altri sarebbe follia permettere. L'esistenza di una comunità organizzata dipende dalla regolazione dei due ordini di forze a cui le unità che la compongono, gli uomini, obbediscono: quelle repulsive del diritto naturale e quelle attrattive e coattive della simpatia individuale e del potere collettivo. Quali di queste debbano predominare di volta in volta dovrà certamente dipendere da circostanze esterne e interne e dal grado di sviluppo della comunità» (Huxley 93). La complementarità delle une e dell'altro è tuttavia un'elegiaca forma di rappresentazione della natura. In effetti, la sostituzione delle leggi naturali con le leggi morali o positive costituisce una conversione concettuale del principio della convenienza, che si espleta nelle forme sempre più sofisticate del gusto e dell'attrattiva estetica. «Una volta di più vediamo dunque che la teoria assoluta dei "diritti naturali" – in altre parole, l'individualismo puro e semplice – portata alle estreme conseguenze logiche non è che barbarie ragionata ed egoismo bieco e totale, e perciò

incompatibile con la vita sociale. Tutto questo apparirebbe ovvio a chiunque, se l'ambiguo senso della parola "diritti" non colorisse di una sfumatura morale le relazioni umane, di per sé né morali né immorali, bensì, come Quesnay giustamente afferma, anteriori alla moralità» (Huxley 94). La barbarie, infatti, non è una stagione dell'umanità in sé conclusa, ma pertinace a tutti i cambiamenti sociali, che ne giustificano la presenza limitandone gli effetti. La barbarie è considerata da un punto di vista morale come la natura allo stato puro, senza la «contaminazione» (per altro verso provvidenziale) dell'apporto modificatore dell'inventiva umana. Anche l'inventiva, considerata come una componente naturale, si esplica in un sistema regolato da norme (artificiali), che conferiscono una particolare rilevanza a tutto quanto si realizza con il concorso dei fattori sui quali si fonda la società. L'intelligenza non preclude alle facoltà istintive di estrinsecarsi, ma di manifestarsi in modo che siano produttive di esiti vantaggiosi per la stessa filogenesi dell'umanità. Tutto ciò che influisce sull'operato collettivo in termini di superfetazione mentale contribuisce a elevare il grado della naturalità e, contestualmente, a modificare i criteri di rilevazione di quell'apparente primitivismo connotato come barbarie. Lo scenario naturale è illusoriamente identico a se stesso e sfiderebbe il tempo se le strategie inventate dall'osservatore della natura non tendessero paradossalmente a «snaturalizzarla».

La tolleranza, che i riformatori sociali accreditano alle società organizzate e alle comunità regolate da una serie di norme comunemente intese quale guida dell'azione, si delinea come una strategia della ragione di fronte ai soprassalti dell'istinto, della naturalità primigenia, elementare. La tolleranza appare un succedaneo della solidarietà, mentre in effetti risponde a un calcolo mentale da parte di quanti si propongono di ottenere dei benefici sociali, senza affrontare le contropartite morali, giuridiche ed economiche che tali benefici comportano. La tolleranza e la limitazione si compendiano: l'una e l'altra ineriscono l'aspetto istituzionale del comportamento umano. Quanto più elastica è la prima tanto meno estesa è la seconda: allo scopo di consentire la naturale propensione per il benessere individuale si rende necessario assicurarne l'area di esplicazione. La proprietà e la povertà, sebbene siano categorie differenziate dalla committenza concreta e dall'ipostasi mentale, s'intendono sempre raccordate fra loro da un nesso di compromissione, che insidia i pensieri e i gesti dell'uomo. A seconda del gruppo o della fascia sociale di appartenenza, la rappresentazione della ricchezza e della povertà assume conformazioni talmente differenziate – e perfino didascalicamente esasperate – da risultare propellenti di una loro ellittica giustificazione o di una scabra confutazione.

A conferire una certa rilevanza al giudizio sociale sopperisce l'individualismo, l'abilitazione tipicamente borghese del soggetto che opera nella realtà al fine di nobilitarla anche per questioni di prestigio di casta. La nuova conformazione sociale, alla quale dal Rinascimento in poi dà luogo l'individualismo, contempla un osservatore di quanto accade nell'emisfero dell'azione con le lenti dell'entomologo e con lo smarrimento del mistico o dell'eresiarca. Tutto ciò che si manifesta nell'arengo sociale assume, nella società moderna, un significato per così dire di prospettiva, nel senso che interagisce con quanto presumibilmente avverrà nel futuro. Al presagio e alla premonizione di stampo arcaico si sostituisce progressivamente la previsione, che sconfinata nell'elaborazione statistica, nella media statistica, che oggettiva i particolari e li rende sempre più controvertibili e precari.

L'antidoto politico dell'arbitrarietà è il dispotismo, una forma esagitata di

individualismo, destinato patologicamente all'autoesaltazione e all'autodenigrazione, secondo meccanismi enfattizzanti e depressivi, capaci di suggestionare e obnubilare le menti rispettivamente dei più semplici e dei più facinorosi. L'espedito dialettico, con il quale il despota e il tiranno s'intromettono nella trama della storia, ha qualcosa di soporifero e di balsamico insieme: serve per tranquillizzare le comunità in rivolta, scontente del loro livello di vita e sfiduciate dalla compromissione dei gruppi egemoni. Il despota e il tiranno sono i paradigmi dell'ordine, della staticità, della sedentarietà e della gerarchia, per arbitraria e inconsistente che sia, purché indirizzata al rispetto di alcuni «valori» generalmente connessi con la tradizione. Nell'arcaismo risiede, infatti, la natura legittimante di un potere tutorio, che si arroga il diritto di regolare tutta l'esistenza dei suoi soggetti secondo una successione di fattori, che si coniugano nella rigenerazione genetica dell'umanità. La religione della storia è un momento esiziale del processo degenerativo di tutte le componenti organiche e rappresentative delle strutture sociali. La convinzione, schermata dalla propaganda, di riabilitare il passato perché generi la necessaria suggestione sulle presenti generazioni obnubilate dal mito della macchina, della velocità, dell'organigramma tecnologico.

La dottrina, alla quale il totalitarismo moderno s'ispira, è connessa, per trasloco concettuale, al contrattualismo, che trova il suo mordente esplicativo nell'ipotesi di un conflitto permanente di tutti contro tutti. L'innaturalità delle risoluzioni politiche si evincono dal primigenio naturalismo, nel quale si presume che il genere umano dibatta sulle forme migliori per assicurarsi la sopravvivenza e, in certa misura, alcuni privilegi dispositivi sulla natura, negati o non esplicitamente evidenziati agli altri esseri viventi. In un estemporaneo momento aurorale, gli uomini avrebbero deciso o semplicemente diviso di darsi un contegno che li rendesse depositari di un ordine, capace di salvaguardare la *ratio* che lo pone in essere. Il disordine elementare induce a presagire l'ordine, del quale il genere umano detiene il codice, ne converte storicamente le funzioni e le prospettive, nell'intento di agevolare il più possibile il transito terreno del genere umano.

La nostalgia per la natura evoca uno stato d'animo tutt'altro che increscioso e conflittuale. In una realtà, che si configura sempre più come l'artificio dell'uomo, il significato allegorico dello stato di natura è quello di Jean-Jacques Rousseau: una condizione edenica, interrotta dalla propensione umana alla delimitazione (della proprietà) e quindi della «misura». La cultura dell'Occidente si connota come il processo di razionalizzazione della realtà mediante le figurazioni simboliche della mente, alle quali sia consentito di assegnare delle dimensioni computabili. La delimitazione, i perimetri delle figure costituiscono le prime strumentazioni simboliche, mediante le quali l'istituto della proprietà (un istituto così controverso e dibattuto in tutto il corso della storia occidentale) assume una rilevanza destinata a sovvertire i rapporti presumibilmente instauratisi fra gli individui delle diverse comunità didascalicamente definite pre-logiche. La figura soprintende sempre più alle concezioni mondane. La poetica affabulatrice, che continua nelle saghe e nei miti ad assecondare l'aspettativa nevralgica dell'umanità, fondata sull'udito e sul suono, cede il posto alla scrittura, nelle sue varieguate rappresentazioni, quali nessi concettuali fra le costruzioni geometriche e le loro dimensioni numeriche (e poi algebriche) nell'ambito dell'emisfero visivo.

Quando alla geometria euclidea, nella quale si compendia una complessa stagione della conoscenza umana, fanno riscontro, nell'epoca contemporanea, le geometrie riemanniane, il suono riassume un empito evocativo, che si confa con la ribellione e la

rivolta degli uomini e delle donne esclusi dal «banchetto della natura». Gli *spirituals* e gli esperimentalismi letterari di Albert Camus e di Louis-Ferdinand Céline si possono considerare come il risultato di un'esegesi critica delle sistematiche politiche ed etiche conferite dalla ragione alla carta geopolitica del mondo. L'avvento del sonoro nella società dell'immagine lascia presagire, più ancora che i tormenti del *Giovane Werter* e le visionarie considerazioni di Friedrich Nietzsche, una sorta di mutazione concettuale operante nell'Occidente di intensità maggiore di quella prevista dalla Riforma luterana. La musica di Richard Wagner e di Arnold Schönberg, così difformemente interconnesse fra loro, rappresentano l'inedito della creazione. Questa congettura trova conferma nell'opera più complessa della letteratura dell'Occidente, nel *Doctor Faustus* di Thomas Mann, nella quale il declino dell'Europa e delle ideologie totalitarie che la reggono fino all'epilogo del secondo conflitto mondiale (determinato dalla crisi di Pearl Harbor e quindi dalla frizione dell'Occidente americano con l'Oriente giapponese, prospiciente il Pacifico) si coniuga con l'esaltata esperienza di un esegeta del suono primordiale. Il protagonista dell'opera di Mann rinnega la «misura», della quale è responsabile la tradizione (cioè il patrimonio culturale consolidato), per riappropriarsi metaforicamente di un grado di «libertà demoniaca», capace di suggestionare talmente le coscienze da indurle a rinnegare la presenza provvidenziale del Geometra dell'universo e del Mentore della storia.

La distruzione dell'Europa, anzi l'autodistruzione dell'Europa, preconizzata dal *Declino degli dei*, segna l'avvento di una nuova unità di misura, sia nel suo significato letterale, sia nel suo significato allegorico. La concezione dello Stato e i fondamenti morali, linguistici, consuetudinari della Nazione, sono sottoposti a una spietata disamina concettuale fino a renderli per così dire remissivi nei riguardi di quegli «eventi globali» dominati prevalentemente dall'economia del virtuale e dalla religione del fittizio. Il sistema delle comunicazioni enfatizza, non tanto come nei regimi totalitari gli apporti del militante, del neofita, quanto piuttosto la rovinosa destrezza dell'essere. Negli oggetti d'uso si compendia l'esperienza delle nuove generazioni, che si smarriscono vicino alla figura e ne prescindono. L'arte informale presagisce e asseconda il gusto di un pubblico, che si presume scandagli nel colore, nei plessi dei segni, nell'intento non si sa quanto plausibile di rinvenirvi lo spunto per rafforzare la genesi di un «altro» mondo che, sulle spoglie di questo presente e fatturale, sia in condizioni di liberare l'osservatore della realtà dal fastidio di non comprenderla se non per quegli aspetti secondari che la rendono utilizzabile e quindi deformabile ai fini di un'umanità in crescita e in espansione. L'emisfero dei suoni e l'emisfero dei segni dovrebbero riflettersi nel caleidoscopio di un universo ospitale.

La constatazione, infine, di uno stato di «sublimata» belligeranza rende quanto meno angosciosa l'alternativa tipicamente contemporanea dell'individualismo e del socialismo nelle loro componenti esoteriche, rispettivamente della difesa a oltranza della libertà individuale e della solidarietà comunitaria. La prudenza opererebbe in chiave salvifica per la ridefinizione del perimetro concettuale dell'una e dell'altra dottrina, alle quali sono addebitabili le fortune e le disgrazie del mondo moderno e contemporaneo. L'apoteosica assolutizzazione di alcuni principi si sfalda di fronte all'imperiosità delle incertezze. Ed è proprio questa risoluta affermazione della relativizzazione della conoscenza, e quindi delle norme che regolano il comportamento, a infiggere nella struttura del ragionamento – in pratica, nella facoltà di pensare – un *vulnus*, che lascia incommensurabili spazi di appropriazione indebita alla libera determinazione individuale. Il rischio che tale

atteggiamento comporta è che si inibisca la responsabilità soggettiva con la scusa della refutabilità concettuale di ogni enunciato che la convalidi. L'instabilità (emotiva, a livello individuale; istituzionale, a livello collettivo) è una caratteristica degli organismi comunitari contemporanei, soprattutto di quelli che, dopo il crollo del Muro di Berlino, si aggrappano ai modelli capitalistici occidentali come a una scialuppa di salvataggio per accorgersi, quasi immediatamente, di librarsi nella limacciosa atmosfera del Titanic.

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V.

**HYMNS
TO
A MILLENARY BEGINNING & ENDING**

Laura Stortoni*

Sull'Eurostar

Con l'Eurostar Milano-Bologna-Roma attraverso di nuovo
la triste pianura padana. Vedo i campi ben coltivati della Lombardia
bordati da alti filari di alberi, fienili di mattoni, casolari
con campanili ed archi come chiese romaniche,
antichi caselli ferroviari con finestre murate,
alti camini di fabbriche abbandonate che potresti prendere per minareti.

Passiamo Piacenza, la stazione e i treni
coperti di graffiti. I silos industriali si affacciano
tra i cespugli di sambuco che fiancheggiano la ferrovia
nella distesa di piante di granoturco – il mais
incongruo ai miei occhi in questo mondo settentrionale
dopo averlo celebrato in Messico e nel Southwest.
Torri del telegrafo si ergono come ometti di legno,
pioppi e gracili frassini si chinano sui letti secchi dei torrenti.

Ovunque macchine agricole sono parcheggiate nei campi.
Non c'è posto per la bellezza, tutto è funzionale,
ma la natura schizza fuori lo stesso,
e uno si chiede come sono sopravvissuti,
quei pochi alberi tra i rotoli d'oro dei covoni di fieno
disseminati sui campi pettinati. Ma sopravvivono
e sopravviveranno.

* Laura Stortoni è cresciuta a Milano e poi si è trasferita negli Stati Uniti dove ha insegnato in diverse università in Oregon e in California. Ha tradotto le poetesse del Rinascimento, Giuseppe Conte, Maria Luisa Spaziani e diversi poeti americani. Nel 1997, ha pubblicato il suo primo libro di poesia *The Moon and the Island* con prefazione di Diane Di Prima.

Tomaso Kemeny*

Un cielo nuovo

In principio le labbra della terra
 si schiusero al piacere
 e il seme sgorgò
 fino a sciogliere i laghi di ghiaccio,
 e il vento rovente
 slegò la criniera del bosco
 e la tigre si saziò col grasso
 degli eroi. In principio mia madre
 mostrò i seni alla luna
 e ogni zolla alzata dalla vanga
 s'impregnò del sangue dei vinti
 e il sole indicò a mio padre
 il ritorno e fiorì il melo
 nel bianco attimo del ringraziamento.
 Così il mio nome dal tempio
 si scandì nella neve
 finché tempeste di brago e di candore
 non ribaltarono flotte di alberi
 a mostrare ai cieli l'intensità
 propagata dal profondo. Varsavia
 era in fiamme e rabbrivirono
 le radici dell'azzurro; nel fumo
 si dissolse Praga e Vienna e Budapest
 persero l'arpa regale. Piovvero
 piume di terrore e i barbari
 percorsero ogni strada
 espropriando ogni angolo conveniente,
 spinti dalla sovranità dell'incubo.
 E a Berlino s'uccise dapprima
 il folle persecutore dei figli
 di Sem e quarantaquattro anni dopo

* Tomaso Kemeny è nato a Budapest nel 1939 ed attualmente vive a Milano. È professore di Lingua e Letteratura Inglese all'Università di Pavia. Ha pubblicato cinque libri di poesia e l'ultimo, del 1998, s'intitola *Melody*. È uno dei fondatori del movimento mitomodernista, traduttore di Lord Byron ed autore di saggi critici.

crollò il muro che divise il mondo.
Ma non si vide né un cielo nuovo
né una nuova terra
perché l'utile continuò immediato
ad avvelenare l'acqua, l'aria
e il fuoco divorò ovunque
la sposa adorna per lo sposo,
ma ricordo il giorno in cui un angelo
volto al sole gridò
"Prima della luce fu amore
a animare l'abisso.
Prima della tenebra fu odio
a ingabbiare il vuoto.
Prima del silenzio fu la parola
germogliante dal caos."

Mario Baudino*

Flight Coupon

Nessuno più vede il cielo dal cielo
tutti sopra le nuvole a guardare
altro, carta stampata a volte o immagini
inchiodate nel prisma della fronte, eguali
grosso modo, diresti, a quelle
trascinate al check-in, recuperate
sul nastro dei bagagli quando tutto
nel suo tempo assegnato si consuma: nessuno
ti spia dal cavo delle nuvole, nessuno
che non sia effetto di fiamma o rifrazione, questo spieghi
al tuo vicino gemello
legato a te per la vita e per la morte
anche se l'aeroplano atterrerà di certo
e prenderai un taxi

Nessuno più vede il cielo dal cielo
come l'incantatore buono innamorato
nella sua torre d'aria, e un elfo o gnomo d'umidità addensata
che ti aspetti paziente nascosto
tra quelle praterie e quei mari, quei
mirabolanti bastioni di nebbia,
che ti veda passare di lontano e talvolta tornare
ti faccia cenni lievi con la mano poi alzi le spalle
ti sorrida e ti giochi magari uno scherzo
mentre bevi mangi chiacchieri e non sai,
un piccolo demone, un jinn,
uno spirito in bottiglia non c'è ma fuori è scuro
tutto è già cominciato, tutto
scivola a farsi mettere al sicuro

Corre il sedile bruciando il minuto
vecchio stregone, non t'ho riconosciuto

* Mario Baudino è nato nel 1952 e vive a Torino dove lavora per *La Stampa*. Ha pubblicato tre raccolte di poesia *Una regina tenera e stupenda*, *Grazie*, e *Colloqui con un vecchio nemico*, oltre ai romanzi *In volo per affari* e *Il sorriso della druida*.

Roberto Mussapi*

Parole del tuffatore di Paestum

Io sono l'anima di tuo padre, il tuffatore:
ti ho seguito ogni giorno, ti sono accanto,
conosco come allora le tue zone d'ombra,
il linguaggio dei moti tracciato dalla tua faccia,
niente è cambiato da allora, in questo senso.
Questa è la prima cosa che ho scoperto,
la prima che volevo dirti: non cambia la percezione
dei tuoi attimi, come non cambiava
di notte, nel sonno, o per la distanza.
So che questo mio soffio (dal fondo dell'acqua, tra le attinie)
sarà per te come le mie parole un tempo:
che ti infondevano memoria e coraggio,
più del vino o di una donna che ti guarda.
La mia prima scoperta, la prima verità è che nulla
si spezza nel segreto dell'anima.
Il resto è confuso, è presto
per cercare di riferirti,
coralli, attinie, vite che si disegnano da un moto
d'acqua e si dileguano all'istante.
Non tutto è luce, trasparenza, silenzio,
cunicoli di buio, respiri compressi, poi voci
che inalano in me come se io parlassi.
Scivolo verso un fondo sempre più distante
e sento che una luce sommersa mi chiama da oriente:
non so dove finisca, per ora,
non so che cosa sia ma so che amore
la muove e ne determina il respiro.
Di questo viaggio parlerò più avanti,
quando esperito sarà conoscenza,
posso parlarti di quanto ho lasciato,
sopra la superficie azzurra delle acque,

* Roberto Mussapi è nato a Cuneo nel 1952 ed attualmente vive a Milano dove lavora per la Jaca Book. Ha pubblicato cinque libri di poesie e il più recente, del 2000, s'intitola *L'Antartide*. È autore di drammi teatrali ed è traduttore di Shelley, Keats, Melville e Stevenson.

tra le sabbie bianchissime, le palme,
l'ombra degli ulivi, il vino
che veniva versato dalle anfore:
ama la terra rosa nel tramonto,
immergiti nel mare per gioco, come un tritone,
gusta la frutta, il pane, bevi e mangia,
ascolta le risa delle ragazze,
cerca la loro bocca, ridi e dispèrati,
ringrazia ogni giorno il tuo paese lucente.
Io non sono tuo padre ma la sua anima,
non so quello che vivo ma ricordo,
la riva, la piscina, i colori che formano
lo strano disegno della vita mortale.
Vivi in quella ceramica smagliante e attendi
quanto saprò dirti più avanti, alla fine del viaggio.
Ma ora che dormi come quando in una culla
sembravi cercare i segreti del mondo,
ora che hai spalle più larghe e più radi i capelli,
ascolta le parole della mia anima:
non so molto di lei – di me stessa -
(è presto , figlio, non conosco abbastanza,
ho appena iniziato, sto nuotando),
non pensare al mio corpo (è tardi,
perle, quelli che furono i miei occhi,
e le mie labbra contratte in corallo),
ma ho conoscenza del loro matrimonio,
di quando vivevano all'unisono nel mondo
e io, anima di tuo padre, il tuffatore
ti consegno solo questa esperita certezza
(dal fondo dell'abisso, nel brivido del tuffo):
che anche l'uomo può amare eternamente.*

* Poesia inedita in volume. È ispirata al celebre affresco tombale detto La tomba del tuffatore, a Paestum, l'opera più famosa che rappresenta un tema diffuso e rappresentato in tutto il bacino del Mediterraneo. La figura dell'uomo che si stacca dal suolo per tuffarsi nel mare e raggiungere Oceano, è universalmente considerata simbolo dell'anima che si allontana dal corpo al momento della morte e inizia il viaggio verso il mondo acquatico dell'origine.

Gabriella Galzio*

La nera aurea

Ebbi tante vite, tanti ardori nella muta
muta muta la mia aurea pelle di drago
nessa del tempo la prima corolla del cranio
bucai nella luce e il cielo fu fuoco passerì sfiammanti
le braci della storia vanno ormai cantando
sotto i nostri lucidi passi d'acqua sulla strada
sotto sterpi lucenti nella trama rabbrividente la vita il morso
saprà la lingua il rantolo l'osso
la morte partoriente svellere in luce
spaccherà la labrys le sue labbra nere
nere scogliere denti nella fossa *muta muta la mia aurea*
fossa braciere alata forgia della lingua
incenerente il tempio. Sarà tempio il mare

il lento trasmutare delle forme in affilata
lama parola squarcio latrato e come un boato
afferreremo le ossa dei morti il loro balenante
imperativo sognante: *sono la tua febbre febbre incendiaria*
sono l'ultimo scoglio alle colonne d'ercole massacro dell'amante
che giunge fin dove più giunge la potenza battente sul piano
stacco dal freno potenza slanciata a filo e
in alto in alto volo soprano lirica d'altura e passo fondo grave
sono il mio maschio, mi accompagno nella stella della schiena
ventre cosmico rotante urlo rombo tuono
sono la povertà del secolo e vene secche la tua tanta tanta acqua da bere
dalle nocche colma vuota colma brocca bucata del coppiere
sono misura a dismisura la sfiottante
verità cangiante degli dèi le folgori
il loro pulpito deserto l'eco di maestri più nessun maestro
sei la mia vacante eredità e ti consumo in muta
muta pelle consacrata al rettile grumo di civiltà bagnante

* Gabriella Galzio è nata a Roma nel 1956 ed attualmente lavora come traduttrice a Milano. Ha tradotto autori tedeschi ed ha pubblicato due raccolte di poesie. L'ultimo libro in versi, del 2000, è intitolato *Sofia degenera il mondo*. È anche fondatrice e coordinatrice di redazione della rivista letteraria *Fare Anima*.

*nel Vicino Oriente: inorridite inorridite riesumate dalle polveri
perché erano polveri l'oro dei maghi i canti dei morti
pietà per i vivi per gli sfocati
contorni degli occhi dei piedi i loro affastellati di case chiese cose rotte
ho cieca attraversato le corti ho amato stolti cani ladri lai
l'ampio fiume azzurrante la gola lastricando voce ho cantato l'a
nima nascente delle perle ho srotolato monti divelto campi gettato sai
all'altra che in te s'affannava a nascere fiume interrelato delle ardenti
siamo in frammenti specchi natanti elogio della vita
siamo liberati dagli affranti franti spiriti dei tempi
siamo parlanti la lingua
puri dall'alto di fosse e musica sonante moneta dura
la sola moneta che valga
un'arsura un piede un occhio il mio occhio vigilante delle orbite
feroce battaglia col toro*

(parleranno di noi anche i morti dalla vita ci fiuteranno
resteranno sulle nostre orme come orme
dalle loro ombre dall'anima divise)

Roberto Carifi*

Il nuovo anno tratterrà il respiro,
mescolerà le ore
a un lampo di eterna sete,
in esso percorrerai l'ultimo tratto
saluterai in un raggio
la mano tesa del Signore,
declinerai la testa per vedere a fondo
offerta alla scure invisibile del boia.
Il nuovo anno partorirà l'addio
di cui è gravido il tuo tempo,
nomi intonati alla lingua dei morti,
il tuo pronuncerà la bocca
che non pronuncia a caso.

* Roberto Carifi è nato a Pistoia nel 1949 dove vive e insegna filosofia. Ha pubblicato otto libri di poesia e il più recente, del 2000, è intitolato *Europa*. È traduttore di poeti francesi e tedeschi ed autore di saggi filosofici.

Giuseppe Conte*

Preghiera erotica a Dio per il tempo che ricomincia

Dio di tutti gli dei e di tutte le religioni
Dio che sei Amore – e dunque desideri, baci, seme, rinascita, fremiti, passioni
Dio delle donne, degli uomini, degli omosessuali, dei negri, dei pellerossa, degli sconfitti, dei malati, degli infelici
Dio delle maree, del mestruo, e della luna
Dio delle api e dei delfini
Dio dei giardini e delle nebulose più lontane
io ti prego per il sole che torna e per il tempo che ricomincia
seppellisci il secolo passato, per la sua maschera dal riso atroce
Il secolo feroce dell'Olocausto, dei campi di concentramento, della distruzione nucleare
delle città soffocate, delle piogge acide, delle stragi etniche
del denaro e della merce messi sopra l'altare
io ti prego, dona a noi tutti esseri mortali del pianeta
nuove fioriture di libertà e fratellanza cosmica e carnale
ai ragazzi i sogni eretti, ribelli di rovesciare tutto
agli uomini maturi l'energia di costruire un futuro intatto
ai vecchi ancora una tenera carezza di piacere
donaci il vino delle vigne, il profumo delle primavere
Il respiro ventoso dell'erba, l'umida folla delle notti in cui ci travolgono
i sensi, il bacchico fervore della musica
fa che la Madre Terra sia adorata, riconsacrata
che il potere sia puro e condiviso e mai tirannico
che la giustizia sia limpida e giusta e mai mortale
che sia chiaro che soltanto l'Amore vale.
Concedi tutta la gioia che serve per affrontare il dolore
e per dire davvero "ho vissuto" quando si muore.

* Giuseppe Conte è nato in Liguria nel 1945. Ha pubblicato cinque libri di poesia. L'ultimo libro di versi, del 1997, è intitolato *Canti d'oriente e d'occidente*. È anche autore di sei romanzi e svariati saggi su mito, spiritualità e letteratura. Il più recente è intitolato *Il sonno degli dei*.

Rosita Copioli*

Il profumo di mio figlio

Il profumo di mio figlio
è come quello di un campo fiorente.
Per questo millennio un profumo,
indecifrabile.

Il grano non spira profumo
dove hai diserbato.

La forza del campo è un profumo
d'erba viva agitata dal vento.

Nessuno lo compra,
lo acquista chi avverte
la sua aura lontana.

Invisibile,
da un punto segreto del campo
il tesoro nasce e rinasce.

Chi sarà l'aquila selvaggia
che fissa l'occhio del cielo,
e lo scruta,

profumatrice della gloria,
appartenuta alla carne?

Il regno dei cieli è in un campo
che l'aquila adocchia
ruotando all'aurora.

* Rosita Copioli è una degli esponenti storici del movimento mitomodernista. Vive a Rimini e ha pubblicato poesia, saggi, narrativa e traduzioni di poesie di Yeats. Il suo libro di versi più recente è intitolato *Elena*.

Massimo Maggiari*

Per un millennio di nuovi cammini

tra palmo e dito ho tracciato un confine
e nel silenzio rossastro dei capelli
il mondo ha scoperto cieli e costellazioni

agli orizzonti tribù e dogmi sono scemati
in diaspore e gemme hanno seppellito
secoli di folle al fosco mattino

le ossa dei morti non muoiono più
il mondo di ieri riposa erbari azzurri
e la salvezza, la salvezza di ogni vita
albeggia ai porti delle città-giardino

ogni creatura è in cammino
l'uomo dal nome greco ci ha preso la mano
e nei mille solstizi sfata una falesia di cristallo

siamo liberi, siamo occhi di fuoco, siamo mano ardente
si accendono i cancelli della città celeste
e piano piano, a piccoli passi, gentili
sfogliamo insieme corpo e luce
corpo e gemma, corpo e alberi, cespugli e mare, monti e volti
volti che sbandierano forti come fuochi selvaggi

fratellisorelle
camminate il mondo nelle quattro direzioni
e santi pregate nuove congiunzioni nuovi sentieri
e viaggiate su oceani e sponde, viaggiate su catene e onde
ardenti figli di querce millenarie
soffi di sole arcipelaghi di acque blu

* Massimo Maggiari è nato a Genova nel 1960. Attualmente vive a Charleston, nella Carolina del Sud, dove insegna lingua e letteratura italiana. Ha pubblicato la raccolta di versi *Terre lontane/Lands Away* e i suoi versi sono apparsi su riviste negli Stati Uniti, in Italia e in Sud Africa.

Alessandro Carrera*

The Enormous Room

1.

The Next Century was an enormous room, ecosystems
in a studio apartment, flickering Bibles on the rooftops,
Babelic lovers oblivious to their names.

The police was on patrol, inflicting razor-like caresses
on the newcomers, forcing them to get rid of this year's
fashion, and to shiver in the breeze of the millennium.

Perhaps, he thought, my wordscape will match the scattered profile
of some new Antarctic lake the Next Big Thaw will leave behind.

And beauty will be detached from goodness:
a plane solemnly gliding to a crash landing.

2.

Question: What was he supposed to love
if he really wanted to love the Next Century?

Answer: A spare motel room in a cheap
Southern town, its classic rock station
challenging the absence of a new Wagner.

But he liked being an orphan of genius and
controversy, not unlike a beautiful camellia
getting lazier and lazier the more it is looked after,

which should be neglected and punished instead,
and kept away from humans, to grow wild again.

* **Alessandro Carrera** was born in Lodi, Italy, in 1954. He teaches Italian Literature at New York University and collaborates with the Italian Cultural Institute in New York. He also taught at the University of Houston and at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Recently he has published *L'esperienza dell'istante* (a philosophic study, Lanfranchi 1995), *La sposa perfetta/The Perfect Bride* (poems, Book Editore 1997), *La stagione della strega* (Arturo Loria Prize for short fiction, Diabasis 1998), *A che punto è il Giudizio Universale* (short stories, Mobydick 1999), plus *Giacomo Leopardi poeta e filosofo* (Cadmò 1999), *Il dovere della felicità* (with Filippo La Porta, Baldini & Castoldi 2000), and *Il principe e il giurista* (Pieraldo 2000).

La stanza enorme

1.

Il Secolo Venturo era una stanza enorme, ecosistemi
in appartamenti per scapoli, Bibbie che ammiccavano
sui tetti, amanti babelici ignari di come chiamarsi.

La polizia di ronda infliggeva carezze al rasoio
agli ultimi arrivati, obbligandoli a disfarsi della moda
dell'anno passato e a provare un brivido alla brezza del millennio.

Magari, pensò lui, il mio paesaggio verbale sarà adatto al profilo frastagliato
di un nuovo lago antartico che il Gran Prossimo Disgelo si lascerà alle spalle.

E il bello sarà posto a distanza dal bene: come
un aereo che plana solenne, verso un atterraggio d'emergenza.

2.

Domanda: che cosa doveva amare
se davvero voleva amare il Secolo Venturo?

Risposta: la nuda camera di un motel in una città
meridionale poco cara, la stazione di rock classico
unica rimasta a sfidare l'assenza di un nuovo Wagner.

Ma a lui non dispiaceva essere un orfano
di genio e controversie, come una bellissima
camelia che più la curi e più diventa pigra

e che dovrebbe stare negletta e punita
e tenuta lontana dagli umani, per tornare natura.

3.¹

He and the Next Century, the Next Century and he,
playing Talking God and Calling God in the ceremonial

arena, polishing up their puberty ritual,
rehearsing for First Man and First Woman alone,

not knowing what to do with Changing Woman,
who would steal any show under the Big Dipper.

So they asked Coyote if there was a Holy Person
responsible for the current state of the world.

The world?, asked Coyote, looking up.
This is no world. I would call it a rez.

4.²

*At night his head is spinning,
in the morning he can't sleep.*

*His Bride stays out all day,
only at dusk do they meet.*

And oh, how fast the beat.

*When he's young, he's a flower
stung by every bee.*

*When he's old he'll sail off
to harvest the sea.*

And oh, how can this be?

¹ Talking God, Calling God, First Man, First Woman, Changing Woman, and Coyote belong to Navajo creation myths. See *Amerindian Cosmology*, ed. by Don McCaskill, a joint publication by *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. VII, No. 2, 1987, and *Cosmos*, the Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society, Edinburgh, Scotland, Vol. 4, 1988. *The Enormous Room* is the last section of *Love of the Century*, a poem in which all these characters appear several times.

² The Bride belongs to the author's personal Pantheon (see *La sposa perfetta/The Perfect Bride*, Bologna: Book Editore, 1997).

3.

Lui e il Secolo Venturo, il Secolo Venturo e lui,
a giocare a Dio che Parla e Dio che Chiama nell'arena

dei sacrifici, a riprovare il loro rito di passaggio
a solo beneficio di Primo Uomo e Prima Donna, senza

sapere cosa fare della Donna Trasformata, che dovunque
sotto il carro dell'Orsa la parte del leone la fa sua.

Così chiesero a Coyote se c'era un Uomo di Dio
responsabile dell'attuale stato del mondo.

Il mondo?, chiese Coyote guardando in su.
Questo non è un mondo. Al massimo una riserva.

4.

*Di notte gli gira la testa,
al mattino non trova riposo.*

*La sua Sposa sta fuori, solo
al crepuscolo cerca il suo sposo.*

Oh, e il cuore come batte.

*Quando è giovane è un fiore,
ogni ape lo va a succhiare.*

*Quando è vecchio mette i remi,
va e vendemmia il mare.*

Oh, e come sa di latte.

5.³

Yes, he grew older under an intensity of questioning looks,
and two centuries will relinquish his legacy to each other,
but even if he would come back halfway from the grave,
diaphanous, meek, and yet persistent in defending his case,
tip-tapping on the top of a large ouija board
with a bottlenecked finger sliding on steel strings
to tell the world how dark the night was, his nekuia
would scarcely add a clue to the rendition of his legend:
an obtrusive voice delay was embroidered in his midrash,
like an interference in an epic of long distance calls.

6.⁴

Born in the forest of the Century,
his father befriended a yearling.
The Maker was busy unbalancing the world
as if nothing mattered except the foolishly
singing birds, just when the War
of the Century was about to break
and for the next five years no song could be
redeemed. His father and the yearling walked
through the furrow, in the quiet eye
of the stormy wood, and were gone.

³ *Dark is the night*: The gothic, otherworldly, frightening bottleneck guitar solo played and hummed by Blind Willie Johnson. *Nekuia*: the journey to the land of the dead.

⁴ *His father befriended a yearling*: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' novel *The Yearling* that my father (his father) read when he was young.

5.

Sì, è cresciuto sotto sguardi intensi di domande
e due secoli lasceranno l'uno all'altro la sua eredità,

ma anche se tornasse mezzo vivo dalla tomba,
diafano, mite, e ostinato a difendere il suo caso,

ballando il tip-tap sopra un gran tavolo spiritico
con un dito in un collo di bottiglia che scivola su corde d'acciaio

per rivelare al mondo quanto era scura la notte
la sua nekuia non aggiungerebbe un solo indizio alla leggenda:

una voce fastidiosa era stata inserita nel suo midrash;
un'interferenza in un poema epico di chiamate interurbane.

6.

Nato nella foresta del Secolo,
suo padre fu amico di un cerbiatto.

Il Fattore era impegnato a sbilanciare il mondo
come se niente importasse tranne gli uccelli

che cantavano da sciocchi proprio quando
la Guerra del Secolo stava per scoppiare

e per i prossimi cinque anni non c'era una canzone
da salvare. Suo padre e il cerbiatto camminarono

lungo il burrone, nell'occhio quieto
del bosco tempestoso, e non ci furono più.

7.

He is not afraid of the vast emptiness of space
 where God dwells like Neptune in a sea without fish.

Stars look quiet like carnivals in winter;
 accidental collisions are remote and out of sight.

Ice-ages melt like married couples at a summer party;
 the rate of entropy doesn't cause the nebulae to worry.

A whirl of old leaves rises to his balcony,
 conjuring up its dry, striated alchemy.

Trying to speak the language of the universe,
 he doesn't bother to disguise his funny accent.

7.

Non ha paura dell'immenso vuoto degli spazi
dove Dio abita come Nettuno in un mare senza pesci.

Le stelle sono tranquille come giostre d'inverno;
collisioni accidentali rimangono remote e fuori vista.

Ère glaciali si sciolgono come coppie sposate a un party estivo;
il tasso di entropia non è tale da preoccupare le nebulose.

Un turbine di foglie secche si solleva al suo balcone,
combinando le tinte di una secca, striata alchimia.

Quando cerca di parlare la lingua dell'universo
non si cura di nascondere il suo accento di straniero.

NOTES & REVIEWS

Marina Spunta

'Prima persona': intervista a Erri De Luca

Questa non è una vera intervista. E non vuole provare ad esserlo, nella consapevolezza condivisa con l'autore della difficoltà di arrivare a risposte definitive. Piuttosto cerca di essere un monologo guidato da spunti per conversazione (una conversazione iniziata con i suoi libri e alimentata dalle varie interviste rilasciate dall'autore,¹ da cui deriva il carattere implicito della presente), nel tentativo di far luce su vari punti dell'opera di Erri De Luca (Napoli, 1950), in particolare della sua opera letteraria. Se alcune di

¹ Oltre ai pochi lavori accademici sull'autore, e all'intervista rilasciata a Myriam Swennen Ruthenberg ('Written Exam: A Silent Interview with Erri De Luca', *Gradiva*, 7.1 (1999): 51-62), si considerino i numerosi articoli pubblicati su giornali e riviste, e in particolare le seguenti interviste: Dario Biagi, 'Calce e pennarello', *King*, 60, febbraio 1993: 90-93; Roberto Carvelli, "Inchiostro, arcobaleno" Intervista a Erri De Luca', *Storie*, 16 (1995): 11-15; Grazia Casagrande, 'La scrittura come occasione', *Le interviste del caffè*, 15 ottobre 1999; Elena Dallorso, 'L'isola? L'esilio delle scarpe. Intervista a Erri De Luca', *Alp*, 168, aprile 1999: 8-12; Anna De Laura, 'Quel ponte di Mostar. Stralcio da una conversazione con Erri De Luca', *La rivista del volontariato*, 15 aprile 1994: 19-20; Enzo D'Errico, 'Gennariello, scugnizzo di Pasolini', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 6 ottobre 1994, 25; Cristina De Stefano, 'Silenzio e pagine', *Elle*, ottobre 1992; Paolo Di Stefano, 'Erri De Luca. Vi racconto il mio viaggio al termine delle botte', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12 Aug 1994: 19; Paolo Di Stefano, 'Eppure un tempo lottavamo. Una generazione perduta?', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 ottobre 1992: 6; Costanza Ferrini, 'Noi del Sud, funi sommerse nel mare', *Il Manifesto*, 6 dicembre 1992: 13; Stefano Grassi, 'Il muratore prestato alla letteratura', *Millelibri*, marzo 1993: 55-57; Titti Marrone, 'Il mio affanno tradotto in storie', *Il Mattino*, 13 settembre 1992; Giovanni Mazarella, 'Erri De Luca e l'isola d'Ischia: 'È il mio panorama definitivo'', *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, 20 aprile 1998: 64; Alessandra Olivucci, 'Dalla calce alla penna', *Vita e salute*, aprile 1997; Fulvio Panzeri, 'Il lampo inciso nella parola', *Avvenire*, 12 settembre 1992; Fulvio Panzeri, 'Erri De Luca sull'isola dei segreti', *Avvenire*, 14 febbraio 1998: 20; Francesca Pedrollo, Giampiero Segneri, Antonella Serandrea, 'Parole all'altezza del cuore', *Cous cous*, 10, febbraio-marzo 2000: 39-43; Generoso Picone, 'In nome del padre, ecco il mio aquilone', *Il Mattino*, 25 settembre 1994; Generoso Picone, 'Amore e rivolta', *Il mattino*, 15 febbraio 1998: 11; Mariella Sciancalepore, 'Tu, mio', *Mosaico di pace*, 1 giugno 1998; Michele Trecca, 'Silenzio, parla la pietra e dice antichi proverbi', *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 20 gennaio 1993; Camilla Valletti, 'Non alla roccia, né alla parola', *Alp*, 96, aprile 1993; Claudio Velardi, 'Aceto, arcobaleno, lo specchio dell'uomo', *La Repubblica. Napoli*, 13 settembre 1992: 11; Pierluigi Vito, 'L'uomo fuori dal 2000', *Graffiti. Mensile dell'Azione Cattolica Italiana*, febbraio 2000: 30-31.

queste risposte ricorrono in altre interviste, a conferma della fermezza del pensiero di De Luca, altre mettono in rilievo nuove immagini dello scrittore, che possono illuminare la sua opera per il lettore.

La schiettezza e disponibilità di Erri De Luca sono disarmanti. Prendendo al volo un invito per una 'chiacchierata' dopo un breve scambio di lettere e di domande lasciate aperte, arrivo a casa di Erri De Luca, in campagna fuori Roma, all'una passata, un mercoledì di Aprile. La casa, Erri l'ha ricostruita da una vecchia stalla, mi spiega più tardi la signora Emilia De Luca, madre di Erri, in modo così cordiale e affabile che subito mi sento anch'io a casa. Mi ritrovo seduta a tavola con loro, tra un enorme camino ed una parete interamente ricoperta di etichette di vino, le stesse che il lettore sente sbattere al vento in una scena di Aceto, arcobaleno, il suo romanzo forse più intimo, certo il più riscritto, pubblicato da Feltrinelli tre anni dopo il romanzo d'esordio, Non ora, non qui (1989). Erri ha già mangiato, essendosi svegliato presto come ogni mattina, oggi non per studiare e tradurre dalla Bibbia in Ebraico, ma per un commento mattiniero ai fatti del giorno per Telemontecarlo. Hai poi scritto un articolo sul 'caso Irving' da faxare a Il Mattino di Napoli nel pomeriggio, prima di scappare a Roma per la presentazione di un video sull'artista Giosetta Fioroni, a cui Erri ha partecipato, con un intervento sulla sua ceramica. Nonostante i tanti e diversi impegni di lettura, studio, traduzione, scrittura, critica, oltre a quelli più mondani, Erri non esita a dedicare buona parte del pomeriggio a rispondere alle mie domande; e poi anche parte della sera, perché le domande non finiscono mai... Dopo il caffè ci mettiamo a 'chiacchierare' nell'appartamento a fianco al loro, anch'esso opera sua: Erri parla, guidato al minimo da miei tentativi di domanda. L'essenzialità delle risposte qui riportate, nel tentativo di rendere le parole in modo più fedele possibile, non rispecchia che in minima parte la forza dello scambio orale, l'incidenza del tono, l'espressività dello sguardo. Rivela però parecchio dell'autore e della sua opera, in particolare della sua opera narrativa, seppur tralasciando, per limiti di tempo e scarsa competenza di chi riporta l'intervista, l'altra passione di Erri, quella per l'ebraistica.

L'intervista ripropone le opinioni dell'autore su temi disparati, seppur connessi da un pensiero unico: la scrittura, la lettura, il senso della sua 'autobiografia', l'idea della 'seconda volta'; l'uso della voce narrante, del dialogo, del silenzio; lo sviluppo di temi ricorrenti quali il mare, l'isola, il pescare, le storie narrate; l'esperienza di militanza politica negli anni Settanta in Lotta Continua, e quella di volontariato; l'idea di comunismo; il rapporto con la lingua italiana e con il napoletano; l'esperienza di traduzione dall'ebraico, di critica letteraria in recensioni per giornali; il rapporto con il passato, con la sua opera, e con il suo pubblico. Sono proposte di tracce per il lettore per penetrare meglio la ricchezza dell'opera di Erri De Luca.

A che cosa stai lavorando al momento?

Sono alle prese con Sansone, nel *Libro dei Giudici*; sto finendo dei saggi di Mandel'stam dal russo, e dall'yiddish, sto traducendo Dovid Katz, il primo scrittore in yiddish della seconda generazione, nato in America, non uno scrittore yiddish, ma *in* yiddish.

Hai mai scritto, scrivi poesie?

Non sono un poeta; ho scritto delle poesie, delle schifezze, che non ho pubblicato, tranne quando mi hanno chiesto di fare una poesia sull'acqua (non una poesia scritta

sull'acqua!), per educare a non sprecare l'acqua.² Spesso mi scappa qualche versaccio nella prosa, ma me li censuro perché sono troppo cadenti, risonanti; quindi li tolgo.

Eppure la tua prosa è poetica, ritmata, rispecchia l'oralità della parola parlata o recitata...

Esprime un'acustica dentro che governa la mia scrittura. Quando scrivo sento le voci di chi parla.

E la voce narrante?

La voce che narra è la mia, i personaggi tutti conoscenti; scrivo tutti fatti miei, ospito la voce di loro. Possiamo ospitare intere folle 'in capa', ma anche lì c'è sempre una voce narrante. *Tre cavalli* forse è il libro che più corrisponde a me, è la voce più coetanea alla mia, le altre sono un po' fuori asse con la mia età: *Tu, mio* ha la voce narrante di un adulto prossimo all'adolescenza; *Aceto, arcobaleno, e Non ora, non qui* hanno la voce narrante di un uomo più vecchio della mia età.

Sono tutte prime persone narranti...

Non possiedo la terza persona. Non sono padrone della storia, ne sono una parte, non ne sono il titolare, e nemmeno l'inventore. Un buffo vantaggio della modernità è quello di brevettare le cose. L'unico bene in natura che non puoi brevettare è un'idea, diceva il vecchio presidente degli USA, Thomas Jefferson. Gli scrittori brevettano i loro libri, si arrogano il diritto d'autore, mentre al massimo siamo redattori di varianti. Io nemmeno questo mi arrego; pesco da accidenti di vita svolta.

La tua è una scrittura autobiografica?

Secondo molti scrittori, l' 'autobiografia' è una denigrazione della capacità di invenzione, una limitazione della libertà d'artista. È una gaglioffaggine invece per me inventare mondi, personaggi; arrogandomi la capacità di creare qualcosa mi renderei lo scimmiotto del Buon Dio.

Allora trascrivi la realtà?

Ma non scrivo proprio dei verbali, la scrittura non è qualcosa di meccanico. E poi la vita è più larga della scrittura; le persone sentono di non avere tempo, spazio nella scrittura. Le 'persone' lì si scambiano qualcosa di più intenso, si capiscono meglio, vanno dritto all'intimità, più di quanto non facciano nella vita. La scrittura fa venire in loro più prontezza di riflessi, fa emergere qualcosa di più urgente, e anche di più duro. Io la vita non la posso cambiare; non posso dare un'altra fine, ma una seconda volta, una seconda possibilità, e lì le 'persone' si fanno più male o più bene. Come Salomone, hanno la

² La poesia 'Notizie sull'acqua' è stata richiesta a De Luca dal Centro Studi e Comunicazione Ambientale Antartide. È stampata su una cartolina con un chiaro intento di ampia diffusione, nel tentativo di creare una coscienza di risparmio di energia, in particolare d'acqua. Nel definire le svariate forme e i molteplici usi dell'acqua, la poesia riflette l'impegno morale dell'autore, riecheggiando in punti un tono biblico ('Chi la spreca verrà assetato. / Chi la conserva verrà dissetato') e concludendosi con il monito: 'Ognuno di noi sarà pesato a gocce'.

saggezza di cuore, che non è una saggezza filosofica, ma una prontezza di riflessi, che sta alla base del sangue, la capacità di essere più giusti nei confronti dell'altro.

Che cosa significa dare loro una seconda volta?

Quando Caia tocca la ferita sulla mano del protagonista di *Tu, mio* . . . in quel momento della vita c'è stato solo un tocco di mano; dopo, quando riscrivi, quel tocco contiene di più, è la seconda volta, perché sai già come va a finire nella realtà. Se sei un autore, questo non succede, sei 'padrone' della storia. Io, quando riscrivo, do più intensità alla storia avvenuta, quando i 'personaggi' si incontrano, la storia va più svelta, gli spiriti non vogliono perdere tempo.

Questo succede anche in *Tre cavalli*?

In *Tre cavalli* la distanza, la lontananza è trasformata in scrittura, distacco dalle cose, in una scrittura più rarefatta, più smozzicata che intera . . . tutti questi a capo sono la riproduzione grafica di come si svolge il pensiero in testa.

Questo tuo ultimo romanzo è più dialogico dei precedenti . . .

Sì . . . Per non perdere tempo, per il principio della seconda volta. *Tre cavalli* è un resto di parole, di storia, un rimasuglio di uomo, di pensieri . . . È un anno che è capitato alla vita del protagonista e poi condensa il tempo del suo passato in Argentina. È una seconda volta per via di vita, non di scrittura, non di storia; una seconda volta più corta, breve, svelta; e la scrittura ne risente. È un percorso all'indietro, come quando sulla spiaggia col rastrello acchiappi qualcosa; così accade con la memoria, con un pezzetto ci fai l'intero. Qui si ritorna al rimasuglio, al dettaglio.

È anche un romanzo più pieno di cibo, di cucina, dei precedenti. Riflette un'altra tua passione?

Passione, no; mangio cose molto semplici, pasta con aglio, olio, pomodori crudi. Cucino volentieri, sì, la sera, ma sono solo pezzetti di alimenti, una base di fondo.

Questi ingredienti assumono un significato particolare nei tuoi romanzi? Ad esempio, in *Tre cavalli* il narratore dopo aver toccato il sangue si sporca le mani con l'olio, quasi a ridarsi vita . . .

Un significato non so se ce l'ha. Col mio lavoro mi sono sempre spaccato le mani, erano sempre piene di sangue, che si mischiava con l'olio. Lo stesso succede a scalare.

E a pescare? Quanto tempo hai passato a pescare?

