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# NOTES

IN ITALIAN STUDIES



## Notes in Italian Studies

*Notes in Italian Studies* is an online, open-access journal which publishes note-length studies by postgraduate and early-career researchers working in the field of Italian Studies, with a particular focus on research from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The guiding ethos of the journal is academic rigour, ensured by a process of internal double-blind peer review. It is edited by postgraduate and early-career members of the Society for Italian Studies (SIS) and aims to publish one volume each year, linked to the annual SIS Postgraduate Colloquium. The colloquium on which this, the inaugural volume, is based, 'Italy at Work: Representations of Labour in Italian Culture', took place online on 27 November 2020 and was organised by Erica Bellia (University of Cambridge) and Bianca Rita Cataldi (University College Dublin). Alongside exhibiting the ground-breaking and wide-ranging research of postgraduate and early-career members of the SIS, the journal also includes a Doctoral Bulletin Board, which serves as a record of doctorates awarded in Italian Studies in the UK and Ireland.

Vol. 1, 2021

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# FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR OF THE SOCIETY FOR ITALIAN STUDIES

SIMON GILSON (University of Oxford)

**A**s Chair of the Society for Italian Studies, a subject association whose mission is to further the academic study of Italy and the Italian language across all fields of study in the United Kingdom and Ireland, I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the inaugural volume of a new online postgraduate journal sponsored by the Society: *Notes in Italian Studies*. The Society is strongly committed to supporting postgraduate students working in all fields of Italian Studies: it sponsors an annual postgraduate colloquium; it offers bursaries for attendance at its biennial conference; it runs postgraduate prizes (in partnership with the British Italian Society) every year; and—crucially—postgraduates are full members of its executive committee, feeding into all the discussions and initiatives of the Society. This new journal represents one outcome of such discussions.

The Society already has its own journal, *Italian Studies*, which publishes four issues per year, including one issue per year on Italian Cultural Studies. The journal's former Senior Editors—Ruth Glynn, Catherine Keen, and Giuliana Pieri—recently published an issue (75.2) celebrating the journal's seventy-fifth year and dedicated to examining areas of research that we viewed as representative of the state of the art in 2020 of Italian Studies and key to its future development. I view as just as important to the future development of the discipline the energy and enthusiasm that lie behind *Notes in Italian Studies*. This new journal represents a model of intensive collaboration amongst the Society's postgraduate students, as well as of their ability to find a conceptual and thematic nexus—work and its representations in Italian culture—that speaks across periods and disciplinary boundaries. The volume brings together papers originally delivered online at the Society's 2020 Postgraduate Colloquium together with other contributions from postgraduates in our community. Written in an agile short-format form, peer reviewed and edited by the postgraduate community itself, the essays offer a series of pithy interrogations of the theme, from Dante to contemporary Italian migrant literature, embracing a range of objects of enquiry and critical discourses. Our postgraduate community has been deeply affected by the difficult circumstances of the last eighteenth months, and it is therefore an even greater pleasure to celebrate this achievement, to be able to read these contributions, and to appreciate the collective richness of what is offered.

I am immensely grateful to all those involved, whose initiative (and hard work) has brought the inaugural volume of the journal (the first of many, I hope) to completion.

# ITALY AT WORK: REPRESENTATIONS OF LABOUR IN ITALIAN CULTURE

BIANCA RITA CATALDI (University College Dublin)

CLAUDIA DELLACASA (Durham University and Universität Tübingen)

LACHLAN HUGHES (University of Oxford)

Work can be many things: domestic or public; paid or unpaid; cerebral or physical; unfulfilling or all-consuming; life-long or temporary. It enters almost all dimensions of human experience and profoundly impacts our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to the world around us. In *The German Ideology* (1845–46), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write that humans ‘begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation’.<sup>1</sup> For Marx and Engels, then, work stems not only from a need for sustenance, but also from a desire for self-actualisation. Almost two centuries later, in the radically altered social landscape of 2021, it is worth questioning the extent to which this framing of work is still applicable to contemporary conceptions of selfhood, entangled as they are in a society in which fragmented processes of production are followed by rapid forms of consumption, and in which age-long balances between human beings and the natural environment are being irreversibly compromised.

During the 1950s and 1960s, on the pages of the literary journal *Il menabò*, (founded and edited by Italo Calvino and Elio Vittorini), Italian intellectuals engaged in a public debate on the connection between literature and work, with specific attention devoted to *letteratura industriale*. Responding in part to the championing of *littérature engagée* by Jean Paul Sartre and other post-war writers in the francophone sphere, both Calvino and Vittorini acknowledged the need for a new kind of fiction and poetry which was able to address the harsh reality of factory work and the consequences of Italy’s process of industrialisation. They imagined a literature which was capable of analysing the anthropological impulse behind labour, and the ways in which work (or a lack thereof) shapes individual human experience. These were the very years in which many Italian intellectuals were engaging closely with Antonio Gramsci’s notion of *impegno*, namely the responsibility that writers and artists have to address social issues and to give voice to underrepresented human experiences.<sup>2</sup> In addressing the nature of factory work, Italian writers in the 1950s and ’60s thus productively crossed boundaries between political, social, and artistic domains,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. by Christopher John Arthur (London: ElecBook, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1975 [first published 1948–51]), esp. II, 954–1386.

fostering a discourse whose relevance reaches far beyond the specific context of its production.

Recent years have seen a notable increase in critical engagements with the concept of work in the field of Italian Studies, particularly in the wake of the recessions caused by the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–08 and, more recently, in response to the ongoing instability brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing the timely relevance of work, the 2020 Society for Italian Studies Postgraduate Colloquium ('Italy at Work: Representations of Labour in Italian Culture', 27 November 2020) invited postgraduate and early-career scholars to engage with representations of labour, alienation, and unemployment across all areas of Italian Studies. The wide range of topics presented at the colloquium demonstrated clearly that Italian culture has a long and underexplored history of engaging with the concept of work, from the Middle Ages to the present day. This inaugural volume of *Notes in Italian Studies* collects the findings of the 2020 colloquium, alongside newly written contributions, and represents the (unpaid) intellectual labour of a generation of scholars for whom many of the subjects they write about here—precarity, exploitation, alienation—hold a particular relevance.

The volume opens with two notes on the function of work in Dante's *Commedia*. In 'Waiting and Working in Dante's Ante-Purgatorio', Caroline Dormor draws attention to descriptions of the pilgrim's physical exertion in Ante-Purgatory which seem to undercut its usual characterization as a zone of stasis and delay. With reference to Virgil's explanation of the spiritual logic of the mountain in *Purgatorio* IV, whereby the souls undergoing purgation experience increasingly less pain as they climb the mountain and the weight of vice is lifted from them, Dormor argues that work takes on a necessarily redemptive quality in the opening cantos of *Purgatorio*, troubling the strict division between Ante-Purgatory and Purgatory-proper. In 'Dante's Winemaking *Hapax Legomena*: Textual and Theological Labour in the *Commedia*', George Rayson discusses passages in *Purgatorio* IV and *Paradiso* XII which draw on the theologically inflected language of winemaking, focusing in particular on the significance in each instance of Dante's choice to deploy *hapax legomena*, words which occur only once within the poem. These *hapax*, Rayson argues, are metonymies for the work of poetic creation; but while winemaking *hapax* in *Purgatorio* are tied to cultivated processes of growth and maturity, in *Paradiso* they perform the theological labour of subject-making.

Bridging the gap between Dante and the twentieth century, Simona Di Martino's note explores the depiction of the figure of the wet nurse in both poetry and prose, from Vittorelli to Pirandello. Through an analysis of Vittorelli's poem 'La

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<sup>3</sup> A number of recent critical works have investigated the relationship between work and literature in the Italian context. See, in particular: Giorgio Bigatti and Giuseppe Lupo, *Fabbrica di carta. I libri che raccontano l'Italia industriale* (Bari/Rome: Laterza, 2013); Paolo Chirumbolo, *Letteratura e lavoro. Conversazioni critiche* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2013); Raffaele Donnarumma, *Ipermodernità. Dove va la narrativa contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014); Giuseppe Lupo, *La letteratura al tempo di Adriano Olivetti* (Roma/Ivrea: Edizioni di Comunità, 2016); *Letteratura e lavoro in Italia. Analisi e prospettive*, ed. by Carlo Baghetti, *Nótos*, 4 (2017); Alessandro Ceteroni, *La letteratura aziendale. Gli scrittori che raccontano il precariato, le multinazionali e il nuovo mondo del lavoro* (Milan: Calibano, 2018).

nutrice' and a selection of short stories from Pirandello's *Novelle per un anno*, Di Martino shows that, unsurprisingly, the individual identity of the wet nurse was consistently subjugated to her role as a domestic labourer. This absence of individualized identity is a literary trope which remains fairly consistent across the centuries, Di Martino argues, until the eventual disappearance of the figure of the wet nurse with the invention of formula milk in the late nineteenth century. Without a need for their labour, wet nurses gradually disappear from the pages of Italian literature.

The radical transformation of attitudes to work throughout the twentieth century also provided fertile ground for Italian poets. In her note 'Il lavoro nella poesia magrelliana. Appunti stilistici', Ilaria Cavallin reflects on the representation of work in Valerio Magrelli's lyrical production from 1999 to 2014, focusing in particular on the topics of alienation and capitalist greed. Through an analysis of metaphors and semantic domains, Cavallin shows that Magrelli's lexical and stylistic choices concur in casting a dark shadow on the poet's understanding of work. In his note entitled 'Altri indizi di guerre civili. La fabbrica in una pagina critica di Andrea Zanzotto', Massimiliano Cappello explores Zanzotto's interest in the labour conditions of soldiers and factory workers. Cappello concentrates in particular on Zanzotto's review of a text by poet and labourer Ferruccio Brugnaro, and on the relationship between Zanzotto and Brugnaro, all of which gestures towards an understanding of political *impegno* as an interrelation of theory and practice. The factory thus becomes a place where literature encounters the reality of work, where a parallel can be drawn with the reality of war, and where poetry acquires a crucial and nuanced relevance in the process of representing and understanding the multivalent experience of work.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a number of Italian intellectuals turned their attention with new vigour to the important connection between industrial labour and its representation across different artistic media. In her note 'Pasolini's Work-Poet: A Composite Genealogy', Margaret Scarborough discusses Pasolini's conception of what he calls the 'poeta-operaio', a figure who lives the experience of industrial labour actively and antithetically, resisting its drudgery and alienation in order to reclaim his humanity. Scarborough traces the complex intellectual hinterland of Pasolini's composite figure, citing influence from Charlie Chaplin, Herbert Marcuse, and Simone Weil, among others. In 'The Road to Cosmic Labyrinths: Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco in *Il menabò*, 5', Andrea Brondino addresses literary and cultural responses to Italian industrialization, with a specific focus on the positions of Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco in the debate surrounding industry and literature. Brondino raises questions regarding the avant-garde and postmodernism, complicated by both Calvino and Eco in ways that show the influence of the language and imagery of industry on Italian literary debates and production in the early 1960s. Brondino's note also highlights similarities in Calvino's and Fredric Jameson's approaches to cognitive mapping, as well as in Eco's and John Barth's analyses of exhaustion. Ultimately, it argues for a renewed understanding of the cultural role of Italian industrialization within broader intellectual debates.

Mohamed Baya, in his note entitled ‘An Arabo-(It)alienation: Work and Migration in *Immigrato* and *Divorzio all’isلمica a viale Marconi*’, considers the subject of work as filtered through the experience of migration from North Africa to Italy, while also highlighting the relevance of irony and parody in engendering a heightened understanding of these themes. Baya discusses two major novels of so-called *letteratura della migrazione*, Mario Fortunato and Salah Methani’s *Immigrato* and Amara Lakhous’s *Divorzio all’isلمica a viale Marconi*, and analyses how the experiences of migration and low-paid labour described in these two novels emerge in their full critical potential when the harsh reality at stake encounters irony, both as a mechanism of defence and as a form of resistance to that reality.

The volume concludes with Michele Maiolani’s exploration of ‘Primo Levi’s Anthropology of Work’. In his note, Maiolani focuses on Levi’s conception of work as a starting point for reflections on human identity. Through close readings of *La tregua*, *La chiave a stella*, the short story ‘Gli stregoni’, and the essay ‘Una bottiglia di sole’, Maiolani argues that Levi’s anthropological interrogations of work form part of a broader questioning of what defines humankind and separates it from animals. This final contribution navigates the threshold between humanism and post-humanism, seeking to frame the crucial relevance of work within ever-changing dynamics that need to be questioned today more than ever.

On a final note, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people whose generous assistance has made this inaugural volume of *Notes in Italian Studies* possible. Establishing and editing a journal during an epoch-shifting pandemic has been no mean feat, and that we have managed to bring it to fruition is a testament to the strong spirit of collegiality in the field of Italian Studies in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Particular thanks must go to Simon Gilson, Claudia Rossignoli, Emanuela Patti, Teresa Franco, and the rest of the Executive Committee of the Society for Italian Studies for their enthusiastic support, to Erica Bellia for her role in co-organising the 2020 SIS Postgraduate Colloquium, and to Caroline Dormor for her beautiful cover design.

Dublin, Tübingen, Oxford  
October 2021



# WAITING AND WORKING IN DANTE'S ANTE-PURGATORY\*

CAROLINE DORMOR (University of Oxford)

Ante-Purgatory is a term used by critics and commentators to denote the zone before the gates of Purgatory through which Dante and Virgil pass in the first nine cantos of *Purgatorio*. Unlike the souls on the terraces, the souls who are temporarily located in Ante-Purgatory do not yet experience any physical suffering (or what medieval theologians commonly termed *poena sensus*, pain of sense); instead, they endure only the pain of loss (*poena damni*), waiting outside the gates for a given period of time until they can ascend to the terraces.<sup>1</sup> Ante-Purgatory is typically read as a zone of spiritual stasis, of uncertainty and delay. However, for all its stasis, there are nonetheless displays of physical exertion, action, and movement within the Ante-Purgatory cantos: the souls who flee towards the mountain following Cato's rebuke, the late penitents who run 'sanza freno' (*Purg.* V, 42) towards the pilgrim and enthusiastically make appeals for his attention throughout *Purgatorio* V, and the 'turba spessa' (*Purg.* VI, 10) which surrounds him at the beginning of *Purgatorio* VI and from which the pilgrim has to free himself (*Purg.* VI, 12 and 25).<sup>2</sup> More notably, the pilgrim's own journey involves moments of intense physical effort, particularly in the initial climb up the mountain slopes in *Purgatorio* IV. This note will consider the ways in which physical work is present within the Ante-Purgatory cantos, alongside the liminal zone's more readily perceived static qualities. Moreover, I will ask what importance this dialogue between waiting and working might have for the first nine cantos of *Purgatorio*, and how it might undercut the supposedly strict division between Ante-Purgatory and Purgatory-proper.

## THE SPIRITUAL LOGIC OF THE MOUNTAIN

In *Purgatorio* IV, Virgil explains the spiritual logic of the mountain to the pilgrim when, despairing at the height of the mountain, he asks how far they have left to climb. Rather than offering a number of days, hours, or miles, Virgil explains that the end will

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\* I would like to thank Lachlan Hughes for conversations and comments on this piece which advanced its argument considerably, and Simon Gilson and Francesca Southerden for their support with its earlier development.

<sup>1</sup> On the distinction between *poena sensus* and *poena damni*, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, Suppl., Appendix, *Quaestio de Purgatorio*, Art. III; in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII* (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1882–), XII, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from the *Commedia* are taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, *Le Opere di Dante Alighieri*, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 7, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67).

be *felt* by the pilgrim. The journey of spiritual purification is therefore measured qualitatively (and subjectively) rather than quantitatively:

Ed elli a me: ‘Questa montagna è tale,  
che sempre al cominciar di sotto è grave;  
e quant’ om più va sù, e men fa male.  
Però, quand’ ella ti parrà soave  
tanto, che sù andar ti fia leggero  
com’ a seconda giù andar per nave,  
allor sarai al fin d’esto sentiero;  
quivi di riposar l’affanno aspetta.’

(*Purg.* IV, 88–95)

As the pilgrim progresses up the mountain, his work (or at least his experience of work) lessens as the weight of vice is lifted from him. The relative ease or difficulty of the journey is therefore intimately tied to the process of spiritual purgation; when no physical work is required and the journey becomes as easy and pleasurable (‘soave’) as sailing downstream with the current, the pilgrim will know that the process of purgation has come to an end. Though the metaphor of sin as heaviness is present throughout all of *Purgatorio*, here in Ante-Purgatory, in the absence of specific purgatorial punishments, it functions to establish the importance of physical work to the process of spiritual redemption.

The climb in *Purgatorio* IV is the most physically demanding part of the journey on Mount Purgatory. The daunting barrier that the steep climb imposes is already introduced in *Purgatorio* III (46–54), before the pilgrim and Virgil are guided to an easier point of entry by the excommunicates. The way up is narrow and steep, and is compared to a narrow gap in a hedge which a farmer might fill with thorns to protect the grape harvest from potential thieves:

Maggiore aperta molte volte impruna  
con una forcatella di sue spine  
l’uom de la villa quando l’uva imbruna,  
che non era la calla onde saline.

(*Purg.* IV, 19–22)

These lines are frequently glossed by modern commentators with a reference to Matthew 7.14 (‘For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it’).<sup>3</sup> Nicola Fosca notes an additional echo of Proverbs 15.19 (‘The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway’), a reference which seems particularly relevant in consideration of the fact that the narrow and thorny path leads eventually to an encounter with a group of negligent souls. In his commentary to these verses, Cristoforo Landino makes an

<sup>3</sup> All quotations of biblical passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

explicit connection between the pilgrim's lack of virtue—he has, after all, only just begun his purgative journey—and the physically demanding, thorny path:

Non è maravigla, se la via, che mena al purgatorio, sia stretta et erta. Imperochè questa via sono le virtù purgatorie [...], le quali insino che non habbiamo facto habito, sono piene d'affanni et di sudore. Onde Hesiodo afferma che gli dii hanno posto el sudore innanzi alla virtù.<sup>4</sup>

Referencing a passage from Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Landino insists that work, made visible by breathlessness and sweat, is an essential part of the acquisition of virtue.<sup>5</sup> The difficult climb up the narrow and metaphorically thorny path thus appears to be specifically linked to negligence, and the road 'che mena al purgatorio' appears to be an arduous but necessary step in the acquisition of virtue.

The idea that physical work should be necessary for spiritual redemption is central to a Christian understanding of man's fallen state. In Genesis 3, which relates the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, difficult work is described as the direct consequence of the transgression committed by 'la prima gente' (*Purg.* I, 24) when they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. God says to Adam:

because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread [...].

(Genesis 3.17–19)

Thus while before the Fall man was placed in the garden 'to till it and keep it' (Genesis 2.15), after the Fall it is only with toil and hard labour that humankind can succeed in cultivating crops. It is interesting to note that, here in Genesis, thorns once again mark an obstacle that necessitates physical labour, offering another biblical echo for the 'forcatella di sue spine' in *Purgatorio* IV.

The distinction between pre- and post-lapsarian work is notably discussed in Augustine of Hippo's unfinished commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi ad litteram*. Augustine argues that there was always work in Eden, but that it only became difficult after the Fall. Prior to original sin, he argues, 'there was no stress or wearisome toil, but pure exhilaration of spirit'.<sup>6</sup> For Augustine, then, effortful work is a mark of man's fallenness, and eventual rest from this work in Paradise marks a return to a pre-lapsarian

<sup>4</sup> Cristoforo Landino, commentary to *Purg.* IV, 19–22, accessed via the *Dartmouth Dante Project*, <<http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>>.

<sup>5</sup> See Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 289–92: 'but in front of Excellence the immortal gods have set sweat, and the path to her is long and steep, and rough at first—yet when one arrives at the top, then it becomes easy, difficult though it still is'; in *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. by Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library, 57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad litteram libri XII*, book 8, chapter 8; in *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees: Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, introductions, translation, and notes by Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. by John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 13 (New York: New City Press, 2002), pp. 356–57.

state, a model which resonates with Dante's placement of the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory, where, as Virgil explains in *Purgatorio* IV, the pilgrim will be able to rest and catch his breath: 'allor sarai al fin d'esto sentiero; | quivi di riposar l'affanno aspetta' (94–95).

The idea that souls in Purgatory will ultimately return to a pre-lapsarian state is evoked from the very beginning of the cantica through Cato's rebuke to the newly arrived souls:

[...] ed ecco il veglio onesto  
gridando: 'Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?  
qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?  
Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio  
ch'esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto'.

(*Purg.* II, 118–23)

Cato's rebuke opposes lingering (and therefore negligence) to swiftness, but also establishes the souls' anticipated work on the purgatorial terraces as an act of 'stripping-off' (*spogliare*). Lino Pertile, in analysing the sources behind this metaphor, draws attention to the episode in Genesis 3.21 in which God makes clothes out of animal skins to give to Adam and Eve before exiling them from Paradise: 'And the Lord God made garments of skin for the man and for his wife, and clothed them'. This allusion to Genesis suggests that the journey up the mountain will equate to a return to a pre-lapsarian state, a shedding of the clothes which were put on at the moment of exile from Eden and which mark the beginning of human labour. Pertile draws attention to three possible layers of interpretation arising from Dante's use of the term 'scoglio': firstly, the literal sense in which the tunics are simply animal skin, superior replacements for the leaves which Adam and Eve had used to try to cover themselves; secondly, the allegorical sense in which the tunics represent the human body; and thirdly, as a representation of the corruptible spiritual and physical condition of mankind after the Fall.<sup>7</sup> In the two allegorical interpretations, human corruptibility and fleshiness appear to be closely intertwined with the moment of exile from Eden and the beginning of labour. Furthermore, in Hugh of St Victor's twelfth-century *Didascalicon*, *lanificum* ('fabric making') is listed as the first of the seven mechanical arts, and its prominent position in the list is explained through reference to the need for clothing after the Fall.<sup>8</sup> For Hugh of St Victor, then, the need to work and fabricate is closely linked with humankind's physical vulnerability outside the garden.

The metaphor of the 'scoglio' thus appears to provide a nexus for human fallenness, the beginning of labour in Genesis, human corruptibility or weakness, and the eventual end of labour in the Earthly Paradise. The command 'Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio' might initially appear to gesture towards the *poena sensus* of the

<sup>7</sup> Lino Pertile, *La punta del desio. Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Cadmo, 2005), pp. 59–83 (see esp. pp. 66–67).

<sup>8</sup> See Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, book 2, chapter 21; in *Didascalicon de studio legendi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), p. 39.

terraces. However, given that the 'piè del monte' is located in *Purgatorio* III (46), coinciding with the most physically challenging part of the journey for the pilgrim, are we to consider the slopes of Ante-Purgatory as part of the 'monte'? Moreover, could the very act of rushing towards the mountain constitute physical, redemptive work?

### THE PILGRIM'S CLIMB AND BELACQUA'S LAZINESS

As noted above, the difficulty of the pilgrim's ascent is especially emphasized in Ante-Purgatory, where he is heaviest. This becomes particularly apparent in cantos III and IV, in which the pilgrim and Virgil must begin their climb up the mountain's initial slopes. It is here that Dante emphasizes the pilgrim's physical fatigue more than anywhere else in *Purgatorio*. This is not to suggest that attention to the physically challenging aspects of the journey is unique to Ante-Purgatory. In *Inferno* XXIV, the heaviness of the pilgrim's body as he struggles up the 'ruina' is contrasted with Virgil's lightness (31–36), causing Virgil to chastise the pilgrim for his laziness: 'Omai conven che tu così ti spoltre' (*Inf.* XXIV, 46).<sup>9</sup> However, in Ante-Purgatory the importance of the pilgrim's exertions enters into a new dialogue with a spiritual desire to ascend, and the body begins to act as a clear impediment to the pursuit of an eternal spiritual reward.

