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From the Editor

2020 was a very sad year for the Italian Studies community. We lost, among others, three very dear colleagues and friends: Franco Fido, Edoardo Lebano and Joseph Tusiani. Franco, Edoardo and Joseph touched many of us with their outstanding teaching, research, and service to our profession. They helped many of us become who we are now, and we are forever grateful to them. They will be sorely missed.

In this issue, Franco Fido is remembered by Stefania Buccini. Written reflections on Lebano and Tusiani will follow in subsequent numbers of the journal.

Vol. 97.3 brings you also the latest research, discussion and analysis on various topics, including literature, cinema, media, culture, language, and teaching and learning.

Buona lettura!
Michael Lettieri

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Reviews

Ricordo di Franco Fido

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Abstract: La scomparsa di Franco Fido, avvenuta il 23 giugno 2020, ha destato vivo cordoglio nella comunità accademica. Intellettuale di fama internazionale, vissuto fra l'Italia, la Francia e gli Stati Uniti, Fido ha dedicato la sua intera esistenza agli studi letterari percorrendo un arco cronologico ampio in cui il Settecento ha occupato un posto privilegiato. Attraverso le sue letture critiche, in grado di coniugare in modo esemplare rigore filologico e acribia esegetica, diverse generazioni di studiosi si sono potute avvalere non solo della sua immensa cultura, ma anche del suo rigoroso e antidogmatico metodo di lettura. Dai saggi imperniati su singoli autori alle panoramiche che percorrono vari secoli della storia della letteratura, il tratto distintivo degli studi di Fido va individuato in una profonda e moderna sensibilità umanistica che gli ha permesso di frequentare vari versanti della tradizione letteraria con impareggiabile competenza.

Keywords: Settecento, Illuminismo, lettura, testo, teatro, commedia, Goldoni.
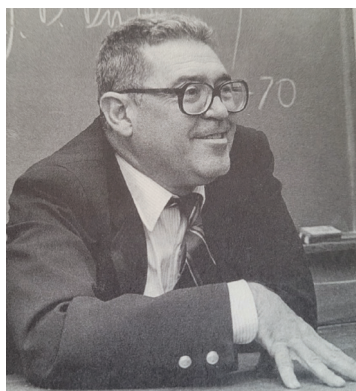
Franco Fido è scomparso il 23 giugno 2020 a Longué-Jumelles, comune situato nella Valle della Loira dove risiedeva dal 2009. Nel corso di una lunga carriera accademica svolta fra l'Italia, la Francia e gli Stati Uniti, la sua vasta erudizione gli ha permesso di spaziare dalla letteratura alla storia delle idee, dal pensiero filosofico all'iconografia e dalla cultura italiana a quella francese con impareggiabile competenza e singolare finezza. Intellettuale di fama internazionale, Fido ha consacrato la sua intera esistenza agli studi letterari percorrendo un arco cronologico ampio in cui il secondo Settecento ha occupato un posto privilegiato.

Dopo gli studi conseguiti alla Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa sotto la direzione di insigni mentori, come Luigi Russo e Giorgio Pasquali, e periodi di insegnamento presso atenei francesi e americani, sono stati soprattutto gli anni trascorsi a Brown e a

Harvard fra il 1969 e il 2005 a marcare le fasi più significative della sua missione educativa e del suo itinerario scientifico.[1] Coniugando rigore filologico e acribia esegetica in una prospettiva comparata, gli studi di Fido hanno offerto alla comunità accademica internazionale rare opportunità di riflessione e di apprendimento. Attraverso di essi diverse generazioni di letterati si sono potute avvalere non solo della sua immensa cultura, ma anche del suo rigoroso e antidogmatico metodo di lettura. Per Fido leggere era un processo organico e intenso, frazionato da soste, rinvii ed escursioni dal centro dell'opera letteraria alla sua periferia e viceversa. Questo sistematico meccanismo mentale, scandito da fasi precise, è delineato nelle preziose riflessioni sul proprio metodo di studio ("Considerazioni sul mio lavoro" 223-230) che, pur se pubblicate nel 1999, sono riproposte nella conclusione del suo ultimo libro:

> Quando mi accosto a un testo - e i testi sono la materia prima del mio lavoro, come i corpi umani quella dell'arte medica - cerco di imparare più che posso su quel testo, a cominciare dalla sua storia testuale, ecdotica, se vogliamo contineggiare, e finendo con la sua fortuna. Ma poi cerco di rileggerlo come se lo vedessi per la prima volta. Così, se a un certo punto mi sento colpito e sorpreso vuol dire che forse sono incappato in qualcosa di peculiare a quel testo, e che sono sulla buona strada (*Alveare* 228).

Questo approccio mirato, libero e intuitivo era per lui il più affidabile criterio di interpretazione non solo per comprendere l'opera letteraria nella sua complessità strutturale, ma anche per inquadrarla nella microstoria evolutiva dell'autore e rapportarla al milieu culturale della sua genesi. Era sua convinzione che la traiettoria della lettura trespariva come in filigrana dal testo stesso: bisognava soltanto avere la costanza di individuarla e la tenacia di seguirla con l'ausilio degli strumenti giusti.[2]

Ogni indagine di Fido è sempre sorta da una connaturata e inesauribile "curiositas" che, abbinata a una scrupolosa esplorazione testuale scevra da ogni sudditanza a teorie e mode letterarie, ha inteso cogliere "la duplice istanza dell'individualità e della storicità"[3] dell'opera letteraria e perpetuare la metodologia "integrale" di Luigi Russo. "Storico della letteratura,"[4] come preferiva definirsi, sensibile alla lezione di Leo Spitzer e di altri maestri,[5] ricettivo allo strutturalismo e al vivace dialogo sull'intertestualità, ma cauto nei confronti di persuasive e rigide strategie di interpretazione, Fido era assertore di una visione dichiaratamente dinamica e aperta dell'esegesi testuale.[6] Infatti, anche se avviate da obiettivi precisi, le sue ricerche suggeriscono spunti per approfondimenti autonomi, e

a testimoniarlo sono i suoi numerosi e originali contributi su quasi tutti i periodi della storia della letteratura. Dagli studi dedicati a singoli autori fra Medioevo e Rinascimento, come Boccaccio e Machiavelli, alle panoramiche che percorrono vari secoli, il tratto distintivo delle letture critiche di Fido va individuato in una profonda e moderna sensibilità umanistica.

Distribuiti in un arco di tempo iniziato nel 1957 e concluso nel 2012,[7] tutti i lavori di Fido rivelano un'invariata perizia esegetica e una costante vitalità di pensiero che vanificano ogni critica di passatismo. L'ampiezza delle competenze e degli interessi del loro autore si riflette soprattutto nella lunga serie di studi goldoniani avviata da *Guida a Goldoni. Teatro e società nel Settecento* (1977),[8] monografia che intende scortare il lettore attraverso un corpus teatrale strutturato come "una città estesa, piena di animazioni e di contrasti, coi suoi quartieri signorili e i suoi sobborghi popolari" (*Guida* viii). Esaminando e storicizzando tematiche ricorrenti nella produzione del commediografo e inquadrandole magistralmente nel contesto della Serenissima, Fido ricostruisce un quadro d'insieme in cui si dispiegano diversificati itinerari storico-sociali ("Le commedie e la carriera del borghese in società"[9] 5-47) e complesse configurazioni multidimensionali ("Il tempo del calendario e le occasioni del carnevale" 139-161; "Il tempo del barometro: lettura delle *Baruffe Chiozzotte*" 162-193). L'attento esame del teatro goldoniano e dei suoi meccanismi interni, con le inevitabili contingenze e prevedibilità che ne derivano, è qui visualizzato in un'inquadratura che travalica il contesto veneziano e sollecita il richiamo ad altri autori appartenenti alla tradizione sia italiana che europea.[10] Su questa linea esegetica va collocato *Da Venezia all'Europa: prospettive sull'ultimo Goldoni* (1984), studio che affranca Goldoni da un limitante "lagunismo"[11] inserendolo in una visuale europea attraverso l'analisi dei difficili anni francesi registrati nei *Mémoires*. Il volume include una fine lettura della "Trilogia della villeggiatura" ("Giacinta nel paese degli uomini: interpretazione *delle Villeggiature* e del 'femminismo' goldoniano" 13-58) che, più di ogni altro capolavoro goldoniano, attesta la sfiducia dell'autore nella classe mercantile veneziana ormai screditata dall'insensata emulazione dei costumi patrizi.[12] Il discorso sul vacillamento dello statuto comico, evidente in questo straordinario trittico teatrale, è ripreso in una sezione della raccolta intitolata *Le Muse perdute e ritrovate. Il divenire dei generi letterari fra Sette e Ottocento* (1989)

che, indagando la complessa dinamica di trasformazione dei generi e delle forme letterarie fra l'età dell'Arcadia e il Romanticismo, individua la ricettività dell'ultimo Goldoni veneziano alle contrastate ragioni del cuore e al mondo dei sentimenti emersi dal dramma borghese europeo ("Dopo la riforma: educazione sentimentale dell'innamorata 'civile' goldoniana" 93-112).

L'esame di aspetti inediti del corpus goldoniano prosegue nel libro successivo, *Le inquietudini di Goldoni. Saggi e letture* (1995) in cui, insieme alla scelta programmatica dei titoli delle commedie, alla ricorrenza dei proverbi e alla rilevanza scenica dei cronotopi del carnevale e della guerra, viene studiata l'innegabile svolta ideologica della produzione francese di Goldoni ("La ragione in ombra e la tentazione della follia nelle commedie degli anni francesi" 163-183). Non più idoneo a trasferire nell'universo comico l'intemperanza di un mondo risanabile attraverso il ricorso a positivi antidoti offerti da una società ristoratrice, il teatro del periodo francese lascia emergere la cognizione di una irrazionalità endemica e inguaribile, rapportabile a "una crescente curiosità e tolleranza per l'errore sentito non più come sintomo aggravante di una discordanza sociale, ma come elemento costitutivo della psiche" (*Inquietudini* 178).

Il percorso su sentieri insondati della letteratura allo scopo di evidenziare visuali nuove e acquisizioni inedite non è, tuttavia, limitato al solo teatro goldoniano, ma si allarga anche ad altri ambiti settecenteschi, spesso poco noti alla critica, che Fido ha potuto frequentare con disinvoltura e competenza grazie alla sua "impareggiabile conoscenza del periodo e quasi affettuosa familiarità con tutti i suoi protagonisti" (Savoia 151). Su questa linea di ricerca va collocato il volume *La serietà del gioco. Svaghi letterari e teatrali nel Settecento* (1998) che "tratta, attraverso lo studio di opere considerate a torto minori, di un aspetto peculiare e attraente di molti autori di quel secolo: la loro capacità di affrontare argomenti molto seri e magari rischiosi con una notevole, calviniana levità, e senza mai prendersi troppo sul serio" (*Alveare* 227). Il gioco, inteso "come *play*, pulsione ludica parallela o interna a tante attività così dette serie" (*Serietà* 8-9), accosta autori diversi — come il massone Tommaso Crudeli al librettista e bibliofilo Lorenzo Da Ponte — richiamando l'attenzione su un Settecento paludato in un manto di leggerezza, ma non per questo inferiore e privo di

dignità letteraria. Dedicato all'esplorazione di figure e temi poco frequentati è anche *Viaggi in Italia di Don Chisciotte e Sancio e altri studi sul Settecento* (2007), libro che raccoglie scritti già apparsi in riviste e miscellanee. Fido mette qui a fuoco problematiche vaste, fra cui la riproposta del mondo classico nel teatro tragico ("La storia umana sulla scena. Dalle tragedie del primo Settecento ai teatrali di Giovanni Pindemonte" 55-72), il rapporto fra la tradizione comica e quella librettistica ("I libretti viennesi di Da Ponte e la tradizione goldoniana" 92-107) e l'incompiutezza di alcune odi parininane ("Le 'altre' odi del Parini e la sindrome del non finito" 155-168), rimarcando l'originalità e l'autonomia dell'illuminismo italiano rispetto a quello d'Oltralpe.

L'ultimo libro su Goldoni è *L'avvocato di buon gusto. Nuovi studi goldoniani* (2008), concepito nell'alveo delle celebrazioni per il tricentenario della nascita del commediografo (1707-2007). A due saggi panoramici iniziali che, rispettivamente, riesaminano aspetti del teatro goldoniano alla luce di strumenti critici attuali ("Goldoni oggi: 1707-2007" 11-28) e il variegato rispecchiamento sulle scene delle arti e dei mestieri ("Le professioni e il mondo del lavoro nel teatro di Goldoni" 29-47), seguono brevi studi presentati a convegni, scritti inediti, e ricerche rivisitate o riproposte con titoli diversi.

Da questa rapida rassegna di libri che costituiscono assi di ricerca imprescindibili per ogni settecentista, emerge il ritratto di uno studioso non solo dotato di prodigiosa erudizione, ma anche di ineccepibile disciplina metodologica, esemplare precisione esegetica e straordinaria chiarezza argomentativa.

La rilevanza scientifica del profilo accademico di Fido non va, tuttavia, disgiunta dall'encomiabile e duraturo apporto al settore didattico. Professore tanto affabile quanto esigente, percepiva la docenza come "una necessità fisiologica" (Pertile et al. 12) e guidava i suoi allievi con competenza, impegno ed entusiasmo. Sempre disposto ad accoglierne i pareri, era inflessibile solo quando ravvisava errori di metodo, inesattezze bibliografiche e cronologiche, o eccessiva ricettività a quelli che riteneva gli imperativi categorici di seducenti e svianti logiche interpretative.[13] Il suo insegnamento era solidamente ancorato alla devota deferenza nei confronti del testo, ritenuta il requisito essenziale del codice deontologico del letterato:

Questo consiste, secondo me, nel trasmettere ai nostri studenti il gusto per le opere letterarie e il senso della loro utilità, e insieme le competenze necessarie per maneggiare con delicatezza quei preziosi oggetti, al tempo stesso indistruttibili e fragili: perché poi possano a loro volta descriverli a beneficio dell'altra, più ampia categoria di utenti da cui anche economicamente dipendiamo, l'insieme dei lettori comuni (*Alveare* 228-229).

"Indistruttibili" e "fragili", sono proprio i libri ad evocare l'ipotiposi del professore bibliofilo e ambasciatore della letteratura italiana e a suggerire un inevitabile raffronto con Lorenzo Da Ponte, pioniere delle lettere italiane negli Stati Uniti. Come l'illustre predecessore, Fido ha svolto una missione educativa con tutti i crismi di un compito morale sollecitato, nel suo caso, dall'esigua fortuna del nostro Settecento e dall'esigenza di istituire una scuola in grado di studiarlo e apprezzarlo con rigore e passione:

Si *minima licet* potrei parlare anch'io di lunga fedeltà, una fedeltà che in America ha assunto fatalmente un lavoro missionario, dato la pressoché totale ignoranza – a parte Vico – degli autori italiani di quel secolo negli Stati Uniti, e il pronunciato sciovinismo dei settecentisti francesi e inglesi. Oggi, con mia soddisfazione alcuni miei allievi continuano a insegnare Parini, Alfieri e Goldoni in varie buone università d'oltre Oceano (*Alveare* 227).

Vivo cordoglio e sincera commozione ha destato la scomparsa di Franco Fido nella comunità accademica e, soprattutto, fra i suoi allievi che perdono un maestro esemplare, ma non la sua intramontabile lezione.

Note

[1] "Dopo la Francia il mio paese d'adozione è stato l'America, paese in cui ho insegnato per molti anni, ma in cui sono arrivato probabilmente troppo tardi per impadronirmi in modo soddisfacente della sua cultura. Se tuttavia, come voglio sperare, anche la lunga esperienza di vita e di colloquio con gli studenti negli Stati Uniti mi è servita a progredire nel mio lavoro ciò è avvenuto non tanto per le molteplici 'scuole' o mode ermeneutiche con cui sono venuto a contatto - nel villaggio globale non avrei comunque potuto ignorarle - quanto per la crescente consapevolezza del posto precario che nel mondo di oggi (di cui l'America è la versione tecnicamente più avanzata) e specialmente fra i giovani, occupano le cosiddette *humanities*" (Fido, *Nell'alveare della memoria. Ultimi incontri letterari*, 226-227).

[2]"Di fatto, situare il testo nel contesto storico giusto, e poi descriverlo il più precisamente e chiaramente possibile, usando di volta in volta le griglie più opportune, mi sembra la quintessenza del nostro compito, o per

lo meno è il risultato che mi propongo di conseguire. Voglio dire che un minimo di gusto e di fiuto critico (senza il quale non ci si dovrebbe occupare di letteratura, come non dovrebbe suonare in orchestra una persona stonata) ci aiuta a privilegiare certi elementi che hanno in un dato autore uno speciale rilievo: dai più ovvi, come la sintassi e i proverbi in Verga o la scansione del dialogo e l'evidenza teatrale in Goldoni, ai più elusivi, per esempio i silenzi e le metafore ossessive come indizi del represso in Alfieri, e così via; e poi scegliere come ogni artigiano, fra gli strumenti a disposizione quelli che fanno più al caso nostro" (Fido, *Alveare*, 228).

[3] Binni 724.

[4] "In sostanza come vedo oggi il mio lavoro, e come mi definisco rispetto ad esso? Per le ragioni che ho detto, preferisco chiamarmi più che un critico, uno storico letterario - restando naturalmente indispensabile e preliminare l'operazione empirica che permette di riconoscere, distinguendolo da altri territori e materiali, l'oggetto di cui cerchiamo di fare la storia. Al massimo posso qualificare l'etichetta di storico con vari attributi. Storico della letteratura del Settecento intanto" (Fido, *Alveare*, 227).

[5] "Dai grandi artigiani che più ammiro, Leo Spitzer, Jean Starobinski, Mario Praz, Carlo Dionisotti, Jean Rousset e altri vecchi studiosi che non sempre stanno in alto nelle quotazioni del giorno, spero di aver imparato a rispettare il mio mestiere" (Fido, *Alveare*, 228).

[6] "Potrei dire che passando da studente a Pisa a insegnante in Francia, i miei interessi si spostarono dal contesto al testo. Nella *routine* di un dialogo con studenti (anzi quasi sempre studentesse) quasi digiuni di letteratura italiana, ma svegli e disciplinati, mi trovai fra il polo alto, quasi metafisico, dello strutturalismo francese allora nella sua prima e migliore stagione, e il polo basso, concreto, della non mai abbastanza lodata *explication de texte*. Nell'esercizio quasi quotidiano di questa, cercando di vedere come funzionavano e come resistevano a una traduzione i più disparati testi francesi o italiani, ho letteralmente re-imparato a leggere, e i risultati buoni o cattivi non tocca a me dirlo, si sono visti parecchi anni dopo in un libro sul *Decameron* (1988), *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette*, in cui, riaprendolo oggi, riconosco anche l'influenza, favorita dall'amicizia personale, di Mario Baratto, Cesare Segre e Maria Corti, e in alcuni saggi su Manzoni" (Fido, *Alveare*, 225-226).

[7] Fido, "Per una lettura storica delle commedie goldoniane"; Fido, *Alveare*.

[8] La nuova edizione del volume, apparsa nel 2000, comprende sedici lettere inedite di Goldoni e altri studi, alcuni dei quali già pubblicati in *Da Venezia all'Europa: prospettive sull'ultimo Goldoni.*

[9] Il primo capitolo è un condensato della tesi di laurea di Fido, intitolata "Spirito borghese e realtà nazionale nel teatro di Goldoni" (Fido, *Alveare,* 225).

[10] Su questo punto cfr. D. Della Terza, 26.

[11]"He is the first critic to have organized Goldoni's poetics along a series of programmed axes which have fully liberated Goldoni (and his future critics) from *lagunismo*, placing him centrally into the most experimental traditions of European drama" (Cope, 299).

[12] Sull'originalità della rilettura di Fido cfr. Cope 306-307.

[13] "Di sicuro, non possiedo e non so usare tutti i migliori strumenti, ma so che non c'è strumento che sia per definizione migliore di tutti gli altri, e che anzi ci sono degli ottimi strumenti che possono sciupare o tradire un testo. Se cerchiamo di applicare a Marivaux e a Goldoni le geniali intuizioni di Bachtin sul multilinguismo o sullo sfrenamento carnevalesco, alla fine ci troveremo tra le mani qualcosa che somiglia più a Dostoevskij o a Rabelais che a Marivaux e a Goldoni" (Fido, *Alveare*, 228).

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Multimodality and Semiotic Codification in Dante's *Inferno*

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Abstract: In the *Divine Comedy* there are key-textual categories of communication identifiable as modes that interact with one another in a multimodal manner. Multimodal configurations contribute to the creation of meaning. The *Inferno* prepares the groundwork for a multimodal articulation and semiotic codification of meaning throughout the three *cantiche*. Dante's *Comedy* is essentially a digital representation (language-as-writing), but it has also inspired artists to reproduce it through sound and visual representations, thus reinterpreting it in the language of icons. Under the semiotic lens, we will attempt to show how the written text is not completely digital but contains features that are applicable and shared with other modes that allow for multimodal codifications, potentially hosting new epistemic paths which may fruitfully contribute to the critical debate on Dante's *Comedy*.

Keywords: Multimodality, mode, translation, transduction, digital, *analogon*, icon, deixis.

1.1 Multimodality in the *Inferno*

The *Divine Comedy* is a literary work that offers a high degree of receptivity to multimodality because it is directly tide to the iconic ground of the representamen which is intrinsically present in verbal signs. For this reason, the iconic ground encourages direct exchanges between signs that belong to different modes. Verbs that are used to express the idea of sight overabound in the *Divine Comedy,* from the very opening scene. What may easily pass unobserved in regard to such verbs is that they are in effect actions of the digital medium (verbal language) and stage fluid transactions with analogues. The iconic ground of digital signs provides a natural predisposition in humans; it gives reason for our deep attachment to analogical modes because we find them instinctually natural, real, and authentic. Ineradicable traces of iconicity contained and retained in the ground of signs prompt a dynamic inclination and a continuous readiness to re-articulate signs, at least in the mind of the interpreter, into modes of image, sound, smell, and touch; in other words, into the modes that seem

to be closer to our natural senses and to the way we perceive things. The synesthetic *terzina* of *Purgatory* 10.94-96: "He in whose sight nothing can be new/wrought this speech made visible,/new to us because it is not found on earth" is a sort of manifesto, it is Dante's explicit stance on multimodality and his multimodal-meta-poetic indication to which the poem lends itself. But, for the time being, let us take a close look at what the *Inferno* has to offer to the reader insofar as multimodality is concerned.

1.2 Iconicity in the Language of the *Inferno*

Dante's account of the afterlife unfolds along the pattern of a journey, and the way the poet speaks of his experience can be imagined as a true mis-en-scène. The text presents all the characteristics of a cinematic script, from the use of a copious amount of verbs and nouns mostly related to sight, to direct/ indirect speech acts, information regarding the whereabouts of Dante the pilgrim and his guide, their directional movement, and stage directions. The iconic mode takes account of deictic functions through deictic markers[1] even if, the latter, are there but not easily and clearly distinguishable. The opening scene of the *Inferno* is essentially about what Dante saw there: "But to retell the good discovered there, / I'll also tell the other things I saw" (1.8-9). The narrative tone is established by "I saw" and all the things he saw take precedence over the good he found there. He continues throughout the canto underscoring the importance of what he saw. As Dante the wayfarer arrives at the foot of a hill, he punctuates his whereabouts again with verbs of sight and deictic markers of spatial directionality: "guardai in alto e vidi le sue spalle/vestite già de' raggi del pianeta" 1.16-17 "*looking up* I *saw* its shoulder/arrayed in the first light of the planet". Moreover, the sunrays he sees by looking up at the top of a hill is diametrically opposite to the dark woods of the opening scene and, here too, he draws attention to what he perceives visually: "so my mind, still in flight,/turned back to look once more upon the pass/no mortal being ever left alive" (1.25-26). Thus, in

approaching the *Divine Comedy* we would do well to remind ourselves that the reading process is a sight-dependent operation and that therefore our first encounter is with the physicality of the text rather than with what lies beyond it (Pietropaolo 202).

1.3 Iconicity with Allegorical Function

The three beasts (the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf) Dante introduces after the regained, short-lived hope set about an allegorical narration and stand for the three basic human vices (incontinence, violence, fraud) from which all other human vices originate. The entire *cantica* of the *Inferno* is structured according to these vices, and the passages in which Dante mentions them for the first time convey an authentic realism, as if the reader could actually see and hear them. Here too Dante uses iconic codes:

> Ed *ecco,* quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
> una lonza leggiera e presta molto
> che di pel macolato era coverta;
> e non si partia *dinanzi* al *volto,*
> anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
> ch'i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.
> [...]
> ma non sì che paura non mi desse
> *la vista* che m'apparve d'un leone.
> Questi *parea* che contra me venisse
> con la test'alta e con rabbiosa fame,
> sì che *parea* che l'aere ne tremasse.
> Ed una lupa che di tutte brame
> *sembiava* carca ne la sua magrezza,
> e molte genti fé già viver grame,
> questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
> con la paura ch'uscia di sua *vista,*
> ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.
> (*Inf.* 1.31-54, the emphasis in italics is mine)

Key-elements of multimodality inherent to the above citations are essentially several language choices Dante makes. First of all, and as we already mentioned, the poet makes extensive use of verbs, nouns, and adverbs related to sight having deictic implication in the specific role of pointers that indicate directionally actions in space and time. Such a choice is also the most explicit attempt to make the digital mode (which is proper to alphabetic languages) converge with the visual mode, and thus turning narration from a rather abstract state of signification into the mode to which our senses respond best. The less explicit aspect, also considered to be the most challenging one, is Dante's poetic language which he uses allegorically. What this means is that if we take the word incontinence and try to convey its content value for what it is, the effect is less direct and less successful. Instead, Dante chooses the animated noun leopard and, by making such a choice, we must

recognize that the result is unquestionably superior. It could be perceived as if Dante handed a sort of photograph to the reader and whose function is a true analogon of the leopard according to our perceptive stimuli. Now, the naïve reader would stop at the literal level and comprehend that the pilgrim's journey is being actually impeded by a leopard. But we know that Dante the poet wants us to read the *Divine Comedy* allegorically. He states that clearly in his epistle 13, commonly known as *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (which I take to be authentic, especially after the convincing argument made by Robert Hollander, Hollander 1993). In the epistle Dante states:

> Ad evidentiam itaque dicendorum sciendum est quod istius operis non est simplex sensus, ymo dici potest polysemos, hoc est plurium sensuum; nam primus sensus est qui habetur per litteram, alius est qui habetur per significata per litteram. Et primus dicitur litteralis, secundus vero allegoricus sive moralis sive anagogicus. [...]

> Et quanquam isti sensus mystici variis appellentur nominibus, generaliter omnes dici possunt allegorici, cum sint a litterali sive historiali diversi. Nam allegoria dicitur ab 'alleon' grece, quod in latinum dicitur 'alienum', sive 'diversum' (Dante, *Epistole* 1979).

As we can see, Dante's explanation to his patron of Verona regarding the way in which to properly read the *Divine Comedy* does not exclude the literal sense that functions as the iconic grounding of his poetic language. As a matter of fact, it constitutes the historicity of the text; it is the actual access to the text in order to move beyond its literalness.[2] We also need to point out that human languages are intrinsically metaphoric and, given this important characteristic, the poet uses it to his advantage to develop an extraordinary allegory having the purpose to search for the potential-other of the text that does-not-yet have a correlated signification. However, when the potential-other is determined, the analogon, or the personification of incontinence through the letter (the animated noun leopard), allows the reader to process the noun's content value at once and to weigh up further interpretive possibilities.

1.4 Transduction in the Multimodality of the *Inferno*

What happens in terms of multimodality in Dante's use of his poetic language in the *Inferno* is what Kress calls *transduction*, which is "the process of moving meaning-material from one mode to another from *speech* to *image*; from *writing* to *film*" (Kress 125).

Such a process requires a "re-articulation of meaning from the entities of one mode into the entities of the new mode" (Kress 125). The entities that govern writing produce different effect of meaning if compared to images. The elementary entities of writing arranged according to the correct grammar and syntax of a particular language produce meaning that is consistent with the specificity of mode-as-writing. On the other hand, if mode-as-writing is compared to the mode that only makes use of images, such as painting or photography, the signifying result is not only different, but most importantly allows us to single out the degree and type of effect of each mode based on the difference itself.

I have purposefully chosen examples from Gustave *Doré's illustrations* (1976), who gives a classical, historicized view of the *Divine Comedy*; Seymour Chwast's rendition of the *Divine Comedy* into a graphic novel (2010); *Dante's* Inferno: *An Animated Epic* which is a free adaptation of Dante's classic poem (2010); *A TV Dante*, the mini-series (I focus on canto 5 only), which is an experimental attempt to make "the writerly aspects of Dante's text" (Iannucci 1989: 22) speak artistically through images (1990); and finally *L'Inferno*, a silent film with written indications of the plot and key lines from the written text of the *Divine Comedy* (1911). All these examples represent the best choice for the purpose of this study when analyzed in a multimodal setting.

Let us begin by looking at Gustave Doré's depiction of the Leopard that Dante the pilgrim encounters in the *Inferno*.

The immediate reaction that the observer has of this illustration is analogical. What this means is that the way in which s/he perceives it does not require a code. The illustration provides a sufficient degree of transparency to the point that everything that the illustration depicts (even if it tricks the observer) is taken as the actual object of representation. The highest degree of transparency (if we remain in the realm of still images) is the photograph. This is as sort of first-order message which stands-in as a "mechanical analogue of reality" (Barthes 44). It pushes the intentional quality of its maker in the background and allows the analogical influence to prevail. Only with the "second-order message" the object of representation is taken as a codified entity, as a true sign. In mode-as-writing, unlike that of mode-as-image, the element of transparency is somewhat narcotized. A word, even if taken at

Figure 1.1
Inferno 1.31-33, Doré illustration

its literal level, is always a matter of codified stuff. It will rarely exercise a function of transparency. With this being said, not only are we in the position to pinpoint what the pros and cons that may emerge from such a difference are, but also identify the degree of effectiveness and limitation of the two modes.

1.5 Power and Limits of the Visual Mode

The effectiveness of the visual mode, based on Doré's illustration shown above, is one that will quickly allow us to grasp the entire content of the representation without barriers. This is so because the observer has the flexibility to have the entire illustration available at once and, at the same time, will be allowed to move freely in whichever direction s/he chooses among its narrative elements. In this instance the other important element which confirms the effectiveness of the visual mode is the concrete referent or a referent that can be materially simulated therein. As a matter of fact, if we attempt to list all the major narrative elements of such an illustration, we are in the position to visualize: sky, clouds,

water, birds, stones, cliffs, mountain slops, light, shade, colors, a leopard, and a human being. They are all objects of representation endowed with physico-sensorial characteristics of actual objects (even if illusory), that are unambiguously replicable.

The visual simulation of concrete referents, as those we listed above, is possible because we are perceptually inclined to recognize the likeness of something as an "innate experience" by means of surrogate stimuli which act together with our cognitive types (Eco 2000: 130-32, 138). For example, if we take the leopard in fig. 1.1, we could say that it does not convey an appearance that makes it look like an authentic leopard. Indeed, such a remark is reasonable and hardly challengeable. Nonetheless, the lack of realism that we may find in the image does not interfere with its signifying power because it conveys what it is indented to signify, an animal belonging to one of the five spices in the genus *panthera*. For it makes pertinent those traits (mouth, nose, ears, tail, and the spotted fur) that have become part of our encyclopedic competence and eliminate ambiguity to the point that it tells us that it is a leopard and not a tiger, or a lioness, or a black panther. The only animal with which we could mistake the leopard is the jaguar because the latter does not possess adequate, distinctive marks that are different from those of the leopard. But whether we are dealing with a leopard or a jaguar, the difference between the two is not relevant in relation to the context in which Dante places the animal. The sign-function of the image, either a leopard or a jaguar, does not limit, change, or confuse its contextual specificity and content value. In *Inf.* 1 such an animal has an allegorical function and not a taxonomic relevance. If indeed the image had a taxonomic relevance, the need to single out even the minutest difference would become relevant to establish classification accuracy and, thus, determining whether it is a leopard or a jaguar.

To recognize the object of an image it is not necessary to have perceived all the pertinent traits accurately. It is enough to have identified even just one of them in relation to the entire object. In the case of the leopard of Doré's illustration, once the viewer has perceived the shape of a big cat combined with the spotted fur (a distinctive pertinent trait) s/he may immediately conclude that it is a leopard or a jaguar, but certainly not a lioness or a tiger. The ability that images have in making themselves self-evident is due to their distinctive, pertinent traits. What happens with

pertinent traits when one is engaged in perception is that they act on recalling stored information together with their power to synopsize the complete visual representation. Such a process is possible because pertinent traits are activated by our cognitive types (a phenomenon of the human cognitive process). Also, pertinent traits engage comparisons and ultimately recognize perceptive occurrences through surrogate stimuli (stimuli which engage comparisons and ultimately recognize occurrences, as it is the case in which we, quite often, perceive an image not necessarily as an image but as a real object). Pertinent traits do not require being authentic to perform their task felicitously. Even a rudimentary, stylized, pertinent trait has the same ability of a highly authentic one because with visual recognition a pertinent trait may substitute the entire image through the aid of human perception and recall of the authentic object stored in the perceiver's mind. In other words, even though a pertinent trait is clearly incomplete and stylized, what counts is that the image to which the trait refers is stored in the memory of an individual as a cognitive type in its complete manner and with the necessary encyclopedic competence that tells the viewer that it is a leopard and not another feline.

The swiftness by which we process images is due to the fact that images are not governed by rigorous, syntactic-grammatical rules as alphabetic languages. With images we are not compelled by a conventional system that tells us how to spell words and what their meanings are in order to grasp their content value. Our visual access to images is multidirectional and fluid. It does not limit us to follow the unidirectional linearity of alphabetic languages whose semanticity can only be constructed step by step. In a visual representation "the message is already wholly present, even if nothing is clearly pronounced in the form of a statement, yet graspable as soon as one realizes that there are several verbal descriptions possible for the same scene" (Spinicci 19). Moreover, an image always shows more than what it willingly chooses to show or what the viewer demands to see for the simple reason that in order to display itself, the image requires a depicted setting. An image needs a space that accepts it. It cannot be placed in a non-space. It requires a physically present space and, in order to be taken as representation, it need be filled with a setting containing itself as-embodied-space, plus its visual features which all take part in filling in such a space. Therefore images, in their intrinsic

figurativeness, tend to show always more than what they prefigure to show, and the deep characterization of their nature is their figurativeness. As such, "images are objects which possess their own immediate, perceptive givenness" and, in their self-showing, the viewer is provided with a plethora of epistemic givenness, is provided with the ground's constituents of the epistemic process capable of conveying multiple *denotata* (what is figuratively represented by the image) within the span of a gaze.

What we have been describing thus far are key-factors that permit us to articulate an immediate understating and formulate a direct response regarding that which images signify. Such factors prove to be of enormous advantage for many situations in which communication pertains to the physical world and tangible objects. As a matter of fact, when referents of this nature are involved, the visual mode is most useful especially for its easy and multidirectional access, for the fluidity of movement of our gaze directed to its elements, and for the complete presence and instantaneous availability of all such elements that make up the image according to our perceptive faculties. Nonetheless, communication and signification do not always have referents that belong to the physical world and to tangible objects. When abstract referents are involved, the visual mode can be limited and limiting, ambiguous, and ineffective. What we need to keep in mind is that though mode-as-image has the distinctive ability and advantage of recognizing things in the blink of an eye, which is a useful resource that comes from the mode's figurativeness, it nevertheless hosts weak codes because the "optional variants exceed by far the pertinent traits" (Eco 1968: 123). Optional variants (in drawings for example) are singular, idiosyncratic ways of representation which may change the type of drawing "under the hand of a different artist, or even when the same artist uses a different style" (Eco 1968: 123). Thus, for the excessive influence of optional variants the mode becomes ambiguous and ineffective and, above all, it is particularly ineffective for its scarce depth of representation.

Let us look for a moment at the optional variants that an image might convey through its figurative givenness. We have information about Dante, his life, some information about his family, historical facts, his friends, intellectuals he frequented, cultural background, political vicissitudes, the fictional date of the

journey of the *Divine Comedy* (Easter 1300), and so on. Based on the information we have and provided that we want to maintain, as much as possible, cultural and historical realism of the fictional journey, we would not depict him in the opening scene of *canto* 1 where he finds himself lost in a dark forest as in the following illustration. If such an illustration were the only interpretive resource, the viewer would conclude that it is about a detective story with its setting spanning between the 1930s/1950s, the era in which detective fiction became popular both in print and film.

Figure 1.2 by Seymour Chwast

The focus of the whole picture is the man with clear, stereotypical, pertinent traits that fit the description of a modern-day detective: fedora hat, pipe, trench coat with belt and buckle, dark glasses, and his overall appearance. There is nothing in the illustration, not even a negligible detail that indicates a probable connection with the Middle Ages, Dante, and the *Divine Comedy*. In order to establish some kind of relation between Chwast's illustration and Dante's

Divine Comedy, we must turn to the depth of representation, a feature that the illustration does not have, and move beyond its perceptive, figurative givenness, beyond its self-showing. In other words, we need to read passed that which the picture shows and proceed by means of abductions or by means of educated guesses to envision a possible connection between the role of a detective and the content value of Dante's *Inferno*. The role of a detective is to investigate crimes and to obtain evidence from them. We can link the role of a detective to Dante's *Inferno* because such a *cantica* is about punished sins, about those transgressions against divine law. Chwast's artistic intuition was to link the semantic node of sin with the node of crime and equating the two by the depth of representation and not by the figurative givenness of the illustration, something that the latter does not have.

Still dwelling on the depth of representation, the suggestion that links the role of a detective with Dante the wayfarer is plausible and intentionally task-focused as the artist, in this case Chwast, purposefully deviates from what we consider culturally and historically leading to stored knowledge, and which we generally accept as true based on the visual givenness of the illustration, namely items of clothing that Dante wore during his time, his overall appearance, and the general atmosphere of the representation. Chwast's illustration instead challenges and, in a way, may even make the viewer wonder because what he intends to communicate and what we actually see in the illustration is significantly different, ambiguous and anachronistic. Yet, in order to present something original and unpredictable, ambiguities and apparently semantic dissonances are necessary to render the message interesting and aesthetically appealing. The artist here is asking the viewer to think deeply about what s/he sees by drawing a man-type (detective) whose value is beyond its figurativeness (man with trousers, dark glasses, pipe, hat, trench coat, etc.). In other words, the viewer is asked to see what is not in the illustration and urged to concentrate her/his interpretive effort on the function of a detective, and how it might fit the narratological framework of the *Inferno* in direct relation with Dante the wayfarer. The *cantica* is about punished sins; hence, the role of a detective aiming to solve a crime mystery is an abductive/extensive semantic node which equates crime with sin and rearticulates the historical content-value of the *cantica* in a new light that simplifies and

makes the text entertaining and suitable for the modern reader at the expenses of historical accuracy.

Chwast's fig. 1.2 shown above, which depicts Dante the pilgrim lost in the dark woods, if compared to Gustave Doré's illustration of the same scene (fig. 1.3), the viewer discovers a major difference in the mode-as-image. In both illustrations, the primary and most influential communicative function reflects the first-order-message in the sense that the viewer comprehends what s/he actually sees in the pictures, without elevating it to a type of critical, second-order-message. The first visual impact, that is, what is displayed before one's eyes is the immediate communicative function. Also, an image does not substitute the actual thing that it represents, yet neither does it exclude it. In fact, it anticipates its presence and, in a visual illusion guarantees the presence of its absence (Ferrarotti 20).

In the capacity of first-order-message, the image eliminates the spatial constraint, the eye is not restricted to direct its gaze within circumscribed, directionally controlled boundaries, as in the case of writing; it does not require hermeneutic efforts to grasp its content because at the level of first-order-message, the image is self-evident, and its compositional elements are non-oppositional as, instead, is the case for alphabetic writing in which the oppositional value of one letter to another is the fundamental rule that gives distinctiveness and meaning to words.

Another aspect worthy of mention here is the passive impact that visual images tend to impose on the observer. This means that in dealing with the first-order message, the image is endowed with self-giveness. Being this the case and considering this very nature of images, the object or the content of the image, though illusory, for the reason that it stands in for something else, is perceived as actually being there. Hence, the illusion of such a presence makes the message a rigid substitute insofar as it emphasizes the illusory presence of the object and narcotizes the hermeneutic faculty of the observer by not making her/him comprehend, in the immediacy of the perception, that the object of observation which the viewer sees is not the actual thing, but only a representation, a substitution standing in for something else. Therefore the observer engages her/his interpretive faculty only at the level of second-order message; that is, when the intrinsic passivity, the laziness of the image's self-

Figure 1.3
Inferno 1.1-3, Doré illustration

giveness does not fit, reasonably, within the contextual domain of
the representation.

1.6 The Visual Mode with Moving Images

With moving images and adding voice and sound to moving
images, the addressee experiences further stimuli of her/his
emotional state because through the inclusion of different
sensorial components, such as moving images, voice and sound,
the ensemble should enrich and pin down more effectively the
content value of the medium and what the latter attempts to
communicate/signify.

Although this is the case for the purpose of clarity and accuracy
of the message, simply because the more one gives the more the

addressee is steered toward an intended meaning, the inclusion of added sensorial components may, however, strip off from the message, or at least they may push aside and relegate to the background important aesthetic-semantic nodes that the message potentially hosts on the plane of connotation.

Let us look for a moment at the animated movie (*Dante's* Inferno: *An Animated Epics*) based on the first *cantica* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The movie is loosely adapted to Dante's *Inferno* and depicts Dante as a Templar knight who goes to fight in the third Crusade. Under the guidance of the Latin poet Virgil, the story shifts from the Crusade to a sort of epic journey in Hell. There Dante, as a Christian hero fights through the nine Circles of Hell to rescue his beloved Beatrice from the clutches of Lucifer. The first observation is that the story in the movie is overturned, and instead of having Beatrice descending from Heaven and asking Virgil to help Dante, in the movie it is Beatrice instead who is in trouble and needs help. In *The Divine Comedy* it is Virgil to speak about this account of the story and tells Dante what follows:

> Io era tra color che son sospesi,
> e donna mi chiamò beata e bella,
> tal che di comandare io la richiesi.
> Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella;
> e cominciommi a dir soave e piana,
> con angelica voce, in sua favella:
> "O anima cortese mantoana,
> di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,
> e durerà quanto 'l mondo lontana,
> l'amico mio, e non de la ventura,
> ne la diserta piaggia è impedito
> sì nel cammin, che vòlt' è per paura;
> e temo che non sia già sì smarrito,
> ch'io mi sia tardi al soccorso levata,
> per quel ch'i' ho di lui nel cielo udito.
> Or movi, e con la tua parola ornata
> e con ciò c'ha mestieri al suo campare,
> l'aiuta sì ch'i' ne sia consolata.
> I' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
> vegno del loco ove tornar disio;
> amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare (*Inf.* 2.52-72).

In the movie where Dante descends into an area of Hell called malebolge on Geryon's back, and where fraud is punished, the spectator sees Beatrice arriving on a sort of gestatorial chair carried by devils. She herself has devilish features perspiring smoke and flames from her body. In the movie she is possessed by Lucifer. In

the short verbal exchange she entertains with Dante, she shows clearly a sense of complacency in regard to Dante's misery and the dreadful verdict she is going to pronounce against him. Below is the short dialogue:

Dante: Beatrice, is that you? My love, I have come back for you as I promised!

Beatrice: I do not wish to see you suffer, but you leave me little choice.

Dante: I am not what you think I am!

Beatrice: There cannot be a rival Lucifer for beat feet.

Dante: You don't have to obey him. Come back to me!

Beatrice: Behold the tenth circle of fraud and deceit. Those who have broken the very bond of love and trust, in this place shall be forever punished! Malacoda, show our guest his eternal resting place (*Dante's* Inferno*: An Animated Epics*)

The situational inversion of the characters' roles is indeed that which an experienced reader of *The Divine Comedy* would immediately notice, along with the transformation of the wayfarer's depiction into a Templar knight. At the same time, what is not easily palpable is the way in which moving images, sounds, and voices influence the reception of the message, particularly when they are employed simultaneously and responding to an intermodal semiotic function. The overall effect that such a scene produces on the spectator allows us to look at the relation moving images, voices, and sounds have when they are used together and how and in what capacity they contribute to the meaning's configuration. The first thing we need to consider is that where a visual modality is used along with, let us say, an oral or written text, the visual mode engages the addressee initially because there are at least three strong characteristics that images contain:

1. the entire content value of the image is fully displayed before the observer's eyes in a condensed manner and instantaneously;

2. the image plays an imposing role when it comes to the initial visual perception which forms the first-order message and produces a sort of givenness of the real;

3. the image transparency is self-given and the observer does not have to make an effort to create it.

Even though these are strong characteristics of the visual mode, we must consider that they also contribute to form a semantically

poor content, mainly in the context of first-order message. But let us proceed in steps and according to the order of such characteristics.

Since the content value of the visual mode is fully displayed before the viewer's eyes (in the case of animated images, such as in movies, the content is fully displayed photogram by photogram) the meaning is restrictive, conditioned, and rigidly shaped by what the viewer actually sees. Thus, if in the scene mentioned above Beatrice is presented with devilish traits, and certainly dominating over the entire scene, the viewer is very much influenced by the self-imposing effect of the visual transparency leaving her/him rigidly anchored to those visual features while narcotizing her/his metaphoric, interpretive faculties. Nonetheless, the scene is multimodal because moving images are organized in a montage in which they interact with the oral mode staged through the brief dialogue that takes places between Dante and Beatrice and, further, multimodalized by the frightening sounds and noises of the scene's soundtrack. The role-specific of the oral mode, though mixing with and attempting to achieve the same meaning that moving images do, adds value to the content in a way in which images alone would not be able to provide. In the scene, it is only through the dialogue that we learn Beatrice is possessed by Lucifer and that she wants to take revenge, wrongfully, over Dante because Lucifer made her believe that Dante broke the bond of love and trust with her. Here are the last words Beatrice utters: "Those who have broken the very bond of love and trust, in this place shall be forever punished! Malacoda, show our guest his eternal resting place." At this point, if we take for a moment the visual and the oral texts and put them side by side, we realize that on the one hand the visual tells the viewer that Beatrice has distinctive somatic characteristics, such as hair in the shape of horns; she has frightening eyes, like those of a person possessed by evil; she presents an ekpyrotic body which radiates flames and smoke from various parts and, indeed, an over-all presence of a menacing, hellish judge. On the other hand, the oral text reveals who is responsible for Beatrice's change and the reason for it. Moreover, the oral mode utilizes more effectively the metaphoric influence resulting in a semantically richer resource when compared to the visual mode. The lack of transparency engages more effectively the metaphoric faculty of the oral mode because the main characteristic of such a mode is mainly "to tell" and not "to show". Therefore, any utterance of the oral mode is

immediately taken as a bi-planar effort of articulation operating in a sign system in terms of codification and decodification, which eliminates any intentional and systematic possibility of transparency. We said that the verbal/aural mode is semantically richer. For it is so because it contains in itself a metaphoric effectiveness whose purpose, according to Aristotle, is to find and create new relations among semantic categories and not simply, as we commonly assume, to produce mere ornamentations. The new relations or metaphoric relations that the verbal/aural mode is able to create out of different, semantic categories constitutes also the invaluable opportunity for the formation of new ontologies which, the latter, modify and enrich the categorical organization of the listener's encyclopedic knowledge.

A clear example of the depth of representation and the rich metaphoric faculty of the verbal/aural mode can be certainly drawn from the last part of the short dialogue that takes place between Dante and Beatrice. Beatrice concludes the scene's dialogue by saying: "Behold the tenth circle of fraud and deceit. Those who have broken the very bond of love and trust, in this place shall be forever punished! Malacoda, show our guest his eternal resting place." Such a passage is indeed a complex one and shows a profound strength of representation if compared to the visual mode. Here Beatrice does not literally say:

> "You, Dante, my former lover, you broke your promise of love for me and betrayed my trust and, because of that, you will be punished in the same place of Hell where are punished the fraudulent and deceitful souls. Your punishment is everlasting and without rest."