A Ischia, fino a sedici anni le estati. Non mi piacevano i coetanei, preferivo stare coi pescatori, con mio zio. Non sono mica buono a pescare, ma mi piaceva stare in mare, facevo da mozzo, dei lavoretti; se c'era da pescare allora pescavo, sennò niente.

L'esperienza di pesca ti ha anche dato di sentire tante storie narrate . . .

Sono di una specie familiare che le storie le ha ricevute in eredità; storie di fantasmi, terremoti, vulcani, guerre; storie loro [dei miei familiari], di loro precedenti; di un tempo in cui le storie passavano attraverso la voce, come un passatempo. La storia è uno strumento a fiato: in TV, sui libri non lo senti. Solo se ti passa per le orecchie, sei pronto a capirla, a chiederne conto.

A cosa servono le storie?

Sono un albero di trasmissione; attraverso le storie si compie il passaggio delle generazioni. Così sei già predisposto alla tua vita, avendo imparato dalle storie.

Come hai iniziato a scrivere storie?

Ho iniziato da piccolo, scrivevo per farmi compagnia. Poi con l'età ho iniziato a scrivere storie che non buttavo più. Le ricopiavo, cambiando qualcosa, poi le lascio e ci ritornavo su. Così per trent'anni.

Aceto, arcobaleno è il tuo romanzo più riscritto, vero?

Sì, l'ho riscritto del tutto dall'inizio parecchie volte.

Vuoi dire che rivedevi il testo già scritto?

No, l'ho proprio riscritto da capo più volte. Mi sono tenuto compagnia con quelle persone scritte, rinnovando la loro conoscenza molte volte in molti anni.

Quando smetti di riscrivere una storia?

Se ti piace, se ne sei contento, quando non serve più a tenerti compagnia. Le storie hanno un valore d'uso, servono a tenerti compagnia. Ora non si considera più il valore d'uso delle cose, ma il valore di scambio. Per me le storie che scrivo hanno molto più valore d'uso personale che di scambio. Se vanno bene per me, allora sono pronte.

Le fai mai leggere ad altri prima di pubblicarle?

No, una storia deve andare bene a me che la scrivo. E poi non ci tengo a piacere a tutti; preferisco dispiacere a qualcuno con metodo, cercando di evitare di piacere a tutti apposta; è un dono di natura. Bisogna evitare di piacere a tutti. Bisogna sapere di essere unilaterali e indivisibili. Soprattutto in scrittura devi dispiacere a qualcuno. Poi puoi avere la fortuna di dispiacere a qualcuno di cui non ti importa niente.

Come sono i personaggi delle tue storie, dei tuoi romanzi?

I personaggi sono delle figure che *non* sono da seguire. Non li propongo come eroi. Sono dei malcapitati, si comportano come possono, cercando di non tirarsi indietro, perché questo mi è impossibile. Io sono così, sapendo di non avere scelta, non sono capace di tirarmi indietro. La nostra generazione rivoluzionaria ha fatto diventare rivoluzionarie persone che avevano vergogna di scappare. La vergogna è il sentimento politico per eccellenza. Impone la necessità di rispondere. Non la sopporti bene. L'amore lo sopporti bene. La vergogna no, ti rende forsennato; però poi, agendo, te la sei scrostata di dosso. La vergogna te la cavi non scappando, perché è tanto più grave il sottrarti, anche se non hai le doti per star lì, non hai il coraggio, ma hai la vergogna di dire di no e quindi stai.

Questa è la tua esperienza degli anni Settanta?

Sì e anche di recente, quando sono stato chiamato in Bosnia: non potevo dire di no. I sentimenti politici si erano già manifestati. La Bosnia non me l'ero procurata io; chi ha libera scelta se la procura; io no, e ho obbedito.

Così sei andato anche in Africa?

In Africa ci sono andato sui trent'anni. Lì invece ho cercato di andare; ho contattato parecchie associazioni di volontari, ho forzato la mano e sono stato punito, mi sono ammalato. Ho imparato che le cose decisive non vengono da una buona volontà, ti capitano. E io non mi so scansare. La vergogna presiede questo non scansarsi: è il presidente del consiglio dei nervi.

Cambiando argomento, come vengono accolte le tue traduzioni bibliche dall'ebraico? Tempo fa una tua traduzione ha dato adito a un diverbio tra eseti sul numero di parole nell'alfabeto ebraico . . .

Il modo in cui traduco non ha ricevuto nessuna critica. Quelle cose sono minori, delle inezie. No, anzi, ho ricevuto un mucchio di soddisfazioni immeritate sia da parte cattolica che da parte ebraica. Per le piccole critiche accademiche non me la sono presa.

E che cosa pensi del giudizio della critica sui tuoi libri di narrativa?

Di solito mi va molto bene coi recensori. E poi non riesco a provare contrasto, non mi sento offeso, in caso di opinioni critiche.

Anche tu sei critico di narrativa, scrivi recensioni, soprattutto di prosa contemporanea in yiddish, non è vero?

Sì, soprattutto per *Il Corriere della Sera*.

Scrivi mai stroncature?

Di recensioni ne scrivo così poche, che mi sembra scemo consigliare di 'non' leggere qualcosa. Chi lo fa per professione, che ne scrive tante, ha per forza una quota di cose che non gli piacciono, degli sconsigliati. Io mi astengo da quelli.

Non scrivi mai di poesia? Ti piace leggerne?

La poesia è un combustibile di emergenza. Questo è un secolo che prometteva poca vita. Il poeta è avvantaggiato dal suo mezzo espressivo che gli consente di condensare tutto in fretta in poco tempo e spazio. Nel ghetto di Varsavia non si scriveva prosa ma poesia. Poesia ne ho letta molta quando ero militante a tempo pieno. La poesia allora dava una scarichetta elettrica, una barretta energetica che tonificava. A diciott'anni [quando sono andato via di casa] leggevo Brecht, un'antologia di poeti cinesi, Hikmet, Neruda, Lorca, Eliot . . . i poeti andavano giusti per quell'età di emergenza. In cella se ti ricordi dei versi è una consolazione.

Sei finito in carcere?

Succedeva a tutti quella volta, robetta, per una notte. Fa bene alla salute e alla reputazione.

Pensi che i giovani di oggi agirebbero nello stesso modo?

Anche la gioventù di oggi farebbe la stessa cosa, agirebbe come me; messa in quella situazione, non sarebbe scappata.

Tu rifaresti la stessa cosa?

Altroché.

E oggi come ti poni a riguardo?

Oggi non c'è quel da farsi lì, non c'è un da farsi a prescindere. E senza le condizioni di emergenza, non ci si inguaia la vita, la gioventù, per capriccio, non ci si addestra al sangue per curiosità.

Che cosa ti ha dato questa educazione?

Mi ha dato il diritto di cittadinanza che non avevo, a diciott'anni ero disertore. Lo stesso anche a Belgrado, l'anno scorso.

Facevi parte di un gruppo di volontari?

No, anche lì per un po' di notti sono stato da solo. Sono individualista, non mi va di chiedere a un altro di fare la stessa cosa, se uno sente lo stesso si trova lì anche lui. Per le cose così non ho bisogno di conforto, di compagnia; però se uno si trova là tanto meglio.

Questo bisogno di cittadinanza pensi sia condiviso da molti?

Da altri no, nascono già cittadini. Io non mi sentivo cittadino. Non mi sentivo legato a questo paese, a questa lingua. Ero stufo di tutto, della lingua. Sono andato via [di casa a diciotto anni] senza libri, non portavo mai libri con me in quegli anni, fino ai trent'anni; poi ho trovato la Bibbia, che ora porto con me quando mi sposto. Allora ero stufo di tutto, della lingua; volevo stare zitto; non mi piacevano neanche le canzoni.

Eri stufo dell'italiano?

Sì, anche se mi piace l'italiano, è una piccola lingua del mondo, non l'abbiamo accompagnata in giro, l'abbiamo lasciata perdere; e non vogliamo insegnarla agli immigrati. È una lingua tenuta piccola da noialtri, però è una bella lingua.

Sei 'nato' in italiano o in napoletano?

Sono nato in napoletano. Il napoletano è una lingua orale, lo so anche leggere, ma è una lingua da dire. La parlavo con mia madre, la lingua della città intorno. L'italiano era la lingua di mio padre: in famiglia bisognava parlare italiano corretto, mio padre non sopportava la cadenza napoletana. Anche con mia sorella ho parlato poco napoletano, ma l'ho sempre parlato con mia madre.

Però scrivi in italiano?

L'italiano è una lingua buona, dunque scrivo in italiano, non *da* italiano. Non sono uno scrittore italiano, ma uno scrittore *in* italiano. Non so se il napoletano è un'intensificazione. Tutti gli scrittori dovrebbero possedere un dialetto, dovrebbero partire con una specificità, un connotato indelebile. Quelli che sanno solo l'italiano lo abitano come una specie di albergo, anche di lusso; non è casa tua, non ci si sente puzza delle tue scarpe, del tuo asciugamano . . .

Scrivi mai in dialetto napoletano?

Adesso scrivo una storia con il napoletano. Scrivo in un italiano che risente di un io narrante, un ragazzino napoletano che scrive in italiano con molto prestito, vicinanza al napoletano, nella preferenza per le parole tronche (come in yiddish), nell'uso ripetuto del verbo tenere . . .

... e nell'uso di certi vocaboli 'intraducibili', come *vope* in *Tu, mio*.

Le *vope* sono dei pesci che pescavamo, non so l'equivalente in italiano. In *Tu, mio* la frase iniziale 'Il pesce è pesce quando sta nella barca' doveva essere in napoletano 'in 'ta murata', che è il muro, le pareti interne della barca, ma non me la sono sentita di lasciarla in napoletano.

E nel romanzo che stai scrivendo, cosa ti spinge a scrivere in napoletano?

Questo romanzo è ambientato a Napoli. Tiene conto, sotto forma di diario, del passaggio dell'età, dello stato civile, dalla scuola dell'obbligo al mestiere di falegname, di garzone. Ma il protagonista, anche se lascia la scuola, è un ragazzo che legge; suo padre è analfabeta, ma inizia l'alfabetizzazione da adulto e ci tiene a far studiare il figlio. È una storia ebraica. A tredici anni si raggiunge la maturità nella tradizione ebraica: si è accolti in sinagoga a leggere la lettura del sabato. L'ebraismo è una comunità di regole, e questa è la cerimonia del Bar Mitsvah, che significa figlio della legge. In questo romanzo ho usato tredici anni come svolta nella vita del protagonista/narratore. Poi lui incontra un calzolaio dalla Polonia, nel dopoguerra a Napoli. È una storia sballata, l'unica cosa concreta è la città di Napoli, la mia esperienza di questa città. Il resto è tutta una fantasia.

Da cosa nasce questo nuovo uso della fantasia, questo distacco dall'esperienza vissuta?

Quest'estate combattevo con i topi, la casa era stata invasa, ho dovuto scoperchiare il tetto e rifare tutto nuovo. Da questo incidente nasce questo miscuglio di scrittura e fantasia; mi sento autorizzato a usare la fantasia. Però dà più responsabilità scrivere fantasia, mi sento più sorvegliato; non è che può succedere qualunque cosa nei libri. Qui deve succedere un miracolo, che noi non registriamo, uno di quei tanti miracoli che succedono, in particolare a Napoli. Poi la storia precipita: è la convergenza di due amici verso un miracolo, sono due vite parallele, che vanno verso un urto.

L'amico è più grande del protagonista?

L'amico è un vecchio calzolaio ebreo, gobbo e rosso di capelli.

Hai già scritto molto del romanzo? Quando pensi di pubblicarlo?

Sì, ho già scritto parecchio, ma è ancora troppo presto per pubblicarlo; non so se lo espurgo, se lo riscrivo. Mi mancano le pagine finali, anche se le ho già in mente. E comunque la pubblicazione non è per quest'anno, sto ancora presentando l'ultimo romanzo, *Tre cavalli*: è ancora troppo presto.

Hai mai scritto di una donna protagonista / narratrice?

Sì, due storie: 'Prima persona',³ ambientata in un ospedale psichiatrico in Bosnia, e 'Lettera non chiusa'.

³ 'Prima persona' pubblicata in *Italiana* (Milano: Mondadori, 1991, 165-70) racconta gli aiuti umanitari inviati in Bosnia dalla prospettiva di una ragazza bosniaca malata di mente (la prima persona del racconto). La forza dirompente della storia sta nella difficoltà di comunicazione della protagonista/narratrice che contrasta con la sua capacità umana di

Non conosco quest'ultima. Di che cosa parla?

È una lettera di una donna in carcere per motivi politici che risponde al marito pure in carcere, ma per altri motivi. Lui sta per essere rilasciato e le chiede la separazione.

Qualcosa accomuna le due donne?

Sono due donne di una sola specialità, dentro una condizione limite.

Nella storia 'Prima persona' l'elemento della fotografia mi sembra centrale; la protagonista vi si attacca come a un amuleto.

In Bosnia ci tenevano tanto, gli piaceva tanto farsi fotografare, 'mettersi di fronte'.

Che ruolo ha la fotografia nella tua scrittura, nella tua vita?

Ho fatto delle foto, so i rudimenti della fotografia.

Tuo padre era un appassionato di fotografia, non è vero?

Sì, gli piaceva molto; aveva una macchina fotografica 'instamatic'. Abbiamo album fotografici in quantità. Poi anche tante foto di altri.

A partire da *Non ora, non qui*, dove la fotografia è più presente, il tuo stile di scrittura ricorda la tecnica fotografica, per la vividezza delle immagini che usi e la frammentarietà della tua prosa, per la brevità dei racconti e lo spezzettamento del narrato, diviso da pause spaziali . . .

Degli spazi vuoti? Come lettore li preferisco. La pagina deve essere arredata, si deve vedere un a capo, un movimento. È come se dovesse piglià fiato.

E il dialogo come nasce?

Ogni tanto mi viene solo dialogo; non lo rigiro in resoconto.

***Tre cavalli* è molto 'parlato' . . .**

Tre cavalli ha molto dialogo, ci sono molti 'dice che . . .'

Ma c'è anche molto discorso diretto e indiretto libero . . .

Ah, già, ci sono molte frasi senza le virgolette, che sono la voce di dentro, e frasi con le virgolette, che sono la voce di fuori . . .

A cosa è dovuta questa scelta di discorso riportato più implicito? A ingaggiare il lettore a decodificare il testo? In questo romanzo è un po' più difficile capire chi parli . . .

È più difficile per il lettore; forse dovevo stare più attento, cambiare carattere, magari aggiungere il corsivo per la voce di dentro.

No, non credo, gli avrebbe tolto il bello dell'implicito; il corsivo è troppo ovvio . . .

Sì, il corsivo non mi piace; e poi l'editore non si è opposto a questo uso del dialogo, quindi l'ho lasciato.

Così come il dialogo e i frammenti fotografici, il tuo narrato si dipana spesso per associazioni. È un uso della memoria proustiana?

Non lo so, non conosco Proust.

Voglio dire nel senso di oggetti, odori, sapori che provocano ricordi, associazioni . . .

Le associazioni sono fin troppe, bisogna tenerle a bada.

Aceto, arcobaleno è il primo romanzo che hai iniziato a scrivere. Com'è che non l'hai pubblicato per primo? Com'è il tuo rapporto con le case editrici?

Ho pubblicato *Non ora, non qui* per primo perché era già lì. Allora stavo da un'amica di Lotta Continua a Milano, che lavorava da Feltrinelli. Lei l'ha fatto vedere in casa editrice ed ho avuto subito un contratto di scrittura. Poi volevano altri romanzi, ma io volevo pubblicare *Una nuvola come tappeto*. Sono riuscito a fare un bel contratto per *Una nuvola come tappeto* con Adelphi; Calasso soprattutto mi ha aiutato a mettere a punto l'italiano. Ma poi hanno avuto paura di azzardi esegetici, così si sono ritirati, dopo avermi pagato. Allora Feltrinelli è tornata all'attacco e così ho venduto *Una nuvola come tappeto* due volte, ho fatto come volevo io, ma nel migliore dei modi. Qualche volta funziona prendere gli editori per il bavero. Pubblico anche dei piccoli libri, gratis, per piccoli editori, come Fahrenheit, Qiqajon, Quodlibet, L'obliquo, mentre dai grossi editori mi faccio pagare.

A cosa devi la tua fortuna all'estero? Sei molto tradotto?

Ora ho una nuova agente letteraria che va forte sull'estero. Gli ultimi romanzi hanno raggiunto le tredici, quattordici lingue. In Francia e in Germania è stato tradotto tutto di mio. In Spagnolo ne sono stati tradotti quattro. In inglese solo *Sea of memory* da Tu, mio.

E anche I colpi dei sensi, come The senses of memory da Myriam Swennen Ruthenberg.

Sì, entrambi in America.

Conosci i tuoi traduttori, le tue traduzioni in altre lingue?

Quelle che conosco meglio sono quelle in francese; sono le uniche che controllo insieme alla traduttrice che me le manda sempre prima di pubblicarle.

Cambiamo argomento, torniamo all'ambientazione della tua narrativa: che ruolo svolge l'isola, Ischia, sfondo più o meno evidente, ma sempre costante?

L'isola è Ischia ed ha uno sfondo autobiografico. Ci passavo tutte le estati, chiamavo i pesci per nome . . .

Assume un significato metaforico, sta per il diverso, l'altro, il fantastico?

L'isola è quanto di meno metaforico ci possa essere, era il corpo che esultava, il sottopelle di natura, l'ultima buccia della bestia, dell'animale che scodinzola. Non si può fabbricare una metafora. Per me non ha senso parlare di metafora, non partecipo del

gioco del testo. I libri sono dei semilavorati che arrivano fino al capolinea della libreria. La metafora è un tram, che trasporta da una casa all'altra. Chi prende il libro sa la corsa sua.

Che valore hanno l'esperienza corporea, le sensazioni?

Tutto passa attraverso le sensazioni, l'esperienza prima del corpo. Le esperienze astratte non le so, sono mutilato di astrazione. Anche l'ebraico è senza astrazioni, non ha '-ung', '-heit', ma solo cose concrete. La conoscenza è fisica per l'ebraico. Il verbo ebraico che indica conoscenza, 'iadà', nel brano biblico si riferisce a conoscenza fisica della donna. Oppure quando è detto 'conoscerete Elohim', vuol dire per evidenza fisica, per prova, non per intelletto; non c'è l'astratto nella Bibbia.

Questo anche nella tua opera?

Questo mi corrisponde, corrisponde al mio modo di usare le parole.

E questa esperienza concreta passa attraverso i sensi. Ce n'è uno che ha il sopravvento sui cinque?

Il naso presiede all'amore.

E l'udito quando è più intenso si trasforma in visione?

L'udito è l'acustica del racconto, è la voce che si sta srotolando. L'udito è condizione di scrittura, di preghiera, della storia, del tramandare le cose. La principale preghiera ebraica dice 'Ascolta Israele': ascolta, non fare altro.

E la visione quando nasce?

Gli ebrei nell'Esodo vedevano le parole di Dio, l'Esodo in un passo parla della parola 'vista', non udita.

È questa l'intensità che ti aspetti dai tuoi lettori?

Magari!

Mi parli del tuo passato, degli anni Settanta?

Noi siamo stati una generazione che non inaugurava, perché il secolo aveva già inaugurato, noi abbiamo portato a compimento una storia iniziata prima, la guerra, il fascismo, la sua sconfitta. L'Italia in cui siamo cresciuti era piena di fascismo, tutti i funzionari erano funzionari fascisti . . . le morti . . . nel '66 di un ragazzo a Roma; il golpe di De Lorenzo . . . Non solo in Italia, ma tutto intorno a noi c'era fascismo, in Spagna, in Grecia, il Mediterraneo era pieno di fascismo. Noi dovevamo completare un'opera interrotta, l'opera non terminata della Resistenza, un'opera per lo più gappista⁴ di città, non di montagna. La lotta armata inizia qui, come radicamento a chiazze di leopardo, come guerra dei GAP, come sabotaggio, come tecnica del colpire e poi sparire.

⁴ Dall'acronimo GAP: 'gruppi armati partigiani'.

Che ruolo avevi in Lotta Continua?

Ero responsabile del servizio d'ordine, addetto alle manifestazioni in piazza, della resistenza illegale di Lotta Continua.

Fino a quando?

Fino al '76 quando il gruppo si scioglie.

Pensi che il comunismo non esista più?

Il comunismo non è un ideale, ma una prassi. Quella prassi non esiste più. Prima chi si dichiarava comunista condivideva una prassi. Ora, senza la prassi condivisa da una folla, dichiararsi comunista è come dichiararsi aristotelico, è dichiarare un ideale, mentre il comunismo non ha luogo senza la prassi. Il comunismo è un luogo da difendere, non da raggiungere; ci si era già dentro, non bisognava conquistare degli indomani luminosi . . . La prassi è fatta di riunioni, volantini, carcere, di ogni forma di sabotaggio di poteri, ad esempio come convincere la gente a non pagare il biglietto sull'autobus. Significa essere infettivo, essere un sabotatore perpetuo: mangiare gratis alla mensa universitaria, non pagare le bollette dell'ENEL, piantare un casino sull'autobus per rifiutarsi di pagare la corsa. Era un intralcio perpetuo e coincideva col rischio di violenza. Essere comunista di prima mano io l'ho praticato. Dichiararsi comunista al di fuori di quello è fasullo. Oggi è una gagliofferia per me chiamarsi comunista; non si può essere comunista senza la comunità infettiva, contagiosa del comunismo.

Com'è cambiato il comunismo?

Non lo so com'è cambiato nel mondo. Io ho visto questo, in Italia, non in Russia, in Cina, non quello di Berlinguer; il partito che si trascinava l'aggettivo comunista per eredità e non vedeva l'ora di cambiare nome.

Rimpiangi quei giorni di comunismo?

No, non rimpiango niente. Ho la coscienza a posto anche per le cose peggiori che ho fatto. Le cose non si rimediano, ho rotto teste . . . ma non rimpiango niente, lo rifarei in quelle condizioni. Oggi rompo le noci con la testa, uno scherzetto che faccio con amici.

Cambi questo passato con la 'seconda volta' della tua narrativa?

La seconda volta è per riscrivere la vita, ma non quella storia, non più.

È un modo per 'digerire' il passato, per elaborare il lutto dei fatti accaduti?

No.

Questa 'seconda volta' narrativa è un esempio della nostalgia che ha tanta parte nella letteratura contemporanea di fine secolo?

No.

Hai nostalgia per il tuo passato, il tuo vissuto?

No, non vorrei tornare in nessuna delle sue stazioni, nemmeno nell'innocenza, non vorrei tornare bambino.

E cambieresti l'epoca in cui vivi con un'altra?

No. Le altre non le conosco, non penso che siano migliori della mia.

Che cosa ne apprezzi?

Il non dover rispondere a nessuno.

Tornando al tema dell'autobiografia, pensi che serva come mezzo per conoscersi?

No. Io so solo quello che è successo. La scrittura dà un formato più pressante, più pressato. Solo che nella scrittura sento la vita una seconda volta, è una bella visita; ho la fortuna di avere un pezzetto restituito dal passato.

La tua opera invia dei messaggi?

No, niente.

Hai un pubblico particolare a cui la indirizzi?

Non parlo a un pubblico, ma a un vuoto, con la mia scrittura. Poi qualcuno decide che risponde e mi corrisponde. È la possibilità della seconda volta in scrittura. Poi avvengono incontri, non per la qualità della scrittura, ma per il bisogno di coincidenza del lettore. Céline coincideva con me, al ritorno a Napoli, dopo il terremoto. L'acidità di Céline di *Viaggio al termine della notte* era uguale al mio Ph. Lì ho coinciso con un vecchio libro che perdeva pagine mentre lo leggevo in metropolitana. Sono incidenti di incontri, capitano come gli amori, gli odi. Sono coincidenze o anche miracoli, qualcosa li fa capitare; cadono e accadono continuamente. Noi siamo sempre 'vivi' per miracolo, anche se non ce ne accorgiamo.

Il silenzio mi sembra una costante delle tue opere. Che ruolo gioca? È un silenzio anche politico?

Il silenzio? In *Non ora, non qui* è un silenzio implosivo, sono parole dal di dentro, anziché dal di fuori.

Anche in *Tu, mio* è molto presente, nella condivisione silenziosa della vita da pescatore, a Ischia.

Il silenzio di *Tu, mio* è il silenzio di chi sa che in mezzo agli adulti bisogna tacere, è un silenzio 'legale', accettato come condizione.

E in *Aceto, arcobaleno* c'è un silenzio di fondo su cui emergono le tre storie?

In *Aceto, arcobaleno* c'è un rumore di fondo, un Re diesis minore, cioè il Mi bemolle minore, che è il basso continuo dell'*Oro del Reno* di Wagner, che rende il rumore del mondo all'inizio. È un'immagine che non è esplicita nel romanzo. Il Re diesis minore poi sarebbe il Mi bemolle minore, ma io lo chiamo Re diesis minore perché ha più accidenti in chiave.

In un passo di *Una nuvola come tappeto* metti a confronto Cristianesimo e Ebraismo. Al centro della prima religione c'è la transustanziazione, il cibarsi del corpo e del

sangue di Cristo, della seconda l'attingere al sacro decifrandone le sue lettere scritte.⁵ Tu ti dichiari 'non credente'. Che influenza hanno su di te le due religioni?

Io sono un Wojtylista. Wojtyla mette insieme le due religioni; non accetta il biteismo della interpretazione corrente della Bibbia. Wojtyla va a ricalcare i passi dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento, per dare evidenza di un unico Dio.

A proposito di ebraismo, hai in progetto altre traduzioni?

Non lo so, ora sto traducendo Sansone; a maggio uscirà per Micromega il *Salmo II*, con note e commento.

Tornando alla tua narrativa, in *Tu, mio* c'è un cambiamento radicale di identità del protagonista / narratore che ospita la voce del padre di Caia, morto nell'olocausto.

C'è un impossessamento. Quando si è guardati da una persona amata con tanto errore si finisce per tentare di aderire a quell'errore, di cercare di esserne all'altezza. Come Dio dice a Israele 'siate santi', così si finisce per cercare di essere santo e qualcuno ci riesce pure. L'amore continua questi svarioni di prospettiva, che costringono a essere migliori. Se una ragazza a sedici anni ti ama pensandoti suo padre, dall'altra parte il padre ti sta dando una mano e ti insegna come fare per essere indelebile. Alla fine va tutto lì. nell'essere indelebile, visto che non ci possiamo portare dietro niente.

Anche in *Tre cavalli* c'è un simile impossessamento da parte di una voce altrui, della voce del ricordo nel protagonista / narratore . . .

Laila glielo tira fuori, stabilisce un'ipnosi acustica che lo costringe a dire.

E Selim, che ruolo ricopre nel romanzo?

Non so cosa è Selim. So chi è, l'ho conosciuto. Era uno che ti poteva tagliare la gola con lo stesso sorriso con cui faceva un mazzo di mimose; ma questo non vuol dir niente di male, solo la nostra capacità semplice di uccidere, come di amare.

***Tre cavalli* mette in scena un giardiniere, ma il mare è sempre presente sullo sfondo. Che funzione ha?**

Il mare è sempre lo scampo . . . in questo romanzo si è marinai spiaggiati, che non ripigliano più il largo . . .

⁵ . . . il cristiano assaggia nell'ostia e nel calice l'ombra del corpo e del sangue del suo Messia. L'ebreo taglia sul testo pezzi del nome di Dio, non simboli ma lettere sue medesime, orma da orma. Il brivido di attingere al sacro è qui doppiato dall'entusiasmo segreto di chi partecipa della sua sorgente. Il nome di Dio che questa tradizione assume, a differenza di altri, non è declinabile d'un fiato' ('Un nome di Dio', *Una nuvola come tappeto*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991, 55).

Così ha termine l'intervista. Erri De Luca mi ha già concesso molto più tempo e disponibilità di quanto non sperassi. Per le tante domande non fatte per mancanza di tempo, per cui, dico, ci vorrebbe tutta una vita, Erri risponde che allora è bene aspettare la vita per farle.

*A Erri,
grazie delle risposte.*

Marina Spunta, University of Leicester, UK

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ITALIAN BOOKSHELF

Edited by Dino S. Cervigni and Anne Tordi with the collaboration of
Paolo Cherchi, Gustavo Costa, Valeria Finucci, Albert N. Mancini,
Massimo Maggiari, and John P. Welle.

**Carlo Paolazzi. *La maniera mutata. Il 'dolce stil novo' tra Scrittura e Ars poetica.*
Milano: Edizioni Vita e Pensiero, 1998. Pp. x, 340.**

Il merito di questo volume consiste nell'aver puntato l'attenzione della critica verso fonti e modelli letterari tralasciati dagli studiosi che si sono impegnati nella polemica sulla legittimità o meno, in sede critica e storiografica, della formula ripresa dal De Sanctis di 'Dolce Stil Novo'. Paolazzi risponde, rettificandola e superandola, alla domanda di Gorni che si era chiesto se la 'inafferrabile sostanza' del Dolce Stil Novo consistesse in quell'ispirazione 'soprannaturale' a cui facevano appello gli 'ardimentosi' poeti per avallare le loro pretese di veridicità poetica. Gorni aveva incluso, tra gli 'antichi' segnati dal mancato miracolo di una lingua 'per sé stessa mossa', anche il bolognese Guinizzelli. È proprio su questo punto che Paolazzi, schierato apertamente sulla linea positivista di Marti, sente il bisogno di rettificare le conclusioni di Gorni, attraverso una puntigliosa indagine intertestuale, volta a rivalutare il ruolo giocato dal 'maximus' Guido nella storia del Dolce Stil Novo. Accusato da Bonagiunta da Lucca di 'iscura parlatura' ma soprattutto di 'traer canson per forsà di scrittura', Guinizzelli ebbe il merito di aver dischiuso per primo i 'canali' biblici, rinnovando radicalmente il linguaggio della poesia cortese grazie alla ricchezza di analogie, similitudini e metafore naturalistiche che il poeta bolognese aveva prelevato dalle Sacre Scritture e 'trasportato' nella poesia amorosa. E basti pensare al sonetto 'Io voglio del vero la mia donna laudare' di cui Paolazzi mette in luce il fitto reticolo di agganci testuali al famoso passo dell'*Ecclesiaste* in cui si tesse la lode del sacerdote Onia: Guinizzelli ne attinge una lunga serie di paragoni naturalistici (la stella mattutina, la rosa e il giglio, per citarne solo alcuni). Ed ancora, ad una analisi attenta e metodicamente serrata, la canzone 'Tegno de folle 'mpresa' rivela al critico accorto una 'costellazione di figure metaforiche e di rispondenze lessicali largamente speculari nei confronti di una solenne apertura descrittiva sulla sposa del *Canticum Canticorum*'. E d'altra parte già in Guinizzelli faceva la sua comparsa quella poetica nata attorno all'idea tutta stilnovistica che il poeta dice 'd'Amor lo vero' su cui si incontreranno sia Dante che Cavalcanti ed infine Cino da Pistoia. Preludio allo scrivere 'ispirato', in cui Gorni ravvisa il nocciolo duro della poetica stilnovistica, è già quel verso guinizzelliano di ammonimento a Bonagiunta in 'Omo ch'è saggio non corre leggero': l'uomo veramente saggio 'riten su' pensiero / infin a tanto che 'l ver 'l asigura'. Paolazzi suggerisce che Guinizzelli voleva così sottolineare gli elementi fondamentali della propria poetica, ovvero quella 'dimensione interiore del pensare', a cui fa da corollario l'individuazione del 'vero'. L'autore procede poi con il constatare che Cavalcanti identificò il 'ver'/'lo vero' di Guinizzelli (pur ridimensionandolo a puro livello di esperienza) con la 'verità' d'Amore', proprio nella sua canzone-manifesto 'Donna me prega, per ch'eo voglio dire' in cui l'aggettivo sostantivato ricorre tre volte e sempre in quella limitata ma precisa accezione ('l ver sentire'). Il 'veder lo vero' del Guido

bolognese riapparirebbe, risemantizzato, anche nel sonetto cavalcantiano 'Io vidi gli occhi dove Amor si mise' in cui Cavalcanti riecheggia la discesa dello Spirito santo sugli Apostoli ('Dal ciel si mosse un spirito, in quel punto / che quella donna mi degnò guardare./ e vennesi a posar nel mio pensiero:/ elli mi conta si d'Amor lo vero,/ che ogni sua virtù veder mi pare / sí com'io fosse nello suo cor giunto'). Si tratta di una sorta di investitura del poeta che, grazie allo spirito divino che gli conta il vero d'Amore, può legittimamente affermare la veridicità del suo dire di Amore.

Dall'insieme coerente di citazioni allusive che l'indagine di Paolazzi mette in luce emerge il nodo cruciale 'di una poetica [guinizzelliana] cresciuta in confronto serrato con il testo sacro ed il suo messaggio'. Fu dunque il poeta bolognese il primo a 'metabolizzare' le fonti bibliche da cui trassero poi ispirazione tematica, lessicale e strutturale sia Dante che Cavalcanti ed a rinnovare il linguaggio poetico attraverso il raffinato riuso dei testi sacri, posti ora al servizio della poesia amorosa. Paolazzi arriva così ad allargare sul terreno della cultura sacra gli spazi di poetica condivisi dal gruppo dei poeti Stilnovisti, allo stesso tempo accreditando questo 'rivoluzionario' processo di rinnovamento, che ebbe straordinari sviluppi nei fiorentini, a Guinizelli, meritatamente considerato 'padre' e precursore del Dolce Stil Novo.

La parte forse più originale, seppur vi si pervenga a conclusioni in sede critica a volte opinabili o poco convincenti, ha il merito di aver individuato una seconda voce, concomitante a quella biblica, 'metabolizzata' dai poeti stilnovisti, che ad essa fecero costante ricorso per lo sviluppo di una comune elaborazione di teoria e prassi poetica. Seppur già De Robertis aveva accertato in Cavalcanti e Dante un 'salto culturale' e Favati aveva sottolineato la grande creatività dei due poeti nel loro 'riuso e rilancio di generi e modelli' antichi, Paolazzi va oltre e crede di poter individuare con certezza nell'*Ars poetica* di Orazio l'altra 'voce' che ha contribuito in maniera determinante a far 'lievitare' l'autoconsapevolezza teorica del gruppo e ad elaborare il nucleo centrale del nuovo codice poetico. Al manuale oraziano si sarebbero rifatti Dante, Cavalcanti, Cino e Guinizelli stesso non solo come fonte normativo-interpretativa ma anche come stimolo a tutta una 'catena di invenzioni' poetiche. L'ambizioso progetto di Paolazzi è quello di 'connettere saldamente il *corpus* poetico degli Stilnovisti con i pronunciamenti oraziani su origine, manifestazione, funzione dei detti poetici' (180) facendo leva su uno sparuto manipolo di versi oraziani (e qui sta una delle massime debolezze della sua indagine, peraltro stimolante) da cui crede di estrapolare un insieme coerente di indizi testuali di 'spessore alternante'. Un 'fitto reticolo di spunti oraziani è già individuabile, secondo l'analisi dell'autore, nel proemio di 'Donne ch'avete', di cui si sottolineano gli agganci con la tradizione stoico-epicurea sulla natura del linguaggio poetico come manifestazione adeguata delle passioni dell'animo (*Ars Poetica* 108-113); la funzione psicagogica della poesia (*Ars Poetica* 99-100) circa la capacità della poesia 'dolce', cioè 'ricca di sentimento' di condurre a suo piacimento il cuore dell'ascoltatore; il principio della 'convenienza' tra materia trattata e stile prescelto dal poeta (*Ars poetica* 24-28). Quello che sottolinea il Paolazzi, e che costituisce veramente il suo contributo forse più originale (ed azzardato?) è che la teoria oraziana della natura che 'forma' dentro i sentimenti e della parola a cui spetta di 'portar fuori' detti sentimenti del poeta contiene tutti gli elementi costitutivi della poetica dell'interiorità di Cavalcanti ('Amor ha fabbricato ciò ch'io limo' nel sonetto polemico diretto a Guido Orlandi 'Di vil materia mi conven parlare') e di Cino ('d'Amor? Che dal suo spirito procede, / che parla in me, ciò ch'io dico rimando' nel sonetto 'Merzei di quel signor ch'è dentro a meve').

Questo il teorema critico su cui si appunta l'indagine di Paolazzi: che il dolce Stil Novo si sia sviluppato in sinergia delle sacre scritture e dell'*Ars Poetica* di Orazio, e che la nuova poetica aveva alle spalle non soltanto il biblico 'ex abundantia cordis os loquitur' ma anche la teoria oraziana del poetare 'come manifestazione fedele [...] del 'dolce sentire' interiore attraverso il segno 'dolce' della parola, capace di trasmettere passioni e sentimenti ad ascoltatori e lettori' (118).

Da questa fondamentale acquisizione critica Paolazzi arriva a ridefinire la questione del 'nodo' nel famoso passo purgatoriale: la distanza 'dall'uno all'altro stilo' consiste nella 'dolcezza' dei rimatori, ovvero nella 'piena corrispondenza fra la dolcezza (= 'ricchezza di sentimento' del dettato interiore di Amore) e la corrispondente dolcezza (= 'forza persuasiva') dello stile della poesia (120). Tralasciando in questa sede le riprove in sede intertestuale dei nessi ispirativi di Cavalcanti con il codice di poetica oraziano, preme far presenti i risultati della ricerca in merito all'influenza esercitata dal poeta latino sulla poetica guinizzelliana. Paolazzi, appoggiandosi per l'ennesima volta al passo oraziano (108-110), mette in luce il parallelismo tra teoria del 'cor gentil' e teoria oraziana della natura che 'forma dentro'. Come la natura oraziana sviluppa l'interiorità e la rende atta a reagire alle contingenze fortunate della vita ('Format enim natura prius nos intus ad omnem fortunarum habitum'), così la natura universale di Guido forma nel cuore 'gentilezza' intesa come 'capacità' potenziale di sprigionare il sentimento 'nobile' dell'amore all'apparire della donna ('così lo cor ch'è fatto di natura / asletto, pur, gentile, / donna a guisa di stella lo 'nnamora' in 'Al cor gentil rempaira sempre Amore', 209). Le concordanze tematiche si rispecchiano anche nelle ricadute lessicali ('fe' -anti- natura in Guido e format - natura-prius in Orazio) così come 'lo cor ch'è fatto da natura' ricalca il 'format enim natura prius nos'. Questi riscontri parzialmente decontestualizzati sono rinforzati da osservazioni di supporto di 'Madonna il fino amor ched eo vo porto' in cui la fusione di 'natura' e 'amor' dà origine alla 'natura amorosa' del poeta, e questa a sua volta dà il via a tutta una serie di 'azioni strettamente parallele' a quelle compiute dalla 'natura' di Orazio.

Al dettato oraziano 'post effert animi motus interprete lingua' si rifa anche quel 'ch'ogni parola che a ciò fori porto' con cui Guinizzelli 'salda in un disegno amplificativo unitario il tema di 'natura' che 'forma' nel cuore gioia e tormento (d'amore) e quello complementare della lingua-parola che interpreta e 'porta fuori' i sentimenti interiori (213). Forte di un insieme di indizi, pur 'non macroscopici' Paolazzi sottolinea non solo il ruolo fondamentale svolto dall'*Ars poetica* di Orazio sulla nascita del Dolce Stil Novo ma anche quanto fu decisiva la mediazione guinizzelliana che sviluppò la teoria oraziana della 'natura' come causa originale del linguaggio poetico (223-224).

Emanuela Zanotti Carney, *University of Chicago*

Olivia Holmes. *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.

It was my interest in the relationship between lyric voice and the concept of authorship in the Old English *Frauenlieder* that attracted me to Olivia Holmes's *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book*. On this topic it did not disappoint: Holmes does indeed provide a fascinating discussion of the relationship between the author and his (fictive) "I" that, while remaining specific to the poets under

discussion at the level of detail, has wide ramifications for the corpora of the *Liederhandschriften* of any European vernacular. Even better, Holmes's careful study of selected manuscripts proved to offer much new information and cogent discussion on two related topics: the transition from oral to written composition and presentation, and the concomitant development of the poet's persona by means of the sequencing of poems to create an autobiographical narrative.

Holmes frames her study as an argument against the widespread notion that Petrarch invented the "author-ordered, first-person" lyric sequence (3) that presents the poet's literary person via "an aggregate of inferences" (4). This mistaken assumption, Holmes says, derives from the historical failure of scholarship to pay sufficient attention to manuscript sequencing, prose bridges, and other layout clues. By the simple but rarely chosen expedient of reading Occitan and Italian lyrics in their manuscript contexts, Holmes is able to show that rather than inventing the implied-author biography, Petrarch was rather the heir of a gradually developed tradition.

The story begins, for Holmes, with Uc de Saint Circ, an early thirteenth-century Occitan troubadour who lived most of his adult life in Treviso. He may well have been responsible for much of the flurry of compiling activity occurring in northern Italy during his lifetime, and for the composition of the *vidas* and *razos* that accompany the manuscript collections of ostensibly oral lyrics. Following Zumthor, critics have naturally assumed that the purpose of the *vidas* and *razos* was to personalize or individualize the lyric "I" on the page, where it is unnaturally divorced from the physical presence of the singer-author troubadour. In reality, as Holmes demonstrates, these prose additions act as palinodes, "draw[ing] attention to the figure of the poet as a liar or artificer" (28). Counterintuitively focussing on a manuscript that happens to be wholly devoid of prose palinodes as well as of any graphic enhancement, Holmes makes her point about Uc as a self-conscious writer by showing how sequencing alone implies a persona and a life history.

Unlike Uc, who was presumably an oral composer, Guittone d'Arezzo was clearly a writer and "explicitly ordered [his poems] into thematic or narrative cycles" (48) to tell a life story turning on a religious conversion (apparently based on Augustine's *Confessions*). As with Uc's palinodes, however, "the entire collection implicitly undermines Guittone's conversion, since the love poems [. . .] are never entirely suppressed [and] their proximity and similarity to the religious poems that oppose them renders the opposition itself unstable" (55). For Holmes, Guittone's creation of a macrotext from a lifetime of lyric production set a precedent for subsequent thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *canzonieri*.

This fact is shown in Holmes's discussion of Vaticano Latino 3793 (ms. V), a multi-author anthology embedding many single-author sequences that Holmes concludes are author-ordered, based on her observations of "formal or thematic connectors" (71). Rustico Fillippi, for example, links sonnets into a fixed order by enchainning their rhyme schemes. Monte Andrea creates fictive *tenzoni* to connect short, lyric sequences. A long, anonymous *corona* is linked with, among other devices, the interlocking repetition of key words and motifs.

As Florentine literary culture was thus thriving, Guittone's contemporary, the last Occitan troubadour Guiraut Riquier, was compiling an autobiographical *libre*. Beginning with a self-conscious rubric alluding to the autograph manuscript, Riquier's *libre* presents his lyrics in (alleged) chronological order, each dated and numbered "in order to make

them tell a story, to mimic change and motion, [. . .] to tie them down, to give them authority and monumentality" (104). The poems are also frequently enchaind with the "elaborate metrical schemes" that became possible with written composition and transmission (105), and even a sequence in the most conventional lyric genre, the *pastorella*, is given autobiographical weight by the conceit that the knight is Riquier himself, and the two shepherdesses a mother-daughter pair whom he courts in sequence over more than twenty years.

At about the same time, a younger contemporary of Guittone and Riquier was expanding many of these lyric-sequence conventions in his *Vita nova*. Holmes argues that young Dante Alighieri, taking the Gospel of John as his model, superimposed "a literary vision of reality in which things and events are interpreted as signs," (125) onto the now conventional lyric sequence, with the innovation of the prosimetrum form. Despite these radical departures from received tradition, "Dante's lyric sequence consists of a repertoire of conventional situations and amorous dilemmas" that recalls the anonymous *corona* of ms. V, previously discussed (127). The poems are, in fact, so extremely conventional that "[i]t is the prose that does the work of increasing their levels of meaning and of making their allegorical meanings explicit, that is, of making them 'new'" (132).

The connection between Dante and Petrarch, who, according to Holmes, was prevented by "the anxiety of influence" from learning directly from his great predecessor (169), was Nicolò de' Rossi, whose *canzoniere* is presented as autobiographical and whose sequences are Dantean in many respects. "What Nicolò learned from Dante (and Dante from Guittone, and ultimately from scripture) was that one's courtly mistress could be an emblem of Wisdom, or Christian Grace, and that the traditional song of change could be reinterpreted upwards [. . .] to figure religious conversion" (168). It was from Nicolò, according to Holmes, that Petrarch learned how to represent his persona "as both historical and emblematic" (169).

Like Nicolò, who was so interested in writing for the page (rather than the ear) that he composed some of his poems to be written in shapes — a star or flower, for example — that would uncover for the reader some intricate word play otherwise invisible and inaudible, Petrarch was focussed on the codex's "precise physical dimensions and formal characteristics" (170), matching his text boundaries with those of the page or pair of facing pages. From Nicolò, Petrarch borrowed the technique of implying chronology via interspersed anniversary poems. From earlier *canzonieri*, he took the fiction that the book is a transcription of a live performance. Through Nicolò, he created Laura as his Beatrice.

Olivia Holmes's chief contribution to the study of Italian lyric surely lies in her evidence of a strong continuity of tradition, but she does not conduct her argument without close readings of the text, which will be of interest in their own right. Nor does her argument for continuity in any way detract from the achievements of Dante and Petrarch. While they learned from earlier and contemporary poets and *canzonieri*, Holmes is always quick to remind us that the quality of their verse and their vision was on a level quite beyond that of their colleagues. I, for one, appreciate these two giants all the more, now that Holmes has reconstructed the paving of their road by their predecessors.

If *Assembling the Lyric Self* could be said to disappoint in any way, it would be in its surprising omission to note any humor in the poetic corpus it examines so carefully. Holmes's decision to focus exclusively on the love and religious lyrics precludes forays into the comic and satiric poems, of course, but one does wonder from time to time,

reading her earnest discussions of apparently thoroughly solemn *canzoni*, sonnets, *tenzoni*, and *pastorellas*, if the love lyrics especially weren't a bit more playful than she would have them. A study of the witty and whimsical aspects of the same poetic corpus, if conducted with the same high standards as the book under review, would likely discover additional and complementary evidence for self-conscious authorship in Petrarch's predecessors.

Lois Bragg, *Gallaudet University*

Gabriele Costa. *Le origini della lingua poetica indeuropea. Voce coscienza e transizione neolitica*. Firenze: Olschki, 1998. Pp. 505.

The work examined here seems to be *rara avis* these days. The impression, conveyed already in the title, is confirmed in the "Preface," in which the author firmly champions the legitimacy of overcoming the particularistic approach, dictated by an undue preoccupation with individual methodologies and specific up-to-date contributions, and the necessity of delving in the problems and themes themselves. The extensive monograph is structured in a "reconstruction of the forms" and a "reconstruction of the values."

In the first part, an overview of the early studies on the origins of the Indo-European poetic language is traced back to its origins in the German scholarship of the nineteenth century. Then the more recent developments, in particular, after the publication of Rüdiger Schmitt's *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967) are examined in greater detail, with special emphasis on the positions of five different scholars: Françoise Bader, Enrico Campanile, Marcello Durante, Gregory Nagy, and Calvert Watkins.

The professed impartiality of the scientific approach does not prevent Costa from frankly and clearly expressing his judgment: "Ritengo che la linguistica sia di fatto una scienza interpretativa, al pari della storia, della filosofia, dell'antropologia, della psicologia, cioè delle altre scienze che si occupano, [. . .] della creazione di significati all'interno di tradizioni e istituzioni culturali, e dunque che essa non possa sottrarre alle e dalle proprie indagini l'esplicitazione dei valori — l'ideologia — insiti nei sistemi semiotici che ricostruisce, rendendo evidente in tal modo, attraverso il giudizio sul passato, anche l'epistemologia di chi, ricercando, modifica e rimodella i dati della Creatura e consentendo apertamente, infine, il controllo metagiudiziale di chi, lettore o critico, si assume il compito della controverifica sperimentale e della falsificazione teoretica" (6-7).

The second part directly examines and reconsiders the main issue that a scholar has to face nowadays in the light of our present knowledge. In an effort to define the epistemological setting of comparative linguistics today, the author proposes a "systemic model" (modello sistemico) which draws from such concepts as Bateson's application of the principle of entropy to a theory of the Mind and Nature, Korzybski's notion of "map" and "territory", and finally on Bohr's complementarity principle.

The historical (or rather, pre-historical and proto-historical) section that follows, "Le origini indeuropee," focuses on the possible time frame of the Indo-European diaspora: the early third millennium B.C., rather than the traditional hypothesis of a later dating, end of the third and beginning of the second millennium. (On the subject, see, lately, Andrew Sherrat, "Echoes of the Big-Bang: The Historical Context of Language

Dispersal" in *Proceedings of the Tenth UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, May 21-23, 1998*, Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man, 1999, 262-81).

Seemingly abstract and often poised on minute linguistic questions (for instance, the analogy between the Greek formula *kleos aphthiton*, "incorruptible glory," and its Vedic equivalent) these studies are a reflection on the meaning of those language forms that shape the world views of Western civilization. As J. Hilman puts it: "[. . .] finché la nostra cultura resta tradizionalmente e ufficialmente legata alle lingue indeuropee [. . .] non potremo cambiare la nostra mente, anche se potremo, beninteso, ampliarla, rivederla, e reimmaginarla (*Kinds of Power*, Italian trans. 1996, 18) (326). We may add that any such research ultimately aims at a hermeneutic contribution to the understanding of the cultural system that, in this century, has been variously referred to as *Welt* (Heidegger), uncharted territory (Wittgenstein), ideology (Ferruccio Rossi-Landi), or labyrinth (Borges).

To give a tangible example of some of the problems debated in the book, I will focus on an issue that is crucial in any research on the origins and character of the Indo-European poetic language: the oral vs. written tradition. It is interesting to note, in fact, that the practice of writing can be ascribed to the common period (as uncontroversially documented by the pan-dialectal diffusion of the root *pei-k/pei-g* ("to write, to paint, to decorate") in Indo-Iranian, Tocharian, Balto-Slavic, Greek, Latin, and Germanic languages. In a diachronic perspective, on the other hand, a culture which has appeared of paramount importance since the very beginnings of Indo-European studies for its unquestionable antiquity, namely Old Indic, has been ostensibly lacking in written documents until relatively recent times: from king Aśoka's inscription (third century B.C.) to the onset of epistolary literature with Kālidāsa (fourth century A.D.). The Vedic, and later Sanskrit and Pali traditions, in fact, seem to be governed by an ideology of memory (*ideologia della memoria*) that lays a tabooistic stigma on writing itself (clearly prohibited in the *Mahābhārata* 13, 24, 70)), which is viewed as a dangerous means of transmission, requiring a specific initiation, in order to avoid the almost sacrilegious spreading of arcane truths. In other traditions, too, the magic character of script is variously alluded to (see, for instance, the reference to the Druids in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* VI: 14, 3-4) as well as mythical narratives. Particularly suggestive, in this respect, is the story of Bellerophon as told in the *Iliad* (VI: 153-174). The hero, victim of the treachery of a woman (in a situation comparable to the Biblical episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife), is given a scroll with some "ominous signs" (*semata lygra*), which are meant to cause indirectly his death. This is the only Homeric passage in which writing is mentioned: the context is the initiation of a hero, who with his force, courage, and cunning eventually prevails over his enemies. If a brief remark can be added to the detailed analysis and beautiful interpretation of this passage by Françoise Bader (*La langue des dieux, ou l'hermétisme des poètes indo-européens*, Pisa: Giardini, 1989, 34-39), I would say that writing, placed on the threshold between life and death, has all the ambivalent power of an oracle: a message from the other world.