In *Purgatorio* III the wall of rock is described as 'la roccia sì erta, | che 'ndarno vi sarien le gambe pronte' (47–48), emphasizing the physical implications of the climb. Then, however, Dante engages with the metaphor of spiritual flight once more when Virgil asks rhetorically: "Or chi sa da qual man la costa cala [...] sì che possa salir chi va sanz' ala?" (52–54). Similarly, in *Purgatorio* IV Dante makes a comparison between mountains in Italy and the mountain of Purgatory: 'con esso i piè; ma qui conven ch'om voli; | dico con l'ale snelle e con le piume | del gran disio' (27–29). On both occasions, the physical labour of the climb is present in the reference to 'gambe pronte' and 'piè', in contrast to the metaphor of wished-for spiritual flight. In the first comparison, Virgil's question places emphasis on the physical effort required, underling the absence of spiritual *levitas* that the pilgrim experiences at this stage in the journey. In *Purgatorio* IV, the poet draws attention to the need for spiritual desire when faced with a seemingly impossible physical challenge. The arrival at the first major obstacle in Purgatory thus permits a rearticulation of the dialectic between spiritual swiftness and corporeal *gravitas* introduced in *Purgatorio* II. In Ante-Purgatory, the pilgrim's body is an obstacle to ascent, but the difficulty of the climb equally places new emphasis on physical work as a form of redemptive labour.

The attention to physical effort and spiritual willingness built up over cantos II–IV is brought into sharp contrast through the pilgrim's encounter with the infamously lazy Belacqua at the end of *Purgatorio* IV. Belacqua, a Florentine maker of musical instruments, died between 1299 and March 1302, making him a relatively recent arrival

<sup>9</sup> See also *Purg.* X, 7–24, which recalls *Purg.* IV through the locutions 'pietra fessa' (7) and 'l'alta ripa' (23). However, indications of physical fatigue are limited to 'passi scarsi' (13) and 'stancato' (19).

to Ante-Purgatory.<sup>10</sup> The pilgrim's physical effort is almost immediately mocked by his old acquaintance, who interrupts Virgil's explanation of the spiritual logic of the mountain with the wry observation: '[...] "Forse | che di sedere in pria avrai distretta!"' (*Purg.* IV, 98–99). Belacqua then turns towards them:

Allor si volse a noi e puose mente  
 movendo 'l viso pur su per la coscia,  
 e disse: 'Or va tu sù, che se' valente!  
 Conobbi allor chi era, e quella angoscia  
 che m'avacciava un poco ancor la lena,  
 non m'impedì l'andare a lui [...].

(*Purg.* IV, 112–17)

Dante recognizes Belacqua thanks to his languid comportment and sarcastic remarks. Though this exchange is typically read for its comic elements, Belacqua's slow movements offer an interesting contrast with the great physical effort the pilgrim has just expended to reach the top of the steep slope. He barely moves to address the pilgrim, while the pilgrim fights his own fatigue in order to approach the soul. Dante thus appears to place the pilgrim's physical effort in direct contrast with Belacqua's laziness and stasis. While one is 'lasso' (43) from physical toil, the other is 'lasso' (106) from the very lack of it.

Belacqua bemoans his enforced period of waiting in Ante-Purgatory, but in doing so, ironically misses the opportunity to ask Dante for prayers to speed his journey, as other souls in Ante-Purgatory often do:

Ed elli: 'O frate, andar in sù che porta?  
 ché non mi lascerbbe ire a' martiri  
 l'angel di Dio che siede in su la porta.  
 Prima convien che tanto il ciel m'aggiri  
 di fuor da essa, quanto fece in vita,  
 perch'io 'ngdugiai al fine i buon sospiri,  
 se orazione in prima non m'aita  
 che surga sù di cuor che in grazia viva;  
 l'altra che val, che 'n ciel non è udita?'

(*Purg.* IV, 127–35)

Belacqua is also one of the few souls who fails to comment on Dante's living body, instead lamenting the amount of time he must spend on the mountain without prayers. His question—'andar in sù che porta?'—is pertinent (after all, he cannot ascend past the gates), but also deeply problematic given his status among the saved. Belacqua's indolence offers a poignant contrast with the pilgrim's physically difficult climb, and his efforts in engaging with Belacqua despite his breathlessness. Unlike the souls that

<sup>10</sup> See George D. Economou, 'Belacqua', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 96.

rush towards Dante 'sanza freno' (*Purg.* V, 42), hoping to entreat him for prayers from the living, Belacqua's static position beneath the 'gran petrone' (*Purg.* IV, 101) is indicative of an unchanged, negligent character. Belacqua's question is emblematic of one of the paradoxes of Ante-Purgatory: physical work is at once affirmed as an antidote to negligence, yet due to the quantitative nature of the delay imposed on souls in Ante-Purgatory, physical work and movement have no effect on the duration of their stay in this liminal zone.

## CONCLUSION

Though the transition between Ante-Purgatory and Purgatory-proper is rendered binary through the topographical marker of the gates and rituals of entrance in *Purgatorio* IX, it is important to remember that all souls in Ante-Purgatory are nonetheless numbered among 'spiriti eletti' (*Purg.* III, 73). On the Day of Judgement, the binary which Dante creates between these zones of Purgatory will be null and void from a theological perspective, as all souls will ascend to Paradise together. Waiting and working similarly stand in opposition to one another; and yet, paradoxically, the reader is equally urged to remember that the journey towards salvation begins upon arrival on the shores of Purgatory, or perhaps even on the banks of the Tiber, where souls must wait for passage to the island of Purgatory (*Purg.* II, 94–102). Indeed, Dante's extension of delay to the banks of the Tiber arguably suggests that this work should begin in the mortal realm. The only way for an individual to reduce their time in Ante-Purgatory (without prayer), therefore, is to work against slothful and negligent tendencies in this life rather than in the next.

# DANTE'S WINEMAKING *HAPAX* *LEGOMENA*: TEXTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL LABOUR IN THE *COMMEDIA*

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Whether as Eucharistic symbol, the result of a miracle, or as a means of heavenly inebriation, the theological significance of wine is self-evident. As Piero Boitani writes, it ‘needs no Cicero or medieval philosopher to explain it: the nous of a farmer will do just as well—or, equally, the biblical knowledge of the average Christian’.<sup>1</sup> Dante invokes the theologically inflected language of winemaking on several key occasions in the *Commedia*, particularly in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. In this note I will discuss passages in *Purgatorio* IV and *Paradiso* XII which refer to winemaking, focusing in particular on the significance in each instance of Dante’s choice to deploy *hapax legomena*, words which occur only once within the poem.<sup>2</sup> I will show that, far from merely alluding to the promises of salvation through implicit biblical allusion, Dante’s winemaking *hapax*, the result of stringent attention combined with judicious restraint, in fact perform the work of its very enaction.

## ***PURGATORIO* IV: ‘IMPRUNA’, ‘FORCATELLA’, ‘UVA’, ‘IMBRUNA’**

In *Purgatorio* IV, on their difficult ascent towards the gate of Purgatory, the pilgrim and his guide arrive at a steep and narrow opening in the rock, narrower than the gap in a hedge which a farmer might fill with thorns to stop potential thieves from stealing newly ripened grapes:

Maggiore aperta molte volte impruna  
con una forcatella di sue spine  
l’uom de la villa quando l’uva imbruna,

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<sup>1</sup> Piero Boitani, ‘The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation’, in *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, The William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante Studies, 11 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 95–130 (p. 106).

<sup>2</sup> I follow the definition of *hapax legomena* used by Robert Hollander in ‘An Index of Hapax Legomena in Dante’s *Commedia*’, *Dante Studies*, 106 (1988), 81–110, which will be my authority for citing a word as a *hapax*. On *hapax* in the *Commedia*, see also Riccardo Viel, ‘*Quella materia ond’io son fatto scriba*’: *Hapax e prime attestazioni della ‘Commedia’*, Mele cotogne (Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia, 2018); Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Dethologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 215; and Ronald L. Martinez, ‘Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy’, in *Reviewing Dante’s Theology*, ed. by Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, 2 vols (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), II, 89–155 (p. 106).



che non era la calla onde saline  
 lo duca mio, e io appresso, soli,  
 come da noi la schiera si partìne.<sup>3</sup>

(*Purg.* IV, 19–24)

Many commentators, first among them Carlo Steiner, have drawn attention to the conspicuous echo of Matthew 7.14 ('For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it') in Dante's pseudosimile, with its obvious relevance to the pilgrim's incipient purgative journey.<sup>4</sup> Nicola Fosca, citing the eighteenth-century Jesuit Pompeo Venturi, adds to this a possible reference to Proverbs 15.19 ('The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway').<sup>5</sup> This latter reference, though less often cited, is particularly pertinent to the passage, especially in consideration of the fact that the narrow path leads eventually to a group of souls usually referred to by anglophone critics as the 'late-penitent', who delayed their repentance until the last possible moment and so must wait outside the gate of Purgatory for as long as they lived in contumacy on earth, unless aided by the prayers of the living. To reach their waiting place, these indolent souls must travel up through a path which, in the vehicle of Dante's pseudosimile at least, is full of thorns.

Dante's 'homely comparison [...] rich with biblical resonances' is also an island of singular usages in a *canto* relatively poor in lexical diversity; the opening *terzina* (lines 19–21) contains a cluster of four *hapax legomena*, the first of the *canto* and the last for twenty-nine lines: 'impruna', 'forcatella', 'uva', and 'imbruna'.<sup>6</sup> Dante's description of a difficult and constricted topography, itself already rich with biblical metaphors, is thus expressed, appropriately enough, through highly constricted language, all drawn from the language of winemaking. As the late fourteenth-century commentator Benvenuto da Imola writes, this 'primus ingressus montis' (first entrance to the mountain) is 'difficilior *sine comparatione*' (very difficult, *without comparison* [my emphasis]), a remark which could apply equally well to Dante's lexical choices.<sup>7</sup> The use of *hapax* in the passage forces the reader to streamline their reading away from the plurality of comparison and towards a singular focus on the words themselves, equivalent to Virgil and the pilgrim being forced into single file by the narrowness of the path.

In the *Ars poetica*, one of the most widely read classical treatises on poetics in the Middle Ages, Horace describes the writing of poetry as 'limae labor et mora' (the toil and tedium of the file), a characterization borrowed from the language of sculpture

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from the *Commedia* are taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, Le Opere di Dante Alighieri, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 7, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67).

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Steiner, commentary to *Purg.* IV, 19–21, accessed via the *Dartmouth Dante Project* [henceforth *DDP*], <<http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>>. All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>5</sup> Nicola Fosca, commentary to *Purgatorio* IV, 19–24 (*DDP*).

<sup>6</sup> *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling, introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011), II, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, commentary to *Purg.* IV, 19–24 (*DDP*).

which holds a particular relevance for the restrictive, filed down poetics of the *hapax*.<sup>8</sup> In the context of Dante's *Purgatorio*, the *limae labor* of the *hapax* is also linked to a specifically Christian system of ethics which informs Purgatory's landscape, as evidenced by the 'calla' of *Purgatorio* IV discussed above. The penitent soul undergoing purgation is included in the generosity of the language's intelligibility, but is also filed down to their own specific, singular path to God. The message for the penitent (and for readers) is clear: recognize the generous bounty of God's forgiveness but remain single-minded in pursuing salvation.

The *impruna-imbruna* rhyme in *Purgatorio* IV brings together in near-equivalence the workings of a human labourer (the farmer who 'impruna') and a divine *artifex* (seen in the grape which, through natural processes, 'imbruna'). The positioning of 'impruna' before 'imbruna' suggests that the latter could be a riff on the former, where divine operations in nature (i.e. the ripening of the grape) are cast as the work of a labourer. This mechanical framing of the universe provides the metaphysical backdrop to the materially enacted playfulness of linking two very similar words in a near *rima equivocca*. Providing a tonic to the *limae labor*, these *hapax* evince generosity in their vivid intelligibility as they reveal the joy that can be found in lexical choices made materially active. As the *terzina* ends, the poet chooses to place two *hapax* side by side, 'l'uva imbruna', likely selecting 'uva' rather than 'vite' (used on two other occasions in the poem, *Purg.* XXV, 78 and *Par.* XXIV, 111) precisely because of its phonic qualities, its *-u-a-* assonance with 'imbruna'. This sound pattern binds the two *hapax* together and demonstrates that the selection of a *hapax*, ahead of any of its synonyms, is based primarily on its phonic qualities. The duality of the *hapax*, its filing down and reaching out, is further evident in the rhyme *-una*. The rhyme *una-impruna-imbruna* (lines 17, 19, 21) includes what Joan Ferrante calls a 'core rhyme', i.e. the presence of one rhyme word within another, in this case 'una'.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the presence of 'una' in the two *hapax* highlights their uniqueness. On the other hand, 'una' is used earlier, in lines 17–18, to describe the communal—and therefore necessarily plural—cry of the excommunicated souls announcing the location of the pathway: 'venimmo ove quell' anime ad una | gridaro a noi: "Qui è vostro dimando"'. The doubleness in the semantic field of 'singularity', where it is both a means of differentiation and a *telos* of unification, is therefore performed by these *hapax* in rhyme. They are words which say 'una' and are singular, and they are words which say 'una' and perform unification. The text thus enacts the specified, individual, and continually worked process of salvation which underwrites the *Purgatorio*.

<sup>8</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, line 291; in *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library, 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926, rev. and repr. 1929), pp. 474–75. On the Horatian legacy in the Middle Ages with respect to Dante, see Ronald L. Martinez, 'Rhetoric, Literary Theory, and Practical Criticism', in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 277–96 (pp. 287–91).

<sup>9</sup> Joan Ferrante, 'A Poetics of Chaos and Harmony', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 181–200 (p. 192).

**PARADISO XII: 'AGRICOLA', 'GROMMA'**

The shift from *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso* entails a shift away from direct physical contact with the generated world; the winemaking language of *Paradiso* must therefore move from the cultivated processes of growth and maturity to the theological labour of subject-making. In Saint Bonaventure's praise of Saint Dominic, which occupies the majority of *Paradiso* XII, Dominic is described as an 'agricola' (*Par.* XII, 71). This is a *hapax* in the poem and is clearly lifted from John 15.1: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower ['agricola' in the Vulgate].' As a *hapax*, the word 'agricola' is specifically tailored in its application in the poem to Dominic, singularizing his divine status through a name which, however unique in the *Commedia*, is shared with God the Father in the Bible. Where the biblical intertext allows for the fashioning, through *hapax*, of the penitent subject in *Purgatorio* IV, the *hapax* here in *Paradiso* allows for a shared identity of Dominic with the Father in a lexical performance of divine subjectivity. The union of human and divine labourer is no longer deferred, no longer a process of maturation, but is immediately apparent.

Having finished his praise of Dominic, Bonaventure turns to a condemnation of the contemporary Franciscan orders, drawing on yet more viticultural language:

Se tal fu l'una rota de la biga  
in che la Santa Chiesa si difese  
e vinse in campo la sua civil briga,  
ben ti dovrebbe assai esser palese  
l'eccellenza de l'altra, di cui Tomma  
dinanzi al mio venir fu sì cortese.  
Ma l'orbita che fé la parte somma  
di sua circonferenza, è derelitta,  
sì ch'è la muffa dov' era la gromma.

(*Par.* XII, 106–14)

The excellence of Francis, attested by Thomas Aquinas in the previous canto, has withered. Now where there was 'gromma', there is 'muffa', where there was the crust which gives wine its flavour, there is mould. 'Gromma' is also a *hapax* in the *Commedia*, and the *-omma* rhyme is also unique in the poem. It is safe to assume that, as Riccardo Viel argues for the verbal form 'grommate' at *Inf.* XVIII, 106, the noun 'gromma' is a word from a demotic language of working people.<sup>10</sup> The presence of 'gromma' in rhyme position enhances its physical, phonic characteristics, which bespeak a colloquial history of usage and enhance its status as 'other' to a literary 'vulgare illustre'. Reciprocally, this otherness acts to singularize the rhyme pattern. The singularity of the *-omma* rhyme scheme, exemplified by 'gromma', is therefore the product of deliberate lexical selection and concatenation, and of the phonic qualities baked into the word's very texture. The rhyming *hapax* is a product of deliberate choice and is also partly arbitrary.

<sup>10</sup> Viel, p. 86.

The poetic *limae labor* exemplified by the *hapax* must reckon with what is outside of the control of the poetic labourer. And in the instance of the historical reality accessed by ‘gromma’, the vintner has little to no control over the natural fermentation of the wine, as the vineyard labourer has no control over the maturation of the grape, other than the crude imposition of thorns to prevent thieves. The labour which allows the ‘gromma’ to be gained is rather subtler, even if operating on the same principle that the human hand cannot affect natural process as a natural agent, only intervene in it as a human agent. But the work which would give ‘gromma’ rather than ‘muffa’ is particular to poetic labour, and pertinent to the type of working self which is curated in the *Paradiso*. The work of ensuring there is ‘gromma’ rather than ‘muffa’ is a work of patient acceptance, while remaining ready to intervene at the crucial moment. The *-omma* rhyme can be seen as one such specific intervention, one which entails the poet’s acceptance of the scarcity of the rhyme words, thus yielding to the extreme arbitrariness that allows them to rhyme together. Such attentiveness is evidently lacking in the contemporary Franciscan orders, meaning the *-omma* rhymes not only describe the problem but also perform its solution.

The temporal distinction between the labour that allows the production of wine from grape, and that which goes into the development of its flavour maps onto the distinction between Purgatory and Paradise as realms which respectively pre- and post-date the Eschaton. But in a realm where all the souls are already saved, there remains a question over where labour is directed in *Paradiso*. Because the *limae labor* of the *hapax* is highly metapoetic, the labour of *Paradiso* could be seen to be directed towards itself, to the curation of its own meanings. According to Ronald L. Martinez, Bernard’s use of the word ‘punto’ in *Paradiso* XXXII is metatextual as both a ‘point’ of the text, and a tailor’s stitch. Martinez argues that Bernard’s use of ‘punto’ places a ‘self-referential or metapoetic emphasis on the formal articulation of Dante’s text, that is, of the *forma tractatus* of the *Commedia*, divided into *cantiche*, *canti*, and *terzine*’.<sup>11</sup> In effect, the temporal collapse into a point, which is both beginning and end, achieves textually what the Empyrean does metaphysically. As the latter ‘contains the whole universe’ such that ‘panoramic looks within it are in effect comprehensive of the creation’, the singular textual points, *hapax*, are ‘comprehensive’ of the entirety of the textual creation that is the *Commedia*.<sup>12</sup> Singular usages reflect on this singular poetic act because, in much the same way that a *hapax* is effectively irreducible, so the poem, as with any poem, cannot have its individual elements altered without altering its unique character. It is in the Empyrean where the work of the text approaches nearer than ever the divine work described, where Dante deploys a ‘strategy of jumping textuality which exemplifies rather than explains’ and his poetic work becomes most strikingly performative.<sup>13</sup> But it is only at the poem’s end, the climax of its diegetic

<sup>11</sup> Ronald L. Martinez, ‘Dante “buon sartore” (*Paradiso* 32.140): Textile Arts, Rhetoric, and Metapoetics at the End of the *Commedia*’, *Dante Studies*, 136 (2018), 22–61 (pp. 26–27).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati, ‘Dante After Wittgenstein: “Aspetto”, Language, and Subjectivity from *Convivio* to *Paradiso*’, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 223–47 (p. 239). See also Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, on the unique ‘lyrical or antinarrative mode’ (p. 221) of these final cantos.

progression, that a retrospective glance can achieve what *hapax* do throughout the poem. As the Empyrean contains the entirety of creation, the fruits of divine labour, so each *hapax* contains the fruits of poetic labour, the singular text.

## CONCLUSION

*Hapax legomena* are metonymies for the creative act of bringing into being through language itself, the spark of singularity behind poetic creation. There is perhaps no more effective means that the text has at its disposal for representing its own singularity than the *hapax*. The paradigm which they present for the curation of self within the temporality of salvation is fundamentally metatextual. The winemaking *hapax* of *Purgatorio* IV advocate a model for self-preparation for salvation through a single-minded focus on one's own relationship with God, which remains open to his unbounded potential for forgiveness. But this also reflects on the specific modality of *Purgatorio*'s labour, the work through which the text prepares both pilgrim and reader for salvation. Then, in *Paradiso* XII, the model is of the soul yielding to that which is outside its command while remaining attentive, ready to intervene at the right moment, something which is instantiated in the rare *-omma* rhyme. The continual curation of self, implicit behind any model of labour which is applied to *Paradiso*, is also an issue of the text and its unfolding through time. The souls as represented in *Paradiso* have already achieved perfection. But then, significantly, *hapax legomena* operate outside temporally defined boundaries insofar as any one *hapax*, I argue, can represent the textual whole. Perhaps it is in this teleological denial that the *hapax* is the best representative of the text, as a disinterested, playful articulation which takes joy in its lexical choices.

# THE FIGURE OF THE WET NURSE FROM VITTORELLI TO PIRANDELLO

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Throughout history, certain categories of domestic labour have been considered the specific responsibility of women, contributing to what Daniela Perco has called ‘l’invisibile quotidiano’.<sup>1</sup> Though seemingly invisible, such workers were often essential to the successful functioning of many bourgeois and aristocratic Italian families. One such worker, the nursemaid—including both the dry nurse, who cared for a child without suckling it, and the wet nurse, who breastfed the children of other women—has a long, but understudied, presence in both visual arts and literature in Italy until the early twentieth century, after which the profession and its representation gradually disappeared with the invention of formula milk. In this note I will analyse the representation of the figure of the wet nurse in works by Iacopo Vittorelli (1749–1835), Ippolito Pindemonte (1753–1828), and Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936), focusing in particular on the ways in which the individual identity of the wet nurse is consistently subjugated to her role as a domestic labourer.

## VITTORELLI, ‘LA NUTRICE’

The eighteenth century witnessed an increase in the popularity of *poesie d’occasione*, poems composed for specific social occasions and usually addressed to members of the aristocracy.<sup>2</sup> *Poesie d’occasione* most often recorded marriages, deaths, monastic vows, graduations, births, and the like. Iacopo Vittorelli’s poem ‘La nutrice’ (1806), an ode dedicated to a ‘nobilissima sposa’, is a prime example of the genre, in which the poet suggests a list of qualities that a good wet nurse should possess in order to be recruited by an expectant mother.<sup>3</sup>

Vittorelli’s imagined young candidate is a picture of health: she is ‘giuliva nel sembiante’ and ‘composta nelle membra’ (lines 29–30). Furthermore, her moral and temperamental qualities are directly linked to her ability to provide quality milk to a child:

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<sup>1</sup> Daniela Perco, ‘Balie da latte. Note e testimonianze su alcune esperienze di lavoro’, in *Balie da latte. Una forma peculiare di emigrazione temporanea*, ed. by Daniela Perco (Feltre: Comunità montana feltrina, 1984), pp. 15–50 (p. 15).

<sup>2</sup> *Poesie d’occasione* were so popular in the mid-eighteenth century that many poets produced parodic versions; see, for example, Domenico Balestrieri, *Lagrima in morte di un gatto* (Milan: Maresis, 1741).