The complexity of the text here is that Beatrice does not literally say that Dante broke his promise of love and trust. That it is Dante and not someone else, the listener can only deduce from the context. Moreover, Beatrice's ironic intent for uttering "in this place shall be forever punished!" (where the fraudulent and the deceitful souls are punished), coupled with a sprinkle of sadism in her final sentence ["Malacoda, show our guest his eternal resting place" (referring to Dante)], represents the metaphoric aspect of her ironic/sadistic intent. Upon hearing these lines, the listener is faced with a contradiction because the place Beatrice is referencing is a place of punishment and, if indeed that is the case, how can it be possible that it is, at the same time, a place of punishment and an "eternal resting place"? It is by such a contradiction that irony and

sadism pup up and the listener grasps them through the metaphoric determinant which only the verbal/aural mode may guarantee. Now, if we attempt to reproduce the same ironic/sadistic meaning with the visual mode, we realize that we do not know where to start and that it is an impossible task to carry out. The impossibility to reproduce irony/sadism by means of the visual mode is due to the fact that it is not a concrete referent, or a referent that can be materially simulated. It lacks physico-sensorial characteristics, the central reproductive element that makes available pertinent traits to sight and that the viewer can link to any object of the visual representation. That is, even if the referent is illusory or imaginary, as in the case of fantastic representations, such as a unicorn, for example, which is non-existent but it is unambiguously replicable insofar it has been visually conventionalized and stored in the cultural, encyclopedic competence of the viewer. In this case irony, which is an abstract concept pointing to a contradiction between intended and stated meaning, further made complex by sadism, a temperamental tendency of deriving pleasure from pain and cruelty inflicted to others can only be conveyed by the verbal/ aural mode. A complex signification (as the one illustrated above) is doable with the verbal/aural mode because it consists of a system of rigid differences whereby positional and oppositional elements of articulation produce strong codes which may disambiguate and shine light even on the smallest and the most abstract shade of possible meaning.

In describing the image-text relation for the scene mentioned above, we can say that the verbal/aural mode performs an additional yet co-significant function over the visual for the reason that it adds meaning to the image which the image itself cannot. Moreover, it provides the viewer with a more comprehensive content-value that becomes particularly valuable when a semantic choice must be made requiring the elevation of the code to a poetic-aesthetic level. With the use of a multimodal medium, the receiver of the message has an easier task in choosing the proper semantic path that the text itself authorizes to take by means of a cohesive dependability of meaning shared and supported across the semiotic modes. This is what Eveline Chan calls "interdependent" labor by which "image/ words together convey an idea that neither could convey alone" (146). At the same time the semiotic function, to some extent, is reciprocal across modes in that what is word specific, as Beatrice's

nuanced irony/sadism detectable in the short dialogue, receives support from the visual mode. Beatrice dominates the scene; she is depicted in a way that she has complete control over Dante. She comes into sight as a controlling, vicious, cynical woman. These visual determinants are feeders and contribute to the formation of the verbal connotation that, the latter, may be nuanced as ironic/sadistic.

Now, let us assume for a moment that the receiver of the message could rely on the verbal/aural mode only. In this case, the text requires some antecedent-specifics in order to convey an ironic/sadistic nuance. Moreover, reliance on the verbal/aural mode only, in spite of being the closest one to the visual mode, as we are going to see soon, would nonetheless determine a different semiotic outcome. In fact, the configuration process of the message is delayed in a narrative-linear-sequential-abstract-logical manner lacking simultaneity and comprehensiveness, the two prevalent characteristics that we find in the visual mode. The other aspect of reciprocity, in this case it is the verbal/aural mode that feeds the visual, is that the ironic/sadistic segmentation of the verbal dialogue punctuates Beatrice's facial expression with an akin visual temperament approximating the content value of the dialogue. Yet, such a nuance could easily pass unnoticed with the visual mode alone because it lacks accurate oppositional elements that, the latter, may more accurately single out and are capable of calling attention to specific shades of meaning. This is something that, unlike the visual, the verbal/aural mode has and, therefore, is able to steer the visual toward an adequate analytical interpretation. Moreover, we cannot disregard the fact that the verbal/aural mode is the closest one to the visual in that, as Amilcare Iannucci argues: "the aural impact of Dante's verbal imagery collapses the distinction between the fictional world being described and reality, and establishes a close relationship between the audience and the thing being evoked. Here meaning is produced through identification with and participation in the action of the poem and is grasped without reflection" (Iannucci 1989: 5-6). The effect described by Iannucci may be compared to a similar effect an audience receives from the visual mode insofar as the "self-givenness" and the sense of "nowness" of the image are fundamental factors that prompt the eye to narcotize fiction and interpretation and set in motion an empathic connection with the object of representation.

Let us now direct our attention to *A TV Dante*, the 1990 mini-series directed by Peter Greenway and Tom Phillips covering eight of the thirty-four *canti* of the *Inferno*. There are some general aspects of this artistic attempt to bring Dante's *Inferno* to the television screen which digress from conventional ideas. "The eight Cantos of the film are not conventionally dramatized, rather they are illuminated with layered and juxtaposed imagery and a soundtrack which comments, counterpoints and clarifies. There are visual footnotes delivered by relevant expert authorities, and these often perform the function of narration as well as illustration."[3] Greenway-Phillips' series has the skillful intent to experiment by means of the visual medium "the writerly aspects of Dante's text" whose result is "parodic" at times, "entertaining", a sort of "postmodern collage of televisual styles, an exercise which is not dissimilar in spirit to Dante's conscious mixing of styles or plurilinguisim" (Iannucci 1989: 22). Yet, what is beyond doubt about this production, as much as the directors made an effort to turn Dante's text into "a blank for new things"[4] and thus, showing the best effort possible to make, quite often, images speak (artistically) their visual language, is that the production remains a text-based visual representation. Something that is contrary, particularly to Greenway's artistic temperament, as in various occasions and among which, he voiced the opinion that (in a joking sense obviously), although it would be "an unpopular thing to say, all film writers should be shot! We do not need a text-based cinema; we need an image-based cinema." The prologue of the Gospel according to John reads: "In the beginning was the word […]". Greenway disagrees and says: "Sorry, that's wrong! In the beginning was the image" ("Peter Greenaway on His Filmmaking Style & Career"). What Greenway implies in his joking, sardonic observation (but with a serious undertone) is that a fundamental objective of his cinematic endeavor has always been that of making images speak directly, finding ways to make images articulate that for which they stand, creating a sort of visual literacy. To be able to create a true visual literacy is a remarkable ambition. However we know, as much as Greenway knows, especially after many experimental attempts, particularly with "Nine Classic Paintings Revisited" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plWSGEAuD_0)", that such a thing is impossible to achieve in the strict functional manner that we attribute to alphabetic languages. The visual mode

presents major limitations in view of the fact that, and as Eco argues:

> [n]el continuum iconico non si ritagliano tratti pertinenti discreti e catalogabili una volta per tutte, ma gli aspetti pertinenti variano: talora sono grandi configurazioni riconoscibili per convenzione, talora anche piccolo segmenti di linea, punti, spazi bianchi, come accade per un disegno di profilo umano, dove un punto rappresenta l'occhio, il semicerchio la palpebra; e sappiamo che in un altro contesto lo stesso tipo di punto e lo stesso semicerchio rappresentano invece, poniamo una banana e un acino d'uva. Dunque i segni del disegno non sono segni di articolazione corrispettivi ai fonemi della lingua perché non hanno valore posizionale e opposizionale, non significano per il fatto di apparire o non apparire; possono assumere significati contestuali (punto = occhio – quando è iscritto in una forma amigdaloide) senza avere significato in proprio, ma non si costituiscono in un sistema di rigide differenze per cui un punto significhi in quanto si oppone alla linea retta o al cerchio. Il loro valore posizionale varia a seconda della convenzione che il tipo di disegno istituisce e che può variare sotto la mano di un altro disegnatore, o nel momento in cui lo stesso disegnatore assume un altro stile. Ci si trova dunque di fronte a una ridda di idioletti, alcuni dei quali riconoscibili da molti, alcuni dei quali privatissimi, dove le varianti facoltative superano di gran lunga i tratti pertinenti, o meglio dove le varianti facoltative diventano tratti pertinenti e viceversa a seconda del codice assunto dal disegnatore (il quale mette in crisi con estrema libertà un codice preesistente e ne costituisce uno nuovo coi detriti dell'altro o di altri). Ecco in che senso i codi iconici, se esistono, sono codi deboli (Eco 1968:123-124).

What this means is that images utilize extensive chromatic continua but do not display distinctive and highly conventional elements of articulation. Therefore, visual signs are neither well-established systemically nor are they conventionally recognized as having strict positional and oppositional values. Such is the reason for which Eco speaks of weak codes in relation to images. In light of these limitations, a true visual literacy that one could attempt to stage through the visual mode, especially if compared to the verbal mode of alphabetic languages, would inevitable produce unsatisfactory results. At the same time it is legitimate to say that the reader here could argue that one thing is to deal with still, artistically produced images, which are the creation and execution of a painter, illustrator, cartoonist, caricaturist, illuminator, computer-graphic designer, computer-animated-image designer, etc., and another is to deal with an actual photograph and moving images that pertain *stricto sensu* to the cinematic domain.

In the case of photographs and moving images, we spontaneously see the objects they show, we "see the world through them" (Walton

251). The relation that links the object to its photographic and cinematic reproduction is not filtered through the beliefs of the photographer and/or of the cameraperson, there is no presence (even though for certain shots and scenes the viewer can identify the camera's presence), there is no trace of an intentional attitude and, thus, one may only photograph or film what is in front of the lens and not what one believes there is. What the viewer sees through a photograph or scene of a film depends on what is in front of the lens. Perception is produced by the relation of a causal dependency which originates from the photographed/filmed object. According to Walton, photographs and scenes are the means that extend the causal link between us and the object without adding any intentional mediation (Walton 251). Photographs and moving images are "transparent" and even though one might argue that they contain intentional efforts, as in the case in which photographic shots and the actual filming of moving images may be arranged in a specific way and not in another and thus, in this case, they certainly show a level of intentionality and aesthetic function, nonetheless what remains unalterable is transparency, which is the main feature of the visual perception. Moreover, in regard to mode-as-moving picture, cinema lacks a true language, the cinematic language is always a performative entity of speech insofar as it does not have a true dictionary and/or a proper normative grammar. It is an artistic language that, to borrow Pasolini's expression, "will never attain a true grammatical normativity" because its elements are "pre-human", "pre-grammatical", "irrational" and, the latter (the irrational), also "explains the profoundly oneiric nature of cinema" (Pasolini 545-46). If anything, moving images produce stylemes and not syntagmas and, as such, they are "stylistic" not "grammatical" (Pasolini 545). With these notions in mind, let us now return to Greenway-Phillips' film and focus on one *canto* so that we may attempt to point out important semiotic aspects that participate and wield distinctive signifying functions in such a production.

Canto 5 of the *Inferno* is about the lustful and primarily about the story of Paolo and Francesca. The scene of these adulterous lovers is indeed the most famous in the *Divine Comedy* and certainly the one that has evoked great imagination in the minds of readers of all ages. The British *A TV Dante* series by Peter Greenway and Tom Phillips, which includes the televised episode of *canto* 5, is

the production that through the visual mode the directors chose and employed ingenious images to single out and to validate key-interpretive paths of the text-based content to transmit immediate and comprehensive insights of the subject matter by manipulating creatively the transparency of the visual medium. Moreover, through the use and manipulation of ingenious images that Greenway-Phillips' production contains, not only is the spectator able to establish an immediate connection with relevant thematic issues of the *canto*, but s/he will be left with a sense of curiosity, left to wonder and encouraged to think creatively to find out whether or not such images can become hosts of further connotations in light of the polysemic nature of Dante's text. Thus, if on the one hand *A TV Dante* is a text-governed production, on the other it is an original attempt to make images speak their own language, with all their potentials and limitations.

The opening part of *canto* 5 of *A TV Dante* is conceived in a way that the visual mode supports and clarifies the text by providing immediate rendition of what is being said. The linear time-bond and content-limiting constrains that the verbal text requires in its unfolding are removed by the transparency of flashing images imposed over the narration of Robert Peck who plays the role of Dante and reads the text from a teleprompter. Also, small windows open up here and there and are superimposed over images. In these windows pop up scholars who provide short explanations of some useful points with thematic visual backdrops, and link the text to important fields of information that can be compared to hypertexts. These techniques are common to the entire production and are specifically the ones that support, clarify, and work in the capacity of providing an initial and immediate comprehension of the text. Although images support and clarify the text, there is also a sort of semiotic concurrence here whereby ideational forms of the same meaning are conveyed distinctly according to the nature and specificity of each mode. When meaning is similar across modes or when there is a specific effort and intent to keep it similar, as in the case described above, Chan argues that meaning "is not simply repeated or duplicated" but instead happens that "different sets of semiotic resources employed by each mode enable distinct affordances. More often than not, we find relationships of similarity where one mode elaborates on the meanings of the other by further specifying or describing while no new ideational

elements are introduced by the text or image" (Chen 149-50).

For example, in *canto* 5 the textual mention of the infernal storm is rendered much more suggestive and dramatic with images of dark-fast-moving clouds, whirlwind storm, lightening, and stormy sea. The visual mode, while maintaining uniformity with the written text and adding suggestiveness and dramatization to the scene, it lengthens and enlarges exceptionally the idea of the *bufera infernale* (infernal storm). This wide-ranging rendition of the visual mode, even if planned, would be impossible to be conveyed through the written text because transparency, comprehensiveness, and the lengthening of those images using the technique of angle and shot changes are distinctive elements that are only apt to the visual mode. More or less, this is the function and purpose of the largest portion of the visual mode we find in *A TV Dante*. Let us now move on to those images that are "picture specific" by which the visual creates meaning and controls it without the participation of the verbal text.

In *canto* 5 the images that are "picture specific" and add new meaning to the verbal mode are fundamentally four: Francesca's naked body appearing in three windows that open up on a black background frame, Paolo's naked body also appearing in three windows that open up on a black background frame, Francesca's close-up shot of her lips with an angle movement of the camera, and finally a long shot of an ultrasound monitor. What do these shots contain that may be considered "picture specific" and add new meanings to the verbal text? At first sight, the three images of Francesca's naked body, appear as actual doubles[5] of the image in the first window and could very likely stand as a repetition to emphasize the idea of carnal lust which, in fact, was the source of her disgrace and tragic death. What influences our immediate, impervious response to similarity is our perceptive constancy based on memory relation. Thus, "color, shape, and brightness of things remain to us relatively constant, even though we may notice some variation with the change of distance, illumination, angle of vision, and so on" (Gombrich 52). But if we pay close attention to the three images and use a critical eye, we realize that they are all different. The first noticeable difference is about colour: in the first window Francesca's photogram presents an indefinable colour with the prevalence of warm chromaticity propending toward skin tone; in the second window the colour

is skin tone; in the third it is black and white. As far as colours are concerned, in the first window we can single out a contrast between black, which is in the background and classified as cold colour, and a chromatic gradience of warm tonality surfacing from Francesca's naked body inside the window. In the second window the contrast between cold and warm colours is maintained, but with an intensification of warm gradation reaching the realistic illusion of skin tone. A psychological effect of warm colours is that they draw the viewer close to the object of representation.[6] Finally, with the cold, black-and-white figure of Francesca and the black background in the third window, the image distances itself from the eye of the spectator and the libido drive that the image conveys in the previous window decreases with the distancing illusion of the image as a result of the cold, black-and-white effect. What we know is that Greenway and Phillips made a deliberate effort to guarantee variation in the similarity of the three images. By doing so, what were they trying to achieve? The least challenging answer is that they wanted to convey a poetic message by making images speak their own language. Based on the function of warm and cold colours that we discussed above, we can only speculate what exactly the directors were attempting to communicate. However, since it is a poetic message, which is in line with the thematic guidelines of *canto* 5 and specifically with the story of Paolo and Francesca, we can say that it is an experimental attempt that connotes visually the process of a concupiscible appetite punctuated by key-steps from the beginning to the end, with a point of view that makes Francesca aware of and ponder her libidinous story.

Moreover, in the first window Francesca has her harms that show a gesture indicating that she is about to cover her genital area; in the second window she has her right hand that covers the left side of her breast and her left hand that covers her genital area; in the third window she appears relaxed with her breast and genital area uncovered, and her harms naturally falling on her sides. Here too, there is a variation in the similarity which consists of key-gestural elements. The three shots are arranged in a sequence that suggests the intent to tell a singular story, the story of the first woman which is centered entirely on the gestural succession of the three images and summarize in steps her biggest mistake: hubris. Eve's hubris is manifested through her behavior that defies the norms of limit and challenges God's authority which, in turn and as a result

of her behavior, brings about nemesis, her downfall culminating in a nostalgic, timeless torment for herself and for Paolo. Before we proceed with the account of the three images, we need to keep in mind that Greenway and Phillips are working with images that are culturized and unmistakably conventionalized in the Western tradition of visual language, particularly through that of painting. Thus, in terms of content value they are not adding anything substantially innovative. The poetic quality of the message emerges instead from the way in which Greenway and Phillips arranged the images and the exceptional cinematic narration they managed to produce in order to tell such a story. Let us now look at the three images in details.

In the first window we said that Francesca's naked body has her harms that show a gesture indicating the intention to cover her genital area. It shows a movement toward such an aim that is indicative of a transition from a state of naiveté to awareness. It is a progression from innocence to a culturized embarrassment that finds full affirmation in the second window in which Francesca uses both hands to cover, as much as possible, her most common, conventional erogenous parts that we generally associate with breast and vagina. The visual narration of said transition is further corroborated by the gradual increase of warm colours in the second image. In this image, warm colours produce a desirable chromaticy to put in motion a concupiscible emotion by the attainment of Francesca's full skin tone of her naked body. In the black-and-white shot of the third window, Francesca appears intentionless, with her nudity fully exposed punctuating a visual narration that takes a turn by which desire disappears and, thus, removed from the human soul. With black "comes a great silence which materially represented is like a cold, indestructible wall going on into the infinite. White [at last] [...] acts upon our psyche as a great, absolute silence, like the pauses in music that temporarily break the melody" (Kandinsky 60). The chromatic account of the third image attempts to signify a return to innocence whose world transcends the finite, temporal human condition. At the very end of the episode Francesca portrays awareness and tells Dante what was the decisive moment and the cause of her perdition:

> "Quando leggemmo il disïato riso
> esser basciato da cotanto amante,

questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
     la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante" (*Inf.* 5.133-38).

Greenway-Phillips' visual rendition of this part suggests a reiteration of lust dominated by hubris, which is the all-encompassing sin of *canto* 5, with an intensifying hunger for sexual realization reaching a point of no return. Such a conclusion is conveyed by a close-up shot of Francesca's lips that move according to the required verbal enunciation of the text above. Moreover, by a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree rotation of the camera, which turns Francesca's lips from horizontal to vertical, and aided by the use of warm colors (switched to black-and-white only for a split second), the visual arrangement alludes to the labia of an actual vagina yearning for sexual interaction. The whole episode ends with the name "EVE" appearing in huge, red letters just after Francesca's lips fade away from the screen.

For what concerns sign production, the cinematic account of *canto* 5 consists of a few central elements that contribute to the semiotic articulation of images and turn them into sign-functions. There are elements of first articulation called semes, commonly recognizable as 'images' or 'iconic signs', which are meaningful in their state of figurativeness. For example, the shot in which Francesca begins to talk, what is meaningful and conventionally codified is that we see a naked woman, she is talking while walking toward the camera, she is followed by a naked man who is also moving toward the camera and following the woman. The semes in such a shot are not only meaningful but wield also predicative functions because they "formulate a complex iconic phrase."(Eco 1970: 597) Other important elements are the figures, which Eco considers the smallest elements of second articulation. They are meaningless on their own and acquire meaning only when combined with semes or images. They are "conditions of perception" and consist of "'angles', 'light contrasts', 'curves', 'subject-background relationships'" (Eco 1970: 602). The cinematic background in *canto* 5 is dominated by darkness, and the light contrast is particularly accentuated with the black-and-white images. The curving movement with the one-hundred-and-eighty-degree rotation of the camera portrays Francesca's lips vertically and the actual movement of the camera becomes meaningful with the established relation with the lips.

These figures are not only meaningless on their own. There are situations in which they are not "always discrete" and for this reason they appear "as a continuum of possibilities from which many individual messages emerge" and, thus, difficult to reduce them to a "precise code" (Eco 1970: 596-97). Lastly, we identify meaningful elements of third articulation that Eco calls *kines*.[7] They consist of motion; they are kinesic in nature and related to gestures of the body language that contribute to form the cinematic code. When "passing from the photogram to the frame, the characters [present in the photogram] accomplish certain gestures: the *icons* generate *kines* via a diachronic movement, and the *kines* are further arranged to compose *kinemorphs*" (Eco 1970: 602). Examples of kinesic articulation in which meaningful *kines* are emphasized to the point of drawing the spectator's attention are Francesca's and Paolo's images appearing in the middle windows whereby movement, which is grounded in the denotative, transparent figurativeness of the two naked bodies, add meaning and connote at the same time the idea of shame through the arms' gesture in the act of covering their private parts. Yet, it is reasonable to dispute the notion of third articulation that Eco introduced at the end of the 1960s insofar as the same effect could be rendered by two contiguous photograms. That is, in the first one, the arms can basically be depicted at rest stretching on both sides of the body, and in the second one the arms can be motionless and covering the private parts. In a way such a remark may outargue the necessity of a third articulation, but at the same time it turns out to be limiting the pictorial value of the images' figurativeness and completely ignoring time and motion which, the latter, are key factors in the way in which meaning and emotions are handled and punctuated in the visual mode. *Kines* capture dynamically the critical moment of performative gestures in the smallest units of time and simulate such gestures as real phenomena of reality through the medium's illusory task. *Kines* are apt to capture accurately the ever-changing condition of a represented reality contained within the limited span of time and limited figurativeness of space. Also, the kinesic factor makes the cinematic language always a performative entity of speech. It is difficult to take it as a unit of language detached from its performative occurrence; it is "always actualized" (Metz 67). Lastly, we may add that Greenway and Phillips use the cinematic medium in the way in which a painter would use tools

and colors, while retaining and exploiting the distinctive properties of moving pictures. This is the novelty and the poetic quality of their production which, once again, puts emphasis on the way in which they staged their entire visual narration.

A major source concerning the cinematic third articulation in Dante's work is *L'Inferno*, the oldest feature film on Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the "oldest intact feature film in existence". The main characteristic about *L'Inferno* is that it is a silent film with written indications of the plot and key lines from the written text of the *Divine Comedy* to help with the comprehension of the visual story. In this film, *kines* are particularly important because they complete the sign-function of *semes* and further add transparency to meaning and emotions arising from images. Such is the case if we consider the entire production dominated by cultural antecedents of moving images that the filmmaker stages and manages in order to portray gestures that have specific meanings, functions, and emotions. But even with the most careful and rigorous exploit of the medium, we do not have a true dictionary and/or a proper normative grammar for moving images. Therefore, the filmmaker is always engaged in some sort of performative task of language creation. In a comparative sense, we may claim that the verbal mode's desirable end, by means of words, wishes to create idiolectic images in the mind of the user. The visual mode's aim, on the other hand, by means of images wishes to create a conventional vocabulary and a normative grammar for the cinematic medium.

1.7 The Auditory Mode in the *Inferno*

In the first canto of the *Inferno* where Dante finds himself lost in the dark woods and Beatrice sends Virgil to rescue him, Virgil explains to Dante that in order to get back on the right path of life, he must go to and through hell. As he explains to Dante what he must do and who and why sent him to his rescue is conveyed by a passage that draws attention to hearing as Dante enters hell:

> ove *udirai* le disperate strida,
> vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti,
> ch'a la seconda morte ciascun grida.
> (*Inf.* 1.115-17, the emphasis on "udirai" is mine)

Dante's experience in hell will first of all be an auditory experience that the Latin poet points out in the first line of the *terzina* with the verb "udirai" (shall hear). The visual comes after

the auditory. It appears in the second line of the *terzina* with the verb "vedrai" (shall see). Of the two sensorial fields, the auditory takes precedence over the visual and sets the narrative tone of the entire *cantica*. Moreover, Virgil announces to Dante that upon crossing the threshold of hell's gate, the first human sense that will be engaged is hearing:

>   Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai
> risonavan per l'aere sanza stelle,
> per ch'io al cominciar ne lagrimai.
>   Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
> parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
> voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
>   facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira
> sempre in quell' aura sanza tempo tinta,
> come la rena quando turbo spira (*Inf.* 3.22-30).

Dante's initial insight of hell, although preceded by Virgil's guidance that calls attention to what they are going to see: "For we have reached the place of which I spoke, where you will *see* the miserable people, those who have lost the good of the intellect" (the emphasis on "see" is mine) is a matter of what they hear. Through the unfolding of events, we find many terms and expressions that are linked to the sense of hearing. On the whole they contribute in the formation of the auditory mode. One major characteristic occupying the sense of hearing in the *Inferno* is cacophony. There is an overwhelming presence of harsh, discordant sounds that correspond to its chaotic landscape. Whether dealing with sounds or noises, the fundamental aspect that involves all of them is that they are productions of "multi-dimensional resonance" (McLuhan 1969: 36) governed by an "acoustic space" that is "boundless, directionless, horizonless", a space that lives "in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror" (McLuhan 1967: 48). And as the "ear favours no particular 'point of view', we are "enveloped by sounds" and by noises which form "a seamless web around us. We say, 'Music shall fill the air.' We never say, 'Music shall fill a particular segment of the air'" (McLuhan 1967:111). Sounds and noises are multidirectional; they can be heard "from everywhere, without ever having to focus. […] Where a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships" (McLuhan 1967:111). Although the "ear favours no particular 'point of view'", what remains seminal is that the ear perceives acoustic occurrences and discriminates between

sounds that produce pleasing sensations and sounds that produce displeasing sensations. Elementary and as obvious as it may appear (actually as it may sound!), such a statement sheds light not only on what everyone knows based on personal experience, but more importantly on what it is not a too-obvious-consideration; that is, the here and now of the acoustic manifestation, that which concerns the immediacy of the acoustic occurrence and the ear's response to it. Responses can be classified as acoustic sensations and significations. A detailed account of said responses clarifies the usefulness of the auditory mode considered by itself or with other modes as a way of producing knowledge.

Responses to acoustic phenomena without significant mediation consist primarily of two semiotic categories that Peirce calls *firstness* and *secondness. Firstness* is the category in which sound is in "the mode of being of that which is [as] such [...] and without reference to anything else" (Peirce 8.328). It is a presence "independently of its being perceived or remembered" (Peirce 8.328, 329). For example, it is sound in itself or the idea of sound that does not refer to anything and neither can it be described in words. It is simply a presence without the ear's perception and response; it entails no mediation with *an*-other. With *secondness*, there is the actualization of the sound-feeling because it implies the existence of a dyadic relation insofar as it acts on the ear and generates a felt experience of sound. The experience is the central part of *secondness* and requires an effort. It "is the experience of the effort, prescinded from the idea of purpose" (Peirce 8.330). Peirce points out also that an "experience of effort cannot exist without the experience of resistance. Effort only is effort by virtue of its being opposed" (Peirce 8.330). In other words, *secondness* is an actual occurrence (sound's occurrence) that produces some kind of reaction in the form of experience without having reached the point of mediation (*thirdness*), without having become a thought, verbalizable knowledge, intellectual experience.

The auditory mode dwells extensively on the Peircean categories of *firstness* and *secondness* because what we consider experienced sounds and noises are primarily sources of emotions. And the ear may very likely favor and limit a sound or a noise to an experience of emotions (though with noises one instinctually would plug one's ears signaling a sensation of displeasure) and not necessarily encouraging to push sounds and noises to the level of mind-

dependent, significant experience, a correlation of the Peircean *first* and *second* by means of a *third* that develops into thought, intellectual knowledge that can be verbalized. We also know that there are sounds and noises that are recognizable immediately because already codified as this or that sound, as this or that noise. A thunder is not only an acoustic manifestation that stops at the level of sensation. It is a true auditory sign that stands in for a meteorological condition. If one likes espresso coffee and drinks it every day, when s/he hears a mocha coffee maker that starts *Grrrrëclëackealing* on the stove, the onomatopoeic sound does not stop at the level of *secondness* and, thus, limiting the sound to a mere sensation. It is an actual sign standing in for the idea that the machine has released all the coffee and it is ready to be served. This means that since the "ear favours no particular 'point of view'" it takes in conventionalized and non-conventionalized acoustic occurrences that work on different levels.

A distinctive characteristic of the auditory mode is that when it handles codified acoustic signs, such as the whinny of a horse, the cry of a baby, the sound of a violin, and all those acoustic sounds and noises that are immediately recognizable by the ear, such a mode may generate a semiosic retroactivity. What this means is that the auditory mode is endowed with a fluid aptitude to spontaneously invert the experience of hearing from a temporary mind-dependent state (*thirdness*) to an auditory climax that is sense-dependent (*secondness*). For example, the ear perceives the codified sound of a violin as a thought, as an experience of the mind that can be verbalized as "sound of a violin" (*thirdness*). The thought "sound of a violin" is only a temporary state which instead of moving forward and unidirectionally to produce further codifiable correlations, it instead allows the semiosic process to revert to a state of emotions (*secondness*) because acoustic occurrences, mostly musical sounds are direct objectifications of our emotional world. In regard to music and certainly as a case in point for our analysis, Arthur Schopenhauer stressed that "music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but *a copy of the will itself* […] For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence" (Schopenhauer, vol. 1, 257).

   With sounds, and specifically with music, there is an important role that repetition engenders. It impacts our relation with what we hear. What we hear is in part oriented by how we hear sonorous manifestations. To this Arthur Schopenhauer adds: "How full of meaning and significance the language of music is we see from the repetition signs, as well as from the *Da capo* which would be intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words. In music, however, they are very appropriate and beneficial; for to comprehend it fully, we must hear it twice" (Schopenhauer, vol. 1, 264). In this citation, Schopenhauer points out not only the fullness of the musical experience through repetition, but encourages to uncover an important semiosic process which, by means of a "Da capo" action, a revertible spontaneity to a state of emotions, repetition   provides the necessary condition for sounds to engage fully the emotional nature of the will and to become what Schopenhauer calls "*a copy of the will itself*"; that is, the skipped *secondness*, our sense-dependent experience for those codified sounds that people can easily recognize and to which they can link meanings. The recognition of codified sounds is a mental experience that, in the immediacy of its occurrence, bypasses, skips momentarily the emotional part. After the short-lived mental act of recognition, the sound's occurrence operates on the human senses because it is a physical event, sensible *per se* (*kath' hauta*, Aristotle 2. 6, 418a, 8-9); it is the object of reality itself; it is an event that the ear takes in without discrimination. Sounds prompt a fluid connection with the will in the form of *ratione sensibilis*, sensitive knowledge, sense-cognition (*secondness*). In their natural state, as they are in themselves (sensible *per se*), sounds are not signs because they are primarily that which produces a sense-dependent experience. Nonetheless they may become signs in virtue of what we discussed above and, again, once the mental recognition of the sound-sign (carrying a meaning) is fulfilled, the sound that initially was used as a sign reverts to what it really is, to its natural state (*secondness*). This is so because the in-itself of a sound does not stand for something else in the capacity of sign, it is not "a copy of the phenomenon, or, more exactly, of the will's adequate objectivity, but it is directly the copy of the will itself, and therefore expresses the metaphysical to everything physical in the world, the thing-in-itself to every phenomenon" (Schopenhauer, vol. 1, 262). This is also a noteworthy aspect to explain why repetition is

permissible and vital for sounds, while "intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words."

1.8 *Inferno*'s Soundscape

There is a sort of virtual reality when it comes to the soundscape of the *Inferno*. In fact, through the written pages, the reader may easily feel the vibration of sound waves that are enacted by sound-words. Such words are joined together in a poetical form and with the

> addition of poetry to music [...] our most direct and indirect methods of knowledge are [...] stimulated simultaneously and in union. Thus the most direct is that for which music expresses the stirring of the will itself, but the most indirect that of the concepts denoted by words (Schopenhauer, vol. 2, 449).

In the previous section we spoke of codified sounds and noises that are actual signs standing in for something else. As words stand for something else, they are *de facto* signs in themselves. The poetic words of the *Inferno* that refer to sounds and noises are signs of a special quality because they revert to their natural state; they become physical events, sensible *per se*. In this manner, they are the language of feelings and emotions in their immediate state. They make the auditory mode a vehicle of virtual reality and expose the *musica diaboli* of the *Inferno* in its full extent which implies emotions (as objectification of the will) and the conceptual faculty of reason as a meaningful experience of the mind.

In section 1.7 we stated that the ear perceives acoustic occurrences and discriminates between sounds that produce pleasing sensations and sounds that produce displeasing sensations. The *musica diaboli*, as termed, is essentially an overwhelming and prolonged phenomenon of "disquieting" sonorous "dissonances" which are never "resolved into new consonances" (Schopenhauer, vol. 2, 456). A human being is a musical being (*musica humana*, Boetii 188)[8] and capable of recognizing dissonances that are never resolved into new consonances. Such is the situation of the *Inferno* where sounds produce displeasing sensations which are enacted by the written text through reading. The act of reading was itself a true, physical, auditory event in the Middle Ages and Dante intended such an act in a similar way, especially when reading poetry. Reading had to be certainly carried out with the eyes but more so with

the lips, pronouncing what [one saw on the page], and with the ear, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what is called the "voices of the pages." It is a real acoustic reading; *legere* means at the same time *audire*; [...] an activity which [...] requires the participation of the whole body and the whole mind [...] This results in more than a visual memory of the written words. What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard [...] It is what inscribes, so to speak, the [...] text in the body and in the soul (Leclerq 24, 78).

Thus, reading would be inscribed "in the body and in the soul" of the reader in a way that most of the codified words, such as "sighs", "lamentations", "loud cries" "accents of anger", "words of suffering", "voices shrill and faint", "beating hands" (*Inf.* 3. 22-27), from their state of mind-depended *thirdness*, would produce an actual experience of the body and soul transforming the act of reading into the language of feelings and emotions (*secondness*) and therein dwelling as *ratione sensibilis*, sense-cognition of a *musica diaboli*. According to Boethius, hearing is not only the faculty that allows a person to rationally discern acoustic differences but also that which determines whether or not sounds comply with the condition of order. In Boethian terms:

the sense of hearing can apprehend sounds in such a way that it not only judges them and recognizes their differences, but it very often takes pleasure in them if they are in the form of sweet and well-ordered modes, whereas it finds displeasure if the sounds heard are unordered and incoherent. (*The Principles of Music* 32)

In the *Inferno* the ear is exposed to sounds without order, audible noises that can be viewed under the domain of *musica instrumentalis* (*The Principles of Music* 47). It consists of sounds produced by pulsations and percussions, percussion of the air and preceded by motion. These sounds remain "undissolved until" they "reaches the ear" (*The Principles of Music* 48). At the bottom of what we call sounds without order or simply noises, there is essentially a numerical disorder, a *sfasatura del tempo* (tempo mismatch). Dante signals this upon entering the gate of hell with "aura sanza tempo" (timeless air, *Inf.* 3.29). This expression refers to a symbolic notion of hell as the place of the emptiness of time, but it is mainly indicative of the place in which prevails disharmony due to a shortcoming of proper numerical ratio and intervals that are under the authority of tempo. The audible chaos of such a kingdom consisting of *musica diaboli*, a perverted *musica instrumentalis*, is also an indication of a perverted *musica humana*, a perverted microcosm that finds concrete representation in the

physical deformation of the infernal souls, the disharmonious relation of the bodily parts, and the disharmonious relation of the souls rational and irrational faculties. An example that draws a clear parallelism between the chaos of the *musica instrumentalis* and a discord of the *musica humana* in the *Inferno* is Dante's anomalous portrayal of the counterfeiter of the Florentine florin Mastro Adamo:

> Io vidi un, fatto a guisa di lëuto,
> pur ch'elli avesse avuta l'anguinaia
> tronca da l'altro che l'uomo ha forcuto.
>   La grave idropesì, che sì dispaia
> le membra con l'omor che mal converte,
> che 'l viso non risponde a la ventraia,
>   [...]
>   E l'un di lor, che si recò a noia
> forse d'esser nomato sì oscuro,
> col pugno li percosse l'epa croia.
>   Quella sonò come fosse un tamburo (*Inf*. 30.49-54, 100-103).

In this citation we unmistakably realize that there is something wrong with Mastro Adamo's physical parts because as they are, in their conjoined state, make the entire body look like a lute. Dante's depiction of Mastro Adamo is certainly an indication of physical disfiguration. He is disproportionate, discordant in the parts themselves and in relation to the whole body. As depicted, Mastro Adamo's body is a sign of perverted *musica humana* that draws attention to our senses of sight and hearing. Also, Iannucci expressed a noteworthy consideration about the explicit musical imagery Dante indented to convey with Mastro Adamo:

> From a lute Adamo becomes a drum. Within the hierarchical scale of musical instruments, the ontological descent is considerable. The drum is far inferior to the lute, which as a stringed instrument is associated with the World-lyre and perfection (J Hollander 44). What happens in this episode is that Mastro Adamo's soul is metaphorically "unstrung". The original term of comparison was false. The counterfeiter first appears as what he is not - a lute. He is in reality a drum, and his body-soul continues to produce disharmonious sounds. His rigid belly echoes like a drum (Iannucci 1990: 32-33; De Benedictis 2000: 61-64).

In the *Inferno* the reader witnesses a crescendo of degenerate sounds that begins at the human level with "sighs", "lamentations", "loud cries" "accents of anger", "words of suffering", to later heightening it through bestial noises: "There dreadful Minos stands, gnashing his teeth" (*Inf*. 5.4), Cerberus with "his three throats barking, doglike" (*Inf*. 6.13) and, ultimately, to make

it reach its singular degenerateness with sarcasm through the obscene noise of Barbariccia's ass:

> Per l'argine sinistro volta dienno;
> ma prima avea ciascun la lingua stretta
> coi denti, verso lor duca, per cenno;
>> ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta (*Inf.* 21. 136-39).

Barbariccia's obscene gesture, which corresponds to an established Medieval "*ridiculum*" of the "*obscenus sonus*", the "*carmen horridum*" of the "*tuba ventris*", of the "*trombetta*" "*del cul*" (Sanguineti 209-10) and that he celebrates with his shameless body language is also an interesting recapitulation of anti-musicality of the *Inferno*. It is a clever example that includes, indirectly, the olfactory sense in a skilful play of multimodality between a degenerate sound and fetor, the latter allusively displeasing the olfactory sense of the reader.

For reasons of brevity, here we are not going to discuss the olfactory mode in its details, but it will suffice to say that it increases the effectiveness of multimodality insofar as the *Inferno* has a considerable amount of words and expressions that describe revolting, putrid souls in a nauseating ambiance, as in: "This swamp that breeds and breathes the giant stench, (*Inf.* 9. 31); "and here, because of the outrageous stench/thrown up in excess by that deep abyss,/we drew back till we were behind the lid" (*Inf.* 11. 4-6); "so was it here, and such a stench rose up/as usually comes from festering limbs (*Inf.* 29.50-51); "I saw one with a head so smeared with shit (*Inf.* 18.116); "that makes excrement of what is swallowed (*Inf.* 28.27).

We may conclude by further saying that the multimodality of the *Inferno*, if analyzed from a semiotic standpoint, is an invaluable tool which prepares the groundwork for the production of meaning which can be managed and conveyed across modes in ways in which the artistic intuition requires. Quite often one mode stands out because it is more effective than others for specific messages that are being communicated, while others are deemed to be inadequate due to their signifying shortcomings. In this study we attempted to convey major multimodal insights of the *Inferno* linked to various modes, but particularly how each mode signifies in its own communicative system to better comprehend Dante's resources that he intentionally exploited to add sensation, inventiveness, charming effect and, overall, a richer content

value to his poetry. Here we endeavored to show how Dante's oeuvre contains textual categories of communication attuned to multimodal articulation but more importantly how, beginning with the *Inferno*, new epistemic frontiers may be achieved when the original text is re-articulated through other modes.

Notes

[1] Deictic markers, as defined by Marcel Danesi, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Media, and Communications*, point out "something by a gesture, word, or symbol, in order to locate in time or space or in relation to something else." On deictic markers see also Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 115.

[2] Dante's view of verbal language is essentially semiotic. For an in-depth study regarding this aspect see my: *"De vulgari eloquentia:* Dante's Semiotic Workshop," *Italica* 86.2 (2009); my *Wordly Wise: The Semiotics of Discourse in Dante's* Commedia. See also John Deely, *Medieval Philosophy Redefined* ; by the same author *Augustine and Poinsot: The Protosemiotic Development.*

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_TV_Dante, online posting, 9 Feb. 2020.

[4] "Peter Greenaway on His Filmmaking Style & Career, A Life in Pictures," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK8RcscVu5I, online posting, 9 Jan. 2019

[5] According to Umberto Eco 1968:180, "absolute duplicative replicas produce" *doubles*, "and partial replicas" produce *replicas*.

[6] Kandinsky (57) argues that warm colors draw the spectator close to the objects they represent. On the other hand, cold colors create a sort of barrier; they distance the image in which they are used from the spectator. Also, warm colors exert a centrifugal movement, while cold colors a centripetal one.

[7] Eco also states that kines, as meaningful units, can decompose into kinesic figures (meaningless units).

[8] Anicii Manlii Torquati Severini, Boetii, *De Institutione musica*, 188. For the English transition of Boethius' *De institutione musica* I have used Boethius' *The Principles of Music, An Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, by Calvin M. Bower, 46-7. Henceforth, Boethius' translation of *De Institutione musica* will be cited as *The Principles of Music*.

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Frammenti, rovine, "immaginazione ermeneutica": Mantegna e il Novecento

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Abstract: Molti autori del Novecento apprezzano Andrea Mantegna, il cui amore per l'antichità classica, rappresentata nella sua veste frammentaria e in rovina, trova echi e paralleli nella cultura del secolo scorso, affascinata dall'estetica del frammento. Dagli ultimi prodotti della Decadenza alle rivoluzioni formali delle Avanguardie artistiche e letterarie, dalle severe poetiche del Modernismo fino alle ibridazioni del Postmoderno, Mantegna seduce scrittori anche assai diversi fra loro, dentro e fuori i confini italiani: un poeta come Pound, americano ma per tutta la vita profondamente legato all'Italia, ne è un esempio paradigmatico. In particolare la città di Mantova, dove il pittore quattrocentesco trascorre la maggior parte della sua esistenza e in cui lascia alcune delle testimonianze maggiori della sua arte, ispira alcune delle pagine novecentesche più significative sul Mantegna. È il caso di Viaggio in Italia di Piovene, di cui si analizzano qui alcuni elementi, alla luce degli interessi figurativi dello scrittore veneto.

Keywords: Frammenti, Mantegna, Mantova, Novecento, Piovene, Pound.

> Écrire l'histoire de l'art - c'est d'abord, il faut le répéter, *écrire*.
>
> (Didi-Huberman, *Aperçues* 112)

Negli ultimi due capitoli de *La pelle di San Bartolomeo. Discorso e tempo dell'arte* – "La teoria della ricezione di Muka ovský e l'estetica del frammento", "Filologia e poetica delle rovine" – Cesare Segre ripercorre molte delle tappe salienti, e alcune delle ragioni, che hanno segnato la fascinazione verso le rovine e i frammenti nella cultura occidentale, da Rutilio Namaziano a Squarcione ad Andrea Mantegna, da Diderot a Bernardin de Saint-Pierre alla produzione letteraria e figurativa delle avanguardie novecentesche (109-128).

Secondo lo studioso le rovine permettono un "contatto col tempo" (125), ovvero con i suoi effetti distruttivi, di particolare intensità ed evidenza. Da un lato, tale esperienza ci pone davanti all'irreversibilità del divenire e può suscitare una sorta di "estetica

della nostalgia" (114); dall'altro i monumenti in rovina, ovvero i frammenti superstiti di testi visivi, plastici, verbali possono anche stimolare un'attiva partecipazione del lettore e dello spettatore, una specie di istinto filologico e archeologico orientato a ricostruire la totalità perduta. Si tratta di attivare una "immaginazione ermeneutica" (112), che punti a contrastare l'inarrestabile scorrere del tempo e a riedificare, colmando le mancanze e i vuoti grazie alla mente, quanto la temporalità ha frammentato. Siamo insomma davanti ad un processo tanto stimolante quanto ambivalente, insieme disforico ed euforico. Anche per questo, in alcune epoche – ad esempio nel ventesimo secolo – si può parlare di una vera e propria "estetica del frammento" o di un "frammento-progetto" (124): è l'artista stesso a produrre la propria opera in modo frammentario, o a privilegiare opere d'arte del passato giunteci in veste disgregata e incompleta. Forse questo avviene per la percezione di una omologia fra alcuni elementi del gusto contemporaneo e la suggestiva, misteriosa frammentarietà dei resti del passato – oltre che per il desiderio di ingaggiare il proprio pubblico in un atto interpretativo complesso, impegnativo, seducente. A questo proposito Segre cita – fra gli altri – André Malraux, che in modo particolarmente icastico arriverà addirittura ad elogiare la corrosione o i gravi danni operati dalla crudeltà del tempo, e a parlare della "felice mutilazione" della Venere di Milo, delle statue di Lagash, e dei Buddha Khmer (114).

Sembra quasi inevitabile, se si orienta l'attenzione verso il secolo scorso, pensare all'ascendenza nietzschiana di tali temi: almeno dal Nietzsche che, nelle pagine della *Gaia scienza* e in altri punti del suo corpus, scrive del fascino dell'incompiutezza. Va detto tuttavia che le dense pagine segriane si ispirano piuttosto ad un breve, celebre volume di Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy* (apparso per la prima volta nel 1963) in cui il sodale di Warburg e Panofsky traccia una vera e propria genealogia della nozione di frammento, attraverso un'indagine che abbraccia la storia dell'arte come quella della letteratura, della musica, del gusto nel senso più ampio del termine.[1] Wind si concentra sulle radici filosofiche e poetiche – soprattutto di area germanofona e anglofona – dell'interesse verso i frammenti, ricordando gli aforismi di Friedrich Schlegel e i versi di Novalis e Rilke, così come il concetto di pittoresco, citando il singolare *Essay on Picturesque Beauty* del reverendo William Gilpin, che invita a disintegrare (letteralmente) la politezza troppo perfetta dell'architettura palladiana, in modo tale che uno "*smooth building*"

si trasformi, felicemente, in una "*rough ruin*" (39-40).[2] Ma è la cultura francese, soprattutto fra Decadenza, Simbolismo, e Modernismo, ad offrire esempi quasi innumerevoli dell'amore per i frammenti. Giustamente, lo studioso tedesco nota che in questo senso basta ricordare alcuni dei titoli di Valéry, fra cui spiccano *Fragments du Narcisse, Fragments de poésie brute, Fragments de mémoires d'un poème*, e molti altri dello stesso tenore (44); Mallarmé, con ancora più forza, paragona i suoi scritti ad un chiostro in rovina, oppure ad "une collection de chiffons" e dichiara "la Destruction fut ma Béatrice" (109, 127). Rodin avrebbe potuto sottoscrivere queste parole, visto che, almeno a detta di Vollard, era solito amputare violentemente le proprie statue per renderle frammentarie (42). In breve, al di là del medium e del genere, tutti gli artisti citati sembrano, da un lato, attratti dalla dialettica che frammenti e rovine riescono a far intravedere (come in una sineddoche) tra la parte e il tutto, tra il finito e l'infinito: "if the finite is broken", chiosa Wind, "it suggests the infinite" (118) – in altre parole quanto Segre riassume con l'espressione "immaginazione ermeneutica"; dall'altro, alcuni autori appaiono inclini ad un rapporto con la temporalità e con il passato in cui queste forze non siano interpretate esclusivamente come distruttrici, ma anche in quanto creatrici: "the past is not destroyed by the present but survives in it as a latent force" (16). Ad ogni modo è interessante che, in un libro di un centinaio di pagine o poco più, il nome di Andrea Mantegna appaia in diverse occasioni (10, 80, 112).

In effetti le riflessioni di Segre, le note provocatorie di Malraux, le brillanti sintesi di Wind possono aiutare a comprendere alcune delle ragioni che, nel corso del Novecento e oltre, hanno reso possibile la rinnovata, profonda fascinazione verso l'arte di 'Andreas Mantinia' – come il pittore firma l'impressionante *Cristo in pietà sorretto da due angeli*, ora a Copenaghen. Qui mi occuperò soprattutto di autori italiani, principalmente poeti romanzieri cineasti, ma la presenza di Andrea (così lo chiama, familiarmente, il Vasari) si fa sentire con forza anche al di fuori dei confini nazionali, e anche al di là delle distinzioni fra i generi e le identità professionali e accademiche, da Proust a Degas a Pound, da Lewis a Eliot a Fry, da Bonnefoy a Saramago a Godard a innumerevoli altri studiosi e artisti, della parola e dell'immagine. In alcuni versi risalenti al 1917, ad esempio, Ezra Pound invita a scrivere poesia ispirandosi al grande pittore quattrocentesco, la cui "sterner line"

ben si sposa – grazie forse alla sua nettezza aspra e severa – al "new world about us", dove tale 'nuovo mondo' è da intendersi anche come il mondo nuovo delle molte avanguardie letterarie, scultoree, pittoriche, cinematografiche capitanate o fiancheggiate dal poeta statunitense (*Canti postumi* 18). In effetti, molti intellettuali e artisti del ventesimo (e ventunesimo) secolo hanno percepito, nell'artista di Isola di Carturo, una profonda consonanza, in termini di sensibilità e di poetica, insomma una sorta di blochiana "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleischzeitigen" (contemporaneità del non contemporaneo) come suggeriscono Stephen J. Campbell e Jérémie Koering (213).