A subject closely related to the above topic is the metrical aspect in the Indo-European poetic tradition (see, in this regard, the very recent contribution by Morris Halle, "On Stress and Accent in Indo-European," *Language* 73 [1997]: 275-313). The issue is often discussed in the context of the possibility, or impossibility, of reconstructing an even partial framework that is common to the different languages, (see the debate among Enrico Campanile, Marcello Durante, and Calvert Watkins 117-21).

The research, however, more importantly addresses the question of the verbal scanning of time — rhythm which, regardless of the different historical forms, is a founding element in the very genesis of poetry. It is highly significant in this context that in some Indo-European languages, like Sanskrit, Greek, and possibly Latin, the linguistic accent was musical in nature, namely, it was based on variations in pitch, not differences in expiration (as in the case of the dynamic accent of modern languages).

The reflection on the musical character of poetry could well lead into the direction of the psychoanalytic investigations on the emotional dimension of language, a venue, however, usually disregarded (whence its absence in Costa's book) by scholars of Indo-European studies. In view of some very promising beginnings (already with Freud's very insightful remarks on the opposite meanings of primitive words), such a gap between linguistic archaeology and psychology seems to be a highly regrettable one. Among the few exceptions is the masterful work of the not adequately known and recognized Hungarian psychologist and linguist Theodore Thass-Thienemann. His book, *The Interpretation of Language 1. Understanding the Symbolic Meaning of Language. 2. Understanding the Unconscious Meaning of Language* (New York: J. Aronson, 1973), now out of print, is a journey into the enchanted *silva* of multi-lingual etymologies, conducted with the confidence and originality of a Vico, who assimilated Indo-European linguistics as well as twentieth-century philosophy and psychoanalysis.

By way of conclusion, I may note that the very extensive (145 pages!) critical bibliography appended to *Le origini della lingua poetica indeuropea* seems to belie my opening statement about the rarity of such works in contemporary scholarship. I would simply add that, aside from the number of related works, Costa's work can still be viewed as *rara avis* for the nearly poetic sensibility of an extremely erudite work, in which the rather frequent literary citations appear as but the surface aspect of a deep empathy of the author with the subject of his research: the origins of Indo-European *poetic* language.

Massimo Mandolini Pesaresi, *Columbia University*

Wilhelm Pötters. *Nascita del sonetto. Metrica e matematica al tempo di Federico II.* Ravenna: Longo, 1998. Pp. 189.

In the immortal words of W. S. Gilbert's Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*), "here's a how-de-do!" Few readers of this undeniably thought-provoking book will, I suspect, be able to maintain complete scholarly equanimity in the face of the sheer unexpectedness of its contents. Lulled into a sense of comforting familiarity by its sober presentation and respectable publisher, the charming miniature on its cover, or the numerous illustrations reproduced from late medieval manuscripts in its first chapter, the literary scholar will scarcely fail to note — it may be with a certain disquiet — the proliferation of figures and statistical tables that begins in the book's opening pages. For some, disquiet may soon turn to alarm, as the remaining pages fill with geometrical diagrams, mathematical symbols, fractions, equations, sketches of flatfish, sunflowers, and horses, computer-generated images derived from fractals, and more or less grainy photographs of the Apollo Belvedere, sculptures at Chartres Cathedral, and sundry works of Raphael, Duccio, Dürer, Mondrian, and Aristide Maillol — not to mention the Parthenon, the Pyramids, and a singularly unattractive Le Corbusier apartment building in sunny

Marseilles. It all seems to take us a long way indeed from the author's titular preoccupation, the "birth of the sonnet."

Which, of course, is precisely the point. Wilhelm Pötters is anxious to make us think about this hackneyed problem of literary history in an entirely new way. In order to do so, he has marshaled an astonishing variety of (mainly) non-literary evidence in support of a simple but dramatically original argument: that the sonnet takes the form that it does — fourteen lines of eleven syllables apiece, usually grouped into eight-line octave and six-line sestet — because its inventors were writing, at the Sicilian court of Frederick II in the early thirteenth century, in a cultural atmosphere suffused by the most advanced mathematical theories available at that time in the Christian West. The numerical values inherent in the sonnet structure — not only 11 and 14, but also 154 (the total number of syllables in a sonnet), 22 and 7 (the numerical elements of π in their respective proportional relationships with 11 and 14), and the ratio 4:3 (or 8:6, octave to sestet) — are thus neither arbitrarily devised nor adapted from existing models in a tradition of literary forms, but chosen precisely for their power to signify key mathematical ideas, especially those connected with squaring the circle and the so-called Golden Section (in the late medieval discussion of which these very numbers, as Pötters exhaustively demonstrates, recur over and over again).

This is revolutionary stuff indeed. Many a scholar has ventured a hypothesis as to the origin of the sonnet, all the way from the form's dependence on Provençal (or classical, or even Arabic) literary precedent to Ezra Pound's reductive, but not altogether implausible, suggestion that the sonnet simply came into being one day when an incompetent artist found himself faltering in the attempt to compose the opening stanza of a *canzone*. No one before Pötters, however, has gone so far outside specifically literary history in pursuit of an answer, or has presented such a wealth of information in support of so provocative a thesis. There is much to be learned from this book about both the history and the theory of mathematics — Pötters is generous with his description and quotation of some remarkably interesting primary texts — and even the most deplorably unmathematical reader will come away not only much better informed but also with a deeper sense of the richness of cultural and intellectual possibility that distinguished the thirteenth century in general and the Frederician court in particular.

That being said, from a strictly literary point of view the book suffers from some serious problems. In essence these are structural: there is much more about *matematica* than *metrica* here, and the imbalance is not redressed by any very searching inquiry into the relationship between the two concepts, either in theory (beyond the identification of the importance of certain numbers), or in practice (through, say, the analysis of particular texts in which numerically-based disposition of syllables has a verifiable influence on poetic meaning). Pötters tells us that 11 and 14 are crucial numbers in medieval mathematical theory, and we believe him. He tells us that squaring the circle and the Golden Section are fascinating topics in mathematics, influential in art and architecture down to the present day, and we believe that too. Then, instead of clinching his argument by demonstrating the concrete significance of these connections for *literary* analysis, he contents himself with piling up evidence — much of it (see the list above) dubiously relevant to the invention of the sonnet or to any other aspect of medieval culture — for points he has already made.

Likewise, the book fails to deal with some fairly obvious potential objections to its thesis. Apart from the biographical question, which seems likely to remain unanswerable

for lack of hard evidence (we remain, that is, entitled to wonder just how much the poets at Frederick's court *did* actually know, or care, about mathematics), it might be asked why, if 11 and 14, or the ratio 4:3, are really so indispensably important to the invention of the sonnet, they seem to lose their indispensability so early in the subsequent development of the form? It is not long after 1250 that the *sonetto caudato* appears, its extra lines putting an end to the ubiquity of 14. A mere couple of centuries after that, sonnets begin to be written in non-Italian languages, and there goes the need for 11 (replaced by the 10 syllables per line of English pentameter or the 12 of the French *alexandrin*). As for the 4:3 ratio, it too ceases to be mandatory as early as the third quarter of the thirteenth century, with the replacement of the octave by the ten-line *fronte* devised by Guittone d'Arezzo and perfected by Monte Andrea. Of course, it might be replied that Pötters's concern is with the *birth* of the sonnet, not with what became of it in later life; but it does seem strange that, if certain numbers and proportions are so universally significant in mathematical culture as to have spilled over into prosody and generated the sonnet form, their significance in the history of poetic practice should thereafter be restricted by features of language and chronology.

Wilhelm Pötters has written a learned and original book that certainly deserves to be taken seriously by scholars of literary history and poetic form. But some of his readers may find themselves wishing for rather fewer pictures, however pretty, and rather more — and more incisive — discussion of literary texts.

Steven Botterill, *University of California, Berkeley*

Alison Cornish. *Reading Dante's Stars*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Pp. 226.

Alison Cornish has written an elegant, erudite, and engaging little book. I say "little" because it runs only 144 pages of text, plus 70 pages of notes — testifying to its erudition. Yet despite its remarkable learnedness and the difficulty of the subject matter, it is simply and lucidly written. The numerous Latin citations are generally translated into graceful English, with the original text given only in the notes. The book is easily readable, unlike, perhaps, the stars that it describes.

Cornish tackles as her subject Dante's invocations of astronomical learning, including some of the most notoriously difficult passages in the *Commedia*. We Dante scholars are frequently tempted, out of a mixture of laziness and humanist snobbery, to give short shrift to the poem's scientific and technical aspects. The writings of John Freccero first taught many of us, however, that understanding the science of the age increases, rather than diminishes, the poem's beauty. Cornish shows how astronomy has everything to do with its beauty, but also with its meaning, and how form and content are one inseparable package, by reading the astronomical references contextually, in terms of the narrative or thematic moments in which they appear. Two basic ideas with which she begins and to which she repeatedly returns are that: 1) in Dante's world view, the stars are concrete representations of eternal ideas, *exempla* of the spiritual order that governs the universe by the power of love; and 2) Dante's astronomy is not simply aesthetic but also ethical, inasmuch as it demands a personal application and interpretation. The constellations are invitations to virtue, serving to remind us of what we ought to do and requiring us to opt for the good.

The volume is divided into an introduction, eight chapters, and a brief conclusion. The chapters are generally based on the explication of a single astronomical invocation or a short series of related references. Chapter 1 addresses the relationship — in the *Vita*

nuova, the *Convivio*, and the *Commedia* — between astronomical motion and love. Aristotle posited a First Mover who set the cosmos in motion by being desired. The behavior of the material universe is analogous, in the microcosm, to the human appetitive faculties. With each description of the celestial wheels, “the reader is made to stand before the universe [. . .] as the lover stands before the beloved” (23).

Chapter 2 takes on the date of the pilgrim’s journey and the apparent discrepancy between Dante’s astrology and the “real” positions of the planets on Maundy Thursday 1300, showing how Dante’s “false” astronomical description of spring yokes the journey’s fictional beginning to Easter and to the anniversary of the creation of the world. Chapter 3 discusses three literary references to farmers as readers of the stars (*Inferno* 20, 24, and 26) which stand as symbolic positive alternatives to antiquity’s deluded soothsayers and rash sailors whose excessive curiosity led them to precipitous disaster. Chapter 4 analyzes the elaborate astronomical periphrase at the opening of *Purgatorio* 9 which refers to the contemporaneity of nighttime in Purgatory and dawn in Italy, on the other side of the world, inviting the reader to compare “there” and “here,” the corrective afterlife with our present sinful state.

In Chapter 5, Cornish moves on to the *Paradiso*, where the astronomical descriptions generally lose their function as time-markers, to become metaphorical representations of spiritual abstractions. The canticle begins with a complex and imprecise chronological indicator based, once more, on multiple time references — it was day there and evening here — suggesting an atemporal or post-temporal perspective in which all times converge. In Chapter 6, she examines the imaginative exercise, in which the poet asks the reader to participate in *Paradiso* 13, of reshaping selected stars into a new configuration in order to activate the image of the Trinity in the individual soul. Chapter 7 examines, rather, the relation between the traveler’s vision of nine concentric circles wheeling around a fixed point in Canto 28 and the homocentric Aristotelian universe.

In the most intricate and, to my mind, interesting argument, Chapter 8 demonstrates how the astronomical exordium to Beatrice’s discourse on angels in *Paradiso* 29 — a simile ostensibly describing a pause in her speech — relates to the theological issue raised later in the canto as to whether there was an interval and, if so, of what sort, between the creation of the angels and Satan’s fall. The astronomical image focuses on the momentary balance of two planets on the horizon, one rising and one setting, corresponding to the undecided state in which both sets of angels hesitated momentarily before making the single, irrevocable decision that set the universe in motion. This final discussion brings Cornish neatly back, in the book’s conclusion, to her original emphasis on observed celestial phenomena as texts that are open to different personal interpretations, and that demand the reader take a stand, choosing virtue and love.

If this book has a limitation, it is that it gets a little bogged down at times in dry, technical discussions. Despite the admittedly ambiguous nature of some of his imagery, Dante is almost always shown to think rationally, like a scientist or philosopher, and just what distinguishes him from his scholastic contemporaries may not always be adequately explained. But the fault may also lie in this reader’s perhaps too-short attention span for issues that obviously fascinated both the poet and his contemporaries. Cornish’s contribution is, without a doubt, an extremely useful and supremely original addition (not a small feat in such an overcrowded field!) to the canon of American Dante criticism.

Olivia Holmes, *Yale University*

Gloria Allaire. *Andrea da Barberino and the Language of Chivalry*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1997. Pp. 183.

Although the subject of this interesting study has never quite sunk altogether out of scholarly sight, it is probably safe to say that there will be relatively few readers outside Italy, other than specialists in his period (c. 1370-1431) or his favored (chivalric) genre, for whom Andrea da Barberino is much more than a name. (In Italy, narratives based on his writings have at least enjoyed a prolonged afterlife in popular culture.) Even the specialists, however, have still not found decisive answers to many of the fundamental questions that might be asked about the output of any late medieval author: exactly which texts can safely or plausibly be attributed to him? What are the defining stylistic features of his writing? What precisely are the relations among the various manuscript witnesses to the dissemination of his works? What are the generic and thematic connections of those works with their literary and cultural matrix? Thanks to Gloria Allaire's lucid and meticulous account of her pioneering work on Andrea's manuscript tradition, we are at last in a position to begin to answer all of these questions, and indeed to come to Andrea's work not only better informed but more sensitive to both its cultural significance and its specifically literary value.

Allaire begins at the most traditional of beginnings with an account of Andrea's "Life and Works" (5-13). She spells out what is known of his life, what can (judiciously) be inferred from his works and scribal glosses in manuscripts thereof, what kind of reception his *œuvre* enjoyed among his contemporaries, and what impact his plots and characters had in subsequent literary, cultural, and even folkloristic manifestations down to the 1990s. She then undertakes an analysis of "Andrea's Narrative Style" (14-30), identifying such key features as a "striving for verisimilitude" (14), a "chronicle-like texture" (16), an abiding interest in geography and genealogy, a "varied use of registers, shaped according to the particular narrative needs of a passage" (21), frequent reference (more so than might have been expected in the genre) to the Latin classics and the liturgy, characteristic use of particular narrative and rhetorical formulae, and the presence of determinable devices of grammar and syntax such as polysyndeton. Allaire is careful to acknowledge that several of these "hallmarks" (30) of Andrea's style are shared with many other late medieval authors and texts, and that their use as identifiers must therefore be subject to rigorous control. She is also under no illusions about the potential (and potentially vast) distance between author and manuscript, admitting, for instance, that the appearance of polysyndeton in a given text may easily have been created by a scribal rather than an authorial preference for, and insertion of, conjunctions (30). Nonetheless, she makes a strong — because cautious — case for the definition of a recognizable style as characteristic of the authentic works of Andrea da Barberino, and, on that basis, sets out in subsequent chapters to determine several still controversial questions of attribution connected with his name.

The first of these ("The Case for *La Prima Spagna*," 31-42) involves the text known as the *Prima Spagna*, an account of the first of Charlemagne's wars in Spain. Here the eponymous case is especially tricky because, codicologically speaking, there is no "there" there: the only surviving manuscript of the *Prima Spagna*, found in a Roman library in the early nineteenth century, was lost some time thereafter and has never resurfaced (literally: it went down with the ship that was carrying it to Germany). The only available evidence for its contents is therefore a set of rubrics transcribed from the

manuscript before its ill-starred embarkation. Allaire examines these minutely, along with other surviving evidence of the manuscript's appearance, and concludes both that "[i]n addition to similarities of plot and characters, the lost *Prima Spagna* shares specific narrative motifs with the known works of Andrea" (36), and that there is substantial evidence (provided by the rubrics) for the presence in the *Prima Spagna* of lexical items typical of Andrea's authentic works, but rarely if ever found in a control group of *tre-* and *quattrocento* Tuscan chivalric texts by other hands.

The next chapter, "The Case for *Ansuigi* (*La Seconda Spagna*)" (43–64), likewise begins from the lost Roman manuscript, arguing that the *Seconda Spagna* it contained is probably identifiable with an extant *Storia di Ansuigi, re di Spagna*, which in turn can be attributed to Andrea on the basis of lexical and stylistic analysis and comparison similar to those conducted in the previous chapter. Allaire does some admirable philological spadework here, clearing the ground of misconceptions and confusions introduced by earlier generations of scholars, and consistently handling her sometimes evanescent textual material with critical acumen and sound common sense. She continues to exercise her skills in the following chapters, in which she argues first (65–92) that the lengthy prose narrative known as the *Storie di Rinaldo da Monte Albano* is probably Andrea's, and then (93–122) that the slightly less lengthy *Libro di Rambaldo da Risa*, occasionally assigned in the past to Andrea, probably is not. A brief conclusion (123–24) expresses the hope that this book's establishment of more precise definitions of Andrea's style and canon will lead to "more thoughtful and comprehensive critical treatments" (124) of his works (which, it might be noted, Allaire herself would surely be very well equipped to provide). The volume is rounded out by useful appendices that list extant manuscripts of Andrea's texts and supply a diplomatic transcription of a key extract from the proem to one of them. They also analyze the content of the disputed *Rambaldo* in comparison with that of Andrea's undisputed works, as well as provide thorough notes and bibliography.

In every chapter, Allaire's basic method is to take a fine-tooth comb to the texts themselves, examining lexical and stylistic evidence with minute care, assessing individual texts in the light of a wide range of analogous contemporary material, taking full account of the variants and vagaries of the manuscript tradition, and restraining any impulse to push the ensuing argument beyond the limits of the possible, the likely, or the probable into the treacherous realm of the categorical. It must be conceded that there are points at which particular claims or applications of method seem open to question — given the nature of the subject, it could scarcely be otherwise. But Allaire herself is well aware of the limitations inherent in her chosen approach; as a result, the effect of her painstaking accumulation of evidence and her refusal to squeeze that evidence harder than it can bear is, in the end, impressive enough in its own terms. Unless they are prepared to deny the validity of the entire philological method itself (which some, of course, will be) readers who wish to challenge Allaire's conclusions will have to engage with the material in a fashion as methodologically responsible and as exhaustively detailed as her own, which they will not find easy.

All in all, this book stands as a fine monument to a way of doing things in literary study which has fallen out of fashion in recent years, but whose value is likely to endure long beyond that of more modish forms of literary-critical practice that have taken its place. By dint of great learning, subtle argument, and sheer hard work with texts, Allaire has been able to clarify confusion, dispel ignorance, and point the way toward deeper and

more satisfying readings of a previously under-rated author. It is an achievement that any of us who call ourselves scholars might, and should, envy.

Steven Botterill, *University of California, Berkeley*

Charles Klopp. *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro*. Toronto: UP, 1999. Pp. xv+276.

Charles Klopp's *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro* is an authoritative and insightful guide through the fascinating realm of confinement and its representation in literary expression. Although he includes items as early as the 1500s, his selection of prison letters and autobiographical writings is dominated by works belonging to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — a somber indication, in and of itself, of the prevalence of political detentions and strife in Italy's recent history.

With laudable economy of detail, Klopp situates each author in his or her respective historical milieu, provides the reader with pertinent biographical information, and balances the often intimate revelations of his subjects with his own distanced yet discerning reflections. In his exposition of this literature that deals with some of humankind's darker moments, he highlights both its drama and pathos, while relieving his reader with an occasional amusing and even entertaining comment. His book, then, presents a kaleidoscopic vision of many separate and distinct portrayals of the experience of confinement, each linked by historical repetition and by a self-perpetuating network of intertextual allusions and themes. At times, Klopp seems to embrace this phenomenon of intertextuality; in one example, he connects twentieth-century prisoner/authors Rodolfo Morandi and Mario Alicata with their Risorgimento predecessors by way of the recurrent theme of conversion (161-62); at other times, he censures it, as indicated by his summation of the Spielberg patriots' "squabbles," "bickering," "rewriting, refutation, and repudiation of one another" (66); and in several instances, he concludes that prisoner/authors are de facto "captives of the intertextual tradition of prison writing" (36; also 29, 37, 118-19). One might argue that all genres (Klopp is treating several: the epistolary genre, the memoir, and poetry) possess textual prototypes and traditions or they would not be defined as such. Would all writers then be "captives" to precedent models? Setting aside the somewhat forced metaphor, I do agree that the shared imagery and the tendency to identify with past models are outstanding features of prison discourse and, as such, substantiate its designation as genre while investing it with something of an eternal quality.

This said, it should not be forgotten that prison writing is also influenced by the literary currents, trends, and values of the historical moment from which it emerges. Klopp has successfully integrated this notion into his discussion and thus illumined certain aspects of the Aldo Moro writings, for example, and those of Andrea Costa and the Communists. His book certainly whets the appetite for more of this type of analysis, which must obviously be minimized in a wide-ranging survey. Indeed, the strength of *Sentences* lies in its broad coverage of materials not easily accessed, but, nonetheless, brought forth with mastery.

The reader's understanding and appreciation of the more peculiar or distinctive tropes of prison narrative are advanced by Klopp's acute observations of the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of imprisonment. One such elucidation highlights the

potentially paradoxical state of forced confinement in which bodily constraints may actually dispose the mind to a certain broadening, a heightened receptiveness, or even freedom. Klopp also points out that the reverse is possible, in that victims of confinement may be so traumatized, demoralized, or otherwise unable to adapt to captivity that they simply lose the powers of concentration or memory.

In this same spirit of mental and physical interplay, Klopp presents an interesting discussion of the "textualization of the body and the accompanying corporalization of the text" (191). As he demonstrates with numerous examples, the suffering body itself can become a medium of expression "able to authenticate or subvert an accompanying or competing text" (192). Whether it be writing in blood or on soiled bandages, the visible scars of torture or illness, or in the "dialectic of substitution and replacement" (191), the pathology of the prisoner is a graphic fixture of prison discourse. Klopp's elaborations on this theme are extremely important not only to the study of these particular texts, but in furthering, from a socio-cultural perspective, our understanding of the role of captivity in human society.

Any interpreter of highly subjective material must be faithful to the content of the text, that is, to the words each author has chosen to convey his or her thoughts. Klopp tells us, though, that he and the reader must also see what is *not* stated in the text. He explains that prison writing consists of an ostensible text beneath which lies a "clandestine" or "unarticulated, secret" text which, in his view, is "more authentic" (10, 192) than that which the author has in fact composed. Although I admire his line of reasoning and am equally intrigued by these authors' allusions to hidden or lost texts, suppressed emotions or ideas, censored fragments, and ineffable experiences, I do not agree that the unspoken text is somehow *more* authentic than the text which functions as its referent. Rather, I believe that just as the shadow of a person or an object is not invisible, but a perceptible presence — albeit of a different nature and dependent upon its concrete source — so, too, the unarticulated text or shadow-text, if you will, is perceptible and meaningful in tandem with, but not separate from, the ostensible text. If indeed a covert, though undefined, text is somehow implied within the overt text, the allusion itself must be seen as meaningful. In a sense, the author has, consciously or subconsciously, invited the reader to speculation. In the altogether different case of writings in symbolic language, cryptic alphabets, acrostics, or even invisible ink, which are intended for a specific recipient, the question is not one of authenticity but of simply recognizing the symbiotic function of a foil text (or, literally, a pretext) and the coded message it harbors. It seems to me that Klopp's engrossment with the text *manqué* forces him to characterize the prison writings in terms of their inadequacies. He repeatedly refers to "inexpressible passion," "ineffable suffering" (192), "unexpressed affection" (122), "inexpressible texts of suffering and desire" (10) as if these experiences, common to all people, surpass the limits of human expression. If that were the case, the world would have very few works of art, musical compositions, or books. Is it not in the act of writing, singing, painting, dancing, or remembering, whilst body and mind are engaged in the struggle to express, that the experience lives? Artistic expression is never finalized nor perfected, yet in that imperfection, it accurately reflects the human condition. Countless Holocaust scholars invariably refer to the *unutterable* nature of that horrific event, yet there, within the testimonies of each survivor, a voice speaks the unspeakable. The nightmare, according to Primo Levi, himself a Holocaust witness, was not the

"gruesome privilege of writing," but the fear that the world would not listen, or in his own ironic turn of phrase, that his would be an "unlistened-to story."

In conclusion, I cannot neglect to mention what I perceive as a persistent source of distraction throughout Charles Klopp's otherwise masterful work. The very title of his book, *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro*, presents a troublesome issue in that neither Cellini nor Moro was a political prisoner by any definition of the term as it is understood today or, for that matter, in its prototypical sense. Since there exist slightly variant definitions of the term "political prisoner" presently vying for universal recognition, it seems all the more imperative that Klopp clarify his own interpretation in a way that remains consistent throughout his discussion. The elasticity with which he treats this key term has spilled over onto other closely associated terms, such as the word "prison" itself. A convent or a *ritiro* (as Mondragone was called in Caracciolo's case) is not a prison, nor is a hospital for the mentally ill (Tasso's case), although I am well aware not only of their historical associations with carceral institutions, but also of the many similar experiences that forced confinement in such places might produce. However, some defining parameters must be drawn, or we could easily expand the discussion to include house arrests or any number of institutions from orphanages, schools, factories, retirement homes, military barracks, rehabilitation centers, and so on. For all of their Foucaultian similarities, these institutions are symbols of quite different social mechanisms, operating on distinct principles and generating their own logic and purpose, some with the aim of protecting society from the dangerous transgressor, others to protect, for example, the chaste nun or wayward juvenile from society and its contaminating evils. Is the nun Enrichetta Caracciolo's erotic interest a "prison doctor" or a "convent doctor"? Klopp uses the words as if they were interchangeable (127, 129). The reader is further baffled by the inclusion of a purely fictitious work (the Pignata story), the letters of Red Brigades' hostage, Aldo Moro (who committed no crime at all), and the cases of Cellini, Tasso, Casanova, and Caracciolo, whose offenses do not appear to be politically motivated. Klopp's introductory remarks on Cellini, Tasso, and Casanova, in which he states that "these men were transgressive enough in their behavior for irritated ecclesiastical or civil authorities to decide they should go to jail" (12), and are thus "precursors" to later political prisoners, do not, in my mind, serve the reader adequately nor bear the burden of expectation that his weighty title creates. My concern with this matter is as practical as it is theoretical in that the autobiographical writings of prisoners are, with few exceptions, acutely focused upon the particular physical and psychological conditions of their prison environment, on the circumstances of their trials and interrogations, and on the nature of their actual or purported crimes. Their respective self-portraits and portrayals of captivity, while intimately linked to the constricted world on the "inside," are also shaped by the "outside," that is, by the perceived moral judgments of family, friends, society in general, and even their oppressors.

My argument is not with Klopp's treating the various aforementioned authors. In truth, these segments of his book are among the more interesting, for here we find much of the shared imagery that connects all portraits of confinement. Nonetheless, I maintain that the writings of a political dissident reflect a very different perspective and overall experience from those of a mentally disturbed poet or a wanton libertine, and the attempt to represent all such writers as political prisoners is simply misleading, and conveys a false sense of continuity where, in fact, stands an historical discontinuity.

Fortunately this flaw does not mar the many virtues of Klopp's work, not the least being its originality as an extensive critical survey of strictly Italian prisoner/authors. Beyond the culturally specific considerations which so richly inform this book, and regardless of country or language, Charles Klopp's *Sentences* represents one of the most thought-provoking and vital contributions to the study of prison literature in recent scholarship.

Maria Smith, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Nancy L. Canepa. *From Court to Forest: Giambattista Basile's Lo cunto de li cunti and the Birth of the Literary Fairy Tale*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1999.

Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone*, a collection of forty-nine fairy tales framed by a fiftieth tale that opens and closes the collection, which was published posthumously in 1634-36, is described by Marina Warner as "the foundation stone of the modern literary fairy tale" (*From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* 148). Critical attention to this work, however, especially in English, has been sparse and uneven. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklorists tended to see Basile as an anomalous figure in early seventeenth-century Italian letters. Although Canepa agrees that his choice to write the work in Neapolitan dialect impeded widespread diffusion of the work, she also points out that, until recently, this same perception dominated his reception in his own country where he was also categorized as an "unconscious ironizer" of Baroque persuasion, a secondary aesthetic at best (31).

Canepa proposes to remedy Basile's marginal status in the English-speaking scholarly community with this historical and literary study of the varied and innovative elements that distinguish "Basile's version of the literary fairy tale from both the oral folktales and from the fairy tales of his better known successors" (22). According to Canepa, "the true novelty of *Lo cunto* lies not in any structural elaboration of the genre but in the figural and ideological interpolations, the references to diverse social orders and narrative traditions, that crowd the tales and disturb their illusory 'happily ever after' linearity" (22). In the book's nine chapters, Canepa shows how Basile 1) creates a seminal text in the history of the fairy-tale genre; 2) uses a highly innovative baroque poetics to participate in the century's cultural debates on the intersections of "low" popular with "high" elitist traditions; and 3) offers and simultaneously critiques a portrait of the socio-historical and cultural contexts in which it was written (11-12). Central to her analysis is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque although Canepa is also extremely well versed in international scholarship on fairy tales, rhetoric, and the Baroque period. Bakhtin used the theory of the carnivalesque to clarify the role of folk humor in the works of François Rabelais and solidify Rabelais's status as a canonical writer in world literature. Like Rabelais, Basile uses carnival and grotesque themes and techniques to fuse seemingly antithetical traditions. Basile drew his materials from the more realistic *novelle* of Boccaccio's "groundbreaking model of the *Decameron* in the mid-fourteenth century" (54) which, *mutatis mutandi*, Matteo Bandello and Giovan Francesco Straparola kept in circulation, and from the Neapolitan dialect tradition of writers like Giulio Cesare Cortese and Felippe de Scafata Sgruttendio, who were already carnivalizing themes and motifs from classical, chivalric, epic, and folk literature (Chapter 3).

Theoreticians of dialect literature view the tradition either as engaging in a critical polemic with the literary traditions and institutions of the time, or as aiming to valorize the local culture and integrate these resources into a unified literary tradition. Canepa uses both theories in her analyses of the tales which she organizes around the fairy-tale characters rather than around a day-by-day analysis of the stories (Chapters 5-7). Although there are some similarities between the tales told each day, it is through the diverse representations of fairy tale's stock characters that we see Basile's "critique of social reality and the power hierarchies of his time [. . .] [his] utopian revision of these hierarchies into an alternative system, [. . .] [and the] wealth of 'anthropological' details regarding the structuring of human relationships and [. . .] the organization of human and natural space" (111). Portraits of corrupt and inept kings and courtiers (Chapter 4) mask Basile's autobiographical reflections on the vicissitudes of his life as a working bourgeois intellectual (and not as a populist as some critics would have it) in a court consumed by conspicuous and prestige consumerism. Basile's kings are of a "diminished authority and distracted nature"; rather than being "the guarantors of the well-being of a system, they are the most blatant symptom of its malaise" (113). In Chapter 6, "The Key to Success: Enterprising Heroes and Heroines," the artifices of trickery, solidarity, and *ingenuo*, usually on the part of the female characters, provide caustic commentary on what life has become in Spanish-dominated Naples. Chapter 7 demonstrates how the portraits of ogres, fools, and forests that proliferate throughout the tales can be interpreted as comic caricatures of Basile's historical self, or as alternative figures of transgression and positive difference.

Canepa's readings of the historical and cultural contexts of the tales are scholarly and well-informed although, at times, by dint of their seriousness, show the limitations of these theories when dealing with the burlesque. Although Basile participates in the formation of a literary genre, which fifty years later Madame d'Aulnoy and others would use to represent a "transformed world in which justice, equality and love would reign" (19), this was far from the case in the majority of Basile's tales where Fortune and chance, semi-humanized ogres and fairies helped less than ideal protagonists stumble through stock ordeals that ended well most of the time despite their misguided efforts. For example, in the most famous tale of the *Pentamerone*, "Lo cuento dell'uerco" ("The Tale of the Ogre"), where an ogre and a lazy fool are the principal protagonists, Canepa sees the moral initiation of Antuono (a stock name for a fool) and happy ending as part of the reward for Antuono's learning to use language effectively, something a nice ogre was trying to teach him. This reward also figures into Basile's project of bringing the low tradition into the mainstream. However, as Canepa states, Basile has a preference for the "low-mimetic mode" (Northrop Frye's term although no mention is made of Frye) which indeed functions to make the burlesque and its characters seem more based in everyday reality (70). Hence are we to sympathize with or just laugh at this half-human, pragmatic ogre type who gives the fool a jewel-defecating donkey to take home to a mother already frustrated with her son's denseness? Antuono loses the donkey on the way home to a tavern keeper, and brings home a donkey who does his business on the linens saved for his sisters' dowry, and gets thrown out again. Canepa quotes Jameson's theory that "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a specific cultural artifact" (69). Indeed it is difficult to interpret a "contract" in a text where all genres are being burlesqued (including that of the common sense proverb at the end of so many of Basile's

tales which misses rather than clarifies the point of the story). Basile destabilizes all meaning except perhaps in the eclogues which, as Canepa points out, attack directly one form, the pastoral, and thus make Basile's criticism of the court clear.

However, as Canepa states early on, her main goal is not to read the tales as cynical reactions on Basile's part, or as a historical or sociological tract in which Basile is pleading for a more just and noble world for himself and fellow members of the "Oziosi," (the literary academy founded in 1611 whose name showed the members' irreverent awareness of the precarious status of the literary tradition in which they wrote). For Canepa, Basile's greatest achievement was his creation of a model of "literary interaction" (34). Basile was working with materials from the long illustrious Greek and Roman romance tradition, whose plots and characters can be found in the fourteenth-century *Gesta Romanorum*, a text long believed to be the principal storehouse of Italian novelists writing realistic, horror, tragic, or comic stories. Basile even wrote his own version of Heliodorus's romance *Aethiopica*. (62). But it is precisely his brilliant use of dialect which makes Basile even more difficult now for us to understand. Canepa's theory of the workings of metaphor in Basile, which she works into every chapter and then fully and brilliantly develops in the final two chapters, elucidate how Basile parodies Classical, Renaissance, and finally the folk tradition itself in ways that exemplify and clarify the rhetorical creativity and exuberance of the Baroque. And, most important, Canepa gives a multitude of textual examples and translations so that the contemporary reader can decide for him/herself how to interpret the parody. Therefore, thanks to Canepa and this well-written, well-researched, and most interesting and amusing critical work, it will be hard from now on to ignore Basile and his place in the Western literary tradition.

Carol Lazzaro-Weis, *Southern University*

Moderata Fonte (Modesta Pozzo). *The Worth of Women Wherein is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*. Trans. Virginia Cox. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997. Pp.XXVII + 290.

Among Italian women writers of the Renaissance who have most impacted on teaching and research recently, Moderata Fonte seems to occupy the number one position. Writing a few years ago an entry for a European encyclopedia on women, I was undecided whether I should catalogue this writer under her family name, Modesta Pozzo, or her penname, Moderata Fonte. At that time few people seemed to have heard of her. What a difference a few years make! Today Fonte has graciously taken her place among canonized Italian Renaissance writers, and the recent beautiful translation in English by Virginia Cox of her work, *The Worth of Women (Il merito delle donne)*, goes a long way toward making her name known within a larger pool of critics and students.

The Worth of Women constitutes a new addition to "The Other Voice" series that coeditors Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. are offering through the University of Chicago Press. Their stated aim is to make sure that the "silent voices" of early modern women in philosophy, narrative, medicine, poetry, and natural science (and likewise of men who have examined the "woman question") are finally loudly heard. Like all others in the series, this volume is preceded by an introduction of the coeditors that frames the issues facing women during the period, and sketches in broad strokes the extent of past misogyny. Then Cox provides an introduction to the author and her work, with special

emphasis on her biography and on the intellectual climate of her times. Next the treatise is examined and put in context, and a history of its reception is given. Within the translated text, the notes guide the reader thoroughly and detail the relationship of this dialogic defense to similar works.

Published in 1600 a few years after her death, Fonte's *Worth* differs from other treatises on women not only because its title places more emphasis on the inner worth of the female sex than on its superiority (the latter being the usual approach in many pro women texts of the *querelle des femmes*), but also because it boldly politicizes women's powerlessness and lack of authority. The seven Venetian ladies discussing women's worth in the relaxed environment of a garden consistently debate the pros and cons of marriage, since this was the status that gave women "status" in sixteenth-century society. But marriage is shown as inconvenient to wives, given the cultural assumptions and the behavior of their legal companions. On the other hand, since women legally were always minors no matter their age or their social class, the condition of female singlehood was difficult to advocate. And yet Fonte repeatedly does so through the figure of Corinna and her free-spirited sisters, who time and again denounce the inattentiveness or outright malice of male guardians who forget to set up, say, a sufficient dowry, to assure that the women of their household do not plunge into a life of prostitution or utter poverty. The chasm between this view and that expressed a few decades earlier in the similarly titled treatise by Sperone Speroni, *Della dignità delle donne* (1542), is enormous. In Speroni, Beatrice degli Olbizzi was made to embrace nonchalantly a misogynist and demeaning position by claiming that wives were happy to serve their husbands ("in questa tale sua servitù esser posto tutto il suo bene e la felicità sua"). In Fonte, women are thinking beings, led more by their logic than by their appetites, and men repeatedly are said to be envious of them.

This part of the conversation constitutes Day 1 of the treatise and until Cox's introduction, it was the only section closely examined by critics. Day 2 was dismissed as a mixture of unrelated pronouncements on geography, medicine, patronage, and the like. The seemingly scattered knowledge on these topics that the women in the conversation appear to have acquired through hearsay seemed to some critics only to confirm how difficult it was for those who lacked proper schooling to navigate the world of bookish, encyclopedic knowledge. But Cox authoritatively argues that Day 2 does not constitute scientific prattle. Rather, it foregrounds Fonte's strategy of reclaiming for women a right to equality by naming a nature — i.e., rivers, plants, animals, herbs, and the like — in harmony with itself, a nature in which no hierarchy exists between males and females.

The issue of seriousness in treatises on women's worth has been a topic hotly debated in Italy and central to the argument of Adriana Chemello in the first modern edition of *Il merito delle donne* (Venice: Eidos, 1988). Cox rightfully argues that Fonte opted indeed for a form of *serio ludere* in discussing issues of social friction (e.g., the status of prostitutes, men's hypocrisy) but that she was also deadly serious. I agree. It is true that some writers praising women's worth have been facetious in their claims for radical changes in the relationship between the sexes. But women writers could not adopt this strategy. Fonte is sure-footed in her denunciations even though she ends her argument on a conservative note by letting the reader assume that marriage is a necessary evil for women.

While I am on the subject of conclusions, it is worth noting that we do not really know how Fonte concluded the *Worth*. In the introductory material that accompanied the

publication of her book, Fonte's uncle, Giovanni Doglioni, claimed that his niece was busy finishing her manuscript the night before her death in childbirth, as if a premonition of sorry events to come was spurring her on. To argue, as Cox does, that the *Worth* was only a first draft cut abruptly by the author's death is certainly in the realm of possibilities. In the same vein, one could reason that in revisiting the text a few years later, her children and uncle corrected it. Today we do not have a manuscript copy to which to refer in studying erasures and additions imported by different handwritings, since master texts were routinely discarded after publication. But we know from Doglioni, himself a writer, that the lengthy poem in *ottava rima* that concludes the treatise was not meant by Fonte to be put in this work. We can only surmise what other changes have been effected and what other arguments have been adapted and discarded during the process of preparing the manuscript for printing. Be that as it may, the *Merit's* conservative ending does not detract from the import of what Fonte forcefully argues throughout.

In her biographical sketch of Fonte, Cox argues that there must have been an enmity between the writer and her only brother because he was not mentioned in her first will. This siblings' rivalry, she adds, may have stemmed from money matters preceding Fonte's own marriage. Cox's hypothesis may very well be grounded in reality — and in the *Worth* Fonte strongly chastises inept brothers — but in general the omission of a brother's name from the will of a married woman with children in the early modern period was the norm in Venetian society rather than the exception. (See, for example, Stanley Chojnacki's essays on patrician Venetian women, now usefully collected in *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000.) But such an instance of perhaps over-reading is just a quibble in an otherwise intelligent, well organized, and superbly argued introduction.

Valeria Finucci, *Duke University*

Linda Bisello. *Medicina della memoria. Aforistica ed esemplarità nella scrittura barocca*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998. Pp. 300.

Il titolo del libro, di complessa evocatività, dà un saggio dei percorsi, non tutti egualmente perspicui e lineari, che l'autrice tenta di segnare nella vasta proliferazione della scrittura aforistica nel Seicento. Il volume è diviso in tre sezioni, o parti, indicate con titoli superbamente barocchi, in cui un materiale di straordinaria ricchezza viene catalogato, ancorché con connessioni talvolta implicite. Le 'parti' in cui il libro è suddiviso servono dunque da contenitori meglio che da linee prospettiche, punti di fuga o direttrici dell'analisi.

Tra XVI e XVII secolo la "pratica centonaria" già seguita dal Lipsio, ovvero "l'allestimento di quaderni di citazioni, di rubriche generali", subisce una repentina crescita, che esprime una "mentalità analogica" e un gusto estetico favorevole al collezionismo di porzioni testuali (19). La scrittura "sussiste sempre dialetticamente rispetto al bianco della pagina" e si mantiene con esso in un rapporto costante "come se da questo schermo [. . .] i pensieri si rapprendessero in parola in modo irrevocabile" (31).

I moralisti si volgono alla scrittura aforistica (una scrittura frammentaria che prevede una lettura "parcellizzante" dei testi) consapevoli che la tradizione offra i paradigmi sui quali fondarsi.

L'avvicinamento e il confronto tra testi a carattere aforistico, generalmente moralistici, e testi di stampo religioso viene tentato dall'autrice in un significativo capitolo del libro, apparentemente dotato di un'impalcatura concettuale più continua di altri (il cap. III della prima parte: "La stilistica della via breve: *semitae* della letteratura spirituale", 33-67). La *forma breve* — si propone di dimostrare l'autrice — diventa un punto di simile protensione per i mistici (numerosi sono i riferimenti all'opera di Giovanni Bona), spinti dall'urgenza della comunicazione, e i moralisti, diffidenti verso la forma articolata e compatta del trattato. Il linguaggio acuto e aforistico e quello "mistico-apofatico" convergono nella "rifondazione di un *eloquium* dell'autenticità, in cui la parola non sia espressione di una frattura, quanto coincidenza tra verbo e cosa" (44). Il mistico (si pensi alla definizione di Giovanni Bona, per cui "il canone della presenza di Dio" è formulato "come esperienza della contrarietà", 64) sperimenta il linguaggio come una corrente di contraddizioni.

La parte seconda del volume ("*Strictius arctius*: l'impresa e lo statuto del neolaconismo", 71-170), momento fra i più interessanti, si incentra sulla controversia che ebbe per oggetto la forma ellittica sentenziosa, confrontata o equiparata al concettismo e al laconismo di marca senecana. Il laconismo, attratto nell'orbita del concettismo in alcune opere teoriche tra Cinque e Seicento, continua a essere considerato come una categoria stilistica a sé da critici avveduti, come il Fioretti. La questione della "«quantità» lessicale più adeguata alla scrittura in prosa" (73) produce una disputa, alla quale partecipa anche Daniello Bartoli. Quest'ultimo prova avversione verso uno stile "lambiccato a goccia a goccia, allo stentatissimo lume d'una lucerna" (80) e considera il concettismo e il laconismo sostanzialmente non diversi.

Il dibattito (cfr. cap. I, "La controversia secentesca sul 'parlare a riciso'", 73-112) sorto in Italia, dove lo stile neolaconico ha un rappresentante conosciuto e tradotto in tutta Europa, Virgilio Malvezzi, trova risonanze e riprese in tutte le principali letterature europee. Per il francese La Mothe Le Vayer lo stile neolaconico è un morbo linguistico da ricusare. Per Mascardi, "successore di Famiano Strada nella cattedra di retorica del Collegio Romano" (84), di cui la Bisello riassume attentamente le posizioni, è un gioco per asmatici, balbuzienti o bambini.

Nel tardo Cinquecento l'innalzamento del modello senecano e tacitista fa seguito al declino del modello ciceroniano. Gianbattista Manzini, tra i maggiori sostenitori del senecismo e del laconismo (che nelle sue scritture si offrono come due suggestioni parallele), teorizza "una prosa dell'ingegno come sostituto della vacua efflorescenza decorativa (che produce 'libracci migliaiaiosi')" (106). Seneca incarnava, per il Bartoli, "un esempio di libertà dalle consuetudini e dalla tradizione, deputata ad educare il gusto, non ad irregimentarlo" (108). Anche gli scritti di Tesoro, che adduce esempi normativi prelevandoli da scrittori fino a qualche tempo prima ritenuti irregolari, testimoniano una variazione del gusto stilistico. Per il Malvezzi, ricercatore della novità e di una "dicitura" "tanto prodiga d'insegnamento, quanto avara di parole" (da una cit. di P. Sforza Pallavicino, 110), la maniera di Tacito deve essere assunta come modello e simbolo ideale dello stile laconico.

La compiuta codificazione dello stile laconico avviene, al principio del Seicento, con l'opera di Ericio Puteano (cfr. cap. II, "'Laconismi patrociniū': i fondamenti del fiammingo Ericio Puteano", 113-124), che soggiorna lungamente a Milano, stringendo rapporti con l'erudito Giovanni Ambrogio Biffi, traduttore di alcuni suoi scritti, e intrattiene rapporti epistolari con il Malvezzi. Il Puteano sostiene una corrente

brachilogica che trova riscontro anche nello stile epistolare di quegli anni, teorizzato, tra gli altri, da Bernardino Pino da Cagli, segretario del cardinale Giulio della Rovere.

È certamente degno di attenzione anche Carlo Pasquali, di cui la Bisello ricorda il recupero di una modalità dell'eloquenza nel circuito delle circostanze storico-politiche che vi avrebbero influito: "proprio dall'assolutismo monarchico [...] il Pasquali desume la necessità contingente di una modalità espressiva contratta e allusiva" (118).

Tacito e Malvezzi sono i capisaldi dell'indagine del capitolo terzo ("Tra 'veloci tragitti' e 'batter di palpebra': il processo mentale associativo nello stile acuto", 125-170). L'aforisma, nella logica della scrittura malvezziana, non devia dal tracciato della storia ma collabora al suo fine, includendolo: quando si scrive per i principi, che dispongono di poco tempo, occorre essere brevi e incisivi. L'aforisma, "prima ancora che un'articolazione linguistica" (136), rappresenterebbe "una disposizione del pensiero, che si rapporta in modo peculiare alla realtà mutevole, al transitare di eventi irrevocabili, il cui commento sarà ugualmente immediato, discontinuo" (136). Malvezzi tiene a modello la prosa di Tacito e la questione stilistica diviene per lui, come fa notare la Bisello, occasione di una disputa che vede scendere in campo lo Sforza Pallavicino, coerente con il Tesauro e ostile all'ornamento quando sia "uno straniero accidente, il quale o corregga o celi i difetti della sostanza" (da una cit. di P. Sforza Pallavicino, 139). "Il punto archimedeo" della *querelle* stilistica che ne sorge, poi penetrata anche in Francia, viene trovato da i più equilibrati "nella proficua collaborazione di logica e retorica", cioè affermando "il necessario temperarsi di materia e forma" (148). Circa le argutezze, la Bisello si sofferma a illustrare le posizioni del Tesauro (il quale, intendendo la natura come l'enciclopedia delle immagini e delle nozioni, sostiene "l'unica loda delle argutezze consistere nel saper ben mentire", 150) e del Peregrini, nemico di quelle acutezze che si esauriscono nell'esteriore abbellimento del discorso, ma favorevole ad esse quando istituiscano un legame fra le "cose lontane" (152), in modo tale da generare ammirazione per la mente vivace e accorta che le abbia escogitate.

Il percorso della Bisello lambisce quindi Giordano Bruno e il Gracián, il "massimo esponente della poetica concettista" (164), rilevando le affinità con il Malvezzi e la simile propensione verso una "retorica dell'incompiutezza" (165). La scrittura "atomistica", di cui il Gracián e il Malvezzi sono sostenitori, e "una lettura che trascelga dal *continuum* testuale per tesaurizzarne delle parti" (167) suggeriscono una concezione dell'opera letteraria che ha matrice in "un diffuso senso di saturazione dello spazio dicibile" (167).

Giungendo all'ultima parte del saggio, la terza ("*Immensum minimis arctat*: l'esperienza compendiata nei precetti", 171-269), attraverso un percorso sorretto quasi completamente da una tramatura di assonanze e ricucito su uno sfondo di affinità dipendenti dalla simile temperie culturale, l'autrice si propone di indagare l'"afferinarsi di un uso cosciente della forma aforistica presso i suoi cultori [...] in quanto genere letterario peculiare" (173). La storia letteraria dell'aforisma s'intreccia a questo punto con il culto per le sentenze tacitiane, per i massimari enciclopedici desunti da Tacito e per lo stile acuto dello storico imperiale, talvolta applicato come maschera su un latente machiavellismo.

La prima accezione di 'aforisma' riconduce la parola al campo della medicina ippocratea, mentre "sul crinale tra Cinque e Seicento, è l'estensione semantica del sostantivo dall'ambito medico ad uno politico e morale" (178). Il legame tra medicina e arte di governo si consolida in seguito in Spagna, Italia e Francia e l'aforisma assume l'accezione attualmente corrente: ha nome di *Aforismos* il commentario, volto in italiano

nel 1618 ad opera di Girolamo Canini d'Anghiari, "gremito di circa cinquemila annotazioni politiche e morali" (180), che Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos redige a margine della propria traduzione degli *Annales* e delle *Historiae* di Tacito.

Tenta di spiegare le motivazioni del culto di Tacito l'editore Paolo Baglioni nella prefazione con dedica preposta alla riedizione degli *Aforismi* del 1665: gli scritti dello storico romano vi vengono presentati come "un tesoro di prudenza civile", più ricchi di misteri "che i geroglifici d'Egitto", nonché come "una scuola d'aforismi, e di massime riservate" (da una cit. di P. Baglioni, 188). Filippo Cavriana, diplomatico e medico di Caterina de' Medici, suggerisce in un proprio commentario "la simmetria tra l'empiria medica e quella politica" (187), indicando come propri maestri, in originale associazione, Ippocrate e Cornelio Tacito.