<sup>3</sup> Iacopo Vittorelli, ‘La nutrice. Ode diretta a nobilissima sposa’, in *Rime di Jacopo Vittorelli, nuova edizione dall’autore medesimo accresciuta, e unicamente approvata* (Bassano del Grappa: Remondini, 1806), pp. 61–73 (p. 61). All subsequent quotations of Vittorelli’s poetry are taken from this edition and are cited by line number.

Ah! Quell'anima serena,  
 Quel modesto e ingenuo ciglio  
 Ben sapranno al caro figlio  
 Puro latte apparecchiare.

(lines 33–36)

However, Vittorelli's idealistic depiction differs markedly from any probable reality, since wet nurses were most often women who had recently experienced the loss of a child, or new mothers who had been forced to abandon their own babies in order to breastfeed the children of others due to financial need.<sup>4</sup> While Vittorelli draws attention to the practical benefits of a healthy wet nurse, the theme of breastfeeding has a long literary history and has enjoyed various metaphorical associations, spanning from the New Testament epistles, in which milk symbolizes the first spiritual nourishment offered to Christian infants, to Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, in which breastmilk is linked to the acquisition of language.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond an ability to breastfeed, Vittorelli lists the desirable qualities that a good wet nurse from the countryside should possess. Suggestions principally concern the wet nurse's diet, including the instruction that she should only eat wheat from the fields and drink clean water from rivers. Moreover, Vittorelli suggests that the wet nurse should not be fed with 'cibo pingue e delicato', because 'son migliori i cibi agresti | erbe, poma, e latte, e miel' (lines 45–48). Additionally, the noble lady who hires the wet nurse should be careful that she does not drink 'i pungenti amari sali | del volatile caffè' (lines 51–52), for it can irritate the baby through soiled milk. Vittorelli also suggests that it is best to breastfeed the baby 'a ciel sereno' in the countryside, rather than in the shadow 'de la stanza signoril' (lines 65–68).

Aristocratic and bourgeois families during the nineteenth century often resorted to private wet nursing, which used to be carried out in one of two ways: either by entrusting the new-born child to a country wet nurse, who would raise the child in her own home and return it to the parents when weaning was complete (as in Vittorelli's poem), or by hosting the wet nurse in the employer's home, so as to be able to control the process of raising and educating the child.<sup>6</sup> The first option was clearly preferred by Vittorelli, who underlines the importance of the wet nurse's singing skills and her expertise in swaddling the baby. Vittorelli also insists on the importance of a wet nurse's singing skills in his sonnet *Alla Nobile Signora Francesca Negri per la nascita del suo Primogenito*, in which he suggests that the baby be breastfed by Lauretta, the

<sup>4</sup> See Anna Bellavitis, *Women's Work and Rights in Early Modern Urban Europe*, trans. by Clelia Boscolo (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Maurizio Fiorilla, 'La metafora del latte in Dante tra tradizione classica e cristiana', in *La metafora in Dante*, ed. by Marco Ariani (Florence: Olschki, 2009), pp. 149–65 (p. 150). On the cultural significance of the nursing mother in medieval discussions of language and selfhood, see also Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body*, The William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante Studies, 5 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Rossella Ropa, 'Tra due secoli. I lavori di cura', in *Donne e lavoro: un'identità difficile. Lavoratrici in Emilia Romagna (1860–1960)*, ed. by Rossella Ropa and Cinzia Venturoli (Bologna: Compositori, 2010), pp. 35–52 (p. 36).

eponymous Francesca Negri's sister, as she was considered an excellent singer. Vittorelli strictly differentiates the roles of the two women:

Lasciala in cura a lei, che d'ogni eletta  
Voce melodiosa il pregio annulla.  
Tu sei madre d'un figlio, e a te si aspetta  
Vegliare intorno a la felice culla.

(lines 5–8)

Nonetheless, despite concluding his checklist by declaring that 'questi [...] son gli studii di Colei, | che prescelsero gli Dei | al bambin, tuo dolce amor' (lines 177–80), Vittorelli grants that, should the mother want to suckle her baby herself, she should be free to do so, citing as his authority a poem from 1788 by Ippolito Pindemonte that praises the countess Teodora Lisca for breastfeeding her own child:

Che se un dolce interno affetto,  
O Amarille, ti dicesse,  
Porgi, porgi le tue stesse  
Nivee poppe al figliuolin:

Cedi, o Bella, e avrai dal chiaro  
Pindemonte in Elicona  
La medesima corona,  
Ch'ei tessè di Dori al crin.

(lines 185–92)

In the poem to which Vittorelli alludes, *Per la Sig.ra Contessa Teodora Lisca Pompei che allatta il suo figliuolino*, Pindemonte criticized the upper classes' habit of entrusting new-borns to wet nurses from the countryside.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, such decisions were sometimes fiercely contested by contemporaries, and it was often said that the children were considered inconveniences by mothers of the upper bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup> Pindemonte gives two reasons why the mother's own milk was preferable. Firstly, the mother's milk was considered to be more genuine than the milk coming from the wet nurse ('latte che gli potria tornar veleno' [line 8]). Secondly, and more importantly, Pindemonte's poem appeals to the emotional connection between a mother and her child, to which the wet nurse could potentially pose a disruption: 'Dell'amor suo non soffrirò ch'esulti | altri pria che sua madre' (lines 17–18).

There were also other possible reasons that mothers should apparently be wary of employing wet nurses; in nineteenth-century England, for example, many medical authorities believed that 'the milk of an irritable or bad-tempered nurse could injure or even kill the child', a danger that was particularly associated with red hair, leading 'a

<sup>7</sup> Ippolito Pindemonte, 'Per la Sig.ra Contessa Teodora Lisca Pompei che allatta il suo figliuolino', in *Poesie di Ippolito Pindemonte veronese* (Pisa: Nuova Tipografia, 1798), pp. 99–104.

<sup>8</sup> Ropa, p. 36.



number of authorities to advise against the employment of red-haired wetnurses'.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, due to their provenance from the countryside, many wet nurses were suspected of witchcraft, and, in some cases, even of heresy.<sup>10</sup> In a related vein, Giacomo Leopardi in his 1815 *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi* inveighs against 'those caretakers [...] and wet-nurses [...] who threaten children with bogies', causing indelible shock to the tender minds of infants.<sup>11</sup>

Hiring a wet nurse was therefore a potentially risky affair for aristocratic families, a fact which explains Vittorelli's emphasis on the importance of a considered recruitment process. Nonetheless, by the mid-nineteenth century there were a number of institutionalized means by which wet nurses could be obtained, and the practice of mercenary wet nursing became increasingly popular. Such a custom gave rise to a real exodus that affected a significant proportion of the Italian female population, with thousands of young women, mostly belonging to the labouring class and therefore driven by need and poverty, being forced to leave their homes and children in order to find gainful employment and, very occasionally, a level of independence.<sup>12</sup> The price of such emancipation, though, was that wet nurses were uprooted from their nearest and dearest to undergo a transformation that only partially alleviated the pain of abandonment by offering a way of life far from the food shortages and domestic chores they left behind.<sup>13</sup> Wet nurses' emancipation often also brought about a conspicuous change in appearance. Indeed, far from the rustic naïveté praised by Vittorelli, the tide of wet nurses who moved to the city gained new wardrobes, hairstyles and behaviours as they adapted to their new urban lives.<sup>14</sup> Thus, their adaptation to the social level of the family that employed them became both a requirement for and a consequence of their new role.

### PIRANDELLO, *NOVELLE PER UN ANNO*

Almost a century after the publication of 'La nutrice', Vittorelli's criteria for a successful wet nurse remained largely unchanged, as demonstrated by Luigi Pirandello's various depictions of the figure in his *Novelle per un anno* (1884–1936), a collection of short stories. Most of the wet nurses depicted in Pirandello's short stories are presented primarily as workers, and only marginally as human beings, as if to suggest that the real characters in the stories are aristocratic families, with the wet nurses occupying only ancillary roles, both socially and in terms of the narrative. Most

<sup>9</sup> Ann Roberts, 'Mothers and Babies: The Wet Nurse and Her Employer in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England', *Women's Studies*, 3 (1976), 279–93 (p. 283).

<sup>10</sup> Bellavitis, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Fabio Camilletti, 'Leopardi's Night (T)errors, the Uncanny, and the "Old Wives' Tales"', in *Archaeology of the Unconscious: Italian Perspectives*, ed. by Alessandra Aloisi and Fabio Camilletti (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 67–85 (p. 68).

<sup>12</sup> Ropa, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Sarti, "'Noi donne siamo fatte per patire". Trame femminili a confronto ne *La balia* di Pirandello, dalla pagina allo schermo', *Pirandelliana*, 5 (2011), 143–53 (p. 143).

<sup>14</sup> Adriana Dadà, 'Partire per un figlio altrui: racconti delle balie nel Novecento', in *Altrove. Viaggi di donne dall'antichità al Novecento*, ed. by Dinora Corsi (Rome: Viella, 1999), pp. 111–31.

elements of Vittorelli's ode remain valid, such as the provenance of the wet nurse from the countryside, her young age, and her good health, while other elements, such as the death of her own baby, are added as documents of social history. In the novella *O di uno o di nessuno* (1912), for instance, the two main characters, Carlino e Tito, urgently require a wet nurse due to the unexpected death of Melina, the third member of their *ménage à trois* who died shortly after giving birth. An old woman tells them about a young woman she knows, presenting her as a potential candidate:

conosceva lei una balia, una contadina d'Alatri, venuta a sgravarsi all'ospedale di San Giovanni: era uscita da parecchi giorni; il figlietto le era morto, e quella sera stessa sarebbe ripartita per Alatri: buona, ottima giovine; maritata, sì; il marito le era partito da pochi mesi per l'America; sana, forte; il figlietto le era morto per disgrazia, nel parto, non già per malattia.<sup>15</sup>

In the guise of a recruiter, the old woman underlines that the candidate is a peasant, married, and healthy, and that her baby died 'per disgrazia', due to an accident, and not due to illness. The two men decide to give the baby to the wet nurse in the countryside—'meglio che il bimbo andasse lontano, affidato alla balia' (*NA*, I, p. 518)—only visiting him to check on the nurse. However, it is soon made clear that the child will need a proper education, and that the wet nurse is not able to provide him with one:

Per ora, Nilli era piccino piccino, e poteva star lì con la balia, che assicurava di volerlo tenere con sé, come un figliuolo, almeno fino al ritorno del marito dall'America. Ma non ci poteva star sempre! Crescendo, bisognava pur dargli una certa educazione.

(*NA*, I, p. 519)

The same characterization of a poorly educated wet nurse appears in Pirandello's novella 'Nenia' (1901), in which a wet nurse is portrayed during a journey in a third-class wagon while singing to a crying infant. Echoing Vittorelli's advice as to the benefits of a wet nurse's singing ability, Pirandello describes the contrast between the nurse's rough appearance and her gentle voice:

E accennava, svogliata, quasi prolungando un sospiro d'impazienza, un motivo di nenia paesana. [...] A un tratto, nella cupa ombra della sera imminente, dalle labbra di quella rozza contadinona si svolse a mezza voce, con soavità inverosimile, con fascino d'ineffabile amarezza, la nenia mesta [...].

(*NA*, I, p. 525)

The figure of a rough nurse hailing from the countryside is also reiterated in Pirandello's novella 'In silenzio' (1905), in which a young woman recruited to breastfeed a newborn baby behaves poorly and unprofessionally. Her employer even hesitates in reproaching her, scared that this could have repercussions for the baby: 'e a

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Novelle per un anno*, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1954), I, p. 517 [henceforth *NA*].

muoverne a quella balia il minimo rimprovero, già la certezza d'indispettirla e il pericolo ch'ella approfittasse dell'assenza di lui per sfogare il dispetto contro la creaturina innocente' (*NA*, II, p. 218). However, though highly criticized ('Brutta zoticonna, venuta su dalla campagna che pareva un tronco d'albero, e che ora credeva di farsi bella, pettinandosi coi capelli alti e infronzolandosi' [*NA*, II, p. 219]), the wet nurse excels in producing quality milk, a pivotal requirement of her role: 'Ma pazienza! Il latte, lo aveva buono; e il bimbo, quantunque trascurato, prosperava' (*NA*, II, p. 219). Such a comment, once again, sheds light on the wet nurse's status as a domestic worker who, though inadequate in other respects, is valued chiefly for her ability to express milk.

In a similar vein, Pirandello's novella 'La balia' (1903), which tells the story of Annicchia and her relocation from the countryside to the city of Rome, shows how wet nurses were increasingly considered solely on the basis of their productive value, even more so than in the early nineteenth century. At first, Annicchia is shocked by the offer to go to Rome, because it means the abandonment of her child, a common fate for wet nurses, as discussed above.<sup>16</sup> Later in the story, Annicchia's own child dies while she is in Rome, nursing Ersilia's baby. Annicchia's mourning leaves Ersilia indifferent, and she eventually fires the wet nurse when she loses her milk due to the shock of her bereavement. Having lost her milk, Annicchia soon becomes completely unsuitable for her job.

Pirandello's 'La balia' also sheds light on the important social role which wet nurses clearly occupied in urban upper-class families. Indeed, the social impact that the wet nurse would have had in Roman aristocratic society seems to be the second most important criterion for Ersilia and her parents in their search for a wet nurse. As soon as Ersilia's mother sees Annicchia, she pictures her in the context of the family's social life:

la signora Manfroni osservava la giovine e, con l'immaginazione, la parava da balia e approvava col capo, approvava come se già la vedesse con un goffo zendado rosso in testa e uno spillone dai tremuli fiori d'argento tra i biondi capelli.

(*NA*, II, p. 299)

Not only, then, does the wet nurse have to provide good milk for the newborn, but also, as a new key requirement, she needs to possess physical qualities that allow her to debut in society and look like a lady.

## CONCLUSION

Wet-nursing, though today an almost forgotten form of female labour, has a long and rich history as a literary trope in Italian poetry and prose. Through an analysis of Vittorelli's 'La nutrice' and a selection of short stories from Pirandello's *Novelle per un anno*, we see that the characterization of this marginalized female labourer remains

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<sup>16</sup> Sarti, p. 114.

fairly consistent throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the wet nurse being characterized chiefly as a source of nourishment for new-born babies of aristocratic families, and at times also as a luxury object to be showcased by her employers. From the end of the nineteenth century, however, with the invention of readily available formula milk, literary depictions of the figure begin to dwindle. Without a need for their labour, wet nurses gradually disappear from the pages of Italian literature altogether.

# IL LAVORO NELLA POESIA MAGRELLIANA. APPUNTI STILISTICI

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Dopo l'esordio poetico di *Ora serrata retinae* (1980),<sup>1</sup> opera 'sovratemporale e impermeabile alla dimensione storico-politica',<sup>2</sup> caratterizzata dal ripiegamento dello sguardo lirico su se stesso, con le raccolte successive la poesia magrelliana si apre alla realtà del mondo esterno, assumendo, a partire dagli anni Novanta, una disposizione prettamente civile. Questa svolta impegnata, in controtendenza rispetto agli orientamenti culturali dominanti,<sup>3</sup> nasce dall'esigenza di una critica severa alla società contemporanea, dominata dal denaro e dalla massificazione e degradazione dell'informazione. Questa necessità viene tuttavia a scontrarsi con i limiti conoscitivi determinati da un linguaggio che il poeta avverte come ambiguo e contraffabile, tanto da disconoscerne, in chiusura ai *Disturbi del sistema binario* (2006), la funzione di strumento comunicativo condiviso.<sup>4</sup> Se una comprensione chiara e univoca del reale non risulta possibile, per l'autore è comunque necessario perseverare nell'esercizio di un pensiero critico che trovi nella razionalità della forma poetica il principio ordinatore capace di porre un argine all'equivocità del mondo.

La riflessione magrelliana sul lavoro, sviluppata da *Didascalie per la lettura di un giornale* (1999) a *Il sangue amaro* (2014), si inserisce entro questo filone civile, ponendo in evidenza i temi dell'alienazione e della reificazione dell'individuo, dell'asservimento al denaro e al dogma della produzione.<sup>5</sup> Nel trattare questi motivi, l'io lirico trascende se stesso, coinvolgendo l'intera società, forza-lavoro immolata sull'altare del guadagno.

Tale concezione negativa del lavoro sarà quindi illustrata a partire dall'analisi delle metafore e dei domini semantici, per essere verificata alla prova dell'analisi del lessico e dello stile, strumenti regolatori—questi ultimi—capaci di ordinare razionalmente la babelica magmaticità del reale.

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<sup>1</sup> Valerio Magrelli, *Ora serrata retinae* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Riccardo Socci, "E sto dove non stavo": linee evolutive nella poesia di Valerio Magrelli, *Italianistica*, 46.3 (2017), 227–36 (p. 228).

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. l'intervista all'autore in Francesco Diaco, 'Poesia e società. Conversazione con Valerio Magrelli', <<http://www.leparoleelecose.it/?p=6763>> [ultimo accesso 26 agosto 2021]: "[...] ho avuto una vera e propria trasformazione nel corso di trentacinque anni di scrittura [...]: "sono passato da Ponge a Brecht. Il motivo è stato che la società è passata da Brecht a Ponge".

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. 'Post scriptum. Addio alla lingua II', in Valerio Magrelli, *Le cavie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2018), p. 454.

<sup>5</sup> Si analizzano le seguenti opere, citate come tra parentesi: *Didascalie per la lettura di un giornale* (DLG), *Disturbi del sistema binario* (DSB), *Il sangue amaro* (SA). I versi si indicano in cifre arabe tra parentesi tonde. Si cita da Magrelli, *Le cavie*.

## METAFORE E DOMINI SEMANTICI

Uno dei campi metaforici maggiormente attivati nella rappresentazione del lavoro è quello medico-corporale.<sup>6</sup> Ne ‘La seduta II’ (*DSB*) Magrelli, a partire dalla definizione del lavoro come prestazione, costruisce l’immagine dell’io-lavoratore quale ‘globulo rosso’ (4), che cede se stesso ‘per ottenere ossigeno’ (5). Questa degradazione corpuscolare dell’individuo, questa sua cessione ‘in cambio di denaro’ (3), tocca il suo punto più basso nella sua stessa dissoluzione, che è insieme fisica e morale, veicolata per mezzo di una citazione, tradotta e adattata ai versi, da *Nadja* di André Bréton: ‘perché non serve a niente essere vivi | mentre lavoriamo’ (6–7). Così, la reificazione del soggetto-lavoratore si accompagna al suo annichilimento totale, nella disconnessione tra gesto prestato (‘Presto dei gesti’, 3) e vita a se stessa presente.

Tale binomio lavoro-morte, variamente declinato, è anch’esso una costante. All’interno del dominio medico-corporale esso si riscontra pure in ‘Posta dei lettori I’ (*DLG*); viene qui innanzitutto riproposto il motivo della riduzione dell’io, assimilato a ‘carne-tempo’, a esito residuale. Un tempo che, già intaccato dalla ‘disapprovazione’, giunge a vanificarsi e a logorarsi ulteriormente in sterili trafilie burocratiche, che innervano ‘capillarmente’ nell’esistenza del poeta il cancro subdolo della dispersione di risorse, di vita, di dignità (3–12):

Sono io  
venuto alla luce per questo?  
Per questo ho superato febbri e fratture  
e morti e lutti e offese?  
Ho superato le offese solo perché il mio tempo,  
carne-tempo, fosse così smembrato e offeso  
e capillarmente umiliato?  
La disapprovazione  
che una volta veniva dal lavoro  
ora è Metastasi.

Inoltre, l’io, già declassato ad ‘allegato’ (3), giunge a definirsi ‘aborto’ (13-15):

Perciò, se cancellassi le ore immolate al nulla,  
non resterebbe l’età di un neonato  
– l’aborto che qui scrive.

L’io svanisce tra gli allegati, che—dice—‘sto compilando da sempre’ (2), opponendo in questo modo la dimensione eterna della burocrazia allo scarto del tempo, testimone di una vita residuale.

Ancora in ‘A Natale, credo, scada il bollino blu’ (*SA*) la ‘metastasi’ (6) delle trafilie burocratiche, atomizzata e moltiplicata in ‘password, [...] codice utente, PIN e PUK’ (5), inchioda il lavoratore alla croce delle tasse in scadenza: ‘il bollino blu | del motorino,

<sup>6</sup> In proposito, cfr. Federico Francucci, *Il mio corpo estraneo* (Milano/Udine: Mimesis, 2013).

il canone URAR TV, | poi l'IMU e in più il secondo | acconto IRPEF – o era INRI?' (1–4); qui il dissanguamento del frutto del lavoro passa attraverso la proliferazione cancerosa di sigle astruse, fino al rovesciamento parodico e dissacrante, ottenuto come per replicazione genomica anomala, dell' 'IRPEF' in 'INRI'. Questa contaminazione ironica di piani metaforici consente di rafforzare immediatamente la raffigurazione del martirio del lavoratore, associando alla sofferenza per malattia quella per religioso asservimento al sistema economico stabilito.

Proprio quello religioso è un altro dei campi metaforici più sviluppati. I motivi della sottomissione al mercato e agli imperativi del guadagno, in particolare, vengono frequentemente declinati in chiave devozionale. Il 'Codice a barre' (*DLG*) viene ad esempio onorato come 'l'altissimo vessillo | che sventola sul regno della cosa' (1–2); 'Borsa' (*DLG*) allestisce invece uno scenario da cerimonia religiosa: 'Piazza Affari' (6)—cuore del guadagno speculativo—è il 'Tempio' (5) che accoglie i 'fedeli | genuflessi' (4–5) in adorazione del dio-denaro, mentre l'andamento degli indici azionari, 'organo' dalle 'mille canne' (1), sostiene l'intero sistema, al cui centro—in un intreccio allitterante—si addensa 'Il soffio della morte e della merce, | lungo la sterminata cordigliera di merda | che Sisifo va accumulando' (8–10); in 'Incubo della borsa planetaria' (*SA*) la sottomissione diventa poi 'Totale, corporale asservimento | del soggetto al mercato' (5–6), fino a che, per monitorare l'andamento dei 'titoli' (6), non 'risponderà l'Insonnia | – dea dell'Assenza e del Vuoto' (7–8).

Ne 'La seduta II' (*DSB*) l'assoggettamento al sistema economico costituito si realizza attraverso il lavoro operativo e la dedizione al proprio dovere; il lessico si focalizza allora sui domini del sacrificio rituale e della competizione, connessi tra loro a delineare il lavoro quale luogo agognato di martirio (15–22):

Si potrebbe chiamarlo il diritto al dovere:  
 prima occorre competere per assicurarsi  
 il privilegio di farlo.  
 Penso agli Atzechi, alla sfida rituale  
 onde ottenere di essere immolati.  
 Il sacrificio è una  
 gara a eliminazione, e la sua ara  
 il posto di lavoro.

In 'Thyssen: per i senza parola' (*SA*) la metafora si incarna invece nella rappresentazione di una tragedia consumata, quella dell'esplosione nello stabilimento ThyssenKrupp di Torino, che nel 2007 costò la vita a sette operai. L'olio incendiato, le fiamme, la morte per ustione vengono trasfigurate nei momenti di un rito sacrificale vetero-testamentario, in un'offerta al 'dio del lavoro' (13), che culmina in una sorta di Pentecoste alla rovescia, dove le 'lingue di fiamma' (14) non scendono dal cielo come Spirito, ma s'innalzano come estremo sacrificio dalla stessa 'forza-lavoro' (15). La poesia, ricca di anadiplosi strutturanti particolarmente patetiche, avvicenda, alternando terzetti e versi isolati, i momenti della descrizione del macabro falò votivo e delle domande, disperate e smarrite, di chi, coinvolto nella vicenda, invano chiede che cosa fare e inutilmente prega di non esser lasciato solo. Morte e sacrificio si intrecciano

con funerea e corrosiva ironia, nel tentativo di dare voce ai ‘senza parola’ del titolo, le vittime del lavoro e del guadagno, muovendo un’accusa al sistema perverso che immola carne umana al dio del profitto. Con progressiva alterazione dei tempi verbali, il dramma, inizialmente attualizzato e perpetuato nel presente (‘Continuano ad ardere’, 1), si proietta dapprima nel futuro, generalizzandosi a simbolo di un’umanità tutta votata alla stessa sorte (‘Continueranno ad ardere | ad ardere per noi stoppini | stoppini di carne votiva’, 9–11), quindi nel passato (‘Bruciavano’, 13), dove viene fissata la realtà dei fatti accaduti fuor di metafora.