Di nuovo, si pensi alla galassia modernista e a Pound, che giustificava i suoi 'ideogrammi' – continuamente in grado di associare artisti, epoche, lingue diverse – dichiarando: "All ages are contemporaneous".[3] La forte consonanza fra l'estetica del Mantegna e la poetica di molti autori del ventesimo secolo, oltre che sulla "sterner line" poundiana, si fonda in parte sulla capacità mantegnesca di conciliare plasticità scultorea e tenerezza malinconica, rigore e delicatezza, come nota José Saramago:

> Nella sua pittura, non ha posto solo tutto quanto sapeva, ma anche ciò che più profondamente era: un uomo intero nella sua durezza e nella sua sensibilità, come una pietra che fosse capace di piangere" (30).

Affermazioni simili anche in Lawrence Gowing:

> Il frammento antico di un piede che giace a lato delle caviglie legate del martire ricorda che uno stesso fato crudele colpisce tanto l'uomo quanto la scultura [...]. Non c'è pietà nel Mantegna. Nei suoi quadri, anche il più atroce martirio non ottiene promessa di ricompensa. La morte che permea di sé la vita è il suo tema più profondo. Il Mantegna vi ritorna di continuo, in ogni variazione dei suoi soggetti abituali: nelle storie di Giuditta, di san Sebastiano come pure di Orfeo. E ciò lo lascia indifferente: per lui è una condizione giusta e immutabile, che lo soddisfa pienamente. La scoperta della morte nella vita rivela la più profonda passione del Mantegna: è l'espressione della stessa pietrosa ostilità che ravvisiamo nel suo volto. [...] Ed è in questo contesto che i momenti di tenerezza nel Mantegna assumono il loro speciale, unico significato. Nelle sue piccole Madonne, la Madre e il Bambino sono rappresentati in un'unione così intima da non trovare riscontro in altri dipinti" (2).

Come ricorda Giovanni Agosti:

> Mantegna non conobbe sostanzialmente mai eclissi della sua fama [...]. Ogni epoca ha semplicemente cercato un Mantegna diverso e spesso l'artista si è trovato a fare da propulsore ad altre avventure della storia delle immagini" (25-26).[4]

Lo conferma il fatto che, se si volesse continuare con la lista degli artisti che, anche oggi, continuano ad essere ispirati dal Mantegna, si potrebbero riempire molte pagine. Basti l'esempio degli eventi legati all'edizione 2019 della Biennale di Venezia: una delle installazioni più notevoli si ispira, e si accosta, al San Sebastiano di Mantegna presso la Ca' d'Oro (nella cornice della mostra "Dysfunctional", Galleria Giorgio Franchetti: l'opera si intitola Fragile Future Chandelier Venice Mantegna, Studio Drift).[5]

Per quanto riguarda la cultura italiana moderna e contemporanea, soprattutto quella letteraria, Andrea ha ispirato fra i primi (e fra gli altri) Gabriele D'Annunzio. L'Imaginifico cita il pittore in varie occasioni, ma forse la più significativa si trova nelle pagine de *La Leda senza cigno* (1917), dedicate ad una mistica visita alla Ca'd'Oro veneziana e al suo *San Sebastiano*. Del resto la lista di testi – poetici, narrativi, filmici – in cui spicca la presenza di Mantegna è piuttosto lunga e include la produzione di Edoardo Sanguineti (la sezione *Mantova, 13.9.6.* (*luglio-agosto 2006*) nella raccolta *Varie ed eventuali. Poesie 1995-2010*), Dario Fo (il volume *Il Mantegna impossibile*, del 2006), Alberto Arbasino (il capitolo *Mantova-Ferrara* in *Fratelli d'Italia*, nell'edizione del 1993), Pier Paolo Pasolini (la sceneggiatura e il film *Mamma Roma*, del 1962), Carlo Emilio Gadda (*Eros e Priapo*, scritto negli anni Quaranta, apparso censurato nel 1967, e recentemente riedito, nel 2016), Guido Piovene (le pagine dedicate a Mantova nei reportages dei primi anni Cinquanta, originariamente radiofonici e in seguito antologizzati in *Viaggio in Italia*, 1957).[6] Nel caso di Piovene – per quanto il controverso romanziere, saggista e giornalista vicentino sia forse il meno frequentato, tra gli autori citati fino ad ora, dai lettori e dagli studiosi di oggi – si ha la possibilità di individuare, in un testo rapidamente accolto da un significativo favore da parte del grande pubblico, alcune delle probabili ragioni che hanno contribuito anche al successo di Mantegna nel corso del Novecento e oltre, sia fra gli addetti ai lavori sia nel più ampio orizzonte delle mostre e dei mass media.[7]

Forse con una certa ironia, Piovene definisce il grosso volume (più di settecento, fitte pagine, divise in diciotto capitoli fra una "Premessa" e delle "Conclusioni") un "inventario delle cose italiane", ovvero una "descrizione dell'Italia pezzo per pezzo" a seguito di un viaggio – dal Nord al Sud della penisola – cominciato nel maggio 1953 e finito nell'ottobre 1956 (*Viaggio* 7). Siamo, insomma, nel pieno del cosiddetto 'miracolo economico', e l'autore non manca

di sottolineare le rapidissime trasformazioni che interessano tutto il paese, rendendo spesso vani i tentativi di fermare sulla pagina quanto la storia sta mutando radicalmente sotto gli occhi stessi del viaggiatore. Tuttavia, lo scrittore dichiara simultaneamente – e paradossalmente – che i cambiamenti, per quanto enormi, di portata quasi incalcolabile, non intaccano una sorta di fondo immutabile delle genti e dei luoghi visitati:

> Mentre percorrevo l'Italia, e scrivevo dopo ogni tappa quello che avevo appena visto, la situazione mi cambiava in parte alle spalle. È vero che avevo cercato di eliminare tutto quanto pareva più evidentemente legato a circostanze transitorie. Ma lo stabile e il transitorio entrambi sono relativi, e non possono sempre dividersi con taglio netto. Si risolvevano questioni lasciate in sospeso, e questioni diverse spuntavano al loro posto. Industrie si chiudevano, altre si aprivano; decadevano prefetti e sindaci; nascevano nuove province. Per aggiornare le mie pagine, avrei dovuto compiere il viaggio un'altra volta, e poi una terza, all'infinito. Decisi perciò di lasciare quelle pagine come stavano. Ci rappresentano le regioni d'Italia com'erano quando vi andai. *La situazione di fondo resta sempre la stessa* (*Viaggio* 7, corsivi miei).

Altri paradossi, altre ambivalenze, o forse meglio convivenze di poli opposti, si riscontrano nel secondo capitolo del libro, dedicato alla Lombardia, soprattutto nelle pagine su Mantova. Secondo Piovene, la città sulle rive del Mincio si caratterizza per un'identità doppia, divisa, in altre parole "un prodotto d'incrocio". Ancora una volta, oltre le vicissitudini della storia e della geografia sarebbe possibile rilevare una, intima, segreta, "impronta perpetua", che forse il colto e attento visitatore può cogliere e apprezzare. Siamo in effetti davanti al prodotto di un'attenzione che dev'essere particolarmente acuminata, perché secondo lo scrittore vicentino non si tratta solo di contemplare luoghi, monumenti, opere, volti, gesti, concreti nella loro fisicità esteriore ma anche altri, impalpabili paesaggi "interni come quelli dell'anima":

> Mantova è una città-fortezza; la sua fisionomia è un prodotto d'incrocio. La determinarono insieme una natura che fu cruda (cruda è l'aggettivo che Dante usò per Manto, fondatrice leggendaria della città), le necessità militari, ed una Corte dedita alla musica, alla pittura, ai fasti e al piacere di vivere. La natura non è più cruda, Mantova non è più una delle maggiori fortezze dell'Italia Settentrionale, famosa per gli assedi, come rimase fino al secolo scorso, e noi vi cerchiamo soltanto i segni lasciati dall'arte. Le necessità militari e la crudezza naturale hanno però lasciato alla bellezza artistica della città un'impronta perpetua [...]. Un visitatore distratto, che attraversi Mantova in fretta, può rimanere inconsapevole delle bellezze che racchiude. Avrà la visione di un grosso centro di vita agricola, ruvido, un po' massiccio, affollato, con porte ed edifici di mattone dai quali emana

una luce rossastra. Il meglio di Mantova è chiuso, i suoi paesaggi sono interni come quelli dell'anima (*Viaggio* 112).

Questa specie di invito alla claustrofilia di tipo urbano pare l'altra faccia, più segreta appunto, di un'ispirazione pioveniana peraltro nota per la dromomania e l'insistito descrittivismo paesaggistico, qui meno scopertamente estetizzante rispetto alla produzione narrativa del vicentino, eppure presente anche nell'apparente immediatezza del reportage giornalistico. La vena claustrofilica qui predilige tuttavia tale fondo chiuso e nascosto del centro lombardo, sfuggente perché insieme materiale e immateriale, nel tempo e nello spazio eppure, diremmo, idealmente al di là di entrambi. Tutto questo si identifica, per l'autore, con il marchio impresso dai Gonzaga e dal loro più celebre artista, Andrea Mantegna, sulla città, e sui suoi luoghi notevoli. Non sorprende che Piovene, da sempre appassionato di pittura (fiamminga e veneta, in particolare: dell'autore, ad esempio, sono le prefazioni ad importanti monografie sul Veronese e su Tiepolo, apparse alla fine degli anni Sessanta) dedichi ampio spazio al Mantegna.[8] Non soprende inoltre che Mantova come il suo pittore appaiano doppi, contraddittoriamente ambivalenti, quasi come i tanti personaggi che popolano i racconti, i romanzi, gli scritti (semi)autobiografici pioveniani (penso soprattutto a testi come *Lettere di una novizia* e *Le Furie, Le stelle fredde* o *La coda di paglia*):

> Principi ricchi, raffinati, gaudenti, i Gonzaga riunirono a Mantova le fantasie, nell'arte e nel modo di vivere, degli anni più perfetti della nostra cultura. Pure, la piazza per la quale si accede all'ingresso della loro reggia è soltanto una vecchia piazza poetica come si incontrano in altre città padane. Se penetriamo nel palazzo, ecco invece la meraviglia, la sopresa teatrale; è, dentro Mantova, un'altra città nascosta. Perciò il palazzo suggerisce la fantasia del labirinto e del gioco di specchi. Si può vagabondare a lungo per quelle sfilate di sale fastose, scoprire piccoli appartamenti geniali, imbattersi in giardinetti circondati da architetture [...] e fermare il vagabondaggio nella *Camera degli Sposi* affrescata da Andrea Mantegna [...] questo ritratto suddiviso in alcuni grandi riquadri, anzi questo romanzo narrato in alcuni capitoli, in cui tutti i Gonzaga, principi, donne, adolescenti, giovinette e prelati, entrano come personaggi, con i loro pensieri politici e i loro piaceri. Si ammira un'arte di psicologo sommo, che penetra nelle anime, le distingue sui volti, ma lasciandole integre e, a differenza dei moderni, sapendo portare alla luce anche la gloria principesca, la magnificenza (*Viaggio* 112).[9]

Si noti, innanzitutto, l'elogio degli elementi più 'narrativi' della pittura mantegnesca, se non la vera e propria equivalenza fra scrittura e pittura (la *Camera degli Sposi* – la "più alta e matura

espressione" dello stile mantegnesco, oltre che "una piena unità figurale fra gli elementi architettonici, plastici e pittorici", secondo Paccagnini [6, 41], raffigura una riunione della corte dei Gonzaga, come su dei palcoscenici, solo parzialmente protetti da sipari, si vedono cortigiani, cani, cavalli, membri della famiglia vecchi e giovani, donne e uomini, fra cui il marchese Ludovico e suo figlio, il futuro cardinale Francesco – è un "romanzo narrato in alcuni capitoli"). Inoltre: il divario fra la rustica concretezza della cultura contadina o militare, e il fasto principesco della Corte; la memoria nostalgica della magnificenza del passato, di contro alla più prosaica realtà presente; la segretezza, l'intimità letteralmente e spiritualmente celata delle pur maestose e celeberrime meraviglie d'arte mantovane: tutto questo, nota Piovene – viaggiatore cosmopolita, eppure ostinatamente ancorato al microcosmo del natio paesaggio dei colli Berici, scrittore le cui origini aristocratiche, mescolate all'identità professionale pienamente inserita nei mezzi di comunicazione di massa, forse rendono specialmente sensibile a tali contrasti[10] – non poteva che incontrare il favore del "gusto romantico e decadente". Quest'ultimo probabilmente si estende fino all'autore stesso, dal momento che un'altra fra le opere più alte del Mantegna, la piccola tavola della *Morte della Vergine* o più precisamente *Dormitio Virginis* (in origine, con tutta probabilità, parte della decorazione della perduta cappella nel mantovano Castello di San Giorgio, e ora al Prado) pare incarnare – con la sua precisione miniaturistica, con la sua soffusa dolcezza quasi belliniana – lo struggimento del ricordo di un tempo per sempre scomparso, eppure tuttora presente nello spazio della pittura:

> Il gusto romantico e decadente elesse Mantova tra le sue città preferite, scorgendovi, come in Ferrara, una figurazione ideale di 'città morta'. Lo attrassero una bellezza quasi orchestrata nel segreto, una musica sulla quale ristagna oggi la morte oppure si agita la vita pratica dell'agricoltura. I romantici vi trovarono lo stimolo ad immaginare intrecci, retroscena, intrighi; i decadenti vi cercarono il disfacimento. Uno dei luoghi poetici della città sono le logge del Palazzo Ducale da cui si contempla il lago d'acque stagnanti derivante dal Mincio. Serví come sfondo alla *Morte della Vergine* di Andrea Mantegna che si vede al Museo del Prado. La fantasia può partire di qui per rievocare la provincia di Mantova quand'era quasi tutta una terra sterile, palude o, come dice Dante, pantano. È un saggio del tempo che fu, quasi conservato in vetrina (*Viaggio* 112-113).[11]

Ciò che Piovene chiama "fantasia" è simile a quanto Segre definisce come "immaginazione ermeneutica", la quale è in grado di partire da un frammento – in questo caso la straordinaria

veduta, il brano paesistico di sapore seuratiano (oltre che vero e proprio quadro nel quadro) delle acque del Mincio nell'aria di una giornata afosa, con il ponte di San Giorgio di fronte al Castello, nella *Morte della Vergine* mantegnesca – per ricostruire o risalire ad una entità (testuale, storica, esistenziale) perduta: in questo caso il paesaggio mantovano precedente l'era dell'espansione industriale, al suo culmine proprio negli anni in cui lo scrittore visita la città lombarda, insomma "del tempo che fu", come sintetizza l'autore vicentino. Quest'ultimo, tuttavia, non pare ingannarsi sulla natura mentale e ideale, se non illusoria, del processo che dal frammento porta alla totalità disgregata e perduta: il frammento è fragile, volontaristicamente "conservato in vetrina", insomma isolato, museificato, irrecuperabile rispetto al contesto altrimenti vitale, e certo con tutti gli stridori della vitalità, in cui lo spettatore lo osserva.[12]

Siamo davanti, potremmo dire, al versante malinconico della scrittura d'arte di Piovene, ed è singolare che toni assai simili si ritrovino in molti altri autori novecenteschi, anche lontanissimi dall'autore di *Viaggio in Italia*. Pound, ad esempio, dopo il già citato elogio di Mantegna nei suoi versi giovanili, si affretta a sottolineare lo stato di decadenza e abbandono in cui sono caduti i luoghi per eccellenza mantegneschi. Si tratta di una miscela in cui il passato appare ancora vivo, grazie all'arte, ma pure fatalmente perduto, come in una sorta di presenza di un'assenza, insomma una presenza fantasmatica:

> Send out your thought upon the Mantuan palace –
> Drear waste, great halls,
> Silk tatters still in the frame, Gonzaga's splendor
> Alight with phantoms! What have we of them,
> Or much or little? (Pound, *Canti postumi* 20).

Il poeta statunitense, sempre abile nel sintetizzare lunghe e complesse vicende storiche con pochi, densi versi, si riferisce probabilmente alle vicissitudini della città lombarda che, da splendida capitale rinascimentale scende la china di un processo di decadimento politico e culturale, in particolare dopo le crisi dinastiche e le conseguenti spoliazioni o svendite secentesche delle gigantesche collezioni ducali. Ma anche al di là dei puntuali riferimenti alla storia mantovana e alla saccheggiata reggia dei Gonzaga, non diversamente nel campo specialistico degli studi di storia dell'arte ci si imbatte con frequenza in affermazioni simili a quelle poundiane. Se, per Argan, il "transito dall'antico al presente",

con tutte le infinite e spesso contradditorie e quasi sempre dolorose sfumature del caso (quante città medievali sorgono direttamente sui resti diruti di città romane, negli sfondi mantegneschi), contraddistingue la totalità delle opere dell'artista dei Gonzaga, è anche vero che (di nuovo in modo fantasmatico):

> Mantegna cerca di ottenere il massimo rilievo e la massima durezza, quasi scolpendo ogni cosa nel metallo o nella pietra dura [...] per il bisogno di impedire alle immagini, provenienti dal remoto passato della storia, di dileguare o svanire" (Argan 292).[13]

Lo stesso si può dire quando poesia e storia dell'arte si fondono nella medesima persona. Ecco allora che Bonnefoy, appassionato delle opere di Mantegna, "ce sculpteur manqué" (Bonnefoy 57), ammira da un lato la vitalità plastica, orgogliosamente terrena e diremmo carnale, del pittore: "rides, muscles saillants, réseau des veines, Mantegna aime render visible ce qui en nous [...] est matière, ce que les anges n'ont pas, il fait paraître à nos yeux notre limite extérieure" (Bonnefoy 45); dall'altro, soffermando lo sguardo sul grande *San Sebastiano* del Louvre, vi nota le costruzioni pericolosamente inerpicate su quella "roche minée", sulla destra dello spettatore, "qui ne peut faire penser qu'à l'effondrement à venir" (Bonnefoy 56).

Nonostante gli elementi disforici, spesso presenti nelle ekphraseis novecentesche dedicate ad Andrea Mantegna, il grande protagonista della pittura del Quattrocento ha continuato e continua, secoli dopo la sua scomparsa, ad ispirare molti scrittori e le loro visioni di bellezza antichissima eppure moderna, aspra ma anche struggentemente paradisiaca, per quanto di un paradiso perduto, disgregato, a frammenti. E forse ad una serie di frammenti, per quanto rivelatorî, si riduce anche l'analisi delle ragioni profonde della passione della contemporaneità per il pittore della *Morte della Vergine* e della *Camera degli Sposi*, del *Cristo Morto* e dei santi stoicamente sofferenti fra le rovine di un mondo antico. Di quest'ultimo sopravvivono solo alcune schegge, per quanto luminose, nel presente – ovvero nella Mantova di più di cinquecento anni fa e nel nostro tempo, nel quale le forze della disgregazione e della frammentazione paiono particolarmente accanite. Del resto, come annotava Pound dalla sua gabbia di detenzione a Pisa, durante uno dei periodi più sanguinosi della guerra: "Le Paradis n'est pas artificiel / but spezzato apparently / it exists only in fragments" (*The Pisan Cantos* 16).

Note

[1] Sui medesimi argomenti, si vedano anche gli ormai classici studi di Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, e di Paul Zucker, *Fascination of Decay*, entrambi con numerosi esempi (e considerevole documentazione fotografica) all'intersezione fra storia del gusto e riflessione filosofica, sociologia ed estetica. Di grande rilievo, nel libro di Zucker, la sezione "Artificial Ruins" (193-258), con singolari testimonianze di 'frammenti-progetto' (come direbbe Segre): dal Tempietto Diruto di Carlo Marchionni, risalente al 1760, presso la Villa Albani di Roma, all'imitazione ottocentesca della fronte del Tempio di Antonino e Faustina nei giardini di Villa Borghese, di nuovo nella capitale, a tante altre rovine artificiali nelle dimore e nei parchi inglesi, tedeschi, francesi.

[2] Nell'ampia bibliografia sull'importanza di questo tema nella cultura tedesca, e più in generale nel mondo decadente, mi limito a segnalare i lavori di Paul de Man, in particolare i saggi raccolti in *Blindness and Insight* (soprattutto "The Rhetoric of Temporality", pp. 187-228) e *Allegories of Reading* ["Tropes (Rilke)", pp. 20-56], ove le categorie di 'frammento' e 'frammentario' sono situate nel più vasto contesto del discorso, al crocevia fra retorica e speculazione filosofica, sul simbolo e sull'allegoria.

[3] Ezra Pound, "Praefatio Ad Lectorem Electum (1910)", ora in *The Spirit of Romance* 6.

[4] *Su Mantegna I*, di Giovanni Agosti, è fondamentale per il tema dei numerosi "accrediti letterari", come scrive lo studioso milanese, della pittura mantegnesca – da sempre assai amata dai letterati: dagli scrittori universalmente conosciuti (Ariosto, Castiglione, Sannazaro, e tutti quelli che ho già citato) a nomi ormai noti solo ai frequentatori degli archivi (come Antonio Tebaldeo, precettore di Isabella d'Este e segretario di Lucrezia Borgia, o il padovano Marco Businello, i cui versi cantano insieme attraenti efebi e le opere di Donatello e di Mantegna). Inoltre, risulta forse pleonastico notare che la bibliografia sul pittore è, ormai, sterminata. Oltre ai testi cui ho fatto cenno, mi limito ad invitare alla lettura del catalogo, a cura di Giovanni Paccagnini, della storica mostra mantegnesca del 1961, e inoltre degli essenziali studi di Paul Kristeller, Erika Tietze-Conrat, Ronald Lightbrown, Alberta De Nicolò Salmazo. Importanti, inoltre, i cataloghi di varie mostre del 1992 (a cura di Boorsch e Martineau) del 2006 (volumi a cura di Banzato, Marini e Marinelli, Lucco, Trevisani) del 2008 (Agosti e Thiébaut). Va detto che, soprattutto durante il secondo dopoguerra, studiosi, artisti e scrittori interessati a Mantegna cercano di smussare gli elementi più pesantemente retorici della 'moda' mantegnesca. Cfr. Paccagnini, il quale agli inizi degli anni Sessanta dichiarava: "Che ormai il problema dell'arte del Mantegna e del suo significato e valore nella civiltà del Rina-

scimento fosse da riproporre in termini meno circospetti e ammirativi, che relegavano questo grande ma umanissimo artista in un Olimpo quasi irraggiungibile, era da tempo palese" (Paccagnini XIX). Per quanto riguarda l'Italia, inoltre, si devono tenere in conto anche certi fraintendimenti nati da una lettura 'fascista' di alcune opere mantegnesche (in primis i *Trionfi*) per cui rimando all'illuminante saggio di Giovanni Agosti, "Mantegna 2046" (Agosti e Thiébaut 49; del primo studioso cfr. anche *Mantegna 1961*, p. 26 sulla "maschia e rude fermezza" che il Fascismo celebrava in occasione dei cinquecento anni dalla nascita dell'artista). Infine per quanto riguarda la fortuna, anche cinematografica, di Mantegna (in particolare il *Cristo morto* di Brera) si vedano i volumi di Frangi (73-79) e Facchinetti (80-83).

[5] Si tratta degli artisti Ralph Nauta e Lonneke Gordijn, il cui Studio Drift – con sede ad Amsterdam, ma attivo nei principali spazi espositivi del mondo – è specializzato in installazioni luminose e multimediali, con l'obiettivo di mettere in discussione i confini tra arte, architettura, design. Nel caso della Ca' d'Oro e di Mantegna, il contributo di Studio Drift punta a stabilire un dialogo aperto fra il passato illustre del testo pittorico, e del magnifico edificio che lo ospita, e i nuovi linguaggi dell'arte e della tecnologia contemporanee.

[6] Sui riferimenti al pittore quattrocentesco, e in generale alle arti visive, negli scritti dannunziani si veda Tamassia Mazzarotto, *Le arti figurative nell'arte di Gabriele D'Annunzio*, pp. 200, 234, 248, 361, 400-403, 462. Memorabili soprattutto le pagine del Vate – particolarmente sensuali, sinestetiche, e misticheggianti – dedicate al già citato *San Sebastiano* della Ca' d'Oro ("scolpito dal pennello di Andrea Mantegna") ne *La Leda senza cigno* (*Prose di romanzi* 1309-1311). A proposito di Pasolini, fedele discepolo di Roberto Longhi e intensamente appassionato di pittura per tutta la vita, rinvio in primo luogo a Marchesini, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini*, e a Galluzzi, *Pasolini e la pittura*. Infine, per quanto riguarda Arbasino, cfr. il capitolo *Mantova-Ferrara* in *Fratelli d'Italia* 949-960 (soprattutto le pagine 954-955). Chi scrive si è occupato in più occasioni delle ekphraseis di questi scrittori, per cui mi permetto di rimandare ai miei volumi, *Scrivere la pittura* e *Multimedia Archaeologie*s. Ad ogni modo, tutti questi autori sono importanti per Sanguineti, studioso di D'Annunzio, protagonista di varie polemiche con Pasolini, amico di Arbasino, anch'egli fra gli animatori del Gruppo 63: i versi sanguinetiani dedicati a Mantegna si trovano alle pp. 79-98 di *Varie ed eventuali*, su cui invito alla lettura di Niva Lorenzini, *Sanguineti e il teatro della scrittura* (soprattutto la sezione "Il frammento, l'immagine: Mantegna, Dürer" alle pp. 101-115).

[7] Per uno sguardo d'insieme su Guido Piovene, sono ora disponibili i due volumi mondadoriani, a cura di Clelia Martignoni, con un profilo

scritto da Enzo Bettiza, dell'*Opera narrativa*. Presso Mondadori sono stati pubblicati anche due raccolte di *Saggi*. Cfr. anche, infine, l'*Invito alla lettura* di Giuseppe Marchetti e il *Piovene* di Gabriele Catalano.

[8] Interessante, per quanto concerne l'attrazione dell'autore di *Viaggio in Italia* verso le arti figurative, anche il breve film (16 minuti) di Luciano Emmer: *Piovene e "Il Battesimo di Cristo" del Bellini*, del 1972, parte di una serie realizzata per un programma televisivo di Anna Zanoli, in cui personaggi della cultura e dello spettacolo (e altri scrittori tra i quali Bacchelli, Moravia, Parise, Zavattini) commentavano un'opera d'arte a loro particolarmente cara. In termini più generali, è importante sottolineare la sensibilità cromatica, la centralità degli elementi visivi, in Piovene – soprattutto nella fase matura del suo percorso creativo, in cui il narratore si dimostra interessato (per quanto molto criticamente) alle teorie del Nouveau Roman di Robbe-Grillet, ovvero a forme di scrittura in cui la descrizione fredda, accanita, insistita di oggetti e spazi prende il sopravvento sui dati di tipo psicologico o narrativo (cfr. Bettiza, XXXVII e XL).

[9] Oltre alle memorabili pagine dannunziane, non pochi scrittori e studiosi si sono soffermati sul versante 'labirintico', 'segreto', etc. delle opere mantegnesche a Mantova e dei luoghi che le ospitano, in primis per quanto riguarda l'antonomastica "Camera Picta" ("opus hoc tenue", come la definisce modestamente Mantegna, l'espressione "Camera degli Sposi" appare solo a partire dagli scritti secenteschi di Carlo Ridolfi, e da allora entra nell'uso popolare per designare questo ambiente, sito nella torre nord-est del Castello mantovano): a tal proposito si legga, fra i possibili e più recenti esempi, Daniel Arasse, che sottolinea anche le ragioni squisitamente politiche di questa atmosfera di chiusura e segretezza: "[La Camera degli Sposi] avait en effet une fonction à la fois publique et privée, et le programme politique de son décor visait entre autres à mettre en scène le mystère intime des *arcana principis* par lequel Ludovic Gonzague légitimait son exercise autoritaire du pouvoir" (Arasse 39). Per quanto riguarda la sensibilità psicologica del Mantegna in quest'opera, a cui l'artista lavora fra il 1465 e il 1474, cfr. Paccagnini: "Qualunque sia l'interpretazione storica da dare alle due scene il loro vero significato sta nella potenza, sfrondata da ogni retorica encomiastica, con la quale il Mantegna evoca sulle pareti della Camera la corte dei Gonzaga nella sua vivente attualità, individuando nei ritratti dei singoli attori la loro più interiore storia umana" (42).

[10] Per il tema della scissione interiore e dei contrasti come fondo dell'ispirazione di Piovene, cfr. quanto scrive Pampaloni: "C'è un Piovene romantico, pronto a eccitarsi a ogni trasalimento della coscienza, di ogni doppiezza per cui in ogni uomo si divide e si assomma il bene e il male; i suoi personaggi sono quasi vivai, colonie d'incubazione dei germi di am-

biguità irrisolta, goduta come una natura, un paesaggio. E c'è un Piovene illuminista, che punta sull'analisi concettuale, sulla via di chiarezza che porti quell'ambiguità a un ordine morale" (citato in Marchetti 116-117).

[11] Cfr. Paccagnini, secondo il quale la *Morte della Vergine* del Prado e i tre dipinti degli Uffizi (*Adorazione dei Magi, Ascensione, Circoncisione*) costituivano la decorazione originaria della Cappella perduta (XXIII, 35). Sulle radici decadenti ed estetizzanti della scrittura di Piovene, al di là del discrimine (comunque labile) fra narrativa e saggistica, e oltre le distinzioni dei vari generi frequentati dall'autore veneto, cfr. Marchetti: "Affascinato dal mito della decadenza e della morte, Piovene inietta il vizio della distruzione esistenziale nei suoi personaggi tutti cosí chiaramente emblematici da poter giustificare l'assunto che, al limite, egli non abbia mai scritto altro che un libro solo: la propria autobiografia, arricchita – si capisce – dagli umori di una cultura agilmente sensitiva" (48-49).

[12] Vengono in mente, a questo proposito, alcuni passi in cui Piovene segnala – all'interno di *Viaggio in Italia* – il lato distruttivo dell'impetuoso 'boom' economico degli anni Cinquanta, in particolare per quanto riguarda le trasformazioni, spesso irreversibili, del paesaggio italiano: "Pochi altri Paesi sembrano meno legati al loro passato. In nessun altro Paese sarebbe permesso assalire come da noi, deturpare città e campagne, secondo gli interessi e i capricci del giorno" (665). È singolare che, decenni dopo *Viaggio in Italia*, anche Giovanni Agosti scelga la *Morte della Vergine* mantegnesca per denunciare i rischi di un indiscriminato sviluppo urbanistico e industriale: "[...] la veduta dei Laghi di Mantova che occupa la parte superiore della *Morte della Vergine* del Prado [...]: bella come un Seurat di oltre quattrocento anni più antico. È un dipinto su tavola, eseguito al principio degli anni sessanta del Quattrocento, subito dopo il trasferimento alla corte dei Gonzaga. Mantegna ha la grande idea di raffigurare fuori dall'arcata della stanza dove la Madonna è spirata quello che realmente si vedeva dalle finestre del luogo a cui il quadro era destinato: la cappella del Castello di San Giorgio. Maria muore dunque in una Gerusalemme-Mantova. La realtà del profilo di quel paesaggio, a Cipata, con il ponte di San Giorgio che taglia i Laghi, esiste ancora adesso: ma l'irrealtà della speculazione è in agguato. Lottizzazioni, residenze, immobiliari, valorizzazioni, 'Lago-Castello' [sic], agenzie, 'Celeste Galleria', saper guardare il futuro, non arroccarsi sul passato, non abbaiare alla luna... Molti ciliegi sono già stati abbattuti" (Agosti e Thiébaut 2).

[13] Così anche Giovanni Agosti sulle "predilezioni dell'artista che di fronte alla realtà che cambia vertiginosamente cerca di aggrapparsi alle sicurezze di un mondo di pietre" (Agosti e Thiébaut 48).

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A Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: A Discourse on the Role of Poetry in Our Times

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Abstract: Poetry has always come in many forms and shapes and served different purposes. A radical and, quite possibly, irreversible shift occurred in the second half of the Nineteenth Century when the art of poetry began to de-pragmatize and to concern itself mainly with the creation of messages whose cognitive and emotional powers were rooted in the material ingredients and the orchestration of its linguistic medium. The message could only surface if the readers contributed to its manifestation. Examples focusing on both the *dictatorial* power of language and the role of the reader are drawn from Guido Cavalcanti, Dante Alighieri, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, Antonella Anedda, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Wallace Stevens, and Amelia Rosselli.

Keywords: Leopardi, Poetry, Homer, Ancient Greek language, Rimbaud, Objective poetry, Jakobson, Conative function, Ego and the Subject, the Other, Role of the reader, Contemporary Poetry, Art of listening to language.

> *If old imbeciles had not discovered only the false meaning of the Ego, we would not have to sweep away those millions of skeletons which, for times immemorial, have accumulated the results of their one-eyed intellects by claiming to be the authors!*
> Arthur Rimbaud

> *That which language does is precisely its "content."*
> Alfredo Giuliani

> *As the Chinese say, one thousand and one words are worth more than a picture.*
> John McCarthy

God only knows why, in the course of their life, and especially in that stretch of it known as adolescence, all men and women, be they of good or bad will, have succumbed, at least once, to the

temptation of writing a poem, or, to be more precise, a versified and often rhymed composition which, timidly or haughtily as the case may be, they have presumed to inscribe under the rubric of poetry. We ourselves, who apply the term poetry to the epics of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Milton, Camões, and Goethe, to the songs and soliloquies of Petrarch, Shakespeare, Donne, Leopardi, Whitman, Shelley, Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Heine, the lays of Marie de France and the sonnets of Gaspara Stampa and Vittoria Colonna, and a nearly infinite number of great lyricists, we ourselves, as it were, feel no compunction in applying the word *poetry* to such innocent and time honored stanzas as the following one by Clement Clarke Moore:

> T'was the night before Christmas,
> when all through the house,
> not a creature was stirring,
> not even a mouse [...]

or to *La partenza del Crociato per la Palestina*, better known as *Il prode Anselmo*, penned by Giovanni Visconti Venosta in 1856:

> Passa un giorno, passa l'altro
> Mai non torna il prode Anselmo,
> Perché egli era molto scaltro
> Andò in guerra e mise l'elmo [...]

as well as to what has been unanimously labeled the worst set of verses ever conceived by a human mind: *The Tay Bridge Disaster*, a text authored by the late nineteenth Century Scottish poetaster William Topaz McGonagall to lament a December 28, 1879 tragedy: the Tay Rail Bridge near Dundee collapsed and the train that was passing over it at that precise moment sank into the river drowning all people on board:

> Beautiful Railway Bridge of the Silv'ry Tay!
> Alas! I am very sorry to say
> That ninety lives have been taken away
> On the last Sabbath day of 1879,
> Which will be remember'd for a very long time.

It is so terrible that the perverse pleasure we may derive from reading it top to bottom can only be diagnosed, in Aristotelian terms (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1-10), as a form of *akrasia*, a spiritual disposition clearly not praiseworthy as a virtue, and yet not wholly deplorable as a vice. Its essence is perhaps best captured by the Ovidian *Video bona proboque deteriora sequor* (I see what is good and I am all for it, but in the end, I go the way of the bad).

With these words (*Metamorphoses*, Book 7, lines 20-21) Medea recognizes the obligations that tie her to her father, and her fatherland, but chooses to ignore them for the love of Jason. Admittedly, the stakes surrounding the pleasurable guilt people experience in reading a poem that appalls them, are not as high as those that mark the theft of the golden fleece. Furthermore, not all cases are as atrocious as those displayed by the insuperably referential William Topaz McGonagall.

Indeed, even such a deliriously ludic and exuberantly language-first poet as Gertrude Stein –who, in her *Poetry and Grammar* (1934), wrote that "Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun"– felt the urge to cast a rather wide and very humorous taxonomic net, concluding that "there are a great many kinds of poetry."

As to the appreciation of what may be good or bad in poetry, more than a century earlier, Giacomo Leopardi, had pacified the issue by stating (see *Zibaldone* 58) that:

Tutto si è perfezionato da Omero in poi, ma non la poesia.

In the highly meritorious English edition (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, revised in 2015), the Leopardian dictum has been rendered with:

From Homer onward everything got better, *except poetry.*

Without detracting an iota of my admiration for the courageous work of editors Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, let me note that the locution *got better*, may be less felicitous than it appears at first, in so far as it doesn't capture the sense of finality implicit in *perfezionato*, a signifier whose semantic efficacy is rooted in the idea of *perfectum* (from *perficere*, that is to say to finish, to proceed no more, for the goal has been attained) which in turn is related to the Aristotelian concept of *entelecheia*, a reality that has achieved its fullest development, once and for all, something completed in all its parts and, as such, a point or arrival that cannot be surpassed.

My hesitation to accept the expression *got better* comes from the suspicion that it might admit or, at least, not exclude, a modicum of hope, as if the war for the improvement of poetry were still raging, and that after a series of lost battles, who knows, poets might end up serving under a victorious general, capable of routing the guards of the Homeric citadel.

I am of the opinion that Leopardi, squarely denies any such option by placing the point of arrival at the beginning of the poetic trajectory on which he himself occupies a spot of no little significance. This means that poetry is essentially and constantly activated by a backward look, by an urge to regain the signifying power its medium possessed at the time of its first historically known appearance.

This conviction is not entrusted to an early and isolated entry. In *Zibaldone* 2573-74, the poet delves more deeply into his argument and links the concept of an *initial finality* with that of *perpetuity*. In poetry, it seems, fathers cannot be killed, and what obtains with Homer in Ancient Greece, obtains in Italy with Dante Alighieri:

> Homer is the *father* and the *eternal prince* of all the poets in the world. These two qualities of father and prince are not combined in any other man with respect to any other human art or science. Further, no one recognized as the prince in any other art or science, can with this assurance, resulting from the experience of many centuries, be called eternal [2574] prince. *Such is the nature of poetry that it is greatest in the beginning. I mean greatest and nearly incomparable, purely as poetry, and as true poetry,* not as style, etc. etc. An example repeated in Dante, who as a poet did not have and never will have equals among Italians (21 July 1822).

As it is plain to see, the idea of attributing a perpetual, princely superiority to Homer's poetry is not proposed as the outcome of a personal predilection, but rather stipulated as an inevitable and necessary condition, an inner and substantial reality, grafted on the nature itself of the art of poetry, and peculiarly unique to it.

A surprisingly paradoxical and illuminating corollary to be drawn from Leopardi's frequent and scattered reflections on poetry, is to be found in *Zibaldone* 3164-67. Here, through a masterful play on the word *disegno* – deployed in the double occurrence of *intention* and *blue-print* – the infinite superiority of the *Iliad* over all subsequent epic poems (*Aeneid*, and *Jerusalem* not excluded) is attributed, to the simple fact that the authors of these later poems

> […] pursued a unity which Homer did not set himself, as a result of that same increase and establishment of art which fashioned and governed them, and which they pride themselves in, but which Homer himself did not know, and that they fall short precisely because of that increased *perfection of design* […] an alleged perfection is what constitutes the greatest and most essential flaw in their *design,* a flaw which no one recognizes in them but whose effect cannot fail to be felt, and which people attribute to causes that are not the true ones, while wrongly requiring those poems to produce effect that are not truly compatible with the *design* that is so praised in them.

Homer, on the other hand,

> […] ignorant of this art (which was born of him), and following only nature and himself, derived from his own imagination and intellect an idea, a concept, a *design* for the epic poem that was much truer, much more in conformity with the nature of man and poetry, more perfect than the others, who had him as their example, and who in looking to him, when the faculty from which he had produced these *models* had been reduced to *art*, and poetry was determined, marked, and constrained by rules, could not even come close to achieving (5-11 August 1823)

The number of entries dealing with the issue of the artificiality and progressive weakening of models – a stylistic straitjacket, we might call it, unwittingly worn the poets who followed Homer's footsteps – is such that it would not be amiss to see in them the manifestations of an obsessive disorder.

We, however, who are not interested in approaching Leopardi's work from a clinical point of view, regard his insistence on the absolute supremacy of the-epic-that-came-first, as the sign of an irrefutable discovery: not only does epic poetry operate in ways that are categorically different, indeed opposed, to those that apply to all other types of human endeavors, but this peculiarity can be extended to poetry in general, that is, outrageous as it may sound, to the entire corpus of Western literature.

> Human works tend to serve as models for each other. Thus a type is gradually perfected and each work, or most [3290] of them; prove to be better than their models until full perfection is achieved: the first model appears to be and is the most imperfect work of its type, until the type itself falls into decadence or is corrupted, which invariably happens with it ultimate perfection. *Not so in the epic* where the poem which was the model for all others, the Iliad, is also the more perfect. […] *Similarly, in other genres of poetry,* the best and most perfect models are for, the most part the oldest, either in absolute terms or relative to individual nations and literatures [3291] like the Comedia of our own Dante, which is the best as well as the first work of its genre (28 August 1823).

Times may be ripe, then, for a re-assessment of the "other genres of poetry," and particularly of the genre we are accustomed to call the lyrical. We might discover that when the language which is its medium is "taken to task," when we assess, in other words, the quality of its expressions, the separation of its occurrences from those of the epic makes very little sense. Any of Sappho's, or Erinna's, or Alcaeus' fragments could easily be set, like a precious stone on a ring, within the frame of a measured narrative or dialogical poem, as is the case in fact, in Homer, in Dante, or again,

in the XX Century, exemplarily, in the "fragmented" epic of Ezra Pound's *Cantos.*

It would be fair to object that the statements we have been quoting, surely bear witness to a will to affirm but do not provide a sound criterion on which to hang their validity. Even the notion of *disegno* to which we have reductively assigned a binomial function, can be pulled in a thousand directions and ultimately abandoned as overly generic.

Leopardi, however, knows better than liquidating the matter on such an open-ended and unsubstantiated utterance, and, once again, in a number of entries, he clarifies that Homeric excellence is to be predicated on the language the sovereign poet, as Dante calls him, had at his disposal, that is to say the Greek language at the time of its birth as a literary vehicle; a language that did not have to find ways to retain the vigor and flavor that poetry has been seeking from the very beginning, for the simple reason that vigor and flavor belonged to it by birthright.

Leopardi inscribes the dawning power of the emerging language under the rubric of *Vaghezza*, and, in Zibaldone 3975, maintains that

> In Homer everything is *vague,* everything is supremely poetic, using the term in its fullest truth and rightness and force, starting with the person [of the poet] and his history, as well as the supreme antiquity and distance between his times and later ones and especially our own, and becoming greater by degrees (12 Dec. 1823).

What could Leopardi possibly mean by "fullest truth and rightness and force" of the term *vaghezza* which, by the way, was to become the backbone of his own poetics and poetry?

Any etymologically responsible dictionary informs us that, although, in contemporary usage *vague* carries, exclusively negative connotations – indicating that upon which we cannot quite put our fingers, something undetermined and uncertain, something not clearly distinguishable – its original signifying power comes from the Latin *vagus* which, alongside these well-known negative connotations carries, and indeed stresses in a highly positive manner, the idea of movement, of wandering, of roaming. Something is *vague* because it moves, and moving, elicits and links realities that a merely consequential logic would tend to discard.

Vagueness, Leopardi continues, building upon the celebrated

essay *On Style* by Cesare Beccaria, is the constitutional quality of *parole* (words). That which separates them from *termini* (terms).

> They [the words] present not just the idea of the object they signify but also [110] accessory images […] And it is the most precious gift of a language to have these words. Scientific words present the bare and circumscribed idea of an object, and that's why they're called terms, because they *determine* and *define* the thing from all sides. The richer in words a language is, the more suitable it is for literature and beauty […] and the opposite is true when it is richer in terms, I mean when this richness of terms damages that of words, because an abundance of both is not harmful. Because the appropriate choice of a word and plainness or dryness are very different things, and if the former gives discourse efficacy and clarity, the latter adds nothing but aridity (30 April 1820).

Jumping back to entry 100 we encounter another sensationally pertinent and at the same time prophetic entry in which the quality of *vagueness* is said to be not only a sign of respect for the poetic object that has caused the writing of the poem, but also an opportunity offered to the reader to take part in the shaping of the message:

> It has been observed of ancient poets and artists, particularly the Greeks, that they were *accustomed to leave more for the viewer or listener to think about then they themselves expressed.* As for the reasons, it is just their naturalness and simplicity, which meant they did not go into the detail of the things, as do the moderns, showing off the hard work of the writer who does not speak of, or describe, the thing the way nature presents it but refines, notes the circumstances, breaks down the description, and extends it in a desire to create an effect, all of which makes the intention obvious, destroy natural ease and unconcern, reveals art and affectation, and gives more space in the poem to the poet than to the things he is talking about (8 Jan. 1820).

In the field of contemporary poetics, the active participation of the reader and consequently the diminished role of the writing ego is, of course, an established acquisition, but its acceptance has had to overcome more than one obstacle, and even in our own times a whole plethora of writing individuals are convinced that the attempted public exposure of their feelings and the right of self-expression are reasons enough to justify their investiture as poets.

It has been pointed out, recently and quite convincingly, by Edoardo Sanguineti in his *Attraverso i poemetti pascoliani*,[1] that Leopardi's notion of *vagueness* stands in contrast with Pascoli's adoption of vernacular locutions – a feature that, for reason of his own, greatly pleased Pasolini – and, even more so, with the author of *Myricae's* penchant for the terminological precision that Contini

welcomed as a long waited for extension and enrichment of the "lexical platform" in Italian poetry.

The inherent consequences of this critical divide reflect the attitudes from which they spring: whereas *vagueness* in words invites participation, precision of terms discourages it and, actually, makes it impossible. To all intents and purposes, it downgrades the reader to the role of mere explicator.

In 1965, inspired, more than likely, by Leopardi's instigation and translating it into a language that had poetically absorbed the lesson of structural linguistics, Alfredo Giuliani, in his 1965 *Preface* to the second edition of the by now canonical anthology of *I Novissimi, poetry for the sixties* wrote:

> Anyone who writes a poem (and thus also anyone who, by reading a poem, rewrites it) experiences all of language's possible ambiguity and comprehensiveness. What seems clear is raised to the point where it loses any sense, what presents itself as obscure is vexed to the point of revealing itself in miming a meaning. I don't mean to give the impression that I want to plunge the reader into mysticism and the ineffable. Language is certainly a rational elaboration, but its material is psychically and ideologically *vague*, it leaves social sediments of every provenance, it is insufficient and discontinuous, inert or in a state of fermentation, putrefied or crystalline; this deceptive material (thing, sentiment, nexus, idea, notion, archetype, game) the poet cultivates, selects, handles without regard for some pre-truth it might contain.[2]

A statement of this sort would appear, in fact, to be supported by the truly masterful cross-like diagram devised by Roman Jakobson in the late Fifties and published in 1960 as *Linguistics and poetics*.[3]

Here, the presence of an uncommon or intriguing signifier, or sets of signifiers, in what Jakobson identifies as the *conative function* of the poetic message, transforms what in a simpler message would amount to a mere reaction (as when the deployment of a verb in its imperative mode is followed by an act of compliance, or not compliance: "Go," says the addresser, and the addressee gets going) into an open invitation to further investigate its communicative potential. Said otherwise, no poetic experience will ever materialize unless the readers of poetry heed to their inner wish, and appropriate the emotive energy hiding in the materiality of the language proposed by the writer of the poem. Let's spell it out: there are no great poems without great readers of poetry, keeping in mind, however, that some of the poetic specimens that constitute a tradition are by far more inviting than others.

Jakobson further stipulates that one of the functions operative in the language of a verbal message is what he calls the *metalingual*, that is to say any set of "equational sentences" aimed at conveying "information about a lexical code." He offers as an example the following dialogue, which he himself defines as exasperating:

"The sophomore was plucked."
"But what is *plucked*?"
"*Plucked* means the same as *flunked*."
"And *flunked*?"
"*To be flunked* is *to fail an exam*."
"And what is a *sophomore*?"
"A *sophomore* is a *second-year student*."

The metalingual, then, is the function whereby the sender of the message and its recipient exercise, or try to exercise, some measure of control over the exactness of the meaning carried by the linguistic vehicle.