La prosa dei *Ricordi* del Guicciardini è soggetto di forte influenza sugli storici "penetrativi", come il Brignole Sale e il Boccalini, apparendo loro con le caratteristiche di una valida proposta di registrazione sintetica del fatto all'interno della predominanza del ragionamento. In alcune tra le non molte pagine davvero limpide del saggio (203-05) la scrittura aforistica di impronta guicciardiniana viene messa in rapporto con la discontinuità del silenzio e della lacuna volontaria, su cui si appoggierebbe per scavalcarla.

La *brevitas* tacitiana, nel giro di pochi anni, viene vista con scetticismo, riprovata, quindi lodata e talvolta esaltata. La storia e gli strumenti dell'indagine storica vengono assimilati alla medicina; la diagnosi sullo stato di salute della politica alle prescrizioni mediche rilasciate a un paziente. La prosa tacitiana, "siccam ac sobriam" per il Mureto (230), può apparire come la "cifra connotativa di un ragionare sui fatti, strumentale all'espressione di una verità oggettiva che scaturisce però sempre dall'esperienza" (230).

Esprimono giudizi sullo stile di Tacito, tra gli altri, Giorgio Dati, suo volgarizzatore, Bernardo Davanzati, Adriano Politi e Benedetto Pucci. Si chiarisce l'immagine della 'gara stilistica' che il traduttore sosterrebbe con il suo modello, cercando di raggiungere una concisione equivalente e una pari densità d'espressione.

L'ultimo capitolo del libro è dedicato all'acuità dello sguardo e alla prudenza, associate sul tessuto della scrittura aforistica e della precettistica morale. Per l'Álamos de Barrientos, non lontano dal Malvezzi, la prudenza si incardina sull'esperienza "che è fomite di regole — quasi un viatico — per condursi nella vita, e sapervisi destreggiare" (245). La precettistica, come vorrebbe provare anche Raimondo Montecuccoli, autore degli *Aforismi dell'arte bellica* (1670), si presenta quindi come una scienza rigorosamente deduttiva, mentre la storia, in cui si comprende "tutta la vita del mondo" (257), offre allo studioso, insieme al diletto, una sorta di scorciatoia dell'esperienza: "ivi a spese d'altri l'uomo impara quel che conviene a sé, ivi si veggono i naufragi senza orrore" (da una cit. di G. Botero, 257).

Stefano Termanini, *Genova*

Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*. Princeton: UP, 1999. Pp. xviii + 267.

This volume was hailed as "the best book on Vico . . . written in any language since Isaiah Berlin, forty years ago, delivered his Vico lectures . . . that would later become the first part of *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*" (Cecilia Miller, "Ancient and Modern," *TLS*, 10 Dec. 1999: 30). One can understand the reason why

Miller, who worked for her DPhil in Modern History under Berlin's supervision, considers the lectures on Vico that he delivered at the Italian Institute of London in 1957-58 as a watershed in the development of Vichian studies. Obviously, she wants to profess her admiration for her master who was indeed an exceptional man. One can also interpret Miller's attitude as a proof of modesty, since she is the author of a book on Vico which is not without merit (G. Costa, *New Vico Studies*, 13 (1995): 67-70). But Miller not only proclaims the superiority of Mazzotta's book on Vico over any other work published since 1957-58, including the one by Leon Pompa, which Berlin regretted not to have been able to exploit since it appeared too late (I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*, New York: Viking, 1976, xi). She also assures us that Mazzotta "has a better sense and knowledge of Vico than almost any other writer," that "his work can be associated with that of Michelet on Vico" (*TLS*, 10 Dec. 1999: 30). Such wild claims require careful verification.

Mazzotta's book is based on a wide and diligent reading of the vast literature dedicated to Vico. In the preface, Mazzotta credits his predecessors, including this reviewer, for "having succeeded in putting Vico studies on a solid philosophical-historical footing" (x). Since he has no original ideas or data to offer, Mazzotta tries to complement the conclusions reached by previous scholars by recasting previous interpretations. The central idea of the book under review, namely "the unification of the arts and sciences" (xi), is taken from Giorgio Tagliacozzo who stressed the importance of Vico's "tree of knowledge," the symbol of his pursuit of a philosophy able to close the gap between humanistic and scientific knowledge. In the introduction, Mazzotta acknowledges that the "question of the 'whole'" and "the encyclopedic genre in the *New Science*" have "already been pointed out by contemporary scholars" (10-11). He intends to draft "Vico's periplus around the kingdom of the arts and sciences," and to show "how poetry, as it links them together, modifies the logical coherence of the whole" (10-11). Mazzotta believes that poetry, the master key of the *New Science*, "is a unique mode of making and knowing, that the whole must be perceived in the perspective of metaphor's property to join together disparate worlds" (11). Obviously, the poetry and the metaphor mentioned by Mazzotta are deeply rooted in studies on Vico's rhetoric by such scholars as Ernesto Grassi, Andrea Battistini, and Donald Phillip Verene.

That poetry or myth is essential to Vico's project we already knew from Benedetto Croce and his followers. What Croce chose to downplay is that Vico considered poetry exclusively in primitivistic terms, relegating it to the most remote phase of universal history. Unfortunately, the same fallacy is to be found in contemporary inquiries on Vico's rhetoric. Even Mazzotta advocates Vico's "poetic philosophy," which is an oxymoron in light of the *New Science* §185: "Imagination is more robust in proportion as reasoning power is weak" (I quote from the classical translation by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch). Therefore, in Vichian terms, a poetic philosophy is either a weak philosophy or a travesty of something else. Croce identified it with his own, late romantic philosophy, founded on aesthetics. Mazzotta, following in the steps of other scholars (Grassi, Battistini, and Verene) views Vico's poetic philosophy as a travesty of rhetoric. But you cannot adopt this view unless you cancel (as Croce and Grassi did for different purposes) the clear-cut separation between archaic and developed civilizations which Vico carefully draws in his *New Science*. In other words, you obtain a more coherent Vico only at the cost of ignoring the inner complexity of his thought, which is further complicated by Vico's strategy to elude the censorship (always ready to neutralize

any attempt to make early eighteenth-century Italian culture an active part of the contemporary European culture).

Mazzotta's eclectic attitude is probably responsible for the exasperating fuzziness of his formulations. He seems to consider the sublime as the basis of his interpretation of Vico's poetry. But Mazzotta, like Battistini and Massimo Lollini, considers sublime poetry as coextensive to human history, while it should be viewed as coextensive only to the early phase of it. Vico offered an original interpretation of the Longinian sublime, which was confined to archaic societies. These, however, did not exist only in the past. Indeed, he considered contemporary England as a relatively primitive country. The fact that Vico at the same time praised English culture is not at odds with his idea that creativity is the main connotation of primitive civilizations. We should also keep in mind that the continent was under the spell of England, which after the Glorious Revolution was considered a rampart of Protestantism. In this context, Vico's ideal eternal history, emphasizing the creativity of primitive people, appears to be the embodiment of his dissatisfaction with the Catholic countries of Europe.

Mazzotta's reluctance to make use of textual evidence and concrete historical data accounts for his strong inclination for abstract, atemporal "discourse." He rightly takes side against those interpreters who follow Lorenzo Giusso's view that Vico was a representative of the Baroque: for Mazzotta, the *New Science* has nothing to do with "baroque theories of art as illusive, ironic artifice" (9). We would be grateful to him for disposing of Giusso's old hobby-horse (that has been recycled under various guises by scholars content to consider Vico a sort of Italian counterpart of the hero of *Fray Gerundio de Campacas* by José Francisco de Isla), were it not for the fact that later on Mazzotta stresses the "baroque technique, which Vico applies to the representations on the great stage of history" (74). Anyhow, we can hardly be satisfied with vague statements such as "Vico proposes an ancient and yet new esthetics whereby the imagination and the passions are no longer sundered from reason," or "Neoplatonic ideas of the imagination merge with neo-Aristotelian notions of art" (9).

The ambition to offer, in a normally sized book, a *summa* of Vichian studies severely mars the validity of the book under review. Mazzotta is obliged to compress in ten chapters the huge amount of published material, from which he freely draws, without taking into account manuscript sources. Chapter 1, "The Life of a Philosopher" (16-39), is an outline of Vico's autobiography or *Vita*. Here the reader will find many basic facts of Vico's life, but no allusion to his familiarity with Giuseppe Valletta's library which possessed many prohibited books. The author has forgotten to see the 622-page volume of Valletta's philosophical works, edited by Michele Rak, who also made a list of Valletta's library. Such a gap cannot be filled by Biagio De Giovanni's article on Valletta, which Mazzotta quotes in chapter 8 (184n). Even Paolo Mattia Doria goes unmentioned. He will appear only in the same chapter 8 as "Vico's own friend and imitator in Naples" (183), a characterization that is going to raise many eyebrows.

Chapter 2, "The Idea of a University" (40-64), deals not only with the University of Naples where Vico taught rhetoric, but also with the Neapolitan learned societies. Here Mazzotta, who closely follows such scholars as De Giovanni, Giuseppe Ricuperati, and Vincenzo Ferrone, offers a good synthesis, but forgets to mention Celestino Galiani, a patron of Vico and a key figure in the Neapolitan intellectual world, which he shielded from the strict requirements of the Holy Office. In Chapter 3, "The Historian of Modernity" (65-94), Mazzotta defines both Vico's concept of history and his idea of

politics through an analysis of the *Neapolitan Conspiracy* and *The Life of Antonio Carafa*, while the rest of the book (chapters 4-10) is dedicated mainly to the *New Science*. Among the latter, Chapter 8, "The Political Philosophers" (182-205), reflects ideas already expressed by Mazzotta in his essay "Machiavelli and Vico" (in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, Ed. A. R. Ascoli and V. Kahn, Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993, 259-74). Since Machiavelli's figure looms large in the book under review, one would expect to find at least a passing reference to an astute essay by Enrico De Negri, which was considered important by Pietro Piovani: "Principi e popoli in Machiavelli e Vico" (*Tra filosofia e letteratura*, Naples: Morano, 1983, 279-313).

Chapter 10, "The Bible" (234-55), proves that Mazzotta is well informed about the literature concerning the controversies on the Holy Scripture and Vico's attitude toward them. He quotes many significant scholars, such as Arnaldo Momigliano, Richard H. Popkin, Paolo Rossi, and Massimo Lollini. It is a pity that Mazzotta, who has never been at the forefront of Vichian research, did not suspect that the Holy Office prohibited the publication of the Venetian edition of Vico's masterpiece, because the *New Science* was deemed to be a dangerous attack against the Catholic interpretation of the Bible. The philosopher circumvented the obstacle by concentrating on the preparation of the second edition (1730) of the *New Science* (see *Giornate internazionali di studi: Il mondo di Vico/Vico nel mondo, in ricordo di Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Roma, 15-Sansepolcro 16-18 aprile 1999, Riassunto delle relazioni*. Ed. F. Ratto, Acquaviva Picena: FAST EDIT, 1999, 19-20; *Congreso Internacional/Convegno Internazionale "Pensar para el nuevo siglo: Giambattista Vico y la cultura europea, Sevilla, 4-9 de octubre 1999, Resumen de ponencias/Riassunto delle relazioni*. Ed. E. Hidalgo-Serna, J. M. Sevilla, J. Villalobos, Naples: La Città del Sole, 1999, 72-75). This aspect of Vico's life radically changes our perception of his religious orientation, and jeopardizes the interpretation of Catholic scholars, including John Milbank whom Mazzotta praises for having placed Vico "within a Catholic theological historical context" (226n). We doubt that Milbank's Catholic Vico can be reconciled with Machiavelli through the anti-Machiavellian tradition, as suggested by Mazzotta. Extremely superficial is also the treatment of the crucial problem of the Malebranche-Vico relationship, which can no longer be understood on the basis of Augusto Del Noce's obsolete essay, quoted by Mazzotta (254 n14). Given these shortcomings, it is hard to understand why such lavish praises were heaped on the book under review.

Gustavo Costa, *University of California, Berkeley*

Elena Urganì. *La vicenda letteraria e politica di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel*. Napoli: La città del sole, 1998. Pp. 380.

Eleonora De Fonseca Pimentel was born in 1752 in Rome of Portuguese parents. Just a few years after her birth, the family moved to Naples. It is to the tumultuous history of this city that her own story is indissolubly tied. At the Bourbon court in Naples, De Fonseca Pimentel's prestigious position as the queen's librarian assured her livelihood and granted her access to the world of philosophers and intellectuals. She corresponded with Metastasio and Voltaire, among others, and wrote both official poems for the court which supported her, and poems of personal inspiration. Most striking, among the latter, are the five, very moving sonnets written after the death of her infant son, as well as the ode on her miscarriage, a thematically unique piece of poetry. During the first half of

1799, de Fonseca Pimentel founded, directed, and edited the first periodical of the Neapolitan Republic, *Il Monitore Napoletano*. This is the activity for which she is best known. But on August 20 of that same year, de Fonseca Pimentel was hung for her participation in the revolution of the Neapolitan people against the Bourbons. She was buried in a common grave.

After a detailed biography of this fascinating figure, perhaps a bit idealized as a fighter and an intellectual, and as a precursor to women's emancipation, Elena Urganì's book presents all of de Fonseca Pimentel's known literary texts: sonnets (one of which written in Neapolitan dialect), an epithalamic poem, cantatas, an ode, and a religious oratorio, as well as essays, articles from *Il Monitore Napoletano*, and in a separate chapter, her letters. As Urganì mentions more than once, it is probable that some or even many of de Fonseca Pimentel's works have been destroyed or lost (for example, none of her letters to Metastasio seems to have survived). Each of the texts included in these two middle chapters is preceded by a useful, highly informative introduction which places the piece in its often complicated historical and stylistic context. The reading of each work is also facilitated by linguistic, historical, and cultural notes.

In the following chapter of the book, Urganì provides a more extended interpretation and discussion of de Fonseca Pimentel's works presented in the preceding chapters. Urganì intends to redeem de Fonseca Pimentel as more than a minor poet, comparing her at first with Ugo Foscolo, as well as by noting the ways in which she distinguishes herself from the rest of Arcadia, and underlining the influence of Parini. For Urganì, de Fonseca Pimentel is representative of the tensions and contradictions of the late *Settecento*, a period torn between Arcadia and pre-Romanticism. This is an interesting and well-argued chapter, though I found it repetitive at times because its aims often coincide with those of the single introductions to the works found in the previous two chapters. Still, Urganì's great admiration for de Fonseca Pimentel, if it could occasionally be seen as obtrusive, usually pleasantly seasons her arguments. I found especially fascinating Urganì's interpretation of the poet's religious oratorio, *La fuga in Egitto*, a piece usually dismissed by critics as a step backwards on the part of an *Illuminista* author, if not as downright hypocritical. Urganì, instead, persuasively reads this oratorio as an allegory for the fundamental tragedy of its author's life — the death of her baby son, one of the "innocents" — a tragedy doubled in turn by the death of her ideal child, i.e., the destruction of her hopes for political and social reform. These hopes were in fact squelched by the Bourbons in the same year that the oratorio was written, 1792. Urganì's volume ends with an account of the historical and literary reception of de Fonseca Pimentel's work (it is interesting to remember, for instance, that during the Fascist era de Fonseca Pimentel was hailed as a kind of "madre della patria"), and is completed by an extended bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

La vicenda letteraria e politica di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel is a welcome and indeed an indispensable addition to the field of Italian Women's Studies and to Italian Studies more generally, above all because it provides for the first time all of de Fonseca Pimentel's literary texts within one volume. Another great merit of this work is its persuasive recovery of de Fonseca Pimentel as an important literary figure, rather than one with an exclusively historical significance. Our literary history is enriched, our canon is fruitfully destabilized, by the addition of a poet like de Fonseca Pimentel who, although she was recognized as such in her own time, has been remembered solely for her political adventures. This selective oblivion has been in great part due, according to

Urgnani, to the harsh judgment of Benedetto Croce, who dismissed de Fonseca Pimentel's work as the minor poetry of a member of Arcadia and of Metastasio's circle, and who (mistakenly, in Urgnani's opinion) viewed it as possessing historical value alone. On repeated occasions in this book, Urgnani points out aspects of the poet's work which effectively refute Croce's reductive interpretation, attributed at least in part to Croce's general dislike for Metastasio's period.

Among the several happy surprises of Elena Urgnani's book is the brief preface by Luisa Muraro, one of Italy's most original feminist scholars. The enthusiasm of Muraro's preface is tamed by its criticism of Urgnani's occasional critical harshness (*asprezze*), which Muraro hypothetically attributes to Urgnani's American academic experience (ouch!). Urgnani, on the other hand, refers to Muraro's work very positively, especially in the remarkable, important last paragraph of her interpretive chapter, where she attributes her own fascination with de Fonseca Pimentel to this writer's status as female authority. Reading de Fonseca Pimentel's work, then, is for Urgnani, and perhaps could be for us as well, a recovery of what Muraro has famously termed "l'ordine simbolico della madre" (in her book by the same title). The literary, linguistic authority of de Fonseca Pimentel, excluded by critics, has been painfully repressed; nevertheless, we need to face her authoritative voice if we too want to speak, have a voice. Urgnani's personal reflection at this point is so well-placed as to seem inevitable, even necessary. Indeed, in this paragraph, Urgnani significantly and uncharacteristically refers to de Fonseca Pimentel as Eleonora. Because for this critic, Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel is both sameness (she is a woman) and otherness (she is a southerner), both a real fellow writer and an idealized counterpart, both history and voice. Her loss is thus bound to become that "doloroso lutto culturale" (332) against which this book, by its very existence, struggles.

Cristina Mazzoni, *University of Vermont*

Vincenzo De Caprio e Gaetano Platania. *Il viaggio in testi inediti o rari*. Ed. Fernanda Roscetti. Roma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1998. Pp. 180.

Ultimata nel 1995 la prima serie della collana *Effetto Roma*, dedicata ad *Occasioni, presenze, suggestioni, influenze nella letteratura e nella società* e realizzata in collaborazione con la casa editrice Bulzoni, l'Istituto nazionale di Studi Romani ha avviato, in proprio, nel 1998, la seconda serie dedicata al tema de *Il viaggio*.

Oggetto di questa seconda serie, come specificato nella premessa del suo primo volume dal presidente dell'Istituto Mario Petrucciani, saranno ancora "le suggestioni, le occasioni, le meditazioni, le riflessioni, le accensioni immaginative, le proiezioni mitiche e simboliche, le influenze nella letteratura e nella società, prodottesi attraverso l'instaurarsi di un rapporto con la città di Roma" focalizzando però "tale oggetto a largo spettro problematico [. . .] intorno a quel particolarissimo momento di incontro [. . .] che si realizza con la visita e il soggiorno in città da parte dei viaggiatori" (7) e soprattutto preoccupandosi di "rimettere in circolazione testi rimasti fuori o ai margini dell'attenzione non solo dei cultori della letteratura di viaggio ma anche dei cultori della storia politica e sociale oltre che del panorama intellettuale di Roma" (8).

Resta così implicitamente motivata, almeno a prima vista, la scelta di raccogliere nel primo volume di questa nuova serie, intitolato *Il viaggio in testi inediti o rari* (a cura di Fernanda Roscetti, che però non firma alcun intervento né in testa né in coda al libro) due

saggi che fanno capo ad ambiti (e si servono quindi di strumenti critici) profondamente diversi come quelli della letteratura di viaggio (nella forma del *true travel account*) e della storia diplomatica (con particolare riferimento al tema delle ambascerie).

Il primo saggio, opera di Vincenzo de Caprio, *Giuseppe Acerbi a Roma. Diario di un viaggiatore diventato turista* (9-68), ha infatti per oggetto il diario che l'ex direttore della *Biblioteca Italiana* redasse in occasione del viaggio compiuto tra Roma e Napoli nel 1834, rinnovando quell'attitudine alla scrittura odepica che aveva già fatto di lui il fortunato autore dei *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, to the North Cape, in the years 1798 and 1799* (tradotti solo due anni prima in italiano da Giuseppe Compagnoni, dopo le versioni francesi del 1804 e quella tedesca del 1804-6), oltre che di alcuni articoli, pubblicati dalla sua ex rivista, sull'Egitto, dove aveva esercitato la funzione di console negli anni venti.

E proprio i *Travels*, cui De Caprio ha dedicato una monografia, nel 1996, per i tipi dell'Archivio Guido Izzi (che comprende, tra l'altro, in appendice uno dei taccuini di appunti, intitolato *Viaggio in Lapponia*, da cui doveva prendere quindi forma l'opera definitiva pubblicata a Londra nel 1802) rappresentano il termine di confronto esplicito del diario romano, permettendo allo studioso di evidenziare il passaggio dell'Acerbi da una scrittura e da un atteggiamento propri del 'viaggiatore' a quelli tipici del 'turista'. Pur riconoscendo, infatti, i limiti di tale distinzione ("utile come strumento conoscitivo solo a patto che venga considerata come una distinzione non solo empirica ma anche non netta e non rigidamente definibile e a patto che, di conseguenza, non si considerino quella del viaggiatore e quella del turista come due categorie opposte" (28)), De Caprio sottolinea che in questo viaggio romano "come un turista, egli passa frettolosamente nei luoghi senza interagire sostanzialmente con essi [. . .] non 'soggiorna' nella città ma la 'visita'" (30), trasferendo questo atteggiamento anche nelle sue note, soprattutto quelle dedicate a monumenti e opere d'arte, mentre quelle concernenti l'ambiente sociale riflettono ancora in parte l'antico spirito del viaggiatore.

La Roma che entra nel diario di Acerbi appare infatti "come una semplice sommatoria di edifici e monumenti privi di relazioni di continuità" (30), secondo il noto modello delle guide turistiche, mentre "la città degli uomini" (come la definisce De Caprio), città cui Acerbi, in virtù della sua attività alla direzione della *Biblioteca Italiana*, era tutt'altro che estraneo, consente al viaggiatore di assumere una posizione eccentrica rispetto a quanti l'avevano preceduto e prima di lui avevano scritto della città eterna, esprimendo da una parte la sua ammirazione per gli intellettuali locali (a partire da Angelo Mai e Giuseppe Gaspare Mezzofanti) e riservando, dall'altra, un "occhio benevolo e divertito" anche per il popolino (41), in virtù anche dell'impressione positiva che ha su di lui la mescolanza dei ceti in alcuni luoghi della città, come Villa Borghese, che "non è un fattore di sovvertimento e disordine sociale ma anzi si unisce all'ordine, creando una sorta di civile convivenza nel segno della spensieratezza" (61).

L'ultimo paragrafo del saggio è quindi riservato ad un confronto più serrato con le memorie e i taccuini precedenti, dal quale, pur riconoscendo da una parte il carattere *in itinere* del manoscritto ("il testo del diario appartiene a una fase elaborativa più prossima a degli appunti buttati giù alla meglio *in itinere* che non a una distesa e meditata relazione" (65-66)), trae l'ipotesi che si tratti di "un reale diario di viaggio e non una serie di appunti di viaggio in forma diaristica" (66), come confermerebbe anche la registrazione di "episodi da diario privato" (66), ferma restando, però, la rimozione rispetto alle esperienze erotiche.

Ad ogni modo la struttura diaristica, in queste memorie romane, “non si accampa in maniera univoca e lineare” (67), e alle riprese di modalità già adottate da Acerbi nel *Viaggio in Lapponia* (come la ripartizione delle sequenze narrative in singole giornate-tappa o giornate visita) si affiancano soluzioni originali fino al diario egiziano (come il fare di questi frammenti narrativi degli elementi di aggregazione invece che di ulteriore segmentazione tramite il loro raggruppamento in capitoli).

Pur senza quindi poter giungere a dire una parola ultima e definitiva sullo statuto di questo diario (che non era comunque destinato alla stampa, perlomeno nella forma attuale, come il lettore è tenuto a ricordare, soprattutto quando — come nelle pagine sul *topos* del “deserto che bisogna attraversare per giungere alla città” (50) — De Caprio istituisce confronti con altri testi che invece erano destinati al pubblico e che quindi rispondevano anche alle sollecitazioni dei codici stilistici adattati e della tradizione letteraria), il primo saggio ci offre nel contempo un'immagine della città di Roma di inizio Ottocento nonché un esempio della sua percezione e della sua rielaborazione all'interno di un testo di carattere documentario se non propriamente letterario.

Il che non possiamo invece dire del secondo saggio, *Il viaggio politico. Il caso di Michele Casimiro Radziwill, principe polacco, a Vienna e Roma nella documentazione d'archivio*, di Gaetano Platania (69-173), che, al di là della ricchezza e della puntualità dei dati presentati, si pone ai margini (se non oltre) degli obiettivi espressi nella *Premessa* da Petrucciani.

Oggetto del saggio è infatti l'ambasciata compiuta sotto forma di *missione di obbedienza* da Michele Casimiro Radziwill, per conto del re polacco Giovanni Sobieski, alla Santa Sede, con il duplice compito di “convincere Innocenzo XI a sostenere una grande coalizione europea in funzione anti-turca” (129) centrata sull'asse Vienna-Varsavia-Mosca e di riconoscere alla corona polacca da una parte “lo *ius patronato* sulle abbazie nel regno” (131) e dall'altra le *somme napoletane* (ovvero “l'eredità contesa dalla corte di Polonia e da quella di Svezia, che riguardava i possedimenti già appartenuti a Bona Sforza” (131)).

Ambasciata che Platania ricostruisce attraverso lettere, diari e documenti ufficiali che ha il merito di riprodurre, almeno in parte, in appendice (141-73), ma che non assumono comunque mai la forma del *travel account* (né reale né finzionale), né rendono in alcun modo conto, anche solo in maniera indiretta, del modo di porsi del protagonista di fronte alla realtà del viaggio e a quella della città eterna.

Radziwill d'altra parte, come lo stesso Platania non manca di sottolineare, “non era un semplice *turista* desideroso di giungere a Roma per visitare le bellezze artistiche ed archeologiche della città” (108), e anche quando si era trovato di fatto, due anni prima, a rivestire questo ruolo, non aveva avvertito il bisogno di fissare sulla carta le impressioni che era andato provando. L'unica preoccupazione cui sembra prestare attenzione Radziwill nella doppia ambasciata alle corti di Leopoldo I d'Asburgo e del papa è infatti quella, ancor prima che di portare felicemente a termine il proprio mandato, di ben apparire, ovvero di ribadire attraverso la pompa e la sontuosità delle sue apparizioni l'importanza rivestita in patria. Quella stessa pompa e sontuosità che, unita ad un'attenzione maniacale per “questioni di cerimoniale tanto futili quanto inutili” (92), avrebbe di fatto portato al fallimento totale della sua missione, facendo saltare incontri (come quello a tre con la delegazione moscovita e i ministri austriaci) e suscitando l'irritazione tanto dell'imperatore (che “aveva persino minacciato di non concedere udienza all'inviato del Sobieski” (100-101)) quanto del papa (che in primo momento

“negò al principe l'autorizzazione all'ingresso e alla 'cavalcata' solenne” (125) cui comunque rifiutarono ufficialmente di presenziare i rappresentanti di Francia, Spagna e Portogallo). L'ambasciata del Radziwill doveva quindi conoscere una fine ancor più tragica, al di là del fallimento sul piano della diplomazia e della politica, con la sua morte, per tumore, a Bologna, dopo che il Gran Duca Cosimo de' Medici, offeso a sua volta dai modi dell'ambasciatore, aveva fatto sapere che si sarebbe comunque rifiutato di incontrarlo se fosse passato per Firenze.

La seconda serie della collana *Effetto Roma*, aperta da questa raccolta di saggi, si prospetta quindi come uno strumento certamente utile per approfondire la conoscenza di un ambito problematico come quello del viaggio che nonostante la ricchezza della produzione critica degli ultimi anni necessita ancora di essere esplorato a fondo (ed in questo senso sarebbero auspicabili maggiori indicazioni bibliografiche in calce ai diversi saggi), anche se la latitudine dell'angolo prospettico rivelata già da questo primo volume rischia di frustrare, almeno in parte, il conseguimento dell'obiettivo di analizzare “quel particolarissimo momento di incontro [. . .] che si realizza con la visita e il soggiorno in città da parte dei viaggiatori” (7) proposti dall'Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani.

Paolo Rambelli, *University College London*

Anna Maria di Martino. “Quel divino ingegno.” Giulio Perticari. Un intellettuale tra Impero e Restaurazione. Napoli: Liguori, 1997. Pp. 257

Il fine studio dedicato da Anna Maria di Martino a Giulio Perticari non soltanto ha il merito di venire ad arricchire il panorama degli studi montiani, facendo luce sul fecondo rapporto che lega il letterato pesarese al celebre suocero, modello imprescindibile di scrittura per più di una generazione di poeti, ma ha altresì quello di recuperare nella sua specificità una figura per lungo tempo dimenticata dalla critica.

L'autrice traccia, sulla base di materiale in gran parte inedito e conservato presso la Biblioteca Oliveriana di Pesaro e la Rubiconia Accademia dei Filopatridi di Savignano sul Rubicone, il percorso di formazione di Giulio, dall'infanzia trascorsa sotto l'attento sguardo paterno ai primi studi compiuti con precettori locali e, successivamente, nel collegio di San Carlo a Fano. Di questi anni sono anche i primi componimenti poetici, inviati orgogliosamente al padre insieme a lettere che la di Martino trascrive, restituendoci così scorci della vita di un giovane di famiglia influente, destinato sin dall'età di otto anni ad un abito talare che in seguito rifiuterà per dedicarsi alla magistratura, un giovane amante dell'arte in tutte le sue espressioni, dalle lettere alle arti figurative al teatro, e da sempre immerso nella realtà storica e politica della sua regione. Ed è proprio la Romagna a costituire sempre un importante punto di riferimento per Giulio, insieme al gruppo di letterati romagnoli che gravitava intorno all'Accademia dei Filopatridi: Borghesi, Amati e Amaduzzi, quest'ultimo stimato professore a Roma di lingua greca, figura di spicco di quella che si definisce *aufklärung* cattolica verso cui guardavano letterati di tutta Italia, come testimonia il nutrito carteggio conservato, purtroppo in gran parte ancora inedito, presso la biblioteca dell'Accademia. E sorprende allora di non trovare tra i nomi di coloro che ebbero contatti con il giovane Perticari quello di Aurelio de Giorgi Bertola, corrispondente e amico dell'Amaduzzi ed estimatore di quel Gessner di cui Perticari volgarizza l'“Idillio della notte” a soli 23 anni, anzi suo estimatore a tal punto da recarsi in Germania appositamente per farne la conoscenza e da scriverne un elogio dopo la morte, nel 1789. Certo, il Perticari, di una generazione più

giovane, sarà del tutto estraneo al gusto del viaggio che animava l'abate riminese, come del resto prenderà differenti posizioni politiche, tuttavia risulterebbe davvero di notevole interesse verificare possibili relazioni, soprattutto alla luce del rinnovato interesse per il Bertola, interesse testimoniato anche da un recente convegno i cui atti sono di prossima pubblicazione.

Dall'esame della ricca corrispondenza del Peticari, emerge quindi la figura di un uomo di lettere vissuto in un'epoca di contraddizioni, di bruschi trapassi di potere che non potevano non riflettersi su coloro i quali di quel potere si facevano spesso compiacenti cantori. Come per Monti ed altri intellettuali italiani, le posizioni di Peticari mutano dall'avversione per la Cisalpina alla celebrazione di Bonaparte eroe sanatore di tutti i mali e, ancora come nel caso di Monti, la sua scrittura poetica diviene progressivamente concentrata su una celebrazione dell'Imperatore che troverà il suo compimento nel "Panegirico di Napoleone", opera in prosa di chiaro stampo anti-illuminista, tesa a cercare nella storia esempi di valore tali da essere equiparati all'invitto Prometeo.

Rimanendo sempre un illustre esempio per Peticari, Monti fu a sua volta sensibilmente influenzato dalle teorie linguistiche del genere, come appare evidente soprattutto nella "Proposta" a cui il Peticari collabora con due scritti che costituiscono la *summa* dei suoi interessi linguistici e filologici: il primo un trattato sugli scrittori trecenteschi, il secondo un'analisi dell'influenza della poesia del Duecento e del modello dantesco sulla costituzione dell'italiano letterario. Anzi, è proprio il Monti a sollecitare tale collaborazione con ripetuti inviti di cui porta testimonianza il carteggio tra i due, dal quale si può evincere l'influenza esercitata da Peticari sulla teoria, che viene sostenuta nella "Proposta", di una lingua comune, capace di unire i popoli sulla base dell'indiscussa autorità di Dante.

Se Monti è figura chiave nella vita come nella produzione letteraria di Peticari, altrettanto si può dire della figlia Costanza, esemplare *femme de lettre*, sposa del Peticari dal 1812 e al tempo stesso sua allieva e collaboratrice in ricerche e studi eruditi. E altro motivo di interesse del libro della di Martino è proprio l'equilibrata analisi che ci consegna di Costanza, letterata capace di fini giudizi critici, tanto da chiosare con perizia la "Commedia", ma anche donna e come tale avida di contatti intellettuali e di esperienze al suo sesso spesso negate dal ceto maschile. Si veda a tal proposito la lettera in cui lamenta di non potere — proprio in quanto donna — accedere ai codici danteschi conservati nel Vaticano, e quindi portare avanti i suoi studi. Stretta tra due ingombranti figure maschili, Costanza, non dissimilmente da quanto accadeva un secolo prima ad un'altra letterata, Faustina Maratti Zappi, sembra totalmente affidarsi a loro, piuttosto che a loro contrapporre una propria autonoma scrittura, rendendo così vana una lettura del suo personaggio in chiave proto-femminista, a cui infatti l'autrice mai si abbandona.

Un libro quindi equilibrato, come nota Franco Fido nella sua prefazione al volume, con il merito di recuperare la figura di un erudito accademico di provincia, che grazie al fortunato matrimonio ebbe accesso ai più esclusivi circoli intellettuali a Roma come a Milano, a salotti dove conobbe — senza tuttavia rimanerne colpito — Stendhal e Byron, anche se a questi ambienti sempre sembrò preferire la quiete e la distanza della vita di Pesaro e di Savignano. Una figura che nondimeno acquista interesse là dove la si consideri non unicamente nell'orbita montiana ma nel più composito quadro della questione della lingua di inizio Ottocento, a cui non solo Peticari partecipò ma di cui

essa fu altresì voce importante e, grazie al libro di Anna Maria di Martino, non più a lungo trascurabile.

Cristina Abbona, *Brown University*

Santorre di Santa Rosa. *Ricordi 1818-1824 (Torino, Svizzera, Parigi, Londra)*. Ed. Marco Montersino. Firenze: Olschki, 1998. Pp. xx + 109.

Santorre de Rossi di Pomarolo, conte di Santarosa (1783-1825), è una figura importante del Risorgimento italiano: ufficiale dell'esercito piemontese, protagonista dei moti costituzionali del 1821 e ministro della guerra del Regno di Sardegna fra l'abdicazione di Vittorio Emanuele I e la sconfitta di Novara, esule in Svizzera, e poi in Francia e in Inghilterra, muore a Sfactoria combattendo per la libertà della Grecia. Victor Cousin, che lo commemora nella *Revue des deux mondes*, celebra tanto il significato politico della sua azione quanto la sua ricchezza umana (tenerezza e forza, dice, erano intimamente congiunte in lui). Giovanni Arrivabene, descrivendo nelle *Memorie* la comunità di fuorusciti italiani a Londra, elogia Santarosa ("uomo religioso, idolatra della sua famiglia, dalla quale non sapeva tollerare la separazione") contrapponendolo a Foscolo ("tutto immaginazione, oserei dire quasi violento"). Nel 1969, nell'*Introduzione* alle *Lettere dall'esilio*, pubblicate a Roma dall'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, Antonino Olmo riafferma l'"indiscussa probità di intenti" del conte.

Di Santarosa sono rilevanti anche gli interessi culturali. Legge con attenzione Rousseau e Madame de Staël, è amico di Cousin, Malthus e Sismondi. Pratica molti generi letterari: stende un saggio *De la révolution piémontaise* sugli eventi del 1821; scrive un romanzo storico (inedito) e delle poesie (uscite nel 1984); prepara dei *Ricordi di letteratura italiana* e dei *Brouillons littéraires*, mai pubblicati integralmente ma ancora disponibili nel museo civico di Savigliano, in provincia di Cuneo; compone diversi scritti autobiografici, fra cui delle *Confessions* in francese, alcune pagine in inglese, e dei *Ricordi* in italiano. Marco Montersino ha pubblicato questi *Ricordi* nella collana di letteratura italiana in Piemonte dell'editore Olschki, controllando il testo sui quaderni di Santarosa, correggendo le sviste di una precedente edizione (curata da Nicomede Bianchi nel 1877) e preparando un apparato di note e di informazioni preliminari, con un'utile storia della fortuna critica di Santarosa. Nell'introduzione a questo volume Narciso Nada sottolinea il carattere frammentario dei *Ricordi*, sorta di "contrappunto alle lettere [. . .] scritte in quegli anni d'esilio" (v), ma ne rivendica anche l'importanza per la varietà di temi che il conte tocca in essi.

Oltre a confermare l'immagine che le *Lettere dall'esilio* danno di Santarosa, i *Ricordi* presentano delle novità interessanti. Nell'una e nell'altra opera Santarosa si presenta come un gentiluomo colto, attento agli sviluppi della politica e della cultura europea, affezionato alla moglie e ai figli lontani, addolorato dall'esilio ma deciso a mantenersi coerente con i propri ideali, mai malevolo nei confronti dei paesi che lo ospitano. Nelle *Lettere*, però, Santarosa si misura con le esigenze degli interlocutori e si controlla; nei *Ricordi*, un diario in cui colloquia sostanzialmente con se stesso, manifesta più liberamente la sua natura romantica. Le prime pagine rivelano in lui l'appassionato ammiratore di Rousseau che esce a mezzogiorno dal ministero in cui lavora per passeggiare con dei libri in tasca, salire sulla vetta di una collina, stendersi sull'erba, e leggere l'*Émile*. Questo camminatore solitario è anche un funzionario abbastanza attento ai propri doveri, che si rimprovera perché "indugi[a] molti affari" e "ne disimpegn[a]

molti con tanto precipizio che le [sue] facoltà non bastano a disimpegnarli bene”, che delibera di non riaprire le cartelle del suo romanzo storico “prima di aver dato corso alle pratiche che [. . .] trovansi affastellate sulla [sua] tavola” (6), e che vuole distribuire più ordinatamente il lavoro agli impiegati della sua divisione. È nuova, nei *Ricordi*, anche l'insistenza sull'uso della lingua italiana, adottata per coerenza di patriota.

Ciò che i *Ricordi* aiutano a conoscere meglio è forse il sentimento religioso di Santarosa. Il conte è un liberale, che celebra la tolleranza e che, nel clima politico della Restaurazione, fa scelte anticlericali: “le bonnet rouge du Jacobin, et la mitre d'un archevêque Espagnol, le manteau noir du ministre presbytérien, l'habit brodé d'un inspecteur de police de Bonaparte ... anathème sur tout ce qui attente à la liberté” (*Lettere* 317). Anche se i sacerdoti gli appaiono come “uomini di setta politica, esclusivi e superbi” (*Lettere* 241), Santarosa rimane cattolico: in Svizzera e in Inghilterra si lamenta di non poter partecipare alle cerimonie di rito romano (*Lettere* 106); nella Francia, che cattolica è, rimpiange i canti liturgici, gli accenti, le atmosfere e i sentimenti religiosi condivisi in Piemonte con gli amici più cari. A differenza di conterranei come Pellico, Santarosa ha un profondo rispetto per le religioni altrui. Discute coi pastori protestanti, e fa loro qualche concessione: “non vollen sostenere che il Papa non potesse fallire, perché questa non è una ragione di molto valore” (*Ricordi* 21). Ammira le qualità morali di anglicani, unitari, presbiteriani, metodisti; frequenta le loro cerimonie religiose; una riunione in una casa di quaccheri “mi rasserenò l'animo. Il padre lesse un capitolo del Vangelo, e un salmo con semplicità e raccoglimento. Poi tutti seduti a una lunga tavola ed un aspetto di letizia e pace dolcissimi” (*Ricordi* 79). Fa amicizia con un pastore svizzero che “è di grande carità, ed amorevole col suo popolo. E lo amano e riveriscono assai. Viaggiò, poi si ridusse in questa sua patria e chiesa, e vive da 30 anni in qua nella pace e solitudine del Signore” (*Ricordi* 21). Il riconoscimento del valore delle esperienze religiose altrui, nel ribadito attaccamento alla propria tradizione spirituale, segnala la serietà con cui Santarosa concilia liberalismo e cattolicesimo, e rivela una sensibilità ecumenica di cui pochi erano capaci nell'Italia del suo tempo.

Santarosa è anche sensibile alla religione naturale. Le onde dei laghi svizzeri “percuotono il lido, e biancheggiano tra i sassi. Questo è un tempio dell'Eterno Iddio. Le nuda mura de' templi de' seguaci di Calvino, e le immagini che ingombrano i templi cattolici non parlano al cuore come questo spazioso orizzonte” (*Ricordi* 13). La ragione di Santarosa “non può quietarsi fuori della religione naturale, onde io debbo attendere ad osservarla come degno adoratore di Dio in ispirito e verità”. Il conte è rousseauianamente convinto che la coscienza non inganna nel dare a conoscere la via della giustizia: “basta che io obbedisca ai suoi suggerimenti” (*Ricordi* 8). Era difficile conciliare questo sentimento con la tradizione cattolica del primo Ottocento, e non si vede con chiarezza come Santarosa lo abbia fatto: in lui coesistono la contemplazione dell'infinito riflesso nella bellezza maestosa della natura e l'ossequio alla dottrina tradizionale (*Ricordi* 21), il dialogo diretto con il Dio e l'accettazione della funzione mediatrice della chiesa.

Il conte non è un grande scrittore: troppe idee sono date per scontate, troppi sentimenti accennati soltanto, troppe pagine stese in fretta; e si ha l'impressione che Santarosa fosse più a suo agio col francese delle *Confessions* che con l'italiano dei *Ricordi*, la cui testimonianza arricchisce peraltro il panorama culturale dell'Italia della Restaurazione. Sarebbe interessante perciò conoscere gli altri suoi scritti, ed è auspicabile che la pubblicazione degli inediti continui. In particolare, per le anticipazioni che Olmo e Montersino ne hanno dato, sembra che i *Brouillons littéraires*, che contengono fra l'altro

uno studio di Santarosa sull'*Adelchi* manzoniano, meritino di essere proposti a chi non li può sfogliare nel museo di Savigliano.

Luciano Parisi, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Roberto Bertoni, ed. *L'ultimo orizzonte. Giacomo Leopardi: A Cosmic Poet and His Testament*. Torino: Trauben Edizioni, 1999.

La breve raccolta di questi saggi può apparire a prima vista casuale, eppure, fin dal titolo, si avverte la volontà di presentare una prospettiva di lettura che in qualche modo offra una chiave interpretativa unitaria e che si può trovare nell'intenzione dei tre autori di definire, pur in un ambito circoscritto, quella che può essere una sorta di eredità leopardiana per il nuovo secolo: il 'testamento' di Leopardi quindi non come chiusura di un momento storico, ma come apertura verso il futuro, non un fare il punto di ciò che è stato nella critica leopardiana, ma proposta per una presenza di Leopardi nella critica e nella letteratura contemporanee.

I tre saggi sono stati originariamente presentati durante una giornata di studio dedicata a Leopardi nel 1998, nell'ambito del bicentenario della nascita del poeta. È inevitabile però notare, con dispiacere, che nella prefazione si parla invece della morte di Leopardi. Un errore di stampa? Un altro piccolo appunto che si può fare è che la prefazione, brevissima, sarebbe potuta servire ad introdurre i temi dei saggi riuniti. Inutile, in ogni modo, parlare di quello che 'sarebbe potuto essere'. Ciò che in effetti 'è' rimane una raccolta di tre studi interessanti.

Il primo saggio, di Niva Lorenzini, è intitolato "Leopardi e la poesia cosmica". Qui si identifica l'importanza per Leopardi della poesia lirica, del rapporto (che implica anche contraddizione) fra poesia e pensiero, e, soprattutto, della valenza conoscitiva che la parola poetica ha per il poeta di Recanati e la matrice sensistica della sua filosofia. Dopo aver definito in tutte le sue variabili la concezione di poesia lirica, la studiosa bolognese procede ad investigare la possibilità di incontro fra essa e la poesia cosmica. L'io, oltre che conoscere, avverte e sente nel senso di 'esperienza' e questa "occasione lirica" da privata ed individuale si fa collettiva e da un presente o da un ricordo "si può muovere verso la vertigine cosmica". Si è persa la centralità dell'io e la sua unica capacità di percepire il mondo, per cui, scrive la Lorenzini, "L'io e il mondo si contrappongono in un contrasto dialettico e [...] la natura si rivela luogo della vertigine". Segue una analisi della perdita di centralità non solo dell'individuo ma della terra stessa in base ad osservazioni scientifiche, per cui anche Newton poteva servire a Leopardi come fonte di immaginazione poetica. L'esame delle suggestioni scientifiche e delle influenze filosofiche da cui, attraverso Pascal, Fontenelle, Algarotti e Rousseau, il "neoplatonismo esce disorientato", si accompagna ad una analisi di alcuni testi poetici accurata seppur ovviamente limitata all'essenziale dato che si tratta pur sempre di un saggio. A questo punto si intrecciano considerazioni morali al pensiero sulla fisica e sull'astronomia, ancora insieme ad una lettura attenta dei testi poetici e di prosa, lettura che segue giustamente un logico sviluppo cronologico all'interno dell'opera dello scrittore del "pathos dell'infinito", fino al "Canto notturno", definito "pura poesia cosmica" e a "La ginestra". Sono analizzate con accuratezza le figure retoriche che suggeriscono una dilatazione dello spazio e la solitudine cosmica per "dar voce alla molteplicità" e confermare la mancanza di significato nel destino dell'umanità.

Il saggio "La ginestra: The Last Will and Testament of a Poet and Philosopher" di Pamela Williams affronta l'analisi di quello che forse è il canto leopardiano più complesso, che ha da sempre suggerito interpretazioni divergenti, spesso contraddittorie, per cui, anche per chi recensisce, è difficile non prendere parte. Il titolo è molto ambizioso, suggerendo in effetti 'tutta' la poetica e la filosofia leopardiane, per cui nell'ambito di un articolo si può solo prendere certe posizioni e giustificarle parzialmente, senza la possibilità di estendere lo studio alle contraddizioni inevitabili nel 'sistema' di pensiero del Leopardi. Ed è vero che "La ginestra" va considerato come il testamento, l'ultimo lascito, del nostro poeta: il che implica arrivare al fondo delle proprie opinioni sulla sua poesia e si può ridurre alla dicotomia fra pessimismo e coraggio che segna ed ha segnato tanta critica leopardiana. Senza qui entrare nell'esegesi del pensiero leopardiano nel suo complesso, la discussione conclusiva si può ridurre al significato metaforico del fiore del deserto, dando in un certo senso per scontato il riconoscimento del male e della nullità della vita. Supera Leopardi questo pessimismo totale, e si può in realtà definirlo pessimismo? È la ginestra simbolo del coraggio con cui il poeta guarda alla realtà-verità della vita e della natura e con cui invita gli altri esseri umani ad affrontare insieme il vuoto dell'esistenza? L'interpretazione della Williams non riconosce la forza e il coraggio della ginestra, ma ne fa invece strumento e simbolo di consolazione.

La poesia e il pensiero di Leopardi sono analizzati alla luce di poeti e filosofi di tempi e origini diverse, come Keats, Voltaire, Locke, Bentham, Tommaseo, Epitteto, Hobbes, ed alcune affermazioni sono chiaramente corrette. Ad esempio, "La ginestra" si può considerare un'accusa contro gli errori del pensiero ed è una solida condanna della vanità intellettuale, mentre gli oppositori a cui il poeta si rivolge sono molto probabilmente i nuovi cristiani promotori di false speranze, i liberali fiduciosi nel progresso storico, contro cui soprattutto si rivolge la "Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi". In generale, è vero che Leopardi si considerò amante della verità e realista, come afferma la Williams, ma sembra affrettata l'opinione che il suo pessimismo si possa semplicemente risolvere in realismo. Sembra poi sostenere indirettamente le accuse del Tommaseo la riflessione che la compassione reciproca offerta come rimedio alla nullità della vita sia una "negative goodness", un rimedio non positivo né costruttivo, per cui la ginestra finisce con il rappresentare solo un invito a conservare un minimo di dignità umana, non il coraggio che altri critici le hanno riconosciuto, ma l'accettazione dignitosa di una battaglia persa: "The ginestra has a proper estimation of its vulnerability and fragility and in that sense retains its dignity". Oltre a suggerire dignità ed ispirare compassione, avverte Williams, il canto non va letto come se la ginestra offrisse "uno spiraglio di speranza".

Il terzo saggio, di Roberto Bertoni, intitolato "Note sul dialogo di Calvino con Leopardi" sembrerebbe meno direttamente connesso con il resto della raccolta, ma, attraverso l'analisi dei rapporti testuali e di pensiero fra i due scrittori, anche questo studio si presenta come un'apertura alla presenza e valenza leopardiana nella letteratura contemporanea. Bertoni esamina l'eredità di Leopardi raccolta da Calvino sotto gli aspetti di indefinito e infinito; piacere e desiderio, noia e nulla; esattezza, rapidità, leggerezza; il fantastico; pensiero e immaginazione; l'idillio; morte e apocalisse. L'autore spazia con approfondita conoscenza attraverso tutta l'opera di Calvino e di Leopardi. A proposito della prima equazione ritrova nella memoria letteraria di Calvino la dimensione dell'infinito leopardiano sia spaziale che temporale, quindi, attraverso l'esame dei

concetti di piacere e desiderio, analizza la differenza fra una certa fiducia calviniana nella raggiungibilità della felicità e la sfiducia di Leopardi, messe però in connessione dalla comune convinzione che il presente è invivibile, il che avvia "il balzo postleopardiano verso il futuro". Sono ben note le *Lezioni americane* di Calvino e se, per quanto riguarda l' 'esattezza' nell'interpretazione calviniana della precisione del linguaggio leopardiano al di là della ricerca del 'vago', si nota un certo prevalere della poetica di Calvino su quella del poeta di Recanati, maggiore corrispondenza si riscontra riguardo alla 'rapidità' e ancora di più per la 'leggerezza' che va intesa anche come misura e come complesso rapporto fra gioco e pesantezza del vivere. Per quanto riguarda poi l'immaginario, fu proprio Calvino a riconoscere nella *Operette Morali* il "seme da cui poteva nascere il fantastico italiano" e Bertoni identifica la somiglianza fra il fantastico leopardiano e calviniano nell'uso degli elementi della quotidianità. Più complessa e ricca è la sezione su pensiero e immaginazione, ovvero filosofia e poesia: se Leopardi risolse l'apparente contrapposizione fra filosofia e letteratura attraverso l'immaginazione, Calvino introduce un altro fattore, cioè la scienza. In un involontario movimento circolare, qui la raccolta torna a rifarsi, come nel primo saggio, a Newton (e Galileo), pur ovviamente in un contesto diverso. Riguardo al tema della difficoltà dell'idillio, è interessante l'impostazione della visione della natura nei due scrittori. Calvino si confronta in maniera dinamica e articolata con la questione leopardiana del rapporto fra individuo e natura, rifuggendo sempre dall'idillio come "commozione e nostalgia" e alludendo "al contrasto leopardiano tra coscienza del presente e memoria del passato". Se in Calvino a volte si possono scorgere istanze di una natura che può anche consolare, queste restano secondarie e ciò che accomuna i due scrittori è un atteggiamento di coraggio, di non-sottomissione. Calvino, benché non si possa definire ottimista, non segue Leopardi nella sua polemica contro il progresso storico dell'umanità. anche se, negli ultimi scritti, crescono i riferimenti alla morte con allusioni leopardiane. In particolare in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* si scorge un Calvino vicino a Leopardi nella concezione della vita come 'deserto'. Perlomeno all'apparenza questo saggio è più incentrato su Calvino che Leopardi, proponendo una più vasta e profonda interpretazione del primo, ma resta valido come proposta concreta del riscontro della presenza del poeta di Recanati nella letteratura italiana contemporanea.