Qualunque sia il dominio metaforico, il binomio lavoro-morte permane. La morte, sia essa fisica o psichico-morale, si configura come esito di una promessa disattesa di dignità e libertà. Ciò appare evidente laddove i gesti del lavoratore si riducono a processi meccanici e spersonalizzati. In ‘Posta dei lettori: | Ah, la burocrazia... III’, l’intera esistenza, dell’io lirico come di chiunque altro, viene ridotta a ‘Manutenzione’ (7), cioè a continuo esercizio di controllo e incanalamento, e viene sminuita dalla necessità di ottimizzare, imponendo percorsi stereotipati che prospettano realizzazioni parziali e omologanti (‘Penso all’obbligo d’essere felice | nella facilità di un’esistenza normata’, 4–5). Un episodio autobiografico dell’autore, costretto a compilare montagne di scartoffie per essere retribuito, si trasforma nell’emblema di una condizione universale: l’io-lavoratore è intrappolato tra pile di documenti che dovrebbero assicurargli un sostentamento e che lo costringono invece in un limbo indistinto tra l’esistenza e la sua negazione (‘Il confine tra la mia morte e la mia vita | io non riesco a vederlo | mentre continuo a spuntare ricevute’, 1–3). La dialettica vita-morte si gioca qui, tra chiasmi e parallelismi, sul campo della burocrazia, estesa a metafora labirintica e paradossale della vita umana (9–13):

Mi basta un’altra fila, un’altra pratica  
per ritrovarmi a sperare che la morte venga  
e mi porti in salvo dalla vita,  
per ritrovarmi a sperare che la vita venga  
e mi porti in salvo dalla morte.

A demoni infernali assomigliano poi ‘I necroburi’ (SA): i burocrati, somministratori di morte, sono i primi a umiliare il lavoro, riducendolo a una serie di pratiche obsolete e tortuose, simili ad avviliti torture. Le vittime, lavoratori o futuri tali, vengono infatti marchiati col ‘fuoco’ (8) del codice fiscale: vengono così contrassegnati, collocati all’interno di un preciso sistema economico e ridotti a mero dato appuntabile. I necroburi, provvisti di strumenti di tortura, compaiono dapprima intorno alla ‘culla’ (4) dell’io lirico per andarsene, dopo la marchiatura, tra la ‘puzza di bruciato’ (9), accompagnati sinistramente da ‘cani’ (12), funerei simboli di morte.

All’idea di morte si connettono anche i domini semantici della vacuità e della falsità. Un senso di inattività accompagna, ad esempio, tutta la parabola lavorativa: dalla sua comparsa come annuncio d’impiego al suo esercizio, dalla sua sospensione nel giorno di ferie fino alla sua negazione nella disoccupazione. In ‘Offerte di impiego’ (DLG) il vuoto generato dall’assenza di un’occupazione non trova un argine nelle possibilità attivate dalle inserzioni lavorative, definite ‘vane | lusinghe’ (2–3). La



prospettiva del colloquio di lavoro genera un senso di ‘orrore’ (7), che intensifica paradossalmente la solitudine del soggetto (‘L’orrore del giorno deserto’, 1, e ‘Essere soli | senza nessun riparo’, 3–4), aggravata dal rifiuto e dall’esclusione (‘mentre si cerca un altro | e non cercano me’, 5–6).

L’esercizio del lavoro rivela poi la sua vanità attraverso il parossismo formale della sestina ‘Si riparano personal [computer]’ (*DSB*), dove il senso sembra passare in secondo piano; tuttavia, le parole-rima, riproposte in ognuno dei sei esastici di settenari, bastano a veicolare il messaggio negativo: ‘nulla’, ‘male’ e ‘ostaggio’ indicano ciò a cui il lavoratore ‘incompetente’ viene ridotto da una ‘scienza’ e una ‘tecnica’ che egli non può padroneggiare completamente.

Nemmeno nella sospensione del lavoro l’individuo-lavoratore ritrova la sua libertà o la sua consapevolezza. Il potenziale valore positivo del ‘Weekend’ (*DLG*), quale momento di ricostruzione del senso, viene ad esempio vanificato dalla stessa azione che ne ha permesso la fruizione: l’ottimizzazione. Il ‘tempo ottimizzato’ (1) viene descritto come ‘servo-tempo | a trazione integrale’ (2–3), cioè come elemento essenziale che innesca ogni fine e azione del lavoratore. Ogni sforzo si esaurisce tuttavia con l’energia che l’ha prodotto, senza condurre a risultati proporzionali: il tempo guadagnato ora ‘cede’ (3), con profusione allitterante, ‘al vacuo vacare della vacanza’ (4). Stasi e morte pervadono il weekend, momento tanto allettante quanto sterile (5–9):

bestiola imbalsamata, tempo cavo,  
 immobile e sventrato, morto,  
 morto e leggero (carogna  
 senza viscere), ma dal pelo  
 lucente.

Anche la disoccupazione si configura come deleteria privazione. L’esistenza dei ‘Giovani senza lavoro’ (*SA*) è una ‘vita a metà’ (I, 16), sospesa tra il ‘sonno | mortale dell’età’ (I, 11–12) e un ‘eterno presente’ (II, 3), in cui tutto è immobile, senza passato né prospettiva. Incapaci di incidere sul reale, i giovani disoccupati sono come ‘convalescenti’ (II, 5) o, peggio, vittime di un ‘sortilegio’ (I, 15), che fa assomigliare la loro giovinezza a una ‘Bella Addormentata’ (I, 14). I loro ‘sogni sono vuoti’ (II, 11) e ‘falsi’ (II, 12), come la loro vita (II, 14–16):

finta, una pantomima  
 fatta da controfigure  
 interrotta da prima.

## LESSICO E STILE

L’analisi che segue, volta a rilevare le strategie messe in atto dall’autore per l’efficace resa espressiva dei testi, si articola in tre punti: l’osservazione statistica del lessico, lo studio

delle ripetizioni lessicali e della loro resa espressiva, l'esame dei fenomeni di composizione lessicale e delle loro ricadute sul senso.

Da una rapida osservazione statistica, nelle dodici poesie esaminate si nota una significativa frequenza di alcune voci e delle loro variazioni grammaticali, sinonimiche o derivate (Tabella 1). Oltre alla parola-tema *lavoro*, che ricorre almeno quindici volte nella metà delle poesie, spicca il consueto binomio vita-morte, dove tuttavia la vita si dà spesso come negazione della stessa, finendo per coincidere con la morte o con un suo stato prossimo:

'Posta dei lettori: Ah, la burocrazia... III', 9-10 (DLG)	per ritrovarmi a sperare che la morte venga e mi porti in salvo dalla vita, [...].
'La seduta II', 16 (DSB)	non basta sottomettersi per sopravvivere, [...].
'Natale, credo, scada il bollino blu', 11-12 (SA)	mentre mi prende acuta nostalgia per una forma di vita estinta: la mia.
'Giovani senza lavoro I', 16 (SA)	una vita a metà.
'Giovani senza lavoro II', 13 (SA)	Falsa è la loro vita, [...].

La componente negativa si misura poi anche nella frequenza dei termini *male* e *nulla* e nella ricorrenza di parole affini per campo semantico, come *ardere*, *fuoco* e *fiamme*.

Per veicolare i contenuti finora enucleati, Magrelli ricorre frequentemente all'iterazione lessicale, che di volta in volta modella fenomeni di tipo strutturale ed espressivo, nel tentativo di organizzare e mettere a fuoco la realtà che si viene a criticare. Laddove la ripetizione plasma precise morfologie strutturanti, si possono osservare architetture:

1. di tipo circolare, come in 'Offerte di impiego' (DLG), dove il senso di solitudine del soggetto viene estremizzato dal suo isolamento entro una gabbia di 'orrore': 'L'orrore del giorno deserto', 1, e 'L'orrore del colloquio | quando questa parola | dovrebbe essere quella | che scongiura l'orrore', 7-10;
2. di tipo anaforico-parallelistico, come in 'Giovani senza lavoro' (SA), dove le due parti di cui si compone la poesia iterano il primo verso ('Giovani senza lavoro'), sottolineando così non solo l'omogeneità del tema ma anche l'atmosfera di immobilità che permea la poesia ('in un eterno presente | che non li lascia andar', II, 3-4);
3. di tipo anaforico-elencativo, come ne 'La seduta III' (DSB), dove l'io, lavoratore appena 'Assunto, vittorioso' agisce 'a pagamento' facendo 'un muro' (1-3); si

elencano quindi – con le lettere dalla ‘a’ alla ‘d’—i ‘possibili sensi’ (4) implicati nell’idea di ‘fare un muro’ (6, 11, 16, 21):

- a) muro di muratore
- b) muro di video-programmatore
- c) muro di saltatore
- d) muro, infine, di attore [...].

La struttura a elenco veicola idee di meccanicità, spersonalizzazione e riproducibilità del lavoro, suggerite anche dalle espressioni che introducono (‘Segue un elenco di possibili sensi’) e chiudono (‘Questi sono lavori, | deduco dai miei aghi, | forme diverse di un’unica matrice, | data dall’adesione a una richiesta, | data da una rinuncia al desiderio’) l’enumerazione;

4. di tipo anaforico-progressivo, come in ‘Posta dei lettori: | Ah, la burocrazia...’ (DLG); le sue tre parti iniziano con uno stesso verso, che varia declinando in modo sempre diverso, a seconda della focalizzazione, la riflessione dell’io lirico sulla propria vita, in un crescendo patetico e insieme spietatamente ironico:

- I Il confine tra la vita e la mia vita
- II Il confine tra la mia vita e la morte altrui
- III Il confine tra la mia morte e la mia vita
- [...];

5. di tipo spiraliforme, come in ‘Thyssen: per i senza parola’ (SA), dove il testo procede per recuperi e rilanci, dando al testo un andamento serpentino, quasi litanico e, perciò, solenne e inevitabile. La continua ripresa in anadiplosi dei termini tra versi conferisce peso anche a parole semanticamente vuote (‘Continuano ad ardere come | come le lampade ad olio | ad olio della Bibbia’, 1–3) e costringe la dizione a rallentare, accrescendo in questo modo il *pathos*.

La ripetizione lessicale, organizzandosi in strutture parallele o chiasmiche, può inoltre sostenere dinamiche semantiche oppostive:

‘Offerte di impiego’, 5–6 (DLG)	mentre si cerca un altro e non cercano me.
‘Posta dei lettori: Ah, la burocrazia... III’, 9–13 (DLG)	(vedasi sopra).
‘La seduta III’, 28–30 (DSB)	forme diverse di un’unica matrice data dall’adesione a una richiesta, data da una rinuncia al desiderio.

Infine, l’iterazione conferisce pateticità al dettato e ne rafforza il senso, dando talora vita a una variazione e a un arricchimento del discorso:

‘Borsa’, 7–8 (DLG)	– e il soffio della morte. Il soffio della morte e della merce, [...].
‘Posta dei lettori: Ah, la burocrazia... I’, 1–4 (DLG)	Il confine tra la vita e la mia vita corre fra gli allegati che sto compilando da sempre. Sono io l’allegato. Sono io venuto alla luce per questo?
‘Weekend’, 6–7 (DLG)	immobile e sventrato, morto, morto e leggero (carogna [...]) [...].
‘I necroburi’, 6–7 (SA)	mi marchiaronò, mi marchiaronò di morte e di burocrazia [...].

Un’altra strategia stilistica, che potenzia l’espressività verbale, è la composizione lessicale, data per fusione—‘necroburi’—o per giustapposizione, formando le cosiddette ‘parole-trattino’.<sup>7</sup> Queste ultime, in particolare, concentrano la quintessenza della concezione negativa sul lavoro, fungendo da centri propulsori di significato:

‘Weekend’ (DLG)	‘servo-tempo’ (2)	→ soggezione
‘Posta dei lettori: Ah, la burocrazia... I’ (DLG)	‘carne-tempo’ (8)	→ degradazione
‘La seduta III’ (DSB)	‘mastro proto-storico’ (10) ‘video-programmatore’ (11) ‘atleta-operaio’ (16)	→ spersonalizzazione
‘Thyssen: per i senza parola’ (SA)	‘forza-lavoro’ (15)	→ asservimento

Da una ‘parola-trattino’, tuttavia, scaturisce anche una possibilità: nei ‘versi-agni’ (16) de ‘La seduta I’ (DSB) il poeta individua, infatti, gli strumenti utili per ‘praticare una poesia civile’ (18) e, giocando ‘al dottore’ (21), giungere a un qualche rimedio. Se pure ne ‘La seduta IV’ il lavoro verrà riconosciuto come una ‘necessità materiale’ (2) e si decreterà l’impossibilità di una ‘via d’uscita’ (8)—‘[...] il *diritto al dovere* rimane | la sola forma di uguaglianza possibile | fra le vittime’, (9–11)—, il discorso poetico resta qui uno strumento imprescindibile di analisi critica (‘dicono i miei aghi’, 12) e acquisizione di consapevolezza. Lo stesso congedo della sestina ‘Si riparano personal [computer]’ (DSB), dove alla vacuità del progresso l’autore contrappone la tecnica liberatrice della scrittura, sembra confermarlo, seppure con qualche ambiguità:

<sup>7</sup> In proposito, cfr. ‘treno-cometa’ (Magrelli, *Le caviglie*, p. 282) e Francucci, pp. 23–28.

Invece, contro il male, contro il nulla  
 di una scienza affidata (mala tecnica  
 currunt) a incompetenti, io scrivo!, ostaggio.

## CONCLUSIONI

Il lavoro polemicamente descritto nelle poesie analizzate è espressione di un sistema economico-sociale, dominato dalla finanza e dai consumi, che l'autore rigetta; al suo interno l'individuo-lavoratore, spossato e alienato, è ridotto a mero ingranaggio di un processo produttivo di beni più o meno materiali, al termine del quale si ritrova facile preda delle trafilate burocratiche. Contro questa realtà avvilita affila la punta del suo strumento il poeta, cesellando una forma entro le cui maglie trovino ordinatamente posto la disamina del reale e la sua denuncia. Le diverse soluzioni stilistiche—costruzione e combinazione metaforica, organizzazione strutturale e intensificazione espressiva del lessico—concorrono non solo a una critica di questa cultura lavorativa, ma anche alla sua razionalizzazione, sviscerandone insidie ed equivocità. Lo stile geometrico—puntellato su anafore, strutture circolari e spiraliformi, parallelismi, chiasmi ed elenchi—diventa esso stesso uno strumento critico e di resistenza, atto a discernere le nervature del reale e a porre un argine razionale al suo dilagare mortifero e cieco.

**Tabella 1: Occorrenze lessicali**

<i>Voce</i>	<i>Variazioni</i>	<i>Ricorrenze</i>	<i>Poesie</i>
lavoro	impiego; lavorare	15	6
vita	vivi; sopravvivere; esistenza; viva	15	4
morte	morto; morti; mortale	11	5
nulla		10	3
male		8	2
tempo		5	2
ardere	bruciavano; bruciato	5	2
allegato	allegati; pratica; ricevute; protocolli	5	2
orrore		4	2
asservimento	schiavitù; sottomettersi	4	2
fuoco	fiamma; fiamme	3	2

# ALTRI INDIZI DI GUERRE CIVILI. LA FABBRICA IN UNA PAGINA CRITICA DI ANDREA ZANZOTTO

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I soviet sono il più perfetto sistema rappresentativo del popolo. [...] Fondati direttamente sull'esercito e nelle trincee, sugli operai e nelle fabbriche, sui contadini e nei campi, sono la spina dorsale della rivoluzione.<sup>1</sup>

(John Reed, *Dieci giorni che sconvolsero il mondo*)

Il tempo non passa mai.<sup>2</sup>

(Andrea Zanzotto, nota a 'Profezie o memorie o giornali murali: XVIII', *La Beltà*)

Nel novembre 1973, le pagine del quotidiano *Il Giorno* ospitano una recensione a 'Quotidianamente quotidianamente' di Ferruccio Brugnaro, 'poeta di e per la fabbrica',<sup>3</sup> operaio a Porto Marghera assunto alle cronache letterarie per i suoi ciclostilati—comunicazioni interne tra compagni di lavoro prima, poi sempre più acquisiti da una frangia della cultura italiana come voce della condizione operaia nel corso delle lotte e delle sperimentazioni politiche degli anni Sessanta e Settanta.<sup>4</sup> La firma, d'eccezione, è quella di Andrea Zanzotto; il titolo—allusivo quanto, a conti fatti, letterale—, 'La trincea e la fabbrica'.<sup>5</sup> Le pagine che seguono intendono approfondire il binomio tra la condizione dell'operaio in fabbrica e quella del soldato in trincea a partire da un'analisi di questa pagina critica; proposito che richiede tuttavia una perlustrazione preliminare delle prossimità tra il discorso poetico di Zanzotto e le tematiche sopracitate.

È significativo che, in chiusura della sua antologia dei poeti italiani nella Grande Guerra,<sup>6</sup> Andrea Cortellessa abbia posto in esergo 'Rivolgersi agli ossari',

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<sup>1</sup> John Reed, *Dieci giorni che sconvolsero il mondo* (1919), trad. da Marco Amante (Milano, Rizzoli, 1980), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, *La Beltà* (1968), oggi in *Le poesie e prose scelte*, ed. di Stefano Dal Bianco e Gian Mario Villalta (Milano: Mondadori, 1999), pp. 265–3579 (p. 357).

<sup>3</sup> Giovanna Nuvoli, *Zanzotto* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Ferruccio Brugnaro, 'Quotidianamente quotidianamente', in *Vogliamo cacciarci sotto. Un operaio e la sua poesia. Con una nota di Andrea Zanzotto* (Verona: Bertani, 1975), pp. 90–110.

<sup>5</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, 'La trincea e la fabbrica', *Il Giorno*, 21 novembre 1973, ora in Brugnaro, *Vogliamo cacciarci sotto*, pp. 113–15 (da qui in poi: 'La trincea').

<sup>6</sup> Andrea Cortellessa, 'Post-factum. La guerra postuma', in *Le notti chiare erano tutte un'alba. Antologia dei poeti italiani nella Prima guerra mondiale* (Milano: Bompiani, 2018), pp. 619–65.

componimento tratto dal *Galateo in Bosco* di Andrea Zanzotto.<sup>7</sup> Sin dal titolo, il libro del 1978 si pone come accostamento antinomico tra un ‘codice di comportamento’ e ‘ciò che resiste a ogni tentativo di codificazione’;<sup>8</sup> ed è su questo crinale che Zanzotto situa un possibile recupero di un senso alto-tragico dell’esistenza, contrapponendo l’evento alle sue cause storicizzabili, la memoria che lo tramanda all’edificazione di una storicità ‘eternante’ che lo occulta. Gli ossari del Montello, brulicanti delle centinaia di migliaia di morti sacrificati all’altare della patria tra il 1915 e il 1918, sono il luogo entro cui l’istituzione della retorica statale, nel suo tentativo di corroborarsi, mostra più il fianco—potenzialmente sconfessata dalla muta interrogazione dei morti. È notevole allora osservare come in ‘Rivolgersi agli ossari’ si rinvenga, secondo il medesimo processo antinomico, il luogo d’incontro tra la vita-in-morte degli ossari e la morte-in-vita della fabbrica:

Hanno come un fervore di fabbrica gli ossari.  
Vi si ricevono ordini, ordinazioni interne. Vi si smista.  
All’asilo, certi pazzi-di-guerra, ancora vivi  
Allevano maiali; traffici con gli ossari.

(vv. 23–26)

Attraversando l’imperscrutabilità marmorea e perenne del monumento—un percorso di cui i clitici ‘vi si’, sospesi tra valore avverbiale e pronominale, tra locativo e vocativo, recano le tracce—,<sup>9</sup> l’intima struttura dell’ossario rivela le sue fattezze di dispositivo logistico. Vi riverberano non solo le gerarchie belliche, ma anche un ordine *marchand*, atto a produrre e a riprodurre il discorso nazionalistico, simile per ‘fervore’ alla vita di fabbrica.

Bisognerà d’altro canto osservare che questo componimento-chiave del *Galateo* data in realtà più di un decennio prima, essendo stato composto pochi giorni dopo le celebrazioni del cinquantennale della Grande Guerra, nel 1965.<sup>10</sup> Alla luce della sinergia che discorso in versi e discorso sui versi intessono nella riflessione di Zanzotto, si potrà dunque discutere della pagina critica dedicata a Brugnaro. Una recente intervista fa luce sul loro rapporto, e sulla fedeltà di quest’ultimo all’esperienza come forma dell’impegno poetico:

L’ho conosciuto nel 1963, alla presentazione di un fascicoletto [...]. Da lì cominciò un rapporto fraterno [...]. Quando andavo a casa sua gli portavo i ciclostilati. Una volta, non convinto di un mio lavoro, mi disse: “Tu devi scrivere di quello di cui vivi!”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, ‘Rivolgersi agli ossari’, in *Il Galateo in Bosco* (1978), oggi in *Le poesie e le prose scelte*, pp. 547–650 (p. 565–66).

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Dal Bianco, ‘Il Galateo in Bosco (1978)’, in *Le poesie e le prose scelte*, pp. 1574–608 (p. 1575).

<sup>9</sup> Sull’uso della particella pronominale di seconda persona ‘vi’, si veda Andrea Zanzotto, ‘Profezie o memorie o giornali murali’, in *La Beltà*, oggi in *Le poesie e prose scelte*, pp. 318–47 (p. 318).

<sup>10</sup> Francesco Venturi, *Genesi e storia della ‘trilogia’ di Andrea Zanzotto* (Pisa: ETS, 2016), p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Steffan, “Niente mi ha fiaccato!”. Conversazione con Ferruccio Brugnaro’, *Poetarum Silva*, 16 marzo 2017, <<https://poetarumsilva.com/2017/03/16/ferruccio-brugnaro-conversazione-paolo-steffan/>> [ultimo accesso 30 giugno 2021].