Given that metalanguage can be used to build equational sequences ("*Mare is the female of a horse*"), Jakobson alerts us that "poetry and metalanguage are in diametrical opposition to each other: in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation, whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence." A sequence, we should add, in which equation can be as imaginary as those at work in Homeric similitudes. In book 18 of the *Iliad*, for instance, invincible and nearly super human Achilles, having placed his hands on dead Patroclus' chest, becomes an endlessly groaning "bearded lion" "whose cubs a stag-hunter has snatched from some dense thicket".

Poetry, then, does not deal with a type of truth whose validity can be verified by the occurrence of an event, or the reality of the object to which it allegedly refers. It is, rather, a form of revelation that transpires fleetingly in the search for the unconditioned which no one can disavow without a deprivation, without giving up on his own innermost vitality.

We now need to make a short detour and visit options and strategies adopted by a handful of poets who, have engaged, or played with, and, implicitly or explicitly, dealt with the conative function in their own writing. After this excursus, we shall return to Roman Jakobson's seminal essay.

How the Old Mountains drip with Sunset may indeed be the beautiful title of a beautiful poem by Emily Dickinson, but the

substance of what makes its message poetic is neither the *old mountains* nor the *sunset* – enchanting as they maybe – and is to be looked for in the ingredients (both material and compositional) of the language "spurred into action" by the emotion caused by their sight.

In the first two stanzas of the poem we encounter not only a question the poet will not even try to answer, but also two splendid examples of the *precariousness* (I borrow the term from Edoardo Sanguineti who used it to synthesize the circumstances under which Italian neo-avant-garde poets operated, in the late Fifties/ early Sixties of the past century)[4] or the *vagueness* (to return to Leopardi) that enable readers to shift their curiosity from the plausible to the uncanny:

> How the old Mountains drip with Sunset
> How the Hemlocks burn —
> How the Dun Brake is draped in Cinder
> By the Wizard Sun —
>
> How the old Steeples hand the Scarlet
> Till the Ball is full —
> Have I the lip of the Flamingo
> That I dare to tell.

What is significant, here, is the irresistible and inexhaustible desire to explore the link Emily Dickinson has unequivocally and inexplicably established between *wizardry* and *sun*, and even more so the seemingly absurd logic whereby the courage to speak could only be the privilege of those who have the *lip of the flamingo*, a bird endowed with a rather conspicuous beak but hopelessly deprived of lips.

The precariousness can be so acute that, Emily Dickinson laments, it may cause immobility, stillness, catalepsy.

> These are the Visions flitted Guido —
> Titian — never told —
> Domenichino dropped his pencil
> Paralyzed, with Gold —

But here again the reasons for the alleged coming to a halt of Guido Reni's, Titian's and Domenichino's painterly actions, are of much lesser concern to an equipped reader of poetry than the semantic relationship between *paralysis* and *gold*.

Poets operating in a regime of vagueness or precariousness can

also wish for an opportunity to make sense, entrusting an agency not subjected to their control, to usher in utterances for which they themselves feel inadequate. In late medieval times Love was usually called upon to fulfill the task of speaking, although, quite often, the invocation is a rhetorical device deployed to mention something by professing to omit it. Here's a superb example drawn from the extraordinary, and graciously small, poetic output of Guido Cavalcanti:

> O Deo, che sembra quando li occhi gira!
> dical' Amor, ch'i' nol savria contare:
> cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare,
> ch'ogn'altra ver' di lei i' la chiam'ira.

Dante takes this trope to another level in *Purgatory* (XXIV, 52-54). What Guido addresses as a desire, as a "consummation devoutly to be wished," Dante promotes as the "natural" cause, and perhaps even as the law itself of poetic composition:

> […] I' mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
> ch' e' ditta dentro vo significando.

Embarrassing as it may be to dwell on a passage so frequently quoted, it would be difficult to find a more suitable example of a poet revealing the structural *otherness* of his work. In Dante's time the message is uttered by Love; in our own by the unconscious. In either case what matters lies wholly in the verb *to dictate* which implies submission. Guido delegates, Dante surrenders. The poetic ego meets and accepts the strength of its weakness. Dante's ego (*I am one who*) is truly poetic only when he lets himself be spoken by another (*Love*).

A step in this direction, distinguishing the pleasure of solacing the I from the requirements of the poetic drive, Dante had already taken in In *Vita Nuova XVIII* where the not yet exiled Florentine poet, announces a shift in his *modus loquendi*. While it may be a sign of temerity to outfit it as a downright anticipation of Leopardi's notion of *vaghezza*, it should raise no critical eyebrow if proposed as a significant step in the pre-history of its formulation:

> Allora queste donne cominciaro a parlare tra loro; e sì come talora vedemo cadere l'acqua mischiata di bella neve, così mi parea udire le loro parole uscire mischiate di sospiri. E poi che alquanto ebbero parlato tra loro, anche mi disse questa donna che m'avea prima parlato, queste parole: "Noi ti preghiamo che tu ne dichi ove sta questa tua beatitudine". Ed io, rispondendo lei, dissi cotanto: *"In quelle parole che lodano la donna mia"*.

Allora mi rispuose questa che mi parlava: *"Se tu ne dicessi vero, quelle parole che tu n'hai dette in notificando la tua condizione, avrestù operate con altro intendimento"*. Onde io, pensando a queste parole, quasi vergognoso mi partio da loro, e venia dicendo fra me medesimo: *"Poi che è tanta beatitudine in quelle parole che lodano la mia donna, perché altro parlare è stato lo mio?"*. E però propuosi di prendere per *matera de lo mio parlare sempre mai quello che fosse loda di questa gentilissima*; e pensando molto a ciò, pareami avere impresa troppo alta matera quanto a me, sì che non ardia di cominciare; e così dimorai alquanti dì con disiderio di dire e con paura di cominciare.

And when fear and tears did subside, he began anew, writing the trailblazing canzone *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* – the very same poem he resorts to, in the previously mentioned episode of *Purgatory XXIV* – to signal not just the external provenance of his inspiration and his action as a receiver of the message, but also a possible frequency in which to couch it, something akin to the art of fugue:

I' vo' con voi de la mia donna *dire*
Non perch'io creda sia laude *finire*,
ma *ragionar per isfogar* la mente.

An impeccable lexical choice: a poetic message is promised that will <u>not</u> define the *laude* and thus qualify as an item to be, inscribed, eventually, under the rubric of *vaghezza*. Letting loose (*isfogar la mente*) not through ravings and dithyrambs, but through the activity of reason (*ragionar*) suggests furthermore that while it would be quite rash to entertain the formal notion of a musical fugue, its exigencies are definitely present and active.

Brushing aside Antonio Delfini's sarcastic quip: "la morte di un fondatore / è il principio di una piccola soddisfazione poetica," and recalling briefly that Dante is the one exception Leopardi makes in his negative evaluation of post-Homeric poetry, we may look with some interest into the strategy adopted, in modern times, by a poet who would not easily renounce his special role – heroic or pathetic or both – as the unencumbered source of the poetic message, as an author, that is, who, etymologically speaking,[5] brings about increase in meaning and consequently in the fermenting of emotions: Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Him too, however, falls prey to the inevitable. He neither delegates nor surrenders. In his inimitable fashion he creates a most alluring horizon of expectations only to acquit himself from the responsibility of an immediate delivery. He turns poetry into the art of promising and postponing revelations. His *Sera fiesolana*

(Evening at Fiesole) begins with a wish to please an unnamed interlocutor:

> *Fresche le mie parole* ne la sera
> *ti sien* come il fruscìo che fan le foglie
> del gelso *etc.*
>
> *Dolci le mie parole* nella sera
> *ti sien* come la pioggia che bruiva
> tepida e fuggitiva [...]

and comes full circle with a series of impeccable dodgings:

> *e ti dirò* verso quali reami
> d'amor ci chiami il fiume, le cui fonti
> eterne a l'ombra de gli antichi rami
> parlano nel mistero sacro dei monti;
> *e ti dirò* per qual segreto
> le colline su i limpidi orizzonti
> s'incurvino come labbra che un divieto
> chiuda, e perché la *volontà di dire*
> le faccia belle
> oltre ogni uman desire
> e nel *silenzio* lor sempre novelle
> consolatrici.

The octative subjunctive ("ti sien") of the initial stanzas leads to a promise whose fulfillment is forever delayed (cast in the future tense: "ti dirò"), while the effect of its enunciation, that is the assumption of a comforting function on the part of inanimate objects ("fonti eterne," "colline sui limpidi orizzonti") emerges from a tangle of auspiciously antagonistic implications: "labbra che un divieto chiuda" "volontà di dire" "silenzio."

Many other ways of injecting language with variable doses of the conative function have been identified and practiced, of course, by different poets, and we shall return to this issue. Now, however, time has come to reconnect, as promised, with Jakobson's line of thought. In his diagram, the poetic function, that is the device that makes a message a poetic message, sits midway between addresser and addressee, and is brilliantly defined *as the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination.*

In sonnet 18, William Shakespeare, for instance, is famously tempted to construct an equivalence between *dark youth* and *summer's day*, and though he eventually decides against it, the signifying link between the two entities is not predicated on any

notion of demonstrable plausibility, but rather on a *projected*, longed for, and finally achieved *co-existence* of items that no set theory would allow to be gathered within the same compound.

"Bewitched, bothered and bewildered" as she might have been – had she been exposed to this type of structuralist protocol – and perhaps equally stupefied by the Bard's notion that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," Gertrude Stein boldly submitted her own "rose is a rose is a rose, is a rose," and spellbound readers with a kind of equivalence that straddles across both poetry and metalanguage.

Remarkable, indeed essential, as Jakobson's analysis has proven to be in the field of literary criticism – revolving as it does around a language in which it hardly matters whether the referent has been accurately engaged or creatively betrayed – the perverse delight poetry provides in exonerating the addressee of the message from the task of a factual verification is perhaps less enthusiastically emphasized than such an exponent of the neo-avant-garde as Alfredo Giuliani would have wished, but it remains a very significant weapon, a counter-measure, to combat pathetic and inflated Egos.

Anyhow, the auspicious fluidity of the enunciation, and, consequently, the propitious precariousness from which the sender of the poetic message operates – and which we have now largely extended to the receiver – was not born yesterday.

Thirty-six years after Leopardi's death, and eighty-seven years prior to Roman Jakobson's lecture, Arthur Rimbaud (age 17, for the record) inaugurated modern poetry inserting a mandatory four word phrase in a letter, dated May 15th 1871, addressed to Paul Demeny, a man of letters indicted of incomprehension and disregard for what constitutes a meaningful poem, an utterance that cannot be confused with a mere set of measurable verses.

This letter, universally referred to as the *Lettre du voyant* (Letter of the seer, of the visionary),[6] on account of the equation Rimbaud draws between the conditions of the seer and those of the poet – conditions that can only be achieved by means of *a long et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens* (long and well thought out derangement of all perceptions) – opens with a perfectly arrogant statement "*J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de littérature nouvelle*" (I decided to offer you an hour's worth of modern literature) and accompanies

some texts, penned by Rimbaud himself, as specimens of what he calls *littérature nouvelle*.

The phrase is the well-known rebel yell: *Je est un autre* (I *is* another). At times it has been treated as a slightly modified revamping of Gerard De Nerval's *Je suis l'autre* (I *am the* other): a grave error.

An unbridgeable divide separates the nightmarish lack of a definite identity that haunts Nerval's verses, and Rimbaud's formidable intuition whereby an *I* predicated by the verb to be in third person – *Is* rather than *am* – turns the enunciation of what looked like a predicament (not without reason, for centuries poets, and everyone else in their tow, had banked on the identity of *I* and *self*) into the admission of an inevitable, structural alienation. The *I* can only be conceived through its relation to a *non-I* agent, external or internal as the case maybe, and thus operate exclusively in condition of uncertainty and variability. The *I* is groundless. It is a subject in the domain of the *Other*. It has been *subjectified. The Other speaks words that constitute the I.*

Far from a being misconstrued as a lamentable shortcoming, and thus as a perfect opportunity for elegy, or in Rimbaldian terms, *subjective poetry*, this hyper-volatile condition of the *subjectified I* leads to the making of *objective poetry*. The radical complexity of this puzzling affirmation (shouldn't a subject write subjective poetry?) would be the cause of much frustration had not Rimbaud himself provided some light, which, feeble as it may be, it nonetheless signals the beginning of a new way of practicing and consciously understanding poetry.

In a letter, a rebuke, really, written two days before the *Lettre du Voyant*, addressed to Georges Izambard, his *professeur* of French literature at the College de Charleville, and containing perhaps the first occurrence of the locution "Je est un autre," Rimbaud first gives voice to his repulsion for what he considers the outcome of a poetic lethargy, the passive re-mastication of inherited literary patterns:

> Fundamentally, you see your principles as an argument for *subjective* poetry: your will to return to the university trough – sorry! – proves it. But you will end up as an accomplished complacent who accomplishes nothing of any worth. That's without even beginning to discuss your fadasse[7] *subjective* poetry. One day, I hope – as do countless others – I'll see the possibility for *objective* poetry in your principles, said with more sincerity than you can imagine!

Secondly, having informed his interlocutor of his invincible desire – a sort of divine vocation – to become a poet, that is to say a voyant, a seer, a visionary, he puts forth the conditions, both sufficient and necessary, whereby poetry, objective poetry, can come into being: *"C'est faux de dire : Je pense : on devrait dire : On me pense"* (It's wrong to say "I think"; one ought to say "I am being thought."). Put differently: the *personae* of the *I* can only express themselves, in poetry, through grammatical constructs received by the communal and political phenomenon called language. Language speaks (and makes thinking possible); the poet once again is the listener.

We may not be surprised, at this point, to learn that Rimbaud was also of the opinion that poetry had reached its climax in Homer's time:

> All ancient poetry culminated with Greek poetry—Harmonious Life. From Greece to the romantic movement—the Middle Ages—there are writers and versifiers. From Ennius to Theroldus, from Theroldus to Casimir Delavigne, it's all rhymed prose, a game, the sloppiness and glory of innumerable ridiculous generations: Racine is the standout, pure, strong, great. Had his rhymes been ruined and his hemistiches muddled, the Divine Dunderhead would be as forgotten today as the next author of the *Origins*. —After Racine, the game got old. It kept going for two thousand years! […] In Greece, as I mentioned, poems and lyres turned *Action into Rhythm*. Later, music and rhyme became games, mere pastimes. The study of this past proves precious to the curious: many get a kick out of reworking these antiquities: let them. The universal intelligence has, of course, always shed ideas; man harvests a portion of these mental fruits: they measured themselves against them, wrote books about them: so things progressed, man not working to develop himself, not yet awake, or not yet enveloped in the fullness of the dream. Functionaries, writers: author, creator, poet—such a man never existed.[8]

Doubtless, Rimbaud's adolescent enthusiasm (sometime one has the impression that God loves some of his children better than others) is decidedly more inclusive than the philologically infused verdict pronounced by Leopardi. Their words, are not perfectly coincidental, of course, and yet the fascination they both felt for the poetry of the origins is rather explicit.

Whether poetry is denied any chance to ever peak higher than the Homeric heights, as maintained by Giacomo Leopardi, or whether it will be retooled and re-energized by the poet-seer as projected by the rowdy Rimbaud who, by the way, admits to be merely striving to become a new Prometheus (a *voleur de feu*, a thief

of fire), it will be necessary to extract it from language, lending our ears to its predicative implications, and ignoring any pre-conceived notion of what to expect. In poetry language can be encouraged to speak, but cannot be coerced to render what *we think* we have in mind. What has been linguistically thought and "formatted" can, at best, serve as s stimulus, as a point of departure.

Rimbaud, however, could not have imagined how resilient *subjective* (confessional, egocentric, and inevitably *fadasse*) *poetry* was going to be, despite the numerous subsequent attacks launched against it by the exponents of avant-garde movements, first and foremost, Futurism.

In his *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (May 11th, 1912), somewhat cavalierly, Marinetti wrote:

> In literature, eradicate the "I," which means all psychology. The man who is damaged beyond redemption by the library and the museum, who is in thrall to a fearful logic and wisdom, offers absolutely nothing that is any longer of any interest. Therefore we must abolish him from literature, letting matter at last take his place, and we must seize its essence with deft strokes of intuition [...] [9]

This type of cutthroat rhetoric is ideologically driven and must, as such, be taken with a grain of salt, or at least viewed as the death of a romantic which, according to Wallace Stevens is always "an exaggeration." Providing no clue towards a definition of *matter* and vehemently unclear on how to handle the *deft strokes of intuition*, the enthusiasm initially stirred by the manifesto (he wrote psychology but I bet he meant psychologism) abated quickly, however, even within the Futurist camp.

This not-withstanding, the impetuous spin impressed upon poetry by Rimbaud's manifesto – *absit iniuria verbis* – proclaiming the necessity to abandon subjectiveness to pursue, in its stead, the objectiveness that filters through the voice of the other, marks a point of no return. The authorial I sheds its prerogatives as a cognitively and emotionally superior being, to become the *Subject waiting to catch a message* to be relayed, eventually, to a *reading Subject*.

Divesting is a difficult job. My teacher, friend and great poet Elio Pagliarani confessed to me that having to select poems to be included in the anthology of the *Novissimi*, he felt obliged to disown some of his early poems, feeling that they were too ego-

centered. Which forced me to write an essay showing that his pronominal *I* even in his earliest poetry, was not really an *I myself* who seeks opportunities to speak *in interiore viscerum*, but the *lyrical I* capable of creating humorous and otherwise unimaginably forms of predication:

> noi ci mettiamo terzo
>
> Prima il pane secondo la minestra
> Terzo la donna e la parola
> noi ci poniamo a questa
> come l'ultima che ha da avere un senso
> duttile contro il ferro, la sola che si possa anche inventare
> tutta del nostro tempo stanza e renderne testimonianza
>
> possiamo lavarci la faccia
> e camminare in mezzo alla gente

Ottobre, notte, an exquisite and powerful poem Antonella Anedda included in her book *Notti di pace occidentale* (Donzelli, 1999) will serve as another and radically different example of what the *lyrical I* can do writing a poem addressed to one's mother and father.

> Accetta questo silenzio: la parola stretta nel buio della gola come una bestia irrigidita, come il cinghiale imbalsamato che nei temporali di ottobre scintillava in cantina. Livido e intrecciato di paglia, il cuore secco, senza fumo, eppure contro il fulmine che inchiodava la porta, ogni volta nel punto esatto in cui era iniziata la morte: l'inutile indietreggiare, il corpo ardente, il calcio del cacciatore sul suo fianco.
>
> Chiudi gli occhi. Pensa: lepre, e volpe e lupo chiama le bestie che cacciate corrono sulla terra rasa e sono nella fionda del morire o dell'addormentarsi sfinite nella tana dove solo chi è inseguito conosce davvero la notte davvero il respiro.

The numeric paucity of Rimbaud's catechumens and confirmed converts is clearly a sign of the difficulty encountered in the implementation of his intuition, but anyone enrolled in the new faith will be able to boast a rich and distinguished pedigree, a mark of nobility that dates back, as we have shown, to Dante's, actually to Homer's time.

Curiously, and most appropriately from a Rimbaldian point of view, American poet Jack Spicer's collected poetry appeared in 2008 under the title *my vocabulary did this to me,* a clear endorsement of objective poetry by a "poet who claimed," as editors Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian remind us, "that his poems originated outside himself," who insisted that a poet was no more than a radio transmitting messages, a poet who professed an almost monkish

practice of dictation from "Martians," no less, who rejected what he called "the big lie of the personal."

This lack of control over the making of meaning on the part of the poet could cause some anxiety. In the short essay *In the Environs of Lacan*, in which he records his reaction to his first encounter with the French psychoanalyst's theory, Andrea Zanzotto writes:

> The transformation of every discourse, "everything," rather, into a mere signifier, into a letter; the suspicion that the "I" was a grammaticalized production of the imaginary, a point of flight and not a reality […]. But could one really affirm, speak, make plain all of this? Wouldn't one's mouth remain irreparably dumb? Wouldn't all the cerebral relays have short-circuited? At that time no truth effects that were not destructive reached me from any quarter, while in me were accumulating as if the give to the "I" a kind of ironclad super-consistency, strata that were ever more accursed with anxiety.

What Zanzotto, in the late fifties, viewed as threatening, Wallace Stevens, in the late forties, had already assumed to be the most favorable, indeed necessary conditions for poetry to be of any service to humanity. The point, he declared, was not meant to transmogrify an experience defined in advance, but to record the shake-up caused by that experience in the language of the subjectified ego. He said it best in his *The Creations of Sound* from the book *Transport to Summer*, published in 1947.

It is not an easy poem to deconstruct, and yet it is perfectly suited (though it is always dangerous to fashion poems into statement of poetics) to illustrate the dynamics of what Rimbaud had intuitively called "objective poetry," poetry written, as you recall, by one who is being thought by language.

> If the poetry of X was music,
> So that it came to him of its own,
> Without understanding, out of the wall
>
> Or in the ceiling, in sounds not chosen,
> Or chosen quickly, in a freedom
> That was their element, we should not know
>
> That X was an obstruction, a man
> Too exactly himself, and that there are words
> Better without an author, without a poet,
>
> Or having a separate author, a different poet,
> An accretion from ourselves, intelligent
> Beyond intelligence, an artificial man
>
> At a distance, a secondary expositor,

A being of sound, whom one does not approach
Through any exaggeration. From him we collect.

***

Tell X that speech is not dirty silence
Clarified. It is silence made dirtier.
It is more than an imitation for the ear.

He lacks this venerable complication.
His poems are not of the second part of life.
They do not make the visible a little hard

To see nor, reverberating, eke out of the mind
On peculiar horns, themselves eked out
By the spontaneous particulars of sound.

We do not see ourselves like that in poems.
We say ourselves in syllables that rise
From the floor, rising in speech we do not speak.

It may not be amiss, at this juncture – prior to embarking upon any, no matter how quick and desperate commentary – to introduce a couple of caveats that might help us distinguish Stevens' position from that of poets who also reflected on the nature and function of poetry.

Clearly, we are miles away from poets lingering over the idea that poetry is, may, or should be, a rite of language purification. In his *Le tombeau d'Edgar Poe* (The tomb of Edgar Poe) Mallarmé, for instance, speaks of the American poet as an angel bent on giving "*un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*," (a purer sense to the speech of the tribe) turning, that is, ordinary parlance into an elevated (more musical?) form of expression, into poetic language. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as poetic language, unless by this expression we mean language that effectuates sense by reflecting upon itself and relinquishing, or at least twisting its referential obligations, to make out of their world, "a place / formerly / unsuspected."[10]

If not miles, certainly kilometers away also from Ezra Pound's *Canto XIV* that, in a truly Dantean fashion, describes his own "*luogo d'ogni luce muto*" ("a place where every light is muted") where not the lustful are punished (as in Dante's fifth Canto) but, among other kindred souls,

[…] the betrayers of language
[…]
And those who had lied for hire,
the perverts, the perverters of language,

the perverts, who have set money-lust
before the pleasure of the sense

To Mallarme's invitation to turn away from the drab realism besieging common speech and to enhance instead, through choice of words, the signifying potential of each utterance, and to Pound's rightful invective – which, alas, continues to be as galvanizingly furious as doomed to fail – Stevens opposes a terse analysis of the process of poetic acquisition.

Six main points are clearly discernible in *The Creations of Sound*. Number 1: with the exception of the last tercet, the text is written exclusively by the receiver of the poetic message. Number 2: the receiver is dissatisfied with what he has received (it is not *music*) and indicts the non-music-poet on a charge of self-absorption: someone who has reduced language to a device for the transmission and circulation of one's sentiments, impressions, and speculations. Number 3: the receiver asserts to have learnt that there are words other than those used by the self-absorbed poet, or yes, the same as used by him, but used differently, words that are defined, through a long series of "equivalent" appositives, as "better without an author, without a poet," or "having a separate author," "a different poet," "an accretion from ourselves, intelligent beyond intelligence," "an artificial man at a distance," "a secondary expositor," "a being of sound." Number 4: the indicted poet is not addressed directly but through a third party charged with the task of reforming him: You (whoever that might be: perhaps a Baudelarian *hypocrite lecteur*) must inform X that his poetry, among other things, is not "silence made dirtier", as it should, nor such that it "makes the visible a little hard to see", as it should etc. Number 5: in the last tercet the sender of the poetic message regains the role that had been usurped, so to say, by the receiver, and informs the reader that he (or she) will not be considered an obstruction if the poem being offered is made of "*syllables* that rise / From the floor, rising in *speech we do not speak*." Number 6: the pluralizing of the pronoun in the last stanza, is a stroke of genius. From the beginning, but not quite to the end, the poem has targeted a *Him/Her* through an interface between *You* and *I*, but here the voice is returned to a two headed monster capable of saying *We*, not out of royal complacency, but of a logical necessity. It is the sign of a reconciliation, better still, a blending together of two agencies seeking to free the language of the poem from the choking ineptness of a tyrant ego.

As to what Stevens might have meant by music, which is the wobbling pivot of the entire composition, I could only advise to keep away from all the *videvits* and other forms of onomatopoeia that fill Pascoli's *Myricae* as well as all the alliterations hinting at natural sounds (example: "*de grilli il verso che perpetuo trema,*" Pascoli again). Stevens' music, I should think, has nothing to do with musicality and can only be heard (*collected*) when an effect of sense, a truth that can neither be circumscribed nor denied, surfaces from the sea of sounds: "sounds not chosen, or chosen quickly, in a freedom that was their element," from a language that cannot be coopted.

There may be room for further thought in the difference Stevens introduces between music of X that ought to leap out of walls and down from ceilings, while the syllables enabling the dual speaker performing the rite of saying "arise from the floor." One more source of apprehension, if not of exegetical frustration that we, at the moment, are not in a position to investigate. Even at a conjectural level, such a pursuit would mean treading upon very thin ice: we might be tempted, for instance, to equate ceiling with dictation, wall with suggestion, and floor with inner scrutiny and clumsily drown in the frigid waters that lie under the icy surface: the projection qualifying a poetic message as such, moves in fact equivalences from the axis of selection to the axis of combination, but not vice versa.

Until further notice, then, wisdom advises to leave alone these comings and goings, as well as any sort of applied determinism, and listen instead to the voices hidden in the raw materiality of the words themselves and, of course, in the rhythm they acquire upon entering the text. This type of listening is the umbrella under which the signifiers of writing reach out to the signifiers of reading.

This linguistic tight-rope walking, this precarious communicational exchange between two subjects masochistically happy to advance towards a non-end, just like in Zeno's celebrated paradox of the fleet-footed Achilles who gets closer and closer to a slow moving tortoise but will never be able to reach it, can perhaps be tested by analyzing a brief text by Giuseppe Ungaretti, the sense of which, at first sight, would seem to be "obstructed" by a *large looming* snippet of the poet's biography.

L'amore più non è quella tempesta
che nel notturno abbaglio
ancora mi avvinceva poco fa
tra l'insonnia e le smanie,
balugina da un faro
verso cui va tranquillo
un vecchio capitano.

It is one of the *Ultimi cori per la Terra promessa*, number 27 to be exact, and it was first published in *Il taccuino del Vecchio* which dates back to 1960.

Much older are the origins of its design. Quoting Ungaretti's own words, Leone Piccioni informs us that many are the prose writings and the poems (some dating back to 1914) that show quite clearly how "I began my journey to the *Terra Promessa*. All my poetic activity, after 1919, has been unfolding in that direction." More specifically, and crucially for a non-gratuitous appreciation of the "project," we are also told how liminal and forever incipient the experience of the *Terra Promessa* is bound to be: Aeneas, in fact, Ungaretti's perspective hero, upon touching the soil he has been craving to reach, would be assaulted by "the representations of his previous experiences that, in turn, would enlighten him on the outcome of the immediate future has in stock for him." Is it not, then, the promised land, a land of promise? What kind of land is this promise made of? Is it not, in its essence, a language proffered to keep alive a horizon of unchartered expectations "until, when times are consumed, men will be allowed to see the true Terra Promessa"?[11]

To approach, let alone answer, these questions we have to circumvent, first of all, the temptation of viewing the poem as a document of personal resignation. If "balugina" at the beginning of the second stanza, is a predicate of "Amore," which opens the poem, then Ungaretti is simply confessing that, as an old man, his erotic drive has weakened and that he has peacefully accepted his new and unalterable condition. Little does it matter that love flickers like the light from a somewhat not fully reliable lighthouse, nor that the lover is cast as a captain (a favorite persona since the time of *Porto sepolto*), and he will make do with whatever light he can get.

There are however two good reasons, one punctuative and one paratextual, to favor the linking of "balugina" and "vecchio

capitano"; one is the comma at the end of the first stanza. Odd as the position it occupies may be, it has been firmly planted there since day one. All subsequent editions of *Taccuino* confirm this simple fact. The other is the white space. It is much more substantial than the traditional typographical distance separating quatrain and tercet, and this item also has never been modified. Something was supposed to follow the word "smanie" – and room was made available to accommodate it – but nothing has come. The stanza has been interrupted. We are left with *desiderantur*, a willful suspension of the narrative.

There is indeed a third and more cogent reason: if "balugina" is linked to "vecchio capitano" at the end of the poem, the discourse becomes much more engaging and fruitful. A wholly new perspective comes into being. Accepting the proleptic option (a rhetorical device not at all uncommon in Ungaretti) we find ourselves in the presence of a captain for whom *baluginare* has become a verb of motion, indicating provenance, without of course losing any of its original denotations.

To sum it up: the old captain flickers/comes from a lighthouse towards which, oblivious of the contradictions (tranquillo), he is actually going. It may be difficult to gulp this down logically, but psychologically it makes perfect sense: an increased and unexpected iridescence is visited upon the enunciation where the conflicts of desire replace some ultimately uninteresting factual evidence.

This would also seem to validate Jakobson's definition of what it is that renders poetic a message: the projection – let us revisit his formula one more time – of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination.

In poetry then, "vecchio capitano" and "balugina" are a perfectly plausible, and a by far richer and surprising match then, let's say, "old captain" and, "smokes a pipe," or "hoists a sail," or any other foreseeable definition of activities, conditions, or qualities, that would explain away (and kill) the grammatical subject. "Balugina," which in the axis of selection would belong to a "light-house" and, metaphorically, to "love," in the axis of combination belongs, *equivalently*, to "old captain."

For this kind of event to take place, the receivers, as we have just seen, have to work no less and no more than the senders, and at times even a little more. This simply means that they must separate

reason from rationalization, stop harkening back to what is known and instead look for whatever is surprising and capable of opening vistas. Stimulated by a powerful emotion, words in a poem collide and seduce each other, rub against one another, let themselves be enjoyed as harbingers of a truth lingering in the unfathomable mystery of their own origin.

Under such circumstances it is simply ridiculous to make prose versions of poems as we were instructed to do in grade school and beyond, as if the task of poets were indeed that of "making the visible a little hard to see," and that of the readers of providing adequate lenses to unblur the vision. Instead of a prose version of a poem we might as well turn in a picture, for clearly the type of information that prose can relay is by far more speedily advanced through the "ineluctable modality of the visible" that tormented Stephen Dedalus at the beginning of *Proteus* in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

This sort of truth, however, would fall quite short of the mark. Pictured, verbally pronounced, or jotted down, it might result in a clinically accurate description of what the objects under scrutiny look like, and the feelings allegedly experienced by the poet standing before them. Descriptions of descriptions, in fact, and not at all a sharing of the signifiers brought to life by the incessant and inexplicable urge to communicate with the thing itself, or to give voice to the silence that surrounds it.

While perceptions that moved individuals towards the objects with which they intended to establish a contact – and which have since time immemorial stirred their imagination – have been if not abandoned, certainly quieted down in favor of a truth for profit that entails a tranquillizing uniformity and behavioral bridling of impulses, language itself, in poetry, can fully regain its status as an object of wonder, an opportunity to retrieve from what we may call a referential habit, the energy necessary to a perennial rejuvenation of the myth of our existence.

The observance of this subterranean and pervasive principle would not only deflate the arrogance of those who believe to be in the know, but also redirect our search towards a type of knowledge in which logic and imagination would not be mutually repulsive. Conservative and even nostalgic as it may sound, we propose that this urge to fashion meaning be regarded as socially relevant and, in fact, necessary to halt the robotization of humanity which is unfortunately well underway.

Language is made of words and poetry is made of words. They both are used to express and communicate. Poetry today, that is language striving to regain admission to the terrors and joys of its dawning phase, its obscure emerging from the sound of voice, can also conjure up images no camera will ever be able to capture, unless it makes room for poetry: fleeting images, flashes of intuition, or, as Wallace Stevens put it in his *Adagia*, "pheasants disappearing in the brush."

Catching the glimpse, or looking for a glimpse to catch, might prove to be a touch more subversive than the reiteration of slogans inviting us to sing solo, out of the choir in which we are immersed or by which we are surrounded. A virus desertifying language spreads daily from a variety of mediatic hotbeds, and this means one thing only: that we are indeed thought by language, as Rimbaud realized, but certainly not by the vast range and depth of its potentially signifying power. Rather, we are enslaved and turned into regurgitators – from speakers that we might be – by the formulaic misery of unimaginative loud-speakers whose authority, far from deriving from semantic competence, is guaranteed by the diffusive agencies that have hired their phonetic apparatus.

Poetry? Poets? In today's world? What for? For whom does the absence of poetry toll? It tolls for thee, of course.

In the trajectory we have followed from vagueness to otherness, our last "impossible" image, that of the "flickering captain" caught between a precarious sender and a precarious addressee, is worth, in my estimate, a hundred pictures at least. To reach one thousand I would like to propose a text by Amelia Rosselli – the very last of her *Variazioni (1961-62)*, in the second part of her *Variazioni belliche* published in 1964. Here repetition is chant, and ontophony prevails by enhancing enunciations that reverse the linguistically codified and historically transmitted data of experience:

> Tutto il mondo è vedovo se è vero che tu cammini ancora
> tutto il mondo è vedovo se è vero! Tutto il mondo
> è vero se è vero che tu cammini ancora, tutto il
> mondo è vedovo se tu non muori! Tutto il mondo
> è mio se è vero che tu non sei vivo, ma solo
> una lanterna per i miei occhi obliqui. Cieca rimasi
> dalla tua nascita e l'importanza del nuovo giorno
> non è che notte per la tua distanza. Cieca sono
> ché tu cammini ancora! Cieca sono che tu cammini
> e il mondo è vedovo e il mondo è cieco se tu cammini
> ancora aggrappato ai miei occhi celestiali.

Prose and picture mongers will no doubt reject this dramatically convulsive landscape from which, anyhow, they are sadly excluded.

Notes

[1] Now as *I poemetti pascoliani*, in *Il chierico organico*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000.

[2] See the updated American edition annotated and introduced by Luigi Ballerini and Federica Santini, New York: Agincourt Press, 2017, p. 323.

[3] *Linguistic and Poetics* Roman Jakobson was first delivered as a lecture at the colloquium on *Style* held at Indiana University in the Spring of 1958. See it now in *Language and Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Cambridge (Ma): Harvard University Press, 1987.

[4] Quoted by Giuliani in his introduction to *I Novissimi, poesie per gli anni '60*, Torino: Einaudi, 2003, p. xxv. (Prima edizione Milano: Rusconi e Paolazzi, 1961.)

[5] Author. Mid-14c., *auctor, autour, autor* "father, creator, one who brings about, one who makes or creates" someone or something, from Old French *auctor, acteor* "author, originator, creator, instigator" (12c., Modern French auteur) and directly from Latin *auctor* "promoter, producer, father, progenitor; builder, founder; trustworthy writer, authority; historian; performer, doer; responsible person, teacher," literally "one who causes to grow," agent noun from *auctus*, past participle of *augere* "to increase," from PIE root *aug- (1) "to increase." Online Etymological Dictionary (https://www.etymonline.com)

[6] For a full translation see *I promise to be good, The Letters of Arthur Rimbaud*, New York: Random House (The Modern Library), 2004.

[7] Fadasse = "dull," "wishy-washy," or as translated by Wyatt Mason (work cited in note 5, p. 28) "dry-as-dust."

[8] See *I Promise to be Good*. pp. 31-33.

[9] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Critical Writings*. Edited by Günter Berghaus; translated by Doug Thompson. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

[10] William Carlos Williams, "The Descent." *Selected Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1968.

[11] See Leone Piccioni, "Le origini della Terra promessa" in Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Vita d'un uomo, Tutte le poesie*. Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1969.

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Task-Based Language Teaching of Italian:
A One-Year Case Study

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Abstract: This article is a description of a second-semester elementary Italian course that utilized task-based language teaching (TBLT) as the teaching and learning methodology. The same course was taught to two different sections over the course of one year, both sections had 30 students. This case study has two priorities: 1) to share a contextually feasible model of TBLT as a foreign language that is supported by relevant research and 2) to share the reflections of both the learners and the teacher involved. A qualitative analysis of the students' impressions demonstrates that the students believed the course was effective and enjoyable and met the overall goal of TBLT: What they learned in the classroom could be put to practical usage in the outside world.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Italian, Pedagogy, L2.

Introduction

TBLT is an approach to language teaching and learning that is premised on the belief that languages are learned best when meaningful message exchange is the instructional priority, and attention to grammatical form supports these exchanges. One definition of TBLT that informs the present paper is that it is a system of instruction in which students act primarily as language users; compare this to traditional instruction (TI), where students act primarily as language learners (Van den Branden). TBLT is also referred to as task-based instruction (TBI) and task-based language learning (TBLL).

The model presented here is shaped by the many contextual factors present – such as the institution, learners, teachers and traditions – in an attempt to create a model of feasible TBLT. It balances a focus on meaning with a focus on form as is necessary within the context that many foreign language teachers in United

States find themselves. The model contains significant elements of TI, also referred to as Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) but maintains its emphasis on task because every unit begins with a task assignment, and task completion counts for 30% of the final grade. The TI components include explicit grammar instruction as presented in a communicative-based textbook. This balance is similar to a task-based "middle road" that Littlewood refers to as "a continuum along which students may operate with differing degrees of focus on form and meaning." ("Task-based" 321).

Review of the Literature

Through its balance of flooding learners with input and providing learners with opportunities to interact and produce meaningful output, TBLT presents an optimal framework for FL learning to occur. Decades of research has shown that language learning is most successful when two factors are prioritized: *input* and *interaction*, specifically the quality and quantity of input and interaction (King and Mackey). The TBLT model described here is based on empirical studies demonstrating the beneficial effects of its various components (Long, Skehan, VanPatten, Willis). Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research generally concurs that classroom instruction should emulate authentic language use: it should not be static and analytical, as human languages are dynamic and constantly fluctuating (VanPatten). TBLT sets the stage for the acquisition of a FL by challenging students to comprehend rich, extended input and to interact with each other, and the teacher, en route to performing meaningful tasks in realistic ways, in real time.

Although TBLT has received considerable attention by SLA researchers in the past 40 years, for the first 20 years most of this attention was directed toward theoretical reviews of TBLT's psycholinguistic merits, or brief overviews of individual tasks and local task conditions used in research. These fine-grained, comparative studies allow for the identification of optimal task conditions, e.g., pre-task planning time (Ellis, "Planning"), and are directed at discovering what task variables predispose learners to emphasize fluency, accuracy or complexity in their production. This type of laboratory-based TBLT research allows TBLT course designers to defend classroom-based models as empirically based.

Over the past 20 years there has been an increase in the literature

of TBLT studies analyzing models in use in intact classes (Carless, East, Watson-Todd). Norris endorses such an agenda,

> A top priority must be the transformation of task-based research into an educationally relevant endeavor... it is not the case that primary studies of a few task features or learner conversations will, on their own, provide much in the way of warranted implications for task-based teaching in practice (Norris 588).

The majority of these classroom-based TBLT studies take place in Asia with English as the target language. Shehade & Coombe thoroughly examine TBLT in FL contexts around the world – again with a majority of the studies based in Asia – but the collection is focused *exclusively* on English as a FL. Much less attention has been paid to the use of TBLT in a FL setting for languages other than English (there are some, for example, see Pyun). One goal of this article is to describe a model of TBLT that can succeed in large, intact FL classrooms.

Challenges of Implementing TBLT as a FL

There is a longstanding tradition in many institutions of higher learning that associates FL teaching with grammar-based, teacher-centered approaches. Carless reports it accurately as "a deeply ingrained attitude that language teaching is grammar teaching." ("Suitability" 601) One of the persistent problems in language teaching innovation is grammar-based exams. Skehan explains that this paradigm exists for two very clear reasons:

1. it keeps the teacher firmly in charge
2. it aligns very neatly with accountability – the teacher presents certain forms, the students must study these forms, the test will address these forms.

These institutional traditions help explain the persistence of grammar-based, teacher-centered TI of FLs.

In a typical FL setting, grammar-oriented 'communicative' textbooks are used as the means for teaching and learning. Similar to the point made above, this is in keeping with a stable tradition. Unfortunately, what this means for the TBLT-oriented instructor is the necessity to find or develop TBLT materials, often without monetary or departmental support (Ellis et al.).

The amount of time that is necessary to both complete a task module and to comprehensively present a textbook chapter is often

insufficient. This question is especially pressing in a FL context in the US, where there is often just 45 hours of contact time between the teacher and the students in a semester. When you add to this the double duty of completing a textbook-based agenda and a TBLT agenda, the amount of time may be insufficient.

At many (public) universities in the US, elementary-level FL classes have 25+ students per section. This makes a more individualized approach like TBLT difficult for several reasons: When the teacher assists individuals or dyads, the other students frequently go off task, talk loudly, start texting, etc. An approach like TBLT requires extended stretches of individual work, and several studies have documented the problems that come with this. E.g., Carless ("Task-based" 656) reports that "concerns over noise and discipline inhibited task-based teaching."

The One-Year Case Study

The course reported in this study meets three times per week: two times per week with the teacher for 100 minutes per meeting, and one time per week at the language lab for 50 minutes. It is a 4-credit course, called Elementary Italian 2.

Although not intentional, this one-year case study reports partial data from a (fall) pilot semester and comprehensive data from a (spring) semester. This was not intentional because the goal was to report comprehensive data from both semesters but the fall semester became unwieldy due to an overabundance of oral production tasks that put a strain on the schedule. In the pilot semester, three out of the five task modules were oral tasks that had to be recorded in class, and then transcribed, edited and revised by each student for each task (Means, "Students").

The pilot semester illustrated that in this FL context, it is very difficult to record and transcribe multiple task modules with large classes (30 students). In this model of TBLT, the *oral* tasks are so time consuming because they must be performed and recorded in class to ensure that students are not reading their performance; individuals or dyads take turns presenting their task orally. Students are allowed to glance at their notes but if they start reading them, we stop the recording and students must start over. This is done to promote spontaneous speaking ability (Ellis, "Task-Based"), and it is time-consuming.

In the following semester, only one of the five task modules was oral. By redesigning the other two tasks into written, time-pressured, in-class tasks, we came upon a feasible solution. Carless advocates a similar shift for TBLT practitioners:

> Task-based research has predominantly focused on oral production… a situated task-based approach may demand a varied repertoire of activities… a useful strategy might be to focus more on reading and writing tasks to cohere better with examinations and contribute to a clarification of the perception that task-based approaches overemphasize speaking ("Communicative" 605).

This shift in task design may also lighten the cognitive load, especially at the elementary level of language proficiency under examination in the present study.

For the course in the spring semester, there were 32 students (only 29 completed the semester), all of whom had taken Elementary Italian 1 at our college. Although they had different instructors in the previous semester, all had used the same textbook and departmental exams. It was decided to experiment with second-semester Italian because at that point in their linguistic development, students already have some control of grammar and some working vocabulary: such rudimentary tools better allow for the architecture of concrete task performances.

Similar published accounts (McDonough and Chaikitmongkol), have shown that TBLT in a FL setting can work well if the tasks are designed in consultation with the course's required textbook. Key to this intersection between task and textbook is the hope that students will see, in the textbook, activities and forms that reinforce or illuminate something they said or tried to say in their performance.

The order of instruction in this report is the following: First we complete the task module (pre-task, during-task, post-task; this takes approximately one week), and then we complete the accompanying textbook chapter (for approximately one week). Test preparation and test-taking (approximately one week) include a review of both the task performance and the textbook chapter. This timeline explains how we cover five units across a 15-week semester. For the purposes of this paper, I define a "unit" as one task module and its one corresponding textbook chapter.

Task assignments are designed by examining which grammar points, vocabulary, and cultural themes are presented in a given

chapter. The textbook used at our institution is *Avanti!* (Aski and Musumeci). I carefully analyze the chapters I must cover and then brainstorm on various tasks that align with the chapters' content. One logistical challenge must be taken into account: I work at a very large college, and with over 12 Italian professors in the department, we must cover the same amount of chapters in our elementary courses for obvious reasons of course sequencing.

As I design tasks from relevant material in the textbook chapters, I am careful to consider the four main task types, as described by Richards and Rodgers: presentational, information-gap, problem-solving, jigsaw. I have found the five task assignments reported below in Figure 1 to be the best solution at present for teaching second-semester Italian as a FL with a TBLT approach.

In each semester we cover five units (again, each unit is comprised of one task module and one textbook chapter). For each unit there is a test: 75% of the unit test is based on communicately-embedded grammar and vocabulary from the chapter. The remaining 25 % of the unit test is a task-oriented writing assignment: the student must provide a summary of the task that was performed in this module. This is done for reasons of task recycling (Bygate, Hawkes), in order to test the way we teach (Omaggio-Hadley) and as a feasible way to design tests in a way that is similar to the dozens of other elementary Italian courses taught in our department in a given semester.

Figure 1 presents the five task modules that were completed across the second semester reported in this study; the corresponding textbook chapter from *Avanti!* is also presented in Figure 1. All tasks were performed in class under strict time constraints.

For the second semester of this case study, following McDonough and Chaikitmongkol, learners completed an anonymous unit evaluation form at the end of each unit. Detailed analysis of their responses will be treated in the Discussion section. I implemented this aspect into the project so that I could see how the learners felt about the task/text balance in real time, along the course of the semester, and make any necessary adjustments. The five questions on the form were:

1. What skills did you learn?
2. What knowledge did you gain about how Italians communicate?

Figure 1. The Five Task Modules Reported

Task Module	*Avanti!* Chapter	Task Assignment	Task Performance
1	7	In a 15-minute timed task, you will describe what your task partner did last weekend.	Written
2	8	In a 15-minute timed task, you will describe a trip you took with at least one other person.	Written
3	9	Before we watch the final 15 minutes, you and your partner will write an ending to the film, *Io sono l'amore*; you will have 30 minutes.	Written
4	10	You will have 30-60 seconds to present your task partner's summer plans. It will be recorded, you will then transcribe your recording and hand it in.	Oral
5	11	Before we read the final 3 pages, you and your partner will write an ending to the book, *Dov'è Yukio?*; you will have 30 minutes.	Written

3. What real-world relevance did you see?

4. What did you like/dislike about the teaching approach?

5. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest) what is your level of satisfaction with how class time was spent?

TBLT Module Utilized in This Case Study

Pre-task phase

I begin the task module (Appendix) by announcing the task assignment in Italian and, if necessary, in English. The aim of the rest of the pre-task phase is to take learners through input- and output-activities that incrementally build up the necessary skills and language required to complete the task. Students are told that they have approximately two classes to get ready for their performance.

It is important to perform the task demonstration immediately after the task is assigned. Students essentially watch the teacher

demonstrate the task. This is imperative not only for motivational reasons, but also so that students gain some exposure to samples of spontaneous language. Some tasks lend themselves more easily to a demonstration, e.g., presentational tasks. Jigsaw- and problem solving tasks are more complicated to demonstrate. For example, for the two problem-solving tasks reported here (task modules three and five), the task demonstration consists of the professor 'free writing' in front of the class, after watching a short video that was stopped just before its conclusion. In this way, learners experience a concrete demonstration of what their problem-solving task performance will ask of them: spontaneous, creative writing (with a partner) in Italian.

After the task demonstration, the pre-task phase consists of approximately four task-relevant activities. These input- and output-based activities take the learners through the types of exposure, interaction, and production practice that they will need in order to successfully perform the task. I make use of whatever media fits the purpose of preparing the students for the performance, however videos are the most prevalent. Topic-relevant videos made by Italians (for Italians) on YouTube are usually the best fit. Naturally, this requires some prep work by the teacher but once task-relevant videos are identified, videos can be reused for many semesters. The overarching goal is to provide the students with very rich, extended input: challenging, engaging, level-appropriate, task-relevant input floods (Means, "Input-Heavy").