Nell'insieme, i tre saggi qui riportati si inseriscono in maniera stimolante nel discorso aperto dai numerosi studi e convegni del 1998, che ci si augura non restino circoscritti a quel particolare anno, ma siano un invito a continuare e approfondire la ricerca leopardiana.

Irene Marchegiani Jones, *California State University*

Sergio Calzone. *La giovine del miracolo. "I promessi sposi" e la cultura di ispirazione religiosa.* Torino: Tirrenia, 1997. Pp. 162.

Sergio Calzone arriva a conclusioni originali studiando *I promessi sposi* da punti di vista insoliti. In alcuni casi queste conclusioni sono convincenti e degne di seria riflessione. Che in altri suscitino dei dubbi è forse il prezzo da pagare per la novità della ricerca.

Nelle parti più interessanti del suo libro Calzone rilegge il romanzo manzoniano dal punto di vista della rappresentazione degli animali, delle descrizioni architettoniche e della scelta dei nomi. I capponi di Renzo, la mula di don Abbondio, i cavalli dei monatti, le capre del lazzaretto entrano direttamente nella trama de *I promessi sposi*. Altri animali

appaiono nelle metafore del romanziere: Lucia rapita è “un pulcino bagnato che basisce per nulla” (cap. 20); Renzo ricorda a don Abbondio di essere “una sua pecora” (cap. 33); il curato ascolta i rimproveri del cardinale “come un pulcino negli artigli del falco, che lo tengono sollevato in una regione sconosciuta, in un’aria che non ha mai respirata” (cap. 25); i bravi di don Rodrigo ritornano al loro rifugio “come un branco di segugi, dopo aver inseguita invano una lepre” (cap. 11). Raccolte le descrizioni di animali sparse nel libro, Calzone le rilegge in maniera unitaria vedendo in esse delle immagini negative che illustrano un destino di sofferenza e di morte. I monatti sospingono i loro cavalli “a frustate, a punzioni, a bestemmie” (cap. 90); Lucia ricambia le tenerezze di Gertrude “come la pecora, tremolando senza timore sotto la mano del pastore che la palpa e la strascina mollemente, si volta a leccar quella mano; e non sa che, fuori della stalla, l’aspetta il macellaio a cui il pastore l’ha venduta un momento prima” (cap. 20). Il mondo animale, osserva Calzone, “è teatro di sangue, di innocenza tradita, di terrore senza nome e senza scopo”, e rappresenta “quello che sarebbe il mondo umano senza Dio” (98).

Ne *I promessi sposi* compaiono città, paesi, castelli, case, cortili, palazzi, monasteri, forni, osterie, strade, capanne, tabernacoli. Calzone osserva che le capanne, quella in cui Renzo si rifugia prima di attraversare l’Adda e quella che Lucia abita con la mercantessa nel lazzeretto, sottolineano con la loro semplicità architettonica il valore redentivo della preghiera. Rappresentano “una temporanea uscita dalla Storia, e una pausa interamente spirituale, di fiducioso abbandono [. . .] a Lui che ‘sa quello che fa’” (136) — fragili costruzioni senza catenaccio — e evidenziano il “grado zero di adesione ai valori del mondo” dei miti che ereditano la terra (137). I palazzi di don Rodrigo e dell’Innominato sono dominati invece da un’oscurità marcatamente simbolica: “rade e piccole finestre [. . .] chiuse da imposte sconnesse” (cap. 5), “salotti oscuri” (cap. 6), “corridoi bui” (cap. 20) alludono al male che in essi si congiura o si compie. I locali di quei palazzi si dilatano e si rischiarano quando l’Innominato matura la sua conversione, annunciata nella “sala grande” (cap. 20), e quando l’erede di don Rodrigo ospita “in un bel tinello” i giovani perseguitati dal suo defunto parente (cap. 38). Le pagine di Calzone sul simbolismo che compare a tratti nel romanzo manzoniano stanno alla pari con quelle di Jean Pierre Barricelli su ‘Structure and Symbol in Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*’ (*PMLA* 87 [1972]: 499-507), rifluite poi in *Manzoni* (Boston: Twayne, 1976, 148-56).

Sull’onomastica manzoniana hanno scritto pagine importanti Eurialo De Michelis (“I nomi. Come scelti”, in *La vergine e il drago*, Padova: Marsilio, 1968, 313-39) e Gianfranco Contini (“Onomastica manzoniana”, in *Varianti e altra linguistica*, Torino: Einaudi, 1970, 201-05). Calzone approfondisce l’argomento consultando un *Dizionario dei nomi e dei santi* e considerando il significato che la tradizione religiosa attribuisce ai nomi propri utilizzati da Manzoni. Santa Marta, ad esempio, è la patrona delle cuoche e delle casalinghe; e Marta, nel romanzo manzoniano, è la donna che porta la cena a Lucia prigioniera dell’Innominato. Sant’Alessio è il protettore dei viaggiatori; e ne *I promessi sposi* si chiama Alessio il cugino che aiuta Agnese a corrispondere con il peregrinante Renzo. (L’aiuto di Alessio, come è noto, è poco fruttuoso, ma, osserva Calzone, l’ironia manzoniana si afferma anche nelle scelte nominali: Renzo, ignaro della cattiva sorte che lo attende in città, arriva a Milano con una lettera per padre Bonaventura).

Calzone inoltre si propone di scoprire quegli elementi della cultura d’ispirazione religiosa che sono entrati ne *I promessi sposi* “a vari livelli di prestito, di calco, in qualche caso rivelando, in filigrana, intendimenti non sempre palesi dell’Autore, o non sempre conformi a più solenni e pur esplicite dichiarazioni di poetica” (9). La letteratura

italiana, osserva, è influenzata dalla tradizione religiosa oltre che dalla cultura classica e letteraria; i critici però si sono limitati ad affermare questa particolare influenza senza illustrarla; l'interesse dei cattolici e dei laici per la religiosità manzoniana, aggiungiamo, si è concentrato intorno a due temi marginali e fuorvianti (il presunto miracolo della conversione, il presunto giansenismo dello scrittore); ed ha ragione Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, nell'introduzione a questo libro, a sostenere che le indagini "sulle risposdenze fra la comune cultura religiosa, la cosiddetta cultura della 'pietà', e tanti aspetti, situazioni, nomi anche, del romanzo manzoniano" possono essere più fruttuose (9). Purtroppo la ricerca di Calzone in questa direzione è meno felice, soprattutto perché lo studioso sente il bisogno di raggiungere risultati immediatamente significativi e forza la logica del discorso. Se i rimandi a santa Marta e a sant' Alessio sono chiari e hanno un loro significato, sono poco convincenti quelli a sant' Egidio (protettore dei tessitori; e l' Egidio del romanzo, spiega Calzone, corrompe Gertrude, che permette a sua volta il rapimento della tessitrice Lucia) e a san Lorenzo (protettore di bibliotecari e librai; e il Renzo del romanzo condurrebbe "quella che potremmo definire una guerra di retroguardia con la cultura scritta", 104).

L'immagine di Lucia, sostiene Calzone, è costruita con il materiale della letteratura mariana (16). È una tesi stimolante, che andrebbe sostenuta però con prove più sostanziose: che Lucia sia vergine (16), che pianga spesso (16), che abbia fede (21-22), che sia misericordiosa, prudente e modesta (22-23) può fare di lei una cristiana esemplare, ma non evidenzia un particolare legame con la letteratura mariana. Dire che Lucia, come la Madonna, "supera tutti nelle virtù" perché "è attesa nel bergamasco con non poca aspettativa" (23) implica una fiducia nella voce del popolo che Manzoni non avrebbe condiviso.

È possibile che Manzoni abbia utilizzato la *Leggenda aurea* di Jacopo da Varazze o la *Vita di Alfonso de' Liguori* di Antonio Tannoia nel tratteggiare alcune figure del suo romanzo. La seconda ipotesi mi sembra improbabile: Alfonso de' Liguori era una campione delle pratiche religiose di ispirazione gesuitica che Eustachio Degola avversava e per le quali il suo allievo Manzoni non sembra aver avuto un particolare apprezzamento. Le prove che Calzone adduce, in ogni caso, sono abbastanza deboli: Tannoia racconta che sant' Alfonso era accolto da festosi evviva e da acclamazioni di gioia dai fedeli che si accalcavano lungo il suo cammino, proprio come accade al Federigo manzoniano; e che l'uno e l'altro, in tempi di carestia, acquistarono grano da distribuire ai poveri (122-23). Ma in quale altro modo le folle avrebbero potuto accogliere personaggi in fama di santità? e cos'altro avrebbero potuto fare questi alti prelati in caso di penuria di cibo e di generale rialzo dei prezzi? Gli accostamenti sono troppo generici per essere risolutivi. Calzone, comunque, va apprezzato per aver intrapreso un'indagine difficile, che è importante proseguire.

Luciano Parisi, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Simone Giusti. *L'instaurazione del poemetto in prosa (1879-1898)*. Lecce: *Pensa Multimedia "Filigrane"* 5, 1999. Pp. 146.

La ricerca di Simone Giusti — delimitata dai due millesimi 1879, anno della prima traduzione dei *Petits poèmes en prose* di Charles Baudelaire, e 1898, in cui appaiono le *Piccole anime senza corpo* di Ricciotto Canudo — è intesa alla caccia del "poemetto in prosa" ("sintagma meno vitale forse del maggiore poesia in prosa, ma per questo più

abbordabile" 9), adottandone il punto di vista. È dunque, come spiega l'autore, una ricerca di un'"etichetta generica (di un genere letterario)" e in ciò "un buon modo per evidenziare parentele" (10), non sempre dirette, a volte false, ma sempre significative in una famiglia in cui l'ambiguità dei componenti appare il dato più certo. E non può essere altrimenti per un sintagma ibrido qual è quello in cui sono giustapposte, in tensione semantica, due manifestazioni letterarie diverse.

Nel primo dei tre capitoli, intitolato "Effetto poème en prose", Giusti considera "ciò che viene prima dell'instaurazione, prima dell'invenzione del nome, [cioè, ciò] che cade ancora sotto il dominio del *poème*, non del poemetto" (10).

La prima versione di *Petits poèmes en prose*, risalente al dicembre 1877, è "piccoli poemi in prosa": "I piccoli poemi in prosa appartengono a quel genere suolsi chiamare oggi giorno bozzetto" (I. Demaria, "Charles Baudelaire", *Gazzetta Letteraria*), cioè "componimenti brevi in prosa" (19). La traduzione letterale, ed errata, di *poème* in *poema*, addizionata all'ulteriore precisazione *bozzetto*, va a smorzare l'"obiettivo decadente di travalicamento o fusione dei generi letterari" (19) esplicito nell'espressione originaria. Ma più che un errore questa assimilazione indica, ché la Parigi dell'epoca non era la Torino della *Gazzetta Letteraria*, come furono recepiti i *Petits poèmes en prose*: la nota al lettore (la dedica *A Arsène Houssaye* di Baudelaire), che è un *mode d'emploi* dell'opera, e il suo carattere antinarrativo, li accomunano ai nostrani libri di bozzetti.

Grande spazio e analisi approfondita sono dedicati alle esperienze letterarie di Carlo Dossi, veramente artista *in anticipo*, che veniva elaborando, con lucida coscienza critica e a monte dell'influsso bodleriano, il genere letterario della *goccia d'inchiostro*.

Il sintagma in questione porta poi l'inchiesta su due operatori culturali attivi dalla fine degli anni Settanta, Vittorio Pica e Girolamo Ragusa Moleti — il primo, traduttore di Mallarmé coi *Poemucci*, il secondo, di Baudelaire coi *Poemetti in prosa*. Al "piccolo Baudelaire italiano", come Ragusa Moleti veniva definito, si deve, oltre alla prima traduzione italiana dei *Petits poèmes en prose*, apparsa in parte su *Il Crepuscolo* (periodico verista) nel 1879, poi in volume nell'80, l'aver, come lui stesso afferma, "per il primo, e con molto buon esito [...] tentata la piccola prosa in Italia" (57). Ecco un'altra traduzione interpretativa del sintagma francese, che ambisce al riconoscimento di *genere*, rinnovando il termine *bozzetto*. Ma nulla accomuna la piccola prosa, termine attivo fin dal 1890, alla poesia. Pica dal canto suo — profondo conoscitore non solo delle opere ma anche degli autori del "decadentismo" francese e mediatore, per il tramite di una originale lettura in chiave naturalista del romanzo-manifesto *A rebours* di Huysmans, tra una letteratura verista e aristocratica — promuove, con il saggio del 1888 *Poemucci in prosa* (sul *Fanfulla della Domenica*), una lucida poetica del poemetto in prosa, isolato in quanto *genere* e non filtrato attraverso l'ammirazione per un autore, com'era stato per Ragusa Moleti. E anche Pica trova spazio nel capitolo intitolato "Dalla parte della prosa", giacché i suoi poemucci, "felice compendio del passato prossimo, dal bozzetto alla goccia d'inchiostro" (77), fronteggiano il romanzo *reportage* piuttosto che la poesia.

Il terzo capitolo, "Dalla parte della poesia. Il poemetto in prosa nell'epoca del versoliberismo", ripercorre gli anni 1888-1898, evidenziando, sulla base di opere e uomini esemplari, le nuove valenze dell'oggetto indagato.

Primo fra tutti in Italia a "recepire il valore innovativo ed eversivo [...] dell'operazione *Petits poèmes en prose*" (93) è Filippo Turati con *A un tarlo, (pseudoversi)* del 1882. Il futuro autore dell'*Inno dei lavoratori*, attaccando dall'interno il sistema prosodico, mira a instaurarne uno nuovo, poetico non metrico. Certo, l'esperienza

dei *Semiritmi* di Capuana è contemporanea, ma Giusti dimostra come l'approccio del siciliano sia distruttivo, mentre quello di Turati eminentemente costruttivo. Di particolare interesse è il ribaltamento interpretativo, *dalla parte della poesia*, che Turati fa subire alla citazione, posta in epigrafe agli *pseudoversi*, dalla *lettre-préface* ai *Petits poèmes en prose* ("une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime"), quando, annota Giusti, "Baudelaire non scrive versi liberi [. . .], né auspica la loro 'invenzione'" (99). Sul versante di una "prosa biblicamente intonata", whitmaniana, e in sé distinta dal *poème en prose* bodleriano, "privo di ritmo e di ogni altra concessione visibile alla versificazione" (107), l'autore accoglie i *Canti e prose ritmiche* di Eugenio Colosi del 1889. Con il sottotitolo *Il caso Petrucci*, Giusti, frustrato dalle inutili ricerche, analizza i testi poi confluiti in un'opera, per ora introvabile, che potrebbe confermare "l'avvenuta instaurazione dell'etichetta che sta inseguendo" (112) e coronare il lavoro culturale svolto negli anni 1888-1890; si tratta dei *Poemetti in prosa* (1890) di Gualtiero Petrucci.

Ormai *Il Marzocco* inizia a riorganizzare, assestatisi le scosse provocate dagli urti tra naturalismo e decadentismo, quanto disordinatamente esperito nel quindicennio precedente. Sul quotidiano fiorentino, proprio nell'anno di fondazione, 1896, appare un modo nuovo per distinguere la poesia, in versi o in prosa, dalla prosa: questa è in tondo, quella in corsivo. La soluzione grafica è "un contenitore vuoto perfetto che giustifica e regola al tempo stesso ogni esperimento in prosa. E solo in prosa, perché siamo certi che sul *Marzocco* il confine tra prosa e verso non viene messo in discussione" (117). È come dire che le spinte versoliberiste rifluiscono nella prosa lirica del poemetto. Con le *Piccole anime senza corpo* (1898) di Ricciotto Canudo è confermata la tendenza, dopo un temporaneo sbilanciamento, *dalla parte della prosa*. Come scrive Giusti, *Le piccole anime* sono il "risultato più complesso ottenuto su questo versante, dove la sperimentazione si esercita sui rapporti intertestuali che regolano il funzionamento del sistema letterario: sul peritesto quindi [. . .] poi sui più discreti segnali testuali" (120).

Lo studio ha il merito di affrontare un argomento dei più inafferrabili ma che marcherà poi capillarmente le esperienze letterarie novecentesche; Giusti dunque, con una larga inchiesta, retrocede per interrogarne i prodromi, intesi o travisati, accolti o respinti. Forse proprio per l'inafferabilità dell'oggetto *poemetto in prosa*, il discorso si organizza in gangli argomentativi (sottocapitoli) difficilmente allineabili sul piano dell'argomentazione generale, che soffre dell'insufficienza di più ampi momenti consuntivi.

Matteo Pedroni, *Université de Lausanne*

Tullio Pagano. *Experimental Fictions: From Emile Zola's Naturalism to Giovanni Verga's Verism*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999. Pp. 189.

The ostensible objectivity of both Naturalism and Verism does not constitute ideological neutrality. Building upon a critical and theoretical framework of Lukács, Althusser, Barthes, and Jameson, Tullio Pagano's *Experimental Fictions* provides a lucid and articulate analysis of the novels of Emile Zola and Giovanni Verga. Specifically, Pagano deploys a formalist analysis of these works to reveal the complexity of their underlying relationship to late nineteenth-century hegemonic ideology. Pagano neither recuperates the erstwhile and highly problematic (self-)construction of these novelists as revolutionary, nor does he presume that their novelistic studies of the operations of social power comprise a tacit reaffirmation of it. Instead, he simply states, "Verga's and Zola's

experimental fictions are not only devices designed to reconfirm an ideology that imprisons us within its hegemonic discourse, as (post)structuralist critics would have it, but also are a medium through which the mechanisms of domination are put to the test and eventually exposed" (17). On one hand, Pagano both accepts and discusses the Althusserian social inscription of the subject, noting in detail how neither Verga nor Zola remains immune from the Positivist and Social Darwinist paradigms of their time. On the other hand, Pagano realizes that writers are not merely and only written upon, and he avoids reducing them into mere mouthpieces for dominant ideology. Pagano rightfully recognizes that hegemonic ideology is neither monolithic nor a pre-constituted given. Instead, it continually evolves and fluctuates, so that Zola and Verga can engage in an "antagonist dialogue" with it (34), though the degree and nature of this antagonism varies from author to author and from work to work. Attentive to the historical context which shaped the consciousness of these authors, Pagano implicitly seems to find Verga the ideologically more interesting, partly because of the Sicilian's more problematic relationship with hegemony. He reads "Verga's 'ontological pessimism' as a response to his marginalization within the newly unified state" (9). As a geographically disenfranchised member of an otherwise enfranchised class, and as a landowner in an age of increasing industrialization, Verga could not share Zola's Positivist faith in progress. In contrast, Pagano's Zola appears more at the center of his society, surviving the disillusionment of the Revolution of 1848 to witness the affluence of Napoleon III's regime and the rebirth of the Republic. In either case, Pagano reads the work of both authors as embodying the ideological debates of their period, negotiating hegemony, contesting and replicating it in varying degrees.

While Verga stipulated the "eclipse" of the artist from his text, Pagano observes that an absolute eclipse is impossible. He compares the seeming disappearance of the author from his text to the shot-reverse shot formation in cinema as a mere disavowal, but not an erasure, of authorship. In his Introduction to *L'amante di Gramigna*, Verga claimed "l'opera d'arte sembrerà essersi fatta da sé, aver maturato ed esser sorta spontanea, come un fatto naturale" (33). Verga thus collapses the ideological into the natural in a manner in keeping with late nineteenth-century bourgeois discourses on scientificity. Matching Verga and Zola novel for novel, Pagano plots out a fascinating trajectory, wherein the ideological vitality of the two writers follows a path where they mirror each other in opposition. By the time of his late novelistic version of *Dal tuo al mio*, Verga's *vinti* have become *pre-vinti*, regardless of their social class. The wealth of Baron Navarra and even his familial relationships fall victim to the greed of others, as Social Darwinism manifests itself in "a single instinct: self-interest" (147). Pagano encapsulates Verga's *Weltanschauung*: "Once he discovered the economic mechanisms that govern human actions in capitalist society, he transformed that condition into an ontologic principle that cannot be contradicted" (148). Such "ontological pessimism" descends into a nihilistic silence by the end of Verga's career, deterring him from writing. In stark contrast, Pagano observes how the (re)conciliatory stance of Zola's late work, *Travail*, ultimately degenerates into a tautologically endorsement of the status quo as the proper path of social evolution. With marriages in the workplace and flowers on the machines, the novel presents a capitalist utopia. Hegemony is no longer susceptible to "antagonistic dialogue" but rather is "gradually silenced by the totalizing vision of the messiah, Luc Froment" (134), the engineer who works in the service of capital and who serves Zola as his mouthpiece in the work.

In a brief summary of the critical response to Verga, Pagano recounts that “Italian leftist intellectuals could not accept Verga’s text as it is, but instead had to separate the Realistic (and therefore ‘progressive’) component of the novel from its regressive ideology” (26). Traditional Marxist utopianism could not accept Verga’s pessimism. Pagano faults both Verga and Zola for accepting capitalism as a form of determinism in their works. He observes, “Capitalism is endowed with an almost transcendental mission: It loses its historical dimension, and becomes a providential force, to which everyone must conform” (59). Pagano reads against this, re-historicizing and contextualizing Verga and Zola, and consequently demystifying their ideological allegiance to capitalism as an inexorable force. While Pagano wastes no time theorizing an alternative to economic Social Darwinism in the novels, he does attempt a post-Marxist and subtly recuperative reading of late Verga from a proto-Pirandellian perspective. Following Althusser, Pagano notes that the maintenance of power structures relies upon their invisibility. The ostensibly “eclipsed” author thus relates directly to the desired invisibility of hegemonic power, and, in the case of Zola’s later works, may even embody it. In contrast, using Verga’s late collection of short stories *Don Candeloro e C. i.* (1894), Pagano shows how Verga configures himself in debased form as the puppeteer Don Candeloro, a tawdry *deus ex machina*. Basically, Verga outs himself as author, concedes his textual intervention and manipulation, and abdicates the myths of objectivity and ideological neutrality. In the process, Verga metaphorically and retroactively reduces his characters to puppets in a manner that presages Pirandello and Rosso di San Secondo. Verga’s characters, however, remain distinct from those of his successors in that his *vinti* are unaware of their status as ideologically constructed subjects. While Verga’s characters may remain ignorant of the impact of ideology on personal psychology, Pagano reasserts that the readers of both Verga and Zola need not remain so. Pagano states his premise: “If it is true, as Althusser has stated, that ideology functions by interpellating the subject, the second-degree interpellation that takes place during the reading process can make the reader reflect on the process of ideological interpellation that takes place in everyday life” (151). Reading these novels on a metaliterary level, Pagano thus scrutinizes the authorial interventions of Verga and Zola in terms of both content and form. This scrutiny reveals the persistence and insistence of internalized ideologies that the two writers have attempted to disavow in the name of scientific objectivity. Of course, such theoretical objectivity was itself an ideology, although it was not recognized as such at the time. Recognition, as opposed to ostensible invisibility, becomes a key issue for Pagano, and recognition scenes within these novels serve as metaliterary markers for glimmers of ideological self-awareness, not only on the part of the characters, but also on the part of the authors.

The scientificity with which Naturalism and Verism validated themselves also constituted the attempt of the bourgeoisie to control the world around it. As bourgeois writers, Verga and Zola could attempt to write about the peasantry and the working class, respectively, but they could not write “within” it. Nevertheless, in order to avoid traditional moralism, both authors abdicated the univocal expression of the epic and romantic traditions. Instead, they attempted to disguise their own voices as writers with those of their characters and the demi-mondes of their respective texts. Addressing *L'Assommoir*, *I Malavoglia*, *La Curée*, *L'Argent* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, as well as the texts already mentioned, Pagano provides a meticulous analysis of the use of authorial voice and the various strategies Verga and Zola employ to disavow it. Admittedly, Verga

had the more daunting task, synthesizing a hybrid language that attempted to render Sicilian vernacular comprehensible to readers of formal Italian. While lesser in degree, Zola's challenge was similar in kind, as he attempted to write "*comme parle le peuple*" for readers belonging to the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. Pagano studies how Verga and Zola pursue their goals by sometimes using a popular internal narrator from within the *quartier* or *villaggio* of the novelistic setting. At other times, they may use the discourse of the characters themselves, or else may attempt to fuse their voices with those of the characters and their characters' thoughts. Pagano observes how Zola and Verga deploy what Bakhtin has termed "character zones" as a loose form of free indirect discourse. Finally, in telling moments the authors even resort to, or lapse into, using their own voices as external bourgeois narrators. As one level of narration may contradict another, the result is a polycentric structure, a heteroglossia that has permitted divergent interpretations of these novels. The polyphonic nature of these novels indicates that the bourgeois ideology internalized by Verga and Zola, whether hegemonic or not, remained in a state of perpetual negotiation up until their later lesser works. The very concept of hegemony in these authors, in fact, becomes problematic. As Pagano points out, a crisis in the hegemony of the authorial voice at the metaliterary level attests to a crisis in the hegemony of the author at the social level. It is at this metaliterary level in these "experimental fictions" that the novels of Verga and Zola may be their most revolutionary. Pagano's formidable achievement consists in his perceptive and keen analysis of how the use of voice in these prose narratives impacts, disguises, and/or reveals the ideological position(s) of their respective authors.

William Van Watson, *Illinois State University*

**Giorgio Cavallini. *Verga Tozzi Biamonti. Tre tritici con una premessa comune.*
Roma: Bulzoni, 1998. Pp. 196.**

Nel volume, che raccoglie nove saggi, in parte già pubblicati, Giorgio Cavallini si propone di documentare la "grandezza" letteraria di tre autori, tra i maggiori della letteratura italiana del Novecento. Il saggista giustifica la scelta dell'accostamento nella 'Premessa': Verga, Tozzi e Biamonti, separati da differenze di tempo, di luogo e da modalità di scrittura, hanno una simile capacità di trascendere "qualsiasi 'colore locale' per attingere una visione più vasta e profonda — più lungimirante, anche — di quella racchiusa nella *loro* provincia originaria" (9).

La tecnica narrativa della localizzazione nel secondo capitolo dei *Malavoglia* è l'argomento del primo elemento del primo trittico ("La tecnica narrativa della localizzazione nel secondo capitolo dei 'Malavoglia'", 15-36). Per Cavallini ricorrenti "indicazioni e determinazioni di luogo" (22) diventano in Verga non "dati descrittivi esterni o pittoreschi ma [. . .] veri e propri elementi narrativi intrinseci della struttura interna e del ritmo sotteso alla vicenda" (22). Verga tende a creare due categorie di presenze romanzesche: i personaggi, in movimento, si contrappongono ai luoghi, "immobili e sempre identici, nei quali avviene la vicenda narrata" (22). Il luogo definisce il personaggio: "stare al telaio" e "stare alla finestra", oltreché due azioni diverse, sono metafore che gettano luce "sul costume del personaggio e, in definitiva, sul suo stesso 'essere'" (26). Come in altri saggi compresi nello stesso volume (tale tecnica è largamente utilizzata nei contributi su Biamonti), Cavallini applica un metodo critico che

attraversa il testo categorizzandolo e procedendo dagli esempi, di cui fa ampia raccolta, "ad evitare qualsiasi schema troppo rigido e ogni forma di elencazione" (26).

Nel secondo elemento del tritico per Verga, una "Postilla alle novelle 'La lupa' e 'La roba'" (37-60), Cavallini intraprende una rilettura delle due celebri novelle verghiane, preparata dal recupero di alcuni contributi adeguatamente commentati (a cominciare dalle interpretazioni critiche di F. Chiappelli, cui altre si aggiungono, citate nelle ultime pagine del saggio). Nella "Lupa" Verga eviterebbe "la rappresentazione convenzionale del fatto nudo e crudo, per privilegiare la forza espressiva, per mirare alla catastrofe essenziale, per lasciare tutta la scena ai due personaggi, insieme attratti fatalmente e contrapposti" (39-40). Cavallini osserva l'uso verghiano del verbo, inteso a rappresentare la durata, breve o lunga, dell'azione, e fa accenno ancora alla tecnica della localizzazione (in particolare tracciando lo sfondo della vicenda della "Lupa"), su cui si è diffuso nel primo elemento dello stesso tritico. Il commento alla novella "La roba" cresce sull'osservazione secondo cui oggettività e soggettività ne costituirebbero la trama: l'"oggettività della rappresentazione" e la "soggettività dell'opinione" (46). Gli esempi che Cavallini enuclea, secondo un modo di procedere che gli è abituale, non ne raffreddano il commento.

Nel terzo elemento del primo tritico ("Sull'uso espressivo dell'avverbio in *-mente* in alcuni episodi di *Mastro-don Gesualdo*", 61-74) il saggista si sofferma su alcune scene, tra le più celebri, del secondo capolavoro verghiano. È tra queste l'episodio della prima notte di nozze fra Gesualdo Motta e Bianca Trao, in cui, nota Cavallini, "si può rilevare l'uso misurato ma molto espressivo dell'avverbio in *-mente*, unito a verbi, esprimenti azioni o condizioni, in cui si accentra il contrasto" (63). La lettura sperimentata dal saggista è puntuale e si protende verso una meta dimostrativa da raggiungere grazie a un percorso di immagini via via evocate ed enucleate nel testo preso in esame. In quanto uno dei cardini della fisionomia linguistica dello stile verghiano, l'avverbio in *-mente* prolunga o rallenta l'azione; la sospende, la ridefinisce. Scegliendo l'avverbio in *-mente* quale "centro" e rappresentazione dell'intensità semantica di alcune fra le più alte pagine del secondo capolavoro verghiano, Cavallini sa che sta correndo il rischio della tendenziosità e che "anche l'analisi corre il pericolo di essere più minuziosa che acuta" (73). Di fatto, "l'individuazione e la messa in evidenza di un indizio, benché minimo, può far scoprire e rivelare un senso più vasto e profondo dell'opera d'arte considerata" (74). Svolgere una ricerca attorno all'avverbio modale, per Cavallini, è come scoprire un "tassello, non importa se piccolo o addirittura piccolissimo" (74), di "un intero universo stilistico e concorrere, così, alla sua intima coesione e coerenza artistica" (74).

Il primo dei tre saggi del secondo tritico ("La forza intima dello stile", 77-101), quello dedicato a Tozzi, porta Cavallini a ripercorrere l'opera dell'autore toscano trascogliendone alcuni scorci significativi. Idea ricorrente e quasi perno tematico degli scritti critici di Tozzi, "apparso per massima parte in giornali e riviste tra il 1914 e il 1920" (77), quindi raccolti nel volume postumo *Realtà di ieri e di oggi* (Milano, Alpes, 1928), è la ricerca della "forza", del "vigore", della "compattezza" della scrittura, in contrapposizione ai giochi retorici con cui l'innalzamento del tono della pagina viene talvolta esibito. Giorgio Cavallini non esita a mettere a confronto la purezza e la forza dello stile di alcuni tra i maggiori classici italiani — Guicciardini e Galilei — con alcune immagini di *Tre croci*. Il confronto ha maggiore efficacia nel caso della narrazione del suicidio quasi involontario di Giulio ("Personaggio introspettivo più intelligente dei

fratelli, ma abulico e staccato dalla realtà, Giulio agisce spesso come avvolto in una nube di sogno e come sospinto irrazionalmente da una fatalità gratuita e crudele”, 89) e della conclusione de *Il potere*, trattenuta “in un clima denso di fatalità” (96). La misura del saggio di Cavallini resta, per sua stessa ammissione, esemplificativa. Egli scrive, concludendo il suo lavoro: “Si potrebbero citare molti altri esempi della forza intima che percorre lo stile di Tozzi, intensificando l’espressività e l’efficacia non solo dei suoi romanzi più riusciti, fra i quali spicca *Tre croci*, ma anche di parecchie novelle, sia dal taglio rapido ed essenziale [. . .] sia dal respiro più ampio [. . .], che l’autore scrisse negli ultimi anni della sua vita” (100-01).

Ne “La crisi dell’uomo moderno” (103-127) Cavallini traccia un quadro generale della “crisi di valori” che tra la fine dell’Ottocento e l’inizio del Novecento “investe la civiltà europea, provocando una serie di profondi mutamenti” (103). Dopo tale premessa, il saggio diventa una rilettura, autonoma piuttosto che bibliografica, dell’opera di Tozzi. Interprete attento, tra i “più preparati culturalmente” (126), della crisi dell’uomo moderno, Tozzi viene presentato come “maestro nel cogliere e rappresentare gesti e atti meccanici o immotivati, trapassi e sbalzi repentini d’umore, moti psichici contraddittori” (125).

Il terzo elemento del trittico tozziano, “Il problema critico della modernità di Tozzi” (129-40), è un saggio mantenuto a metà tra l’analisi e la rassegna della bibliografia critica su Tozzi. Cavallini nota che l’adesione al socialismo e l’ideologia cattolica ebbero in fondo poca capacità di determinare il corso dell’attività letteraria di Tozzi. La sua modernità è comprovata dalle sue felicissime intuizioni critiche sulla letteratura italiana delle origini. Fra “autenticità di vita interiore e intensità dello stile e dell’arte” (138) dovrebbe crearsi, secondo Tozzi, un rapporto inscindibile.

Nel primo saggio del trittico per Biamonti, “Su alcune parole-immagine: *vento, mare, luce*” già pubblicato negli “Studi di filologia e letteratura offerti a Franco Croce” (recensiti su queste stesse pagine, *Adl*, 17: [1999] 300-06), Cavallini osserva che la prosa liricamente modulata di Biamonti “ha il potere di creare subito un’atmosfera, una suggestione oppure di evocare un clima di silenzio e di attesa oppure, ancora, di far lievitare cose, persone, ambienti in toni e sfumature cangianti di luce” (144). Vi tornano, frequentemente e quasi con insistenza, “parole tematiche legate a elementi naturali, a situazioni e motivi di fondo facenti parte di quel paesaggio che [. . .] è la componente essenziale o la forma stessa del romanzo di Biamonti” (144). L’accumulazione di esempi è amplissima. Cavallini cita i passi in cui le parole *vento, mare e luce* sono parole-immagine, adatte a romanzi in cui “l’esilità costante delle trame non è un difetto, ma si spiega con la rinuncia dello scrittore all’azione e all’intreccio romanzeschi” (156). Descrive quindi il senso del metodo finora applicato: “perfino in un elemento singolo, in un particolare minuto e anche minimo di un testo è possibile cogliere [. . .] l’indizio di un senso più vasto e profondo: ciò che si può definire l’impronta del tutto” (155). Più dei due seguenti, questo contributo pare doversi legare a una fase della scoperta dello scrittore ligure, superata per crescita di consapevolezza nei due successivi elementi del trittico biamontiano. Da quando il saggio è stato scritto, infatti, la notorietà di Biamonti è cresciuta ed egli ha guadagnato maggiore attenzione, sia da parte degli specialisti che del vasto pubblico.

Nel secondo saggio per Biamonti, “Staticità e durata dell’azione verbale” (159-71), Cavallini applica, in maniera diversa, una metodologia già sperimentata: dati linguistici, raccolti dal testo, si trasformano in considerazioni che confluiscono in una visione storica

della letteratura. L'imperfetto, rispetto al passato remoto, prolunga l'azione e le assegna la vibrazione "di una sottile vena nostalgica" (164), quasi a prostrarre l'emozione contenuta nel verbo. Cavallini afferma che nella prosa di Biamonti "a una azione istantanea, espressa con il passato remoto, segue spesso una azione durativa o continuata, espressa con l'imperfetto" (166). Spiega, di seguito, le cause di quest'alternanza tra passato remoto e imperfetto: "Il ripetersi di questo mutamento o trapasso indica che allo scrittore interessa non già il fatto in sé o la sua concatenazione nell'intreccio, bensì [. . .] la risonanza che si sprigiona dalle linee ferme e pure del paesaggio per riverberarsi nell'intimo" (166-67). L'imperfetto assegna alla scrittura un "tono accentuatamente lirico" (171) e insegna la via che, dalla staticità degli oggetti, dei luoghi e del paesaggio, conduce al dinamismo della "tensione verso l'assoluto" (171) e della "ricerca quasi austera di una verità interiore" (171).

Nel *Le parole la notte*, il più recente romanzo di Biamonti, che Cavallini fa oggetto di un'approfondita indagine linguistica e tematica nel terzo elemento del trittico biamontiano ("L'ultimo Biamonti", 173-90), ritornano alcune parole-immagine: la *notte*, più di ogni altra, "che trapassa da semplice determinazione temporale a una entità animata e personificata" (177), quindi, in un "gioco mobile di sfumature" (181) e di analogie, l'*ombra*, l'*abisso*, la *cenere*. Il più recente Biamonti, osserva Cavallini, è calato nell'attualità concreta e dinamica. In un monologo interiore del protagonista Leonardo, interprete del mutamento dei tempi, si esprime l'idea della compresenza di due Ligurie, quella "costiera, ormai irrimediabilmente devastata e deturpata" (185) e quella di montagna, che resiste, intatta e austera.

Cavallini sa correre il rischio insito nell'accumulazione esemplificativa e superarlo: in realtà, la recensione di parole-immagini è suggerita dall'andamento stesso della prosa di Biamonti o, come Cavallini scrive, da quel suo *occhio* "di cui non si sa se ammirare di più la fermezza e forza tranquilla oppure la castità e limpidezza" (190).

Stefano Termanini, *Genova*

Vittorio Sereni. *Variable Star*. Trans. Luigi Bonaffini. Toronto: Guernica, 1999.

In reissuing his first book of poems, *Frontiera*, Vittorio Sereni gave it the more general title *Poesie*, and explained this choice with reference to the possibility of its being his only book. Critics have given perhaps too much attention to the question of whether Sereni had a notion of writing *the* book of his career, a sort of *canzoniere* — something to which a number of hermetic poets aspired — or was, instead, simply expressing the quite understandable anxiety of an Italian soldier in 1942, who knew he might at any moment be shipped off to join in the fighting. Sereni, of course, went on to survive capture by the Allies and two years spent as a prisoner of war, and by the time of his death in 1983, he had published another three volumes of poetry. However, reading his final collection, *Stella variabile*, one is struck by the almost obsessive return to the events of an earlier period — from the Munich Agreement of 1938 and the war that followed, to a dream that finds him back in an Algerian prison camp, to the years just after the war and the summers spent at Bocca di Magra with Vittorini, Fortini and others — so much so that his comments regarding the possibility of a single book, if meant to suggest a coming to terms with the essential events of a single life, prove in some sense to be prophetic.

As Laura Baffoni Licata notes in the "Afterward" to Luigi Bonaffini's new English translation, *Variable Star*, it is a collection in which "the poet's discourse centers on

'variations' of a few fundamental themes, among which predominates, from the very first composition, the theme of death" (79-80). Along with this return to familiar themes — which, it should be noted, date back to poems from as early as 1938, when Sereni declared, "Voi morti non ci date mai quiete" (*Tutte le poesie*, Mondadori, 1986) — one witnesses in *Variable Star* the reappearance of familiar names, often of friends now dead, and of ambiguous images from the past, like the swastikas he notices in New York: "[. . .] what are those small swastikas doing here in the Bronx / [. . .] / but you can also take them to be emblems of old Indian motifs" (11).

In this collection more than any other, Sereni contemplates the process by which a past, unrecoverable in life, is transfigured in the work of poetry. In "Niccolò," a poem addressed to a dead friend, the critic Niccolò Gallo, he writes: "[. . .] the world is being emptied of you and the true/false / *you* of the poets becomes filled with you" (47). When Sereni engages in a dialogue with figures from his past, the result is not merely elegy or nostalgic revisitation, but a meditation on the possibility of poetry itself, on its ability to write the story of life's moments. Unfortunately, this aspect of the poems, their constant engagement with private and public history, which makes them so compelling to readers familiar with twentieth-century Italian literary culture, and with Sereni's life in particular, is also what impedes the access of an English-speaking readership to a translation lacking explanatory notes (though Bonaffini does include Sereni's own brief notes to the collection, and Baffoni Licata's "Afterword" serves as a helpful introduction for those less familiar with Sereni's work).

Of his own process of translation, Sereni writes, "Nessuna decisione preventiva, nessun disegno organico, nessuna ricognizione preliminare a supporto di chissà quali progettazioni è alla base di questa mia attività, determinata più dall'emozionalità che dal gusto" (*Tutte le poesie*, 291). In this first complete English translation of Sereni's fourth collection of poetry, Bonaffini proceeds with a faithfulness, one that avoids any imposition from the target language, of which Sereni, who claimed to have little interest in the "problems" of literary translation, would no doubt have approved. These English versions are a pleasure to read. The language is natural throughout, yet does not lose sight of the Italian text behind it, and one never has the sense that Bonaffini has sacrificed faithfulness by going for an effect in the English. In addition to scholars of Sereni's poetry, *Variable Star* will certainly be of interest to comparatists, who will find in it evidence of a European poet engaged in a conversation with Rimbaud and René Char, as well as with Pound and William Carlos Williams.

Viktor Berberi, *Indiana University, Bloomington*

Philip V. Cannistraro. *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism 1921-1929*. West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera P, 1999. Pp.124.

As the latest endeavor by one of the leading American historians of Italian Fascism, *Blackshirts in Little Italy* is a most welcome addition to scholarly discussions on Italian Americans. It provides a well-informed, engaging account of the origins and development of the Fascist movement on American soil during the twenties while describing the internal and external tensions that always characterized its history. Additionally, it also accounts for the activities of pro-Fascist cultural organizations after Mussolini's decision to close the American *fasci* in 1929.

The volume begins with an introduction, titled "Nationalism, Fascism, and the Italian Diaspora," where Cannistraro builds a case for the role of Italian Fascism in shaping immigrants' sense of an "Italian" community. He argues that while the points of self-identification of earlier immigrants had remained "local," that is to say, tied to the family, the village, and the region, by the late thirties identity had clearly taken a wider, nationalistic dimension. Cannistraro's thesis finds ample demonstration in the historical account of the Italian American Fascist movement that follows. Carried out in five chapters, this account is the result of extensive archival research of government records and immigrant press in both the United States and in Italy.

In the first chapter, "The Origins of Italian American Fascism," Cannistraro focuses on the founding figure of Italian Fascism in the United States, Agostino De Biasi. A strong promoter of Italian national pride and solidarity, De Biasi had emigrated to the United States in 1900 and was the founder of the journal *Il Carroccio* which had chronicled Italy's efforts during World War I. On April 30, 1921, De Biasi established the New York *fascio* and shortly after published an article in *Il Carroccio* where he described the need of the association to elevate the conditions of the Italian immigrants while adapting itself to the culture of the host country. Italian officials responded to De Biasi's programmatic writing with much caution, as Cannistraro's second and third chapters suggest. Focused on the early twenties, these chapters describe how Italian officials realized that the *fasci* might compromise Italian foreign relations or might even resort to violence to deal with the increasing rallies of the Anti-Fascist Alliance. For example, Cannistraro's research suggests that the Italian ambassador to the United States, Gelasio Caetani di Sermoneta, was instrumental not only in Mussolini's decision to urge the American *fasci* to avoid any action that would damage diplomacy, but also in Mussolini's decision to create the Fascist Central Council, or CCF. Established on September 18, 1923, the CCF severely limited the freedom of Italian American Fascist organizations and was eventually responsible for dismissing Agostino De Biasi from the political scene. However, the crisis of the Italian American Fascist was by no means over. By the summer of 1925 the CCF was replaced with the Fascist League of North America, or FLNA, and *Il Carroccio* of Di Biasi gave way to another official organ of diffusion, *Giovinetta*. The FLNA, which Cannistraro treats in his fourth chapter, "The Fascist League of North America," encountered, from its very start, a number of difficulties. It made ambiguous demands on its members, requiring them to be loyal to the Fascist idea of society and the United States constitution. More fundamentally, the head of FLNA, Thaon di Revel, made the mistake of allowing extremists to join and, in the summer of 1925, several incidents involving Fascist and anti-Fascist groups occurred. In 1926, the violence escalated and Bastianini, the political secretary of the PNF, added to the crisis by sending *squadristi* to the United States. Eventually, these confrontations caught the attention of Congress and so by 1927 Mussolini started, once more, to redress public opinion directly. Mussolini's actions, so Cannistraro argues, were quite likely influenced by two other Italian officials: De Martino, who had replaced Caetani as the ambassador to Washington, and Grandi, who had been appointed to Italy's Foreign Ministry in 1925. Grandi had understood that Italian Americans could profoundly influence American politics if allowed to become citizens and vote. Hence, the need to maintain a good public image was imperative. In chapter five, "The Crisis of Fascism," Cannistraro describes the measures taken to this effect, which included the creation of a court of discipline for unruly members and a press office, managed by Toto Giurato, one of the editors of

Giovinezza. Yet, despite these efforts, episodes of violence continued. They eventually culminated in the death of two Fascists, Nicola Amoroso and Giuseppe Carisi on May 30, 1927. The opposition to Fascism grew stronger and was voiced in a number of newspapers and radiobroadcasts. Hence, Mussolini ordered all Fascist groups outside of Italy to refrain from marching in uniforms and asked them to end divisions within their host communities. Finally, he also made all *fasci* answerable to the secretary in Rome. This move, however, was correctly seen by many to establish stronger connections between the PNF and the American *fasci*. This rising pressure resulted in a series of events which were to bring about the end of the Fascist League. In June 1929, an article in *Christian Science* exposed Fascist activity in the United States and prompted Alabama Senator Heflin to call for a formal investigation of FLNA. On December 23, 1929, Mussolini dissolved the Fascist League, claiming, however, that such action was not the result of Heflin's request, but was due to the fact that the League had accomplished its tasks.

A concluding chapter, "Towards the 1930s," describes the transformation of the League after the closing of the *fasci*. Cannistraro argues that propaganda did continue, but was now carried out through the activity of cultural organizations, such as the Dante Alighieri Society, the Italian American Society, and the Casa Italiana of Columbia University. Also crucial was the role of influential businessmen of the Italian American community who were favorable to Fascism. First among these *prominenti* was Generoso Pope. Politically connected as well as extremely wealthy, Pope purchased a number of papers and ultimately came to control 70% of the Italian language press. Hence, he was in a unique position to use Fascism as a tool to build the Italian American immigrants' sense of a cohesive, national identity.

A well-written and well-researched book, Cannistraro's *Blackshirts in Little Italy* provides a most useful account of the history of Italian American Fascism and its role in the process of identity formation within Italian American communities. Ultimately, then, it not only sheds light on the ways Fascism configured itself on American soil, but makes an important case for the diasporic effects of immigration as opposed to the prior belief in one-directional notions of immigration as "uprooting" and/or "transplanting" (4). For these reasons, *Blackshirts in Little Italy* is a valuable addition not only for historians of Italian American history, but also to scholars of Italian culture.

Norma Bouchard, *The University of Connecticut, Storrs*

Laura A. Salsini. *Gendered Genres: Female Experiences and Narrative Patterns in the Works of Matilde Serao*. Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999. Pp. 189.

Gendered Genres is Laura Salsini's convincing argument for a feminist appreciation of Matilde Serao's narrative, journalistic, and epistolary production. In this broad-minded book, Salsini also argues that the post-unification author Serao be granted a critical identity independent of *verismo*. Salsini, with an impressive command of feminist and genre criticism, devotes one chapter each to Serao's use of realism, romance, and Gothic narratives to elucidate the link between the contradictory expression of female identity in her fiction, life, and in her journalistic writing. Salsini's wide knowledge of the social and cultural contexts that influenced Serao's life and works justifies her conviction that the antifeminist attitude of Serao's journalism and letters should not spoil an appreciation for her women-centered fiction. In fact, critics evaluating Serao's works on the basis of

"conventional periodization or generic standards" have, in the past, failed to appreciate her paradoxical portrayal of women's position in society (24).

In Chapter I, "Realist Revisions," the author contends that Serao's realist narratives, in constructing a "city of women," are an innovative reworking of the male-oriented tradition of *verista* narratives started by Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga (28). Serao sacrificed authorial objectivity, unacceptable in the eyes of many critics, in order to "gender," or populate her narratives with female characters whose restricted experiences in marriage and work often reflect the author's own life. For example, Serao's short stories, "La virtù di Checchina" and "La moglie di un grand'uomo," cast light on the institution of marriage in late nineteenth-century Italy, and poke fun at the misogynist conventions of fairy tales. One may hear, in the repeated futility of her protagonists' rebellion from patriarchal constraints, a call to consciousness. Another story, "Per monaca" questions, as its protagonists "move away from the relative liberty of adolescence to the enclosure of marriage," male-female relations, and instead takes up a female community of support (56).

In the second chapter, "Romantic Interlude," Salsini demonstrates how Serao's use of the romance to portray nineteenth-century womanhood, in particular, female desire and sexuality in the figure of the *femme fatale*, subverts conventional plot formulae. The author asks readers, like cultural studies' critics ask of the Harlequin romance, to re-envision Serao's sentimental works, and women's supposed "innate affinity with the genre," as a serious expression of female identity (75). In the short story "Paolo Spada," the male protagonist is an author unable to condemn his female characters to tragic fates. Serao, it seems, in adopting the familiar nineteenth-century practice of textual male impersonation, was sympathetic to the narrative roles prescribed to female characters, and perhaps even to the ones society dictated to women. Her turn-of-the-century novel *La ballerina* and the short story "O Giovannino o la morte" are romance texts that explore female identity, and are acutely sensitive to the confines of heterosexual relationships. The analysis of the little-known short story "Livia Speri" is a welcome critical addition and typical of Salsini's ability to breathe new life into Serao's minor works. The research in this chapter leads effectively to a survey of the *femme fatale* in Italian literature that distinguishes Serao's use of the figure from, for instance, Gabriele D'Annunzio's in *Il Trionfo della morte* and Giovanni Verga's in "La lupa."