L'anno 1963, d'altronde, è particolarmente significativo per Zanzotto; e non solo perché, dopo le *IX Ecloghe* pubblicate l'anno prima, allestisce di fatto il cantiere per *La Beltà*, ma perché, contemporaneamente, si consuma l'intera sua collaborazione a *Questo e altro*<sup>12</sup>—rivista di letteratura in senso lato militante che si proponeva di definire di volta in volta e sempre meglio 'ciò che è valido e ciò che non lo è, ciò che è urgente e ciò che è effimero nella letteratura e in rapporto alla presenza della letteratura nella vita del nostro tempo'.<sup>13</sup> Ebbene, è proprio a partire dai propositi e dalle aspettative attorno a questa rivista e al suo programmatico titolo che possono innestarsi alcune considerazioni sul testo in oggetto. Giovanni Giudici, nel 1962, vi scriveva:

Scrivo su una rivista di poesia e altro: *Questo e altro*. Altro sarebbe la letteratura? Altro sarebbero queste cose? Altro sarebbe anche la società in cui si fa poesia, ci si occupa di letteratura, si scrivono queste cose?<sup>14</sup>

Le parole di Giudici manifestano una preoccupazione latente, ma ben avvertita da quanti non potevano condividere sino in fondo il perentorio epigramma programmatico di Fortini ('questo e altro per voi | questo è altro per me'), il quale di fatto rivendicava per sé l'identità di momento letterario e momento politico.<sup>15</sup> Dieci anni più tardi, le prime righe del saggio di Zanzotto funzionano in questo senso come un referto storico-critico:

A chi si occupa di letteratura è da poco pervenuto 'Quotidianamente quotidianamente', un altro dei ciclostilati di Ferruccio Brugnaro, l'operaio e sindacalista veneto da tempo noto per la sua valida attività poetica. Ma sappiamo che questo ciclostilato è destinato soprattutto ai compagni di lavoro di Brugnaro, e che avrà probabilmente circolazione nelle fabbriche. [...] Certo in lui prevale apertamente un intento che 'bisognerebbe' definire extrapoetico; egli ha più volte dichiarato che la sua parola vuole essere solo uno dei tanti stimoli alla coscienza e alla lotta sociale. Ed effettivamente gli scritti di Brugnaro sono tutto questo. Ma in essi c'è anche l'altro'. Troppo profondo è il suo impegno per ridursi soltanto a una delle varianti del famoso o famigerato 'impegno' e queste sue parole sono troppo intense perché si limitino a essere solo comuni parole, per quanto efficaci. O meglio, al di sotto di quel suo dire che si vuole azione, all'interno di esso (e perfino contro), nasce il dire che è atto poetico, invenzione di forma.

(‘La trincea’, p. 113)

La tensione irrisolta tra diverse specializzazioni del sapere risemantizza sia le figure sintattiche sia quelle lessicali, manifestazioni diverse di un medesimo discernimento tra occupazioni e specificità letterarie e operaie. È d'altronde la stessa griglia retorica, giocata su un botta e risposta dialettico (assertivo-avversativo-correttivo), a indicarci i tratti più persistenti di questa intenzione. Da una parte, c'è chi

<sup>12</sup> Zanzotto, 'Eluard dopo dieci anni' (1963) e 'A faccia a faccia' (1963), oggi in Andrea Zanzotto, *Fantasie di avvicinamento. Le lettere di un poeta* (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), pp. 115–21 e pp. 125–30.

<sup>13</sup> [Vittorio Sereni?], 'Perché "Questo e altro"', *Questo e altro*, 1 (1962), 55–57 (p. 56).

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Giudici, 'La teologia è piccola e brutta', in *La letteratura verso Hiroshima e altri scritti (1959–1975)* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1976), pp. 178–87 (p. 184). Corsivi nell'originale.

<sup>15</sup> Citato in [Vittorio Sereni?], 'Dialogo con un lettore', *Questo e altro*, 2 (1962), 5–7 (p. 5).



si occupa di letteratura, con i suoi tempi di ricezione e di elaborazione; dall'altra, i compagni di fabbrica di Brugnaro—*trait d'union* tra condizioni tanto più ermeticamente separate nella pratica quanto più assimilate nelle intenzioni di molti *engagé*.

In una cultura letteraria a sua volta lacerata da opposte assiomatiche—l'autonomia della letteratura di origine simbolistico-decadente contro una concezione eteronoma e pedagogica, determinata in ultima istanza dai rivolgimenti storico-politici—,<sup>16</sup> la fiducia in un agire letterario tanto più integralmente politico quanto meno direttamente impegnato aveva indotto molti a credere che la soluzione risiedesse nell'esperienza, nel saper guardare la realtà 'a più lungo raggio' ma non 'direttamente' né 'fissamente'.<sup>17</sup> Quanto di più significativo si può trarre dalle prime righe del saggio – causa o conseguenza diretta della separazione—riguarda proprio la disposizione zanzottiana verso il discorso sul 'questo' e sull' 'altro'. A dieci anni dal termine delle pubblicazioni, Zanzotto ne rovescia di fatto il paradigma: il primo termine ora sottintende la 'realtà', più o meno sociale; il secondo, l'invincibile oltre della letteratura. Non più polarità da attraversare da una riva all'altra per positivamente influenzarle entrambe, ma condizioni di esistenza in un assetto sempre più votato allo specialismo e alla frammentazione.<sup>18</sup>

Eppure, anche se la poesia perde voce e mandato, un impegno può ancora darsi come moto di fedeltà al vissuto e alla sua messa in forma; così, al di sotto, dentro o contro il dato più materiale e performativo di un enunciato che si vuole azione sulla realtà, l'atto poetico nasce come eternizzazione dell'esperienza e insieme disarticolazione da ogni storicità imposta. È solo in questa sospensione che nella poesia di Brugnaro si può materializzare la realtà ambientale della fabbrica (o, con un contrappunto nuovamente storicizzato-situato, di 'certe fabbriche, oggi') e le sue 'raccapriccianti affinità' con quella bellica ('La trincea', p. 113). Zanzotto rileva nei versi di Brugnaro quattro diversi scorci di vita di fabbrica, concatenandoli in una sorta di *climax* discendente verso la reificazione. Le scelte retoriche e semantiche degradano il materiale esperienziale nei suoi tratti più ineffabili e archetipici: 'Ci sono in quei versi le mattine di livido inferno dopo i turni, i fumi e rumori che disintegrano, le morti a stillo, l'indefinibile e inarrestabile trasformazione degli uomini in cosa' ('La trincea', p. 113).

Il primo segmento, oltre a unire sinesteticamente il dato visivo a quello esperienziale, frammenta quest'ultimo in tre diverse temporalità: quella naturale-esistenziale delle mattine; quella artificiale-reificata dei turni al tornio; e, infine, quella eternata, letteraria e infernale—quale appare a Dante nel canto III della *Commedia*: una 'livida palude', 'senza tempo tinta'.<sup>19</sup> Il secondo segmento si rifà invece alla

<sup>16</sup> Alfonso Berardinelli, 'Le molte voci della poesia moderna', in *La poesia verso la prosa. Controversie sulla lirica moderna* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994), pp. 23–43 (p. 33).

<sup>17</sup> Zanzotto, 'A faccia a faccia', p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Si veda Gianluigi Simonetti, 'Mito delle origini, nevrosi della fine', *L'Ulisse*, 11 (2008), 51–56 (p. 53); Guido Mazzone, 'Sulla storia sociale della poesia contemporanea in Italia', *Ticontra*, 8 (2017), 1–26 (p. 3).

<sup>19</sup> Dante, *Inf.* III, 98, 29; in *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. di Giorgio Petrocchi, Le Opere di Dante Alighieri, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 7, 4 vols (Milano: Mondadori, 1966–67), II, pp. 50, 42.

dimensione più carnale del corpo operaio, assumendo al grado zero il verbo ‘disintegrare’—riferito principalmente all’ambito della fisica nucleare—e procedendo a esprimere per tramite di una metonimia le sue precarie condizioni uditive e olfattive. Combinando nuovamente i dati percettivi—in questo caso la vista e l’udito nell’immagine dello ‘stillicidio’, parente di quello ‘stillicidio del sangue’ che campeggia tra le note del *Galateo*—,<sup>20</sup> nel terzo segmento Zanzotto introduce l’immagine a-soggettiva e pluralizzata della morte, forma limite dell’esperienza umana; e, forse solo indugiando sulla prossimità morfologica dei verbi latini *cadere* e *caedere*, ne restituisce tutta la tragica quotidianità per tramite di un’espressione largamente abusata nel lessico giornalistico circa le ‘morti bianche’.

La destinazione iniziale del suo scritto—le pagine di un quotidiano a diffusione nazionale—, contribuisce peraltro a straniare ulteriormente queste parole, forma perversa dell’ironia che si fa, nel quarto e ultimo momento, paradosso afasico che tenta di nominare, dunque di contenere, il processo intimamente ‘indefinibile’ e ‘inarrestabile’ della reificazione. È a questo punto che un’ulteriore *quadruplicatio* interviene a definire ulteriormente il rapporto tra esperienza poetica e storica, scavando come di consueto nel solco che separa atto e azione, ‘esserci’ e ‘aversi’ di un’esperienza collettiva e singolare:

Si ha quindi, in termini attuali, un’esperienza analoga a quella che Ungaretti compì nelle trincee del Carso, radicalizzata ora per una mancanza di ‘eccezionalità’, un sovrappiù di banale che la permea, il vago senso del suo non aver mai fine, il suo cogliere la degradazione, peggio che ‘a pietra’, a materiale plastico-chimico.

(‘La trincea’, p. 113–14)

La quotidianità di fabbriche come la Montedison di Porto Marghera sembra così ‘radicalizzare’ le condizioni estreme che rendono possibile la distruzione dell’uomo, di cui il massacro organizzato dalle borghesie europee sul Carso negli anni Dieci del Novecento è solo uno dei lancinanti esempi.<sup>21</sup> Un esempio di cui, peraltro, è nuovamente la parola poetica—e di quale importanza: quella di Giuseppe Ungaretti—a recare le tracce.<sup>22</sup> Un ulteriore rilievo stilistico permetterebbe di osservare una disturbante armonia compositiva nell’intersezione delle due *quadruplicatio*, solida fino alla complementarità. Laddove Fortini, nel suo primo intervento critico sulla poesia di Zanzotto, metteva in luce ‘l’araldica dei plurali’ che sovrastava il suo apparente idillio ermetizzante, qui la pluralizzazione collettiva dei sostantivi della prima *quadruplicatio*—‘le mattine’, ‘i turni’, ‘i fumi’, ‘i rumori’, ‘le morti’, ‘gli uomini’—è pareggiata dall’irriducibile singolarità della seconda stringa, che ne espone ossimoricamente la presenza-assenza: ‘una mancanza’, ‘un sovrappiù’, ‘un vago senso’, ‘il suo cogliere’. L’insistenza sull’area semantica dell’afasia, motivata per eccesso o per

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, *Il Galateo in Bosco*, p. 644.

<sup>21</sup> Zanzotto stesso parla della Prima guerra mondiale come ‘irreparabile olocausto’; si veda Andrea Zanzotto, ‘Ungaretti: Terra Promessa’ (1958–1988), *L’Unità*, 23 marzo 1988, ora in *Fantasie di avvicinamento*, pp. 81–84 (p. 81).

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, ‘I settant’anni di Ungaretti’, *Comunità*, 63 (1958), 99–100.

difetto, pareggia quella sulla sensorialità, tanto presente quanto più ‘vaga’. D'altronde, era proprio l'“incontro con la parola “trovata” nel silenzio” a costituire, per Zanzotto critico, il maggiore contributo di Ungaretti alla poesia—‘impietrato soffrire senza nome’ che si fa ‘parola della pietra, di quella pietra che è l'uomo’.<sup>23</sup>

Sorprende (ma nemmeno troppo) la stratigrafica arborescenza di questi riferimenti, che coinvolge tanto il passato quanto il futuro critico del poeta. In un intervento di poco posteriore, Zanzotto distinguerà in Ungaretti un ‘polo Artaud’ e un ‘polo Mallarmé’ come forme della carnalità e della scomparsa;<sup>24</sup> ed è proprio questa degradazione fisico-afasica a essere negata a Brugnaro: la tragicità della ‘pietra’ carsico-ungarettiana prima e geologico-montaliana poi;<sup>25</sup> con più di un pensiero alla Medusa dantesca, allegoria di una paralisi che nega ogni autentica catabasi e, dunque, ogni risalita.<sup>26</sup> L'avantesto maggiore è, in questo caso, proprio il precedente ungarettiano, che Zanzotto affidava alle pagine di *Comunità* già nel 1958—prima, cioè, di riformularlo in vista della pubblicazione nel volume *Fantasie di avvicinamento*.<sup>27</sup> Qui il riferimento alla ‘fiera e implacata contemplazione della testa di Medusa’ costituiva uno snodo importante nell'argomentazione sulla poesia ungarettiana.<sup>28</sup> Un'analisi più dettagliata delle permanenze stilistico-retoriche tra questi saggi ne metterebbe in luce la diretta ascendenza nella composizione di ‘La trincea e la fabbrica’.

In quest'occasione, ci si limiterà a osservare come Zanzotto nomini Ungaretti il ‘testimone’ e la sua poesia ‘un appello’ alla ‘libertà’ contro la ‘negazione’ dell'umano.<sup>29</sup> Sono, questi, altri due lemmi chiave che apparentano questa riflessione al discorso critico su Brugnaro—per il quale, secondo Zanzotto, ‘la fabbrica [...] è oggi il luogo della *negazione* [...] come lo era la trincea ungarettiana’; un luogo, tuttavia, ‘potenzialmente positivo’, che permette all'uomo ‘di liberarsi e di liberare gli altri’ (‘La trincea’, p. 114). E sarà importante osservare come il doppio registro verbale, transitivo e riflessivo, trovi un suo diretto precedente in un intervento zanzottiano di pochi anni prima (siamo nel 1970) e dedicato alle ragioni della propria preferenza per il PSI:

«Volto umano»: che ciarpame, che polverume di retorica, che viscidì equivoci si possono contrabbandare dietro questa maschera. [...] Diciamo comunque che la realtà e il mito del «volto umano» resistono e hanno diritto di resistere come segno di una tensione verso ciò che apre, che si irradia, che libera e che si libera. Il socialismo è – almeno – questa linea di resistenza.<sup>30</sup>

Un ultimo spunto di riflessione—strettamente connesso alla tematica della ‘vitalità’—riguarda l'‘oscuro amore’ che permea la fabbrica e l'operaio (‘La trincea’, p.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, ‘Testimonianza’ (1979–1981), in *Fantasie di avvicinamento*, pp. 87–100 (pp. 87–88).

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, ‘L'inno nel fango’ (1953), in *Fantasie di avvicinamento*, pp. 15–20; ‘Ungaretti: Terra Promessa’, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Si veda Dante, *Inf.* IX, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Zanzotto, ‘Ungaretti: Terra Promessa’. Si veda anche Andrea Cortellessa, ‘Geiger sull'Erba. Prospezioni su Zanzotto critico’, *Poetiche*, 1 (2002), 149–75 (pp. 163–66).

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, ‘I settant'anni di Ungaretti’, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Zanzotto, ‘Ungaretti: Terra Promessa’, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Zanzotto, ‘Perché sono con il PSI’, *Avanti!*, 3 giugno 1970.

114); e, in definitiva, l'assenza di amore che ne permette la parentela con la trincea—che si lega strettamente al lavoro in quanto 'significante maggiore dell'esistenza umana'.<sup>31</sup> 'La fabbrica e tutto ciò che la riguarda sono permeate da quel nulla che è l'assenza dell'amore [...]. Per Brugnaro dunque l'operaio è, prima di tutto, colui che non viene amato, che è respinto al margine' ('La trincea', p. 114–15). Esattamente come il poeta nella società che si va configurando, l'operaio risulta marginalizzato, e, come il soldato primonovecentesco, dimenticato. Ed è peraltro proprio la figura del 'soldato sconosciuto' a rappresentare il maggior ritrovato della poesia di Ungaretti:

Non la guerra dei re e dei generali e dei vati fu quella che Ungaretti mise in chiaro, scoprì, ma quella del 'soldato sconosciuto' (l'espressione è di Jahier, altra figura grandissima che soffiò tutto dei campi di battaglia), anzi dell'uomo diventato nella trincea qualcosa di peggio dell'insetto in cui si trasforma il protagonista delle *Metamorfosi* di Kafka, diventato mero accadimento, insensatezza pura: in cui l'insensatezza della guerra si rivela senza possibilità di travestimenti retorici.<sup>32</sup>

È insomma la comune condizione di 'sconosciuto' ad accomunare Ungaretti e Brugnaro, il soldato e l'operaio—'germe della democrazia novecentesca' e autentici soggetti rivoluzionari nelle parole di Mario Tronti; quell'anonimato dei molti, cioè, che in assenza di radicali rivolgimenti può venire quantomeno riscattato nella 'testimonianza', nell'«invenzione» poetica—altro lemma che Zanzotto riprende in entrambi gli scritti, e significativamente legato alla scoperta in prima persona.<sup>33</sup>

E tuttavia, così come il soldato, anche l'operaio sta smettendo i panni del soggetto rivoluzionario; e come il poeta, sempre meno amato, contribuisce a mantenere in vita un'istituzione del passato erodendola al suo interno. È, questa, una condizione a cui Zanzotto si riferirà spesso—e, per ritornare al *Galateo in Bosco*, nel 'Sonetto dell'amoroso e del parassita': dove l'Io lirico che 'sfigura Veneri' e 'falsifica simbiosi',<sup>34</sup> per dirla con Cortellessa, 'impalma la tradizione e se ne nutre, al contempo dandosi in pasto a chi verrà dopo di lui'.<sup>35</sup> 'In una società, oltre che stravolta dagli sfruttatori, piena di legioni di parassiti, l'operaio sembra condannato a essere solo, nonostante certe apparenze; e sola è la voce di Brugnaro' ('La trincea', p. 115).<sup>36</sup> Sorvolando la laguna e i suoi inabissamenti cinquant'anni dopo, un'aria di profezia sembra ammantare queste parole.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Alain De Botton, *Lavorare piace*, trad. da Luisa Nera (Parma: Guanda, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Zanzotto, 'Ungaretti: Terra Promessa', p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, 'Ungaretti: *Terra promessa*', p. 81; Andrea Zanzotto, 'La trincea', p. 113.

<sup>34</sup> Dal Bianco, 'Il Galateo in Bosco', p. 1595.

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Cortellessa, *Andrea Zanzotto. Il canto della terra* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 2021), p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Per un discorso, non affrontabile in questa sede, sul termine 'legione', con esplicito riferimento al discorso dell'indemoniato a Gesù (Mc, 51: 1–20), si veda Zanzotto, 'Profezie o memorie o giornali murali', p. 335. Si veda anche Cortellessa, *Andrea Zanzotto*, pp. 122, 196, 198.

<sup>37</sup> 'Un exploit senza precedenti per il sindaco di Venezia Luigi Brugnaro', *Il Gazzettino*, 6 luglio 2021: 'Io rappresento le persone che si alzano la mattina presto per lavorare'. Luigi Brugnaro è il figlio di Ferruccio Brugnaro.

# PASOLINI'S WORKER-POET: A COMPOSITE GENEALOGY\*

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Poet, novelist, and director Pier Paolo Pasolini was frequently critical of the Italian Communist Party's failures to innovate in the face of accelerated industrialization and new structures of power. Briefly a member of the PCI after the Second World War, Pasolini was ousted in 1949 after being charged with corrupting minors and indecent public exposure. He maintained an affiliation with the party until his death, however, choosing to refer to himself as a 'compagno di strada' of the PCI.<sup>1</sup> Beyond official party membership, and despite his declared love of Gramsci and Marx, the task of categorizing Pasolini's politics remains a challenge.<sup>2</sup> Thanks in part to his dogmatic rhetoric and recourse to eclectic and anachronistic sources and historical figures, he is often described as a 'heterodox' Marxist.<sup>3</sup> He was also, as this paper attempts to demonstrate, a highly idiosyncratic one.

Most readers will be familiar with Pasolini's thesis of anthropological mutation, the idea that neocapitalism, particularly its consumerist ideology, was altering humans in Italy and elsewhere by exterminating older peasant societies and eroding class differences to create new, standardized bourgeois masses.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps because of his emphasis on, and affection for, the subproletariat and whatever he deemed archaic, though, we do not often think of Pasolini in conjunction with notions of modern, industrial labour. Indeed, barring *Accattone* (1961) and *Teorema* (1968), the theme of work would not seem to be among Pasolini's concerns as either poet, critic, or filmmaker. Given the centrality of labour to Marxist theory, and the fact that the working class made up over forty percent of the Italian working population in the 1960s and 1970s, would this omission not constitute something of a paradox in Pasolini's politics of representation?

In 1964, an Italian factory worker asked more or less the same question in an unsigned letter sent to *Dialoghi con Pasolini*, the column which Pasolini kept off and

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<sup>1</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il sogno del centauro. Incontri con Jean Duflot [1969–1975]', in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), p. 1477 [henceforth *SPS*].

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Pasolini's political thought, see Giorgio Galli, *Pasolini comunista dissidente: attualità di un pensiero politico* (Milan: Kaos, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> The designation is widespread in Pasolini criticism; see, for example, Ara H. Merjian, "'Howls from the Left': Pier Paolo Pasolini, Allen Ginsberg, and the Legacies of Beat America", in *Pier Paolo Pasolini, Framed and Unframed: A Thinker for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Luca Peretti and Karen T. Raizen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Pasolini elaborates his theory of anthropological mutation from the mid-1960s on, but it finds its clearest formulation in the writings from 1973–1975 collected in *Scritti corsari*; see *SPS*, pp. 265–535.

on in *Vie nuove*, the Communist Party weekly, between 1960 and 1965.<sup>5</sup> After nine years of unsteady work in a mechanical plant, the 27-year-old factory worker had recently taken a job as a deliveryman for a chemical products company. Working there, he realized that very few people knew what a job in industry looked like. He suggested that Pasolini should make a film about the life of the Italian working class that would give the public insight into workers' anxieties and struggles. Pasolini responded to this letter—one of dozens of similar letters he claims to have received from blue-collar workers over the years asking him to 'express' their world on either the screen or the page—with his vision of what he calls the 'worker-poet' (*poeta-operaio* [*SPS*, p. 1036]). He defines this worker-poet as someone who lives the experience of industrial labour actively and 'antiteticamente' (*SPS*, p. 1036), resisting its drudgery and alienation in order to reclaim his humanity. In this note I will lay out Pasolini's vision of the worker-poet and assess its composite, if undeclared, genealogy in the thought of other authors.

In his response to the worker's letter, published on 10 December 1964, and in a short follow-up note, Pasolini links factory work to the question of freedom.<sup>6</sup> Like other letters in the *Dialoghi* column, in which Pasolini was supposed to act as an intermediary between the Communist Party and the people, the letter serves mainly to convey Pasolini's own opinions rather than the party's, ultimately reflecting, as Robert Gordon puts it, 'the evolution of [his] deepening crisis of subjectivity'.<sup>7</sup> As a committed intellectual, Pasolini's personal crisis in the early 1960s was also a political one: it corresponded to his growing sense that Marxist politics, and therefore his own, had failed to interpret and keep up with dramatic historical change. Midway through the letter, Pasolini refers to this rupture in terms of a 'svolta tecnologica e tecnocratica' (*SPS*, p. 1035). In this 'svolta', he argues, the factory, once a 'momento particolare e esemplare della vita moderna', has become the 'modulo fondamentale e [...] unico *di tutta la vita*' (*SPS*, p. 1035). In the new post-rupture era, the factory's 'mostruosa sfera di pura strumentalità o comunicazione' (*SPS*, p. 1035) has been universalized to other, non-industrial domains. Toward the end of the letter, Pasolini argues that expressivity, or humankind's capacity for self-expression, must assert itself as a form of freedom, a mode of resistance against the instrumentalization of human beings imposed by the factory paradigm. The worker-poet would be the embodiment of this expressive freedom, a whimsical but living antidote to the nefarious trajectory of modernity. He names 'Charlot'—British actor and director Charlie Chaplin in the film *Modern Times* (1932)—as the paragon of the worker-poet: not a worker at all, but an actor who plays a worker and botches his job.