Following are some examples of activities from the third task module, "Before we watch the final 15 minutes, you and your partner will write an ending to the film, *Io sono l'amore*; you will have 30 minutes," this is also the module that is reported most thoroughly below with the students' impressions, forming the bulk of the qualitative evidence reported in this paper. One pre-task activity from the third task module was the following: After creating dyads, I played a 10-minute short film, "La Pagella" and all students had to independently document five actions from the short film, after I provide a few examples, e.g., "il signore in prigione ha parlato con suo figlio;" "sua madre ha aspettato fuori." We then watch the entire 10-minute short again, and dyads are given the opportunity to collaborate, only after the second viewing, i.e., to compare their notes. After the third viewing, they have a strict five-

minute time limit to come up with ten summarizing statements, all written in third-person. Since their performance will be written in third-person, and will follow a video screening that is stopped before its climax, this pre-task activity has high relevance.

Another example of a pre-task activity from the third task module that emphasized task-relevant input/output is a homework assignment: Dyads had to watch a 10-minute video "Il rumore della neve" and collaboratively write a 50-word summary of the video. They are told to watch it at least two times. Overall, the focus of the pre-task activities is to engage the learners on topics and modalities relevant to the task (Samuda et al. 2018).

One key aspect of the pre-task phase that is not apparent on the attached outline is its time-pressure component—each in-class activity is given a precise time limit. An example of this from the fourth task, "You will have 30-60 seconds to present your task partner's summer plans. It will be recorded, you will then transcribe your recording and hand it in," is a recording in which two Italians discuss a trip that one of them will take. The recording is two minutes long and it is very natural in terms of speed and overlapping speech. While I play the dialogue for the class *several* times, learners have a challenging dictogloss activity to complete individually: pieces of the dialogue are missing. Only after several listenings, are dyads allowed to collaborate to complete the dialogue to the best of their ability under a strict time limit, e.g., three minutes. Dyads are then exposed to one final listening and they have a final one-minute window to collaboratively complete the dictogloss before it is collected. The inclusion of a time-pressure component speaks to TBLT's goal of achieving a high degree of representativeness. In the real world there is almost always a degree of pressure to create or understand fluent speech without undue hesitation (Skehan). This instructional variable should contribute to the learners' increased ability to produce spontaneous language.

By forcing the task partners to work together under a degree of pressure, we also aim to help develop their zone of proximal development, defined by Lantolf as "the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else" (Lantolf 17). For each task module, we orchestrate the pairings so that the dyads are different. Therefore across the five task modules,

a given student will have worked with five different classmates for at least one week each.

As documented in my field notes, reported below in Discussion, when we approached the task performances, there was always a palpable energy in the room. I believe this was enhanced by the time-pressured pair activities that led up to the performances. For the entire week leading up to the task performance, the dyads work together essentially as a team. My field notes report how, on the performance days, the learners were nervous, excited and vocal about their desire to perform the task. In their unit evaluations, the students corroborate these observations of mine: several learners commented how they enjoyed all the work with their peers that the tasks forced them to do.

During-task phase

The task performance provides the potential for TBLT to be a learner-centered pedagogy that fosters individuals' ability to speak or write spontaneously and creatively. Consider the final task module implemented in this case study: "Before we read the final 3 pages, you and your partner will write an ending to the book, *Dov'è Yukio?*; you will have 30 minutes." Albert and Kormos speak about the importance of factoring in learners' creativity into task-based performances. Their findings show that students' creativity correlates to the amount of output produced in task performances.

A prerequisite for allowing this important learner-led language to emerge is the decentralization of the teacher—a cornerstone of TBLT. At this pivotal during-task phase, the teacher must withdraw and allow the learners to perform the best they can. Samuda (120) speaks about the teacher's decentralized role in TBLT, "a role for the teacher is to 'lead from behind.'" Toth has also reported on the benefits of such learner-led language, especially for a TBLT approach that has elements of teacher-led language, as much of this model does.

Post-task phase

This phase typically begins with negative feedback (Ayoun), i.e., highlighting learners' errors without providing explicit direction on how to arrive at target-like forms. After providing feedback on the written/transcribed performances, the classroom follows a fairly traditional format: teacher guidance on the textbook chapter;

relevant communicative activities; workbook/lab manual practice; test preparation.

As we proceed toward the end of the unit, the hope is that students will notice connections between their task performances – describing their partner's summer plans, recounting a trip they once took, etc. – and the explicit forms they are now learning, practicing and trying to master.

A great deal has been written about the value of task recycling (Bygate, Hawkes), especially when learners feel a sense of ownership about the language they are recycling. As we enter the final phase of a unit—test prep—a key point in maintaining the emphasis on task is the reminder to learners that they still have to hand in a revised version (Version B) of their written/transcribed performance. Students are frequently reminded that a task is not considered completed until this is done, and that task completion counts for 30% of the final grade. The revised written/transcribed performance must be handed in the day before the unit test, at the very latest, so that students will have a chance to get some teacher feedback on any outstanding errors before the test is taken. Most importantly, this sequence shows students that the task, the text and the test are interwoven.

Discussion

Student Reactions

As detailed above, following McDonough and Chaikitmongkol, learners completed an anonymous unit evaluation form at the end of *each* unit.

One correlation analysis I am able to do based on the task module evaluation forms is an average of question #5, "On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest) what is your level of satisfaction with how class time was spent?" My hypothesis that students would gradually become more comfortable with the TBLT approach was confirmed by the following modest data. As demonstrated below in Figure 2, students' satisfaction levels with how classroom time was spent increased modestly as the semester went along; following are the averages for each unit:

As we can see, the numbers trended upwards as the semester went along, suggesting a correlation between familiarity with TBLT and students' satisfaction. It is interesting to note that among tasks,

Figure 2. Students' levels of satisfaction per unit

Task Module/Modality	Textbook chapter from, *Avanti!*	Average student level of satisfaction (with 10 being the highest)
1/written	7	8.52
2/written	8	9.02
3/written	9	8.95
4/oral	10	9.55
5/written	11	9.26

the highest-ranked module was # 4, the only oral task performance we did. Hopefully this study will spark new considerations of ways to include more oral task performances, given their considerable logistic challenges, as documented above in the description of the pilot semester.

Qualitative analysis

Due to the massive amount of qualitative evidence gathered with these unit evaluation forms (30 students filled out a five-question evaluation form for each of the five modules), I will only report representative quotations from one unit below in Figure 3. All of the following student comments come from the evaluation form for the third task module, "Before we watch the final 15 minutes, you and your partner will write an ending to the film, *Io sono l'amore*; you will have 30 minutes," and the accompanying textbook work, chapter 9 in *Avanti!*.

Representative student opinions from the third unit

Question 1

What skills did you learn from this task cycle/chapter?

- It was fun and different, which made learning a better experience.
- I didn't even realize that I learned all these past tenses.
- I learned how to narrate a story in a much more detailed way (imperfect tense).
- I learned how to narrate a story that happened in the past.

Question 2

What knowledge did you gain about how Italians communicate?

• I have to think when and how to use l'imperfecto but with Italians it comes natural.

• I understand a bit more when I hear Italian.

• They have many past tenses [and it] makes the language more complex.

• They speak a lot with the imperfect and mix it with the passato prossimo.

• They switch from present to past in one sentence.

• Italians talk very fast.

• They have a lot of different verbs.

• Italians are very friendly and talkative.

Question 3

What real-world relevance did you see in this task cycle/chapter?

• So many words and expressions that I can really use.

• We got to see a movie which showed how Italians actually communicate.

• It is very helpful when you try to follow conversations.

• I saw how they talk about childhood.

• Lots, because we are always telling people what we used to do.

• In the real world, a conversation has so many conjugations, like English.

• People talk a lot about past activities.

• It's important to know how to use passato prossimo in order to be understood.

• Italian sounds very similar to Spanish.

• The movie really gave me a taste of how Italians speak.

• If I heard someone speaking in Italian I will have more knowledge.

• I might need to describe a past event someday to an Italian.

Question 4

What did you like/dislike about the teaching approach?

• Credo che e' molte bravissima.

- I like the way you reinforce the material, it makes it easier to learn.
- The professor took his time to explain everything.
- Maybe more time on the passato prossimo and imperfect.
- I liked that we did the workbook in class.
- I didn't quite understand the imperfect.
- I disliked that we rushed through the imperfect vs passato prossimo.
- The teaching was fine, I just need to study more.
- I liked watching the Italian movie, really interesting.
- I like the passion you have for what you teach.
- Doing exercises in class all together is very helpful.
- Too much information to grasp.
- My ear gets more familiar to the pronunciation.

Question 5

On a scale of 1-10, 10 is the highest, what is your level of satisfaction with how class time was spent?

- I think we could have spent more time in the chapter.
- I think the professor spent more time on the movie to show us real-life scenarios on how Italians speak.
- 10, all the way satisfaction.
- 8.5, because I still understood.
- 10, 10, 10, 10!
- 10 because I learned a lot in Chapter 9.

As we can see through the students' voices, this TBLT course appears to have achieved its aim of giving students a means to authentic expression in the target language. Consider the quotes reported above, "I learned how to narrate a story," and, "I didn't even realize I learned all these past tenses," The latter quote is perhaps an instance of implicit, unconscious learning (DeKeyser). We can speculate that the learner "didn't even realize" that learning was taking place because of task absorption.

Professor's Reactions

Field notes

At the conclusion of every class, I wrote up my field notes within 24 hours. They reveal the highs and lows that most classroom teachers experience, especially when implementing a new approach. Figure 4 presents my notes across the same task module reported above, "Before we watch the final 15 minutes, you and your partner will write an ending to the film, *Io sono l'amore*; you will have 30 minutes," and the accompanying textbook work, chapter 9 in *Avanti!*.

Representative field notes from the third task module

By category (determined in hindsight) with representative comments from professor's field notes

Sense of achievement.

- There seems to be some excitement about this task. It has an element of mystery, creativity and collaboration to it.
- The time-pressured written task performance is happening right now. Great energy in the room.
- I'm not sure if the task performance increased their accuracy but at least they used their language skills to express a real opinion…maybe their fluency improved because of it.
- I built up some suspense, "drumroll please!" and then we watched the real ending. We applauded the groups that came the closest to it in their task [performance].
- [After reviewing their written task performances] I used this 'raw evidence' from their performances to highlight differences between the passato prossimo and imperfetto.
- When possible, I tied in an example from students' task performances.

Classroom management.

- We reviewed the chapter 8 test in detail, I told them we are spending so much time on the test review because our next chapter introduces another past tense so it's very important to understand the p.p. before moving on.
- We started the film for task #3

- We finished the film [except for the final 15 minutes] and did the time-pressured written task performance.
- I collected their tasks and then we watched the final 15 minutes.
- I taught vocab from Ch. 9 and the forms/uses of imperfetto.
- We reviewed the imperfetto and did lots of textbook exercises; I reviewed how to form the p.p, and how to distinguish the tenses; we did more textbook exercises and I assigned lots of workbook exercises to be done in their lab hour on Wed.
- I returned their tasks with corrected past tenses only. We reviewed professions on the board and we reviewed key words that often trigger either tense, mentre, un giorno, etc.
- I distributed the test with 50 minutes left and had them fill out task cycle evaluation form when their test was over.

Sense of frustration.
- Only four of the 28 students got the grammar part [entirely] correct, another two came close. My anecdotal rule of 80/20 is true again. 80% of the students can't seem to master grammar.
- I should have returned their written tasks earlier but I feel so busy correcting tests and teaching my other two 101 classes (which are, as always, frustrating), plus ALL my committee work that I just didn't do it.
- Today's class started with task partners (being forced to sit) together, they were told to rewrite their composition (or at least the sentences that had my feedback in them), so in a way we completed the task cycle, but they don't have to hand it in, there's just not enough time to treat all the material in the text and to finish the task cycle as designed.

This is only a small sample of the 30+ pages I filled with my reflections, triumphs and frustrations. They are highly representative of the two themes that emerged most clearly from my field notes: 1) the task performances did foster a high level of peer-to-peer interaction, and they forced the students to use the language to the best of their abilities in a high-stakes moment; 2) as the teacher, I often had to persist through some trying moments, especially when the classroom felt unruly and rushed.

As demonstrated by my field notes and the students' impressions, a middle road was necessary for this TBLT course to

operate successfully. In the language of Littlewood ("Task-Based"), it falls somewhere on the spectrum between a strong- and weak-interpretation of TBLT. While I am still confident calling it a TBLT approach, it certainly has aspects of TI/PPP in it and some of the students requested even more. Consider a student quote from the second unit, "Sometimes we do not have enough time to go over the material." Based on that quote, it would be easy to criticize how classroom time was spent: too much time on task, not enough time in the textbook. However, in the spirit of acknowledging how difficult group opinions are to assess, another student commented about the same unit, "I like how we go over our homework from the workbook." Clearly the latter student felt like we did spend enough time on (communicative-based) grammar.

Conclusions

One demonstrable conclusion from this year-long study that I am happy to share with fellow educators is this: Get the tasks done! Only now in hindsight, am I able to see that my sense of messiness and hurry was mostly just in my head. 100+ pages of students' impressions do not include one mention of "messy" or "disorganized," and there is scant mention of sensations like "rushed" or "hurried." By orders of magnitude, learners more frequently used descriptions like "fun" and "interesting," and these compliments almost always apply to task engagement/completion. This conclusion bears repeating: The students' prideful comments on task completion is the most important lesson to be shared from this one-year study. Learners appreciated the sense of achievement and application that came with their task performances.

Another conclusion from this study that is difficult to document on paper is the enthusiasm that I perceived in so many of the students' task performances—positive energy that is perhaps captured by the following two student quotes, "I can express myself better, I feel more confident about myself," taken from task module 4; and "I felt free reading and understanding a book in Italian," taken from task module 5. If a teaching approach succeeds in making students feel "confident" and "free," it would be hard to argue against its effectiveness, in both linguistic and humanistic terms.

In my field notes, from unit 4, I recorded an observation of such student development as I perceived it, "Today we had some

casual conversation about the tasks [performed two days ago] and many students volunteered that they sounded better than they expected….they then provided me with proof that they really did listen to their peers' performances." This is more qualitative evidence that the TBLT approach utilized in this study was successful in its mission to provide effective and enjoyable instruction, and to do so in a feasible format.

One outstanding limitation is the need to resolve the question of time management and how to balance the logistics of (time-consuming) task modules and (time-consuming) textbook coverage. Butler offers some practical advice on how to resolve this, suggesting that it can only be resolved according to what is right for your context, "Innovative approaches…consistently emphasize the importance for having flexibility in implementing TBLT. Effective practice…is grounded in context and has never been static" (51).

One adaptation that occurred after the pilot semester was the substitution of two oral production tasks with (in-class, time-pressured) written production tasks. A design pivot like this may help counter the belief that TBLT is "predominately focused on oral production," as Carless puts it ("Issues" 647). More reading and writing tasks, and less oral production tasks, may make TBLT easier to implement.

My field notes corroborate the belief that teacher commitment and perseverance are the most important variables in implementing new methods (Samuda et al.), even for approaches like TBLT that have a sound research base. As a TBLT researcher and practitioner, I hope to have shared a model that will assist other language teachers who wish to experiment with TBLT in a FL context.

Appendix

Task module

I. *Pre-task*

a. Introduce the task assignment for this unit (designed in consultation with the textbook)

b. Watch teacher demonstrate task performance

c. Listening/Reading/Viewing Activities

d. Speaking/Writing Activities

e. Pre-task planning time (individual and/or pairs)

II. *During-task*

a. Do task with time pressure (if task is oral, no reading of notes)

b. If oral, record task performance on Voice Notes

III. *Post-task*

a. If oral, students prepare transcription, Version A

b. Teacher provides feedback on written/transcribed tasks

c. Group assessment on task strengths and weaknesses

d. Teach corresponding textbook chapter; do relevant textbook exercises

e. Learners revise written/transcribed tasks, Version B

f. Illustrate connections between students' task performances and textbook chapter

g. Unit-end Quiz

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Queering the Italian Classroom:
A Course on Gender and Society in Italy

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Abstract: In this article, the author discusses their experience designing and teaching a course on "Gender and Society in Italy" at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw (GA) in the academic year 2018-2019. The goal of this contribution is to discuss the pedagogical value of adopting a gender and queer studies approach in guiding students' exploration of Italian culture(s). In doing so, the author also argues for the importance of using Italian culture courses taught outside Italy as a laboratory for translating and merging research and pedagogical methodologies well established in the anglophone world into and with the Italian tradition. The idea is, on the one hand, to benefit students interested in learning about Italian history and society by adopting a framework of analysis already familiar to them, while, on the other hand, to develop teaching practices and comparatist analysis that can be adopted across different educational systems.

Keywords: queer and gender studies – queer pedagogy – Italian culture – modern language and culture education

Introduction

Even in 2019, Gender and Queer Studies play a marginal role in Italy, where prejudice and lack of knowledge about the methodology and scientific underpinnings of this field of study are often accompanied by fierce ideological opposition against what is perceived to be a political attack on traditional values[1]. In this sense, the Catholic Church's inspired polemic against the so-called "teoria" or "ideologia" gender has largely contributed to conjure a distorted and often parodic image of what gender and queer studies are[2]. Meanwhile, the conservatism and territorial instincts of the Italian academic system create obstacles in the path to the institutionalization of this field of study[3]. Even in such a bleak landscape, we can see encouraging signs. Research initiatives such as the *Centro Studi GLTQ*, the *PoliTeSse* research center at the University of Verona, or the *CIRQUE* (Centro Interuniversitario di

Ricerca Queer), among others, are having a significant impact in bringing about a paradigm shift in the conversation on gender in Italy. In particular, the contribution of a new generation of scholars, both in Italy and abroad, has effectively positioned Italian gender and queer studies in the larger international context[4]. Moreover, in the field of social activism, "queer" groups and themes have increasingly gained traction, often in opposition to the more "traditional" LGBTQIA+ identity-focused campaigns[5].

Within this general framework, the present article focuses on a specific pedagogical experience: a course on "Gender and Society in Italy" taught at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw (GA) in academic year 2018-2019. The goal of this contribution is to discuss the pedagogical value of adopting a gender and queer studies approach in guiding students' exploration of Italian culture(s). In doing so, I also argue for the importance of using Italian culture courses taught outside Italy as a laboratory for translating and merging research and pedagogical methodologies well established in the anglophone world into and with the Italian tradition. The idea is, on the one hand, to benefit students interested in learning about Italian history and society by adopting a framework of analysis already familiar to them, while, on the other hand, to develop teaching practices and comparatist analysis that can be adopted across different educational systems. In this sense, I envisioned this course as a canvas for a learning experience in which the role of the teacher was more akin to that of a cultural mediator and co-participant in a community of learners. Students were encouraged to assume an active role in the learning process and collaborate in the selection of topics and relevant materials for class discussions. Students were also asked to contribute to the advancement of research in the field of Gender Studies in the Italian context through their projects and research papers.

1. Gender and Society in Italy: Course Description and Purpose

"Gender and Society in Italy," an upper-level Italian course (ITAL 4490) cross-listed with Gender and Women's Studies (GWST 4040), is taught in English and intended for students majoring or minoring in Italian studies and Gender and Women's studies. The overarching goal is to examine how gender roles and relations have been shaped and transformed in the context of modern

and contemporary Italian society. During the semester, students analyze the evolution of gender relations in Italy through a variety of cultural practices, products, and perspectives: literary texts, cinema, drama, legal documents, newspaper articles, and television programs. Particular attention is given to how non-conforming gender identities and behaviors have been marginalized or normalized in and through different media. The specific learning goals negotiated with students at the beginning of the semester include:

- Recognizing the different historical periods and main actors shaping gender identities and relations in modern and contemporary Italian society;

- Defining and Explaining the main concepts in the field of gender and queer studies;

- Analyzing the content of a variety of texts and media: literature, cinema, theater, TV programs, legal documents, newspaper articles, scholarly research;

- Contrasting and Comparing the evolution of gender roles and relations in Italy and the U.S.; and

- Designing a webpage on topics related to the content of the course.

In order to achieve these goals, students engage with a series of readings, watch several Italian films and documentaries, and conduct research on topics of their choice related to the content of the class, on which they give short individual and group presentations. The course follows a chronological order (from Fascism to today's Italy) and is organized in thematic units covering roughly a decade each. After a preliminary unit designed to introduce students to main concepts in the field of gender and queer studies (i.e. the different dimensions of sex and gender: identity, orientation, expression, biological sex; the characteristics of gender: performativity, collaborative formation, asymmetry; etc.), the first unit explores Fascism and, in particular, the construction of models of masculinity and femininity designed to support the nationalistic ideology of the regime. The second unit focuses on the contradictions marking the first decade after the end of World War II and the liberation of Italy from nazi-fascism. We first discuss the hopes raised by the birth of the Republic and the legal equality

between sexes sanctioned in the new 1948 constitution and how they contrast with the remnants of the fascist legal system[6]. We also discuss how, during this same period, the Catholic Church and the Christian Democracy—the Christian-inspired party that ruled Italy from 1948 until the end of the so-called "first republic" in 1992[7]—played a major role in advocating and actively preserving a traditional view of the family and gender roles in Italian society. We focus on how, within this traditional framework, some signs of deep transformation manifested themselves, such as a new cohort of women joining the workforce and taking on an active role in unions and political parties, and how even the more conservative popular magazines and *fotoromanzi* (photo love stories very popular in Italy until the advent of commercial television networks in the 80s) portrayed a romantic representation of love relationships that propagated new forms of agency and freedom in the private sphere.

The third unit explores the Sixties and Seventies, years of deep social, cultural, and legal transformation in Italy as well as in most Western countries. We discuss the student movement and the "autunno caldo" (hot autumn) of worker protests, and how this ushered in an era of political mobilization and a questioning of the *status quo*. Students see how gender roles and relations became a central issue of the time, first with the emergence of the second wave of feminism, then with the birth of the modern gay and lesbian movement. The global character of these new social movements invites interpretations through comparative lenses. For this reason, after a general introduction to the Sixties and the New Left, students work in groups to research and give poster presentations on one of the many social movements active in those years in the United States, such as the civil rights movement, the student movement, the feminist movement, and the gay and lesbian movement. The presentations and discussions on these social movements in the United States lay the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the Italian context. The final two units deal with the years of Berlusconi[8] and the over-sexualized representation of female (and male) bodies on TV and media, and the fight for the recognition of gay rights and the legalization of same-sex unions.

Students complete a variety of assignments over the course of the semester. They write summaries and short response papers for all assigned readings. The day before each lesson, they share discussion

questions based on the assigned readings and their personal research with the rest of the class. They make short video reviews of the films and documentaries (viewed either during out-of-class movie screenings or on their own after). For their final project, students individually create a webpage (e.g., *WordPress*, *Fold* page, *Wikipedia* entry) on topics, ideas, movements, organizations, or historical figures that have marked the history of gender identities and relations in post-war Italy.

2. Queering the Italian classroom: Methods and Content Queer methodologies[9]

As I have shown in this brief overview, the "queerness" of "Gender and Society in Italy" informs not only the content of each unit, but also the assignments students complete. In particular, students are introduced to the history of Gender and Queer Studies in Italy and engage with works of Italian scholars on the subject. At the same time, the "queerness" of this course manifests itself in the approach I have adopted in delivering this content and in the teaching and learning methodologies used that challenge the traditional classroom dynamic. The process of queering the Italian classroom takes place in a few significant ways. First, it implies the individual positioning of the actors involved. The disclosure of gender identities and orientations by members of the learning community poses many challenges in terms of power structure, privacy, and personal comfort, as well as the way in which a Queer Studies framework views the concept of "fixed" identities. A queer approach, by definition, defies the stability of identities, whether gender-related or not, and invokes a more open and non-normative interpretation of the self[10]. However, while the deconstruction of normative frameworks of thought and behavior is at the core of this course, the positioning of the actors involved through voluntary self-disclosure is in line with both the goals of the class and the history of Queer Studies. The rationale behind the decision to model and invite self-disclosure is to create the conditions for open communication that breaks the barriers of traditional classroom roles and integrate personal experiences into the fabric of the learning process. We can find the same interweaving of cultural analysis and life experiences at the origin of Queer Studies in the embedding of constructivism into political and social activism, as, for example, in the role of ACT UP in bringing together a

new generation of activists and new forms of political as well as cultural mobilization[11]. In Fall 2018, the first semester in which this class was offered at KSU, of the ten students enrolled, seven were majoring or minoring in Italian, and three were majoring or minoring in Gender and Women's Studies. In terms of gender orientation, three participants self-identified as heterosexual females, one student self-identified as queer non-binary, and one participant self-identified as a transgender man. The rest of the class preferred not to disclose their orientation.

In addition to modeling and inviting a practice of self-disclosure and positioning, at the beginning and the end of the semester, I also had students respond to an entry and exit questionnaire, respectively (see Appendix A). These questionnaires were designed to assess the level of knowledge of contemporary Italian culture and society as well as basic concepts and ideas related to gender studies. Through these questionnaires, students were also invited to set learning goals at the beginning of the semester and self-assess the level of success in achieving them at the end. During the semester, a few other "check-points" helped both me and my students monitor progress towards the learning objectives and overall course experience. I have also found these checks to be useful in adjusting course pace and content to students' backgrounds, interests, and goals. In the entry questionnaire administered at the beginning of the Fall semester 2018, students were asked to identify the difference between the concepts of "sex" and "gender." All nine students who submitted the entry questionnaire identified the main difference between these two concepts with the binary biology/physiology on one side (sex) and culture/society on the other (gender). Only the student who did not submit the questionnaire, in the following weeks, asked for a definition of the two concepts and how they differed. However, when I administered the same questionnaire to the students enrolled in the course I taught in the Summer Study Abroad Program in Italy (Summer 2019) and then again in the Fall Semester 2019 at Kennesaw State, the responses were less consistent with more students openly express some confusion about the difference between the two concepts and in particular on the definition of gender.

Another question asked students to compare gender roles and relations in the US and Italy. Most students confirmed the influence

of traditional heteronormative expectations in dictating how gender is perceived and performed. In particular, with regards to how Italian men and women are generally seen in American society, almost all students reported a traditional view of Italian gender roles, with men that are supposed to be dominant and womanizers and women who always look perfect and are heavily sexualized. At the same time, many students expressed the belief that Italy is more progressive when it comes to gender norms compared to the United States. Some students, particularly those who had spent time in Italy, showed a more nuanced vision, noticing how, in Italy, in the context of a quite traditional society, there are aspects of progress in terms of secularization (e.g., a less "problematic" view of nudity compared to the US) and gender equality (e.g., longer maternity leave). The end of the semester questionnaire showed that the large majority of the students, even those who didn't have a direct experience of the Italian society, had acquired a better grasp of the complexity of gender norms and expectations in the Italian context. For example, a student stated:

> I was surprised by the difference between Italian and American women's attitudes toward sexual objectification and harassment from men; I knew that Italy was more conservative than other European countries, but I still expected Italians to be more progressive than Americans. They are in some ways, but they are more conservative in other ways. The entire section on LGBT issues was a valuable learning experience, especially because you were able to speak about it personally as a member of the community.

However, the most relevant and common take-away from students' reflections was a newfound awareness of the history of fights for equal rights and the fragility of those rights, often taken for granted:

> This course was a major wake up call to me. Gender and women's studies have always been of interest to me, but this course enriched my understanding of gender and what it means in other parts of the world.

Another example of queering the classroom is the decision to move away from the traditional teacher-student vertical dynamic by negotiating class rules and policies with the students. In particular, through an activity in which we agreed on a list of rules and expectations, we set class management, assignments, and deadlines, class discussions and conflict resolution and agreed to keep an open-minded and respectful attitude towards the content of the class and to each other.

More notably, however, is the general approach to the history of

gender and society adopted in this class can be defined as "queer." Instead of focusing on the cultural productions of gender identities or simply contextualized discourses on gender and sexuality within historical frameworks, my intention in designing and teaching this class was to draw students' attention to how gender identities and social formations are deeply interconnected and codependent[12]. The aim is to use gender as an interpretative category to read the evolution of Italian society and, at the same time, to read the evolution of gender identities, roles, and relations as a product of the changing material base of Italian society brought about by industrialization and late capitalism. This approach also invites reflection on how discourse on gender is used as an ideological tool to justify and advance political and social interests, as in the case of the myth of masculinity enforced by the Fascist regime as I will discuss in the next section of this article.

Queer content

Before delving in the analysis of the evolution of gender norms and expectations in Italy, we devoted some time to building the theoretical foundations for the remainder of the semester. The introductory reading and discussion revolved around the four major principles around gender as explained by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet in the introduction to *Language and Gender* (2013): gender is learned, collaborative, performative, and asymmetrical. These four principles set a conceptual grid through which to read cultural practices and products such as movies, documentaries, advertisements, and popular magazines.

One way in which we applied these principles was by analyzing the movie *Divorzio all'italiana (Divorce Italian Style)* by Pietro Germi (1961). This well-known story follows the tragicomic vicissitudes of Sicilian baron Ferdinando Cefalù (Marcello Mastroianni), who, after falling in love with his young cousin Angela (Stefania Sandrelli), desperately tries to get rid of his wife Rosalia (Daniela Rocca). After a series of unsuccessful attempts to make his wife cheat on him and catch her in the act—a necessary condition to "lawfully" kill her according to the honor code[13]—the protagonist manages to kill her and, after a few years in jail, marry Angela. In the final scene, the two newlyweds are vacationing on a boat, and the viewer sees Angela playing footsie with a young crew member; this illustrates the futility of Ferdinando's actions and the irony of him becoming

an actual "cornuto" (cuckold) after all the trouble he went through to pretend to be one. The movie, a classic of Italian cinema, offers an invaluable opportunity to discuss gender relations in postwar Italy. Marcello Mastroianni, not only in his role of Baron Cefalù, but also as his status as a movie star and public figure, represents the perfect embodiment of the Latin Lover[14]. However, in this particular movie, the paradigm of masculinity takes a comical twist, and the protagonist is soon revealed to be inept, a victim of the social norms and expectations that he clumsily tries to play into in order to fulfill his romantic dream. Beyond Mastroianni's character, *Divorce Italian Style* offers a stunning, if comic, portrait of societal expectations in Italy, and Southern Italy in particular, in the Fifties. Women were confined to the private sphere of the home, the only place they could have their voice heard and exercise a degree of power in the organization of the household. Men, on the other hand, had absolute power in the public sphere, but this came at the cost of an honor code that forced them to live up to societal expectations in terms of masculinity and family ethics[15].

In preparation for this film, students conducted research on postwar Italy: the political system, the state of the economy with its regional differences, family law, and the honor code. In class, students discussed the readings, shared the information they gathered in their research, and engaged in preparatory activities that introduced the viewing of the film (e.g., activating pre-knowledge through introductory questions about the topic and genre, using the movie poster and selected screenshots to help them anticipate the storyline, discussing images of main characters). After watching the movie, students recorded a video-response in which they reflected on their experience and applied the four principles of gender and a series of binaries (i.e., north vs south, public space vs private space, Christian Democracy vs Communist Party) and keywords (*cornuto, gallo, bella figura*) that were assigned as guidelines for the viewing. In their responses, students demonstrated an understanding of the role that gender played as an ideology in Southern Italian society in terms of power structure and hierarchy of desire. The issue of divorce, still illegal in Italy at the time, and the honor code were the most recurrent topics that arose during class discussion. Students also commented on the performativity of gender: how it was "staged" and carefully "played" and how gender norms were socially enforced both in the

private space of the home and the public sphere. On the one hand, we see Angela attacked by her father and subjected to a humiliating physical examination to test her virginity after the discovery of her love note to a mysterious lover (Baron Cefalù). On the other hand, the baron's failure to defend his honor and punish his wife and her lover Carmelo causes him to suffer an act of public humiliation at the hand of Carmelo's wife, who spits in Ferdinando's face at the funeral of Angela's father. The in-class discussion also touched upon other relevant points, such as the North-South divide, the political background of Italy at the time, and the role of the Church and the Christian Democracy in reproducing traditional views of the family and gender roles.

This example shows how gender can be used as a lens through which to view Italian culture, allowing for an analysis of more complex political, social, and cultural phenomena and an exploration of a variety of social dimensions such as race, class, and status. Exploring the intersections among these dimensions offers a privileged look into a given society. For instance, reading Fascist Italy through the models of masculinity and femininity imposed by the regime also entails tackling the question of how false consciousness and cultural hegemony were instrumental in keeping the working class in a state of inactive subordination and even acceptance of the dominant order that was exploiting them. Students were able to see the relation linking gender, class, and ideology in the film *Una giornata particolare (A Special Day)*, by Ettore Scola (1977). The story, taking place on one special day, follows two characters: Antonietta (Sophia Loren), a housewife from a working-class family, and Gabriele (Marcello Mastroianni), an intellectual and radio host who has lost his job due to his homosexuality and his political views. This particular day, May 4th, 1938, is a very special day both on a political-historical level (it is the day of Hitler's official visit to Rome) and on a personal level for the film's protagonists. The two are neighbors and meet each other in a fortuitous circumstance: Antonietta knocks on Gabriele's door in an attempt to catch a little bird that escaped from its cage and ended up on Gabriele's balcony. The encounter turns out to be a life-changing event for both characters. Antonietta, an uneducated, traditional woman, who completely devotes herself to the care of her family and accepts her husband's infidelity and lack of respect, supports the regime and worships the model of

masculinity embodied by the duce. Meeting Daniele, an outcast and—what at the time was considered to be—a sexual deviant, but also an intellectual and outspoken critic of the dictatorship, casts a new light on her condition and sparks an awareness of the injustices characterizing both the political order and her personal life. For Antonietta, political consciousness and sexual liberation are intertwined, and for a short while, seem to open the possibility to a different way of life. Unfortunately, at the end of that special day, Daniele is arrested by the Fascist police, and Antonietta, who witnesses the sad epilogue from her kitchen window, returns to her previous life.

Before watching the movie, students read an essay on the construction of a new model of masculinity pursued by the regime as a way to build a new heroic Italian nation[16]. In class, they discussed the cultural and ideological sources of that new model. For instance, students worked in groups on Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto." Each group was assigned a few points from the manifesto and analyzed and discussed them within the group before sharing key concepts with the rest of the class. After a general discussion, students created an alternative manifesto that reflected their values and vision of an ideal society. Students also gave brief presentations on different aspects of Fascism and the Italian society of the time, such as propaganda, political exile, but also the role of sport and athleticism in the ideology of the regime. Following the screening of *A Special Day*, students wrote a brief response paper to contextualize the story of Antonietta and Gabriele within the broader political and ideological framework of Fascist Italy.

Cinema is a very effective medium to introduce and explore social and cultural phenomena, but the course also relied on other cultural products, such as popular magazines. Students had the opportunity to examine Niamh Cullen's work on *fotoromanzi*—books with soap opera-like stories comprised of photos and balloon text[17]. They also examined legal cases, such as that of Franca Viola, a Sicilian woman, who, in the sixties, challenged societal expectations by refusing to marry her boyfriend who had kidnapped and raped her. Using these texts gives students an invaluable perspective on how popular culture both represented and influenced profound social and cultural changes in gender

roles and relations in post-war Italy. One specific aspect analyzed in class was the shift that took place in the fifties in the way women looked at marriage. From a family matter often arranged by the parents of the two young people involved, marriage increasingly turned into a personal choice, involving agency and expression of personal feelings and desires on the part of both men and women. Surprisingly, however, in her research on diaries and memoirs of the time Cullen has found that:

> Women who married in the early 1950s, often prompted by their families to marry young, were also likely to describe strong feelings of love for their husbands. One woman described her fear of marriage and her delaying tactics on the wedding day but was careful to point out repeatedly that this was 'despite' her deep love for her husband. In contrast, those who married in the 1960s were more likely to marry out of choice, but also to feel indifference rather than love before the wedding. (http://notchesblog. com/2014/02/14/whats-amore-courtship-and-marriage-in-post-war-italy/)

The traditional narrative of romantic love and the sentimentality that still informed the production of popular culture through a variety of formats, genres, and media (e.g., fotoromanzi, *romanzi rosa* (romance novels), movies, and songs) became increasingly at odds with the reality of many women who were trying to redefine their role and space of agency in and outside the house. The scale of this cultural shift can be seen in the diaries written by women in the late sixties and seventies, such as those at the center of the documentary *Vogliamo anche le rose (We want roses too)*, by Alina Marazzi (2008). The three stories presented in the film deal with sex, pleasure, and the right of women to make decisions regarding their own bodies, such as the fight for the legalization of abortion. It is no longer simply a matter of equal rights or access to the job market; the second wave of feminism brings to the fore the claim of an essential "difference" between the sexes[18]. This emphasis on a woman's body, its affirmation, and liberation, stands in stark contrast to its objectification and commercialization present on Italian television even today. For this reason, it is particularly revealing to pair the viewing of *Vogliamo anche le rose* with that of another documentary, *Il corpo delle donne (Women's Bodies)* by Lorella Zanardo (2009), that explores the use and abuse of women's bodies in contemporary Italian media.

After viewing the two documentaries, students worked in small groups and prepared short poster presentations in which they visually summarized the content of the documentaries focusing on

a few aspects they found particularly relevant and analyzing them from comparative perspective. Two aspects were of particular interest to the students: on the one hand, the objectification of the female body in commercials more specifically and on TV more generally, and, on the other hand, the controversy on abortion both from a historical perspective and in today's political debate. In facilitating the discussion on this like all the other topics touched in class, my goal was to move away from a "culturalist" approach, that confines gender to a separated and marginal social domain, and instead ground the expression of desire in the material foundation of a given society[19]. It is, in fact, in the interplay between the economic and technological environments, on the one hand, and cultural production, on the other, that the expressions of gender roles and relations come into being. The emergence of queer thought in the nineties can be read precisely as a response to the "culturalization" and "localization" of discourses on sexuality. As Floyd points out:

> The critique of [...] heteronormativity emerged as a critique of discourses localizing and particularizing sexuality and its politics, as an insistence that the normalization of heterosexuality can be understood only in terms of its operation across a broad social field. (2009: 5)

It's only by exploring the intersectionality of gender and other dimensions such as class and race we can make sense of the pervasive power of the heteronormative order in our lives and map the rhizomatic multiplication of practices of resistance to that order that we call "queer." Adopting a "queer" approach entails the embracing of the complex and multilayer nature of all identities. In this sense, the love scene of Antonietta and Gabriele in *Una giornata particolare* represents a perfect example of queer subversion of the heteronormative order in its challenging the dominant moral code (the sanctity of marriage), the traditional expectations of female submissiveness (the woman is in charge), but also the stereotypical assumptions of homosexuality (a gay man making love to a woman).

Historicizing gender in the context of Italian society also means providing students with an introduction to the history and state of Gender and Queer Studies in Italy. In this sense, Lorenzo Bernini's work, such as the introduction to his *Queer Apocalypses*, has proven to be effective in giving a sense of the cultural and institutional obstacles that queer studies are facing in the Italian academic system. Another very useful resource is the collection of interviews

with scholars and activists included in Marco Pustianaz's *Queer in Italia. Differenze in movimento.* In particular, this text, in giving voice to diverse and contradictory tapestry of personal and collective experiences making up the Italian queer world, challenges any attempt at forcing these experiences into a unified conceptual category. Questions of labeling, identities, values, methodology, political priorities, and social and cultural alliances, all come into play and complicate an already diverse patchwork. Moreover, mapping the system of external alliances and conflicts leads to unexpected discoveries. The relationship between queer studies and feminism is, in this sense, paradigmatic. On the one hand, there is no doubt that queer studies are heavily indebted to feminism. The existence of queer studies would not be thinkable without the political precedent of the women's movement and the intellectual groundwork laid out by the many feminist scholars and thinkers. The social proximity and strategic convergence of the two fields still produce fruitful collaborations and "intersections."[20] However, instances of divergence or open confrontation are not lacking. Luisa Muraro and other eminent figures of "pensiero della differenza," for example, have repeatedly criticized the so-called "teoria gender" and queer studies in particular as an expression of the hegemonic neo-liberal ideology. Similarly, Serena Sapegno, leader of "Se non ora quando" (if not now when), the new wave of feminist movement in Italy, speaking at a conference in Verona in 2014, said that:

> «La differenza fondamentale del genere umano è quella tra maschi e femmine» e che il soggetto queer è «isolato, autosufficiente, tipico dell'ideologia neoliberista, titolare di diritti individuali, in
>
> grado di automodellarsi e autodefinirsi ricorrendo anche alla tecnologia se necessario, senza storia, senza inconscio, senza limiti, senza legami: un delirio» (Bernini, 2014: 84)
>
> «The fundamental difference in mankind is that between males and females» and that the queer subject is «isolated, self-sufficient, typical of neoliberal ideology, endowed of individual rights, capable of shaping and defining itself also through the use of technology if necessary, deprived of history, unconscious, without limits, ties: a delirium» (my translation)

Such are the perilous and unfriendly waters that queer studies have to sail on the way to institutionalization.

Building Communities

In a class that aims to use gender as an access key to the history

of post-war Italian society, the struggle that queer studies are facing to gain institutional acknowledgment can only be addressed marginally. However, by exposing students to the challenges that not only LGBTQIA+ rights but also queer-friendly approaches to intellectual research have faced and are still facing in Italy, this course can help them gain a better sense of the conservatism that characterizes Italian society more broadly and academic circles in particular. The relevance of this approach is confirmed by the fact that many students decided to focus their final projects on important moments and figures of LGBTQIA+ history in Italy. Students felt empowered by contributing, albeit peripherally, to an ongoing conversation on gender in Italian culture and society. In the final stages of this course, I witnessed and fostered the transition of this group of students from passive observation of social and cultural phenomena to active participation in a conversation on issues of equality and diversity, family and the autonomy of the individual, tradition, and freedom of choice.

The first step in taking on this active role involves tapping into personal experiences and the experiences of the communities of which the students are part: from the class itself to the campus community to their families and friends. For one in-class assignment marking this transition, students interviewed their peers on campus regarding their views of sexuality and relationships. The inspiration and the template for this assignment came from Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Comizi d'Amore" (*Love meetings*) (1965), clips of which were shown and discussed in class beforehand. Pasolini's famous documentary featured the Italian author/director interviewing Italians of different social backgrounds on issues related to sex, love, marriage, and religion. The portrait of Italian society in the sixties emerging from these interviews is as funny as it is troubling, marked as it is by ignorance, prejudice, and religious bigotry. For class, the students asked questions on preferences and priorities in terms of life choices (relationship vs. career, marriage vs. partnership) and views on topics such as gender roles in couples, alternative lifestyle and sexual orientations. They recorded the interviews and then edited them into short films that were shown and discussed in class. This project was one of the most successful of the semester in terms of student response and quality of the final products. In particular, students demonstrated the ability to draw connections between the content learned in class and the reality

of their daily experiences. Applying the four principles of gender (gender is learned, collaborative, performative, and asymmetrical), students were able to deconstruct hegemonic heteronormative models of behavior in terms of expectations towards marriage and relationships as well as to identify variations in behavior and points of view that challenged societal expectations. The in-class discussion that followed the interviews focused on KSU campus culture and how the students in the class related to the responses collected for the project. One of the most interesting aspects of the in-class discussions was students' reaction to how this specific assignment helped them make sense of what we were learning in the classroom. Through their interviews, they were able to reach a deeper level of awareness on how normative narratives on gender shaped values, expectations, and behaviors. In other words, they appropriated and articulated a de-naturalized notion of gender, a notion, that is, that questions common assumptions about what is "normal" in terms of gender orientations, identities, and expressions. This denaturalized perspective, in turn, allowed for their active participation in a scholarly conversation on gender and society in Italy.

To foster this conversation, I designed a final project in which students were to create a webpage or a wiki entry on select topics, aspects, or figures that marked the history of gender identities and relations in post-war Italy. The task required students to expand on the materials covered in class by conducting individual research on a topic negotiated with the instructor and discussed with the rest of the class. In the preparatory stage, students submitted an abstract and outline of their project and received feedback on the significance of the subject matter, the relevance to course content, and the feasibility of the project, along with suggestions of available resources. Subsequently, students gave short presentations on their projects and invited comments and suggestions from their classmates. Far from being a routine peer activity, these presentations proved to be extremely effective in helping students focus and better plan and execute their projects. The range of topics the students selected covered the whole spectrum of historical periods and themes studied during the semester often adding relevant personal content. For example, a student of Italian descent created a visually striking photo album of their family and discussed how specific models of masculinity and femininity, along with a set

of norms and expectations in terms of gender roles and relations, were reproduced and negotiated in the United States after their family moved from Italy. To this end, she used interviews with family members and then analyzed their comments using course texts. During the semester, this student frequently remarked on how she could personally relate to aspects of the traditional Italian system of gender normativity based on her family history. More interestingly, she reflected on how contact with a different culture and the process of adjusting to a different environment brought about, over generations, a process of negotiation between the traditional culture imported from Italy and the new set of norms and expectations encountered in the United States. While this evolution, in part, mirrored the process of modernization and secularization taking place in post-war Italy, in the new country, it faced specific challenges, torn between the conflicting desires of preserving Italian cultural heritage and embracing the new American identity (see Appendix B).

The history of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Italy was a topic explored by several students. One project, in particular, explored both legal and cultural aspects of discrimination against gay men under Fascist rule. Specifically, the student analyzed how in Italy the discrimination against homosexuals was less overt compared to other countries, such as Nazi Germany. Far from being a sign of a more accepting environment, the student highlighted that the reason for this difference was the widespread belief among Italian political and scientific circles at the time that homosexuality was not a common feature in Italy and that a legal provision against it would, in fact, have given more visibility to the problem and made it worse. Instead, the regime preferred to hide the issue and treated it on a case-by-case basis. Gay men, particularly when suspected of antifascist tendencies, would be quietly condemned to exile as a way of isolating the "deviants" and making them disappear from the public eye (see Appendix C).

In general, the final projects showcased students' awareness and familiarity with concepts and methodologies learned during the semester and their ability to conduct independent research on related topics. Moreover, students demonstrated a secure grasp of the main trends marking the history of post-war Italian society: from the cultural and political legacy of Fascism, to the role of

the Catholic Church, to the North-South divide, to the process of industrialization and modernization that the country has undergone since the '50s to the most recent battles for equality and inclusion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as this contribution has shown, adopting a Queer studies approach in the context of an upper-level Italian course at an American university proved to be an effective way to help students explore and understand Italian culture and society. The students enrolled in the class, primarily Italian and Gender Studies majors and minors, gave very positive feedback on their learning experience both during the course of the semester and in end-of-semester evaluations (see Appendix D). The familiarity that most students had with themes and methodologies adopted in the class made the exploration of another cultural context, using a variety of media and texts, more accessible. By relating the history of Italian society to their own experiences and the history of the United States, students were able to move from passive observation of products and practices of Italian culture(s) to active participation in the conversation of Gender and Queer studies in Italy. Such participation is especially relevant, not only for the pedagogical value of empowering students to take charge of their own learning experience, but also because it contributes to the growing field of activism and research practices in Italian Gender and Queer studies. Though this paper represents one course at one university, it is still beneficial to the ongoing effort to broaden and diversify the still quite narrow and conservative world of the Italian academia.

Facing the fierce ideological opposition against the so-called "ideologia gender" on one side, and the conservatism of large sectors of the academic community on the other, Italian Gender and Queer Studies have still a long way to go to establish themselves and reach the degree of recognition they have acquired in the anglophone world. The success of this effort, which I believe is also part of the effort toward a less provincial and more diverse cultural outlook of Italian society as a whole, depends in part on the ability of the actors involved to create transnational and transdisciplinary networks of activists, scholars, educators, and learners. To this end, the Gender and Society in Italy course hopes to have offered a small, but important, contribution.

APPENDICES

A. Questionnaires

Entry questions

1. What is your major?

2. Have you taken any Italian language and/or culture classes before?

3. Have you ever traveled to or lived in Italy? Where? When? For how long?

4. What is your main learning goal in taking this class?

5. Can you provide a definition of the word: gender?

6. Can you provide a definition of the word: sex?

7. What does LGBTQIA+ stand for?

8. In your opinion, what are some of the main characteristics of gender roles and relations in the U.S.?

9. In your opinion, what are some of the most common stereotypes about Italian men and women? What are some of the sources of those stereotypes (i.e. TV? Movies? Books? etc.)

10. In your opinion, what are some of the major differences (if any) between gender roles and relations in Italy vs the U.S.?

Exit questions

1. How would you rate your learning experience in this class (motivate your answer):

   a. Disappointing

   b. Satisfactory

   c. Excellent

2. Have you reached the learning goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the semester? To what degree?

3. What were some of the most and least useful activities, readings, assignments you completed during the semester? Why?

4. What are some of the most curious, interesting, unexpected things you've learned in this class?

5. In what ways (if any) do you think this class helped you reach a better understanding of Italian society and culture?

6. Did this class change your perception of gender roles and relations in Italy? In what ways?

7. Did this class change your perception of gender roles and relations in the US? In what ways?

8. Do you plan to continue studying Italian language/culture in the future? Explain.

B. Final project on Gender and Italian-American Communities

Once settled in America, the first generation of Italian-Americans were born. With this, the nuclear family was key to their upbringing and gender roles were solidified (Cinotto, 2013, pg. 19). The idea of the strong male Italian provider has been rotted in the culture for years and once they started to immigrate, this role became increasingly more important. Along with the idea of of the male role in the family, the family itself was, and still is, one of the most important aspects of being an Italian-American. From the very beginning to now, research shows that the Sunday night family dinners are a staple in most, if not all Italian-American families.