In the "Family Gothic," Salsini discusses, against the backdrop of works ranging from Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, E. T. Hoffmann, and Mary Shelley to Alessandro Manzoni, the thematic and stylistic freedom that the Gothic narrative offered Serao. Her conservative conviction that women's primary vocation is motherhood is seen differently in the Gothic short story "Un inventore," as taking on a subversive air by linking female procreation to authorial creation. A new interpretation of the novels *Castigo* and *Addio, amore!* aptly shows how the discredited Gothic supernatural was a safe site for Serao to illuminate, more pointedly than in her realist and romance texts, "acute social commentary," such as the subjugation of women in patriarchal society (127). At the same time, these Gothic fictional devices, with their dark vision, may account for the defeatism often encountered in Serao's characters.

Another of Serao's works that adopts a familiar Gothic theme to examine the structure of the family unit is the novel *Il paese della cucagna*, whose focus is a chaste daughter's relationship with her mother. Yet despite its Gothic character, the novel is, ironically, recognized as one of Serao's best "realist" works. It is worth remembering that

Serao was not the only contemporary author to harbor conflicting realist and non-realist aesthetics. Salsini's stylistic and narrative analysis of Serao's Gothic and *verista* veins also evokes the contradictory aesthetics of Luigi Capuana, who was both the theorizer of "verismo" and a practitioner of the occult. Serao's novel *La mano tagliata*, merging elements of both Gothic and detective novels, is another form of cross-genre hybrid that remains nonetheless faithful to the women-centered focus of her narrative.

The conclusion of Salsini's book exemplifies how the author's research into Serao's life and works merits her assuming definitive stances about several, thorny issues, above all, Serao's ideological stance about women's roles and issues. She argues credibly that critics adherent to "long-entrenched literary standards" have obscured "the complexity and richness of [Serao's] multigenred approach" intent on exhibiting a female community, a "city of women" (148), complete with all its socio-cultural incongruities. With a close reading of plot and character, an appreciation for Serao's less-popular works, and a broad application of genre, feminist, and cultural criticism, Salsini engages a more recent critical approach to Serao's works that seeks to wrest her legacy from a one-dimensional realist interpretation. In *Gendered Genres*, Salsini provides an informative bridge from Serao's literary, journalistic, and epistolary production to her life, and in doing so draws a clearer picture of Serao's narrative and the social context in which she worked.

David Del Principe, *Montclair State University*

Vincenzo Binetti. Cesare Pavese. Una vita imperfetta. Ravenna: Longo, 1998. Pp. 155

Il volume di Binetti — originariamente una tesi di Ph.D. — si propone di considerare Cesare Pavese non tanto nella sua veste di scrittore o poeta, quanto in quella di intellettuale. Un ruolo questo, particolarmente complesso e sfaccettato nell'Italia del dopoguerra, percorsa da fremiti di rinnovamento fluttuanti tra dogmatiche adesioni partitiche e necessarie sconfessioni ideologiche: un ruolo particolarmente difficile per Pavese, che il lavoro intellettuale lo affrontava con rigore ed impegno etico quasi calvinista e con un'adesione emotiva e razionale a dir poco totalizzante.

D'altronde la figura dell'uomo di cultura è oggi sempre meno carismatica, come ben illustra Binetti nel capitolo introduttivo. Nelle pagine iniziali l'autore annovera tra le morti eccellenti del secolo anche quella dell'intellettuale, ormai orfano di quella funzione oracolare che ne aveva contrassegnato la gloria passata. Sempre più dis-organico e dis-ideologizzato, il pensatore agisce in un mondo i cui presupposti di impegno ideale ed etico si sono sbriciolati all'insegna di un relativismo — alias postmodernismo — sempre più pressante. Non era ancora così nell'immediato dopoguerra. Il clima di solidarietà creatosi nei confronti di un nemico appena sconfitto — il fascismo — aveva spinto un eterogeneo gruppo di intellettuali a fare causa comune, avvicinandosi alle direttive culturali del partito comunista, a cui lo stesso Pavese si iscrisse nel 1945. Ma già dal '47, le indicazioni sempre più dogmatiche e zdanoviste del PCI allontanano diversi scrittori. E, sicuramente, sul suicidio di Pavese avvenuto nel '50, grava l'ombra, a tutt'oggi poco esplorata, di un dissidio problematico e insanabile tra sfera "privata" (quella dell'espressione artistica) e "pubblica" (quella della militanza politica). Che Pavese avesse aderito all'ideologia marxista con estrema serietà, è comprovato da opere come *Il compagno* e *Dialoghi col compagno*, due romanzi il cui intento pedagogico è talmente programmatico da risultare pedante. Lo stesso Pavese ne è in qualche misura consapevole

tanto che, dopo la loro stesura, come sostiene Binetti, “si avvia verso un recupero della sua solitudine come scelta intellettuale cosciente nei confronti dell'establishment che tentava di fagocitarlo” (45). È nel *Diario* e nelle *Lettere* che possiamo cogliere la genesi di una contraddizione sofferta e mai ricomposta tra “il bisogno soggettivo di esplorare la dimensione mitica ed irrazionale del *selvaggio* e le necessità imprescindibili della ragione e della storia” (48). *Lettere e Diario* ci illuminano su un percorso interiore parallelo alla stesura di romanzi e poesie, fatto di dubbi e interrogativi che l'autore annota succintamente e tuttavia con coscienza vigile e impietosa, con una sofferta lucidità. Se il *Diario* ci consente di “spiare” nelle pieghe dell'animo pavese, il giornalismo politico ci permette di ricostruire un profilo del suo *engagement*. L'autore riflette dapprima sugli articoli pavesiani dedicati alla letteratura americana degli anni '30. Per Binetti è chiaro come già in questi saggi lo scrittore piemontese cerchi di “teorizzare un concetto di arte che non fosse appunto fine a se stessa ma che stabilisse un sia pur minimo aggancio a questioni storico-sociali” (75). Come lo stesso Pavese riconoscerà al termine della guerra, l'“America” aveva rappresentato negli anni '30 una sorta di utopia politica, un'alternativa rispetto al grigiore accademico e retorico della cultura fascista, ma, al termine del conflitto, questa funzione antagonista si svuota di significato. Pavese cerca allora di orientare la propria scrittura verso una dimensione più sociale, consapevole com'è della necessità di intervenire nel dibattito culturale in corso, sollecitando un intervento delle masse, da lui un po' troppo idealizzate e, nel contempo, rendendosi chiaramente conto di non avere la vocazione dello scrittore realista. Se da una parte apprezza il neorealismo, dall'altra vede in esso un limite posto alla propria poetica e alle proprie inclinazioni. Così, anche nel giornalismo politico Pavese rimane sospeso tra un bisogno di partecipazione diretta alla storia e la fuga esistenziale in un privato poco oggettivabile su cui pesa l'eredità decadentista — un'eredità in cui è da ricercare, forse, la matrice del suo interesse per il mito. Tale passione, presente in Pavese fin dall'infanzia, si approfondisce verso la fine della vita, quando lo scrittore dirige per Einaudi, assieme ad Ernesto de Martino, una “Collana di studi religiosi, etnici e psicologici”. L'approccio, perseguito con la consueta caparbieta intellettuale ed intensità emotiva, è quello di chi vuole mediare tra “mito”, che per Pavese è linguaggio e corrisponde vichianamente alla poesia, e “logos”, la parola razionale che storicizza i contenuti del mito stesso. Un'operazione delicatissima che, alla fine degli anni '40, risultava probabilmente impossibile. Come ben ha evidenziato Binetti, Pavese s'era avventurato lungo una strada insidiosa e probabilmente fatale, spinto com'era dal “bisogno urgente di ridefinire la propria soggettività e di riproporre, in uno spazio sociale che non era ancora immaginabile a quel tempo, una figura intellettuale ed umana *diversa* e per certi versi incoerente e marginale” (128). Pavese si muoveva infatti su quel versante *debole* del pensiero che alcuni filosofi italiani hanno abbracciato a partire dagli anni '80. Ma, nel dopoguerra, da una parte la categoricità del partito comunista, che richiedeva all'arte di svolgere un ruolo eminentemente pedagogico e, dall'altra, l'eredità culturale nazionale, che sosteneva per l'uomo, intellettuale e non, un atteggiamento ancora sostanzialmente patriarcale, impedirono allo scrittore di vivere quelle che apparivano soltanto delle *debolezze* in modo euristico e creativo. Ed emerge quindi ancora una volta l'urgenza di riconsiderare il suicidio di Pavese non più solamente come una scelta esistenziale privata, ma come momento tragico di una irrisolta dialettica tra privato e pubblico, alla luce dei *diktat* più o meno rigorosi, più o meno espliciti, della militanza politica.

In appendice Binetti esamina la “querelle” esplosa sui quotidiani italiani nell'estate del '90 a seguito della pubblicazione del “taccuino” di Cesare Pavese, consistente in una ventina di foglietti scritti a matita tra il '42 e il '43, in cui appaiono registrate sconcertanti valutazioni concernenti il regime fascista, i fascisti e gli antifascisti. Binetti riepiloga i vari interventi, lasciando spazio anche a chi, come Natalia Ginzburg, conobbe bene Pavese, e legge in questi appunti — che definisce comunque “inaccettabili” — la testimonianza di dubbi, incertezze e tormenti di un uomo che fu sempre, paradossalmente, coerente con la propria contraddittorietà.

Il volume di Binetti presenta uno studio approfondito e accuratamente documentato, nonché ben scritto, su un aspetto poco indagato di quello scrittore-poeta-operatore culturale-consulente editoriale che fu Pavese. Lo studio costituisce inoltre un buon contributo per ampliare le indagini su quel turbolento, magmatico momento politico-culturale da cui l'Italia emerse come stato democratico.

Anna Maria Torriglia, *University of California at Padua*

Stefania Lucamante. *Elsa Morante e l'eredità proustiana.*

Fiesole: Cadmo, 1998. Pp. 199.

In questa sua opera prima Stefania Lucamante propone al pubblico dei lettori e dei ricercatori uno studio stimolante, una lettura intertestuale di due splendidi testi morantiani, *Menzogna e sortilegio* e *L'isola di Arturo*, che evidenzia non solo la sua notevole competenza sull'argomento ma soprattutto la sua acuta e raffinata sensibilità di critica letteraria. *Elsa Morante e l'eredità proustiana* scaturisce da una palpabile predilezione per la valenza scrittoria morantiana, predilezione da cui è emerso un impegno intellettuale teso a rivalutare il carattere transnazionale della cifra poetica di questa scrittrice, a rivelarne il sottinteso dialogo con la tradizione letteraria precedente, in particolare con l'universo narratologico della *Recherche* proustiana, e infine ad esplicitare il valore straordinariamente innovativo e canonico di un *corpus* narrativo efficacemente novecentesco come quello della Morante.

Lucamante sottolinea la vasta cultura letteraria che anima il segno poetico morantiano, il cui terreno rimane fecondato massimamente dalla grande letteratura francese, mentre iscrive la formazione estetica della scrittrice nell'ambito di un panorama culturale italiano ancora legato alla tradizione del romanzo ottocentesco. Lo scarto narrativo che tuttavia viene continuamente rilevato in questa indagine è l'esigenza, sentita e espressa dalla scrittrice, di stabilire un termine *ad quem*, una soglia narrativa che recuperi tutte le istanze, le strategie e le modalità narrative del romanzo ottocentesco, trasformandole, strutturalmente, stilisticamente e contestualmente, per renderle consone al panorama sociale, storico e psicologico novecentesco. “Ero convinta che il romanzo . . . era in agonia. Allora, io ho voluto fare quello che per i poemi cavallereschi ha fatto l'Ariosto: scrivere l'ultimo romanzo della terra . . . Volevo anche che il romanzo contenesse tutto ciò che era stata la sostanza del romanzo dell'Ottocento: i parenti poveri, quelli ricchi, le orfanelle, le prostitute dal cuore generoso . . .” (Elsa Morante, *Opere*, I Meridiani, a cura di Carlo Cecchi e Cesare Garboli, Milano: Mondadori, 1988, LVII). Alla Lucamante, sensibile e acuta lettrice, non sfuggono le sottili implicazioni di un tale discorso, che, mentre sembra sfiorare esclusivamente il contenuto tematico del tessuto narrativo, adombra più suggestive trasformazioni e manipolazioni stilistiche nell'ipotesto, dal quale è intenzione della studiosa, attraverso un raffronto intertestuale che si

contrappone all'indirizzo statuito da molta della precedente critica, trarre spunti e stimoli per la sua indagine.

Ad una introduzione ricca di importanti ragguagli storici e critici, miranti ad iscrivere il discorso morantiano in un paesaggio letterario novecentesco cronologicamente definito entro i cui confini Lucamante colloca la sua scrittrice, sottolineandone le influenze e interferenze poetiche, i rimandi e richiami narrativi e suggerendo una genealogia letteraria che emerge, in modo più o meno palese, nella cifra di alcune autrici dell'ultimo decennio, segue una analisi assai approfondita e completa delle ragioni che hanno sospinto la studiosa ad intraprendere uno studio dei nessi, delle strutture tematiche e degli stilemi morantiani al fine di illuminarne l'originale palinsesto narrativo e poetico. Dalle rilevanti osservazioni di Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, e Cesare Segre, alle teorie espresse in alcuni pregevoli saggi da Riffaterre e Guillén, Lucamante trae spunto per la sua "duplice lettura", una lettura comparata, analogica, della *Recherche* proustiana e di *Menzogna e sortilegio* e de *L'isola di Arturo*, un processo epistemologico che si propone di far incontrare i testi e di rintracciare, nel più recente, i segni di una densa ed operante intertestualità, di una originale plurivocalità che, in ultima analisi, conferisce all'opera la sua straordinaria e moderna "letterarietà" (29).

Fanno parte integrante di *Cosmogonie letterarie*, questo il titolo del primo capitolo, cinque susseguenti rubriche in cui la studiosa suddivide le questioni salienti della esegesi morantiana. In "Proustismo e anti-proustismo," Lucamante delimita, in un breve *excursus* storico, una precisa sfera di influenza operante all'inizio del Novecento, marcando la presenza di un vivace rapporto di impollinazione e inseminazione nell'area di produzione letteraria franco-italiana. Il consistente e continuo attraversamento dei confini poetologici e incontro dei due universi poetici rende plausibile l'ipotesi di un recupero, da parte di alcuni scrittori italiani, di specifici cronotopi letterari e, in essi, la reinvenzione, reinterpretazione e infine la riscrittura di funzioni, strutture narrative e modelli ontologici ed epistemologici preesistenti.

Una prima interiorizzazione del modello proustiano viene efficacemente evidenziata e illustrata da Lucamante in "Imitatio e lettura proustiana," rubrica in cui lo schema narrativo morantiano viene assimilato, nel procedimento compositivo, allo schema che permea l'opera dello scrittore francese, fondato su un pervasivo autobiografismo le cui coordinate di base sono i riferimenti alla vocazione letteraria, informata dalla passione per la lettura, per l'invenzione e la manipolazione del reale che viene trasformato, attraverso una narrativizzazione onirica e immaginaria, in una grande architettura fantastico-epica. Alla disamina del modello narratologico operante al livello della struttura compositiva la studiosa fa seguire, ne "Il motivo della Chambre," lo scandaglio di un'immagine archetipa ricorrente nei romanzi morantiani, quella della stanza in cui, nel silenzio e nella solitudine, il protagonista si isola, si estranea dal mondo circostante, per poter percepire e materializzare, in una forma narrativa integrale, l'eco delle voci, dei pensieri e degli eventi in cui ha coinvolto i propri personaggi. Lucamante elabora con sapiente eloquenza e lucido giudizio critico le componenti poetiche e ontologiche di tale significativa presenza nell'universo scrittoria morantiano: dalla chiusura spaziale che ingenera il processo "anamnico" (63), alla delimitazione di un rifugio dal quale è possibile, attraverso una serie di fantasticherie "analettiche," proiettare un mondo inventato ed essere, contemporaneamente, protetti da quella realtà dannosa e distruttrice che si trova al di fuori del cerchio magico, alla finale illusione di una distanza che offre la

stabilità di un cosmo definito e stabilito dalla forma artistica e contrapposto all'incessante flusso del reale.

Nel segmento seguente, intitolato "Tempo e racconto: ordine narrativo e ordine diegetico," Lucamante individua, nel livello cronologico del racconto, una ulteriore convergenza con lo scrittore della *Recherche*. Le coordinate temporali, osserva la studiosa, non testimoniano di una verosimiglianza ma accentuano la singolarità, la soggettività del racconto e dell'io narrante, e in ultima analisi, corrispondono al tempo e al ritmo interno alla scrittura stessa. La funzionalità del cronotopo romanzenso morantiano e proustiano si disvela nella sua utilizzazione memoriale, come momento in cui avviene l'anacronia e si interseca la digressione, e più efficacemente si mescola la falsificazione dell'enunciato, e la celebrazione di quello che Lucamante definisce essere l'"antimimetismo" narrativo messo in atto dalla protagonista. Ultima rubrica del primo capitolo, "Inizi multipli," sottolinea un tracciato comune alla struttura narratologica morantiana e proustiana, il cui percorso viene intersecato da una molteplice serie di inizi dal quale il racconto viene, continuamente e simultaneamente avviato.

Il secondo e ultimo capitolo, "L'amour-jalousie," è suddiviso anch'esso in sei sottocapitoli e comprende una serie di indagini e stimolanti riflessioni al livello del discorso tematico e narrativo che sottende alle opere in esame e ne illumina la funzione ontologica esplicitandone il progetto epistemologico d'insieme. Il tema del titolo fa di conseguenza da sfondo alla apparizione, nel primo segmento esegetico, dei "Magnifici ospiti," ai quali la studiosa si richiama, proponendo comparativamente sulla stessa pagina l'invocazione ai personaggi che precede la sezione dedicata all'"Erede Normanno" e una riflessione sul medesimo argomento che Proust aveva incasellata nelle pagine di *Du côté de chez Swann*. Pertinente è l'osservazione di Lucamante sulla divergente prospettiva da cui si dipana l'identità scrittoria, dominante e ottocentesca nel discorso proustiano, "suddita e ancella fedele" dei propri personaggi, e in questo squisitamente novecentesco, nella composizione morantiana. Ma se la premessa è quella di una fondamentale differenza gnoseologica, la studiosa non manca di sottolineare la forte analogia tra i personaggi e le funzioni disgreganti e decostruttive ad essi affidate da entrambi gli autori. Dalla capacità di scomposizione del personaggio proustiano, alla invenzione-creazione dei "fantastici doppi" morantiani, che vivono in una permanente specularità di affetti e sentimenti, Lucamante trae lo spunto per una ulteriore disamina del personaggio, che in Morante, grazie alla mancanza di un fuoco prospettico statico, appare continuamente in movimento, psicologicamente più coerente al relativismo psicologico che distingue la scrittura e la letteratura del nuovo secolo. Essenziale per definire l'originalità della scrittrice italiana, si rivela quindi la preziosa "interiorizzazione dei personaggi" dai cui gesti e tratti psicologici è facile risalire alle topologie, ai miti e alle immagini simboliche tratteggiati nel corso della narrazione e, nella duplicità e specularità, è possibile individuare l'intento autorale, che secondo Lucamante è precipuamente quello di dimostrare la epicità negativa della storia, il *Bildungsroman* alla rovescia, in uno sfondo storico, quello novecentesco, in cui il personaggio non partecipa, non agisce e infine non è (103).

Il "Sistema dei personaggi" estende e approfondisce il discorso iniziato nel sottocapitolo precedente, configurando in modo più specifico la funzione della voce-protagonista femminile, la quale si scinde e si moltiplica nella struttura del racconto così da ritrovarsi in tutti i diversi fili esistenziali dei personaggi deuteragonisti. È tuttavia nella investigazione del passato che Lucamante riconosce, in Proust come in Morante, il fulcro

e il motore dell'enunciato, che sublima il desiderio di comprendere la propria esistenza ed il proprio destino nel presente. Sia nella *Recherche* che in *Menzogna e sortilegio* si intuisce quindi quel parallelismo "passato-presente" che rimanda al fondamento epistemologico del progetto narrativo, un progetto che rifiuta la linearità e favorisce la circolarità, si oppone alla singolarità e celebra la doppiezza e la plurivocalità di ogni singolo personaggio.

Nella terza rubrica, "Visione fuggitiva": l'amore," la studiosa riconosce questo sentimento come chiave di lettura fondamentale nell'opera morantiana e proustiana, e ne chiarisce i tratti patemici e patologici, ne illustra, in Proust, la componente essenziale di irrazionalità, e in Morante ne sottolinea l'aspetto angosciante, patologico e di conseguenza ciclotimico che agisce al livello dei personaggi e delle loro azioni, passioni e relazioni interpersonali. L'amore è il sentimento più assimilabile al morbo, alla malattia e infine, specifica Lucamante, per la protagonista morantiana esso è sinonimico con la composizione del racconto diegetico, in cui la tara ereditaria della menzogna, l'*antica follia* che caratterizza la famiglia, si scontrano continuamente con il tentativo della protagonista di conferire veridicità e verosimiglianza al racconto. La scrittura viene vissuta come tentativo di sublimazione, di purificazione da una ereditarietà morbosa, la menzogna viene allora giustificata e praticata non come fine a se stessa, ma come strumento funzionale alla invenzione narrativa, in cui tuttavia non si può non riconoscere, se si pone l'obiettivo sui personaggi che la animano e la abitano, la clinicità nevrotica, l'aspetto psicotico e patologico delle loro esistenze umorali.

In "Il sentimento erroneo": *zelotypia*, una passione intersoggettiva," Lucamante affronta la tematica della gelosia, passione archetipa che permea il tessuto dell'opera morantiana e ricorre con frequenza assai alta nel testo proustiano. Nell'indicazione della studiosa una tale topologia passionale viene utilizzata da entrambi gli autori come strumento di sublimazione a carattere estetizzante, in cui scopo ultimo è quello di "convertire il piacere . . . in sofferenza . . . e . . . poi riconvertire un'infinità di sofferenze attraverso il lavoro dell'arte, in felicità." (150) La sintassi *zelotypica* percorre la trama dell'ipotesto ed opera a tutti i livelli testuali, si consuma nel legame amoroso, nel relazionarsi intersoggettivo, per echeggiare infine in tutti i rapporti sociali e socio-economici che intercorrono tra i personaggi e il sistema. A questa fuorviante patologia, alla quale non è possibile sfuggire, secondo Lucamante la Morante appone, a corollario, la morbosità di stratagemmi amorosi quali l'indifferenza e l'ipocrisia, infallibili *deus ex machina* per il personaggio ottocentesco, che sapeva servirsene a proprio vantaggio; al novecentesco protagonista morantiano invece non è dato di trasformare la propria condizione e di migliorare le proprie sorti, irresolutezza e ignavia gli impediscono di agire e lo sprofondano in una irreversibile angoscia. Al sottocapitolo sulla *zelotypia* in *Menzogna e sortilegio* si aggiunge una rubrica dedicata alla "Gelosia di Arturo," ennesimo complesso esemplare morantiano, nel quale la topologia passionale si esemplifica in un desiderio mimetico di tipica matrice freudiana.

L'ultima rubrica del secondo capitolo è dedicata dalla studiosa alle "Necessarie e brevissime conclusioni," in cui vengono ricomposti i fili del suo interessantissimo e oltremodo stimolante percorso esegetico. Come magistralmente è riuscita ad illustrare Lucamante, la Morante ha prodotto opere, e in particolare qui il riferimento va a *Menzogna e sortilegio*, "la cui costruzione riesce a trasformare in una storia incantata, in una epopea moderna, quello che . . . potrebbe apparire un modesto romanzo d'amore." (180) La modernità dell'impostazione ideologica e l'originalità della cifra poetica

morantiana, qui confermate dall'approfondimento analitico e critico della Lucamante, stanno nel fare proprio il patrimonio letterario della tradizione precedente e nel renderlo operante in un diverso paradigma socio-culturale. La sperimentazione attuata dalla scrittrice riposa su una rielaborazione formale e tematica squisitamente novecentesca, in cui modelli narrativi, stilistici e tematici acquisiti vengono continuamente decostruiti e ricomposti nell'ipotesto come nel tessuto diegetico, portando a suggestive e innovative soluzioni narrative.

Simona Wright, *The College of New Jersey*

Angela Bianchini. *Un amore sconveniente*. Milano: Frassinelli, 1999.

Angela Bianchini was born and lives in Rome, but spent many years in the U.S., where she obtained a Ph.D. in Romance Philology at the Johns Hopkins University, under the direction of Leo Spitzer. One of her best works is a penetrating and exhaustive study that serves as introduction to the letters written in the mid-1400s by Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, whose sons had been exiled from Florence for political reasons (*Tempo di affetti e di mercanti. Lettere ai figli esuli*. Milano: Garzanti, 1987). Most of her essays, however, address twentieth-century Italian and Latin-American literature. In addition, in 1979 she published a comprehensive and immensely perceptive volume on women's history, *Voce donna*, which was then reprinted in 1996 by Frassinelli. Bianchini has also written in various media genres, and she continues to contribute articles and book reviews to major Italian dailies. Three novellas entitled "Gli oleandri," "Festa dell'indipendenza," and "Lungo equinozio" appeared in 1962. Then came *Le nostre distanze*, a novel situated on a barely disguised Johns Hopkins campus, that was published in 1965. *La ragazza in nero* followed in 1990, and *Le labbra tue sincere* in 1995. One of her best works of fiction is *Capo d'Europa*, which was first published in 1991 and reprinted in 1998. It is a narrative about seldom explored aspects of the Jewish experience in the 1930s and 1940s, in Europe. An Italian girl discovers what the Diaspora is, and what is her place in it, during a three-day stopover in Lisbon, as she is awaiting passage to the United States, in the terrible days of 1941. *Capo d'Europa* is Bianchini's first work to appear in English translation, under the imprint of the University of Nebraska Press and the title *The Edge of Europe*.

Un amore sconveniente is Angela Bianchini's sixth novel; it confirms the unique quality of her fictional world and the self-assured luminosity of her writing. As in all coherent artistic universes, the essential themes that provided the deep structure of her earlier fiction recur here: the intertwining of private passions and historical events, the experience of exile, and the disenchanting realization of the elusiveness of all returns. The title of the novel is ironic, since there is nothing strictly "improper" about the love story it chronicles. It is also rich in suggestions, since the term *sconveniente* may mean unsuitable, unseemly, inopportune, and disadvantageous, which are all appropriate definitions for it, considering the heartache and damaging effects produced by the liaison, and then the marriage, of the two protagonists.

The story is linear: Edoardo Ascoli is an esteemed intellectual and scholar from a well-to-do Italian family; he is also a handsome and aloof bachelor, and a World War I hero. During a visit to his cousin Ottavio, a painter, who had already endured the pains and sorrows of an unlucky love, he meets Ottavio's current lover, a mysterious French beauty and falls in love with her. She leaves Ottavio to live with Edoardo, and later

becomes his wife. Since the Ascolis happen to be Jewish family, loyalty and religious taboos are thus flouted. Flaminia is ignored by the Ascoli family and shunned by the closed community of the intellectual élite in Florence, where Edoardo teaches at the French University Institute and where the couple resides. Yet, in time, she manages to become an accepted member of the Florentine upper class just as the promulgation of the so-called racial laws relegates Edoardo to the margins of a society that, until then, he had believed to be profoundly his. Professor Ascoli must leave his university chair and his country while Flaminia remains in Italy. After the end of World War II, Edoardo returns, a broken man, to find that his beautiful, opportunistic wife has barely survived.

This is the story of an Italian family and an all-consuming love in the midst of an immense public tragedy. The words of an epitaph, which the author had once read on the walls of a palace in the Roman countryside, set the tone: "Love for a woman, envious Fate, and a cruel destiny brought me here, where you see me." Yet, the novel opens on the airy view of a villa in the northern Italian hill country against the backdrop of snowy Alps and mellow autumn colors. Edoardo has returned after a seven-year-long estrangement to introduce to his mother and close relatives his wife, Flaminia, of whom everybody disapproves because of her shady past. The understated elegance of the Ascolis' summer residence and the family's stern lifestyle contrast sharply with the sensual presence of the interloper. Flaminia is the epitome of early thirties stylishness. She appears wrapped in furs, holding two fashionable dogs on a leash; even her voice conveys the dark implications of her seductiveness, "a very deep murmur, soft and husky at the same time"(6). The sun is setting; the yellow salon where tea is served appears to the children riding their bicycles in the luxuriant park "at every turn . . . violently lit through the patterned bars of the windows" (8). In this truly staged scene, a performance filled with sadness is being played; Flaminia emerges a winner in all her graceful and sexual femininity, and Edoardo's mother must acknowledge her defeat.

The opening episode is followed by flashbacks. Larger events mesh with the private life episodes of a family and an estranged son: World War I is revisited, the memory of Jewish emancipation in Risorgimento Italy is evoked, and the family engages in heated discussions of current politics. Edoardo's mother, who lives in Rome, is favorable to Fascism for patriotic reasons, while the other relatives, residents of Turin, are anti-Fascist. Both cities as well as Florence serve as settings for the story, but Turin and its region, the Piedmont, loom larger as the locations of a culture with which readers of Italian twentieth-century literature are familiar. From Natalia Ginzburg to Cesare Pavese, from Primo Levi to Carlo Levi, Italo Calvino, and many others, the various parts of the Piedmont and its capital city appear with their peculiar aura, parsimonious, elegant, serious, industrious, and militantly anti-Fascist. In Bianchini, the cosmopolitan connections of the Ascolis are skillfully interwoven with the evocation of an aristocratic family's passion for regional and family traditions. Edoardo is a specialist in eighteenth-century literature, both Italian and French, and he has brought to a lovingly described Florentine environment his family ethos, very private and discrete.

Flaminia comes from a world that is very different from the Ascolis'. Probably very poor in childhood — if one is to believe her words — she has been a woman accustomed to luxury and expediency. She first appears in the white and green light of a bright midday in a small town in the French Alps, as she is preparing a succulent but elegant dish for Ottavio and Edoardo, who is their guest. Her young but ripe body and the mystery of her background suggest to Edoardo an incarnation of the feminine images he

had encountered in ancient European love poetry. Almost immediately, he is also tormented by a retroactive jealousy because her past remains her secret; only a magnificent emerald on her finger is a witness to that past.

In the first part of the novel, the author recreates for us the atmosphere of a world on the verge of disappearance, but she does so by bringing it back to life in a direct way, without nostalgia. Every detail of Italian life in the early thirties, the comfort and exclusive lifestyle of a privileged class, seems to belong to a timeless present. After her long wait for upward mobility, Flaminia blossoms, having become the wife of a prominent man, mistress of a beautiful home, and a fascinating lady endowed with a perpetually youthful charm. She has conquered Florence and has acquired "different gestures, self-assured and willful" (83). Only occasionally the apparent stability of the couple's social situation is disturbed by hints of danger. Edoardo is fundamentally insecure about Flaminia's attachment to him, but there is more to his despondency. The times are drastically changing. Political life in Europe is dominated by the newly established dictatorships. A Jewish exodus has begun in many northern European countries. Censorship and violence are spreading in Italy, and in 1938 the Fascist regime begins implementation of the principles expounded in the "Manifesto on Race." The persecution it had waged against the members of the leftist parties is extended to all Italians of Jewish ancestry. A phrase of heart-breaking naivete indicates the disbelief the Ascolis' experience in the face of such events: "Aren't we all Italians?" (29)

It is Edoardo who has a premonition of what is to come, after reading in the foreign press what is taking place in Germany and Austria. The fires set by Nazi thugs to Jewish businesses and homes evoke for him the terror of those ancient fires that accompanied the various forms of violence visited on Jews throughout history. "For years he had not thought about them, or perhaps he had never thought about them"(91). He is overwhelmed by a sense of loss and impotence that ends up raising a psychological wall between him and Flaminia. She understands what is happening and her reaction is to try to find a way out, an escape, while Edoardo recoils from it. The author thus accentuates the double pattern of the story's development: as Edoardo's quiet strength wanes and his social status declines, Flaminia's energy level and social prestige rise.

The second part of the novel follows the steps Edoardo is forced to take on the road to invisibility, in a cruel crescendo. Branded as a Jew, he loses even the right to his own possessions, which he is persuaded to transfer to Flaminia, who is "Aryan." He cannot maintain his family bonds for fear of attracting the attention of the persecutors, and he is cut off from all his social connections. His elimination is not dramatic, but merciless in its slow and methodical progress. Bianchini's writing uniquely explores not the appalling horrors of the Shoa, but the insidious pervasiveness of hate and persecution. We are witnesses to what ostracism and exile can do to someone who had felt safe in his innocence and strong cultural identity. Edoardo becomes an exile in his own country before he is forced into actual exile by a fearful university administration and a pragmatic Flaminia; he cannot react to the collapse of his existence, and is dragged into the maelstrom. Now, in a stunning reversal, Flaminia's "past turns into the necessary basis for survival in the present" (134), a definite asset for her. In her former life she had made connections that now can be exploited, and she does so, shrewdly and without compunction.

Deprived of everything, even his own name, alone in a foreign and inhospitable country, Edoardo realizes that "the only way to survive was to leave a testimony of his

own existence" (165) by pursuing and completing a study he had long abandoned, on the subject of eighteenth-century poetry. The elegiac mode of love poetry testified in Edoardo's eyes to the imperishable grace of a disappearing culture, and remained as its only memory. After teaching at the University of Grenoble, then returning like a ghost and spending months in hiding in an Italy divided and torn, Edoardo does see the end of the conflict. He immediately begins to search for the woman he loves and finds her. The emerald has disappeared from Flaminia's finger, just as her beauty has dissipated, and ugly rumors circulate about her connections with the occupying Nazis. In spite of these circumstances, the couple resumes life together in a newly built, poor apartment. For Edoardo, who is ill, only one thing remains: his manuscript on love poetry, which on his deathbed he entrusts to the hands of a young woman. She is an Ascoli, the daughter of an at last happily married Ottavio, and she brings him a breath of fresh air, the promise of the coming of age of a new and more aware generation.

A minor "Swann in love," Edoardo is a familiar character for Bianchini's readers; an aristocratic intellectual, reserved and lost in an overpowering passion, he is a man whose main virtue is faithfulness to his own dignity and to a great love. Around him, history weaves its plots that inevitably draw individual human beings into the abyss. Bianchini's prose, which is always rich but accessible in its clarity, flows with ease, perfectly fitted to the atmosphere of the milieu it evokes, and the times and social context it describes. The brief chapters that are her hallmark give a quick-paced rhythm to the narration. Her characters are entirely credible, as they are skillfully developed in their ambiguities and contradictions. Because of their complexity and credibility, they hold the readers' attention and may appear in turn to be attractive or dislikable, like human beings are, for the different ways in which they face life's cruelty. Above all, we find again in Bianchini's fiction a lightness that imparts grace to the heaviness of living. History insinuates itself into the texture of human stories, bringing to sorrowful ends the illusions and passions that were the very sustenance of human lives; but something of worth remains, like a redemption of all that was suffered.

Angela M. Jeannet, *Franklin and Marshall College*

George Talbot and Doug Thompson, eds. *Montale: Words in Time*. Market Harborough: Troubador Publishing, 1998. Pp. x+197.

The centenary celebrations of Eugenio Montale's birth have stimulated a vast amount of new work on the Ligurian poet. During 1996, the two major centres for research on Montale, Genoa and Siena, hosted large international conferences. In addition, an extraordinary number of journals have recently dedicated special issues to the poet including *Antologia Vieusseux*, *Chroniques Italiennes*, *Narrativa*, *Revue des Études Italiennes*, *Sigma* and *Sincronie*. *Montale: Words in Time*, a title echoing that of a recent volume on T. S. Eliot, collects together fifteen articles based on papers given at conferences in 1996 at the University of Hull, England, and the Istituto italiano di cultura in Melbourne, Australia. The book unites a variety of scholars working in four different countries: Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, and Italy. It is rendered particularly interesting by the fact that many of its contributors are not specialists on Montale and are therefore potentially able to offer refreshingly new opinions. *Montale: Words in Time* is one of a growing number of works in Troubador Publishing's *Hull Italian Texts* co-

ordinated by Doug Thompson, who is the editor of this volume together with George Talbot.

In the first article, "Montale on Svevo", Brian Moloney discusses Montale's critical contribution to the study of Svevo. He gives special attention to the 1961 address to the Circolo delle Arti e della Cultura of Trieste. Moloney emphasises how Montale's work on Svevo has been seminal for later criticism on the novelist. Elvio Guagnini ("Montale e Bazlen") examines Montale's relationship with Roberto Bazlen, and the fundamental influence the latter exerted on the Ligurian poet in conducting him to a wider, more European culture. He also paints a picture of the cultural scene of the Trieste of the twenties, providing useful information on Montale's relationship with Gerti Tolazzi and Giorgio Carmelich.

In "Dante, Montale and Miss Brandeis: A (partial) revisitacion of Montale's Dantism", Tom O'Neill, whilst acknowledging the significance of Gianfranco Contini for the large number of *dantismi* to be found in the texts of the thirties and forties, feels that rather than Contini, or even Singleton, the main inspiration for these intertextual allusions may be located in Montale's relationship with the American scholar Irma Brandeis. Charles Burdett ("Montale and Cardarelli: A Two-Way Traffic of Influence") identifies thematic and lexical similarities in a selection of lyrics concerning mortality by Cardarelli and Montale. Burdett asserts that his comparative approach to two very different poets helps to elucidate the distinctive characteristics of each. It is pleasing to read work on Cardarelli: a poet who produced such exquisite texts as "Sera di Liguria" and yet has been largely ignored by the most eminent critics.

A milestone in studies on Montale and Italian literary criticism in general is undoubtedly D'Arco Silvio Avalle's "*Gli orecchini*" di Montale (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1965). In his subtle contribution "Spazi d'acqua, specchi e parvenze in Montale (con alcuni echi danteschi)" Giuseppe Antonio Camerino is inspired by Avalle's study of the mirror to trace the theme of the area of water as a mirror and associated *topoi* in its "graduale processo di analogie da uno stadio fenomenico ad uno metafisico" (68). A central theme in *Montale: Words in Time* is the influence of Dante. However, the intertextual citations are not always entirely convincing. Here Camerino quotes from "Marezzo": "Guarda il mondo del fondo che si profila / come sformato da una lente" and then states "Sono versi che riconvertono in rappresentazione sensibile un'evidente reminiscenza del *Paradiso* dantesco (XXIV, 70-71): 'Le profonde cose che mi largiscono qui la lor parvenza / a li occhi di là giù son si ascose, / [. . .]'" (62).

In "Corno inglese?" Antonio Pagliaro examines the history of the eponymous poem, and the visual and acoustic elements that are an inherent part of it. In the course of his analysis he makes some acute linguistic observations. "Il problema del tempo negli *Ossi di seppia* di Montale" by Alfredo Luzi summarises modern philosophic conceptions of time, and then proceeds to explore a relevant selection of texts from *Ossi di seppia* underlining "[I]'angoscia che prende l'individuo quando nella lotta col tempo egli viene sorpreso o superato" (80).

Clodagh Brook's dense study "The Montalian Object and Inexpressibility" offers a wealth of intelligent observations. Indeed, it is to be hoped that the excellent ideas introduced in her article will be more fully developed in a later, more extensive publication. Having distinguished between a physical object and its poetic equivalent, Brook explains how Montale creates certain poetic objects that simultaneously include the universal and the particular or, in terms associated with Duns Scotus, *natura*

communis and *haecceitas*. Taking issue with Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, she feels that the strength of Montale's poetic objects lies in their private nature, in the fact that without a *posteriori* explanations the reader is frequently unable to discover their original significance for the author. For Brook, Montale's use of private poetic objects is not a form of escapism, but in reality an effective way for the poet to express what would otherwise be inexpressible.

Felix Siddell's "Verticality in Montale" discusses movement upwards and downwards. Siddell contrasts the positive ramifications of ascent with the negative ones of descent. He notes how in the Montalean cosmos, in spite of any resistance, downward movement (symbolic of failed transcendence) is inevitable. In "Montale on the Rites and Rituals of Spring. 'La primavera hitleriana'", George Talbot reads a poem from "Silvae", the most discussed section of all of Montale's collections. His wide-ranging *lettura* provides some valuable new insights. He notes the tendency of readers to mistakenly interpret "golfo mistico" as only "mystic gulf", ignoring the meaning of "orchestra pit". He discusses the "inspired counterbalancing of satanic rites and sacred rituals" (114). However, the most interesting observation in this article regards the poem's musical context. Talbot notes how Montale quite deliberately describes the tragic scene that unfolds before his eyes in terms reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, since he was well aware that the modern masterpiece was a work that the Nazi government would have detested.

David Fairservice's "Hypothesis on Montale's *Memoria dei Poeti* in 'L'anguilla'" looks at possible sources for one of the most studied poems in Italian literature. Fairservice justly observes that Montale's statement "non sono mai stato un grande lettore di poesia" was in reality "a leg-pull or, in Montalian terms, a *depistamento*" (120). As possible influences he cites Saba, Ovid and Jiménez. Fairservice hypothesises that a little-known poem, "Le long-cours de l'anguille" by Pierre Guéguen, may have provided the ultimate stimulus for "L'anguilla".

Rossella Riccobono ("Further Reflections on the Theme of Death in the Poetry of Eugenio Montale. 'A mia madre', 'Voce giunta con le folaghe' and 'I morti'") emphasises how the dialectic immanence/transcendence is fundamental to Montale's poetry. Drawing on the short story "Sul limite" (*Farfalla di Dinard*) she observes that the Montalean defunct are represented in three phases. In "I morti" their situation differs little from that of the living, although it is worsened by the torture inflicted by reminiscence. On the other hand, in "Voce giunta con le folaghe" the dead are transformed into "the bearers of the truthful plenitude of existence, and the living, by comparison, are but shadows" (130). The dead reach a higher state by renouncing the immanent. Hence, in "A mia madre", the maternal figure, having abandoned almost all recollection of the previous world, transcends to Elysium.

In recent years the somewhat meagre corpus of criticism on the post-*Bufera* production has been notably enriched by some excellent studies. Éanna Ó Ceallacháin is recognised as the one of the leading authorities on the later Montale. His article "'Un lungo inghippo': The 'Other' World in Montale's Later Works" investigates the relationship between the "io" and God ("l'Altro"). Ó Ceallacháin demonstrates how, although the interlocutor is still a "tu", the "Xenia" poems provide a sort of template for the later texts regarding God. The poems from *Satura* to *Altri versi* present the ultimate deity as an indifferent and often hostile creature whose very existence is frequently undermined. (Here the reader cannot help but be reminded of many of Caproni's later

poems). Ó Ceallacháin traces his theme diachronically, but the plethora of examples offered does not point to a large degree of development in the archetype. Romano Luperini in "Note sull'allegorismo novecentesco. Il caso di Montale" (*Paragone* 460 (1988): 54-76) observes that Montale's later poetry shifts from "allegoria piena" to "allegoria vuota". Ó Ceallacháin suggests that the static archetype of God to be found in the final collections is a characteristic example of this process. The allegory of God can only symbolise the senselessness of modern times: "The presentation of this monologue of the elderly agnostic, railing against a God in which he does not believe, constitutes the last allegorical figuration of the absurdity of the contemporary world, of its surrender to non-meaning" (154). The publication of Ó Ceallacháin's monograph on the later poetry of Montale is eagerly awaited.

Walter Musolino's "The *Wuthering Heights* of 'La casa dei doganieri'. The Parallel Universes of Emily Brontë and Eugenio Montale" is as revealing about Emily Brontë's masterpiece as it is about Montale's poetry. Musolino describes similarities in the relationship between Heathcliff and the dead Cathy, and the Montalean "io" and his defunct loved ones (Annetta and Mosca). Finally, Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin in "Alone and Palely Loitering: Echoes and Influences in Montale's 'Merigiare'?" looks at possible sources for one of Montale's most famous poems. He cites Dante, Ovid, Pascal, La Fontaine, William Barnes, Keats and above all a passage from Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo* as possible influences. *Montale: Words in Time* is characterised by the importance most of its contributors attach to intertextuality. Since Ó Cuilleánáin's article provides a wealth of theoretical comments on this critical approach, it stands as a fitting conclusion to the collection. Ó Cuilleánáin observes: "[. . .] the search for sources and analogues, however tentative, can add layers of meaning to our reading of a literary text" (174). Some of Ó Cuilleánáin's suggestions for intertextual sources are indeed tenuous (for example, his allusion to Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"). He whimsically describes certain of his parallels as belonging to the "Hound of the Baskervilles school of literary detection" that "could cause one to wake up screaming" (180). Undoubtedly, the approach advocated by Ó Cuilleánáin may easily run the risk of going too far. Ó Cuilleánáin quotes "con la mano" from the ending of Leopardi's "A Silvia" and wonders whether Montale genuinely had Leopardi in mind when writing the last sentence of "La bufera," or if the later poet's repetition of the phrase is simply an example of "a commonplace and therefore meaningless word-pattern" (175). Harold Bloom succinctly summarises the nature of both poetry and criticism: "Every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem. A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety. Poets' misinterpretations or poems are more drastic than critics' misinterpretations or criticism, but this is only a difference in degree and not at all in kind. There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations, and so all criticism is prose poetry" (Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd ed. Oxford: UP, 1997: 94-95).

Montale: Words in Time concludes with a useful bibliography of relevant publications both inside and outside of Italy compiled by George Talbot. The volume as a whole is a very important contribution to studies on Eugenio Montale. The impressive diversity of its content and the variety of critical methodologies it adopts render *Montale: Words in Time* an essential acquisition for every library.

John Butcher, *University College London*

**Mario Luzi. *Phrases and Passages of a Salutory Song*. Trans. Luigi Bonaffini.
Toronto: Guernica, 1999.**

Frase e incisi di un canto salutare (Milano: Garzanti, 1990) represents perhaps the most aesthetically accomplished collection of poems in Mario Luzi's long career as a poet, dramatist, and essayist. The themes of utmost importance to the poet, such as the nature of faith and reality, the meaning of human history, and the relation of the written word to the actual world, are expressed here with a penetrating vigor and often dazzling complexity of language, which may present a translator with great challenges.

Luigi Bonaffini's very skilled and finely nuanced translation stays close to the language of the original, in terms of lexical and syntactical choices, often reaching truly admirable results. One may already see these results in the opening poem of the book, "Auctor," where the lyric intensity of Bonaffini's language matches almost that of Luzi. Equally flawless, in terms of phrasing and the ability to capture the poet's style, is a translation (42) in the section entitled "Angelica," as well as other poems in this part of the book, for instance, "Where was she with her mind?" (44), "Thorn, latent thorn [. . .]" (45), and "Don't lose life's thread [. . .]" (55). Worth mentioning is also the translation (79) which brilliantly captures the flow of Luzi's poem while remaining faithful to the text. Bonaffini also accomplishes a great result in matching Luzi's intensely felt account of his visit to Recanati (107) in the section entitled "Prodigality."

Bonaffini's translations contain certain technical oversights, which, however, hardly distract the reader's attention from what is otherwise an impeccable, and thoroughly enjoyable approach to Luzi's poetry. For example, the verse "Tesi, più tesi i filamenti dell'addio" (89) is missing from the translation. In another instance, Bonaffini's decision regarding the translation of the verb "distinguere" in one poem (81) seems dubious to this reviewer. Whereas Luzi, in the verse in question, uses the verb in the present tense, to express the inability of his poetic self to distinguish or perceive clearly, Bonaffini's chooses to translate "[. . .] distinguo io, distinguo miseramente io [. . .]" with "[. . .] or is that distinction mine, wretchedly mine" (81), which changes the meaning of Luzi's verse.

It is unfortunate that, except for the blurb on the back cover, this volume comes with no introduction or notes that would help the reader, unfamiliar with Luzi, to appreciate the poet, his significance for Italian literature of the *Novecento*, and his place within European poetry. But these may be considered only small shortcomings. In fact, Bonaffini's translation of a complete work of the Florentine author, only the third one available in English, is a very commendable and important effort toward making the poetry of Italy's greatest living poet more accessible to English-speaking audiences.

Predrag Kovacevic, *Indiana University, Bloomington*

**Dacia Maraini. *Stowaway on Board*. Trans. Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Offredi
Poletto. West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera, 2000. Pp. 63.**

Originally published in Italian in 1996, this is the first English translation of what is a short but substantial non-fiction work by Dacia Maraini, destined to provide non-Italian speakers with a better understanding of her *oeuvre*. It participates in what seems to be a recent trend among second-generation feminists, such as Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan, to write reflective essays on topical feminist issues in an attempt to reassess the progress that the movement has made in the last thirty years. Maraini reconsiders what have been the classic societal problems for feminist studies (abortion, incest,

pornography, body image, prostitution, sexual violence, etc.), but with a twist. She exposes each topic as problematic *within feminism* itself. As she sees it, these subjects are difficult for women, and it is nearly impossible to present a united political front. How does one both defend sex workers involved in prostitution and pornography, and at the same time labor to shut down those industries? Focusing attention on such discrepancies produces the questions that feminism still needs to confront. Throughout the text, Maraini employs literary examples to illustrate her point, which is typical of her *modus operandi*. However, it is especially effective here when dealing with what are difficult and painful topics because it moves the reader beyond the obvious.

Stowaway on Board is divided into two parts. The first contains a letter addressed to Enzo Siciliano (originally published in *Nuovi Argomenti*, January-March 1996) in which she describes her thoughts on abortion and motherhood by means of an allegorical comparison to *The Secret Sharer* by Joseph Conrad. This analogy also provides her book's title as she likens pregnancy to "the stowaway on Conrad's ship who is welcomed on board by the captain" (4). The captain of the ship has a choice whether or not to rescue the castaway who, as it turns out, is a criminal. Maraini compares this situation to motherhood and the decisions made by women when considering abortion. She explains that for her the question is complicated by the fact that she herself lost a desired child in the seventh month, and thus her opinions are informed by her own experience. The relationship between mother and child is a "secret," as the title of Conrad's novel suggests, because of its intense and unique nature. "It is the secret of a bond born of a deep carnal knowledge, unutterable, which precedes reason" (7). Maraini also reflects on the nature of motherhood and how, "in the culture of fathers, [it] has been transformed into an extremely passive event" (9). She finds it ironic that most abortions occur in societies where birth control is most readily available: in the modern technological world. "The wish to have an abortion starts with the advent of prosperity, at the point where infant mortality has been reduced to a minimum and where women must make a dramatic choice between the distorted demonstration of their phantom reproductive power and the need to conform to the rules of the job market" (11). Maraini describes a fundamental historical and cultural contradiction.