In what comes across as a tone-deaf *non sequitur*, Pasolini cites Chaplin's film at the very start of his response to the worker's request that he portray working-class reality: '*Tempi moderni* di Chaplin è un film assoluto, che ha detto sul lavoro in fabbrica qualcosa che si pone come insuperabile, nella fantasia' (*SPS*, p. 1034). He writes that it acts on the viewer's imagination the way a dream does, or an experience of *déjà vu*:

<sup>5</sup> Pasolini, 'Espressività contro strumentalità', in *SPS*, pp. 1033–36.

<sup>6</sup> Pasolini, 'Un problema per tutti', in *SPS*, pp. 1036–37.

<sup>7</sup> Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 48.

Ti è mai successo di fare un sogno, che poi riconosci continuamente nella realtà, come una realtà spiegata fuori da se stessa, che si ripete, misteriosamente, imbevendo del suo senso gli oggetti, le persone? Il film di Charlot è come un sogno fatto sulla realtà della fabbrica, e ogni volta che cade sotto gli occhi (gli occhi di un estraneo come me) una fabbrica, essa è come riassunta e prefigurata da quel sogno [...]. L'ossessione di gesti che si ripetono—l'occhio del padrone (tecnicizzato) che osserva—l'indifferenza cretina e sublime della macchina—sono tutti i particolari reali che hanno riferimento con un misterioso sogno profetico già fatto.

(*SPS*, p. 1034)

Pasolini's description of Chaplin's film as a 'critica onirica' (*SPS*, p. 1034) that anticipates the factory evokes the idea of prefiguration, the notion that a dream or an image or person, a figure, can in some way foreshadow a later one in another text or in lived reality, or that one historical period can anticipate another. A central concept in philology and related disciplines, figural interpretation developed out of the medieval belief that the Old Testament and its prophecies in some way prefigure or foreshadow the events of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Here, in what is likely a synthesis of Carl Jung's theory of the unconscious, which Jung understood as a generator of future reality via symbolic combinations truer and more realistic than those produced by the conscious mind, and Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, which argues that prefiguration is the central paradigm by which texts relate to one another across time, Pasolini suggests that Chaplin's film, as a dreamlike representation of the factory, has been fulfilled in reality, to which it relates as a sort of primal archetype.<sup>9</sup>

In his letter, Pasolini emphasizes *Modern Times*'s timelessness: though nearly thirty years old, he finds it does not feel dated as a critique of the factory. In this respect, he echoes Roland Barthes's assertion in *Mythologies* (1957) that Chaplin's film transcends its moment as a work of critique.<sup>10</sup> Barthes focuses his reading on the worker, whose lack of political awareness he considers key to the film's success. For Barthes, Chaplin's pre-political protagonist, ignorant of 'his total alienation at the hands of his masters (the employers and the police)', forces audiences to see their own blindness, pushing them towards class consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Chaplin's comedic worker, a stand in for the everyman, profoundly human amidst the inhuman machines, elicits self-recognition. As such, the worker's 'anarchy [...] represents the most efficient form of revolution in the realm of art'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Auerbach's definition of figural interpretation remains the most canonical; see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 73. For a discussion of Auerbach's influence on Pasolini's thought, see Silvia De Laude, 'Pasolini lettore di *Mimesis*', in *Mimesis: L'eredità di Erich Auerbach*, ed. by Ivano Paccagnella and Elisa Gregori (Padua: Esedra, 2009), pp. 467–82; and Emanuela Patti, *Pasolini After Dante: The 'Divine Mimesis' and the Politics of Representation*, Italian Perspectives, 35 (Cambridge: Legenda, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See Carl Jung, 'General Aspects of Dream Psychology', in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1975), pp. 306–64.

<sup>10</sup> For the Pasolini-Barthes connection, see, among other contributions, H. Joubert-Laurencin, 'Pasolini-Barthes: engagement et suspension de sens', *Studi pasoliniani*, 1 (2007), 55–67.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

While Pasolini agrees with Barthes that Chaplin's worker is a figure with profound political significance, unlike Barthes, he abandons the familiar vocabulary of class struggle to interrogate *Modern Times* as a motor for thinking through the possibilities and limits of representation, and therefore of resistance. He homes in on the film's uncanny ability to exhaust the possibilities of representing the factory. Whereas Christ can be painted in many ways, if you have seen Chaplin's factory, you have seen them all, he concludes. The factory itself is monovalent, a place of sameness. But what is a poet to do in the face of such sameness? Unable to represent the factory 'in mille modi diversi e soggettivi, continuamente nuovi, reinventati' (*SPS*, p. 1035), the poet is impotent. And if, as Pasolini argues, the factory is the paradigm of the modern, does this mean that 'c'è qualcosa nella vita moderna che non è più poetizzabile? O che è solo poetizzabile una volta per tutte' (*SPS*, p. 1035)?

Pasolini's assertion that the factory confounds the intrinsically plural mechanism of representation is of course hyperbolic. Films such as Elio Petri's *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (1971) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972), which do great representative justice to the conditions and effects of factory labour, prove him wrong. But, like Barthes, Pasolini reads Chaplin's film and the reality it is meant to convey as a mythologist. The factory myth that Chaplin's film so perfectly exposes is really 'a form of communication, a "language", a system of second-order meaning'.<sup>13</sup> Chaplin's genius is to reveal what is unnatural about the naturalized world of the factory, and thus of the modern, through his movements as protagonist. Yet for Pasolini, unlike Barthes, the strength of Chaplin's performance is not limited to the demystifying light it sheds on the condition of the worker. Chaplin defies the order of intelligibility and value imposed by the factory, resisting its 'sfera di pura strumentalità o comunicazione' by embodying its antithesis, namely 'espressività' (*SPS*, p. 1035). Pasolini reiterated this observation a few months later in his article 'Intervento sul discorso libero indiretto', in which he claimed that Charlot in *Modern Times* creates 'una demitizzazione-modello dell'*homo technologicus* [...] contrapponendosi ad esso nell'unico modo che pare possibile: ossia in qualità di superstite di un'umanità pre-industriale'.<sup>14</sup> By the force of this juxtaposition, Pasolini argues, Charlot renders visible 'l'inespressività del mondo della tecnica'.<sup>15</sup> In Pasolini's letter to the worker, it is likewise this ability of Charlot to preserve his singular and jarring expressivity that makes him the ideal role model for the worker-poet:

Questo uomo 'espressivo' che si contrappone al mondo 'comunicativo' o meglio 'funzionale' della tecnica, dovrebbe in definitiva essere il poeta. Si dovrebbe insomma pensare a dei poeti-operai (conio questa definizione su quella ormai nota di preti-operai). Soltanto vivendo compiutamente la vita di un operaio in una fabbrica è possibile entrarvi dentro fino in fondo, ma non per viverla passivamente o disperatamente (come succede a te), ma per viverla antitetivamente. Cioè per opporvi la libertà dell'uomo in quanto 'espressivo' e non 'strumentale'.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Lauda, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, p. 1373.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1373.



(SPS, pp. 1035–36)

Here, Pasolini uses 'strumentale' to refer to the organizing principle of thought and action that determines the status of the human, first within the factory, and later, as a *desideratum* and result of the technological turn, across advanced industrial society. His usage reflects the influence of critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, who elaborated his theory of technological society's transformation of subjectivity according to its terms of 'pure instrumentality' in the postwar period and most thoroughly in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse believed that the growing mechanization of labour and corresponding increase in productivity spelled growing unfreedom, when unfreedom is defined 'in the sense of man's subjection to his productive apparatus'.<sup>16</sup> Marcuse held a dim view of the improvements in quality of life and labour conditions made possible by automation. He cautioned that contemporary workers resembled slaves more than ever before, since they existed primarily 'as instruments, as things'—in other words, as means rather than ends, cogs in the machine of capital.<sup>17</sup> Pasolini's identification of the worker-poet as someone who can consciously choose an alternative to instrumentality while still labouring reflects Marcuse's 'Great Refusal', his affirmative belief that the system had to be refused in order to be broken with, which meant that real alternatives, creative modes of living and doing otherwise, had to be put into practice.<sup>18</sup> By recuperating expressivity in a project of freedom, Pasolini does the work of theorizing and putting forward what Marcuse would call a 'true' value as opposed to the 'false' value of instrumentality.<sup>19</sup> Pasolini derived expressivity, literally the quality of being expressive, from the 'stylistic' criticism of Austrian philologist Leo Spitzer, who developed the idea of expressivity as a variable yet isolable quality in every writer's use of language.<sup>20</sup> In stylistic criticism, expressivity assumes that instances of linguistic usage, especially breaks from standard usage, reflect an underlying pre-expressive psychological state unique to individuals. Here we see Pasolini give expressivity an added valence by extending it to his reading of the movements and gestures of a living person in a silent film, meaning that expressivity can be interpreted in the language of the body, and therefore in reality.

When he identifies the worker-poet as the exemplar of embodied expressivity, Pasolini makes an overt nod to the Europe-wide phenomenon of the worker-priest movement, which first emerged in France in the early 1940s. Representing an innovation in Church tradition, the term worker-priest specifically designated a 'priest who did not live in a presbytery or monastery, was freed from parochial work by his

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Pasolini expressed open admiration for Spitzer's work in his criticism. See, for example, 'Il metodo critico di Leo Spitzer offre analisi nuove', in *SPS*, pp. 1556–59. Spitzer returns to expressivity, implicitly or explicitly, over the course of his career. Pasolini would likely have been most familiar with the essays contained in Leo Spitzer, *Critica stilistica e storia del linguaggio*, ed. and trans. by Alfredo Schiaffini (Bari: Laterza, 1954) and Leo Spitzer, *Marcel Proust e altri saggi di letteratura francese moderna*, ed. and trans. by Pietro Citati (Turin: Einaudi, 1959).

bishop, lived only by his full-time labour in a factory or other place of work, and was indistinguishable in appearance from an ordinary workman'.<sup>21</sup> The vocation, as the hyphen suggests, was hybrid and not contradictory: the priest was fully embedded in his place of labour and saw his work as a living embodiment of Christ's message. While Pasolini rightly insists that he has coined the term 'worker-poet' on the basis of the worker-priest, I argue that we should also trace this figure to the thought of Simone Weil, whose ideas circulated from the early 1950s in the Italian context thanks to the translations of Pasolini's friend-*cum*-adversary Franco Fortini.<sup>22</sup> Weil—whose interest in work spans her short but prolific career as a philosopher—came to believe, like Marcuse, that modern factory work was dehumanizing. Several other aspects of Pasolini's notion of the worker-poet likewise suggest Weil's influence: the worker-poet's direct involvement in factory life and the belief in the synthesis or complementarity of poetry and labour.

In the *Dialoghi* sketch, Pasolini insists that only someone who lives 'compiutamente la vita di un operaio in una fabbrica' can resist its instrumentality (*SPS*, p. 1036). This is a belief Pasolini shares with the young Weil, who worked in a series of factories from December 1934 until August the following year, convinced that only firsthand experience of factory work could remedy socialist thinkers' failures to understand the working class. In the short note that follows his letter, 'Un problema per tutti', Pasolini seems to have Weil in mind when he admits that he will not become the worker-poet he calls for, since to do so 'richiederebbe da me una tale vocazione da buttar per aria tutta la mia vita passata e presente: un vero e proprio atto di asceti' (*SPS*, p. 1036). Weil lived just such an ascetic life and discovered what the jaded and more self-protective Pasolini had intuited: that full-time factory work entails a tremendous renunciation of intellectual vocation. In her letters and journal from the period, Weil describes how her work in the factory crushed her by depriving her of her capacity to think. When she does have the energy to think, on Sundays, she writes of it as a sort of rebellion. She also—and here Pasolini's debt would be more explicitly confirmed—wholeheartedly recommends Chaplin's *Modern Times* to her correspondents for the same reason Pasolini recommends it to the worker: 'If you pass through Paris be sure not to miss Charlot's latest film. Here is finally someone who has expressed some of what I experienced!'<sup>23</sup>

Throughout her writings, Weil parses her experience of the factory using the language of slavery. She distinguishes factory work from other types of manual labour, arguing that, physically and psychically, factory work turns workers into slaves by wearing them down to the point of passive submission. She was an especially staunch critic of Taylorism, which led to the widespread implementation of repetitive piecework that demanded workers' undivided (if low-grade), almost bestial attention.

<sup>21</sup> Gregor Siefer, *The Church and Industrial Society: A Survey of the Worker-Priest Movement and Its Implications for the Christian Mission*, trans. by Isabel and Florence McHugh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Domenico Canciani, 'La filosofia e l'industriale. Adriano Olivetti e Simone Weil', in *Pensare il presente con Simone Weil*, ed. by Fabio Amigoni and Fulvio Cesare Manara (Cantalupa: Effatà, 2017), pp. 187–212 (p. 201).

<sup>23</sup> Simone Weil, *La condizione operaia*, trans. by Franco Fortini (Milan: SE, 1994), p. 163.

Nonetheless, Weil also considered work a necessary feature of the human condition, and one, moreover, that could be part of a mystical attainment of grace. As a condition perceived in metaphysical terms, 'Slavery is work without any light from eternity, without poetry, without religion'.<sup>24</sup> In the interval between the slave and the free worker, then, is poetry: 'Workers need poetry more than bread. They need that their life should be a poem. They need some light from eternity'.<sup>25</sup>

For Weil, as for Pasolini, there are no work-free utopias, only work *and* poetry, which is the same as saying that humans must always labour, while also craving something that verges on the ineffable. Whatever you want to call this something—whimsy, poetry, joy, light—, in the economy of grace and refusal that Pasolini sketches for his reader, it is via their own expressivity that the worker-poet reclaims their share of it and maybe, if just for a moment, throws a wrench into the machine.

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<sup>24</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

# THE ROAD TO COSMIC LABYRINTHS: ITALO CALVINO AND UMBERTO ECO IN *IL MENABÒ*, 5

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This note focuses on two essays: ‘La sfida al labirinto’ by Italo Calvino and ‘Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’ by Umberto Eco (henceforth ‘Sfida’ and ‘Modo’, respectively).<sup>1</sup> Both essays were published in the Turin-based literary journal *Il menabò* in 1962, in the midst of a debate surrounding the connection between industry and literature that had originated in the previous number of the publication.<sup>2</sup> From different angles, and with only partially divergent arguments, both essays discuss literary and cultural responses to Italian industrialization. The first section of this note will compare the two essays and analyse their paratexts. The second part will highlight the subtle, yet pervasive influence of ‘Modo’ in Eco’s later works, before moving to a discussion of the double consonance between, on the one hand, Calvino’s discussion of maps in ‘Sfida’ and Fredric Jameson’s idea of cognitive mapping, and on the other hand, between Eco’s analysis of creative exhaustion in ‘Modo’ and John Barth’s ‘literature of exhaustion’. The note ultimately argues that ‘Sfida’ and ‘Modo’ represent not only a key step in their authors’ intellectual paths, but also the first stirrings of Italian postmodernism.

## READING ECO AGAINST CALVINO IN *IL MENABÒ*, 5 (AND BEYOND)

The fifth issue of *Il menabò* focuses principally on the question of the avant-garde. *Gruppo 63* had not yet been formed, but the question of which sort of language should be employed to address the subject of industry was already on the table. Superficially, both ‘Sfida’ and ‘Modo’ seem to support the rise of the avant-garde. Calvino’s article calls for a renovation of the literary field. Eco argues that much of the contemporary artistic language, in the field of music in particular, expresses an exhausted view of the world by using traditional forms. In fact, both authors express strong doubts about the value of the responses provided by avant-garde writers. Calvino thinks that both the visceral (Celine, Joyce) and the rationalist (Robbe-Grillet) lines of the twentieth-century avant-garde produced a retreat of literary discourse in the realm of subjectivity (‘Sfida’, p. 137). In a long footnote, Eco expresses his fear that the avant-garde is a fashionable mannerism, that is, the expressions of the capitalist need to be ‘new’ and

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<sup>1</sup> Now in Italo Calvino, *Una pietra sopra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2015), pp. 127–41; Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta. Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee* (Milan: Bompiani, 1992), pp. 235–90.

<sup>2</sup> See *Il menabò*, 4 (1961) [ed. by Italo Calvino and Elio Vittorini].

‘revolutionary’ (‘Modo’, pp. 264–66). What, then, is the type of renovation that both essays call for and perhaps in part inspire? A hint comes from a letter that Calvino sent to Eco after reading his essay in *Il menabò*:

Caro Eco,

letto il tuo saggio! Formidabile tutta la parte sull’alienazione. Concordo con entusiasmo. [...] BUONI O BUONISSIMI I CAPITOLI 5-6-7

Parli troppo di canzonette: questo involgarisce il discorso. Cos’è questo Claudio Villa? Cos’è questo Festival di S. Remo? Mai sentito nominare!

BENISSIMO IL FINALE PER I RAPPORTI COSMICI. Da anni pensavo di scrivere un manifesto ‘Per una letteratura cosmica’ ma aspettavo di chiarirmi meglio le idee.

Un cordiale saluto,

Calvino<sup>3</sup>

Calvino’s enthusiastic reading of ‘Modo’ contrasts slightly with a later remark made by its author. At the fortieth anniversary of *Gruppo 63*, while explaining the context in which the group was born, Eco comments:

Con il suo solito fiuto [*Vittorini*] aveva deciso di dedicare il *Menabò 5* a un nuovo modo di intendere l’espressione ‘letteratura e industria’, focalizzando l’attenzione critica non sul tema industriale ma sulle nuove tendenze stilistiche in un mondo dominato dalla tecnologia. Era un coraggioso passaggio dal neorealismo (dove valevano i contenuti sopra lo stile) a una ricerca sullo stile dei tempi nuovi, ed ecco che dopo un mio lungo saggio ‘Sul modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’ apparivano prove narrative oltraggiosissime di Edoardo Sanguineti, Nani Filippini e Furio Colombo. *Vi appariva un saggio, apparentemente polemico, ma sostanzialmente complice, di Italo Calvino (‘La sfida al labirinto’), che allora mi aveva detto: “Scusa, ma Vittorini [e dietro a Vittorini stava la cultura marxista dell’epoca, da cui egli si era liberato ma alla quale in fin dei conti doveva ancora rendere conto] mi ha chiesto di stendere un cordone sanitario.”* Caro e amabile Calvino che in futuro avrebbe incrociato i suoi destini con quelli dei sentieri che si biforcano e con gli sperimentalismi dell’Oulipo.<sup>4</sup>

In ‘Sfida’, Calvino’s attempt to contain the political and aesthetic provocations of Eco’s essay (which Eco here metaphorically dubs as Calvino’s ‘cordone sanitario’) is visible in a few minor details. For example, Calvino is dismissive of James Joyce, a fundamental author for Eco: ‘purtroppo uno scrittore che non sono mai riuscito ad amare, perché troppi lati suoi mi riescono privi di interesse: il fisiologico, il cattolico blasfemo, l’irlandese’ (‘Sfida’, p. 133). In favour of Ernest Hemingway, about whose works Eco is relatively disparaging in a footnote (‘Modo’, p. 269), Calvino writes: ‘Lo Hemingway delle mie prime scelte giovanili non è affatto diminuito di statura: resta il migliore di tutti, per esattezza e secchezza nella parola e nel gesto e nei rapporti umani (anche se la

<sup>3</sup> Italo Calvino, *Lettere 1940–1985*, ed. by Luca Baranelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), pp. 705–06. The paragraphs which make up the letter are written horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, forming a patchwork pattern on the page.

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Prolusione: Umberto Eco’, in *Il Gruppo 63 quarant’anni dopo*, ed. by Renato Barilli, Fausto Curi, and Niva Lorenzini (Bologna: Pendragon, 2005), pp. 20–43 (pp. 28–29). Emphasis mine.

giovane generazione americana gli preferisce quel suo fratello assolutamente opposto che è Henry Miller [...]’ (‘Sfida’, p. 133). Calvino also re-evaluates the rationalist root of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s theoretical writings to the detriment of his narrative (‘Sfida’, p. 139), while Eco does the opposite (‘Modo’, pp. 280–81).

Beyond these rather secondary discrepancies, Calvino and Eco share, perhaps unknowingly, a core belief in the primacy of reason over action; that is, in the supremacy of the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*. Neither of their essays suggests simple solutions to the problems discussed. Both of them profusely state that the first and necessary step is a proper understand the new world. In doing so, to embrace a certain amount of complicity with it becomes not only unavoidable, but desirable too. This epistemological premise could then act as a first step towards a new literature that, rather than surrendering to the complexity of reality, instead assumes its labyrinthine aspect as its form. Against the overflowing of the Self in contemporary literature (Calvino is writing *Le cosmicomiche* in these years), the antidote will therefore be a cosmic literature: ‘cioè, al livello dei piani di conoscenza che lo sviluppo storico ha messo in gioco’ (‘Sfida’, p. 140). Calvino thus defines a literature that deals, above all at a formal level, with the implications of new scientific advancements, as well as with the degree of uncertainty which they bring with them.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of ‘Modo’, Eco clarifies that it is paramount to rationalize industrialization before proposing specific counter-reactions:

l’operazione dell’arte che tenta di conferire una forma a ciò che può apparire disordine, informe, dissociazione, mancanza di ogni rapporto, è ancora l’esercizio di una ragione che tenta di ridurre a chiarezza discorsiva le cose; e quando il suo discorso pare oscuro è perché le cose stesse, e il nostro rapporto con esse, è ancora molto oscuro.

(p. 290)

Similarly, in a letter to Angelo Guglielmi, who criticizes ‘Sfida’ in *Il menabò*, 6, Calvino replies:

Siamo venuti su in un’epoca in cui di “valori” sicuri non c’era che quello scacco: e idealismo, e bergsonismo, e fisica moderna, e adesione alla realtà politica non dicevano che quello, sempre la stessa musica da parte di tutte le più venerande barbe. [...] L’uscita da una condizione di minorità è avvenuta per noi quando abbiamo capito che di scacchi alla ragione continueranno a essercene magari uno ogni dieci minuti, ma il bello è vedere ogni volta quale ponte sei capace di costruire per passare dall’altra parte e continuare la tua strada.<sup>6</sup>

As his letter reminds Eco, in Calvino’s map there is no space for Claudio Villa. For Eco, instead, there can be no map without a consideration of lowbrow culture. In this respect, Calvino’s and Eco’s perspectives on literature and industrialization significantly diverge. Calvino could be here identified as ‘apocalyptic’ rather than ‘integrated’, according to the framework of Eco’s 1964 work *Apocalittici e integrati*,

<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, see Eco’s treatment of epistemological metaphors in *Opera aperta*, pp. 159–67.

<sup>6</sup> Italo Calvino, ‘Corrispondenza con Angelo Guglielmi a proposito della *Sfida al labirinto*’, in *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), pp. 69–73 (p. 70).

even though both Calvino's and Eco's positions in fact represent a third alternative to this (in)famous dichotomy.<sup>7</sup>

### THE FIRST CRIES OF POSTMODERNISM: CALVINO/JAMESON, ECO/BARTH

Despite superficial divergences, there is therefore substantial convergence between Eco and Calvino. This suggests an unconventional genealogical hypothesis, which relates to the emergence of postmodernism in Italy as an output of the debate on literature and industry.<sup>8</sup> The very idea of Italian postmodernism is indebted to the figures of Eco and Calvino and how much of their postmodernist phase is inspired by the images of the labyrinth, and of cosmic literature. In this light, it might be useful to touch upon the pervasive influence of 'Modo' on Eco's contemporary and later works. For instance, the core thesis of *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) is already summarized in a passage of 'Modo' (p. 252). Again in 'Modo', Eco quips, referencing the *Iliad* (XVIII, 478–608):

perché appare inumano l'uso poetico del semaforo e non era mai apparso inumano l'uso poetico dello scudo di Achille (di cui si descriveva persino, orrore!, il processo 'industriale' di produzione, perdendosi in particolari siderurgici che avrebbero dovuto scandalizzare l'intellettuale dei tempi omerici)?