C. Final project on homosexuality during fascism

How did Mussolini's regime work to suppress homosexuality during the fascist era?

While many authoritarian regimes in Europe and elsewhere, including Nazi Germany and Fascist Spain, are known for persecution and execution of gay men and other LGBT individuals, Mussolini and his followers handled the "problem" differently. The goal was not to kill off LGBT Italians; the goal was to deny their existence altogether.

One of the ways in which the regime accomplished this was by excluding homosexual acts from penal code, even though they were considered immoral; when it was proposed, the regime decided against it and stated that it was not enough of a problem to bother acknowledging it. This contributed to stigmatization because gay sex was seen as something perverse that was done by a negligible minority of Italian men. It was also likened to pedophilia; gay men were labeled as pederasts (male pedophiles who engage in sexual acts with boys) whether they targeted minors or not.

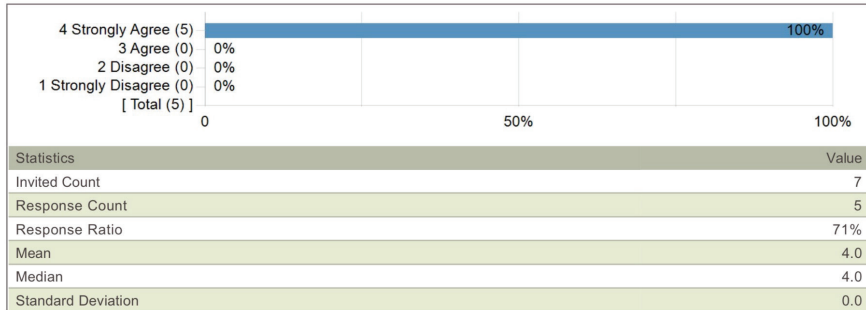*Another propaganda poster, featuring Mussolini, or "il Duce."*

To ensure that gay men had no place in the public consciousness, they were confined to their homes by the police or exiled. Beginning in 1937, gay men and other political

D. End of the semester evaluations

Overall the content of this course contributed to my knowledge and intellectual skills.

Statistics	Value
Invited Count	7
Response Count	5
Response Ratio	71%
Mean	4.0
Median	4.0
Standard Deviation	0.0

Comments
The contents in this course are dense and very interesting. Learning about a topic that relates to the world we live in today is exactly what I feel I needed to learn
I think this is a valuable course for Italian and Gender and Women's Studies students, and I hope it will be offered again in the future. I learned a lot about Italian history and culture that has not come up in other Italian courses and is well worth knowing. I would love to see more courses like this offered to foreign language students in general.
This is such an awesome course and its so important because it covers issues that aren't even being covered in Italy. It's very important.

Comments
The course was extremely informative. I came into the course with no prior knowledge about Italy, or Italian culture.

Notes

[1] See Laura Scarmoncin (2012).

[2] As Nicoletta Marini-Maio explains: "the so-called "teoria del gender" (theory of the [sic] gender), an umbrella definition that is commonly used (with the original English word) to describe a foreign, dangerous attempt to tear down the foundations of traditional morals." (2015: IX). See also Lalli (2016).

[3] See for instance Lorenzo Bernini's introduction to *Queer Apocalypses*, that exposes the prejudices and institutional obstacles characterizing Italian academia.

[4] For an overview on recent experiences and trends of research in the field of gender studies in Italy, see Ross and Scarparo (2010).

[5] See for instance Vincenzo Bavaro's testimony in Pustianaz (2011: 37-38).

[6] The persistence of the Fascist legacy in the Italian legal system is well testified by the endurance of the 1930 Italian Penal Code, commonly referred to as the Rocco Code (for the minister of justice under Mussolini when the code was enacted). The code, introduced under fascism, remains in force today, albeit with significant variation.

[7] The end of the "first republic" coincided with the end of the cold war

and the geopolitical order established at the 1945 Yalta Conference. In Italy this transition to a new party system was marked by a series of corruption scandals (known as "tangentopoli") and the trials that convicted many political leaders and entrepreneurs ("mani pulite"). On this see Gundle and Parker (1996).

[8] Silvio Berlusconi is a billionaire and media tycoon, turned politician, who held the position of prime minister three times (1994-1995, 2001-2006, 2008-2011) and dominated the Italian political arena for over two decades.

[9] There is not a universally accepted definition of Queer Studies. For the sake of this article, I adopt Michael Warner's approach, according to which Queer Studies "rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough *resistance to regimes of the normal* […]. For both academics and activists, 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy" (1993: xxvi).

[10] As Lee Edelman stated: *"queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one"* (2004: 17).

[11] See Brim and Ghaziani (2016). On the intersection between queer theory, pedagogy and activism see also Hill (2004).

[12] Intersectionality is at the very core of Queer Studies. As Robert J Hill puts it: "Critical queer practice is transdisciplinary, investigating processes of normalization and their intersection with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and identity as categories of both experience and analysis." (2004: 90).

[13] According to the honor code, that was finally outlawed in 1981, the murder of a wife who committed adultery was punished less severely because the crime was committed to protect the honor of the family.

[14] See Reich (2004).

[15] See Lawton (2011).

[16] See Gori (2000).

[17] Most of her work on this topic can be accessed online on her personal website: https://niamhcullen.wordpress.com/

[18] See Braidotti (2000).

[19] On this approach, see for instance and among others Morton (1996), Hennesy (2000) and Floyd (2009).

[20] On the rich complex history of intersections between feminism and queer studies (since the first elaboration of "queer" as a field of study by Teresa de Lauretis) see Turner (2000).

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Per una "mitografia dell'uomo" nella letteratura: i *Saggi* di Guido Pugliese

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Abstract: Il testo si propone di riflettere sull'importante figura dell'italianista cosentino, naturalizzato in Canada, Guido Pugliese, attraverso la lettura dei saggi raccolti nel volume postumo *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Da Dante a Manzoni* (2017). In tali interventi, rivisti dall'autore e che ricoprono l'intero arco della sua carriera accademica, emerge con forza l'idea di una letteratura mai svincolata dall'esperienza umana legata a un tempo e in uno spazio ben precisi; in tal senso, nell'esegesi di Pugliese, il metodo crociano è profondamente e implicitamente intriso del concetto di geografia letteraria espresso da Carlo Dionisotti, per cui il documento letterario (la *Commedia*, il *Decameron*, *I promessi sposi*, *I Malavoglia*, etc.) è inteso come prodotto immanente rispetto all'entità storicamente circoscritta della vita umana.

Keywords: Guido Pugliese, Dante, Boccaccio, Antonio Conti, Leopardi, Manzoni Verga, italianisti in Canada.

Nella bibliografia di un critico letterario è possibile riscontrare interessi, generi, autori e questioni sollevate da numerose indagini; quando ciò ricopre gran parte o l'intero arco della letteratura (nel caso specifico, italiana) è possibile quasi sempre individuare un filo rosso che unisce l'intero discorso portato avanti, riflettendo una sfaccettatura di quella che è la sua concezione dell'arte e dell'uomo immerso nel suo tempo. È questo che accade, in particolare, leggendo le pagine di Guido Pugliese (1940-2016) raccolte nel volume *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Da Dante a Manzoni*.[1] Attraverso i contributi che compongono l'opera e che coprono un lasso temporale che va circa dal XIII al XIX secolo, si può comprendere come Pugliese intendesse crocianamente l'uomo e il suo prodotto letterario, ovvero come identità immersa in una comunità e in un contesto storico ben definito. In tal senso, uno dei fattori che sembra emergere con forza dalla riflessione di Pugliese, e che è possibile considerare, è rappresentato dal rapporto che lungo

i secoli l'uomo ha instaurato con Dio attraverso il suo modo di intendere la cristianità; dal Medioevo all'epoca moderna, l'uomo ha continuamente ridefinito la sua relazione col Trascendente e, di conseguenza, con lo spazio in cui è chiamato a vivere da un'Intelligenza superiore; mediante l'esempio di alcuni autori quali Dante, Boccaccio, Leopardi, Manzoni, etc., Pugliese descrive una "mitografia dell'uomo" in relazione alle aspirazioni dell'essere umano, tanto in senso infinito quanto finito.

Emblematico, per quanto riguarda l'intima tensione dell'individuo verso la Gerusalemme Celeste, il caso di Dante. Il Dante di Pugliese è uomo medioevale, immerso nella mondanità, aspirante alla santità: è proprio questo il nodo cruciale della trama delle sue riflessioni. Dopo la lettura generale della *Commedia* e una contestualizzazione dell'Alighieri personaggio-poeta,[2] l'autore dedica ampio spazio all'esegesi del canto I dell'*Inferno,* vero e proprio *limen* dell'uomo (non solo medievale) narrato nel suo volume; ed emblematica la riflessione che contestualizza l'esemplarità del Dante cristiano del XII secolo: prendendo le distanze da chi come Croce, Petrocchi, Sapegno e Singleton considerò i primi versi del poema poveri di poeticità, acerbi e immaturi, Pugliese legge nelle terzine in questione l'impianto morale che sorregge tutte e tre le cantiche tramite un ribaltamento della tragica consequenzialità della dicotomia vita-morte in morte-vita per mezzo della prospettiva cristiana: la "selva oscura" "tant'è amara che poco è più morte" (*Inf.*, I, 7), per cui il pellegrinaggio compiuto è allegoria di un graduale risveglio, dalla morte terrena alla vita eterna.[3] Pugliese, in seguito, ferma la sua attenzione su coloro che sono contrari a una concezione teocentrica dell'universo, ovvero sui dannati che si dimostrano ciechi alla rivelazione divina, come accade per gli eretici del canto X.[4] In esso regna il "dispitto" di Farinata degli Uberti, carattere al contempo positivo e negativo: positivo poiché usò, in vita, particolare riguardo alla città di Firenze in occasione della battaglia di Montaperti; negativo a causa della sua cecità nei confronti della prospettiva cristiana. Scrive difatti Pugliese:

> La sua politica [di Farinata], contrassegnata da una visione esclusivamente terrena, non era frutto di un retto pensiero ma un prodotto della cecità, di una prospettiva troppo limitata. La parola cieco come anche il contrappasso in cui si fa risaltare l'ignoranza del presente ne danno piena conferma[5]

La "vista" diventa allegoricamente il senso cardinale per

compiere il viatico, per essere ammessi al Cielo, e, possiamo perciò aggiungere, la discesa di santa Lucia dalle Alte Sedi è da riferirsi in particolar modo alla possibilità di rendere percorribile, per il pellegrino prescelto ed esemplare, la via altrimenti impraticabile dal buio della "cecità". A tal proposito, di grande rilevanza anche le pagine dedicate alla figura del conte Ugolino.[6] Qui il canto in questione pare comporsi di un duplice strato: quello dottrinale, riproponendo la lettura di Freccero attraverso l'evidenza della lettera di san Paolo apostolo ai Galati;[7] quello meramente materiale, in cui fanno da sfondo le vicende politiche e incarnato dalla figura trasfigurata di Ugolino uomo-lupo. Una riflessione, quella di Pugliese, che si compone della concezione morale esposta a proposito del canto I in riferimento alla voracità della lupa, l'avarizia, di cui Ugolino diviene estensione. Perché, allora, Dante veste di tragedia le vicende del conte della Gherardesca, mutando i dati reali relativi alla mancanza di scrupoli sia di padre sia di figli? Ciò che a Dante interessa non è la pietà suscitata da tali figure, quanto l'esemplarità della vicenda manipolata dal demiurgo poetico, finalizzata perciò all'illuminazione, votandoci ancora a santa Lucia, della via per il Paradiso.[8]

In senso opposto a Dante, Pugliese considera Boccaccio: di quest'ultimo illustra l'errare dell'uomo per le vie del mondo, tralasciando quella che conduce alla santità. Anche il Boccaccio di Pugliese è uomo medievale al pari dell'Alighieri e, così come lui, egli intende fare oggetto della sua opera la realtà che lo circonda. In particolare, nel *Decameron* la "mortifera peste" diviene occasione narrativa nonché prospettiva dell'essere umano in quel determinato momento storico. Tuttavia, rispetto al Sommo Poeta, Boccaccio mette in risalto la condizione finita dell'essere umano e di tutte le cose create:

> Se quasi identica è la premessa di fondo fra le due opere, diversissimo – ed a ragion veduta – ne è l'esito letterario-ideologico. […] in Dante si esce dalla selva quasi-morte mediante un viaggio oltre il tempo in cui si scopre nel giro di sette giorni la chiave della propria salvezza venendo a conoscenza del disegno provvidenziale per il mondo. In Boccaccio si fugge la storica città-morte in cerca di salvezza ma non si evade dal luogo fuori dell'ordine naturale bensì in un ritiro nel contado – luogo non affatto esente dagli effetti del morbo, come il narratore ha ampiamente illustrato con la descrizione degli animali che per abitudine ritornano nelle loro stalle mentre gli uomini hanno abbandonato le loro case o sono morti.[9]

Insomma, se il pellegrinaggio di Dante si riassume in un viatico

che valica la concezione del tempo terreno aspirando all'infinito del Paradiso, il cammino dei personaggi boccacciani si risolve in un tempo finito che, al di là dei dieci giorni di narrazione, si esaurisce nel breve arco della vita di un uomo. A tal proposito, Pugliese distanzia da Dante anche il concetto boccacciano di "fortuna": allontanandosi dalla lettura di Branca, che vede un avvicinamento di Boccaccio a un'idea dantesca della Fortuna come ministra della Provvidenza, il critico concentra la sua attenzione sulla novella di Alessandro e della Principessa d'Inghilterra (*Decameron*, II, 3);[10] con tale esempio egli intende la Fortuna come strumento dell'uomo per il raggiungimento dei propri fini materiali. La conclusione di Pugliese rispecchia l'idea dell'uomo boccacciano fuoriuscito dal disegno divino, per cui l'uomo diviene *faber suae quisque fortunae*, poiché "se la Fortuna fosse stata ente autonomo, sia come dea o caso, l'intervento umano non sarebbe valso a nulla, mentre qui è il fattore dominante".[11] E una tale concezione di Fortuna sembra relativizzarsi anche alla novella di Nastagio degli Onesti (*Decameron*, V, 8),[12] su cui Pugliese anche riflette e nella quale il protagonista, attraverso la "pressione familiare e sociale" riesce a ottenere, per mezzo della visione da lui strumentalizzata per i suoi fini, la mano della donna desiderata e, con essa, tutti i privilegi conseguiti attraverso l'imminente celebrazione di nozze pubbliche. Con ciò, comunque, non si intende una divergente concezione del divino, in termini religiosi, dei due autori medievali, ma semplicemente una differente prospettiva poetica e narratologica: a Dante interessa percorrere un cammino verticale, dal Mondo al Cielo; a Boccaccio un cammino orizzontale che trova piena espressione in una prospettiva mondana. Si tratta di scelte diverse in termini di argomenti letterari, poiché essi restano pur sempre entrambi uomini del loro tempo.

Ulteriori implicazioni definiscono poi il rapporto dell'uomo col Trascendente, visto il graduale passaggio in epoca umanistica (che si consoliderà nell'epoca dei Lumi) dal teocentrismo all'antropocentrismo. Tra i vari esempi che determinano anche una nuova concezione letteraria, quali Muratori (in riferimento al carteggio con il Gherardi),[13] Algarotti e Venturi,[14] figura quello di Antonio Conti, intellettuale patavino, che fu fin dai tempi universitari a Pugliese sempre caro. In particolare, si analizzano i suoi scritti di estetica, offrendo peraltro la pubblicazione di estratti di *Della poesia e delle sue specie: Libri tre e Della poesia simbolica*,

ripresi dalla tesi di dottorato.[15] In tali trattati, Conti riflette sullo statuto della poesia intesa come "fantasma" in quanto prodotto della fantasia e, in particolare, dell'immaginazione e degli effetti che essa provoca sui sensi dell'uomo. Pugliese evidenzia la matrice illuminista di tale pensiero, trovando riscontro nella realtà fenomenica e sensibile. Così, infatti, Pugliese:

> […] Conti assegna un ruolo rilevante all'immaginazione nella produzione di un'opera d'arte. Indubbiamente egli la concepisce in modo più positivo dei cartesiani, che la consideravano "la folle du logis". Allo stesso tempo, non si può sostenere, come qualcuno ha pur fatto, ch'egli ne abbia una concezione simile a quella di Vico. Il punto di divergenza sta nel fatto che, contrariamente a Vico, Conti ne ripone il segno individuante nella sua razionalità costruttiva. Sotto il nome di immaginazione attiva ed artifiziosa, che è un altro modo contiano di indicare l'immaginazione poetica, egli dice di includere tutte le cose che "ordinariamente si attribuiscono all'ingegno, alla sagacità [e] al giudizio del poeta". Come si vede un sostanziale passo avanti rispetto ai razionalisti, ma non ancora la concezione romantica della fantasia creatrice e autonoma.[16]

Conti rifugge la concezione di un tipo di poetica esclusivamente razionalista e, attraverso un metodo gnoseologico di marca platonica, rende materia della sua speculazione estetica ciò che definisce come "psicologia empirica", intendendola, citando ancora Pugliese, come "a discipline which dealt with the nature of men, the nature of reality and man's way of apprehending this reality. In other words, it was the name given to a discipline which has its object both psycological and epistemological concerns".[17]

Ai contributi sulla riflessione contiana seguono quelli legati alla figura di Leopardi; in particolare, Pugliese indaga sulla natura della sua poetica ricollegandosi agli esiti che il "pensiero poetante" sortisce sull'uomo. La matrice empiristico-sensista del pensiero dell'autore fa sì che egli intenda il prodotto della poesia, le immagini, come dei "fantasmi" che sollecitano i sensi e che l'intelletto è in grado di paragonare alla realtà circostante. È su questo scarto fra "reale" e "ideale" che si avvia il ragionamento di Pugliese circa la teoria del piacere, per cui l'essere umano è perennemente teso alla ricerca del proprio appagamento; ciò è da riferirsi anche alla concezione leopardiana della donna, su cui il critico pure si sofferma: intesa platonicamente, la donna rappresenta l'aspetto vivificante dell'esistenza, dato il senso di piacevolezza dell'innamoramento e l'immane tensione che l'uomo presenta verso lei; tuttavia, la cara e arcana beltà che diviene oggetto del desiderio finisce per scontrarsi ancora una volta con la finitezza degli enti materiali, portando il

poeta a definire marcatamente il limite fra reale e ideale.[18]

L'impostazione materialistica delle idee leopardiane reca in sé l'esclusiva implicazione dei sensi per tale appagamento, per cui ogni piacere raggiunto non può essere mai infinito, vista la condizione di finitudine dell'uomo. Per il Recanatese, allora, l'unica fonte di piacere risiede nell'"effetto poetico generale" cui si conforma la natura delle cose, per cui l'immaginazione poetica diviene soluzione e consolazione allo stato dell'uomo. E ben intende Pugliese la ricerca leopardiana (ripercorrendo i passi interessati dello *Zibaldone* e applicandoli ai *Canti*) fondata sullo stile poetico pregno di voci linguistiche, misure e sintassi finalizzate alla indefinitezza dell'immagine:

> Se con la liricità si recupera l'elemento passionale che i progressi della ragione hanno conculcato, le esigenze materiali e fantastiche dell'io desiderante vengono a loro volta recuperate mediante il linguaggio, lo stile e le forme che Leopardi postula per il dettato poetico. Nota è la sua predilezione per le voci "indefinite", "indeterminate", "vaghe" che sfumano i contorni delle cose significate dando modo alla fantasia di spaziare poeticamente […] .[19]

L'uomo Leopardi, insomma, così com'era stato per Dante nella sua epoca, si presenta come vate *super partes*, capace di fornire esempi didascalici con la sua poesia, imperniati, però, su una concezione materialistica dell'esistenza. In tal senso, egli è distaccato e franto da quella prospettiva che ha come meta del viatico umano un possibile regno oltremondano: negando infatti il cristianesimo, che indirizza la tensione umana verso un piacere santo di cui l'Aldilà è manifestazione, il poeta ridimensiona la condizione umana alla misura finita. Leopardi, in altre parole, scruta le stelle, ma nel loro infinito silenzio non ritrova, come Dante, l'espressione dell'Altissimo Fattore, quanto l'estrema e avvilente solitudine dell'uomo.

Diversa è poi la concezione dell'essere umano nei *Promessi sposi*, cui Pugliese dedica vari contributi, riflettendo sul rapporto che intercorre fra la Storia, intrecciata di vite umane, e la Natura, intesa come prodotto ordinato del pensiero perfetto di Dio. L'uomo manzoniano è l'uomo del Seicento, sradicato dall'idea che egli aveva di sé nelle epoche precedenti e quindi descritto nel "guazzabuglio" della Storia; elemento, quest'ultimo di primaria importanza ai fini narrativi, giacché, come asserisce il critico, esso non funge semplicemente da diletto per il lettore:

> The times and conditions in which the characters lived are depicted faithfully […] because they are required by the truth-claims of rappresentation. The characters behave in a certain way bacause they have been conitioned to behave in that way by nature, evironment and social codes.[20]

Il contesto storico così profondamente inteso rappresentava, dunque, una novità rispetto al suo consueto statuto di mera ambientazione cronologica con elementi di realismo. Ogni parola, gesto, decisione dei personaggi dei *Promessi sposi*, dal cardinale Borromeo all'Innominato, da don Rodrigo a Renzo, da fra Galdino a fra Cristoforo, da Lucia a donna Prassede, divengono scelte, parole e decisioni dettate dalla "verità" di tali personaggi, che sono chiamati a vivere in un'epoca che ne condiziona l'esistenza.[21] Per cui la Storia in Manzoni diventa parte dell'essere dell'uomo e l'uomo parte dell'essere della Storia. Come a più riprese l'autore specifica nel romanzo, essa, però, necessita di una forza regolatrice che indirizzi l'uomo, fautore di quella Storia, a non perdere di vista il suo cammino sulla terra: è la Divina Provvidenza a regolamentare il guazzabuglio di eventi che scaturiscono dalle sue scelte, così come la pioggia lustrale che nel romanzo lava finalmente via la marcescenza della peste. E Pugliese si sofferma con attenzione sulle dinamiche che descrivono nel romanzo una morale di questo tipo, riscontrando nell'*Introduzione* i suoi elementi fondativi. Costruita con impeccabile retorica secentesca presto abbandonata dal Manzoni trascrittore/traduttore, queste pagine liminari descrivono in singola prospettiva umana gli elementi che compongono l'esistenza: il Tempo e la Storia, che si scontrano l'uno con l'altra per conferire identità e prova inconfutabile dell'esistenza dell'uomo sulla terra al fine di preservarne la memoria, in caso di vittoria della seconda. Sembrano, questi, dati che rovesciano il senso dottrinario del romanzo; e Pugliese, con grande acume, riflette su quella diversione compiuta dall'uomo per le vie del mondo rispetto alla via del Cielo:

> […] il bene si verificherà solo quando ci sarà un'inversione di senso storico, un riconoscimento da parte dell'uomo della sua soggezione al tempo, del principio che «che fuor della vita è il termine» e dunque nella necessità di informare il proprio ideale di vita a Dio e ai suoi dettami.[22]

Una tale inversione si verifica nel romanzo tramite il caso individuale di Renzo, caricato di una forte esemplarità; il capitolo XVII dei *Promessi sposi* andrebbe quindi assunto come paradigmatico del messaggio manzoniano che si realizza in Renzo, sul cui capo

"avvolve e pesa" la grave onda della Storia: la redenzione del personaggio e dell'uomo non avviene in un'ottica esclusivamente finalizzata alla parificazione con il carattere della devota Lucia, che ha sempre chiara innanzi ai suoi occhi la retta via da seguire; la ricatechizzazione di Renzo significa, più profondamente, accettazione della volontà di Dio che opera silenziosa fra gli uomini; e il fulcro di tale ricongiungimento dell'uomo con la Provvidenza e del suo confidare in Essa risiede nell'accettazione del Tempo e della Storia.[23] La sopportazione di Renzo, in una delle grandi notti manzoniane, in cui i personaggi si confrontano con le proprie coscienze, si ritrova nella scelta del viaggiatore di propendere per una umile *hamac* piuttosto che cercare un giaciglio più caldo e ospitale. La sopportazione e il sacrificio di Renzo riducono l'uomo dalla "selva oscura" alla "dritta via smarrita". E in Manzoni, così come in Dante, le indagini di Pugliese ritrovano, seppur con diversa consapevolezza dei due autori, descritta dalla parabola dell'uomo e del suo legame con Dio.

Un tipo di analisi, ad ogni modo, privilegia un approccio storico alla maniera crociana, in cui la storia diviene a far parte dei principali elementi di analisi.[24] In questo senso, passando per le metodologie analitiche, fra gli altri, del già citato Croce, De Sanctis, Maria Corti e Cesare Segre, Pugliese riflette sulla necessità primaria di affiancare all'indagine del testo letterario quella dell'extratesto, ovvero ciò che Hippolyte Taine ha definito come *milieu* in cui l'opera e il suo autore sono nati. A tal fine, l'intento del critico letterario ritrova esiti variegati in grado di ritrovare strumenti e chiavi di lettura vari e alternativi per una comprensione omogenea.

Guido Pugliese, intercalato nel contesto di studi letterari canadesi cui pure rende omaggio (in particolare nelle figure di James E. Shaw, Beatrice M. Corrigan, Ulrich Leo, S. Bernard Chandler, Giuliana Sanguinetti Kratz e Luciana Marchionne Picchione), occupa un posto di grande rilievo nella scuola di italianistica del Nord America; egli rivela nelle sue analisi rigore metodologico, originalità di pensiero e perizia nella documentazione, per cui attraverso le sue pagine si definiscono i punti cardinali attraverso cui muovono le sue indagini e, attraverso prove e confutazioni, definisce e chiarifica il pensiero vivido e genuino della letteratura posta sotto la sua lente personale.

Note

¹ Il volume *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Da Dante a Manzoni* raccoglie interventi (talvolta rivisti) che vanno dagli anni '70 del Novecento fino al 2016, anno della scomparsa del loro autore; compongono la raccolta anche la nutrita bibliografia dell'autore e un'*Appendice*, costituita dall'intervento ("The Historical Approach in Literary Criticism: Tradition and Application") e da brevi profili di italianisti dell'Università di Toronto (pp. 27-30 e pp. 333-366). Le successive citazioni sono tratte dai saggi contenuti nel volume riferito, per cui si indicherà il titolo dell'intervento e corrispondenti i numeri di pagina.

² In particolare, si veda il saggio di Pugliese "Lecture on the *Divine Comedy*", pp. 37-42.

³ Cfr. il saggio "Form and Meaning in Dante's Prologue Scene", pp. 43-50; in particolare pp. 48-49.

⁴ "Eresia e politica in *Inferno X*", pp. 61-67.

⁵ Cfr. p. 66.

⁶ "'Un circolo vizioso': lettura dell'episodio di Ugolino", pp. 95-102.

⁷ "Tutta la legge è pienamente in questo solo precetto: amerai il prossimo tuo come te stesso. Ma se vi mordete e divorate a vicenda badate che non abbiate a distruggervi vicendevolmente" (*Galati*, V, 14-15). Pugliese intende, inoltre, il riferimento paolino nell'ambito di un più ampio tessuto biblico, che costituisce la struttura dell'episodio dantesco, da rilevarsi anche mediante "spie" testuali (p. 97).

⁸ Si veda pp. 100-102.

⁹ "Dall'eterno al tempo: il *Decameron* vs. la *Divina Commedia*", pp. 111-122; la citazione è a p. 117.

¹⁰ "*Decameron* II 3: un caso di contingenza causale", pp.123-132.

¹¹ Cfr. p. 131.

¹² "Nastagio degli Onesti ovverosia della lotta dei sessi", pp. 133-142.

¹³ "Introduzione". *Carteggio di Lodovico Antonio Muratori con Pietro Ercole Gherardi*, pp. 223-230.

¹⁴ "The Vitality of Italian Culture in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century: General Thought and Critical Theory", pp. 151-164.

¹⁵ "Excerpts from Antonio Conti's Unpublished Treatises on Poetics: *Della poesia e delle sue specie: Libri tre* and *Della poesia simbolica*", pp. 199-222.

16 Si veda anche il saggio "'Lavorar fantasmi': l'arte poetica di Antonio Conti", 187-198; in particolare, la citazione è a p. 195.

17 Sulla concezione contiana di una poetica che intende metafisicamente "realtà" e "idea", si tenga presente anche "Towards a Science of Aesthetics: The Theory of Antonio Conti", in ivi, 175-186 (la citazione è a p. 178).

18 "Leopardi's Woman: 'Delizia ed Erinni'", in ivi, pp. 249-258.

[19] "Piacere e poesia in Leopardi", in ivi, 231-239; in particolare, si veda p. 236.

[20] "The Origin and Development of the Italian Novel 1750-1860", pp. 259-269 (in particolare, p. 267).

[21] "On the Epistemology of *I promessi sposi*", pp. 271-276.

[22] "Parabula dell'*Introduzione* ai *Promessi sposi*", pp. 287-294 (in particolare, p. 293).

[23] "'Hamac' e 'paglia': lettura del capitolo XVII dei *Promessi sposi*", pp. 295-303.

[24] "The Historical Approach in Literary Criticism: Tradition and Application", pp. 335-341.

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Edith Bruck's Poetry
in/and the New Millennium

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Abstract: This paper examines the first three collections of poetry by Hungarian-born author and Holocaust survivor Edith Bruck, which were recently reprinted in the volume *Versi vissuti: poesie (1975-1990)*, edited by Michela Meschini. It does so in the context of a discussion on her poetic endeavors and the way her work is marketed in Italy. After a brief bio-bibliographical introduction this study transitions to a close reading of a selection of her lyrics that stand out for their urgency, their impact on readers, and the universal, ubiquitous nature of the message they convey – one that is just as relevant today as it was when they were first released. In other words, analyzing this new edition of Bruck's poems highlights Meschini's objectives in bringing them "into" the third millennium: to allow readers to revisit some of the most significant translingual poems ever published in Italian.

Keywords: Bruck, Contemporary Italian Poetry, Italian literature, Jewish Literature, Literature and the Shoah, Holocaust Poetry, Autobiographical Writing, Anti-Semitism, Translingual Writing.

A little more than a decade ago, in the pages of the journal *Contemporanea*, Edith Bruck addressed the inherent difficulty of gaining acceptance in the Italian literary scene, describing it as a family in which a foreigner is always treated as such.[1] As evidence of this tendency she cited the fact that, first and foremost, she is always identified as a Hungarian Jew and a Holocaust survivor when scholars and critics discuss her work. Although she has spent more than sixty years living in Rome, publishing exclusively in Italian since the release of her autobiographical debut (*Chi ti ama così*) in 1959, as a translingual author to some degree Bruck still feels (and is treated) like an anomalous literary presence in her adoptive homeland (190).[2]

Born Edith Steinschreiber in the village of Tiszabércel in 1931,[3] she spent the first thirteen years of her life in a relative state of tranquillity. Her family was poor and large in numbers, yet even the sting of socially accepted Anti-Semitism was initially not

strong enough to overshadow the joys of a childhood defined by a loving home. When the spread of Fascism reached her doorstep in 1944, she was deported to the ghetto in Budapest along with her loved ones, and eventually to Auschwitz where her parents and younger brother lost their lives. A close friend and colleague of the late Primo Levi, Bruck has always thought of herself as a *writer-witness*. Her indefatigable efforts to document and expose the atrocities of the Holocaust have influenced a significant portion of her published works. Her writings include numerous novels and collections of short stories, four books of poetry, two autobiographical texts, and a handful of plays and screenplays. On many occasions she has purposefully (and playfully) mixed fiction with true-life events in her prose to the extent that they are quasi-impossible to unravel. With some notable exceptions, such as her works of non-fiction and the epistolary novel *Lettera alla madre*, it is through her poetry that the author has exposed her innermost self to readers, and always through the shield of an Italophone linguistic filter. Nevertheless, in spite of her multiple award-winning novels, the author's poetry has historically been marginalized in the critical discourse on Italian poetry in general, with the exception of the work of Elisa Guida, whose writings on the author's lyrics (especially the collection *Monologo* from 1990) set the tone for future scholars to follow.[4] Additionally, and perhaps more surprisingly, although her prose writings have often been forcefully relegated to the category of Literature of the Shoah, some scholars have failed to acknowledge Bruck's poetry on the Shoah specifically, an area of literary expression to which very few Italophone artists have actually contributed.[5] Let us consider, for example, the prestigious volume entitled *Poetry After Auschwitz* (2003), edited by Susan Gubar, who is arguably one of the greatest scholars of our time. The seminal volume in question is a uniquely inclusive and broad study of poetic representations of the Shoah in a global context. For obvious reasons Gubar included Primo Levi's poetry in her volume, as he is without a doubt the most successful and widely-acclaimed Italian Jewish artist in the world. Given the theme of her book, and her desire to offer a more complete view of how Italian poets have engaged the Holocaust, Gubar also analyzed a poem on the subject which was written by a non-Jewish artist, namely Nobel prize-winning poet Salvatore Quasimodo. Bruck's lyrics, however, unfortunately did not make it onto her radar on

this occasion, which indirectly and unintentionally reinforces the erroneous notion that no noteworthy Italophone female poets have written about the Shoah.

Living in such a tumultuous period of human history, in which instances of Anti-Semitic attacks and acts of vandalism have been steadily on the rise in the US and abroad, the need to revisit Bruck's poems could not be more imperative. Edith Bruck's entire poetic production of the 20th century has finally been reprinted in a precious volume edited by Michela Meschini for Eum (Macerata University Press), which will not only make these poems more readily available (they were, in fact, all out of print), but also and more importantly reinvigorate and renew the extant critical discourse on her lyrics.[6] All of her poems from *Il tatuaggio* (Parma: Guanda, 1975), *In difesa del padre* (Milano: Guanda, 1980), and *Monologo* (Milano: Garzanti, 1990) appear in this edition. Furthermore, it includes a reprint of Giovanni Raboni's original preface to *Il tatuaggio* with a note by the author, as well as a note by Bruck and her afterword to *Monologo* (the latter of which was originally printed on the back cover). The editor of *Versi vissuti* also authored an insightful introduction to this collection ("Rinascere nella parola. Prospettive critiche sulla poesia di Edith Bruck," pp. 5-21) that ventures deeper into the analysis of these lyrics than any scholar has done in the past, which is followed by a short preface penned by Paolo Steffan ("In agonia, in amore," pp. 23-32).

At times the author's fiction has reflected a desire to sculpt a hidden truth into different forms of artistic expression, but Bruck's poetry comes straight from the heart. More specifically: in a 2007 interview she identified her stomach as the place where her poems are born.[7] Her modus operandi is to begin with a single image that struck her; an event that left a mark on her psyche. As Meschini points out, in fact, Bruck's poetry can be read as a sort of autobiography written in verse (20). While the horrors of the concentration camps are usually not overtly addressed in her poems, her verses are clearly informed by the reality of Anti-Semitism in Europe before, during, and after World War II, and as such they're frequently characterized by a strong insistence on the notion of loss and the fear of losing more. This is evident in the poem "Solo solo solo" from *Il tatuaggio*, her poetic debut, in which the speaker initially rejoices in her few, simple possessions,

and only starts to express doubts and fears concerning the future after a poignant memory from her childhood in Hungary comes to mind, triggered by the sight of the color yellow (100):

Tutto quello che ho	All that I have
tutto quello che ho voluto	All that I have wanted
è qui:	is here:
una stanzetta	a small room
le lenzuola gialle	the yellow sheets
un colore	a color
come un altro	like any other
non la stella	not the star
da cucire sul cappotto.	to sew on my coat.
L'immagine del passato	The image of the past
è ricca d'itinerari	is rich with itineraries
e porta alla scoperta	and leads one to discover
che la vita è vita	that life is life
anche da soli	even alone
e del pane ci sarà	and there will be some bread
in un mondo	in a world
dove ora hai un posto	where you now have a place

(vv. 1-17, all translations are mine)

While it comes as no surprise that a memory of Anti-Semitic discrimination (the yellow star) would lead the *I* in this poem to reflect on a traumatic past, it's worth noting that the "trigger" in this case recalls a series of difficulties and fears that were *and* have been of real concern to the author before, during, and *also after* the Shoah, including the need to feel secure and stable in modern European society, in economic, geographical, and psychological terms. The volume *In difesa del padre* (Milano: Guanda, 1980) clearly exemplifies this same propensity. The poem titled "Eravamo in otto" for instance, in spite of its concision and simplicity, speaks volumes about a family shattered by infant mortality and violence alike, scattered all over the world by the forces of history, politics, and discrimination. Works like "Ogni inizio è già la fine," "Che mi vengano pure malattie e sciagure," and "Conto i giorni," focus on the longing one might feel for another person. They revolve around the notion of romantic love and both physical and emotional intimacy, yet the poet leaves just enough room for an alternate interpretation. By saying very little, she coaxes the reader into wondering about the unsaid, placing a considerable amount of weight on each word. The most noteworthy text to follow this Ungarettian strategy is the poem "Sono con me," which consists merely of three lines and only eight words ("Sono con me / per la

prima volta / parliamo" – p. 152).[8] When the *I* in the poem (implied in Italian) states that s/he finally has a chance to be alone with his/her thoughts for the first time, the absence of companionship required for this meditation is transformed into a positive event; one that s/he has waited all his/her life to experience.

The most striking poem in the collection *In difesa del padre* would have to be "Sono fragile;" an examination of the precarious condition of mankind and the intrinsic difficulty of relating to others and learning to trust. There is an overwhelming sense of instability, insecurity, and fear in this piece that can potentially be found in any setting where people interact in a tentative fashion. It speaks volumes about the ephemeral nature of social conventions that usually prevent violence and anger from bleeding into our everyday lives (159).

non mi fido più	I don't trust anymore
sono guardinga	I am watchful
faccio solo un passo avanti	I take only one step forward
e due indietro	and two steps back
come fossi in una gabbia	as if I were in a cage
da cui hanno tolto	from which they removed
le sbarre di difesa	the protective bars
prematuramente	prematurely
prima che si civilizzasse	before the civilization
l'uomo.	of man.

(vv. 7-16)

While literary art is an admittedly flexible medium that will always take on different meanings in the minds of individual readers, there is something urgent and undeniably abrasive about this text and its acknowledgement of the weak set of rules and practices that uphold law and order in our modern, enlightened societies. The experiences that marked the hardest moments of Edith Bruck's childhood (and, indeed, one of the darkest periods of the 20th century) are still with us beneath the surface of our everyday lives, hidden in history texts as if their relevance were somehow diminished. "Sono fragile" reminds us that we are never more than a few steps away from another Hitler, another Pol Pot, and yet another genocide. Furthermore, given that the speaker of the poem is a woman, the image of a female literally or symbolically trapped in a cage, even though it is part of a larger metaphor about the precarious condition of mankind, speaks volumes about the struggles the author has experienced in her life: as a human

being, as a woman, as a Jew, as a Holocaust survivor, and as an artist. In fact, it's worth considering a notion that this poem only alludes to between the lines: the author, who was deported and imprisoned before being forced into slave labor by the Third Reich, is not merely referencing the pain she has personally endured or witnessed. On the contrary, she is making an astute and chilling observation about the most dangerous creatures to ever populate planet earth: human beings, who lock up other species in cages for amusement and for the purpose of scientific study. But that's not the real concern here. The poem is pointing its accusations at us, at *all of us*, as human beings, because we are also the *only* species on earth to put our own kind in cages – regardless of the reason(s) why.

Although in her first two collections of lyrics one might identify a very personal, individual exercise in the act of writing, Guida rightfully reminds us that the volume *Monologo* represents a specific turning point in the evolution of Bruck's craft: the moment when her level of social engagement increased and expanded its scope in her poetry specifically, both as an *author-witness* and as an intellectual who feels a broader sense of responsibility towards society and her readership ("L'etica del sopravvissuto" 202). In terms of her role as a witness, her writing goes beyond the artistic documentation of the Holocaust by fostering and engaging in a discourse on its historical roots as well as its aftermath, as can be seen in the final lines of the poems "Come in un quiz" (208) and "Il segno" (226):

quando può l'oggetto dell'esperimento deve ribellarsi – non siamo in Auschwitz.	when it can, the object of the experiment must rebel – we're not in Auschwitz
(vv. 8-10)	

e se ci sarà un'altra vita sarò una stella gialla per ricordarvi che c'era una volta Auschwitz.	and if there is another life I'll be a yellow star to remind you that once upon a time there was Auschwitz.
(vv. 14-17)	

What stands out the most, however, in *Monologo*, is a clear awareness that the atrocities of the Shoah, as unique and horrifying as they were, were made part of a heartless machine that seeks to capitalize on all forms of human suffering, especially

(though not only) those that have been documented and lend themselves to the purposes of journalists, the news media, and the entertainment industry. In this sense, the breathtaking text "Lo svago" from *Monologo* signals the fundamental shift in Bruck's poetry highlighted by Guida, that one should view not as a revision of Bruck's approach to her poetic compositions, but rather, as an inevitable amplification of her focus. Let us consider, in fact, the last few lines of the aforementioned poem, which is perhaps the most striking and memorable piece in the entire collection:

il papa ferito	the wounded pope
gli handicappati	the handicapped
i sequestrati	the kidnapped
il riscattato inebetito	the stupefied ransomed
la polizia che spara sui neri	the police shooting at blacks
i processi e i processati	the trials and the defendants
i bambini scheletrici	the skeletal children
tutto fa spettacolo.	it's all show business.

(vv. 14-21)

Now more than ever, with the release of Meschini's important edition, it is time to revisit Bruck's body of poetry in its entirety, not merely as a means to better understand her artistic contributions as a whole, but also (and more so) to finally and definitively situate her lyrics in the Italian cultural environment of the 20th and 21st centuries. The collection *Versi vissuti* will undoubtedly contribute immensely to this fundamental process. Given that selections of Bruck's poetry (from *In difesa del padre*, for example) have appeared in English translation more than once in recent years in US-based academic journals dedicated to the study and translation of Italian literature,[9] one can also hope that this collection will facilitate and accelerate the process of bringing her poems to a broader audience in the new millennium – in a global, multilingual context, through the indispensable work of literary translators the world over.

Notes

[1] Gillian Ania and John Butcher. "Inchiesta sulla narrativa italiana degli anni Sessanta e Settanta."

[2] Although a variety of labels have been applied to Bruck's artistic production over the course of the last six decades, the most accurate term used to describe her relationship with the Italian language is the word "translingual," which was first employed in reference to the author in an interview published by Maria Cristina Mauceri in *Italica* in 2007 ("Edith Bruck, a Translingual Writer Who Found a Home in Italy").

[3] Throughout most of her life, Bruck believed she was born in 1932. In recent years, she found evidence that she was actually born in 1931.

[4] See Elisa Guida. "L'etica del sopravvissuto nell'estetica di Edith Bruck" and "Dall'era dei divieti alla memoria del XXI secolo: un percorso nella rappresentazione della Shoah attraverso la poetica di Edith Bruck."

[5] For a more detailed discussion of Edith Bruck's poetry and its critical reception, see the third chapter of my volume *Edith Bruck in the Mirror: Fictional Transitions and Cinematic Narratives*. The chapter in question is entitled "Reflections on the 'Minor' Poetry of a Successful Novelist."

[6] The only book of poetry by Bruck which was not reprinted/included in this edition is the volume *Specchi* from 2005, which differs significantly in style from the collected lyrics that appear in *Versi vissuti*. Not only does this volume consist of a single, book-length poetic breath (best described with the Italian word *poema*), it also draws inspiration from a single event in the author's life; or rather, a heart attack she suffered in the first few years of the 21st century. The works that appear in *Versi vissuti*, on the other hand, are all short(er) poetic compositions, many of which fit on a single page.

[7] Philip Balma. "Intervista a Edith Bruck."

[8] Those who might overestimate the influence of Giuseppe Ungaretti's work on Bruck's poetic production should bear in mind that in the past she has identified Attila Jószef and Illyés Gyula as two of the poets she admires the most (she has, in fact, translated the lyrics of both of these Hungarian artists).

[9] Edith Bruck. "Selected Poems from 'In difesa del padre'" (Trans. Philip Balma) and "Poems from 'In difesa del padre'" (Trans. Philip Balma).

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Emanuela Piovano
autora del cinema al femminile.
Intervista con la regista

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Abstract: Emanuela Piovano, regista sperimentale, fondatrice della casa di produzione KitchenFilm e promotrice di piattaforme online di distribuzione di film internazionali, in questa intervista illustra la sua carriera a partire dagli anni Ottanta, durante i quali fonda l'associazione Camera Woman, fino ad oggi. Piovano racconta le sue esperienze di *autora* impegnata nella realizzazione di documentari e film al femminile e di imprenditrice aperta a nuove iniziative per produrre e divulgare un cinema di impegno sociale e civile.

Keywords: Cinema sperimentale, cinema al femminile, cinema di impegno civile, KitchenFilm.

Introduzione

Emanuela Piovano (Torino 1959) si è formata presso la Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia con una tesi in Storia e Critica del Cinema sull'intervista filmata, ipotesi sperimentali e teoriche. Allieva di Gianni Vattimo (1936) e Gianni Rondolino (1932-2016), ha approcciato il tema del cinema sperimentale, antenato del docu-fiction, attraverso le analisi di Michail Michailovi Bachtin (1895-1975) e Gérard Genette (1930-2018). Per tutti gli anni Ottanta ha lavorato come ricercatrice presso l'Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza, come autrice di testi e aiuto regista al Centro di Produzione Rai di Torino e, come critica, ha collaborato alla rivista *Il nuovo spettatore* diretta da Paolo Gobetti (1925-1995).[1] Piovano dichiara: "All'Archivio noi, giovani reclute, imparavamo il mestiere da KINOKI, ovvero CINEOCCHI, gli operatori immaginati da Dziga Vertov, propugnatori di un cinema motore della ricerca della verità" (2020, 290).[2]

Nel 1982 Piovano ha prodotto il film *Processo a Caterina Ross*[3] di Gabriella Rosaleva (1942) e nel 1984 è stata una dei fondatori dell'associazione Camera Woman che si propone la ricerca e l'indagine sulla condizione femminile e con cui ha realizzato vari

materiali video, contribuendo a far conoscere registe straniere in Italia. In seguito, nel 1988 Piovano ha fondato KitchenFilm, una società di produzione con cui ha prodotto 5 dei suoi film e svariati lavori di altre autrici. Il nome della società è un tributo a The Kitchen a New York,[4] dove diversi suoi lavori sono stati presentati negli anni Ottanta. KitchenFilm apre la sua prima sede a Roma nel 1994 con lo scopo di produrre e promuovere il cinema internazionale indipendente con particolare attenzione ai temi dei giovani e alla rappresentazione delle donne nel cinema. Il principio aristotelico che la creazione avviene attraverso la cucina implica che la cucina in sé sia un fertile laboratorio di idee. KitchenFilm si ispira profondamente alle idee aristoteliche e il simbolo originale della società era una donna che mostrava un uovo in una padella friggente. Successivamente il logo è cambiato in un simbolo astratto in cui un triangolo e un cerchio rappresentano le forme di base della creazione.

Piovano ha realizzato diversi video tra cui, nel 1987, ha firmato la sceneggiatura e la regia del cortometraggio *Senza fissa dimora*. prodotto dalla Rai, *Epistolario immaginario* (videolettere dal carcere) (1988), *Lettere dalla Sicilia* (1988), *Due e Uno* (2004),[5] *Le porte di Bella* (2004),[6] *Svelata* (2004),[7] un omaggio ad Annabella Miscuglio all'indomani della sua scomparsa nel 2003, e *Caterina by Heart* (90 anni di Caterina Boratto) (2005), creato per il Museo del Cinema di Torino.

Dopo aver diretto questi filmati didattici e videointerviste, nel 1989 Piovano ha realizzato, con le cineaste Anna Gasco e Tiziana Pellerano, il documentario *Le rose blu*[8] che ricorda la tragedia dell'incendio avvenuta il 3 giugno 1989 nel carcere femminile Le Vallette di Torino provocando la morte di 11 detenute. Il film racconta la realtà carceraria e la condizione femminile nelle prigioni italiane con un originalissimo stile sperimentale. La rosa blu è un simbolo di vita e libertà. Il film è stato riconosciuto come Miglior Esordio Anni Novanta e ha vinto Premi di Qualità del Ministero.