If this is how the situation is today, she wonders if it were always so, and muses on whether abortion would exist at all in a woman's world. Instinctively, women recall that in ancient cultures the ability to give birth instilled power in women and differentiated them from men. However, in the modern world, women are forced to abort because of a lack of true agency. While Maraini has fought to keep abortion legal, she posits that abortion does not truly represent freedom. Abortion, she claims, is the ugly weapon of a woman faced with no alternatives, like a soldier at war. "With this desperate and self-damaging weapon, women have, in a distorted, wretched and dangerous way, resisted the will of others" (13). She sees the scientific world of contraception and abortion as complicit with age-old attempts to control reproduction and female sexuality. "Churches, nations, established powers have always claimed to be the regulators of the sexual body, dictating how and when to mate, how and when to reproduce" (15).

Whereas her writing on abortion presents a complex argument, the issue of fatherhood remains rather unexamined. In her letter, Maraini promised Enzo Siciliano a piece on both abortion and fatherhood. At first, she claims that it is easier to write about fathers since she has already said so much on abortion. However, her thoughts on abortion are more profound and incisive than what she has to say of fatherhood. Limited

to the final pages of the letter, her observations are disturbing and inadequate. Whether intentional or not, her discourse on fathers remains connected to that of abortion. Her argument appears to be that if women are forced into abortion because of their disempowerment, then it is without a doubt the fault of fathers. Again she refers to a literary analogy to describe the father-daughter relationship, this time Kleist's story of the Marquise of O, whose father is so incestuously enamoured and possessive of his daughter as to eventually cause her more harm than good.

In its entirety, the opening letter stands as a question, an account of the trauma that is caused by misunderstanding the body. It also sets the style and theme to be used throughout the text; discussing the body through allegory. The second part of the book, entitled "Body Against Body," is subdivided into seven short sections each having a title with a reference to the body. The first mini-essay begins the journey with a philological investigation into the significance of the word "corpo," which the translators wisely have left in its original in order to retain its rich meaning. *Corpo* is the physical human body, and also a "body" of work. It contains a duality of being both the passive object of desire, and also the active source of creativity. Maraini expresses this twofold condition in her discussion of the difficult love/hate relationship women have to their bodies. "It is the concept of perfection that torments, wounds, spoils the relationship every woman has with her own body" (27).

From the trauma of women aspiring to a predetermined vision of female beauty, Maraini easily segues into the next section where the topic is the young girl as an object of desire. "Little Girl's Body" reiterates her previous argument in the letter concerning girls as the sexually desirable objects of their fathers, but here extends it to a universal desire of men. If young girls do feel sexual desires themselves, that impulse is quickly channeled into socially acceptable forms. Maraini uses the example of the young women who frequent a nightclub near her apartment. Unlike the boys who are casual and boisterous, the girls squeeze themselves into high-heeled shoes and miniskirts, and muffle their giggles. "[M]any of these young girls seem completely different at school or at the university, confidently pursuing their emancipation. Wearing old pants and sneakers, with their hair tied back, they seem oblivious to themselves and their beauty" (34). The nightclubs dramatically transform even the most independently minded girls, when at night they feel obliged to conform to the stereotype of female beauty.

In the next section, "The Pornographic Body," Maraini asks "what is it that makes woman the accomplice of her sexual tyrant" (37)? In order to answer this startling question, she exposes yet another contradiction. As women seek sexual emancipation, they find themselves instead the object of sexual exploitation. Maraini focuses on how the search for pleasure is intricately linked to the search for pain. At the heart of this dichotomy lies a desire to reconnect the body to the spiritual in the notion that, "beneath that desperate and bitter search for pain, there is the search for God" (38). Maraini refers to ancient pre-Olympian mythology of a maternal culture where the link between the sexual female goddess and the power to procreate is the strongest. The female body was glorified as the holy site of creation. Pornography springs from its desecration.

"Divided Body, Body Double" explores the duplicitous language of the body. Maraini offers the example of a famous and beautiful woman journalist who visited a class she was teaching in Florence. Although the woman was very strong, intelligent, and successful, the students were distracted completely by her appearance. She was attired in a miniskirt, black stockings, and high heels, all of which served to draw attention away

from her words. The journalist was playing with two linguistic codes, that of the voice and that of the body, the latter of which has been mastered by women for centuries. Maraini insists that even when a woman thinks she can juggle both, the former always gives way to the latter.

"Body in a Window" relates Maraini's feelings the first time she walked through Amsterdam's infamous red-light district and saw women on display in a window like merchandise. She asks whether women are really in control of the selling of their own bodies, and deconstructs the myth that prostitutes enjoy or even experience pleasure in their work. Some feminists have fought for better treatment of prostitutes and the legalization of the industry. But Maraini rhetorically questions whether we should "be satisfied with the normalization of evil" (52).

"Violated Body" approaches the subject of rape and sexual violence. What is contradictory here is that despite years spent on making the public aware of domestic abuse and fighting sexual violence, sexual assault is on the rise.

While most of *Stowaway on Board* deals with the violence done to the woman's body, the final section, "Happy Body," offers a glimpse of hope by considering what it is that makes the body happy. That is, it rethinks Freud's inquiry into what women want. Again Maraini maintains that inevitably the question of female corporeal pleasure continues to be linked to pain and sadism. In order to answer the question, women need to explore their own sexuality since it is all that stands between them and true happiness. "But the awareness that the sexual body is the site of historical deprivation and of social malaise is perhaps the beginning of that happiness that is so close to our hearts" (63).

Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Offredi Poletto have constructed an eloquent and precise translation of a consequential work making it accessible to non-Italian speaking teachers and students interested in both Dacia Maraini and in women's studies. An introduction would have been very useful for those unfamiliar with Maraini's work, and could have explained the genesis of its composition. Bordighera Press is justly self-described as "a new kind of publishing house dedicated to promoting innovative and provocative work on Italian and Italian American literature and culture." They have done well to sponsor what is certain to be received as an insightful piece by one of Italy's most important contemporary writers. Maraini's noteworthy book highlights the contradictions inherent in feminist issues and thus offers a new way of thinking about them.

Dawn Green, *Stanford University*

Achille Serrao. *Cantalèsia. Poems in the Neapolitan Dialect (1990-1997)*. Ed. and trans. Luigi Bonaffini. New York: Legas, 1999. Pp. 156.

Cantalèsia. Poems in the Neapolitan Dialect (1990-1997) is the fifth book in Legas's "Italian Poetry in Translation Series" that includes translations of Dante and several collections of dialect poetry. *Cantalèsia* offers the English-speaking reader the opportunity to sample an ample selection of poems in dialect written by Achille Serrao. Achille Serrao (b. 1936) published his first collection of poetry in 1968 with the title *Coordinata popolare*. He has also written narrative works. In 1990 he published his first book of poems in dialect, *Mal'aria*. Since then he has continued to write in dialect: *O ssupierchio* (1993), *A cannatura* (1993, translated into English by Luigi Bonaffini in 1995), *Cecatèlla* (1995), and *Semmènta vèrde* (1996). He has also edited *Via terra: antologia di poesia neodialettale* (1992), now available in a new edition with translations

into English, edited by Achille Serrao, Luigi Bonaffini, and Justin Vitiello (New York, Legas, 1999). The work of Serrao has attracted the attention of many of the major figures in the field of Italian dialect poetry including Franco Loi, Franco Brevini, and Giacinto Spagnoletti.

Serrao writes in the dialect of Caivano. The small town in Campania, once an Oscan settlement dating back to the fifth century B.C., lies halfway between Naples and Caserta. Originally a rural farming district, in recent years it has witnessed the increasing presence of industry. Although dialects in Campania mainly manifest a high degree of homogeneity, there are important differences throughout the territory. The language of Caivano is a long way from the illustrious Neapolitan tradition that began to blossom in the late nineteenth century. It is "phonetically much harsher, less harmonious than the Neapolitan standard" (147). Whilst Serrao's verse exhibits a definite musicality, it is a syncopated often harsh melody mirroring the reality he seeks to describe.

Cesare Vivaldi has mentioned T. S. Eliot in relation to Serrao. Perhaps there is something of the earlier Eliot in Serrao's precise description of a mundane, apparently meaningless life that hopelessly trudges onwards without any evident purpose. In one of the epigraphs to the collection, Serrao quotes Ferdinando Russo: "A vita è chesta! Accumpagnammo 'a morta! [. . .] Nu muzzunciello 'int'a na pippa corta, / e cammina, e strascina, e vai 'nzeffunno!" ("This is what life is! Keeping death company! [. . .] A pinch of tobacco in a stubby pipe / and you go on, you trudge on, and in the end you sink" (all translations in this review are by Luigi Bonaffini). In "'A cannatura," the first group of poems in *Cantalèsia*, the world is displayed in its tragic process of entropy. Serrao refutes the classic Neapolitan vista, the land of sun and sea, to meander through a wintry landscape dominated by driving rain and brisk winds, with only the occasional ray of sunlight. Serrao's personal outlook is not so much one of grim pessimism as of profound melancholy, of "pecundria." The poet escapes total dejection by taking refuge in the day-to-day life of his town and the dense mindscape of private nostalgia. Di Giacomo appears in the first poem, "'O puntone." The opening lines, "A nu puntone chiove, stracqua, 'o sole / pe' scagno [. . .] e chiove schiove," contain an obvious echo of the first sentence of "Marzo": "Marzo: nu poco chiove / e n'ato ppoco stracqua:/ torna a chiovere, schiove, / ride 'o sole cu ll'acqua." Yet, although Serrao shares Di Giacomo's belief in the sad caducity of existence, he is nonetheless a world away from the sublime musicality of the "ariette."

In its unrelenting process of massification and globalisation, industrialised capitalist society has ruthlessly eroded the particular in favour of the homogenous universal. Ancient ways of life are vanishing at an unprecedented velocity. In Italy one of the most evident manifestations of the onslaught of the modern is the gradual disappearance of dialect. At the unification of Italy, the percentage of people able to speak standard Italian was in the low single figures. Now, only a tiny proportion of the population is unfamiliar with the national language. In 1988 a survey in the *Bollettino della Doxa* reported that 34.4% of the population claims to speak exclusively in Italian whilst 60.4% says it uses Italian at home, at least on some occasions (Martin Maiden, *A Linguistic History of Italian*, London, Longman, 1995, 9-10). One suspects that amongst those who sometimes speak dialect, many are younger members of the family who employ it in order to communicate with much older relatives who are not at ease in standard Italian. With the passing of time, this practise will obviously tend to disappear.

Since the seventies there has been a dramatic increase in Italy of what is sometimes called "neodialect" poetry. A fundamental reason for this cultural event is the general recognition on the part of Italian writers that local dialects are for the most part destined to vanish within the near future. (It would be wholly erroneous to suggest that the purpose of the new writers in dialect is to reach a wider, less educated public. Indeed, the language and style they employ can be of such a rarefied or antiquated nature that the text may be as abstruse to residents of the particular area as it is to the general Italian reader). Serrao's verse is pervaded by nostalgia for the ancient "lengua." This is especially apparent in several poems from the second section fittingly entitled "E pparole." Language is a precious resource that the people have conserved for what seems an eternity: "[. . .] piula si chiamma / 'e ccose, fa mill'anne / che sta caterbia pe' ll'annumenà / 'nzerra cràstule 'e lengua [. . .]" ("they warble when they call things, / for ages this multitude has been saving / shards of tongue to name them [. . .]") ("Vide che d'a muntagna ..."). In "Na rosa rosa" dialect is described as a shirt to be worn during the cold season of oppressive massification. The subject emphasises his deep reliance on it and exhorts: "*sona chitarra sona ne'è rummasa / na corda*" ("play guitar play we still have / one string left").

"O ssupierchio," the third section, is pervaded by a sense of the past. It contains some moving poems dedicated to family members and, in particular, to the poet's dead father. "A cantalèsia d'è criature nove," partly an ironic rendition of St Francis's "Laudes creaturarum", shows Serrao at his darkest best. As the other birds fly away, a fledgling muddies its wings. Unable even to lift its eyelids, it implores its maker: "*Signò ca staje llà 'ncoppa / accusì luongo [. . .] ca stajie accusì luntano... / Signò, na mano...*" ("Lord who are / so high, so far away [. . .] who are so far away... / Lord, a hand..."). In his introduction, Pietro Gibellini describes the fourth section, "Cecatèlla," as "marked by a more meditated, disenchanted reflection that only the poet's heuristic bewilderment prevents one from defining gnomic" (14). Indeed, Serrao's verse shares with many recent writers in dialect a willingness to go beyond "traditional" themes of dialect verse (the old ways of life, the common people, nature) and affront issues of an existential or metaphysical character more typical of poetry in standard Italian.

The original poetry in *Cantalèsia* concludes with the fifth section, "C'era na vota." The title of this section reiterates the value Serrao attributes to nostalgia, a central theme of all his poetry. Serrao demonstrates his imaginative virtuosity in his description of classic poetic icons like the moon. If "Chill'anno" reads: "munnata è na cepolla 'a luna" ("peeled onion of a moon"), in "Semmentà vèrde (Sunatèlla a ddoje voce)" the moon becomes far more sinister: "janara è 'a luna cu' ll'uocchie lupégne" ("the moon is a witch with wolfish eyes"). The final section of *Cantalèsia* presents translations into the dialect of Caivano of some of the best-known poems by Catullus and Giuseppe Gioachino Belli. (One suspects that Serrao identifies particularly well with the pessimistic outlook on life of the latter). The book ends with a short biographical note on the author, a pronunciation guide, and a glossary.

Since one of the principal *raison d'être* of recent dialect poetry is to immortalise a specific language and its inherent musicality, it is inevitable that any attempt to translate it will always be to some extent a failure. Luigi Bonaffini, an experienced translator of modern Italian-language poets such as Campana, Luzi, and Sereni, is well-known for his work in the field of dialect poetry, including translations of Achille Serrao and Giose Rimanelli, and important anthologies such as *Dialect Poetry of Southern Italy* (New

York, Legas, 1997). In his latest translation of Serrao, Bonaffini makes a laudable effort to preserve something of the original whilst manifesting a great degree of flexibility in his poetic solutions. In a note he explains: "To try to render into English the inherent phonic resistance of most of Serrao's poetry (which however does offer many notable exceptions, in verses of great elegance and lightness) would entail a forced search for consonantal sounds and broken, antimelodic rhythms, resulting in an artificial — and non-existent — English. I have tried instead to capture the underlying basic tonality of the text, the intense melancholy that subtends the (only) apparent impersonality of the poetic voice" (147). On occasions Bonaffini permits himself a considerable liberty. In "Accussi trase vierno..." the translation of "mmane chiare" as "gossamer hands" may seem rather free although Bonaffini might justify the adjective "gossamer" by the appearance of "e ffeleinie" ("cobwebs") at the beginning of the poem. However, leaving aside such minor observations, Bonaffini provides an excellent translation of some difficult texts. *Cantalèsia. Poems in the Neapolitan Dialect (1990-1997)* will be of interest both to those who follow recent trends in Italian poetry and to those concerned with Italian dialects. It is to be hoped that both its writer and its translator continue their admirable work.

John Butcher, *University College London*

Roberto M. Dainotto. *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.

Roberto M. Dainotto's book, *Place in Literature*, presents a groundbreaking, courageous argument. Dainotto questions the wisdom of one of the most prevalent impulses in contemporary literary and cultural criticism, that is to say, the constant fetishizing of the categories of space, place, locality, and topology. "What have we lost," he asks, "by our 'getting back to place'" (2)? He contends by way of answer that since the Industrial Revolution, the romance with the jargon of location has come at the cost of historical sobriety, as writers and intellectuals increasingly have abandoned the ideological vantage point of history for the "natural" foundation of place. As a consequence, these thinkers seem to have assented to the dubious idea of discrete, monadic social universes that coexist through the multicultural alchemy of something called "topology." In his introduction, Dainotto offers an incisive analysis of the recent critical tendency to privilege the discourse of "positionality." What may we read behind the very politically correct concern for the local and the regional? Although regionalism appears to provide a solution to our fear of globalization and a vocabulary of infinite sociological nuances and gradations, the adoption of such a terminology might prove to be a suspect strategy from a political point of view. A pastoral or idealized view of the local is incompatible with the demands of criticism in so far as the idealization presumes a changeless local nature, or essence, that elides historical differences. Regionalism thus threatens to displace the essentializing assumptions of nationalism in favor of a superficially innocuous nomenclature that appears to be compatible with the decolonization of literature.

Yet all too often, as Dainotto observes, the only alternative to the artificial unity of the nation imagined by the language of regionalism is an equally static, if allegedly natural, collective identity. With this point in mind, *Place in Literature* represents a bracingly skeptical attempt to ascertain whether, and to what extent, regionalism provides a more viable framework than nationalism for the interpretation of literature. Throughout

his analysis, Dainotto subtly demonstrates how a poetics of regionalism ultimately may evade or impede, rather than advance, the interests of those on the cultural margins: "Regionalism remains primarily the metaphor of a desire for an original and free literariness that has survived the instrumental impositions of nationalism and politics alike" (9). He rightfully distrusts the pastoral rhetoric that informs the regionalist sensibility because it aspires to "survive" politics. It betokens a superficial concern for otherness that, in fact, empties alterity of any problematic particularity, thereby secretly facilitating escape from the more worrisome historical horizon.

Place in Literature is, in other words, a very important book, one that may be seen to complement and advance Fredric Jameson's analysis of the category of space in postmodern culture through relentless and pointed questioning of the basic assumptions of a certain kind of postcolonial discourse. The bravery of Dainotto's undertaking may be discerned in his exposure of the disturbing tendency of contemporary criticism to opt when possible for "pure," neutral concepts, such as those of place or community, rather than to face historically and politically more difficult hermeneutic tasks. The use of the notion of region, of an organic unit of people and land, as a replacement for the notion of class in post-Marxist analysis has led to a critical dead-end. Faith in the survival of past traditions and cultural roots — in the *genius loci* — is a prominent feature of the regionalist outlook, and too often consorts with a belief in ethnic purity.

Dainotto pursues his project by reconstructing an ideal genealogy of the literature of regionalism that stretches from Industrial-Revolution-era England to late twentieth-century Europe. In particular, he focuses on the work of Thomas Hardy, Elizabeth Gaskell, D. H. Lawrence (in his specific role as the translator of Giovanni Verga), Giovanni Gentile, and Martin Heidegger. Throughout his adroit readings of these authors' writings, Dainotto consistently undermines the suggestion that regionalism may be regarded in strictly aesthetic terms as a literary genre, and reveals the ideological motivations underlying a method of reading that responds to the crisis of modernity by means of a "pastoralization of social divisions" (30). His account of Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, which he identifies as the archetypal regionalist novel, is a brilliant, sustained exploration of the opposition between the supposed ugliness of the city and beauty of the rustic countryside. Behind this antagonism, Dainotto identifies the fear of the gradual fading of a humanist culture that has been rendered obsolescent by the Industrial Revolution, an anxiety that Dainotto proves to be crucial as well to the reading of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South*: "If the Industrial Revolution has raised 'the idea of class' [. . .] the antithetical idea of community (which rhetorical tradition recalls through the commonplace of the south) is called on to sedate social discontent and tension" (96).

The chapter dedicated to Lawrence's translation of Verga's *Cavalleria rusticana* displays an original and sophisticated approach to what Dainotto describes as the therapeutic value of regionalism. He treats the British novelist's ambition to translate Verga's dialect into an invented idiom — the imaginary linguistic locus of a beneficent "regionalism" — as betraying the belief "that difference can be translated into our own" (102). The final chapters emphasize the dire political significance of a regionalism that presents itself as an alternative or remedy to the crisis of modernity. Dainotto's examination of Giovanni Gentile's work shows how, in direct contrast to the internationalism of the Communist movement, Gentile's brand of Italian fascism perpetually resorted to the therapeutic trope of the southern soil, where the "ideal unity of

the Italian nation [. . .] will be realized by Gentile, Minister of Education, as a pervasive form of regionalism" (153). Following this investigation of the fascist impulses within regionalist discourse, the last chapter daringly addresses the reactionary consequences of Heidegger's "provincial" and pastoral metaphysics of Being: "Far from being an aberration of an otherwise respectable desire for place, Heidegger's provincial nationalism — like Gentile's own particular nationalism — is nothing less than the logical product of a metaphysics of place" (171).

Place in Literature, written with sparkling *brio* and lucidity, might look like an untimely watershed in an age of "instinctive" multiculturalism, but its contribution could not be more valuable. Dainotto's book succeeds in demystifying the rhetoric of authenticity on which the regionalist imagination depends, conclusively showing that the question of identity must be addressed within the labyrinthine space of the political arena, not the "organic" domain of the local.

Alessia Ricciardi, *Northwestern University*

Hermann W. Haller. *The Other Italy: The Literary Canon in Dialect*. Toronto: UP, 1999. Pp. 377.

In describing Pier Paolo Pasolini's legacy in contemporary Italian culture, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo has observed: "Il nostro attuale interesse per la poesia dialettale moderna in Italia, la nostra coscienza della sua pari dignità (e insieme della sua potenziale diversità) rispetto a quella in lingua, devono allo scavo erudito e critico di Pasolini quanto a nessun altro" (*La tradizione del Novecento*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1987, 440).

It would not be an exaggeration to extend Mengaldo's remarks on Pasolini to the author of the book under review here. In the North American context, our current and future interest in Italian dialect poetry — and now with *The Other Italy* — in dialect theatre and in dialect prose, owes more to the erudite and critical excavations of Hermann W. Haller than to anyone else.

The Other Italy: The Literary Canon in Dialect forms a diptych with its distinguished predecessor, *The Hidden Italy: A Bilingual Edition of Italian Dialect Poetry* (Detroit, Wayne State UP, 1986). In placing this new work in its proper context, the words of another Italian writer, Italo Calvino, come to mind. The brilliant novelist and editor of *Le fiabe italiane* remarked on the influence of Pasolini's anthology of popular poetry, *Il canzoniere italiano*, on his own project of collecting and transcribing Italian folktales, a collection that opened a window onto the Mediterranean imagination. In a letter to Pasolini (1 March 1956), Calvino writes: "[. . .] da tempo volevo scriverti quanto il *Canzoniere italiano* mi sia piaciuto, quanto lo stimi un libro bello e importante. La scelta è di una bellezza davvero che supera ogni aspettativa e speranza. Me lo sono letto tutto a poco a poco, e ogni tanto restavo a bocca aperta. [. . .] La tua scelta è di una grande intelligenza poetica. [. . .] Ci sono quelle specie di ritrattini delle varie regioni attraverso i loro canti, che sono bellissimi (e offrono un interessantissimo spunto di confronto a me per le fiabe). [. . .] Dunque, io ti volevo dire questo, che il tuo non è soltanto un importante libro sulla poesia popolare italiana, ma è un importante libro sull'Italia e un importante libro sulla poesia" (P. P. Pasolini, *Lettere 1955-1975*, II, ed. Nico Naldini, Torino, Einaudi, 1988, 175-76).

In a similar fashion, it would not be an exaggeration to say that *The Other Italy* is not only an important book about Italian dialect poetry, theatre, and prose, but it is an

important book about Italy, about the richness of her literary traditions, and about the remarkable diversity of her dialects. Most important, the book succeeds admirably in achieving its ambitious and lofty aim, as Haller puts it in the preface, "to make a contribution towards a deeper understanding of pluralism as a resource and treasure" (IX).

In addition to being about pluralism, and about literature, this book is about language. *The Other Italy* historicizes each and every dialect tradition from the emergence of dialect literature in the Renaissance until the present. Moreover, by foregrounding the language perspective, Haller provides a series of historical essays, or "ritrattini" to use Calvino's term for Pasolini's method of presenting popular poetry from a regional viewpoint. Haller's "little portraits" of each dialect tradition, when seen in the aggregate, form a history of literary expression in what another linguist has called "the tongues of Italy." In this way, *The Other Italy* makes it possible to visualize and to comprehend more fully the importance of the dialects and literary expression in dialect to Italian civilization.

Organized around twin coordinates of time and space, *The Other Italy* establishes the historical canon of literary production in all of the various regions. In the words of the MLA selection committee, which awarded this book the 1998 Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize in Italian Literary Studies, "*The Other Italy* presents an impressively rich array of authors and works that are largely unknown to scholars of Italian studies. [. . .] Working meticulously and imaginatively, the author has set out to categorize the texts historically and linguistically and has provided a useful selective bibliography. [. . .] It is an extremely valuable reference work for scholars and students" (jacket cover).

Having attempted to place Haller's work in a broad critical context, I would like to briefly highlight only three of the many elements that make it such an important contribution to Italian studies. First of all, not only are we introduced to a "rich array of authors and works that are largely *unknown*," in the words of the MLA committee (emphasis added), but many *well known* authors appear in a new light when we learn of their involvement with dialect traditions. In tracing the rich vein of literary expression in the Neapolitan dialect, for example, Haller begins with the *Epistola* that Boccaccio wrote in Neapolitan to Franceschino De' Bardi in 1339. In a similar vein, Pirandello's Sicilian writings gain in our estimation when we see them in the light of a literary tradition belonging to that island. So, too, with Basile, Goldoni, Belli, Porta, and Pasolini with regard to the respective dialect traditions in which they participate.

Second, the regions themselves emerge very clearly in their historical specificity. Haller provides assessments and comparisons that are very well drawn and that enrich our contemporary post-national or trans-national viewpoint on Europe. His description of Abruzzese and Molisan dialect literature, for example, and his characterization of l'Aquila as a literary centre, provides a case in point. "While early vernacular traces were found in Abruzzo already in the twelfth century, and two centuries later in Molise, a literary tradition may have existed in this region much earlier than its first attestation in 1465. In fact, a vernacular religious theatre tradition developed between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries around the centre of L'Aquila. During the Spanish rule of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Spanish became the official language, the Aquilejan literary tradition subsided, and only in the years of Enlightenment did Abruzzo once again participate in European culture, beginning with the Arcadian literary movement and intellectuals of the stature of Antonio Ludovico Antinori" (230).

Haller's historical description of this region's literature in dialect closes with a brief assessment of the contemporary expatriate poet, Giosè Rimanelli, and a reference to a recent anthology in English translation of Molisan poets by Luigi Bonaffini, Giambattista Faralli, and Sebastiano Martelli. In a similar fashion, each region and its dialect traditions in poetry, theatre, and prose receive a thorough and illuminating treatment. "La scelta," to say it with Calvino, "è di una grande intelligenza poetica." Moreover, Haller is always generous in his evaluations and inclusive in his range of authors. Furthermore, the book is enlivened by a sense of humour, a light touch in matters that might become pedantic if handled by a less nimble scholar. In fact, because Haller is able to evoke a literary work with a few deliberate brush strokes, *The Other Italy* is a pleasure to read.

Third, I value *The Other Italy* highly for its contribution to making Italian dialect theatre more accessible for future research. With the exception of Pirandello, the theatre seems to have become a neglected area of Italian studies. Italianists working in North America might want to consider giving more attention to this field. Haller's book, which also notes the effect of the cinema on dialect theatre, and the presence of the dialects in cinema, makes it possible for scholars to consider venturing forth into areas that hitherto have been forbidding if not inaccessible altogether.

In addition to Pasolini and Calvino mentioned above, Andrea Zanzotto comes to mind as a poet who has been deeply involved in some of the issues illuminated in *The Other Italy*. For example, in an essay entitled "Observations on the Meaning and the Situation of the Dialects in Italy in the Late Twentieth Century," Zanzotto writes: "[. . .] today less than ever do we know what *dialects* are, in their infinitesimal capillary movements, and what *languages* are, especially those tending toward a panterrestrial diffusion, nor how their destinies intersect" (*Peasants Wake for Fellini's Casanova*, ed. and trans. J. P. Welle and R. Feldman, Urbana, U of Illinois P, 1997, 87).

In the same essay, Zanzotto goes on to observe: "[. . .] the contact with dialects, killed but never dead, pinpoint in form but with linkages and echoes in the most incredible distances, is capable of framing [. . .] the most dazzling openings onto alterities, futures, active dissolvings. Dialect can have nothing to do with re-exhumations or embalmments 'as on the reservation.' It must be felt as a guide — beyond any hypothesis whatsoever concerning its destiny — to single out the signs of new realities that are pressing to emerge" (90).

Again, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Hermann W. Haller's new book serves as a guide. It provides a map. Not only does it shed light on what Zanzotto calls "the meaning and the situation of the dialects in Italy in the late twentieth century," but it illuminates their significance through the centuries. In conclusion, and to say it with Zanzotto, this new book "frames the most dazzling openings onto alterities." As European and Italian national and regional identities shift and become reconfigured in the new millennium, *The Other Italy* will remain an indispensable tool for understanding the historical dimensions of the diverse literary traditions in dialect that underpin those identities.

John P. Welle, *University of Notre Dame*

Franco Zangrilli. *Sicilia isola-cosmo. Conversazione con G. Bonaviri*. Ravenna: Longo, 1998. Pp. 126.

In una lunga introduzione che occupa un quarto dell'intero testo Zangrilli ci racconta la vita e l'opera dello scrittore al quale ha dedicato parecchi anni di lavoro.

Il tessuto autobiografico emerge nella produzione dello scrittore siciliano che fa di un unico, piccolo paese vicino a Catania dove nacque l'11 luglio 1924, il referente — ispiratore, diretto o indiretto, della sua scrittura. Lo Zangrilli, seguendo una linea cronologica, elenca e riassume la vasta produzione bonaviriana tentandone una classificazione non sempre accessibile vista la varietà e la complessità dei temi e degli stili Bonaviriani: “Guardando all'opera di Bonaviri ci si accorge che predominano i libri di narrativa. Di fatto però Bonaviri ha sempre scritto anche poesia, fin da ragazzo. Recentemente questi testi sono stati tutti raccolti in un volume mondadoriano dal titolo generale *Il dire celeste* (1993)” (33).

Lo Zangrilli sottolinea che qui come in opere precedenti “prevale l'idea della morte come integrazione dell'individuo nel cosmo” (34) e qui più struggente diventa il ricordo del suo mondo familiare, di Mineo, che pur assumendo di volta in volta nomi diversi, rimane “un paesaggio dell'anima, in cui armoniosamente si fondono mito e realtà” (16). Ritornano nella poesia come già nella prosa, “in un velo di melancolia”, il ricordo dei familiari morti, in particolare la figura della madre che “diventa lo strumento attraverso cui il poeta si “*intrica nella memoria dell'universo*” (35).

Lo Zangrilli presenta la sua intervista con Giuseppe Bonaviri come “una lunga e sostenuta conversazione di scavo, di indagine, di analisi, “una autoconfessione critica” (38) nata dalla completa familiarità dell'intervistatore con l'opera dell'intervistato e su questo ultimo punto non sussistono dubbi. Dalla conversazione tra critico e scrittore, emerge il contrasto, forse voluto, fra la semplicità delle domande e l'affascinante ricchezza di lingua, stile e contenuto delle risposte.

Anche il più sprovveduto lettore sarà catturato dalla personalità e dal mondo di Bonaviri così profondamente legato alla sua terra ed alle sue origini: “La mia matrice tuttora la cerco e la trovo a Mineo, nel suo ampio ambito di terre rupestri e vallate, nella sua tradizione, sebbene elettivamente contadina, di proliferanti mitopoiesi. Mineo è un cosmo di cultura” (42). Particolare rilevanza ha per lui la lingua femminile perché “diventa umbratile, emotiva, si porta appresso secoli di esperienze” (43). Non può dimenticare le cantilene materne “dalle quali si può trarre tessuto di parole ricreate sul filo della tenerezza d'una lingua femminile [...] che [...] si può individuare per trame e cordoni e umori in ogni regione e in ogni nazione” (44). Alle donne è rimasta, per Bonaviri, la capacità di trasmettere ai bambini “una carica iniziale” che definisce “ancestrale” (49). Mentre i nonni, a proposito dell'antico rapporto nonno-fiaba-bambino ora sono, agli occhi dello scrittore, trasmettitori della “loro esperienza della visione del mondo tecnologica ed economica” (49).

Alla richiesta di definire la sua poetica cosmica come arricchimento delle poetiche novecentesche, Bonaviri, che più volte ricorda quanto l'importanza del suo mestiere di medico gli ha dato “la dimensione inquieta di nonno del nostro tempo” (52), dichiara che la sua “ispirazione è di inserire l'uomo nel cosmo, di sviluppare il rapporto uomo-natura-cosmo dal livello di micro-storia a quello di macro-storia” (51).

Bonaviri è stato spinto alla scrittura da “questo grande amore” (61), “grande esempio” paterno (58) che gli fa amare “gli uomini come un fratello che li vede perdersi, e che sente di perdersi con loro, e che pure vorrebbe salvarli (e salvarsi con loro)” (61).

Riconosce che in lui esisteva una disposizione innata allo scrivere. Il seguirla gli dava piacere e gli permetteva di esplorare i labirinti umani e di "comunicare con altri" (68). Nella sua produzione vede "un'identità diversificante, o diversificabile" (74) perché "l'uomo è sempre un pozzo, ma se dentro vi gridi, vi parli, per echi e rifrangenze, la tua voce si modifica, non è la stessa; [...] là sotto c'è un rimbalzare diverso di echi e di immagini che fanno parte della molteplicità del tuo essere unico" (74). Bonaviri si considera "un viaggiatore rovesciato, cioè come uno che viaggia dentro i misteriosi labirinti di se stesso, fatti di memorie, di cinestemie, di desideri di ripescare e fare affiorare quant'è perduto per sempre. Viaggio in me e attorno a me, in una storia credo attorno fatta di millenni di storia di contadini, di povera gente, di miti, di odori, ecc." (85).

Sicilia isola-cosmo, pur essendo un testo informativo, è di piacevole lettura e raggiunge un duplice scopo nel suo duplice aspetto: presentazione completa dell'opera di Bonaviri e autocritica della stessa attraverso lo stile immaginario dell'autore. È quindi opera di iniziazione al suo mondo e alla sua poetica e di rivisitazione per una più completa e approfondita visione e comprensione della complessa e polivalente produzione di Bonaviri e del profondo mondo interiore che l'ha originata.

Rosalia Colombo Ascari, *Sweet Briar College*

Seminario sul racconto (Bagni, Capriolo, Celati, Guglielmi, Petrucci, Santi, Starnone, Veronesi). Ed. Luigi Rustichelli. West Lafayette (IN): Bordighera Inc., 1998. Pp. VIII-102.

Il libro, curato da Luigi Rustichelli, che vi ha raccolto le autorevoli relazioni presentate al *Seminario sul racconto* organizzato dall'Istituto Antonio Banfi di Reggio Emilia nell'ottobre-dicembre 1992, è più prezioso di quanto la presentazione voglia fare. Avverte Rustichelli: "Ogni relatore ha tenuto una lezione mattutina rivolta a studenti, e una conferenza pomeridiana rivolta agli insegnanti: i testi qui raccolti riproducono le conferenze pomeridiane, e sono stati rivisti dai rispettivi autori" (V).

Nella breve, acuta "Avvertenza" di Paolo Bagni che, insieme al seguente contributo di Guido Guglielmi costituisce la Parte prima del libro, sottotitolata "Teoria e Storia," viene ricordata l'affermazione di W. Benjamin relativa alla noia in quanto "culmine della distensione spirituale" e condizione necessaria del narrare. Poiché quella di Bagni è, appunto, un'avvertenza, porzioni di testo dei contributi che seguono vengono efficacemente riprese, accostate e discusse e culminano nell'espressione di una visione dell'arte narrativa: "non mi dispiace pensare ai racconti — scrive Bagni — come a curiosi esperimenti d'identità, fuochi d'artificio del caso e della genealogia" (4).

I modi diversi del narrare, il collocamento relativo dei generi letterari rispetto alla volontà dell'autore di costruire un grande scenario onnicomprensivo (come nel caso del romanzo ottocentesco) o di congiungere "una pluralità di incidenti narrativi" (6) (come è, invece, tipico del romanziere-narratore novecentesco) sono argomento del contributo di Guido Guglielmi ("Un'idea di racconto", 5-12). Guglielmi, che nella sua copiosa produzione scientifica ha esaminato a fondo la questione del rapporto tra narrazione breve e narrazione lunga, si spiega secondo un fattore strutturale. La peculiarità del romanzo novecentesco, definita per mezzo di un confronto-opposizione con il romanzo ottocentesco, a sua volta presentato come "una grande unità funzionale" (5), consiste nel rifiuto della via tracciata dai narratori dell'Ottocento ("Riassumere la totalità del mondo

in una prospettiva delle prospettive: questo è il grande mito dello scrittore dell'Ottocento", 6). Guglielmi porta alcuni esempi, che di seguito illustra: Gadda, dalla cui "officina narrativa [. . .] escono pezzi che trasmigrano da un libro a un altro, si combinano ogni volta diversamente, e sono in permanente elaborazione" (6); il Kafka de *Il processo* e la *Coscienza di Zeno* di Svevo, in cui si assiste a una dispersione della potenziale continuità della vicenda in episodi, ognuno dei quali "racconta l'intera vita del personaggio, la replica a partire da una particolare angolazione, la risolve in una somma di totalità parziali" (7). L'ultimo esempio su cui Guglielmi si sofferma è il racconto *Il fidanzato*, "di quello stupendo scrittore che è Antonio Delfini" (9). La tipologia narrativa novecentesca più raffinata viene dunque descritta da Guglielmi per mezzo di un parallelismo con le arti figurative: "Come nell'arte figurativa contemporanea la figura non sta nello spazio, ma costituisce lo spazio, così in questo tipo di narrazione il personaggio non sta nel tempo, ma lo costituisce. E ogni stazione narrativa – episodio o racconto – non si connette saldamente e logicamente all'altra, ma è lasciata alla sua libertà e sta per l'altra. Il divenire non è teleologico" (10).

La Parte seconda ha per sottotitolo "Gli scrittori, la scrittura." Vi si trova, per prima, una pregevole relazione di Gianni Celati ("Il narrare come attività pratica", 15-33). Secondo Celati lo sviluppo della cultura, che va da una maggiore raffinatezza di pensiero a una più rotonda presa di coscienza della propria realtà, diminuisce o uccide la disposizione al narrare, istintiva nello stadio pre-scolare. Celati difende la lettura in quanto fatto naturale, da esercitare spontaneamente; attacca, quindi, la narratologia: "Io non sto contestando che esistano delle regole narrative, ma sto mettendo in dubbio che queste regole siano un campo omogeneo di fenomeni, e non invece un insieme di pratiche sparse ed eterogenee — di tipo logico, linguistico metrico, ritmico, tonale, retorico, emblematico, sintattico ecc. — che ritroviamo nelle più varie attività, e in attività che normalmente non chiamiamo narrative, perché servono ad altri scopi" (17). Celati propende per il narrare in quanto pratica naturale, intrinseca a un universo linguistico che "fa parte" dell'apprendimento di una lingua e che si mantiene "sul filo della temporalità" (19). Il narratore sente e fa sentire "come tutto cambia ogni momento, e come in ogni momento si debbano usare le parole in un modo diverso, con accezioni diverse" (19). Sa che è impossibile fissare "un senso perpetuo e definitivo" (19). Alla relazione segue un ampio dibattito, in cui si portano in luce aspetti dell'attività narrativa, per chiudere con un confronto tra la narrazione antica ("La grande bellezza dei romanzi d'una volta è che c'erano molte voci", 31) e il romanzo contemporaneo, in cui l'autore prevede e controlla processi identificativi tra il lettore e i propri personaggi. Seguendo l'esempio della *compresenza delle voci* del romanzo antico, Celati afferma di accontentarsi di "produrre piccole meraviglie" (32). La sua testimonianza è registrata con incisività in questa sorta di appendice al suo contributo. Vi si trovano pagine di freschezza davvero non comune.

Come Gianni Celati, sono scrittori Paola Capriolo, Sandro Veronesi e Domenico Starnone, i cui scritti si susseguono nella seconda parte del libro.

L'intervento di Paola Capriolo ("L'astrazione e la maschera", 34-47) è una sorta di autorecensione, che include ampi brani delle sue opere. Ne emergono, per affermazione della stessa autrice, dichiarazioni di poetica, accompagnate da una definizione delle atmosfere da lei predilette: "i miei romanzi [. . .] sono accomunati dal fatto di essere antinaturalistici [. . .]. La loro dimensione è una dimensione astratta, volutamente priva di riferimenti precisi a un qualsiasi tempo o spazio determinato: molto spesso si svolgono nel passato, ma non in quello storico, bensì in una sorta di passato immaginario" (34).

L'allusione e l'evocazione si sostituiscono alle descrizioni precise, meticolose, tipiche del realismo. Anche perché, come dichiara la Capriolo, "il dualismo platonico, mondo vero e mondo apparente, idea e realtà, cede il posto a una visione monistica nella quale vi è un'unica realtà, e questa realtà coincide con il soggetto" (44).

Sandro Veronesi ("Tirchieria del racconto e generosità del romanzo", 48-59) non è convinto della resistenza e dell'autonomia del racconto breve. La sua esperienza di scrittore lo ha allontanato da questo genere letterario. Il racconto breve, scrive Veronesi, viene composto per "un motivo di economia di spazio del giornale" piuttosto che per "una vera e propria ragione autosufficiente" (49). Veronesi non trova nel racconto breve quella "disponibilità all'avventura narrativa, cioè al fatto di non sapere con certezza dove si approderà" (50) che è invece connaturata all'attività dello scrittore e alla maniera in cui egli la concepisce. Il racconto breve coincide spesso con un'idea soltanto, mentre nella composizione di un racconto lungo o di un romanzo, si richiede una disponibilità preventiva allo spreco delle idee creative: "proprio per il fatto che debbono incastrarsi le une nelle altre, quindi dovranno smussarsi, non potranno essere portate alle loro estreme conseguenze" (51). È interessante osservare con quale personalissima angolatura Veronesi ripercorra la tradizione narrativa italiana e la interpreti. Tale suo approccio prevede, da un lato, l'ammissione di una preferenza verso le opere, a scapito delle idee ("io continuo a preferire un'arte delle opere e non delle idee: [. . .] è l'idea che si deve piegare alle opere, e non viceversa", 52); dall'altra, prima di concludere, la riduzione dell'asprezza originale di un giudizio condannatorio contro il racconto breve ("ci sono [. . .] tanti romanzi che hanno al loro interno una gran quantità di racconti brevi. Ed è proprio ciò che io preferisco: amo cioè il racconto breve nel momento in cui lo rintraccio nel contesto di una narrazione più ampia", 55).

Domenico Starnone ("Il racconto, ovvero come essere disonesti con i fatti", 60-69) preferisce avvicinare la materia che è ragione del seminario, quindi del libro, con un approccio inconsueto. Riferisce, infatti, alcune annotazioni di vita quotidiana per aggiungere che il racconto nasce dal fatto quotidiano quando sia trattato dallo scrittore in maniera adeguata; ovvero, in maniera disonesta ("Occorrono le ali perché i fatti decollino e diventino racconto. Ciò che è realmente accaduto deve cedere alla disonestà del narratore perché il racconto diventi vero", 62). Meglio ancora gli riesce di spiegare che cosa si debba intendere per "disonestà" del narratore — vicina alla creatività piuttosto che alla falsificazione — riferendo della trasformazione che i fatti reali subiscono sotto la penna dello scrittore: "Comincio, per esempio, dalla casa della mia infanzia e — mettiamo — all'inizio quella sembra proprio la casa in cui una volta sono vissuto, quella la gente che ho frequentato, quella una frase realmente pronunciata. Ma basta poco e, già dall'interno delle prime righe, comincia a saltar fuori non la realtà dei fatti, ma altro. [. . .] La storia si sbarazza di tutto ciò che non le necessita e, per trovare la strada giusta, è disposta a passare sulle cose più sacre, sui brani meglio riusciti" (62). Il narratore non può fare a meno del fatto né del finale. Anche Gogol, scrive Starnone riprendendo Ejchenbaum, "era sempre a caccia di aneddoti" (63). Cioè, di fatti.

Il fatto cosiddetto "spicciolo", frequente nella vita di ogni giorno, deve essere orientato dal narratore verso un finale affinché assuma la coerenza della narrazione e, nel contempo, non deprima la ridondanza della vita reale, che è "abbondante, misteriosa e disordinata" (67). Starnone descrive la propria disillusione dinanzi ai primi racconti scritti da giovane, così privi, appunto, della "verità del racconto" ("il tono mi pareva sbagliato, era sempre pieno di falsità", 67). Lo scrittore che comincia la propria opera si sente

spinto a procedere verso il finale, "per cercare un altro fatto, un altro finale, un altro principio e ricominciare" (69). Oppure, come afferma assai suggestivamente nelle ultime righe del suo contributo, riproponendo una separazione importante tra romanzo e racconto: "I racconti, a differenza del romanzo, consentono di aggiustare continuamente il tiro, di correre ora di qua ora di là, di chiudere e subito riaprire, di non sentirsi mai, insomma, abbandonati alla folla dei fatti. Ogni fatto è in germe un aneddoto, e ogni aneddoto, se si trova un tono, se si trova un linguaggio, è un racconto" (69).

Il volume si conclude con una terza sezione, un'appendice di metodi e strumenti che comprende un utile contributo di Antonio Petrucci e Clementina Santi sulle tecniche narrative ("Note e riflessioni sulla genesi del racconto e sulle tecniche narrative", 73-91). Schematicamente, ma pur sempre in modo intelligente e ben organizzato, vi vengono forniti alcuni elementi di narratologia.

Di poche pagine è il successivo "itinerario di lettura" attraverso un racconto di Calvino ("Appunti per un'analisi de 'L'avventura di un poeta' di Italo Calvino", 92-95).

Le note biobibliografiche sugli autori, poste in fondo al volume, riescono assai utili al fine di un orientamento generale.

Stefano Termanini, *Genova*

***Seminario sulla drammaturgia*. Ed. Luigi Rustichelli. West Lafayette (IN):
Bordighera Inc., 1998. Pp. 90.**

Il volumetto, a cura di Luigi Rustichelli, raccoglie i contributi di studiosi di teatro, autori e attori, intervenuti nel seminario *Incontri sulla drammaturgia italiana contemporanea* (Reggio Emilia, 1991), organizzato dall'Istituto Antonio Banfi, in collaborazione con l'Associazione *I Teatri*. Il seminario, come viene detto nella *Presentazione* e come peraltro si evince molto chiaramente dal taglio dei singoli contributi, si rivolgeva a un pubblico curioso, sinceramente interessato, ma non composto di specialisti. In qualche caso (Martinelli, Molinari, Fo) gli interventi hanno avuto carattere autobiografico, documentario e testimoniale, suggerendo la comprensione del "fare teatro" dall'interno e predisponendo a prospettive di lettura fra le più interessanti. Altrove le relazioni degli studiosi hanno avuto carattere divulgativo.

Nella prima parte del volumetto i contributi di Siro Ferrone e di Claudio Meldolesi gettano le basi teoriche di una ricerca che, nella seconda parte, viene riassorbita nelle testimonianze degli attori-autori, come Umberto Marino, Mario Martinelli e Dario Fo, o del *Dramaturg* Renata Molinari.

Siro Ferrone si è posto l'obiettivo di spiegare come nasce un copione ("Introduzione. Come nasce un copione", 1-18) procedendo da alcune fondamentali distinzioni: il teatro è diverso secondo che vi si assista o lo si 'faccia'. Nel contempo, vi sono diverse specie di autori: i letterati, che scrivono su grandi temi astratti, e gli sceneggiatori, che traggono spunto dalla vita concreta.

Per gli autori del secondo genere gli attori sono come cavie da esperimento, poiché vivono effettivamente in una condizione anomala e patologica. Con una punta di crudele compiacimento, l'autore-sceneggiatore evita l'autobiografia (in cui, invece, inciampa sovente l'Autore) e si concentra sull'attore, vedendovi un uomo estraneo alla quotidianità, che opera di notte e dorme di giorno, che vive un'esistenza "spiazzata", ma che lo sostituisce, anche, in certi slanci potenziali, mai realizzati: "L'autore risulta all'autore un animale o un uomo eroico che riesce a fare cose che lui, autore, non ha il

tempo, la forza e il coraggio, certe volte, di fare" (7). Molti di questi autori-sceneggiatori, negli anni del dopoguerra, migrarono dal teatro al cinema dando vita a copioni costruiti con sensibilità e metodo drammaturgici.

Ferrone dichiara di essere convinto che i grandi testi di teatro, "nel senso di vitali, forti, capaci di produrre emozioni e tensioni dentro di noi", "siano in realtà la trascrizione, ad un livello molto alto, di esperienze condotte all'interno di gruppi chiusi e concentrati", talvolta veri e propri "diari di lavoro" (9). Ferrone sostiene questa sua tesi con il racconto di esperienze reali, per concludere che "il teatro è sempre rappresentazione, trascrizione nel copione verbale, [. . .] di una tensione di compagnia" (9). Nell'ultima parte della sua relazione si solleva infine la questione dei rapporti tra autore e attore. Spesso l'attore tende "a farsi adottare": "invece di mantenere un rapporto di tensione, di indifferenza e di autonomia nei confronti dell'autore, l'attore assume [. . .] un atteggiamento subalterno che poi in realtà è di grande superbia [. . .]" (11). Mettendosi a disposizione dell'autore, esige, di fatto, che l'autore asseconi le sue esigenze, i suoi gusti e preconcetti.

Per Ferrone, dunque, l'autore di teatro può essere sceneggiatore, Autore con la lettera maiuscola (colui che regola il testo dall'esterno), oppure autore-attore, come Dario Fo, "il quale, da una parte, si sente autore, e cioè latore di un messaggio messianico-ideologico, e dall'altra, invece, è un artista che porta l'esperienza del suo essere attore e scrive per il teatro e in primo luogo per se stesso" (13).

In un lucido intervento, che nel volume compare in forma di saggio, ancorché abbia l'agilità dell'articolo di giornale e della lingua parlata, Claudio Meldolesi si è soffermato sul rapporto tra poesia drammatica e recitazione, cogliendo infine la duplicità del drammaturgo italiano ("Poesia drammatica e recitazione. La drammaturgia, signora 'dappertutto'", 19-32). Meldolesi comincia ricordando Scaramuccia e la sua identificazione totale con il ruolo del beffatore e Molière, il figlio di borghesi che accettò di diventare un attore, ovvero di uscire dai ranghi concretamente stabiliti e normati dell'ordine sociale. L'attore è simile al poeta nella rinuncia dei ranghi della società e degli eccessi di organizzazione: come l'attore, "il poeta si identifica con le alterazioni della realtà per farci scoprire la realtà" (20). Meldolesi, che di seguito si rifà all'esempio di Alfieri, poeta che "indusse i suoi interpreti a rivivere, nell'intimo, l'*origine* delle sue tragedie" (21), sostiene che poeta e attore siano legati da "una corda comune": "L'attore è un po' poeta, se è profondo; e vari poeti sono un po' attori, a cominciare da quelli che amano leggere le loro liriche in pubblico *per bisogno* di figurarsi il completamento del fruitore" (21).