(p. 253)

In *Diario minimo* (1962), Eco similarly parodies the Frankfurt School in 'Dove andremo a finire?', a fictional essay set in Ancient Greek, where the philosophy of Aristotle is interpreted by a severe Adornoian critic as the tangible expression of decaying times.<sup>9</sup> The most remarkable foreshadowing of Eco's future works, however, is in three passages of 'Modo':

C'è qualcuno che pensa che si possa ancora parlare di amore evitando l'accenno ai semafori: è l'autore di canzonette melodiche per Claudio Villa. [...] il suo universo è definito dai concetti umanissimi di "cuore", "amore", e "mamma". Ma il moralista avvertito oggi sa che cosa si nasconde dietro a questi *flatus vocis*: un mondo di valori pietrificati usati in funzione mistificatoria.

(p. 256)

[...] non si esce dal sistema solo perché ormai le consuetudini si sono irrigidite, la rosa delle possibilità inventive (in senso puramente formale) esaurita, non si rifiuta cioè il sistema solo perché anche in musica si è arrivati al punto in cui la coppia "cuor" e "amor" non solo è

<sup>7</sup> See Valentina Fulginiti, 'L'altro '63: Eco e Calvino di fronte al "popolare"', in *Tra Eco e Calvino. Relazioni rizomatiche*, ed. by Rocco Capozzi (Milan: EncycloMedia, 2013), pp. 251–84 (p. 284).

<sup>8</sup> On Eco's distinction between 'apocalyptic' and 'integrated' attitudes to the future of mass-culture, see *Apocalittici e integrati* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964); see also Rocco Capozzi, 'Dalla "letteratura e industria" all'industria del postmoderno', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 9 (1991), 144–57.

<sup>9</sup> See Umberto Eco, 'Dove andremo a finire?', in *Diario minimo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1975), pp. 97–114.

divenuta necessitante, ma non può essere che pronunciata in modo ironico, dato che è divenuta uno stereotipo e si è svuotata di qualsiasi capacità di suggestione.

(p. 260)

[...] è in malafede la formula di cortesia e la domanda “signorina vuole diventare mia sposa?”, che può essere detta solo ironicamente e non esprimerà mai più, oggi, una reale passione amorosa, poiché è irrimediabilmente compromessa con una etichetta e con una concezione dei rapporti affettivi strettamente legati alla sensibilità borghese romantica.

(p. 268)

Similarly, the idea that the language of love is stereotyped to such an extent that it means nothing prefigures a famous passage from ‘Postille a *Il nome della rosa*’ (1983). Here Eco provides a famous definition of postmodernism in relation to irony:

Ma arriva il momento che l’avanguardia (il moderno) non può più andare oltre, perché ha ormai prodotto un metalinguaggio che parla dei suoi impossibili testi (l’arte concettuale). La risposta post-moderna al moderno consiste nel riconoscere che il passato, visto che non può essere distrutto, perché la sua distruzione porta al silenzio, deve essere rivisitato: con ironia, in modo non innocente. Penso all’atteggiamento post-moderno come a quello di chi ami una donna, molto colta, e che sappia che non può dirle “ti amo disperatamente”, perché lui sa che lei sa (e che lei sa che lui sa) che queste frasi le ha già scritte Liala. Tuttavia c’è una soluzione. Potrà dire: “Come direbbe Liala, ti amo disperatamente”. A questo punto, avendo evitata la falsa innocenza, avendo detto chiaramente che non si può più parlare in modo innocente, costui avrà però detto alla donna ciò che voleva dirle: che la ama, ma che la ama in un’epoca di innocenza perduta. Se la donna sta al gioco, avrà ricevuto una dichiarazione d’amore, ugualmente. Nessuno dei due interlocutori si sentirà innocente, entrambi avranno accettato la sfida del passato, del già detto che non si può eliminare, entrambi giocheranno coscientemente e con piacere al gioco dell’ironia... Ma entrambi saranno riusciti ancora una volta a parlare d’amore.<sup>10</sup>

Not by chance, this passage from ‘Postille’ begins with a reflection on the avant-garde and its canonization.

Beyond Eco, it is relevant to note the consonance between the two essays in question and widely-known theories of postmodernism. For instance, Calvino’s metaphor of the map of the labyrinth closely resembles Fredric Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping (a dissimulated translation of Marxian class-consciousness): ‘The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.’<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Postille a *Il nome della rosa*’, in *Il nome della rosa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1986), p. 529.

<sup>11</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 54. On Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, see Daniele Giglioli, ‘Postfazione’, in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernismo, ovvero la logica culturale del tardo capitalismo*, trans. by Massimiliano Manganeli (Rome: Fazi, 2015), pp. 499–518 (p. 514).



Likewise, Eco's understanding of alienation in 'Modo' bears deep resemblance to John Barth's later reflections on the literature of exhaustion.<sup>12</sup> Both authors paved the way to postmodernist aesthetics, understanding it as the contemporary *Kunstwollen* ('will to art'), rather than a style or a fashion.<sup>13</sup> They also both critically and creatively operated within the borders of the phenomenon. In 'Modo', Eco's main argument is that, perhaps counterintuitively, an artistic language that comes across as easy, democratic, and inclusive may risk being more alienating than a complex, or deliberately obscure style. Through a drawn-out comparison with music, the Italian academic explains why the language of the avant-garde, apparently very distant and alienating in the layman's perception, is the only capable medium of entertaining a meaningful relation with the world in which it lives:

Quando il musicista compie una operazione di «avanguardia» [...] organizza una forma che pochi ancora sono disposti ad accettare come tale, e perciò si vota all'incomunicazione, e quindi a una sorta di ritiro aristocratico. [...] Il sistema musicale che rifiuta è *esaurito*: produce *clichés*, stimola modelli di reazione standardizzati.

(‘Modo’, pp. 261–62)

The new and difficult language of avant-garde art aims to avoid stereotypes: it is in search of better methods of representation of reality precisely because reality itself (together with its relations of force) is much more complex than what traditional aesthetic expressions may imply through their simple forms. For these reasons, canonical art tends to misrepresent the world: by endorsing a clear, democratic, and communicative language, they risk implying that the world itself, together with its contradictions and injustices, is clear, democratic, and easily understandable. As Eco himself claims at the end of the essay: ‘non sarebbe questa l’ultima e più compiuta figura dell’alienazione?’ (p. 291).

Written five years after Eco's essay, John Barth's 'The Literature of Exhaustion', for similar reasons and with different arguments, calls for new forms of aesthetic engagement and representation of reality in contemporary novels. Like Eco, Barth insists on the meta-narrative function of a truly new artistic language. He seems to be acutely aware that ‘il vero *contenuto* dell’opera diventa il suo *modo di vedere il mondo*, risolto in *modo di formare*’ (‘Modo’, p. 270) in referring to ‘novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author which imitates the role of Author’.<sup>14</sup> Eco's and Barth's essays constitute a call to arms, while almost simultaneously acknowledging the ‘used-upness of certain forms’: namely realism, the role of the author, the concepts of Self, subject, and object.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 62–76.

<sup>13</sup> See Stefano Rosso (trans. by Carolyn Springer), ‘A Correspondence with Umberto Eco; Genova–Bologna–Binghamton–Bloomington; August–September, 1982; March–April, 1983’, *boundary 2*, 12.2 (1983), 1–13 (p. 2).

<sup>14</sup> Barth, ‘Literature of Exhaustion’, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

### CONCLUSION: THE MAP OF THE MAZE

I will conclude by discussing an image. In ‘Sfida’, Calvino argues that ‘quello che oggi ci serve è la mappa del labirinto la più particolareggiata possibile’ (p. 140). Here is one of the many sketches produced by Eco for *Il nome della rosa*, portraying the Borgesian library-maze in the novel:

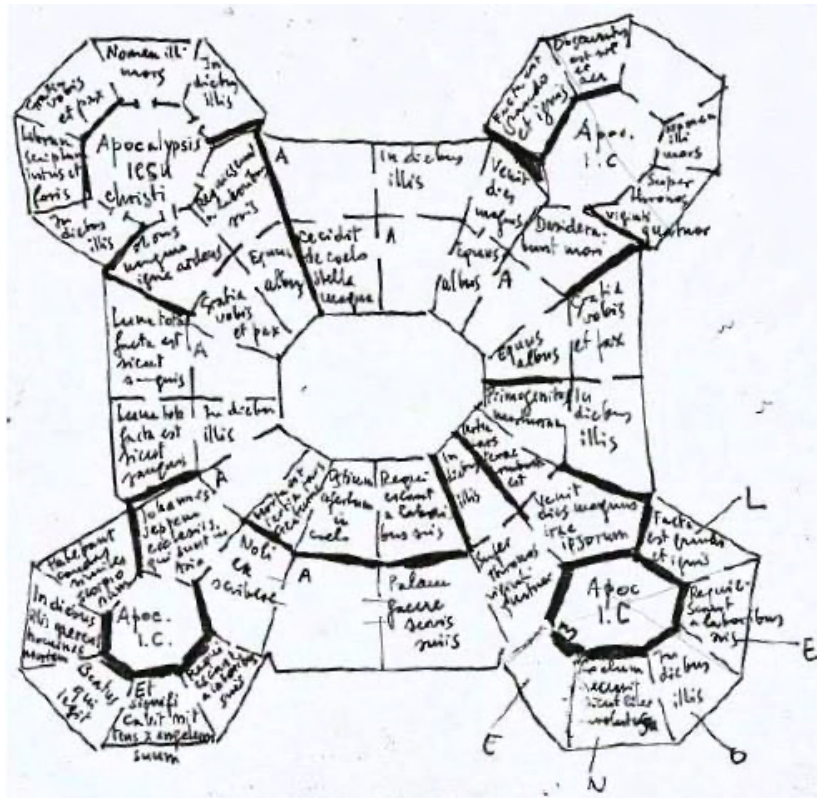


Figure 1: Umberto Eco's map of the Abbey library in *Il nome della rosa* (1980).<sup>16</sup>

Arguably, the mapping of the true labyrinth (that is, the understanding and concrete representation of the current relations of force) has not yet been done. However, as Eco writes, ironically quoting Wittgenstein on the back cover of the first edition of *Il nome della rosa*: ‘di ciò di cui non si può teorizzare, si deve narrare.’<sup>17</sup> Where theory fails, literature can succeed in envisioning a possible world order, as well as its underlying relations of power.

As Calvino finally claims in ‘Sfida’, the purpose of literature is to indicate the right attitude, rather than the solutions to the riddles posed by contemporary economic and political challenges. A multiplicity of maps is therefore needed:

<sup>16</sup> Image from Twitter post by @lanavediteseoed, 2 May 2020, <<https://twitter.com/lanavediteseoed/status/1256527954714206208>>.

<sup>17</sup> See Umberto Eco, ‘Intellectual Autobiography’, in *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco: The Library of Living Philosophers*, ed. by Sara G. Beardsworth and Randall E. Auxier (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2017), pp. 24–93 (p. 90).

è [...] una richiesta poco pertinente quella che si fa alla letteratura, dato un labirinto, di fornirne essa stessa la chiave per uscirne. Quel che la letteratura può fare è definire l'atteggiamento migliore per trovare la via d'uscita, anche se questa via d'uscita non sarà altro che il passaggio da un labirinto all'altro. È la sfida al labirinto che vogliamo salvare, è una letteratura della sfida al labirinto che vogliamo enucleare e distinguere dalla letteratura della resa al labirinto.

(p. 140)

If a pessimist or a maximalist were to interpret Eco's map of the library as the symbol of the impotence from which literature suffers (in failing to provide any key to the real labyrinth), a more reasonable reader could reply with Calvino's words.

# AN ARABO-(IT)ALIENATION: WORK AND MIGRATION IN *IMMIGRATO* AND *DIVORZIO ALL'ISLAMICA A VIALE MARCONI*

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In Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato* (1990) and Amara Lakhous's *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* (2010) the representation of work through the experience of migration is a key concern.<sup>1</sup> The episodes of unemployment, the periods of unsuccessful job hunting, and the depictions of inhospitable workplaces are marked throughout by tension and terror. Nevertheless, the depiction of labour in the two texts yields critical knowledge about the experience of North African migration to Italy, and the severity with which the world of work is depicted suggests that labour can function as a site of resistance. 'Letteratura della migrazione', a critical tradition to which both texts have been connected, is characterized, in the words of Graziella Parati, 'by the desire of the individual to emerge from the mass of undefined and marginalized immigrants, and in so doing to create multifaceted alternative portrayals to the essentialized and homogeneous definition of the "immigrant" created by prejudice and racism in Italy'.<sup>2</sup> Building on Parati's characterization, this note argues that the deployment of aesthetic and stylistic devices such as irony and parody in *Immigrato* and *Divorzio all'islamica* opens up a range of alternative interpretive hypotheses for these novels.

Published in 1990 and written by Salah Methnani in collaboration with Mario Fortunato, *Immigrato* recounts the experiences of twenty-seven-year-old Salah, a graduate student in foreign languages, who embarks on a journey through Italy from South to North. It is divided into chapters named after the towns and cities which Salah visits on his journey: from Tunis to Milan, and then back to Kairouan. The text explores Salah's descent into degradation and his discovery of the underworld in which immigrants are caught in drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, inter-ethnic hostility, and the constant fear of deportation. As such, *Immigrato* offers one of the first literary responses to issues related to migration from the perspective of an Arab and North African migrant arriving in Italy in the 1990s.

Published in 2010, *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* is Amara Lakhous's fourth book. The novel follows Christian on his mission to uncover a supposedly

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani, *Immigrato* (Milan: Bompiani, 2006); Amara Lakhous, *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Graziella Parati, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), p. 17.

imminent bombing in viale Marconi in Rome. Christian is of Sicilian origin and works as a translator, having studied Arabic at the University of Palermo. His assignment consists of impersonating a Muslim Tunisian immigrant in order to infiltrate a purported terrorist cell in the Marconi neighbourhood, home to an immigrant community made up largely of North Africans. Most of the narrative revolves around a call centre in Marconi street called 'Little Cairo'. The two central characters, Christian (alias Issa) and Safia (alias Sofia), are surrounded by a number of Arab immigrants from Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt, alongside non-Arabs from Albania, Senegal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The novel is a juxtaposition of two diaries: one written by Christian/Issa, and the other one by Safia/Sofia. Both shed light on migrant and diasporic experiences in the Italian capital city.

The transformation of the central characters is of particular interest in both texts. Whereas *Immigrato* focuses on Salah's multiple encounters with both native Italians and foreign migrant communities throughout Italy, Christian/Issa's and Safia/Sofia's narratives are set against the background of a much more insulated territory that includes a street, a local market, a few apartments, and a local library. While Salah's odyssey is marked by transience, viale Marconi provides a much more stable setting. Salah's, Safia's, and Christian's migration experiences follow very different patterns, and it is apparent that if *Immigrato* tells of the failure of mimicry as a coping strategy, *Divorzio all'islamica* points to the predominant role and benefits of camouflage in the integration and adjustment of individual migrants. For instance, Christian the translator becomes Issa the Tunisian 'aiuto pizzaiolo' (p. 119). And, once in Rome, Safia starts a secret business working as a 'parrucchiera clandestina' (p. 57), an occupation which is frowned upon by the most orthodox members of the local Muslim community as well as her husband Said, now called Felice, a qualified architect from Cairo University who now works as a cook at a local restaurant. It appears, therefore, that the notion of metamorphosis is at the core of the two texts. Following this line of thought, three key fields of work carry a particular significance for the way that both novels depict labour in the diaspora, namely farming, prostitution, and the catering industry.

The central character of *Immigrato* belongs to the lower end of the Tunisian middle class: his parents are divorced, his father is a surveyor, and his sister works in a supermarket. Salah lives alone with his mother and has only meagre savings when he decides to leave Tunisia in search of better career prospects and freedom. He is a native speaker of Arabic, a polyglot who has studied English and Russian and also speaks French. He reaches Italy—having a only limited knowledge of Italian, which he first gained as a child while watching Italian TV programmes—where he meets Ketti from Bari. However, instead of providing an opportunity to elevate his social status, Salah's knowledge of Italian is a significant handicap, and, in an ironic reversal, it is only by using a lower register of broken Italian that he gains access to hostels and soup kitchens for immigrants.

Upon arrival in Sicily, Salah ironically describes the work of another migrant in Palermo as 'schiavitù part-time' (p. 32), and later self-disparagingly refers to himself as a 'domatore di leoni' (p. 114) while working as a street vendor in Milan. The early

episode in which Salah finds employment in a Sicilian pigsty illustrates not only his perseverance and determination but also the scarcity of work opportunities. In ironizing his filthy working conditions, Salah's self-deprecation can be interpreted as a technique that deflates the severity of the scene: 'Mi viene da vomitare. Penso: "Sono un musulmano. Non posso mangiare la carne del maiale, ma posso pulire la sua merda"' (p. 33). Additionally, the cleaning of the Sicilian pigsty bears parodic resemblance to the cleaning of King Augeas' filthy stables by Hercules. As such, the reading of the pigsty episode through the lens of parody allows for the unlocking of unexplored interpretations. If, on the one hand, Salah is capable of showing signs of resilience in spite of his degrading work, on the other hand, his use of irony can be read as a defence mechanism that he is able to deploy at the very beginning of his descent into the Italian illegal labour market.

Alongside numerous depictions of men and women of the Maghrebi diaspora who struggle with poverty and high unemployment, *Immigrato* also displays a wider variety of sex and gendered norms and practices than *Divorzio all'islamica*. In *Immigrato*, Maghrebi men engage in practices until then unknown to most of them, such as street peddling, drug trafficking, and prostitution, with the diaspora essentially constituting a site of sexual experimentation. Although Maghrebi women appear to have gained financial independence in the diaspora, all the Arab women that Salah meets have entered the paid labour force exclusively through sex work. In Rome, Salah recognizes a prostitute from Tunis who is now 'solo vestita un po' meglio' (p. 54). In Naples, he bumps into twenty-five-year-old Tunisian-born Salwa and her Italian boyfriend, an HIV-positive drug addict. By working as a prostitute, Salwa is able to provide him with the money he needs for his drugs. She also has a son 'che vive alla Caritas con dei parenti' (p. 44).

Later in the novel, Salah comes across an Italian transvestite and three North African sex workers standing by a petrol station near the Fortezza da Basso in Florence. He fails to buy sex from two prostitutes because he is not part of their regular clientele. In fact, the prostitute Sihem only works with non-Arabs, and Salah can't afford Saida's prices. Nonetheless, Sihem and Saida befriend Salah, whose attention is caught by the trajectories that led the two young women into prostitution. Both Sihem and Saida are Tunisian and at the time of their conversation with Salah they have been living in Italy for three years. Sihem is twenty-two years old, and after a short-lived marriage she left Tunisia to join her sister, also a sex worker in Florence. Salah indicates that Sihem's sister returned home after marrying a wealthy Tunisian man. Saida is twenty-eight years old and has a son who lives with his father in Naples. Salah also points out that she sends money regularly 'come una qualsiasi donna che lavora' (p. 81).

Interestingly, it appears from Salah's conversation at the gas station that Sihem and Saida do not consider themselves trafficked victims coerced into prostitution. The conversation underlines the state of aimlessness in which some migrant female sex workers are locked, as is the case with Sihem, who does not have 'particolari progetti' (p. 81). The encounter with the Maghrebi prostitutes also underscores the mechanical and repetitive nature of sex work which turns workers into automata, as can be seen in the Tunisian diaspora with Saida who 'Viene qui sul viale ogni sera, verso le nove, con

puntualità' (p. 81). Yet the manner in which Arab female prostitution is presented is not as sinister as the male one: in fact, Salwa is 'abbastanza felice' (p. 44) in Naples, while Saida 'abita in un bell'albergo del centro' (p. 81); as for Sihem in Florence, 'vivere così non le dispiace, per ora' (p. 81).

In an atmosphere of pervasive recreational drug use, Salah's conversation with Sihem and Saida is also interspersed with the presence of laughter, thereby nuancing the darkness of Salah's stay in Florence. However, beyond their apparent well-being, the North African prostitutes are also objects of derision when they gather at the gas station, as grotesque concubines in a parodic echo of the oriental harem, and struggle to earn a living out of their sexual services. But if the North African women appear less tormented than their male counterparts, Sihem's past experience of domestic violence and Saida's family breakdown need to be taken into consideration, as they contribute to the darkening of the Italian sex labour market visited by Salah.

As he arrives in Sicily, Salah writes:

Il proprietario di un'imbarcazione [...] mi parla della Sicilia e dei problemi del lavoro. Dice: 'Noi non siamo razzisti. Il fatto è che voi siete tutti clandestini, e quindi non potete lavorare in regola. Per questo, siete sfruttati.' [...] Me ne vado in giro, provando a domandare lavoro come lavapiatti o cameriere in un paio di pizzerie: niente da fare. Capisco che aveva ragione l'anziano proprietario del peschereccio: qui, se non hai qualcuno che ti raccomanda, nessuno ti assume. Neppure per un giorno.

(*Immigrato*, pp. 20–21)

It is worth insisting here on the sense of gravity and pessimism with which Fortunato and Methnani elaborate on the issue of migrants' search for employment. In contrast, *Divorzio all'islamica* avoids the question of employment through the lens of farming or sex work. Instead, Lakhous focuses on the urban hospitality industry with a particular emphasis on the food and beverage sector. In this regard, Christian/Issa's verbal exchange on his first day as an 'aiuto pizzaiolo' with the pizzeria owner, 'un sessantenne di nome Damiano' (p. 97), is of particular interest:

'Come vedi io non sono razzista. Non faccio discriminazioni fra musulmani e cristiani, fra quelli che hanno il permesso di soggiorno e i clandestini. Per me sono tutti uguali. Capito?'

'Sì.'

'Senti, ho già dimenticato il tuo nome. È difficile da ricordare. Dobbiamo chiamarti in un altro modo, cosa preferisci: Cristiano o tunisino?'

Scelgo ovviamente il secondo. Un immigrato musulmano che si fa chiamare Cristiano è una pura provocazione. [...]

Comincio a lavorare da subito, dopo aver accettato le condizioni del padrone: due settimane di prova e dimenticare il contratto, ovvero lavorare in nero dall'apertura alla chiusura. [...]

In cucina faccio conoscenza con i tre cuochi: due bengalesi e un peruviano. Insieme a Felice c'è un aiuto pizzaiolo egiziano di nome Farid. I camerieri, invece, sono tutti italiani. I clienti non hanno nessun contatto con il personale immigrato. È una coincidenza?

(Divorzio, pp. 98–99)

Through the humorous undertone of the conversation, Cristian/Issa reveals Damiano's obvious employment fraud and his clear ignorance in matters of religion. He also uncovers the demographics of the workplace, suggesting, on one hand, that the pizzeria reflects the diversity of the Roman neighbourhood, and on the other, that there is a fairly rigid hierarchy in operation in the pizzeria that appears to be set along ethnic lines. Moreover, whereas farms, marketplaces, and street corners are characterized by pity and fear in *Immigrato*, but also by irony and parody, Lakhous depicts pizzerias as sites loaded with tension, but nonetheless able to offer a degree of agency for immigrants. Indeed, the depiction of the pizzeria located 'a due passi da piazza della Radio' (p. 96) offers Lakhous an opportunity to comment on the dissonance between certain forms of employment and religious observance. In this context, the discussion between Christian/Issa and the character of Signor Haram, a rather conservative imam (whose name in Arabic literally means 'unlawful' or 'forbidden'), is particularly insightful. 'E che lavoro fai?', Signor Haram asks. Christian/Issa answers:

'Il lavapiatti.'