Nel 1992 Piovano inoltre ha curato la regia del film *L'aria in testa*,[9] realizzato con Adriano Belli. Per il cinema e la televisione ha girato *Parole incrociate* (1995) e ha prodotto *La grande Dea Madre* (1996). Dopo queste esperienze, ha realizzato il suo primo film a soggetto *Le complici* (1998),[10] un thriller femminile, trasposizione del romanzo *Complice il dubbio* (1992) di Maria Rosa Cutrufelli. Successivamente ha diretto il dramma *Amorfù* (2003),[11] premiato

per Miglior Interpretazione al Bellaria Film Festival e al Karlovivary Film Festival.

Nel 2010 Piovano ha girato *Le stelle inquiete*,[12] film che racconta l'incontro dell'attivista, filosofa e mistica francese Simone Weil (1909-1943) con il filosofo contadino Gustave Thibon (1903-2001). *Le stelle inquiete* è il primo film dedicato a Simone Weil, facendo seguito al documentario *Je suis Simone (la condition ouvrière)* (2009),[13] diretto da Fabrizio Ferraro. Roberto Rossellini aveva preso in prestito episodi della vita della Weil per il suo film *Europa '51* (1952), ma, come sottolinea André Bazin, "senza tuttavia essere in grado di catturare la forza del suo pensiero" (138).[14] Liliana Cavani e Italo Moscati avevano tentato di girare un film su questa straordinaria figura intellettuale e la loro sceneggiatura *Lettere dall'interno* (1974) fu la prima per un film biografico sulla Weil che tuttavia non è stato mai realizzato (Laviosa 2014).

Dal 2004 la KitchenFilm si impegna a diffondere in Italia il cinema di qualità non solo femminile e Piovano, attiva anche come distributrice, ha contribuito a far conoscere i seguenti film: *In the Battlefields* (Danielle Arbid 2004), *Whisky* (Juan Pablo Rebella e Pablo Stoll 2004), *Caramel* (Nadine Labaki 2004), *Aguasaltas. com* (Luís Galvão Teles 2011), *Buon Anno Sarajevo* (Aida Begic 2012), *Apache* (Thierry De Peretti 2013), *Nessun uomo è un'isola* (Dominique Marchais 2017) e *Petit Paysan* (Hubert Charuel 2017). Nel 2006 la Cineteca Nazionale di Roma le ha dedicato una giornata nell'ambito della prima rassegna di registe italiane.

Nel 2013 Piovano ha diretto il cortometraggio *Sorprese!*[15] creato per la Fondazione Nilde Iotti e per il Premio Melograno.[16] Ispirato al tema della cittadinanza, il corto si svolge nella sala d'attesa di un ufficio del Comune, tra sogni e delusioni per ottenere la cittadinanza italiana. Come Notari sottolinea, "il film mette in risalto la grande disparità nel diritto civile alla cittadinanza tra giovani italiani con genitori italiani e giovani italiani con genitori stranieri" (Notari 2021) (Tradotto in italiano da F. Laviosa).[17]

L' ultimo film della Piovano, *L'età d'oro* (2016),[18] è un omaggio alla regista Annabella Miscuglio (1939-2003). Cineasta femminista, Miscuglio ha militato per la difesa dei diritti civili e dei diritti delle donne e ha girato vari film sperimentali. Intorno a lei hanno orbitato molti amici e amori che hanno condiviso le sue passioni, disillusioni, speranze e che nel film, insieme al figlio Sid, cercano

di ricostruire il quadro di una vita intensa e tormentata. Miscuglio è una dei fondatori dello storico cineclub romano Filmstudio che educò molte generazioni cinefile su quanto avveniva nel mondo nel cinema underground, politico e sperimentale. Miscuglio è anche stata regista per la Rai dei programmi *Nel regno degli animali*, *Mi manda Raitre*, *Chi l'ha visto*, studiosa e teorica della donna nel cinema, coautrice, insieme a Loredana Rotondo, Paola De Martiis, Rony Daopoulo, Anna Carini e Maria Grazia Belmonti, del documentario *Processo per stupro* sulla violenza del sistema giudiziario, prodotto dalla Rai nel 1979. Miscuglio ha anche girato film sui riti legati al fenomeno del tarantismo e alle condizioni di lavoro degli operai. Famoso è il suo progetto *A.A.A. Offresi* (1981), con cui voleva raccontare la prostituzione dal punto di vista dei clienti che però le ha scatenato contro istituzioni e censori.

Il cortometraggio *Tre in treno per l'Europa (e un pollo)* (2019), prodotto da KitchenFilm e proiettato il 4 maggio 2019, è stato ideato da Piovano per il convegno L'Europa delle Donne,[19] promosso e organizzato dalla Fondazione Nilde Iotti nella Sala Carla Lonzi presso la Casa Internazionale delle Donne a Roma.[20] Il corto ripropone testualmente le parole di alcune madri fondatrici dell'Europa, da Ursula Hirschmann a Nilde Iotti. Piovano dichiara che:

> L'idea era di far risuonare questi testi, presi da discorsi ufficiali, memoriali o articoli, come fossero il ricordo di tre donne di generazioni diverse che stanno viaggiando su un treno. Le accompagniamo per un breve tratto (15 minuti) nell'arco di una giornata, rievocando tutto il Novecento e gli sforzi fatti per giungere ad una Unione Europea non ancora compiuta (2019).[21]

Il film si ispira alla scrittura del Manifesto di Ventotene, *Per un' Europa libera e unita*, redatto nel 1941 da Altiero Spinelli (1907-1986) e Ernesto Rossi (1897-1967) (Leone 2019).[22] Spinelli scrisse il documento su cartine di sigarette tra il 1941 e il 1943 sull'Isola di Ventotene, durante l'esilio politico per le sue idee antifasciste. Maria Hirshmann (1924), per evitare la censura, le portava alla casa editrice sul continente nascoste nel ventre di un pollo arrosto. Il Manifesto spiega l'importanza di una federazione europea e delinea un piano per realizzarla. Il viaggio in treno accompagna le voci narranti delle tre passeggere e il racconto è punteggiato dalla presenza di un pollo arrosto. Sarah Annunziato spiega nella sua recensione del cortometraggio:

> *Tre in treno* si basa su due principali tecniche filmiche per raccontare la

storia. La prima è l'uso del found footage (filmato ritrovato). Attraverso i 15 minuti del film le immagini passano continuamente da scene nel presente a scene in bianco e nero prese da vecchi filmati. Alcune di queste immagini riprendono passeggeri che viaggiano in treno, mentre altre mostrano la costruzione di rotaie e ponti. L'uso del found footage è una tecnica molto efficace per ricordare allo spettatore una delle funzioni dell'Unione Europea, quella dell'unità dei cittadini di diversi paesi per un'unica causa. Proprio come il sistema ferroviario unisce nazioni, un'alleanza le unifica politicamente ed economicamente. Il costante passaggio dalle immagini vecchie a quelle contemporanee inoltre trasmette l'idea dell'importanza del passato per capire il presente (127) (Tradotto in italiano da F. Laviosa).[23]

Le riprese sono state effettuate all'interno della storica littorina ALn 776.1001 conservata presso la sede espositiva del Museo Ferroviario Piemontese di Savigliano. La metafora del viaggio, grazie anche ai preziosi materiali raccolti dall'Archivio Nazionale del Cinema d'Impresa e dall'Archivio della Fondazione FS, fa da contrappunto alle voci narranti delle tre passeggere.

Da diversi anni, Piovano organizza I giorni di Orosia[24] e ha lanciato l'inizativa #greeneyes.[25] Nel 2020 ha anche istituito Cine-Room, il cinema in una stanza, la piattaforma online di KitchenFilm ed anche NO.MAD Entertainment che offre cinema d'autore.[26] Altre attività di particolare interesse sono le tavole rotonde virtuali da lei organizzate come per esempio "Cinema secondo natura" della campagna GreenEyes[27] improntata al New Normal (modello di crescita basato sulla qualità e non sulla quantità), allo sguardo Green e al ritorno al senso di comunità, all'etica del lavoro, al ripopolamento dei piccoli centri e al rispetto per gli animali e la natura come illustrato nei film *Nessun uomo è un'isola* e *Petit Paysan* (Notari 2021).

Un'altra tavola rotonda realizzata nel 2020 è stata "Il cinema fa scuola."[28] Piovano spiega che questa iniziativa è rivolta

a riflettere sulla necessità di far entrare il cinema nelle scuole non solo come momento di intrattenimento mediante le matineé, ma come strumento didattico utile ai fini della formazione degli uomini e delle donne di domani. Perché il cinema, oltre a essere un potente mezzo di espressione e comunicazione, ha la capacità di metterci in contatto con il reale e con la sua infinita varietà. È un occhio sul mondo e nella presente condizione di incertezza e fragilità che ci ha fatto riscoprire umani può rivelarsi un potente strumento per osservare la realtà e capire dove andare. La Scuola dovrebbe rappresentare la nave, il mezzo di trasporto di questo viaggio imprevedibile e irrinunciabile (Piovano 2020).[29]

Nel 2011 Emanuela Piovano è stata insignita del primo Premio Intervita dedicato alle figure del cinema. In questa intervista

l'artista ripercorre la sua carriera poliedrica di regista, produttrice, *autora* e intellettuale del cinema al femminile.

Intervista 16 giugno 2019, Roma

Laviosa: Emanuela, puoi parlare della tua formazione artistica e delle persone che ti hanno ispirata nelle scelte professionali?

Piovano: Io faccio parte della prima generazione che ha potuto imparare cinema all'università. A Torino, nel 1980, quando mi iscrissi, c'era la cattedra di Storia e Critica del Cinema di Gianni Rondolino che era in realtà una dipendenza della cattedra di Storia del Teatro di Gian Renzo Morteo (1924-1989). C'erano all'epoca non più di una mezza dozzina di cattedre di cinema in Italia: quella di Pio Baldelli (1923-2005) a Firenze, che però era già Scienze e Comunicazione di Massa, e quelle di Gianfranco Bettetini (1933-2017) a Milano, Guido Aristarco (1918-1996) a Magistero a Torino e Ester Carla de Miro d'Ajeta a Genova. Sarebbe interessante capire come Aristarco ottenne quella cattedra. Dico questo perché era un'epoca in cui il cinema era appannaggio di un'esperienza di bottega, quindi chi faceva cinema andava a Roma, come accadde ad Emilio Greco (1938-2012), di Torino, un regista della generazione immediatamente precedente la mia che è andato a Roma per frequentare il Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. A partire dagli anni Ottanta, si creò una generazione, a livello mondiale che imparò il cinema dai VHS, come, ad esempio, Quentin Tarantino, oppure si formò attraverso le cattedre di cinema. Io appartengo a quest'ultimo gruppo di allievi. In realtà, non volevo laurearmi in cinema, bensì in estetica. Venni però travolta dall'entusiasmo che sprigionavano i gruppi che a Torino cominciavano a sperimentare con le prime macchine da presa e facevano parte del "cinema militante," come si diceva allora. C'era il gruppo Cinema e Storia, un gruppo internazionale che veniva a Torino a dare dei seminari molto interessanti. Ero affascinata dall'idea del cinema come testimonianza, come riflessione sull'esistenza. In quel momento pensavo che avrei fatto la scrittrice, ma venni travolta dal mezzo cinematografico e iniziai al mio primo anno di università a seguire seminari con Rondolino. Poi mi sono imbattuta nell'Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza, che allora era un gruppo incredibile e poco istituzionale, capeggiato da Paolo Gobetti, figlio di Piero (1901-1926), *l'enfant prodige* immolato

637

all'antifascismo, la cui madre fu una delle prime vicesindaco d'Italia a Torino. È inoltre importante ricordare il gruppo del Liceo D'Azeglio, di Augusto Monti (1881-1966), gruppo che ha formato la classe dirigente italiana che faceva capo al Partito d'Azione, partito allo stesso tempo rivoluzionario e liberale. Paolo Gobetti era un personaggio sui generis. È stato il primo critico cinematografico del quotidiano *l'Unità* e ha fondato nel 1952 la rivista *Cinema Nuovo* insieme a Guido Aristarco, il critico italiano più noto e probabilmente l'unico tradotto in altre lingue. Aristarco era, inoltre, un insegnante dell'Accademia dei Lincei. Tuttavia, essendo rimasto stalinista e molto legato all'Unione Sovietica, ebbe una sorta di parabola discendente e fu in parte sconfessato dai suoi stessi allievi. Bisogna sottolineare che i Fratelli Taviani forse non sarebbero esistiti senza Aristarco, un vero attivista e critico, uno che formava gli autori. Dopo la separazione da Aristarco, Gobetti fondò nel 1963 la rivista *Il nuovo spettatore cinematografico*. Nell'archivio, oltre a Paolo Gobetti, lavorava Bruno Gambarotta (1937) che sarebbe poi diventato un comico ma era originariamente un regista serio, divertente e buffo, colto e brillante che si occupava di cinema e storia. C'erano anche Paola Casorati, Paola Olivetti che utilizzavano la macchina da presa come indagine sul mondo e poi studiavano gli autori. Noi giovani scaricavamo i film, poi li riversavamo per togliere le pubblicità, li studiavamo, li decostruivamo, li montavamo. Allora non c'erano programmi di editing digitale, quindi si utilizzavano le AMPEX, macchine dismesse dalla Rai, enormi e con bobine e spinotti che non esistono più, oggi si usano le schede o i circuiti stampati. Paolo Gobetti mi aveva molto a cuore e mi aveva messo a disposizione uno stipendio purché lavorassi con loro perché parlavo le lingue ed ero abbastanza intraprendente. Svolgevo lavori di segreteria spicciola e mi dedicavo alla redazione del *Nuovo spettatore*. Quando finalmente arrivava la sera, avevo le chiavi e chiedevo che mi lasciassero lavorare sulle mie prime sperimentazioni, in genere dei montaggi.

LAVIOSA: Potresti raccontare come incomincia la tua carriera di regista?

PIOVANO: Incominciai a fare delle interviste e delle piccole rappresentazioni, approdate in seguito alla mia esperienza

con Gabriella Rosaleva e con la regia di *Senza fissa dimora* per la Rai nel 1987. In quel periodo, oltre a Paolo Gobetti, c'erano Gianni Rondolino, assistente di Gian Renzo Morteo che divenne titolare di cattedra alla fine degli anni Ottanta, Guido Aristarco alla facoltà di Magistero e il capostruttura Cesare Dapino (1939-2019) al centro di produzione Rai di Torino. La Rai ci ingaggiava perché scrivessimo dei piccoli soggetti, loro li valutavano e, per quelli che venivano selezionati, mettevano a disposizione troupe, produzione e un budget per assumere gli esterni. Facevamo degli esperimenti che racchiudevano le varie fasi della lavorazione. In seguito, feci il mio primo cortometraggio, *Senza fissa dimora*, che fu ricevuto molto bene. Paolo Gobetti mi fece partecipare al Festival di Salsomaggiore che allora era importantissimo perché era un'epoca che risentiva della contestazione del '68 al Festival di Venezia. Intraprendere una carriera da regista era l'ultimo dei miei pensieri. La mia idea era invece quella di documentare la Storia, volevo fare video di documentazione. La mia maestra Annabella Miscuglio all'epoca era sotto processo per il film *A.A.A. Offresi*, girato per Rai 2, ma mai andato in onda perché accusato di sfruttamento della prostituzione. Miscuglio aveva chiesto a un'amica di prestarsi per fare delle interviste ai clienti con una telecamera nascosta. Questo le costò un'interrogazione parlamentare, con processi per tutti e tre i gradi per 10 anni, e, anche se tutte le volte fu assolta, nel frattempo si bruciò la carriera. Quindi nacque, in quel momento, un dibattito su fino a dove ci si potesse spingere con il nostro lavoro perché fosse libera espressione. Il Festival di Salsomaggiore era un punto di riferimento per questo dibattito, perciò all'epoca era più interessante di quello di Venezia. Ricordo che era presente Adriano Aprà (1940), un guru tra i critici alternativi che avevano messo in discussione la generazione precedente e iniziavano a fare una critica più strutturalista e meno ideologica. Proponevano molto lavoro sul testo, sulla regia, sul linguaggio. Guido Aristarco è stato molto importante per me, pur non avendolo avuto direttamente come professore perché ero studentessa di Lettere. Ricordo di essere andata a parecchi incontri che lui teneva con importanti registi italiani che venivano a Torino. Eppure, ancora più importante per noi era Adriano Aprà, molto aperto anche agli autori del cinema *off* americano, Jim Jarmusch per esempio. Ricordo un

film che fu fondamentale nella mia formazione: *Born in Flames* (1983) di Lizzie Borden. Lizzie Borden era lo pseudonimo della regista americana Linda Elizabeth Borden (1958) che, all'età di undici anni, prese il nome di Lizzie Borden (1860-1927), donna che aveva ucciso a colpi d'ascia il padre e la matrigna. Era una famosa assassina delle cronache nere americane. All'epoca c'erano le prime rassegne del cinema delle donne, alcune anche promosse da Annabella Miscuglio. Esisteva inoltre il Gruppo Comunicazione Visiva ed erano nati anche i primi cineclub a Torino. Il cinema stava diventando una scuola di vita, anche per chi non pesnava di fare il regista o trovare lavoro in questo ambito professionale. Ma, tornando a Salsomaggiore, Paolo Gobetti mi aveva mandato lì per fare un pezzo sulla sezione video, la prima sezione video del mondo, perché nel 1982 non c'erano ancora i video e cominciava a diffondersi la video art, come Nam June Paik (1932-2006) che faceva le installazioni. Si pensava che il video avrebbe portato una rivoluzione anche linguistica, quindi non era pensato per la televisione.

LAVIOSA: Dopo questo inizio come regista, come incomincia la tua esperienza di produttrice?

PIOVANO: Quando però iniziai a partecipare alla rassegna sul video la trovai di una noia mortale, i sistemi di proiezione, per di più, non erano messi a punto. Una sera, dopo il lavoro andai nella saletta, non c'era nessuno, ma si stava proiettando un video stupendo. Scoprii che era di una regista e provai un grande entusiasmo per la scoperta di un linguaggio cinematografico femminile. Fu così che conobbi Gabriella Rosaleva, autrice del video, che mi invitò alla proiezione del suo film l'indomani, nella sala grande, dove sarebbe stato presentato da Adriano Aprà. La sala era piena perché dopo ci sarebbe stato Samuel Fuller, una delle icone del cinema americano di serie B, poi rivalutato dalla critica. Finita la *Trilogia* di Gabriella Rosaleva,[30] Adriano salì sul palco e disse: "Voglio presentarvi questa regista perché per me è una delle speranze del cinema italiano, e tra l'altro è qui perché cerca un produttore. Gabriella, quanto hai speso per questi film?", e lei rispose: "500.000 lire", che già all'epoca erano pochissimi. E Aprà: "Allora ci sarà qualcuno nella sala che ha voglia di investire 500.000 lire per il suo prossimo film [...]". E io, come in un film, alzai la mano pensando che tutti quanti

avrebbero fatto lo stesso, e invece l'avevo alzata solo io, perché in realtà tutti aspettavano Fuller. La sala si riempì di risate e Adriano disse: "Bene, vedo che hai già trovato un produttore!" Allora Gabriella scese dal palco, venne da me e mi disse: "Cara, cara! Andiamo a berci un caffè!", chiaramente accettai. Io avevo appena fondato una comune insieme ad alcuni amici e avevo appena fatto il passo di andarmene dalla famiglia, avevo 21 anni e la mia mamma non mi parlava più per questo, mi aveva quasi diseredato. Invece il mio papà mi sosteneva dato il contesto culturale e politico di quegli anni ed era contento che io fossi andata a vivere in una valle, allontanandomi un po' da Torino. Dopo l'episodio con Gabriella gli telefonai e gli raccontai del guaio in cui mi ero cacciata. Avevo un rapporto molto bello con lui. Lui mi disse: "Guarda, Emanuela, fai conto che io ti paghi una scuola di cinema. Quanto costa una scuola di cinema? Io ti darò quella somma, e poi vedrai tu se investirla nella produzione del film o in qualcos'altro." E così fu: contrubuii alla produzione di *Processo a Caterina Ross* grazie ai soldi che mio padre mi diede. Era un film talmente indipendente e fuori dagli schemi che dovetti impegnarmi nella sua promozione. Telefonavo a tutti i cineclub e andavo in giro per tutta la penisola. Allora Gabriella Rosaleva, che era un po' particolare e aveva 20 anni più di me, mi disse: "Emanuela, tu sai che io non parlo l'inglese, vacci tu a New York!" Perciò andai anche a New York per la promozione del film. Poi portai Gabriella a Torino a lavorare in un laboratorio che aveva creato Rondolino con il centro di produzione Rai, e lei, a sua volta, mi coinvolse come autore di testi, finché non feci la mia prima regia. Inizialmente volevo fare il concorso in Rai, però c'erano solo tre posti, perciò decisi di non parteciparvi e di lasciare questa occasione alle mie amiche di Camera Woman che ne avevano più bisogno.

Laviosa: Come è nata l'idea di fondare la casa di produzione KitchenFilm?

Piovano: Ho fondato KitchenFilm e il primo film che ho prodotto è *Le rose blu*. Volevo fortemente che fosse un film collettivo e quindi l'ho filmato con Anna Gasco e Tiziana Pellerano, anche se poi Anna e Tiziana non erano d'accordo su come l'avevo montato e quindi si ritirarono. Alla fine, dovetti assumermene la responsabilità, ma fu comunque un lavoro di gruppo, ci tengo

a sottolinearlo. Per quanto riguarda *Le rose blu*, fu un film molto in anticipo rispetto al suo tempo. Un selezionatore del Festival di Cannes mi convocò per questo film, perché secondo lui i film si sarebbero fatti così nei tempi a venire. Io allora volevo stare a Torino, non volevo andare a Roma a lavorare perché per me il vero cinema non era quello romano. Secondo me il cinema doveva ripartire da realtà come quelle di Torino, Bologna, Milano. Quello che stavamo vivendo in quel momento erano i nuovi centri di produzione Rai, da cui sarebbero scaturite le Film Commissions e la nuova ondata di scuole regionali. Dato che non volli andare a Roma per parlare con chi mi aveva consigliato il selezionatore di Cannes, mi feci sfuggire la grande occasione di partecipare a Cannes, e me ne sono sempre pentita. In alternativa partecipai al Festival delle Donne di Créteil e ricordo che qualche anno fa, a una cena con un altro selezionatore di Cannes, costui mi chiese: "Ma tu sei quella che ha fatto *Le rose blu* e che ha scelto Créteil invece di Cannes?" e si fece una risata, come se io fossi una pazza. Mi giustificai dicendo che non era andata proprio così, che a Cannes sarei andata volentieri ma ero molto giovane, senza qualcuno che mi consigliasse. In ogni caso, è una cosa che un po' mi pesa e che ho pagato.

Laviosa: Come procede la tua carriera dopo queste esperienze?

Piovano: Devo aggiungere qualcosa. Secondo Aristarco, che era a capo della commissione dei Premi di Qualità, *Le rose blu*, era un capolavoro, e quindi lui ci assegnò un Premio di Qualità. I Premi di Qualità all'epoca li davano a 10 film all'anno e consistevano in una somma di danaro piuttosto elevata. Quello stesso anno lo vinsero anche Federico Fellini e i Fratelli Taviani. Fu incredibile vincere così tanti soldi per un film costato pochissimo. Mia madre, che non era mai stata d'accordo con la mia scelta di carriera, improvvisamente cambiò parere e si mostrò orgogliosa di me. Ci fu poi l'epoca di Tangentopoli. In quel periodo fui convocata e mi dissero: "adesso abbiamo bisogno di gente come voi." Da allora cominciai a lavorare seriamente e dovetti trasferire KitechnFilm a Roma perché era importante essere a Roma. Lì feci 5 film fino a quello su *Simone Weil*, il primo film non romano perché tornai a Torino per girarlo. Rividi i miei compagni torinesi che, a distanza di 20 anni, si erano affermati come tecnici grazie alla Film Commission e alla ricostruzione di

Torino. Io sono produttrice nel senso che ho sempre prodotto i film che faccio, ma non mi sono mai definita soltanto una cosa. Oggi sembra che i produttori debbano fare solo i produttori, i registi solo i registi, gli sceneggiatori solo gli sceneggiatori. Io appartengo a quella scuola per cui il cinema è una attività molto artigianale, e anche con budget minimi si poteva raggiungere un risultato soddisfacente. Negli anni Ottanta, quando non avevamo i soldi, comunque mettevamo insieme le idee e con una piccola macchina da presa producevamo delle cose molto interessanti. Quello era il cinema, non era iscriversi alla scuola di scrittura e poi essere selezionati per un concorso. Era indubbiamente un contesto diverso. Quindi il dibattito è ancora aperto: il cinema deve essere una cosa industriale o deve essere un prototipo? Io appartengo alla scuola che propende per il prototipo. Ho cercato di mettere in piedi una piccola organizzazione che ho sempre pensato somigliasse a uno studio di architettura più che a una vera e propria impresa cinematografica.

Laviosa: Nei tuoi film, le scelte di personaggi e temi sono coerenti con la formazione tecnica e culturale dell'epoca durante la quale hai fatto le tue esperienze artistiche e politiche. Queste scelte appartengono a un filone preciso?

Piovano: Per quanto riguarda *Le rose blu*, ho seguito un filone dell'epoca che era al centro di una ricerca partita con Camera Woman, con *Processo per stupro*, con il femminismo degli anni Ottanta. Non avevo in mente di fare un film di sole donne, però la cosa bella è che è nato come una scelta obbligata dato che il carcere era occupato esclusivamente da donne. Ero stata invitata da loro a lavorare nel carcere in quanto fondatrice di Camera Woman. La caratteristica vincente di *Le rose blu* è che si è lavorato sulla doppia mascherata. Era, cioè, un film che parlava delle donne, mentre parlava in realtà del carcere. Invece, per quanto riguarda *Amorfù*, dalla sceneggiatura di Massimo Felisatti, volevo raccontare la mia esperienza con la malattia mentale perché ho ospitato a casa mia, in campagna in Piemonte, per 15 anni, una comunità di ex-internati in manicomio. Nel 1978, con la legge 180, i manicomi sono stati chiusi e io ho ospitato i primi usciti dal manicomio in casa mia, quindi ho un rapporto molto profondo con le persone che soffrono di malattie mentali. Avevo in mente che il protagonista dovesse essere il ragazzo.

Poi ho presentato il progetto alla commissione ministeriale, allora diretta da Callisto Cosulich (1922-2015), un altro grande maestro, e mi ricordo che, quando mi chiamò al telefono, rimasi stupefatta. Tra l'altro io non lo conoscevo personalmente, e mi era rimasto impresso un suo commento su un'altra regista: "Basta con queste esili operine al femminile." Invece, con mia grande sorpresa, ho scoperto che lui aveva visto tutti i miei film ed era un mio grande estimatore. Dunque in quell'occasione mi disse: "Piovano, poi lei con quella sua mano farà sicuramente di questa dottoressa un personaggio." Io risposi: "Ma guardi, per me il protagonista è il ragazzo, non la ragazza." E sentii come una delusione in questo importante signore del cinema italiano, allora aggiunsi: "No, no, ma comunque certamente la dottoressa ha la sua importanza." A quel punto realizzai che sono le idee a trovare me, non viceversa. A un certo punto capita che siano le cose esterne a trainarmi e a convincermi che ci sono dei bisogni che devo ascoltare e seguire. C'è sicuramente anche una vocazione in me, però lascio che le cose mi parlino e mi lascio coinvolgere da loro.

LAVIOSA: Come nasce il film *L'età d'oro*?

PIOVANO: Il mio ultimo film, *L'età d'oro*, nasce come una sorta di debito che avevo insieme alla critica Silvana Silvestri nei confronti della nostra maestra e amica Annabella Miscuglio e anche nei confronti della giovane Francesca Romana Massaro.[31] Ho messo insieme una equipe con Francesca, Silvana e Gualtiero Rosella, per fare un omaggio alla cineasta pugliese. Il film è uscito nel decennale dalla sua morte nel 2016, per l'esattezza dopo 13 anni. La cosa bella di questo film è che per la prima volta ho cercato un casting importante che si è formato da solo perché queste persone hanno aderito spontaneamente all'appello di ricordare Annabella. Nel film si parla di un modo di vivere e di fare cinema che è difficile da conciliare con la famiglia. *L'età d'oro* è sul rapporto madre-figlio. Il figlio Sid non hai mai voluto accettare una madre così creativa e destrutturata e, a sua volta, Annabella non accettava il bisogno di sicurezza del figlio. In questo film ho voluto raccontare questo conflitto piuttosto che fare una biografia. Questo è il film più importante che abbia fatto perchè ha un casting importante, le musiche sono di Franco Piersanti, uno dei miti del cinema ed è una coproduzione con la Francia. Il titolo è un omaggio a Luis Buñuel perché nel film si

parla di queste serate in onore di Buñuel de *L'age d'or*.

LAVIOSA: Questo film contribuisce a ricordare e documentare la figura della Miscuglio regista e attivista?

PIOVANO: Sì, perché qualcuno la studiasse, l'approfondisse veramente. Ci sono dei documentari su di lei molto belli che consiglio di andare a vedere perché è stata una delle fondatrici del Filmstudio di Roma, è stata parte importante della storia del cinema censurato da una nazione che ha voluto nascondere i propri panni sporchi e proporre solo un vecchio tipo di cinema.

LAVIOSA: Nei tuoi film le protagoniste sono personaggi che rischiano, che non conoscono limiti. C'è un filo conduttore tra queste donne?

PIOVANO: Non ci avevo mai pensato, ma è proprio così, ed è bello che sia così. Sono tutte delle eroine che hanno rischiato qualcosa. L'idea era sempre quella di descrivere delle cose che non erano state ancora descritte. Quando tu cerchi di mettere nel buio un fascio di luce, rischi sempre di non vedere quello che stai cercando. Forse, per vederlo, occorre che ciò che stai cercando faccia rumore, che gridi, devi essere in grado di fare luce sugli aspetti border, altrimenti non vedi la differenza. È come se le cose diverse, premonitrici, che sono spesso solo delle sentinelle, siano cose che prima o poi verranno fuori se le sai guardare senza ricacciarle indietro. Vengo da una generazione un po' strutturalista, quindi tendo a vedere più i sistemi che le dinamiche singole. Per trovare delle figure non classiche bisogna cercarle dove è più difficile stare: è come una piantina che sta lì sul bordo del fiume e che tutti calpestano e non si spiegano perché questa sopravviva. E invece quella sopravvive, proprio perché sta sul bordo. È una visione strutturalista dell'eroismo. Però è anche vero che là dove ci sia una sorta di eroismo, là dove ci sia un aver varcato i confini, c'è anche la ridefinizione di nuove forme di vita. Oltretutto, dato che le donne hanno sempre vissuto in una condizione di non libertà e in certi casi di cattività, hanno dovuto cercare la libertà negli spazi disponibili, dove si poteva. Esiste tutto un filone sulla pazzia come espressione di libertà e la storia della follia femminile racconta proprio questo: che forse la creatività femminile in certi contesti non ha altro modo per esprimersi. Quindi lavorare sulla follia delle donne può risultare molto interessante per tutti.

Note

[1] La prestigiosa testata fondata e diretta da Paolo Gobetti e uscita dal 1962 al 1965. Dal 1988 Il nuovo spettatore si trasforma in un volume a periodicità annuale pubblicato dalla casa editrice Franco Angeli.

[2] "At the Archive, us young recruits learned the craft of the KINOKS, that is the KINO EYES, the camera persons imagined by Dziga Vertov, promoters of a cinema which seeks the truth." Translation into English by Glen Bonnici.

[3] Il film riproduce esattamente i verbali del processo svoltosi nel 1697 a Poschiavo-Brusio (Confederazione svizzera) contro Caterina Ross, una contadina di trentadue anni, di religione riformata, figlia e nipote di streghe e a sua volta accusata di stregoneria.

[4] Fondato nel 1971 da Woody e Steina Vasulka, The Kitchen è uno dei più antichi centri di New York dove si presentano i lavori sperimentali di autori emegenti e affermati in diverse espressioni artistiche.

[5] Omaggio al critico cinematografico Morando Morandini. Il cortometraggio è stato presentato al Festival della Critica Ring. https://www.kitchenfilm.eu/kitchenfilm.eu/eventi/Voci/2010/11/17_Milano_-_20_INVIDEO__Morandeide.html. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[6] Presentato nell'ambito di "10autori per Ballarò."

[7] Presentato all'Oberdan di Milano e in diversi festival.

[8] Girato in 16 mm e allargato fino a 35 mm, distribuito da Airone.

[9] La regia del film era stata asseggnata ad Andrea Belli, ma poi è passata alla Piovano. Nel film una televisione privata indice un premio di 180 milioni per mettere in scena il racconto *La ragazza del mattino* di un famoso scrittore. Vince il premio una giovane regista, Luce, sostenuta dai critici che, per l'occasione, si reca a Roma. Il film ha ricevuto il premio Miglior Opera Originale Sulmona Film Festival e il premio Agis Scuola Firenze.

[10] Marta, sconvolta e impaurita, si precipita nell'ambulatorio dove Anna lavora e racconta di aver trovato un uomo morto. Presto si scoprirà che lo stesso uomo ha passato la notte con Anna e le due amiche sono le ultime persone ad averlo visto ancora in vita. Il film ha ricevuto il Premio del Pubblico Foggia Film Festival.

[11] Elena è una giovane specializzanda in psichiatria che sogna di recuperare i malati di mente come Fausto, un musicista estroso. Nasce tra i due una sana follia.

[12] Presentato al Festival di Montreal 2010, il film ha ricevuto il Globo d'Oro 2011 "film da non dimenticare" e il premio I've Seen Films - Spazio Donna.

[13] Girato a Parigi al Île Seguin, la ex-sede della fabbrica di auto Renault, che era stata trasformata in un'isola di arte e scienza, il documentario rac-

conta i mesi durante i quali la Weil aveva lavorato in tre diverse fabbriche tra il 4 dicembre 1934 e il 23 agosto 1935.

[14] "without in fact being able to recapture the strength of her thinking" (Bazin 138).

[15] Nel giorno del suo diciottesimo compleanno Mithi, una ragazza indiana nata in Italia, viene portata dal padre Dilip in un posto misterioso. La ragazza deve indovinare e, quando risuonano le note di una fanfare, crede che il padre l'abbia portata ad un'audizione perché il suo sogno è fare la cantante. Grande delusione quando scopre invece di essere nella sala d'attesa di un Ufficio Cittadinanze e che le note della fanfara sono l'Inno di Mameli di accompagnamento al giuramento degli stranieri aventi diritto. Riluttante, Mithi aspetta il suo turno e intanto osserva gli altri in attesa. Ting Ting, ragazza cinese che, per un giorno di ritardo nella consegna del modulo, non ha diritto alla cittadina italiana. Ambra, ragazza somala che non riesce a documentare la sua permanenza in Italia dalla nascita. Elena, cantante soul, Yang, fratello di Ting Ting che vuole invece rimanere cinese, ma è tifoso della Roma e di Totti, e perfino il suo fidanzato italiano Gabriele venuto per festeggiare, ma che vorrebbe convincerla a rinunciare per andare con lui in India. Mithi è confusa, spaesata e arrabbiata perché il padre non le aveva mai detto che non era italiana. Il vicesindaco la chiama pronunciando male il suo cognome. Mithi è dibattuta. Ma alla fine è una questione di orgoglio. Diventare italiana è anche riconoscere la propria origine, non solo il proprio futuro.

[16] Cortometraggio creato per la seconda edizione del Premio Melograno – "Nuove italiane crescono – le giovani immigrate protagoniste dell'Italia e dell'Europa che cambia," promosso dalla Fondazione Nilde Iotti che si è celebrata presso l'Auditorium del Museo Maxxi di Roma il 14 dicembre 2013.

[17] Testo originale in inglese: "Being its target audience probably as wide as possible, this short has a certain explanatory imprint, but it nevertheless succeeds in its intent: the film shows the sharp disparity in the civil right to citizenship between Italian kids with Italian parents and Italian kids with foreign parents."

[18] Presentato a: BIF&ST 2016; Annecy Cinéma Italien anteprima 2017; Festival International du film des villes Jumelées 2019; Semaine du Cinéma Italien 2019 Lido de Castres.

[19] Presentato al convegno L'Europa delle Donne e organizzato dalla Fondazione Nilde Iotti presso la Casa Internazionale delle Donne a Roma, e per *Madri delle Storie* al 41° Festival Internazionale di Cinema e Donne di Firenze nel 2019. *Tre in treno* è anche stato presentato alla seconda edizione del convegno del *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* "Global Intersections and Artistic Interconnections: Italian Cinema and Media Across

Times and Spaces," svoltosi presso The American University of Rome il 14-15 giugno 2019. https://www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/assets/departments/italian/files/jicms_2019_program_final.pdf. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[20] http://www.silviacosta.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/convegno-donne-europa_04.pdf. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[21] https://www.fiftm.it/2019/05/22/un-corto-sulleuropa-girato-al-museo-ferroviario-piemontese/. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[22] https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/file/repository/relazioni/libreria/novita/XVII/Per_unEuropa_libera_e_unita_Ventotene6.763_KB.pdf. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[23] Testo originale "*Tre in Treno* relies on two predominant filmmaking techniques to tell its story. The first of these is found footage. Throughout the film's 15-minutes the images continually transition from scenes taking place in the present-day, and black and white scenes from earlier movies. Some of these images depict passengers travelling by rail, while others show the physical construction of train tracks and bridges. The use of found footage is a very effective technique for reminding the viewer of one of the European Union's key functions, that of uniting the citizens of different countries in a common cause. Just as a railway network literally brings nations together, an alliance joins them both politically and economically. The constant transitioning between old and new footage also conveys an idea of the past's importance for understanding the present-day (Annunziato 127)."

[24] https://ilblogdiorosia.wordpress.com/. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[25] https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/nanipiovano%40gmail.com/p2?projector=1. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[26] https://kitchenfilm.blog/tag/no-mad-entertainment/. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

[27] https://www.facebook.com/111319987266121/videos/603076460628020/ https://youtu.be/aOkIxWgXWfQ. Consultato 11 novembre 2020.

La tavola rotonda è stata moderata dalla critica cinematografica Caterina Taricano e sono intervenuti gli ospiti:

- Dominique Marchais, Regista *Nessun uomo è un'isola*
- Anselme Bakudila, Ufficio Comunicazione di Slow Food Italia
- Paola Cambria, CIA Confederazione Agricoltori Italiani
- Roberto Li Calzi, Rappresentante Consorzio siciliano Le Galline Felici
- Francesco Martinotti, Regista, produttore, direttore del Festival France Odeon di Firenze
- Steve Della Casa, Critico cinematografico, conduttore di Hollywood Party su Rai Radio 3
- Emanuela Piovano, Regista, produttrice e distributrice della Kitchenfilm

- Lydia Genchi, Responsabile acquisizioni e vendite della NO.MAD Entertainment

[28] https://cine-room.com/live/ Consultato 12 novembre 2020.
La tavola rotonda è stata moderata dalla Emanuela Piovano e Lydia Genchi e sono intervenuti gli ospiti:

- Flavia Laviosa, Docente presso il Dipartimento di Italianistica e il Progamma di Cinema e Media a Wellesley College

- Nolwenn Delisle, Coordinatrice degli eventi culturali dell'Institut français - Centre Saint-Louis di Roma

- Letizia Giampietro, Funzionaria dell'INVALSI, responsabile progetto Cine e Scuola

- Matteo Bertolotti, Programmatore di IMAGICA FILM

- Monica Naldi, Responsabile Scuola Cinema Beltrade Milano

[29] Corrispondenza email con Piovano 20 ottobre 2020.

[30] *Cornelia, L'isola Virginia, La borsetta scarlatta* (1980-1981).

[31] La figlia di Gianni Massaro, l'avvocato del cinema italiano che remava contro perché amico di tutti gli autori che avevano dei problemi con la censura.

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Annunziato, Sarah. "Film Review *Tre in Treno per l'Europa (e un Pollo) Emanuela Piovano* (2019), Rome: KitchenFilm, 15:00 min." *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* 8:1. (2020): 126-127. Print.

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Reviews

Andrea Raimondi. *The Many Voices of Contemporary Piedmontese Writers.* Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

This volume provides an overview of the extremely lively literary landscape of Piedmont. In addition to some of the prominent names in the canon of the Italian *Novecento*, such as Pavese, Levi and Fenoglio, Piedmont is home to many writers of national interest today. Among others, Giuseppe Culicchia, Alessandro Baricco and Alessandro Perissinotto have reached commercial success, while receiving critical attention. Raimondi skillfully explores this diverse literary production, with five chapters covering the modern tradition of Piedmontese writers. Raimondi's intention is to "fill a gap" (xi) in the current scholarly offer, providing a study of Piedmontese writers that encompasses the two traditions mentioned above, while intertwining the sociohistorical background of Piedmont and strictly linguistic elements.

Chapter One, "Piedmont's Linguistic Variety and Literary Production," provides an overview of the linguistic features and the literary production that characterized the region from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The problematic concept of "region" is one of the challenges this chapter tackles, remarking on the pivotal role Piedmont has played in key political and cultural phenomena, particularly in relation to the process of nation building. In the bigger picture of historical and cultural transformations, Piedmont emerges as a peculiar case, being central to the destiny of the peninsula but simultaneously being open to foreign influences. Raimondi remarks on linguistical separations as being indicative of social hierarchies, with French being mostly reserved to upper classes, local parlances to lower classes, and Latin being (until the sixteenth century) the language of the written codes, being used by churchmen and diplomats (3). This part leans strongly towards a linguistic reading of historical events, focusing on the role language played in several political transformations, particularly the circumstances that brought to the unification of Italy and its direct aftermath, in connection with the industrial growth the area displayed in the second half of the 1800s. Raimondi finishes this chronological overview with

the social transformations that occurred in the twentieth century, marked by the presence of predominant companies such as Fiat and Olivetti, the editorial activity of Gramsci and Gobetti, and the contradictory relation between fascism and linguistic minorities, ostracized in the name of a standardization that proved unrealistic. In this section Raimondi accompanies the reader through several centuries with a smooth transition, despite the necessity to condense a discussion that could even be the topic of a separate volume.

The second chapter is titled "Subversive Writing: The Language of Alterity in Pavese's *Ciau Masino*." With it, Raimondi begins a linguistically close reading of contemporary texts. The chapter provides a Backtinian approach on alterity and the multiplicity of codes in a text that combines poetry and prose, in relation to the Americanization of Italian customs and language. Raimondi remarks on the function of otherness as an opposition between Italian (official) culture and what is perceived as foreign, clandestine or illegal, as exemplified by the case of anti-Fascist movements and associations. Pavese's collection of stories and poems illustrates the effects of American culture on Italians, particularly in regard to popular forms of cinema and music. Especially the use of English locutions and non-standard linguistic varieties is interpreted as a means through which to faithfully represent reality, "by showing the presence of different languages that correspond to other social realities, dissimilar voices, and worldviews" (57).

Chapter Three is titled "Beppe Fenoglio: Language and Identity in *I racconti del parentado*." It mostly focuses on the use of non-standard codes in Fenoglio's text, pointing out his inclusion of standard Italian, regional variations, archaic terms, neologisms and English words. This section also applies some important linguistic concepts, such as the opposition between realistic literary attempts and the impediment that would come from completely embracing them, which would imply the use of "hesitation pauses, false starts, and syntactic anomalies" (76). Advancing a parallelism with Giovanni Verga's *I Malavoglia* Raimondi reads, in the *Racconti del parentado*, the same attempt to avoid dialect, while rather filtering the vernacular of the Langhe through the Italian language. This chapter is supplemented by an accurate close reading of selected passages, particularly from Fenoglio's short stories.

The fourth chapter is titled "Continuity and Discontinuity in Piedmontese Literature of the 1960s and 1970s." It addresses the

consequences of the tremendous demographic growth of Turin, along with the effects that the economic boom, television and social unrest had on language. This part evinces the democratic effects of social protests, which allowed more and more blue-collar workers to familiarize with a political use of language in the form of union meetings, committees, assemblies and propaganda materials (100), remarking on the legacy left by Marxist terminology and Marcuse's philosophy of protest. Raimondi narrows down his focus to an interesting sub-genre: the "letteratura industriale" of Nanni Balestrini (*Vogliamo tutto*) and Primo Levi (*La chiave a stella*), which takes part in the same tradition as the novels of Ottieri and Volponi. This part reinforces the approach maintained throughout the volume, with linguistic analyses studied in relation to the social changes that occurred in Piedmont, referring to Turin as a prominent vertex of the *triangolo industriale*. The novels studied in this section evince the emergence of "alternative" voices, such as students and factory workers in the years of the protest, along with the survival of dialect in *La chiave a stella*.

Chapter Five, "Trends in Contemporary Narrative Production," addresses what happens once a territory so much influenced by industry is left without it in the strictly contemporary context. From a linguistic perspective, Raimondi isolates a tendency to avoid multilingualism in today's novelists, along with a "propensity for standardisation and linguistic semplification" (137). The final part of this chapter addresses the question of new immigration, with migrant literature being represented by Younis Tawfik's *La straniera*.

In conclusion, Raimondi's book certainly meets the goal the author established: to fill a gap in the scholarly market with a book that accompanies the reader through several stages in the transformation of Piedmontese literature and language. Particularly the simultaneous attention dedicated to linguistic and historical aspects is worth praising, and this book is definitely a welcome addition for literary historians and linguists, proposing an approach that could be repeated for other Italian regions.

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Rosamaria Loretelli, Riccardo Capoferro and John Dunkley (eds.). *The Criminal Question in the Public Sphere. Cesare Beccaria's "On Crimes and Punishments" and Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Two-Way Perspective.* Spec. issue of *Diciottesimo Secolo* 4 (2019).

First published in 1764, Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* ignited furious debates across Europe among judicial specialists and intellectuals, as well as the public, interested in questions of criminal law and the practice of penal reform. The treatise was quickly translated into French in December 1765 where it drew the attention of the *philosophes*, including Voltaire whose *Commentaire sur le Traité des délits et des peines* appeared in 1766. Rosamaria Loretelli and John Dunkley remind readers of the prominent place granted *Dei delitti* in French scholarship in their introduction to the special issue of *Diciottesimo Secolo* dedicated to Beccaria. While the impact of Beccaria's celebrated treatise on French philosophy and judicial thought in the years following its initial publication and subsequent translation into French has been amply addressed, Loretelli and Dunkley point out that the influence of *Dei delitti* in Great Britain has been critically overlooked. The treatise was first translated into English by an anonymous translator in 1767, and its tenets, as the issue will go on to demonstrate, are arguably seen to percolate through the writings of William Blackstone, Jeremy Bentham, Oliver Goldsmith, and Manasseh Dawes, among others. Loretelli and Dunkley therefore characterize the scope of the issue as opening up "lines of inquiry into the relationship between *Dei delitti* and Britain" (9). The issue, however, makes it a point to limit its assessment of Beccaria's impact on Britain to the two decades immediately following the treatise's initial translation into English. Additionally, the issue posits the exchanges between Beccaria and Britain as a sort of "two-way relation" (3); nevertheless, the majority of the essays deals with the Italian jurist's reception in Britain and with the influence of his thought on such areas as legal theory and practice, as well as literary and encyclopedic writings.

The issue opens with several analyses of Beccaria's perception and appreciation of English thought while writing *Dei delitti*. In "Beccaria e Inghilterra," Gianni Francioni investigates the possible English sources for the treatise and argues that through his participation in the Accademia dei Pugni, whose members produced "Il Caffè," the most important magazine of the Lombard Enlightenment, the Italian jurist would have been introduced to

and read, albeit in translation, a wide variety of English writers, including Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. While Francioni notes that Beccaria routinely avoided naming his sources and owes a clear debt to French thinkers such as Montesquieu and Helvétius, the author suggests that the spirit of Beccaria's utilitarian contractarianism, derived from Hobbes and Locke, was largely informed by his reading of the philosopher Francis Hutcheson. Francioni concludes by arguing that Beccaria's ideas on political economy reveal the possible influence of such authors as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar.

Marialuisa Parise examines Beccaria's relationship with Bacon in "Beccaria e Bacon: una fonte inglese alle origini del *Dei delitti*?" and contends that the autograph codex of the *Excerpta baconiani*, first discovered in 1867, confirms Beccaria's fervent interest in the English philosopher. Parise retraces Beccaria's appreciation of Bacon through the epigrams included in *Dei delitti* before embarking on a concise philological analysis of the *Excerpta*, noting that Beccaria deliberately declined to transcribe the sections of Bacon's *Novum organum* that outline the English philosopher's general method and the relationship he establishes between the prelapsarian world and the anticipated *regnum hominis*. Although these omissions in the *Excerpta* indicate the areas of Baconian thought of little interest to Beccaria, Parise ends her analysis of the relationship between the two thinkers by demonstrating Bacon's influence on *Dei delitti*, most notably in the treatise's aphoristic style, its program for judicial reform, and its insistence on the certainty of the law.