La radice del riconoscimento reciproco di recitazione e drammaturgia viene trovata da Meldolesi nel teatro shakespeariano, immediato scenario di una particolare concezione del tempo ("In Shakespeare il teatro è il luogo dell'*eccesso a futura memoria*: i suoi personaggi rappresentano anche la follia a venire", 22). Meldolesi attribuisce a Shakespeare — ed è l'interpretazione forse più interessante del suo saggio — la definizione di "poeta del rapporto incandescente fra vecchio e nuovo mondo, colui che faceva vedere contemporaneamente la persistenza del mondo feudale, terribile per il destino dell'individuo, e — come avrebbe detto Brecht — la prospettiva oscura della libertà rivoluzionaria in senso borghese" (22). Ricevuto l'insegnamento di Shakespeare, l'attore fu costretto "a dissociarsi, a limitare l'approccio convenzionale, i trucchi, a inventare un 'gioco dell'anima' e a investire corpo e psiche nella parte" (23).

Indagini e ricerche sul testo teatrale composto dall'attore professionista sono state compiute, come ricorda Meldolesi, durante la preparazione di alcune tesi di laurea: un impulso, non è chiaro se conscio o inconscio, spinge talvolta l'autore a rendersi simile all'attore, cioè a "scendere in campo" per misurarsi con la recitazione. Qualcosa di simile accade anche all'attore, portato a diventare autore (è di un certo fascino il richiamo di Meldolesi agli attori girovaghi di un tempo, caratterizzati da una fisionomia psicologica prensile o "ghiottona": l'attore girovago è, prima di tutto, una personalità curiosa e si interessa egualmente alla gastronomia e alla notizia). L'attore che diventa autore percepisce nella scrittura "un'altra possibilità di possedere il mestiere e di farlo fruttare" (27). L'attore, prima dell'Ottocento, era girovago e coltivava il gusto per l'autonarrazione che lo conduceva a comporre memorie di viaggio, diari che includessero informazioni varie, notizie ritenute curiose, ricette di cucina.

Prima di concludere, chiedendosi perché in Italia la drammaturgia soffra spesso di duplicità, Meldolesi considera la figura del *Dramaturg*, in quanto "speculare a quella dell'attore che si fa scrittore" (30). Al *Dramaturg*, infatti, tocca il compito di "fornire approfondimenti al regista e stimoli all'attore", riprendendo in mano il testo "datato" per metterlo "in condizione di essere goduto ancora" (31).

La seconda parte del volume riunisce, come si è accennato, contributi di attori, attori-registi, attori-autori. Il testo di Umberto Marino ("Tempo, comunicazione e mondo del teatro", 35-47), che rivela una matrice discorsiva piuttosto evidente, prende le mosse da una riflessione sul tempo nel cinema, negli spettacoli televisivi e teatrali. L'inizio di un'opera, se "composta con le ultime regole credibili che sono quelle proposte dal romanticismo" (35), contiene, per Marino, una dimensione del tempo che inerisce alle strutture drammaturgiche. Il teatro, egli afferma, si distingue dalle altre arti perché la sua dimensione temporale è assai simile a quella reale: a teatro il tempo non si contrae come nel cinema o in televisione ("a teatro per spostare una sedia ci vuole il tempo che ci vuole per spostare una sedia", 37). La relazione di Marino, a tratti effettivamente parziale, si articola attorno a una specifica maniera di fare teatro, che è la sua, organizzata rispetto a regole interne, come, per esempio, l'unità di tempo e di azione. Marino vi include dichiarazioni di poetica ("io mi riconosco in un teatro che si proponga la comunicazione" 37) e personalissimi giudizi critici. In conclusione, egli esprime la propria preferenza per un testo teatrale "aperto", in cui non tutto è esplicito e lo spettatore è invitato a colmare le eventuali lacune.

Dopo l'intervento autobiografico, di fresca narrativa, di Marco Martinelli ("Il cammino dall'idea all'opera si fa in ginocchio", 48-64), diviso "in tre raccontini legati a tre date: il 1977, l'87 e il '90" (48), un contributo di Renata Molinari illustra "Il lavoro del *Dramaturg*" (65-75). Nella prima parte della relazione si fa riferimento all'esperienza della messinscena delle *Troiane* di Euripide, un'occasione che ha consentito agli attori di "creare un vocabolario gestuale" (71), senza inventarlo, bensì cogliendo le indicazioni già presenti nel testo per condurle all'evidenza. La Molinari descrive questa drammaturgia come "attentissima al testo perché assapora ogni parola, la accosta ad altre, vede il tipo di radiazioni che emana" e la spiega con la volontà proterva di "creare, a partire dal testo, una rete di analogie fisiche, organiche alle esigenze e al punto di vista dell'attore", "analogie fra il testo e l'agire scenico" (71). Nella seconda parte della sua relazione, Renata Molinari riporta la propria esperienza di adattamento di un romanzo, *I demoni* di Fedor Dostoevskij, a testo teatrale. A tale proposito si sofferma sulla consistenza ontologica del personaggio, in quanto collegamento tra il testo romanzesco e teatrale:

“Un [...] elemento suscettibile di sviluppo è il personaggio che, sostenendo le azioni, è il principale punto di collegamento fra il romanzo e il teatro. Come agire su di lui? Esiste una doppia vita del personaggio, sempre; esiste la vicenda del personaggio com'è sviluppata nell'opera con tutto il suo corredo di azioni e relazioni drammatiche, ma abbiamo, come accadeva prima per la tragedia, anche la possibilità di lavorare sul personaggio selezionando le informazioni contenute nell'opera” (72). Questo significa che un personaggio letterario, così come l'ha immaginato e l'ha fatto vivere l'autore, può essere trasposto in un altro contesto, immesso in altre situazioni che non siano quelle originarie.

Il contributo di Dario Fo (“L'autore-attore”, 76-84) al seminario di cui il volume è il resoconto scritto, si articola in risposte alle domande sollecitate dal pubblico. Piuttosto che di una relazione, si tratta dunque di una sorta di intervista spontanea, generata dalle richieste provenienti dal pubblico. Fo lamenta la maniera in cui i classici vengono messi in scena, raggelandone la carica espressiva, quindi, interpretando la celebre lirica di Cielo d'Alcamo, “Rosa fresca aulentissima ch'apari”, cerca di dimostrare come la forza del classico debba rintracciarsi nel legame con la contingenza e la realtà. Fo si sofferma anche sulla questione della lingua teatrale, spiegando le origini del suo *grammelot*, e sul rapporto tra autore e attore, assolutamente fecondo e rigenerante per il teatro.

Stefano Termanini, *Genova*

**Cesare Magris. *Utopia e disincanto: storie speranze illusioni del moderno*
Milano: Garzanti, 1999.**

Con questa raccolta di saggi (1974-1998), per lo più articoli apparsi sul *Corriere della Sera*, editoriali, recensioni, interventi monografici su autori mitteleuropei ed, in parte minima, scritti accademici, Magris offre un suo personale contributo alla discussione non tanto sulla modernità, (come implicherebbe il titolo), ma sulla post-modernità. Per analizzare questa epoca, categoria filosofica, fenomeno post-industriale — o comunque lo si voglia definire — Magris suggerisce delle chiavi, o meglio ipotesi, interpretative. Lo fa, con squisita sensibilità post-moderna, lasciandosi guidare dal filo frammentario ed esile della memoria, confrontando passato e presente, recuperando ricordi personali che hanno anche una valenza collettiva, ed eventi storici che, alla luce della rivisitazione personale, si colorano emotivamente. Il suo discorso si compone come un puzzle fatto di tessere in cui l'autore colloquia con i lettori dalla pagine di un quotidiano, citando autori, commemorando date particolari, discutendo in modo quasi salottiero, ma sempre coltissimo e ricco di echi letterari, su eventi del quotidiano. Ad esempio critica l'impietosa liquidazione della bellezza femminile decretata anzitempo da autori come la La Rochefoucauld, Stendhal o Hofmannsthal, offrendo l'immagine di Ninon de Lenclos, ispiratrice di carnali passioni fino oltre i settantanni (“Il caldo autunno di Ninon de Lenclos”). Oppure sviscera in “Una custodia per i *Buddenbrook*; la saggistica di Thomas Mann”, come l'autore tedesco avesse la chiara consapevolezza di essere non tanto un martire, ma un “rappresentante” della società che così acutamente, nonché impietosamente, descriveva. Se alcuni interventi sembrano, per lo scarso approfondimento, occasionali e fruibili a un livello superficiale, altri come “Kitsch e Passione; Hannah Arendt e Martin Heidegger” affrontano tematiche filosofiche più impegnative e, altri ancora si confrontano con temi radicali come quelli dell'impegno

etico connaturato al ruolo dell'intellettuale ("Intellettuali, intelligenza e libertà", "Erasmus e Lutero: libero o servo arbitrio", "La borsa dei valori".)

La memoria, dicevamo, è uno degli elementi fondamentali del quadro conoscitivo che l'autore compone; su cui però vigila, senza intermittenze, senza cedimenti, la Ragione. Per questo il saggio introduttivo, "Utopia e Disincanto", chiarisce in modo inequivocabile la posizione dell'autore, denunciando la matrice illuminista della sua vocazione culturale ed etica. Per Magris da una parte c'è "l'utopia", la necessità cioè di sperare, di credere, anche in modo ingenuo e contro palesi smentite, nella possibilità di una società migliore e più giusta (non era forse il sogno della Rivoluzione Francese?). Dall'altra c'è il "disincanto", l'inevitabile disillusione che segue la presa di contatto con una realtà che non è — ce l'hanno insegnato anche i Romantici e un autore a lui particolarmente caro, Nietzsche, — di per sé "buona". Eppure, per vivere abbiamo bisogno di queste due componenti, della fiducia entusiasta ed acritica che ci fa affrontare l'esistenza con lo slancio di un innamorato e della presa di coscienza, che smentisce, spesso crudamente, le aspettative.

E, per l'autore, la letteratura è l'ambito in cui questa mescolanza contraddittoria eppur vincente si trova meglio rappresentata. Ad esempio *L'Educazione Sentimentale*, con il suo fluire di eventi malinconici e rinunciari è, per Magris, il libro più riuscito "dell'incanto e della seduzione di vivere" (15). Perché ogni mito prende corpo soltanto quando se ne demistificano le pretese; si illumina soltanto quando è smascherato. Se la letteratura è una grande maestra, in senso classico una "nutrice", non bisogna però trascurare il ruolo della cultura e degli intellettuali, nella società contemporanea. Magris ricorda la necessità di mantenere viva la "memoria storica . . . senza la quale non c'è alcun senso della pienezza e della complessità della vita." (10) Con un occhio attento a quell'evento epocale rappresentato dalla caduta del muro di Berlino, Magris ammonisce a non ammucciare nel discredito generalizzato, e in parte giustificato, che il comunismo ha subito, anche quegli ideali di democrazia e progresso che l'avevano originariamente animato e, insomma, a non rinunciare "all'utopia di riscatto sociale e civile" che il comunismo aveva nutrito.

Il ritratto di Magris che si delinea come in filigrana tra le righe del testo è quello di un pensatore molto singolare nell'ambito del panorama italiano: un intellettuale che pare appartenere a una cultura diversa da quella nostrana e a un altro tempo. Uomo di confine, — "La frontiera è ponte o barriera; stimola il dialogo o lo soffoca. La mia educazione sentimentale è stata segnata dall'odissea dei confini, dalla loro arbitrarietà e inevitabilità." (53) — Magris manifesta un'incredibile, e a mio avviso non eguagliata da altri intellettuali italiani, coscienza europeista. Da Trieste si affaccia sul quel cosmopolita mondo mitteleuropeo, insieme giudaico e asburgico, cancellieresco e militare che costituisce una delle anime dell'Europa moderna. L'altra, già l'abbiamo menzionata, è quella illuminista, quella dei *philosophes* che hanno sostenuto un progetto pedagogico della diffusione della cultura e di quei principi democratici che informano le varie costituzioni europee. E guardando all'Europa dal margine, da questa città che è in se stessa una frontiera, un crogiolo di razze e di lingue, lo studioso triestino ne afferra la complessità, la ricchezza e l'unitarietà. Tra i nostri intellettuali, estremamente cosmopoliti come Eco, tenacemente postmoderni come Vattimo, finemente psicanalitici come Rella, è difficile trovare un pensatore che abbia mantenuto un'aderenza così marcata all'eredità europea, continuando a vederla come uno sfaccettato, variegato, ma comunque *unicum* sovranazionale. E così sulla soglia ormai oltrepassata del nuovo

millennio, Magris si interroga su una società dalla sensibilità contorta, travolta da dubbi epistemologici, provata da vuoti di trascendenza; si chiede se ancora sopravvivano valori etici. E risponde così: "Fra gli elementi che non potranno continuare a non essere fondanti, pena la stessa fine della civiltà europea in senso forte, rientrano il senso del valore primario dell'individuo e la razionalità . . . C'è necessità di un pensiero antidolatratico, di un pensiero forte capace di stabilire gerarchie di valori, di scegliere e dunque di dare libertà, di dare all'individuo la forza di resistere alle pressioni che lo minacciano e alla fabbrica di opinioni e di slogan . . . Solo una gerarchia di valori può impedire che l'Io individuale perda la sua unità e la sua solidità e si dissolva . . . in una 'anarchia d'atomi', in una molteplicità di nuclei psichici e di pulsioni non più imprigionate nella rigida corazza dell'individualità e della coscienza" (259).

Anna Maria Torriglia, *University of California at Padua*

Maria Ornella Marotti and Gabriella Brooke, eds. *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999. Women authors' use of historical writing and of personal forms of narrative structure is at the core of *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*. The editors, Gabriella Brooke and Maria Ornella Marotti, are key figures in Italian historiographic studies in North America. They have organized sessions on this topic, challenged their colleagues in the pursuit of studies regarding the canon (Marotti), or written historical fiction themselves, as in the case of Gabriella Brooke. It is thus with authentic knowledge that Marotti and Brooke edited this collection of essays on Italian female authors' historical writing. This kind of writing incorporates a varied mixture of personal forms, like diary, journals, confessions, and also more traditional forms of historiographic research. The most striking commonality of the different narratives composing the novels by Italian female authors is the constant re-interpretation and revision of historical data that, until recent times, were consolidated givens for the Italian readership.

In the beginning of her essay, "Feminist Historiography and Dacia Maraini's *Isolina: Una donna tagliata a pezzi*," Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld states, "in feminist historiography we find two important issues: the recuperation of lost history and the deconstruction of the ideal of the absolute objectivity" (178). The historical novel as perceived through the voice of these novelists derives much of its revisited form both from a new kind of approach to research, parallel to the one practiced by "new historicists," as well as from a fictional writing that utilizes autobiographical forms of expression. These two approaches to historical discourse (both from a structural point of view, as it reinterprets the modes on which narrative is based, as well as the interlocking of genres within the generic umbrella-definition of 'historical novel,' which is also sometimes rejected by some of these female authors, as in the case of Rosetta Loy for her *Le strade di polvere* [see Fulvio Scaglione, *Famiglia cristiana* n.50, 1987]) manage to successfully blur the traditional borders between the private and public spheres for, in rendering the historical past, women writers show that "the public is always subtly and yet powerfully impacted by the private" (Marotti 20).

In "Revising the Past: Feminist Historians/Historical Fictions," Marotti gives a full account of the parallel efforts of Italian feminist historians and novelists. She illustrates the steps taken by historians to reconstruct a female historical trajectory not merely by utilizing the traditional data systems, like archives and historical sources, but also by

incorporating more private sources of information about women's history, namely oral narratives, diaries, and biographies. In order to give a voice to subjects who were erased from official history, feminist historians and novelists need to record this "erased" voice and introduce it within a more systematic form of data collection in which the everyday practices of life, the micro-events forming a woman's day, can find a space along with the more official and public events. This topic is also covered by Giovanna Miceli-Jeffries who, in "Unsigned History: Silent, Micro-'Technologies of Gender' in the Narratives of the Quotidian," gives an insightful reading of Clara Sereni's *Il gioco dei regni* and Mariateresa Di Lascia's *Passaggio in ombra*. Cultural history that, according to Miceli-Jeffries, is synonymous to women's history, is the "indisputable ground of women's historical presence and therefore of feminist analysis, historical, and otherwise" (82).

Carol Lazzaro-Weis's contribution, "Stranger Than Life? Autobiography and Historical Fiction," deals with autobiographical writing and its connection with women's historical writing. The author describes the commonalities between the two genres as well as the terminological confusions (and misconceptions) arising at times between historical novel and fictional autobiography, caused by the presence of personal memories. Echoing the tenets expressed elsewhere by Robin Pickering-Iazzi, Lazzaro-Weis discusses discriminatory criticism about the insertion of personal details of women's everyday lives vis-à-vis the insertion of personal data in historical novels by men. She writes that "if literary techniques served [. . .] to make men's autobiographies more 'universal' and thus closer to the real truth, their presence in women's writings seemed only to exacerbate the latter's idiosyncratic and falsifying nature" (33).

In her article on *Artemisia*, "'Uno sguardo acuto dalla storia': Anna Banti's Historical Writings," Paola Carù finds images of solidarity among women and the female painter, much against interpretations of the novel, as previously attempted by Valeria Finucci. While for Finucci Artemisia basically isolates herself from the society of women of her time ("A Portrait of the Artist as a Female Painter" *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 8 (1987) 2: 167-93, 181), for Carù the character of the artist finds a sort of spiritual understanding with her disciple in Naples. Her reading offers an interesting and original view of how the painter possibly confronts (and competes with) other women's beauty and talent, and yet manages to establish a form of anti-conventional kinship with some of them.

Gerda Reeb gives an interesting analysis of *Rinascimento privato* by Maria Bellonci, demonstrating how the notion of history and of her power in politics and in the arts makes Isabella d'Este a modern character. As portrayed in the book, Isabella is endowed with a full sense of her space and time, and particularly of her own place in the historical discourse of the Renaissance.

In "Trascolorare," Stefania Nedderman analyzes Rosetta Loy's *Le strade di polvere*. Drawing a simile from the verb, Nedderman convincingly demonstrates how in the novel the focal point of the image slowly is diverted from official history, usually based on men's actions, from Luis to Pidren, in order to better understand the point of view of the family's women in the house, within the confining walls of the construction that the patriarch had wanted in the 18th century. The absence of women from the beginning and end of the novel evokes the sense of isolation and entrapment they live in throughout the book, mirroring Piedmontese agricultural society from Napoleon to Unification.

In "Brushing Benjamin Against the Grain," Maurizia Boscagli explains her thesis of the identity of thought in historiographic revision as found in Morante's fiction and in Benjamin's theory. Both their fictional and theoretical attempts at a redefinition of historical time and conjunction of the past with the present in the *jetzeit* "share an awareness that marginal history is a flash that might never be seen again, depending on who constructs and manages the circulation of this memory" (167). Both writers also foreshadow Foucault's and White's discussions of historical discourse that is first and foremost a narrative of facts controlled by power.

There is an excavation and processing of the very same data that constitute the backdrop of the Renaissance period or the *Risorgimento* as treated in Cutrufelli's *La briganta*, brilliantly studied by Monica Rossi, that distances these narratives from any earlier historical fiction, thus establishing a very relevant generic diversion of historical fiction that deserves full attention.

I have tried to offer the reader of this review a small sample of the topics that appear in this book. In order to convey the richness of the book, this review should be much longer. Many courses in women's studies are focused on revisions of history as *res gesta* and of history as *narratio rerum gestarum*, and I am convinced that the importance of this book resides precisely in the variety of the studied fictional texts and in their feminist critical analysis. Finally, this work has given importance to several texts that should be considered canonical but are still frequently ignored in courses and reading lists, written by three generations of Italian female writers, that are essential for the progress of feminist literary and theoretical studies in Italian culture. There is also another more pragmatic point: the variety of the texts and theoretical secondary works makes *Gendering Italian Fiction* very useful, both for teachers and students. Last semester, I taught a course on historical fiction as written by women. I can say that, along with my students, I drew useful information from the reading of this intelligently conceived, well-written, well-researched book, which I strongly recommend as ancillary reading for those colleagues thinking about, or already involved in, teaching a course on women's historical fiction.

Stefania Lucamante, *Georgetown University*

Gaetana Marrone. *The Gaze and the Labyrinth: The Cinema of Liliana Cavani*. Princeton: UP, 2000. Pp. xviii, 308.

This handsomely designed volume on the films of Liliana Cavani is the latest addition to the growing body of scholarship on Italian cinema available in English. Gaetana Marrone offers a careful analysis of nine of Cavani's twelve feature films, along with a complete filmography, an extensive bibliography of sources published in Italian, English, and French, and eighty-five photographic reproductions. Although a handful of book-length studies on Cavani has already been published in Italian, Marrone's monograph provides the most substantial analysis of the director's work available to date in any language.

A complex and often perplexing director, Cavani received immediate recognition from Italian critics for the distinctive promise of her early work. *Francesco di Assisi* (1966), *Milarepa* (1969), and *I cannibali* (1973) — all directed at the outset of her career — still retain a remarkable stylistic freshness and originality of inspiration. Indeed, the power of these films is symptomatic of the wave of renewed creativity that swept through Italian filmmaking in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a phenomenon that also

encompassed the early work of the Taviani Brothers, Marco Bellocchio, and Bernardo Bertolucci. Outside Italy, however, Cavani is associated almost exclusively with the critically acclaimed, though highly controversial, *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*) which was distributed internationally in 1974. Her other films, with the exception of *The Berlin Affair* (1985) and *Francesco* (1989), have not been seen by English-speaking audiences.

Marrone's assertion that Cavani "has achieved an artistic recognition among cineasts and critics that remains unparalleled in the European film industry" (xiii) may thus come as a surprise to many Anglophone readers, especially those who have come of age since the 1970s. Indeed, even in Italy, the director's name has not featured prominently in recent critical accounts of the development of the national cinema over the past twenty-five years. Yet, as this volume reveals, at least up to the release of *Al di là del bene e del male* in 1977, Cavani's films generated widespread discussion and were appreciated and defended at various junctures by such prominent figures as Michel Foucault, Félix Guattari, Alberto Moravia, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Consistently adopting an independent, radically nonconformist stance, Cavani is a self-declared outsider, and cannot be readily categorized among the ranks of Italian filmmakers whose political leanings or ideological convictions are central to their work. Unaffiliated with any political party, she claims to occupy a position that is uninflected by ideology and espouses a purely aesthetic vocation. In 1989 she stated in an interview: "The political category that is most important is beauty. Beauty is the fundamental value of one's existence" (240). This is not to say that the filmmaker's work is concerned merely with the aesthetics of formal expression. Marrone argues that Cavani's films constitute an intellectual cinema, where challenging ideas are explored through the specificity of cinematic language.

In its meticulous examination of the director's work, this study repeatedly foregrounds the intellectual emphasis of Cavani's inspiration, illustrating her distinctive cinematic engagement with various philosophical ideas and spiritual traditions. Marrone also points to the breadth of erudition that characterizes Cavani's approach to filmmaking, identifying intertextual resonances with the works of Sophocles and Euripides, Dostoevsky, Mann, Sade, Nietzsche, Bataille, and Foucault. Ultimately she argues that these films should be considered as tragedies, belonging to a tradition that goes back to classical antiquity.

The director's depiction of some of the great figures of spiritual and intellectual history — St. Francis, Galileo, and Nietzsche — has provoked widely divergent responses. While acknowledging these controversies, Marrone aims at transcending extraneous polemical interests to arrive at a better appreciation of Cavani's complex interpretive vision. Clearly, the filmmaker's work has often been misrepresented or misunderstood. Pasolini, understanding the challenge presented by her films, called Cavani "a cross between Joan of Arc and Pisacane, a heretic and a revolutionary" (7).

The result of more than a decade of exhaustive research, Marrone's study is essentially an auteurist analysis, where Cavani's films are investigated as complex works of art reflecting the inspiration of a singular creative genius. Affirming her intention to go beyond the narrowly thematic approach taken by other critics in their assessment of this body of work, Marrone is especially attentive to the development of Cavani's formal strategies from film to film. She divides the feature films into two broadly defined stylistic periods, the first reflecting a predominantly realist aesthetics, and the second

corresponding to a more complex, psychological exploration, sometimes featuring the use of oneiric imagery. Marrone draws a further, thematic division between some of Cavani's early films and her later work. In this breakdown, the first group of films, encompassing *Francesco di Assisi*, *Galileo* and *Milarepa*, is comprised of narratives developed around the figure of an idealist who, in a courageous search for self-realization, transgresses the boundaries imposed by society. Marrone suggests that most of Cavani's later work, by contrast, "describes a transgression more malevolent and dangerous, where the undoing of the historical time is enacted through the couple's abysmal, ruinous sexual fantasies, a mechanism of perpetual entrapment" (8).

Part One of Marrone's volume focuses on *Francesco di Assisi* (1966), *Galileo* (1968), and *I cannibali* (1969), each of which is dominated by a strong, "heretical" protagonist: St. Francis, Galileo, and Antigone respectively. Marrone links the director's deployment of the gaze in these films to the visionary capacity of her characters. Part Two is devoted to a detailed analysis of Cavani's so-called German Trilogy, comprising *The Night Porter* (1974), *Al di là del bene e del male* (1977), and *The Berlin Affair* (1985). Here the writer associates Cavani's strategic use of the gaze with the concept of transgression as a voyeuristic compulsion. She shows how the director's use of formal strategies in these films creates a sense of complicity with the voyeurism of her characters in order to convey the intensity of their subjective entrapment. Marrone analyzes the erotic relationships around which the films are constructed as complex meditations on the relationship of individuals to historical forces. She defends Cavani's character portrayals against the reductionist arguments leveled against them, particularly in the case of *The Night Porter*, which, with its depiction of a post-war erotic reunion of a Nazi officer and a former female victim, has inspired much heated commentary. Marrone's discussion of Cavani's cinematic deployment of the intersections of power and knowledge, divestiture and desire in these films is enlivened by a broad range of references and citations ranging from Sade and Bataille to Foucault and Deleuze.

Part Three of Marrone's study departs slightly from the chronological examination of the films in the earlier part of the book. Emphasizing the director's use of geometrical strategies in the exploration of spiritual and philosophical themes, she offers a comparative analysis of the architectonics of vision in *Milarepa* (1973) and *Francesco* (1989), the second film that Cavani devoted to the figure of St. Francis. Her discussion, along with the accompanying frame reproductions from both films, reveals surprising visual and thematic parallels in the development of these narratives, one drawn from ancient Buddhist legend and the other from medieval history and hagiography. The volume's conclusion recapitulates many of the dominant ideas discussed throughout the earlier sections and offers a brief analysis of Cavani's most recent film *Dove siete? Io sono qui* (1993). Although considered by many critics as a sharp departure from the director's previous work, Marrone shows how Cavani's contemporary love story, featuring two deaf-mute protagonists, resonates with films made several years earlier in its emphasis on "the rhetoric of silence [. . .] the denunciation of human hypocrisy [and] the emptiness of language" (193).

The examination of Cavani's work provided in this monograph is extremely detailed, and a broad array of critical tools is brought to bear on the close reading of each film. Marrone's research was facilitated by the director's willingness to provide her with access to her archives and to answer specific questions about the films. The wealth of information resulting from this concession is prodigious, as the notes for each chapter are

replete with quotations from reviews, correspondence, and interviews published over a period of thirty years. But such privileged access may also entail some disadvantages. In her analysis of the films, Marrone repeatedly returns to the authority of Cavani as *auteur*, often citing statements made by the filmmaker to illuminate the ultimate meaning of the finished production. The director's interpretation is thus implicitly proposed as the preferred reading of each film, supported by the writer's careful analysis of how Cavani's formal strategies operate in the signifying process, and by citations from other critics who also appear to appreciate the complexity of the filmmaker's intentions. Although the insights provided by Cavani's comments and reflections are often fascinating, they are ultimately accorded too much weight in Marrone's critical assessment of her *oeuvre*, leaving insufficient scope for the exploration of the unconscious or contradictory elements that might otherwise be sought in these intriguing and sometimes puzzling films.

The writer's unquestioning acceptance of Cavani's claim to transcend ideology, for example, is symptomatic of her proximity to her subject. Although this claim is cited at several junctures throughout the volume, the concept of ideology is not defined. The term seems to be understood here in the traditional sense of false consciousness. But this understanding of ideology has been contested by Althusser and other theorists since the early 1970s, and many now argue against the possibility of attaining the kind of position "outside" ideology from which Cavani claims to speak. Indeed, several of the assertions made by the filmmaker and cited within this volume — her views on the "politics of beauty," on the ethics of suicide, or on sexuality and the body — are scarcely devoid of ideological or political import.

Some organisational choices made in the volume may also be related to Marrone's proximity to her subject. The brevity of biographical information provided in the book results, quite probably, from Cavani's well-known insistence on privacy. However, a brief discussion or commentary on the director's apparent abandonment of cinema for opera in recent years might have helped to provide a sharper frame for Marrone's overall discussion of her films. More puzzling than the lack of biographical detail is the writer's decision to exclude three of Cavani's twelve feature films from her critical discussion. In fact, no explanation is provided for her omission of *L'ospite* (1971), *La pelle* (1980) and *Oltre la porta* (1982). We might well ask how these films fit into the paradigms of Marrone's auteurist study. But perhaps we are to infer that they are less characteristic of Cavani's inspiration and achievement than her other work. *La pelle*, in particular, drawn from the eponymous work by Curzio Malaparte, was greeted with much resistance when it was released in Italy in the early 1980s, even by former Cavani supporters. However, between the lines of the writer's thoughtful and admiring appraisal of Cavani's work there is only the slightest hint of the filmmaker's loss of critical standing over the past twenty years.

Marrone's volume is an exceptional achievement, since she has taken on one of the most challenging and controversial directors to emerge in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. Based on a keen understanding of the specificity of cinematic language and a broad appreciation of cultural and intellectual history, this study not only provides invaluable insights into Cavani's films, but also illuminates the complex cultural framework from which this gifted director emerged.

Áine O'Healy, *Loyola Marymount University*

Franca Angelini, ed. *Il puro e l'impuro*. Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1998.

Sotto il titolo *Il puro e l'impuro*, Franca Angelini, docente di Letteratura teatrale all'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma, ha raccolto una serie di saggi presentati per la prima volta a un convegno su donne e teatro svoltosi a Roma nel marzo 1997. Il titolo, preso in prestito da un romanzo di Colette, si riferisce appunto al rapporto tra donne e teatro: "puro", spiega la stessa Angelini in una breve premessa, "il teatro, impuro — le donne; oppure il contrario, come vi piace" (9). La scrittrice Melania G. Mazzucco, nel suo intervento dal titolo "La scrittura mancina", elabora ulteriormente il messaggio proposto dal titolo, suggerendo altre possibili interpretazioni: il puro come la scrittura in sé e l'impuro come la scrittura scenica; il puro come spazio dell'uomo e l'impuro della donna e, finalmente, l'impuro come spazio teatrale riappropriato dalle donne (257-58).

La raccolta è divisa in tre sezioni: la prima è dedicata ad alcune grandi attrici teatrali; la seconda ad un'analisi critica delle drammaturgie di scrittrici teatrali europee degli ultimi due secoli; e la terza ad un'"autopresentazione" di autrici e attrici teatrali italiane.

Il puro e l'impuro si apre con un saggio sul genere letterario dell'autobiografia di attrici famose. Franca Angelini ne sottolinea l'unicità, in quanto, sostiene, si tratta degli "unici esempi letterari di racconti che miscelano volontà di essere accettati e volontà di scandalizzare" (15). L'attrice infatti, spiega Angelini, crea scandalo perché mette in mostra il suo corpo "senza esaltare la funzione di moglie né quella di madre" (15). I casi scelti da Angelini vanno da Mademoiselle Clairon a Sarah Bernhardt, da Eleonora Duse a Piera degli Esposti. La prima parte di *Il puro e l'impuro* continua poi con varie analisi di vite di artiste del palcoscenico. L'esperienza di attrice — amatoriale e professionista — della scrittrice Colette e il suo rapporto con la scrittura costituiscono il tema del saggio di Laura Mariani. Dai carteggi di Eleonora Duse, Paola Bertolone ricava accenni al processo creativo della grande attrice, così pure come al suo complesso rapporto con la parola scritta. Silvia Carandini racconta l'avventura europea contenuta nelle autobiografie delle danzatrici americane Loie Fuller e Isadora Duncan. Daniela Quarta esamina le lettere di Irma e Emma Gramatica, facendone emergere sia notizie biografiche, sia i diversi caratteri e la diversa concezione dell'esperienza teatrale delle due sorelle. L'intervento di Manuela Fraire sul dialogo tra Dacia Maraini e Piera degli Esposti in *Storia di Piera* conclude la prima sezione del libro.

La seconda parte di *Il puro e l'impuro* contiene una serie di saggi sulle esperienze teatrali di autrici italiane forse più note come romanziere: da Paola Masino a Elsa Morante, da Anna Banti a Alba de Céspedes a Natalia Ginzburg. Laura Fortini ripercorre le tappe dell'interesse per il teatro di Paola Masino, da un primo giovanile incontro con Pirandello all'inserimento, nel romanzo *Nascita e morte della Massaia*, di "un vero e proprio atto unico in cui la Massaia [. . .] dispiega il massimo di sé e delle proprie prerogative" (114). Concetta D'Angeli ripropone *La serata a Colono*, unico testo teatrale, mai rappresentato, di Elsa Morante, collegandolo sia alle fonti classiche, sia a quel "mito di salvezza" che la scrittrice identificava con l'innocenza dei ragazzini (153). Alle trasposizioni teatrali di *Artemisia*, con il titolo di *Corte Savella*, e di *Quaderno proibito* è dedicato l'intervento di Tiberia De Matteis, che analizza le tecniche utilizzate dalla Banti e dalla De Céspedes per il passaggio dal romanzo alla scena. La scrittura teatrale di Natalia Ginzburg è il tema del saggio di Maria Antonietta Grignani, che esamina in particolare l'uso di una "varietà substandard della lingua" (161), di stereotipi, ripetizioni

e giochi di parole. Altri saggi sono dedicati alle opere teatrali di Titina De Filippo, agli articoli su attrici famose della giornalista Carola Prosperi, e al "romanzo cosmico per teatro" *Viaggio di Gararà* della scrittrice futurista Benedetta. La seconda sezione è completata da interventi su testi teatrali di scrittrici europee, da George Sand a Hélène Cixous, passando per Marie Luise Fleisser, Simone Weil e Marguerite Yourcenar. Fra le autrici dei saggi, appaiono nomi quali Rossana Rossanda, Nadia Fusini e Sandra Petrignani, che coniugano la loro sensibilità di scrittrici con l'analisi critica di drammi scritti fra Ottocento e Novecento.

"Il mio teatro" è il titolo della terza sezione, che dà voce ad autrici e attrici italiane contemporanee. Raffaella Battaglini presenta alcuni suoi monologhi, basati sulle figure di Medea, Clitennestra e Agave. Maricla Boggio ripercorre le tappe principali della sua carriera di regista e attrice teatrale, dall'esperienza della "Maddalena" agli ultimi testi sulla droga, sull'AIDS e sulla mafia, in un teatro che coniuga "mito, storia e attualità" (237). Biancamaria Frabotta descrive le donne protagoniste del suo *Trittico dell'obbedienza*: Eloisa nel suo conflitto con il figlio Astrolabio e nel suo continuo amore del defunto Abelardo; Alda e Alba, "due nomi che si guardano allo specchio" (250), due donne che instaurano un rapporto fittizio madre-figlia: e per finire Bruna, una "femme fatale postmoderna e telenovelistica" (250). Adriana Martino, illustrando "le diverse maniere per arrivare alla scrittura teatrale" (251), racconta la sua esperienza di attrice, attrice e regista, dal teatro musicale al teatro di Brecht. La presentazione di Ermanna Montanari, una sorta di racconto autobiografico dei primi anni della sua vita, del suo rapporto con il padre e con i nonni, e dell'inizio della sua carriera di attrice, collega quest'ultima sezione del libro alle autobiografie di attrici contenute nella prima. Chiudono la raccolta gli interventi di Valeria Moretti e Lucia Poli. Valeria Moretti si presenta in maniera volutamente non autobiografica: se volete sapere che tipo di commedie scrivo, conclude, "vi aspetto a teatro" (280). Lucia Poli ricorda gli inizi della sua scrittura teatrale, con il monologo *Liquididi*, basato sulle secrezioni fisiologiche di un corpo femminile, fino alla sua scelta attuale di collaborare con autori contemporanei e concentrarsi sul ruolo di attrice e regista.

Una mera lista del contenuto di *Il puro e l'impuro* non rende certo giustizia alla complessità e alla profondità del panorama del mondo teatrale femminile presentato nei vari articoli. La raccolta è piena di spunti biografici, bibliografici e analitici di sicuro interesse per chi studia teatro moderno in generale e il teatro delle donne in particolare. Chi si interessa di scrittura femminile potrà scoprire come varie scrittrici italiane si siano dedicate con successo non solo alla narrativa, ma anche alla letteratura drammatica. I numerosi articoli sul rapporto fra donne, teatro e mito costituiranno una nuova, utilissima fonte di informazione e discussione per chi studia "revisionist mythmaking". E gli studi sulle autobiografie di attrici e danzatrici famose saranno un punto di riferimento importante per chi si occupa di autobiografia femminile. È da augurarsi quindi che questo libro, che, come riassume Franca Angelini, è il primo ad affrontare il tema del teatro delle donne "sia in maniera storica sia in maniera militante, sia guardando al passato italiano e europeo sia guardando le attuali drammaturgie femminili" (9), venga seguito da altri della stessa complessità e qualità.

Daniela Cavallaro, *University of Auckland*

Dalle Acque di Ermes: Novità Mitomoderniste

Il Mitomodernismo è un movimento culturale fondato il 21 gennaio 1995 dal filosofo Stefano Zecchi e dai poeti Giuseppe Conte, Tomaso Kemeny e Roberto Carifi. In quella occasione, nel teatro Filodrammatici di Milano, i fondatori hanno presentato il manifesto programmatico, con la stessa forza esplosiva del Futurismo, proclamando l'esigenza di difendere la poesia e l'arte dalla bruttezza e dalla volgarità dilaganti della civiltà moderna. Il progetto è già delineato nello stesso nome: rimettere il Mito e la sua energia spirituale e metamorfica (con valori annessi) al centro della modernità.

Questi i nove punti del manifesto:

1. Facciamo dell'arte azione, la sua forma visibile sia la bellezza.
2. La bellezza è profonda moralità. Il brutto è immorale.
3. Opponiamoci all'avanzare della decadenza, che è là dove l'arte rinuncia all'essenza della propria creatività.
4. L'estetica è il fondamento di ogni morale.
5. Il mito è tra noi anima, natura, eroe, destino.
6. L'eroismo è la sintesi di luce e di forza spirituale.
7. La politica abbia il primato sull'economia, la poesia abbia il primato sulla politica.
8. Il nuovo è il gesto che ama il presente, è aderire all'incessante metamorfosi del cosmo.
9. Impariamo a sperare laicamente.

A quasi sei anni di distanza dalla sua fondazione, il movimento mitomodernista continua ancora oggi a dare nuovi frutti. Seguono, a conferma, le recensioni di quattro raccolte di poesie pubblicate ultimamente da poeti mitomodernisti.

Gabriella Galzio. *Sofia che genera il mondo*. Bologna:

I Quaderni del Battello Ebro, 2000.

Nel suo fantasmagorico, tenebroso e sfolgorante *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Aloysius Bertrand descrive il vecchio Rembrandt come un uomo assorto nella meditazione e nella preghiera, "che s'inchiocciola" nel suo stambugio e si intrattiene ad occhi chiusi con gli spiriti della bellezza, della scienza, della saggezza e dell'amore, consumandosi nello sforzo di penetrare i misteriosi simboli della natura. Anche nella poesia di Gabriella Galzio c'è un eremo segreto, estatico e contemplativo, un luogo inaccessibile, aspro e selvatico, sul quale le forze della storia sembrano, come per incantamento, non aver potere. Solo allora, in quella pura fortezza dello spirito, contemplativa, solitaria, introspettiva, ma anche erotica, pulsante, materica, l'anima si risveglia, mollemente, ritualmente, e rifiorisce alla vita. Non c'è posto, in questa poesia ardua e fiammante, per l'elegia dolorosa, per il sospiro tenero e agghindato. Le parole sono affondate in una materia dura e arcaica, "incavernate" in una loro abissale verità, che non tollera facili decifrazioni. Il verso si fa assoluto, colato in ritmi severi e fascinatori, che si aprono un varco nella crosta della coscienza, generando febbri e visioni. Non parole dolci e rassicuranti, ma intinte nel sangue della lotta, generate dal bagliore di una spada, dalle scheggiate e bruciate lance dell'invettiva. Perché questo, sembra ammonire la voce del poeta, è il tempo del combattimento, il tempo in cui tutto si divide, e niente è più vero.

Giancarlo Pontiggia

Riccardo Emmolo. *Ombre e destino* Bologna: I Quaderni del Battello Ebbro, 2000.

Solo chi ha visto il colore mielato dei palazzi e delle chiese di Modica alta, chi ha visto i riflessi cangianti, viola e resina e papavero dei Monti Iblei può capire il paesaggio di questo libro, dico anche il suo paesaggio simbolico e umano. Una natura sospesa tra la concretezza terragna e il miraggio tra "il cuore caparbio del carrubbo", con una memoria di Sciascia, e "i sogni delle case di Biserta", al di là del mare, e di quel mare dipinto da Guccione. Siciliana e mediterranea è la flora che si inarca e spunta necessaria su questi versi: nepitelle, parietarie, tuberose, capelveneri, dature, le mimose di gennaio, il lentischio, il noce, l'onnipresente carrubo. Siciliana la fauna: le "panciute pernici", gli "aironi cinerini", le cornacchie, le quaglie, i beccaccini: persino il "fondo obeso della botte vuota" sembra caricarsi di qualità oscure e animali. La luce d'oro, la brezza serica "su questo colle tra Scicli e Modica" invade le pagine, le muove come fa il vento "compagno di sbronze/del tramonto". Le metafore lavorano il linguaggio e lo piegano verso esiti lontani. Nella poesia intitolata "La voce in riva al mare" la Sicilia non c'è già più. Il dialogo tra l'uomo e la voce di Dio, non so quale Dio, avviene in un racconto intelaiato in perfette terzine, in un'area di allegorismo che si avvale della rilettura di Pascoli attraverso la lente pasoliniana. Nella poesia torna la declamazione, la sintassi, lo scavo nel senso. Dietro Pascoli, l'ombra sconfinata di Victor Hugo. Si riparte dal silenzio.

Giuseppe Conte

Roberto Mussapi. *Antartide* Parma: Guanda, 2000.

Antartide, il libro con cui Roberto Mussapi offre al lettore una nuova, sorprendente immagine del suo lavoro, è un poema epico che racconta l'ultimo grande viaggio di scoperta sul nostro pianeta, agli albori del Novecento, quello verso i ghiacci deserti del Polo; ma è anche un poema che ambisce racchiudere in una metafora grandiosa un'idea del Novecento stesso, appena concluso. La metafora, che si sviluppa in una complessa allegoria, è quella della nave *Endurance* su cui Shackleton e il suo equipaggio, partiti per la traversata a piedi del Polo Sud, si trovarono stretti nella morsa di una quantità immensa di ghiaccio, nell'immobilità, nell'inerzia allucinatória, nel freddo e nell'oscurità, come il Novecento si è trovato stretto nella morsa del nichilismo e della propria idea di crisi. Ma il lettore non si aspetti un poema filosofico. Guidato dalla voce del secondo dell'*Endurance*, Thomas Crean, conoscerà in un crescendo visionario e insieme fatto di cento dettagli l'arrivo della notte polare, il drama della sopravvivenza dell'equipaggio, le crude cacce a foche e pinguini, i diversivi, le rappresentazioni a bordo, i personaggi, il cane chiamato Shakespeare, tutto insieme fedelmente trascritto e trasfigurato dalla fantasia del poeta. Mai Mussapi, partito da una poesia tutta lirica e tutta intrisa di luci metafisiche, era stato così concreto, così robusto, così "narratore". Se in *Antartide* l'ossessione delle metafore marinare richiama Coleridge, invano il lettore cercherà qui ritmi ed echi di antiche ballate. È come se il poeta volesse cancellare la musica della parola per arrivare a una musica mentale, allegorica. Mussapi racconta, e il suo talento lirico è ora proprio nell'architettura di ghiaccio del suo poema, nel suo sovrapporre racconto e visione, realtà e allegoria. Il lettore si troverà così ad un'opera coinvolgente, coraggiosa, nuova, sfidante, a una scommessa ardua e forte sul futuro della poesia.

Giuseppe Conte

Mario Baudino. *Colloqui con un vecchio nemico* Parma: Guanda, 1999.

“Garbato sia l’eloquio / e gli aneddoti belli / quel che si vede è lacca per capelli.” Con questo *envoi* in corsivo (e in falso) si conclude la *Lettera* che apre l’ultima raccolta di Baudino. Iscritto nel segno di W. H. Auden, magari proprio quello della *Lettera del nuovo anno*, il libro vive di un’ininterrotta, irridente schermaglia tra suono e senso, e insieme tra alto e basso. Lo si vede nei due testi centrali, Aquila I e Aquila II, dove quotidiano e sublime si contrappongono attraverso due voci, una che canta le ragioni di “*idrocarburi mutui licenze impianti elettrici / e tassi d’interesse*”, l’altra tesa a evocare la solare figura romantica del rapace, “*stirpe*” dei cieli. *Aquile*, d’altra parte, s’intitola anche la sequenza di trenta poesie dedicate a un serrato corteggiamento, che va dispiegandosi nella forma di un scontro tra le costrizioni del cerimoniale sociale e le prepotenti accensioni-ascensioni del desiderio. Nel continuo alternarsi di registri, la forza del cantabile è conquistata grazie a un fitto montaggio metrico, estratta a forza dalla frizione sillabica. È un capitale che viene accumulato per essere scialato in rima lieve: “*Sogni chi vuole sulla terra vaga / che un dio scherzoso apparecchiò ai mortali / io chiudo gli occhi e avanzo / voglio pochi evidenti segnali*”. Accanto alla figurata dell’aquila, sia pure più defilata si colloca quella dell’angelo. Naturalmente anch’essa va incontro a una decisa riduzione. Angelo “*dell’agenda*” e della “*moda*”, la creatura celeste apparirà a Maria come in un western. “*Oh sì ho sognato cherubini / cow-boy della luce*”. Non si pensi però che Baudino risolva ogni tensione nell’arte della sprezzatura. La sua ironia, difatti, costeggia pagine di violenta espressività, come nel caso della composizione forse più irta e ardua dei *Colloqui*. Si tratta del magnifico *Brindisi* che celebrando l’arrivo di un temporale sembra al contempo descrivere l’avvento e l’imminenza della parola poetica.

Valerio Magrelli

Edited by Massimo Maggiari, *College of Charleston*

Brief Notices

Edited by Anne Tordi

Bregoli-Russo, Mauda. *Teatro dei Gonzaga al tempo di Isabella Gonzaga.*

***Studies in Italian Culture, Literature in History*, 21.**

New York: Peter Lang, 1997. Pp. 131.

This work is divided into three parts. Following the introduction (part 1), part 2 is divided into six chapters: “Isabella d’Este Gonzaga e il teatro”; “Notizie sui buffoni e attori della Corte di Mantova”; “Primordi del teatro a Mantova: poeti e operatori teatrali al tempo di Isabella Gonzaga”; “Schede Davari. Appendice. Ulteriori notizie su Filippo Lapaccino e sul Vescovo di Mantova Ludovico Gonzaga”; “Musicisti, cantori e suonatori alla Corte Mantovana nei secoli XV e XVI”; and “Architetti teatrali a Mantova.” Part 3 ends the volume with a conclusion, notes, and a bibliography.

***Differentia. Review of Italian Thought* 8-9 Spring/Autumn 1999. Pp. 453.**

This review edited by Peter Caravetta offers a variety of essays on literature, art, poetry, historiography, as well as interviews and book reviews. Among the essays are “Right and/or Left: Overcoming Ideological Dualisms in Berlusconi’s Italy” by V. Binetti and A. Camaiti; “The Problem of Immigration in Italy” by F. Pankiewicz; “From Water to Dust: A Dehydrating Essay on Erri de Luca” by M. S. Ruthenberg. In “That Awful Mess . . . ,” Robert De Luca offers part of a new translation of Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Pasticciaccio*.

***Esperienze letterarie* 24.4 (ottobre-dicembre 1999). Pp. 160.**

In this literary review directed by Marco Santoro, there are articles by Stephen D. Kolsky on Moderata Fonte (3-18); Toni Iermano on Renato Fucini (19-52); and Luciano Parisi on Antonio Borgese (53-70). Included in this volume are also shorter articles ("Note" and "Rassegne") by Paola Moreno (71-82); Albarosa Macri Tronci (83-92); and Michael Caesar and Ann Hallamore Caesar (93-108). There is a section on book reviews, and another for brief notices concerning recent issues of journals.

Healey, Robin. *Twentieth-Century Italian Literature in English Translation. An Annotated Bibliography 1929-1997*. Toronto: UP, 1998. Pp. 605.

As the author states in the preface, the aim of this bibliography is "to bring together information about all of the translated writers, about their works and the reception of their works, and about their translators." The entries, primarily of books published in Great Britain and the United States, are organized chronologically beginning with 1929. This bibliography ends with a series of indexes of authors, titles, translators, editors, publishers, and periodicals.

Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Trans. George Bull. London: Penguin, 1999. Pp. 106.

This volume is a new edition of Machiavelli's classic translated with notes by George Bull, and an introduction by Anthony Grafton. The text is preceded by a chronology of dates, introduction, translator's note, selected bibliography, and a list of Machiavelli's principal works. The volume concludes with notes and a glossary of proper names.

***Polytext. At the Turn of the Century* 14 (Winter 1999-2000). Pp. 267.**

This millennium issue includes sections on poetry, translation, essays on literature and pedagogy, and conference lectures. Paolo Valesio contributes poems from his collection *Dardi* and is also the author of the essay "Poetry, Exile, and Italophony (51-61). Other essays include Robert Viscusi's "An Italy of the Mind" 62-71) and Edward Said's "An Unresolved Problem" (107-110). Among the contributions of conference lectures are "The Silenced Modernism: F. T. Marinetti and the First Avant-Garde" by Graziella Sidoli (137-60), and "Wounds of War" by Cristina Lombardi-Diop (161-179).

***La Venise de Goldoni. Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre Aixois de Recherche italienne (Aix-en-Provence, 1-3 décembre 1993)*. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1998. Pp. 306.**

This colloquium, the sixteenth to be organized by the Centre aixois since 1982, brings together the works of various specialists in Goldonian criticism. The topic of the colloquium, "L'image de la cité vénitienne dans l'oeuvre de Carlo Goldoni," commemorates the anniversary of the death of the Venetian dramatist. Some of the contributors to this volume are: Georges Ulysse, José Guidi, Franco Fido, Jean Lacroix, Carmelo Alberti, Arturo Tosi and Claudio Milanese.

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