In "Droit naturel et droit à la vie. Beccaria lecteur de Hobbes," Philippe Audegean argues for a direct Hobbesian influence, despite the rejection of Hobbes in the forward to *Dei delitti*, on Beccaria's elaboration of human beings' natural unsociability. Audegean reads *Dei delitti* as deliberately opposed to Hobbesian thought in its general refusal of natural law, except in its discussion of human beings' right to self-defense, and in its insistence that the state must exist prior to laws themselves.

The issue's following two essays pull back slightly from Beccaria to examine the broader Anglo-Italian exchanges in which members of the "Caffè" participated. In "Frisi, Beccaria, the Verris and the Fellows of the Royal Society," Manuela D'Amore analyzes Beccaria's peripheral connection to his English intellectual contemporaries at the Royal Society through the contacts established by Paolo Frisi and Alessandro and Pietro Verri. In "A Member of the Accademia

dei Pugni Translates Frances Brooke's *The History of Julia Mandeville.* From Giambattista Biffi's Manuscripts," Lia Guerra posits Biffi's incomplete and unpublished translation of Brooke's epistolary novel as further evidence of Italy's anglomania and its indirect influence on Beccaria.

Starting with Philip Schofield's "'The first steps rightly directed in the track of legislation': Jeremy Bentham on Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishment,*" the issue directs its attention to Beccaria's impact in Britain with the goal of deepening and diversifying scholarly understanding of Beccaria's influence in the immediate aftermath of the translation of Dei delitti into English. Schofield argues for Bentham as a more perceptive reader of Beccaria than previously thought, whose utilitarian theory was formulated, in part, as a result of his close reading of Beccaria's treatise and his reworking of several of the Italian jurist's ideas on legal reform. Bentham reappears in Luigi Ferrajoli's essay "Beccaria e Bentham" in which the scholar concludes that Beccaria espoused a more radical form of utilitarianism than Bentham in his advocation of a contractarianism that "tiene conto dell'utilità di tutti" (81), as opposed to that of the majority as in Bentham.

In "'Piecemeal, incremental, *ad hoc*': 'Beccarian' Experiments in Law Enforcement in Late Seventeenth-Century- and Early Eighteenth-Century England," Jeanne Clegg suggests that Beccaria's positive reception in Britain owed itself to the irregularly implemented preventative measures taken in the decades preceding the translation of *Dei delitti* and which anticipated some of the proposals put forth by Beccaria's treatise. The first translation of the treatise into English, which presents conspicuous modifications and transpositions of Beccaria's original passages, is the subject of Rosamaria Loretelli's essay "The First English Translation of the *Dei delitti e delle pene.* A Question of Sources and Modifications." In order to correct the traditional belief that the English translation was faithful to the Italian original, Loretelli argues that the first English translation of *Dei delitti* represents a "hybrid case" (106), since the translator availed himself of both the sixth edition of the Italian original from 1766 and the French translation produced by André Morellet in late 1765.

The issue furthers its examination of Beccaria's reception in Britain in John D. Bessler's essay "The Marquis Beccaria: An Italian Penal Reformer's Meteoric Rise in the British Isles in the Transatlantic Republic of Letters." Bessler extends the discussion

of Beccaria's initial reception in Britain to the British colonies and pays close attention to the numerous editions the work enjoyed not only in England but also in Ireland and America.

Because several of the essays previously cited address Beccaria's impact on noted British philosophers, it is in keeping with this line of inquiry that Emilio Mazza analyzes the reception of the Italian jurist on the part of David Hume and the painter and political writer Allan Ramsay. While it is established that Ramsay read and criticized *Dei delitti*, there is only tenuous evidence to suggest that Hume actually read Beccaria despite the assertion made in a letter written to Beccaria by André Morellet. Furthermore, as Mazza points out through an analysis of Hume's writings, the Scottish philosopher did not have Beccaria in mind when critiquing the death penalty.

The final three essays of the issue highlight Beccaria's impact on Britain's approach to legal and penal reform. In "Crime, Punishment, and Law in Eighteenth-Century British Encyclopedias," Elisabetta Lonati makes a select study of British encyclopedias to chart the changing relationship of certain key terms such as *crime, punishment* to the concepts of *law* and *justice* following the appearance of the English translation of Beccaria's treatise in Britain. In "Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments,*" Barbara Witucki analyzes Oliver Wakefield's possible incorporation of Beccarian thought in his novel's call for penal reform. Finally, in "Tra filosofia e diritto. Il pensiero critico-riformista di Manasseh Dawes, studioso di Beccaria," Alberto Carrera traces the barrister Manasseh Dawes's ethico-religious elaboration of Beccaria's reflections on the death penalty and suicide in *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments, with a view of, and Commentary upon Beccaria, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Fielding, and Blackstone*, published in 1782.

With its aim of interrogating the "two-way relation" between Beccaria and Britain, the issue makes a strong case for an understudied aspect of the intellectual exchanges between Italy and Britain in the eighteenth century. While it devotes considerable attention to the possible English sources of *Dei delitti*, along with the influence of anglomania on Beccaria and his intellectual milieu, it more successfully argues for the profound and lasting impact of Beccaria's treatise on British legal reform, already debated, as well as partially under way, by the time *Dei delitti* was translated into English. The issue thus poses Britain as a crucial avenue of inquiry

for Beccarian scholars and opens up questions and problems concerning Beccaria's reception in eighteenth-century Britain as tantalizing topics of future and more detailed study.

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Anna Carocci. *Il poema che cammina. La letteratura cavalleresca nell'opera dei pupi.* Palermo: Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2019.

Published just one year after *Rerum palatinorum fragmenta* (Antonio Pasqualino's posthumous notes on Giusto Lodico's *La storia dei paladini di Francia* edited and supplemented by Alessandro Napoli), this volume further demonstrates the originality and impact of Lodico's monumental prose compilation. Carocci's close study of both traditional puppet theater scripts and select contemporary plays offers, moreover, a sustained account of how *La storia dei paladini* and other literary sources were used by puppeteers of the past and present. Along with the writings of Pasqualino and Napoli, *Il poema che cammina* is an indispensable guide to understanding late nineteenth-century popular culture, the narratives staged in Italian/Sicilian puppet theater, and the trajectory of this unique performance tradition over the past two centuries.

The study is divided into two parts outlining the various stages in the adaptation of medieval and Renaissance chivalric epics for the puppet theater stage. The first part deals with chivalric publications in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in particular, Lodico's extraordinary undertaking of transforming several epic poems into a single prose adaptation of considerable length. Carocci aims to reassess Lodico's contribution by focusing on his selection and blending of sources, extensive use of *entrelacement*, original additions, and narrative asides. Her careful textual analysis of a selection of Lodico's modifications with respect to his sources leads her to reflect that it might be more accurate to refer to Lodico as an author in his own right rather than a mere compiler (37).

Carocci supplies the most comprehensive list to date of Lodico's sources twenty fifteenth- and sixteenth-century poems in *ottava rima* (50) including sources she has newly identified. Among these

texts, she singles out Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* as the nucleus of the entire work: "è interessante sottolineare che l'intero repertorio di Lodico si costruisce intorno alla 'bella storia' di Orlando innamorato e poi furioso: mentre molti altri poemi vengono franti, smembrati e modificati, il nucleo Boiardo-Ariosto è riprodotto in modo fedele per intero e fin nei dettagli, seguendo la peculiare gestione narrativa dello spazio-tempo degli autori senza modifiche, spostamenti o tagli" (51). What is announced by Boiardo as an embarrasing parenthesis in Orlando's heroic trajectory becomes in Lodico's hands "il perno intorno a cui ruota il resto della narrazione: il cuore della *Storia* e il suo centro nevralgico" (51). As a result, all the other poems included are adapted to fit the Boiardan-Ariostean paradigm. This does not mean, however, that Lodico closely adhered to the tone of the two poems. Carocci points out, for instance, that Lodico omitted the irony and humor present in Boiardo and Ariosto and instead rendered the chivalric poems "nella loro forma più seria e nobilitante" (64).

Carocci's study evokes a lost cultural world, that of the serial novel, which was the format in which a whole series of chivalric narratives were published in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sicily (56). At the same time, she advances the original hypothesis that contrary to what scholars have assumed based on Giuseppe Pitré's statements *La storia dei paladini* was not first published in installments but appeared directly in a four-volume set. Also worthy of mention is her close attention to the text's editorial features, including its dimensions, copyright, illustrations, and notes (56-63).

Carocci also devotes attention to the *Storia dei paladini*'s publishing history, including successive editions by two different editors. While the two little-known pirated editions reworked by Pietro Manzanares (1886 and 1895) gained little traction, the expanded version of Giuseppe Leggio (first published in 1895-1896) became so popular that it was the only edition printed in successive decades all the way to the present. Comparing all three versions, Carocci credits Leggio with "un acuto istinto per la tipologia di episodi che potevano riscuotere successo presso i pupari, i *cuntisti* e il loro pubblico" (83) and notes that his additions figured among the most popular episodes in traditional puppet theater (see "L'editoria in piazza," especially 71-95).

The book's second part, which is dedicated to puppet theater

scripts and the plays themselves, begins with a portrait of the following puppet masters ("grandi pupari"): Raffaele Trombetta (Catania), the Argento family (Palermo), the Canino family (Partinico), Emanuele Macrì (Acireale), and Giacomo Cuticchio (Palermo). Subsequently, some attention is also given to the Mancuso family (Palermo). The biographies are concise and relevant to creating a context for the adaptation of the chivalric narratives in puppet theater. Carocci makes the important point that the puppeteers did not passively absorb the material, but actively refashioned it: "Le realtà e le vicende dei singoli pupari non costituiscono affatto un mero sfondo più o meno ricco di 'colore locale' su cui proiettare la fortuna dei romanzi cavallereschi in Sicilia: sono invece il fattore chiave, che determina la longevità, i modi e l'evoluzione di questa fortuna" (108). Nonetheless, since her selection of puppeteers could be conceived of as a Who's Who of sorts, it was disappointing that additional companies did not receive attention. In particular, I missed reading about the other "grande puparo" of the Cuticchio family, Giacomo's brother Girolamo (mentioned only in passing on pages 118 and 130), and the Vaccaro brothers of Siracusa, especially since their descendants have been carrying on the tradition with great skill and passion from 1999 right up to the present day. For more on these puppeteer families, one may read Marcella Croce's *Pupari: storia di Girolamo Cuticchio, dei pupi e di una tradizione* (Flaccovio, 2003), and Alfredo Mauceri, *Pupi siciliani: gesta e amori di cavalieri, dame e incantatori. Sicilian marionettes: deeds and loves of knights, dames and enchanters* (SIME books, 2017). On the other hand, the portrait of Antonio Pasqualino provided a very compelling conclusion to the series of biographies, especially since Carocci underscored how his activity as a scholar and supporter of puppet theater "non si sviluppa all'esterno e in parallelo al mondo dei pupari, ma al suo interno" (123-130).

Carocci's analysis of traditional puppet scripts is based primarily on four complete sets those of Gaspare Canino (Palermo), Natale Meli (Catania), Anna dell'Aquila (Puglia), and Giacomo Cuticchio (Palermo) along with a number of original scripts by Raffaele Trombetta (Catania). Since these puppet theater scripts are unedited and thus only accessible at the Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino and the library of Palazzo Branciforte of Palermo, this section provided a unique window into the different narrative and dramatic choices made by traditional puppeteers both within and across traditions. Carocci investigates

the relation of the various scripts to Lodico, Manzanares, Leggio, and the original poems, identifying the different tendencies of each particular puppet theater company and region.

The notebooks and recorded plays also provide a record of the creative response of puppeteers to the crisis of the 1960s when the traditional public deserted the puppet theaters. Carocci explains that the move to single autonomous episodes (*serate autoconcluse*) and, especially in Catania, extensively written scripts, should not be dismissed as a simple watering down of the tradition. On the contrary, the attempt to create new plays that could stand alone involved in many cases a serious return to the original poems as well as the prose adaptations, along with a sustained effort to find innovative solutions that would transform a narrative segment into a meaningful and complete theatrical experience for a public not familiar with the cycle of the paladins of France ("Copioni d'autore: crisi e reazione degli anni Sessanta," 215-229). Thus, while today one can encounter puppet plays based heavily on the spectacular special effects of the battles, a large number of plays "si basano proprio sulla presenza e sulla rielaborazione della storia, su un nucleo narrativo forte e ragionato" and therefore deserve to be included in the category of "spettacoli d'autore" (216).

The contemporary puppet plays analyzed are limited to three companies in Palermo (Argento, Figli d'arte Cuticchio, Mancuso) and one in Catania (Napoli). If, on the one hand, this does not give a full picture of the state of Sicilian puppet theater today, on the other hand, it allows the author to take a close look at the variants among these particular companies. The case study she uses to compare the four representative companies is their respective renditions of an episode that has had lasting success on the puppet theater stage, *La pazzia di Orlando* (231-246).

In the course of her study Carocci addresses two common prejudices against puppet theater: the first is that this tradition, because *popolare* (of the people), is simple and naïve and not even a form or theater or art; the second, more recent one is that today the art form is either completely dead or only surviving as a spectacle for tourists in search of local color (15). In dismantling both mistaken assumptions, she makes use of the wealth of documentation available at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette, not only the early editions of the *Storia dei paladini di Francia* and other rare nineteenth- and early twentieth-century chivalric publications, but also recordings of interviews that Antonio Pasqualino and his wife

Janne Vibaek had undertaken with puppeteers in previous decades, unedited scripts, letters, and university theses. She supplements these materials with documents available elsewhere in Sicily (such as the Fondo Giacomo Cuticchio in the library of the Palazzo Branciforte of the Fondazione Sicilia) and her own interviews with a select number of practicing puppeteers. As a final note, the book is enriched with several images, including illustrations from printed editions, *cartelli*, scripts, and photographs of puppeteers.

With Carocci's book (and the *Rerum palatinorum fragmenta* mentioned at the outset), Lodico receives unprecedented scholarly attention that brings to the fore not only his impact but also his remarkable literary accomplishment. *Il poema che cammina* should be of interest to literary scholars specializing in Italian medieval and Renaissance chivalric literature, anthropologists dedicated to puppet theater and other popular traditions, and historians of modern Italy.

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Luca Cottini. *The Art of Objects. The Birth of Italian Industrial Culture, 1878-1928.* Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2018.

In his book, Luca Cottini focuses on the Italian five decades from 1878 to 1928 through the singular lens of the objects that were produced this period. In eight chapters that include subjects as far as watchmaking, bicycles, and cigarettes, Cottini highlights the interconnection between society, industry and art. This is a unique, exceptional work because it is interdisciplinary and is based not only on Italian literature and culture but also on design studies and history.

The first chapter of the book, "At the Origin of Italian Industrialism," is about the history of the industrialization in Italy. Cottini explains how two major events had an impact on the vision of Italian Industrialism: the National Exposition of Turin in 1880 and the National Exposition of Milan in 1881. The first "envisioned industrialization as a way to realize the "piedmontization of Italy" (Della Coletta 19) (Cottini 14). The second, by celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the unification "promoted industrialism

as a new age of light and progress ([...] first application of urban illumination and the success of the ballet *Excelsior*)" (14) Hereafter, Italy hosted domestic and international expositions through which gave the nation more visibility among other European countries where industrialization happened years before. The author also shows how Italian production moved from a traditional to a modern craft, giving examples from literary sources such as D'Annunzio and Serao as well as the architect Camillo Boito, and the artist Duilio Cambellotti.

In Chapter 2, "Timepieces and Italian Modern Times," Cottini explores the connections between the foundation of a world standard time and the rise of Italian industrialization after the National Exposition in Milan in 1881. Bulgari and Borletti were the first two companies in Italy to start to produce watches, Bulgari focusing on high-class craftmanship while Borletti concentrating on large-scale manufacturing. The discourse on Borletti's entrepreneurial skills, as the product changed during the First World War from watches to artillery fuses, underlines the tight connection between industrialization, politics and culture. This theme is also explored in Cottini's discussion of Borletti's friendship with D'Annunzio, to whom he asked to name his new business, and his interest in advertising. This chapter also shows the ability of Cottini to bring together all the different strands into one discourse.

Chapter 3, "Industrial Photographs and the Fictional Vision," focuses on the industrialization of photography and its "impact on the formation of Italy's autonomous photographic culture, especially in the cities of Florence and Turin. […] the serialization of industrial photography also led to the parallel evolution of hybrid visual languages, verbalizing, aestheticizing, fictionalizing, or setting in motion photographic image" (53) Cottini explores how the industrialization of photography can influence high culture versus the mass culture. He is aware of the power of the image and the falsity it can carry.

Chapter 4, entitled "Bicycles and the Moving Body of the Nation," like the previous chapters, investigates the birth of Italy's Cycling Industry as it relates not only to a physical exploration of the nation but also to becoming a symbol in literature, visual arts and fashion.

Chapter 5, "Gramophones, Radio, and the New Languages of Sound," retraces the history of sound recordings and transmitting

technologies and the role of music consumption as it moves from a private sphere to a public scale. Here he illuminates this process by showing how Enrico Caruso's first recording became accessible to a larger audience.

Chapter 6, "Cigarettes and Smoke: The Modern Lightness of Being," concentrates on the culture and gender symbolization of the smoke and cigarettes. This discourse culminates with the Futurist "I" Cloud that symbolized the "malleability, ubiquity, and a-corporeality of a new modern being" (148). Chapter 7, "Toys, Clothes, Furniture, and the Aesthetic Power of Play," examines the influence of Futurism in the making of toys, fashion and furniture. Cottini brings up futurist artists such as Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla: the first famous for being a painter, writer, sculptor and for his advertising skills as a graphic designer the second for being a painter, art teacher, poet and what nowadays we called an interior designer.

In the last chapter, "The Industrial Laboratory of Italian Modernity," the author offers an historical analysis of Italian industrialization from 1918 to 1928 and shows the relationship between fascism, arts and industrial design.

Luca Cottini's book is an important contribution to Italian and design studies for his interdisciplinary approach. On a minor note, this book would be greatly enhanced if it included photographs of some of the many interesting objects it describes. Despite this small drawback, this book opens the way to explore further other objects that were not mentioned in this volume and their relationship with industrialization, modernity and culture.

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Frank Burke. *Fellini's Films and Commercials: From Postwar to Postmodern.* Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA: Intellect, 2020.

Frank Burke's *Fellini's Films and Commercials: From Postwar to Postmodern* is really two books in one, or rather it is a unique sort of contemporary palimpsest, with the original text still visible beneath the more recent overlay. This is the result of an unusual publication history: the buy-out of the publisher and the closing of the Twayne's Filmmakers series meant that Burke's 1996 book,

Fellini's Films, disappeared soon after its initial appearance. In 2020 the book was revised by the author and re-issued by Intellect in an expanded edition. The 1996 volume was itself an expanded reissue of a 1984 Twayne text covering Fellini's films up to *La Dolce Vita* (xiv). This is why Burke returns to the same titles – *La Dolce Vita*, *8 1/2*, *Fellini-Satyricon* – in separate chapters from different critical-analytical perspectives. Burke makes a virtue of this challenge by self-reflexively incorporating the evolution of his own theoretical-methodological proclivities into the book's critical narrative, which makes the journey that much more compelling for the reader. Otherwise, the major additions to the original include an entirely new chapter on Fellini's television commercials, reworked analyses of *City of Women* in light of recent scholarship on Fellini's attitudes to masculinity and gender (considerably less retrograde than appearances might suggest), and a discussion of 'whiteness' in Fellini not merely in terms of ex-nominatively racialized identities, but also as the literal absence of colour. As Burke says, in this act of fortuitous historical recuperation he has "revised" and "strengthened" the book "instead of attempting to transform it in to something different" (ix). The result is a comprehensive account of Fellini's entire output, including close analyses of all the films and television commercials from a consistent-but-dynamically-open critical-theoretical perspective. The new book arrives, together with the 537-page Wiley *Companion to Federico Fellini*, co-edited by Burke with Marguerite Waller and Marita Gubareva, in the director's centenary year.

With an entire mountain range of books and other texts on the Italian auteur, *Fellini's Films and Commercials* represents a pinnacle in English-language Fellini scholarship. This volume, a full 366 pages long, brings the tally of Burke's books on Fellini to five, not including his other work on the director, and his many other publications on Italian cinema and related topics. The new book is a kind of *summa* of Burke's own Fellini scholarship, the product of a scholar-auteur at the peak of his game. *Fellini's Films and Commercials* is organized into twelve chapters, reflecting both a chronological and a thematic logic. The latter is the product of Burke's theoretical-methodological approach, which, as he explains, incorporates aspects of New Critical close reading and a post-structuralist-inflected attention to 'postmodernist' textual self-reflexivity, evidence of the book's two-stage evolution. The overall approach, however, is Jungian-psychological, partly

because of Fellini's evident interest in this form of therapy, and partly because of Burke's. From Jung, Burke champions especially the notion of individuation, which forms a central thread in this volume's treatment of the films and commercials. By individuation, Burke means, in part, "the notion, popularized by Carl Jung and his followers, and embraced by Fellini both in and outside his films, that the goal of life is to become a whole and fully individualized human being" (xv). As Burke explains, in the early, pre-1965 films, Fellini combines Jungian individuation, American-style individualism, and Christian Humanism. One of Burke's many insights is to connect this key nexus of ideas in Fellini with the larger cultural picture in postwar Italy. Italian postwar film, epitomized by neorealism, "emphasized the effect of [socioeconomic] environment on sharply defined protagonists with whom the audience could readily identify," remaining aligned with Hollywood narrative cinema in its emphasis on the individual over the collective (6). As Burke shows, however, one of Fellini's many innovations is to move, in his later films, to a more diffuse or polyvocal and de-colonized treatment of subjectivity, while still evincing an abiding fascination with the question of masculinity in general but especially as embodied in his own onscreen avatars, most memorably played by Marcello Mastroianni.

Burke traces the development of Fellini's style across his career, with *La Dolce Vita* as a crucial hinge-point. It is with this film, according to Burke, that Fellini's approach bifurcates into two simultaneous narratives: "the movement [...] toward and beyond individualism and the movement from realism through representation to signification" (103). In this split we see Fellini moving from the earlier, more socially engaged films, with a lingering stylistic purchase on realism (or neorealism), to the later, increasingly studio-bound, self-reflexive, intentionally artificial and more openly autobiographical films. The movement from representation to signification is precisely the shift away from an engagement with an extra-filmic reality toward a cinematic aesthetic in which the primary referent is the filmic image itself. This is tremendously significant for the films, not least for the difference it makes in Fellini's treatment of the auto-biographical material that had leaked into his films since *I Vitelloni*. The post-1965 films are characterized, famously, for the connection they make between the filmmaker's oblique treatment of his own life, coming of age in a small coastal town under fascism, in its

inseparability from the medium of film; increasingly, from film to film, everything, all of life, is subordinated to cinema. This makes of Fellini, arguably, a new kind of political filmmaker, one engaged with both politics writ large and the micro-politics of identity. (This, despite his allergy to overtly 'ideological' cinema because of his experience of fascism [323]; Fellini is a tacit anti-fascist precisely because of his status as one of Italy's greatest film artists, and art cinema's emphasis on the individual and the expression of interiority [345]. Art cinema, despite its pluralistic identity, is by nature anti-fascist.) In this regard Burke makes an utterly convincing case both for Fellini as 'postmodern' filmmaker par excellence, and for the lasting significance of 'postmodernism' as a viable critical term for the light it sheds on a specific modality of cultural production in the late twentieth century.

The new chapter on Fellini's work in the television commercial idiom allows Burke to bring the narrative of his comprehensive analysis to a satisfyingly open-ended conclusion. There is an apparent irony in Fellini's turning to TV commercials at the same time as late films like *Ginger and Fred*, or *La Voce della Luna*, which satirize contemporary commercial television programming (284). Burke's convincing response is that the commercials (his final works as a director) allow Fellini to come full circle aesthetically, returning to his own origins as a cartoonist, even as they provide him with another venue for the exploration of the collective (Italian) unconscious. Burke admits, moreover, that so closely analyzing Fellini's commercials brought him to the realization that "it was the invitational nature of Fellini's films that has attracted me to them all these many years. They have incited me to think about serious matters in serious ways, and they have guided me in that process. They have modeled the complexity of human experience and especially human relationships and have moved me to wonder in both senses of the phrase" (287). "[L]ike everyone else, [Fellini] was a product of his culture, not some autonomous figure who stood apart or above" (*ibidem*). In Burke's estimation, "[t]he seamless interrelationship of Fellini's commercials and his films serves as compelling support that, despite the tendency in academic film studies to dismiss auteurism as untenable, Fellini was indisputably an auteur, able to create an enormously consistent body of work under a variety of different circumstances" (288). Apart from its other many virtues as a comprehensive guide, Burke's latest book will undoubtedly do to any reader what it did to me: send them

back to Fellini's incomparable body of work.

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Eraldo Bellini. *Calvino e i classici italiani.* Anna Falessi Bellini (a cura di). Pisa: ETS, 2019.

Per me, come per chiunque altro abbia avuto la fortuna di conoscere Eraldo Bellini (1957-2018), risulta difficile guardare al volume *Calvino e i classici italiani* come se fosse un normale libro accademico: la prematura scomparsa del suo autore, infatti, lo ha inevitabilmente trasformato in una sorta di testamento, sebbene incompiuto. Nel corso della sua carriera, svolta interamente presso l'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Bellini ha portato avanti un'illustre tradizione di studi, che gli proveniva da maestri quali Francesco Mattesini e Claudio Scarpati, declinandola con uno stile personale, caratterizzato tanto dal rigore e dalla precisione nelle ricerche scientifiche quanto da un atteggiamento dialogante e profondamente umano nei confronti dei suoi studenti, che non potevano fare a meno di coltivare una grande stima per quell'esemplare – davvero non molto comune – di accademico sinceramente interessato al loro percorso universitario e personale.

Senza addentrarmi nei particolari di un percorso scientifico di eccezionale spessore, ricordo che le indagini di Bellini si sono mosse lungo un arco cronologico che parte dal Seicento (fondamentali i suoi contributi su Galileo Galilei, Sforza Pallavicino, Agostino Mascardi), passa per l'Ottocento (con studi su Alessandro Manzoni e Silvio Pellico) e approda al Novecento, ambito in cui si segnalano, in particolare, le ricerche sull'opera di Italo Calvino. Attorno a quest'ultimo settore si è avviato, qualche anno fa, il cantiere della raccolta di saggi *Calvino e i classici italiani*, destinata, nelle intenzioni iniziali, a includere versioni riviste e aggiornate di alcuni contributi già pubblicati in precedenza, assieme a materiali inediti. Il progetto, che prometteva risultati di grande rilievo, è stato purtroppo rallentato e, poi, bruscamente interrotto dalla malattia che ha funestato gli ultimi anni di Bellini, senza tuttavia impedirgli di portare avanti, con sforzo e dedizione ammirevoli, ogni attività che gli fosse materialmente possibile svolgere. Nei suoi ultimi anni, lo studioso è riuscito a completare la revisione dei pezzi già editi

in volumi e riviste, lasciando però incompiuto un saggio inedito. Il presente volume, allestito grazie alle cure della moglie Anna Falessi Bellini, esce perciò in una forma ridotta rispetto a quella che l'autore aveva concepito in origine, ma si configura, senza dubbio, come un testo di fondamentale importanza per gli studi su uno dei maggiori scrittori italiani contemporanei.

L'assunto di base dell'intero lavoro è quello ben esposto nel primo saggio, "Sul classicismo di Calvino" (11-27). Al di là della vasta mole di letture critiche, non sempre molto avvertite, che si sono concentrate sugli aspetti latamente "postmoderni" dell'opera dello scrittore (che pure sono meritevoli di approfondimenti), a un'analisi più ravvicinata Calvino si rivela un autore estremamente attento alla tradizione letteraria, intesa come un flusso di idee e di stili che attraversa i singoli scrittori. A suo parere, è necessario coltivare un rapporto diretto e consapevole con tale flusso, in modo da prendere parte, con consapevolezza, a un processo che supera ogni individualità: "Il partecipare a una creazione collettiva, come qualche cosa cominciata prima di noi e che presumibilmente continuerà dopo di noi, ci dà l'impressione di una forza che passa attraverso di noi" (18). Sebbene anche collocandosi all'interno della tradizione sia possibile far valere la propria spinta innovativa e sperimentale, la conoscenza dei libri del passato – specialmente dei classici, ossia quei testi che "non ha[nno] mai finito di dire quel che ha[nno] da dire" (24) – rappresenta una componente fondamentale del lavoro di uno scrittore, che deve essere, prima di tutto, un lettore attento, e solo successivamente un creatore di nuovi contenuti. Il volume si sviluppa, dunque, attorno al sintagma "Calvino classicista", proponendo un accurato esame delle sue opere e di una grande quantità di materiali collaterali, che spaziano dalle corrispondenze private ai pareri editoriali. L'attenzione di Calvino per i "libri degli altri" (10), specialmente quelli degli autori canonici della nostra letteratura, è messa a fuoco nei saggi successivi, ciascuno dei quali è dedicato in modo specifico ai contatti tra il romanziere e uno scrittore italiano. Se, infatti, i rapporti con Ludovico Ariosto appaiono evidenti e sono stati oggetto di numerosi studi, le connessioni con altri autori sono meno palesi, ma di altrettanta importanza all'interno del percorso umano e letterario di Calvino.

Una peculiarità della relazione di Calvino con i grandi della letteratura italiana, ben messa a fuoco da Bellini, è la tendenza a mutare atteggiamento nei loro confronti, passando dall'insofferenza

giovanile verso modelli percepiti come troppo ingombranti a una riflessione più matura, che rivaluta la pregnanza di quegli autori, al di là di barriere ideologiche o di semplici antipatie. In questo senso, è paradigmatico il rapporto con Alessandro Manzoni, inizialmente detestato e poi gradualmente ricollocato, anche all'interno del canone personale di Calvino, al suo tradizionale posto d'onore ("Una precoce palinodia. 'Amo Manzoni perché fino a poco fa l'odiavo'", 29-73). Se, nel 1953, il giovane scrittore indica addirittura l'influenza di Manzoni tra le cause principali della "mancata fortuna del romanzo italiano" (30), per via del "temperamento poco romanzesco" (31) dei suoi *Promessi sposi*, negli anni successivi è possibile individuare una fitta rete di riferimenti manzoniani, che permeano le opere di Calvino e costituiscono il chiaro segno di un cambiamento di rotta, espresso, del resto, anche in sedi non letterarie, come nell'intervista del 1959 da cui proviene la citazione scelta per il titolo di questo capitolo: "Amo Manzoni perché fino a poco fa l'odiavo" (29). Tramite un accurato studio dei testi, Bellini arriva a delineare una vera e propria "funzione-Manzoni" (9) nei libri di Calvino, dal momento che "Manzoni è […] presenza ineludibile in chi come Calvino costeggia da vicino e per ampio tratto il miraggio di un nuovo realismo e si muove costantemente in bilico tra narrazione e scrittura saggistica" (9).

Al di fuori dal canone scolastico, Calvino si interessa precocemente all'opera di un autore contemporaneo come Eugenio Montale, ma, anche in questo caso, il primo contatto con il poeta ligure non è entusiastico, sebbene la fase del rifiuto sia breve e venga presto superata ("'*Saluti scabri e essenziali'. Calvino e Montale*", 75-132). Dopo avere letto *Ossi di seppia* nel 1942, su suggerimento dell'amico Eugenio Scalfari, Calvino ostenta una reazione perplessa e sarcastica di fronte alla complessità di quel modo aspro e denso di fare poesia, che inizialmente lo respinge. Basta però poco tempo perché si produca in lui una rivalutazione, a partire dalla quale ha origine una lunga fedeltà a Montale, che viene presto a rappresentare un punto di riferimento a più livelli. Infatti, oltre alla sua attenzione per la lingua, che si contrappone nettamente agli usi degradanti della moderna comunicazione massmediale, Calvino ammira il suo sforzo di dare voce, attraverso la poesia, a "una salda coscienza morale e civile" (9).

L'ultimo saggio incluso nel volume interseca due dei principali ambiti di studio di Bellini, esaminando il rapporto tra Calvino e una delle figure chiave del Seicento italiano ("'Chi cattura chi?'.

Letteratura e scienza tra Calvino e Galileo", 133-187). 'Scoperto' negli anni Sessanta, Galileo Galilei diviene per Calvino un modello imprescindibile non solo di metodo, ma anche di scrittura: "non più solo sperimentatore esatto e scrupoloso ma anche brillante creatore di metafore e di una rinnovata mitografia scientifica" (9-10). L'ammirazione per lo scrittore-scienziato si colloca negli anni in cui Calvino prende parte al dibattito sulle "due culture", quella umanistica e quella scientifica, inaugurato, nel 1959, dal noto saggio *The Two Cultures* di Charles Percy Snow e molto vivo anche in Italia. Attirandosi le critiche di alcuni colleghi – vale la pena di ricordare l'attacco di Carlo Cassola, "scandalizzato" (143) dalla presunta subordinazione al sapere scientifico manifestata da Calvino – lo scrittore delle *Cosmicomiche* prende Galileo a modello per una scrittura che sia in grado di coniugare ambiti diversi della conoscenza, superando un diffuso atteggiamento di cieca contrapposizione.

Alla luce dei notevoli risultati dei saggi fin qui descritti, è davvero da lamentare l'assenza – ormai, purtroppo, irrimediabile – del saggio su Italo Calvino e Giacomo Leopardi destinato a suggellare il volume, andando a completare l'esame delle connessioni con quella che lo stesso Calvino definisce come "una delle più importanti linee di forza della nostra letteratura", ossia la direttrice "Ariosto-Galileo-Leopardi" (24). Come evidenziato da Bellini nel primo capitolo, infatti, "resta ancora da saggiare in tutta la sua estensione e profondità il significato della presenza di Leopardi nell'opera di Calvino; presenza che sembra farsi più marcata negli scritti degli ultimi anni, da *Palomar* fino ai continui affioramenti delle *Lezioni americane*" (25).

In conclusione, *Calvino e i classici italiani* è un libro di grande rilevanza, che contribuisce in modo originale ma rigoroso alle ricerche sullo scrittore. Le precise incursioni testuali e le ficcanti disamine critiche di Bellini sono in grado di restituire al lettore un'immagine in parte nuova di Italo Calvino, confermando tanto la ricchezza e la stratificazione delle sue opere, quanto l'acume interpretativo e la sobria precisione dello studioso che le prende in esame.

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Simultanea: A Journal of Italian Media and Pop Culture 1.1 (2020). Edited by Marco Arnaudo and Andrea Ciccarelli.

As in many humanities disciplines, we in Italian Studies have long upheld a hierarchy of subjects worthy of our attention. Recent years have seen this hierarchy become increasingly flexible, as subjects like popular music and comics find more space in our scholarly discourse. However, until recently, we lacked a scholarly venue dedicated to popular culture. For this reason, the debut of *Simultanea: A Journal of Italian Media and Pop Culture* is a welcome innovation in Italian studies in North America. The first issue covers topics ranging from Italian sit-coms to cult horror to children's toys. Its articles not only broaden the range of objects of serious study in the field, but also show new applications for trusted methodologies.

Marco Arnaudo opens the issue with his article "The Shifting Thresholds of Paratextuality and Play: The Case of Kinkeshi, M.U.S.C.L.E., and Exogini," which brings into focus a snapshot from the international toy industry of the 1980s. The Japanese Kinkeshi action figures were based on the characters from the *Kinnikuman* manga and anime. American toy giant Mattel chose not to import the cartoons and instead created its own story for the U.S. market, selling the toys   which they called M.U.S.C.L.E. as alien wrestlers who must fight to determine the fate of earth. Italian company GIG discarded both of these narratives for their own release of the toys. GIG advertised their Exogini, as they called them, simply as mysterious aliens with unknown motives and intentions. Arnuado examines the paratext of each of the three lines of toys, that is, the narrative and context surrounding them: the *Kinnikuman* franchise for Kinkeshi and the wrestling and alien narratives for M.U.S.C.L.E. and Exogini, respectively. Drawing data from online communities of fans and collectors, Arnaudo shows that these differing paratexts produced different types of play with the same toys in the three different countries. His work serves as a case study or a model for further explorations of the relationship between toys' paratext and children's play.

In "The Italian Sitcom Journey: The Struggles and Failures of Italian Commercial Television's Original Productions," Luca Barra gives a history of original sitcom production by Fininvest (Mediaset). He argues that while the Italian approach to the American genre of the situation comedy was ultimately a "failed

attempt," it also produced an original genre that responded to local conditions rather than merely imitating international successes. The longest-running example, *Casa Vianello*, is rooted in Italian theatrical traditions even as it is inspired by imported models of television. Barra notes both its archetypal portrait of middle-class Italian domestic life and its use of farce and caricature as secrets of its success. Subsequent shows failed to reproduce this balance and built more explicitly on American models. As a result, argues Barra, the Italian sitcom remained a facile genre of repeated tropes, void of depth in storytelling.

While Barra's article is historical in its approach, Francesco Ciabattoni's "On Reading a Song" is metacritical. A scholar can choose from a wide array of methodologies for studying a song, including the "musicological, literary, sociological, socio-economic, or historical-cultural" (1). Ciabattoni argues convincingly that these various lenses must be combined in order to make sense of this highly intertextual genre, and in particular to understand concepts of originality and authenticity within it. *Cantautori* from De André to De Gregori have constantly borrowed, rewritten, excerpted, translated, and emulated the work of other artists, musical, literary, and visual, but we should not view such interactions as diminishing the authenticity of the song. Rather, the musician can re-elaborate or re-contextualize the source material in a way that represents a new, authentic work and a "fruitful and communicative channel" (7) between different modalities of art.

In "Digital Affect and the Microbiological in Maxì Dejoie's *The Gerber Syndrome: il contagio* and Alex Infascelli's *H2Odio*," Ricardo Domizio seeks to define what he calls the "digital horror" subgenre, which refers not only to the technologies used but can also be thematically characterized as a type of horror that deals with the fear of abstract threats beyond physical monsters and killers.

The films *H2Odio* and *The Gerber Syndrome: il contagio* both feature threats that originate on the microbiological level and use digital effects like the "glitch" and "febrile" camera work that gesture towards an unreliable reality. Both films express horror at sinister "virtual worlds" real and imagined.

The next three pieces engage methodologies familiar to literary and film criticism. In "(Aesth)ethics Storytelling: A Close Reading of *Kobane Calling* and *Salvezza*," Valentina Frasisti examines two examples of comics journalism. Though the books have differing

aesthetics, the author believes they share an "ethic of reframing." Marcello Messina's "Southernness, Disability and the Construction of the 'Other' in Italian Cinema: Desire, Masculinities, Disfigurations and Medicalisations" discusses particularly male, comic characters whose othering is tied both to their identification (usually through language) as southerners and to their disabilities, often related to sexual disfunction. In "The Sex of the Angels: Hybridization of Judeo-Christian Motifs in American and Italian Mainstream Comics," Carlotta Vacchelli gives readings of comics with stories of sexual relationships between angels and devils. The use of this theme, she argues, far from constituting any sort of theological intervention, is rather part of a progressive desacralization of religious imagery and mythology in comics.

A final essay by Spartaco Paris, "Design italiano o design globale? Una riflessione," offers a useful historical and material perspective. Paris turns to the Italian design of luxury items like cars, shoes, and furniture and ties the rise of Italian design and the turn towards this more practical and commercial form of art to Italy's postwar industrial reality.

I look forward to the innovative conversations that Simultanea will facilitate moving forward. I also applaud the editors for their choice of a digital, open access format. It is fitting that a publication seeking to broaden the range the objects of scholarly attention should, in addition, offer its work to the widest possible audience. May it help us to evolve concepts in our discipline and introduce exciting ideas for years to come.

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Luca Serianni. *Il sentimento della lingua. Conversazione con Giuseppe Antonelli.* Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019 (collana Intersezioni).

Il sentimento della lingua nasce da una conversazione a due con il linguista Giuseppe Antonelli, che di Serianni è stato allievo. Si tratta di una vera conversazione: quattro "lunghe e piacevoli chiacchierate" (così le definisce Antonelli nella *Prefazione*), di cui consapevolmente si è voluto mantenere il "tono rilassato e dialogante" ("nel frattempo, sono andato a controllare in rete", "Direi che qui serve una parafrasi…", "No, no").

Il libro è organizzato in cinque capitoli, che fanno eco a cinque tra le più significative opere di Serianni ("Prima lezione", "L'ora di italiano", "Norma dei puristi e lingua d'uso", "Viaggiatori, musicisti, poeti", e infine "Per l'italiano di domani"). Gli snodi affrontati sono molteplici ma forse possono ricondursi a tre macroaree: il ruolo della lingua italiana nella formazione identitaria degli italiani; il rapporto tra norma e uso; le ricadute sociali e civili connesse alla padronanza o più spesso alla mancata padronanza della lingua. Ma al di là degli specifici temi affrontati in questo simile a un altro libro intervista, quello dell'indimenticato Tullio De Mauro: *La cultura degli italiani*, a cura di Francesco Erbani, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004, *Il sentimento della lingua* è il tentativo di tratteggiare il profilo di un intellettuale, la cui notorietà è da tempo uscita dal recinto dello specialismo accademico.

Tra le opere di Serianni sono soprattutto quelle di carattere grammaticale ad essere approdate sulle scrivanie di insegnanti, giornalisti, uomini di cultura, e ormai anche di liceali. Penso ovviamente alla *Grammatica italiana* (al 1988 risale la prima edizione, per la UTET), ma anche a una fortunata grammatica per i licei scritta a sei mani con Giuseppe Patota e Valeria Della Valle per la Pearson. Molto ha contato anche la viva parola del Nostro. Le sue lezioni hanno formato nel tempo migliaia di studenti, che spesso a loro volta sono divenuti insegnanti, o ricercatori e professori universitari. E richiamano un folto pubblico spesso di semplici appassionati le lezioni-conferenze di Serianni, condotte instancabilmente, lungo tutto l'arco dell'anno, nelle scuole, nei teatri o nei palazzi civici, in un'"Italia di provincia, spesso appartata, ma piena di energie e di competenze". Anche questo emerge dal libro: nulla è più lontano dalla personalità di Serianni della schifiltosità snobistica e viceversa del giovanilismo ostentato.

L'adeguata conoscenza della lingua promuove l'integrazione, non solo dei "nuovi italiani", ma anche di quegli italiani che sono intrappolati nel ghetto delle sottoculture, della disinformazione, e magari della manipolazione politica. E tutto il capitolo "L'ora di italiano" è dedicato ai problemi legati alla didattica della lingua e della letteratura italiana (e in generale delle materie umanistiche) nella scuola, il luogo dove si gioca per l'appunto gran parte di questa battaglia decisiva per l'effettiva realizzazione di una compiuta democrazia moderna. Un giovane, destinato a divenire il cittadino consapevole di domani, dovrebbe arrivare a dominare espressioni e parole che si spingano oltre il lessico fondamentale dell'italiano,

in modo da riuscire a comprendere il libro di testo, ma anche un articolo di legge o un editoriale. Sulla "generazione venti parole", così come in altre questioni, Serianni ha un atteggiamento lucido, incline direi a un moderato pessimismo, ma mai all'allarmismo catastrofista. Una delle indicazioni di Serianni è appunto quella di insistere di più, specie nella secondaria di primo grado (la vecchia scuola media), sul lessico e sulla formazione delle parole. Dando più spazio anche al testo non letterario: un testo giornalistico o un libro di testo, eventualmente anche di un'altra disciplina, presenta anzi il vantaggio di fornire esempi di testi reali e permette di misurare "il grado di sicurezza o di insicurezza con cui ci si muove all'interno di un universo lessicale appena un po' più complesso".

Un libro come *Il sentimento della lingua*, s'intende, è denso di spunti di discussione. Intanto si denuncia il rischio non immediato ma neppure peregrino che, se si generalizzasse la pratica dell'inglese nei corsi magistrali (anche, mettiamo, in diritto o in lettere), si possa pensare un domani di introdurre corsi in inglese per tutte le materie anche nei licei. Appaltando alcune aree del sapere ad un'altra lingua, insomma, si rischierebbe di veder recedere l'italiano a "una semplice varietà idiomatica parlata, spendibile in famiglia o magari nella creazione poetica". Serianni, poi, è dell'opinione che l'importanza delle materie scolastiche non debba essere valutata in base alla loro spendibilità immediata nel mondo del lavoro, ma "al loro potenziale formativo", spesso legato proprio al confronto con un ambito diverso da quello quotidiano. E a questo proposito è un'ingenuità pensare che la letteratura del Novecento sia preferibile in quanto più vicina ai giovani; anzi, Montale e Calvino, per non parlare di Gadda o di Pasolini, sono quanto di più lontano dal mondo dei *millennials*. Questi sono solo alcuni dei numerosissimi spunti offerti dalla lettura, né abbiamo qui lo spazio per commentare le notazioni su singole parole e costruzioni, generosamente disseminate nel testo (specie nel capitolo "Norma dei puristi"), nell'alveo del "sano empirismo" di ascendenza miglioriniana.

L'aspetto forse più inedito del libro è però il ritratto dell'uomo. "Prima lezione" ricostruisce alcuni momenti della vita del Nostro: le prime letture infantili (il padre gli leggeva *Pinocchio*, ma anche *I Promessi sposi*, saltando però il famoso incipit *Quel ramo del Lago di Como*); l'incontro con quello che sarebbe diventato il suo maestro, Arrigo Castellani; la scelta di studiare gli antichi testi pratici toscani "agli antipodi della letteratura"; i primi anni di supplenza come

insegnante delle scuole superiori e le "dritte da avvocato difensore" date agli studenti in vista della maturità; la tumultuosa redazione della *Grammatica* UTET; l'ultima affollatissima lezione, nell'Aula Magna della facoltà di Lettere della Sapienza, nel giugno 2017.

Infine, vorrei ricordare un condivisibilissimo elogio dell'ipocrisia ("se per ipocrisia si intende non dire sempre quello che pensiamo"), salutare antidoto all'aggressività verbale in un mondo che idoleggia la sincerità e la spontaneità ad ogni costo. Fa il paio con la speranza di aver lasciato ai suoi allievi "l'idea di un certo comportamento, di una educazione", che "è anche sapersi muovere e interagire in società".

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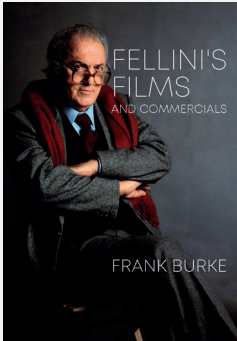
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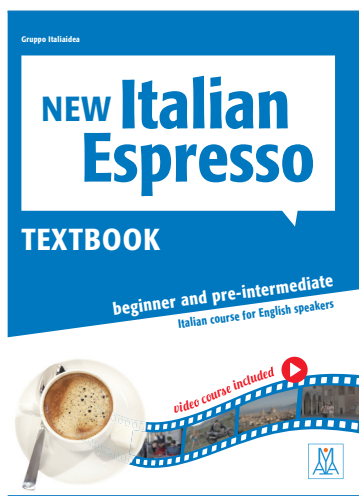Wellesley College, USA
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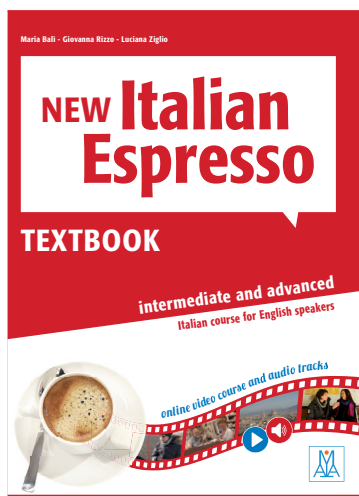www.intellectbooks.com

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Re-tuning of Tele-vision in Fellini's
La voce della luna
AMY HOUGH-DUGDALE

La domenica vestivi di rosso di Silvana Grasso:
un esempio di *Künstlerroman*
STEFANIA LUCAMANTE

Amarcord/Am'l'arcord.
Fascism, Memory, and the Visual
in Federico Fellini and Renzo Renzi
GIULIANA MINGHELLI

Fellini Today? Some Observations on
*Fellini's Films and Commercials:
From Postwar to Postmodern* and
A Companion to Federico Fellini
FRANCESCO RABISSI