'Dove?'

'In un ristorante italiano.'

'Allora il mio discorso di prima vale anche per te, fratello.'

Che bellezza! Mi dedica cinque minuti abbondanti per spiegarmi che il mio lavoro di lavapiatti è *haram*. Il motivo? È sempre lo stesso. Toccare il maiale e gli alcolici è un atto impuro. Di conseguenza i soldi che guadagno, pulendo anche i cessi, valgono quanto i quattrini rubati o guadagnati spacciando.

[...] Invece di fare al meglio il suo lavoro di macellaio si dedica a diffondere sentenze religiose aberranti. Uno come lui, con competenze così straordinarie, dovrebbe vivere non a Roma, ma in qualche villaggio afghano nelle mani dei talebani!

(Divorzio, pp. 116–17)

Through this conversation between Christian/Issa and Signor Haram, Lakhous stages an episode of resistance to forms of religious pressure in the diaspora, thereby critiquing the authoritarian interference of diasporic religious leaders which often results in a further reduction of employment prospects. Christian/Issa playfully 'turns to irony as a means of ridiculing—and implicitly correcting—the vices and follies' of Signor Haram.<sup>3</sup> The assailing function of irony simultaneously engages and amuses the reader, as Lakhous experiments with the caricature of a self-proclaimed authority figure.

If the journey into the Italian labour market completed by Salah and Christian/Issa reveals the role played by migrants in the illegal economy of farming, prostitution, and the catering industry, at the same time, these explorations converge in positioning migrants firmly outside of civic society. From the perspectives offered by the two novels, migrants, diasporans, and newcomers are not involved in the way

<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge 1995), p. 50.



they are governed, and their consent is not sought. They also fail to organize themselves as a group, and for that matter, they lack a political voice and constitute a subaltern group.

Although *Immigrato* and *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* diverge in their depictions of Italy at work, Methnani and Fortunato's dark portrait and Lakhous's lighter illustration converge in implicitly denouncing the production conditions of capitalist economies and the alienation that engenders mechanisms of exclusion. The two texts can be interpreted, therefore, as belonging to a wider call for the emancipation of oppressed, marginalized, and displaced populations, and as sites from which the contemporary Italian world of work can be questioned. Furthermore, in the light of numerous instances of levity, enabled through the deployment of irony and parody, the two texts bring nuance to the field of migrant and diasporic literature in Italy, so often presented as a sombre and uniform counter-discourse.

# PRIMO LEVI'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF WORK

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Primo Levi pursues an anthropological analysis of work in several of his novels and essays, stressing its centrality for approaching a definition of humanity. In this note I will consider a range of Levi's texts which feature representations of work, including *La tregua* (1963), *La chiave a stella* (1978) and the short story 'Gli stregoni', collected in *Lilit e altri racconti* (1981). I will also consider Levi's original anthropological conception of the human as a 'maker of receptacles' as expressed in his essay 'Una bottiglia di sole' (1985), showing how this idea is embodied by several characters of the texts analysed here.

The first text considered in my analysis is *La chiave a stella*, which consists of dialogues between Levi's *alter ego*, a chemist working in a varnish factory, and the highly skilled Piedmontese rigger Libertino Faussonne. In every chapter, Faussonne narrates his work-related adventures in distant lands: from India to Alaska, the Middle East to Russia. Since manual work is one of the main themes of the novel, *La chiave a stella* represents a perfect starting point for a survey of Levi's anthropological conception of humankind.

At the time of its publication, the novel was criticized because it failed to adopt a critical perspective on the representation of the working class. But Levi's intention was to leave aside the concept of class and to focus only on the individuated experience of a single manual worker. He intended to write an ode to human work, celebrating it through an atypical representative of the working class like Faussonne. The result is an epic narrative on manual work, narrated through the protagonist's own words, where 'lamiere e [...] profilati [...] sono gli effettivi eroi dei [...] racconti' (CaS, p. 1070).<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss backed Levi's choice and regarded *La chiave a stella* as a fine anthropological analysis of the profession of the rigger. In 1984 the Belgian anthropologist had an exchange of letters with Levi, who was translating Lévi-Strauss's *Le Regard éloigné* (1983) into Italian. In his first letter to Lévi-Strauss, sent on 17 January 1984, Levi highlighted the similarity of the anthropologist's theories with various episodes narrated in *La chiave a stella*:

Mentre traducevo ne *Lo sguardo da lontano* [...], mi sono accorto con piacere che le sue idee sull'educazione si avvicinano molto a quelle che ho formulato nel mio 'romanzo tecnico', *La chiave a stella*, e mi sono preso la libertà di farle inviare dall'editore Julliard una copia della traduzione francese. Non so se le potrà interessare; in italiano, il libro è uno studio del

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<sup>1</sup> Levi's works are cited from *Opere complete*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2016–18), using the following abbreviations: T = *La tregua* (I, 305–474); CaS = *La chiave a stella* (I, 1033–174); L = *Lilit e altri racconti* (II, 237–412); RS = *Racconti e saggi* (II, 997–1142); SeS = *I sommersi e i salvati* (II, 1143–276).

gergo di mestiere [...]. A ogni modo le basterà leggere i capitoli *Tiresia* e soprattutto *Batter la lastra*.<sup>2</sup>

Lévi-Strauss replied a week later (25 January 1984), thanking Levi for the gift and offering some personal observations on the novel:

Gentile Signore,

mi è stata recapitata la lettera con il libro che mi ha gentilmente inviato. L'ho letto con estremo piacere, perché non c'è nulla al mondo che io ami più che l'ascoltare storie di mestieri; e, in questo ambito, lei si è comportato da grande etnografo, esperto della professione. In più, il racconto è di una continua comicità, e mi sembra che la traduzione francese ne restituisca bene il tono.<sup>3</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's description of his contemporary as a 'grande etnografo' should encourage us to consider Levi's representation of work from an anthropological perspective. Levi was consistently interested in depictions of the social and cultural features of human groups across his writing career, from his testimonial account of Auschwitz in *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) to his sci-fi short stories. Faussonne should therefore not be considered an isolated, atypical character, but instead an allegorical one, who stands as a representative of a group of workers, if not of humanity as a whole. Indeed, Faussonne embodies the dignity of the human being, which, according to Levi, is rooted in the well-done job. This was true even in Auschwitz: as Levi recalls in his collection of essays on the Lager, *I sommersi e i salvati* (1986), prisoners managed to endure their horrible living conditions better when able to practice their old jobs as shoemakers, bricklayers, or tailors (SeS, p. 1222–23). Levi's anthropology is deeply rooted in the notion of work, and in particular in handwork and craftsmanship.

Levi's approach to narration also largely depends on these concepts. There is a whole epic to be uncovered and narrated behind the everyday gestures of workers. This concept also depends on the fact that both handwork and narration are different expressions of creativity and alternative declinations of craftsmanship. This concept is made clear in the opening lines of *La chiave a stella*, in which Faussonne adopts several metaphors taken from the technical terminology of manual work to describe the act of crafting a narrative: 'Lei poi, se proprio lo vuole raccontare, ci lavora sopra, lo ratifica, lo smeriglia, toglie le bavature, gli dà un po' di bombé e tira fuori una storia' (CaS, p. 1037). The connection between handwork and narration is also made explicit in the description of Faussonne's hands, which he uses to perform his daily work as well as to accompany his tales with gestures:

Le avevo davanti agli occhi, le mani di Faussonne: lunghe, solide e veloci, molto più espressive del suo viso. Avevano illustrato e chiarito i suoi racconti imitando di volta in volta la pala, la chiave inglese, il martello [...]. Mi avevano richiamato alla mente lontane letture darwiniane,

<sup>2</sup> Martina Mengoni, 'Epifania di un mestiere. La corrispondenza etnografica tra Primo Levi e Claude Lévi-Strauss', *Italianistica*, 44.1 (2015), 111–31 (p. 128). The letters were originally written in French; Italian translations are by Mengoni.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

sulla mano artefice che, fabbricando strumenti e curvando la materia, ha tratto dal torpore il cervello umano [...].

(CaS, p. 1089)

According to Paola Valabrega, the act of writing reveals the connection between hands and conscience, as also seen in the final paragraph of ‘Carbonio’ (the last chapter of *Il sistema periodico*).<sup>4</sup> When she considers Levi’s insistence on the human ability to craft tools, Valabrega writes that ‘Faussonne è un moderno esemplare dell’uomo fabbro’.<sup>5</sup> In Levi’s *oeuvre*, the concept of the *homo faber* represents the core of his reflection on work and an overcoming of the traditional humanist ideal. The anthropological implications of the idea of the ‘man as a maker’ are stressed by Pierpaolo Antonello in his analysis of the short story ‘Il sesto giorno’ from *Storie naturali* (1966), in which a new species, ‘uomo’, is created by a group of demiurges.<sup>6</sup> Antonello comments: ‘È impossibile costringere l’uomo a non essere artefice perché fa parte della sua costituzione antropologica: è infatti il primo requisito inserito nel suo progetto di costruzione dai demiurghi di “Il sesto giorno”’.<sup>7</sup>

The ability to create tools represents the first crucial aspect that needs to be considered in an examination of Levi’s anthropology of work. According to the author, this skill is what defines humankind and distinguishes it from animals. This opposition between humans and animals becomes evident in *La chiave a stella*. In the chapter ‘L’aiutante’, the character of the monkey shares the feature of manual dexterity with humans and can imitate some of Faussonne’s moves; but when it comes to the use of complex tools, it cannot understand how they work and nearly destroys a huge metal structure built by Faussonne. Comparisons between human beings and animals feature prominently in Levi’s works, particularly in the context of discussions of an anthropological bent. In the essay ‘Una bottiglia di sole’ (collected in *Racconti e saggi*), however, Levi offers an anthropological study of human beings themselves.<sup>8</sup> Retracing the prehistoric origins of the human species, Levi questions what biological or cultural turning point marked the passage from primate to ‘Homo’: ‘a partire da quando, da quale scalino genetico o culturale, essi meritano l’etichetta “Homo”?’ (RS, p. 1113). He subsequently lists a series of technological innovations which contributed to the evolution of our species: the mastering of fire, the fabrication of stone tools, funeral rites. Levi is not satisfied by these hypotheses and instead formulates his own proposal: ‘L’uomo è costruttore di recipienti; una specie che non ne costruisce, per definizione non è umana’ (RS, p. 1113).

According to Levi, the building of receptacles implies two distinctive features of humankind: the possibility to conceive of the future and the ability to understand the

<sup>4</sup> See Paola Valabrega, ‘Mano/Cervello’, *Riga: Primo Levi*, 13 (1997), 380–92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>6</sup> See *Opere complete*, I, 617–32.

<sup>7</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro. Scienza, filosofia, tecnica nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, (Florence: Le Monnier università, 2005), p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> This essay features prominently in Charlotte Ross’s posthumanist reading of Levi’s works in *Primo Levi’s Narratives of Embodiment* (London: Routledge, 2010).

behaviour of materials. Comparing human-made containers to those produced by animals such as ants, bees, squirrels, and birds, Levi finds a difference in the quantity and quality of solutions found by humans in response to the diverse problems encountered when processing, preserving, or manipulating all kinds of materials. As Robert Gordon has observed, 'Una bottiglia di sole' helps us to reconsider the theme of the human being as *homo faber* from a new point of view: 'it binds manual dexterity to a sense of future time that is unique to Man (containers implying preserving something for the future)'.<sup>9</sup> A quick survey of Levi's writings demonstrates the centrality of containers in his production. In his first work, *Se questo è un uomo*, the writer stresses the vital importance of the 'gamella' (metal tin), seen as the tool most essential to survival in Auschwitz. The tin had three functions for prisoners: eating, drinking, and for use as a chamber pot when access to toilets was forbidden.

The anthropological theories implicit in 'Una bottiglia di sole' are also present in many of Levi's other works. The essay represents not an isolated development of Levi's later years, therefore, but a concise *summa* of a life-long reflection on the topic. Starting from this theoretical standpoint, we can retrace a genealogy of the *homo faber* in Levi's *oeuvre* and attempt to discover its phylogenetic origins. In order to do so, we should consider characters who are not simply craftsmen or manual workers but builders of containers. This phylogenetic path is present in several of Levi's novels, and its representation often follows the stages of the technological development of *Homo sapiens*, from the making of stone tools to the production of receptacles. A first example can be seen in the chapter 'Il bosco e la via' in *La tregua*, Levi's account of his return from Auschwitz. Two characters have decided to leave the Russian village of Staryye Dorogi, where all the other former Lager prisoners are sheltered, and live in the forest nearby. They embody the concept of 'man as a maker' and symbolize different steps of the cultural evolution of the human species. The first is Cantarella, a Calabrian mariner who behaves like a hermit. He masters the technique of building receptacles and then sells them or presents them as ritual gifts at weddings:

Possedeva un martello e una specie di rozza incudine, che aveva ricavato da un residuo di guerra e incastrato in un ceppo: con questi strumenti, e con vecchie latte di conserva, fabbricava pentole e padelle con grande abilità e diligenza religiosa. Le fabbricava su commissione, per le nuove convivenze. [...] Lui, senza far domande, si metteva al lavoro, e in poco più di un'ora, con sapienti colpi di martello, piegava e ribatteva lamiere nelle forme che i coniugi desideravano.

(T, p. 419–20)

The physical and spiritual rebirth experienced by all prisoners after their liberation from Auschwitz and their return to civilization is thus marked by the rediscovery of technological skills. But the role of Cantarella becomes even more relevant if we compare him to the primitive Velletrano, who, Levi writes, 'si era trasformato in selvaggio con mirabile facilità' and 'viveva come i nostri lontani progenitori' (T, p. 421).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues: From Testimony to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 182.

Velletrano wanders barefoot and almost naked, talks rarely, secures his food by hunting and gathering, and sleeps on the ground close to a campfire. Representing a former stage of human history (or better pre-history), Velletrano embodies a sort of ‘missing link’ and symbolizes the passage from our primate ancestors to the ‘Uomo’ on which Levi reflects in ‘Una bottiglia di sole’. Velletrano unevolved state leads him to retrace all the steps of human pre-history, rediscovering day by day the technologies that contributed to the success of *Homo sapiens*:

Ma poiché era figlio d’uomo tuttavia, perseguiva a suo modo la virtù e la conoscenza, e perfezionava di giorno in giorno le sue arti e i suoi strumenti: si fabbricò un coltello, poi una zagaglia e un’ascia, e se ne avesse avuto il tempo, non dubito che avrebbe riscoperto l’agricoltura e la pastorizia.

(T, p. 421)

We find another example of receptacle building in the short story ‘Gli stregoni’, in which two anthropologists conduct fieldwork research on a technologically underdeveloped Amazonian tribe. Although the natives have forgotten many human technologies, such as fire-making techniques, the anthropologists are unable to rival them in the construction of objects from the raw materials available in the rainforest. The tribal chief Achtiti decides to show the Westerners how to build vital objects for survival. He starts by manipulating clay and creating a very simple receptacle:

Achtiti [...] entrò in una capanna, ne uscì tenendo in mano una ciotola di terra e un arco. Pose la ciotola al suolo; raccolse un po’ di terra argillosa, la intrise d’acqua, e mostrò ai due che l’impasto si poteva modellare nella forma della ciotola.

(L, p. 369)

This symbolic action clearly identifies Achtiti as a *homo faber*. Moreover, by building clay pots, the tribal chief implicitly shows the anthropologists how all human cultures depend on the building of receptacles and how all tools are originated through the manipulation of raw matter (which, as a chemist, Levi knew full well).

We find yet another representation of characters building receptacles in *La chiave a stella*, in the chapter ‘Batter la lastra’, referred to by Levi in his letter to Lévi-Strauss as fundamental to understanding the whole novel. The chapter is dedicated to the Piedmontese ‘battilastra’, artisans who produce traditional copper receptacles. Significantly, we learn that Faussone’s father was a ‘battilastra’ (CaS, p. 1095). The prototypical *homo faber* Faussone, able to complete any kind of manual work in any possible condition, thus descends from a lineage of builders of receptacles who preceded him both historically and phylogenetically. He has learnt his skills by observing his father and his fellow workers:

La lastra di rame: e col rame, perché allora l’acciaio inossidabile non era ancora di moda, facevano tutto, vasi pentole, tubi, e anche i distillatori senza il bollo della finanza per fare la grappa di contrabbando. Al mio paese, perché anch’io sono nato lì in tempo di guerra, era

tutto un gran battere; più che tutto facevano paioli da cucina, grossi e piccoli, stagnati dentro [...].

(CaS, p. 1095)

However, the passage should not be regarded as simply a nostalgic remark on the abandonment of traditional techniques and productions, and neither is it simply a reflection on the anthropological mutation that Italy experienced after the economic boom of the 1960s. Levi considers the disappearance of traditional copperworks as part of the necessary and almost natural evolution of human cultures, which is perfectly logical if considered within the framework of the phylogenesis of human work. If we return to 'Una bottiglia di sole' and consider its closing paragraph, we see how Levi projects this genealogy into the future and addresses its new challenges:

È stimolante pensare che il nostro avvenire energetico, ossia il nostro avvenire tout court, dipende esclusivamente dalla soluzione di un problema di recipienti. La macchina per mungere energia dal nulla [...] c'è già. Non solo sulla carta, e si è dimostrata tremendamente efficiente nelle bombe a idrogeno. Manca soltanto, e "soltanto", la bottiglia le cui pareti resistano alle temperature spaventose di cui la macchina ha bisogno per funzionare come funziona il sole. [...]

Pare che questo sia il sigillo del nostro secolo. Nella nostra qualità di costruttori di recipienti, abbiamo in mano la chiave del massimo beneficio e del massimo danno: due porte contigue, due serrature, ma la chiave è una sola.

(RS, p. 1115–16)

Levi points to the building of another receptacle, the Tokamak (a nuclear fusion reactor), as the crucial challenge for the *homo faber* of the future, and as the key for the sustainable development of the human species. For Levi, receptacles are a crucial means with which we can identify the human-animal divide; at the same time, they also demonstrate that our future, like our past, depends on work, and on the path taken in the quest for a job well done.

# DOCTORAL BULLETIN BOARD

Recent doctorates awarded in Italian Studies by academic institutions in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

## REBECCA BOWEN

**Institution:** University of Oxford

**Supervisors:** Prof. Elena Lombardi; Prof. Jaś Elsner

**Thesis title:** Figures of Love: Amor from Antiquity to the Italian Middle Ages (winner of the 2020 Society for Italian Studies Postgraduate Prize)

**Short abstract:** Love is a slippery subject; its effect can be physical—capturing, striking, controlling—but its physical form is not always clearly described. This ambiguity is exacerbated by the fact that the Latin word *amor*, the root of ‘love’ in romance languages, is both an abstract concept and the name of a series of famous figures, from the Cupid of Classical Antiquity to the courtly Lord of Love developed in medieval poetry, and even the Christian God. Tracing the tendrils of traditions that link these figures into one history of *amor*, this thesis examines visual as well as literary culture to arrive at an overview of the many looks of Love, from classical Rome to pre-Renaissance Italy. As well as canonical authors including Virgil, Ovid, and Dante, I explore the depiction of love in works of lesser-known late antique poets (Ausonius, Dracontius, Ennodius), various medieval sources (from the *Roman d’Enéas* to the *laude* of Jacopone da Todi), a number of Christian exegetical traditions, and a broad spread of examples from visual culture, from Roman Imperial wall-painting to late antique silverware and thirteenth-century manuscript illuminations. Rather than seeking to separate and divide the multitude of meanings that crowd around this single noun, this thesis focuses on the threads of continuity that bring the sacred and secular into touch, placing love on a spectrum of meanings—from the erotic to the divine—that often defy clear categorization. As well as a map to the survival of Cupid in the Middle Ages, this is a study of the enduring ambiguity of *amor*, the vast signifying power of love, and the slipperiness of the many figures that have been used to represent it.

**Date of conferment:** 22 June 2020

**Internal examiner:** Prof. Simon Gilson

**External examiner:** Prof. Ita MacCarthy (Durham University)

## CLAUDIA DELLACASA

**Institution:** Durham University

**Supervisors:** Dr Katrin Wehling-Giorgi; Dr Fusako Innami



**Thesis title:** Italo Calvino in Japan, Japan in Italo Calvino: A Cross-Cultural Encounter

**Short abstract:** Italo Calvino (1923–1985) travelled to Japan in the autumn of 1976 and, throughout his career, got acquainted with Japanese literature and culture: this encounter is attested to by the ‘Japanese shelf’ of his Roman library and by several authorial reflections, but has been granted little attention so far. The aim of this research project is to highlight for the first time the semiotic relevance of Calvino’s contact with Japanese cultural alterity, as an epitome of the author’s gradual relativization of Eurocentrism, logocentrism, and anthropocentrism. In particular, this study addresses Japanese gardens in light of their role in Calvino’s reflections on the interdependency between the human and other-than-human. This deconstruction of a hierarchical humanism is discussed by interlacing trans-cultural and post-human coordinates, which illuminate the poetical and philosophical mature formulation of Calvino’s age-long ecological awareness. Moreover, if Buddhist meditation, as well as many poetic, artistic, and architectural expressions that capture Calvino’s attention in Japan can be understood as forms of *praxis*, they are here put in dialogue with the author’s development of dialectical materialism over time, especially in his last completed work, *Palomar* (1983). By investigating Calvino’s treatment of perspective changes, language, silence, void, time, and death in his works, this thesis brings to the fore the manifold contradictions, potentialities, and dialectical processes that inform these themes in Calvino’s oeuvre, which fruitfully interact with his exploration of Japanese (and in general non-Western) art, literature, and thought in the late 1970s.

**Date of conferment:** 2 July 2021

**Internal examiner:** Prof. Charles Burdett

**External examiner:** Prof. Martin McLaughlin (University of Oxford)

## REBEKAH LOCKE

**Institution:** University of Bristol

**Supervisors:** Dr Rhiannon Daniels; Dr Tristan Kay

**Thesis title:** The Role of Dante’s *Purgatorio* in the Development and Representation of Purgatory from the Early Fourteenth Century to the Council of Trent in the Sixteenth Century

**Short abstract:** This thesis studies the development of the doctrine of Purgatory in the Italian peninsula during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Specifically, it considers the responses to Dante’s *Purgatorio* in literary and visual texts, as this work is considered to be the first example of an independent and hopeful realm of Purgatory. My comparative and interdisciplinary analysis seeks to address the lack of critical attention given to literary and artistic representations of Purgatory in the period following Dante’s landmark poem.

The thesis is divided into four chapters which focus on Dante's reception in different literary and visual texts. The first chapter examines vernacular commentaries and manuscript illuminations of Dante's *Purgatorio*. The second and third chapters analyse visual depictions of Purgatory in the medieval and early modern periods, focusing on frescoes and altarpieces respectively. The final chapter examines the treatment of Purgatory in Federico Frezzi's *Il Quadriregio* (1394–1403). Each chapter considers the reception of both the geography and theology of Dante's *Purgatorio*, analysing the themes of landscape, transformation, punishment, and prayer.

My findings suggest that, despite its innovation and extensive transmission, *Purgatorio* has a limited influence upon subsequent literary and visual depictions of the realm. Indeed, in addition to Dantean influence, there is evidence that the medieval visionary tradition, the writings of theologians, and hagiography play a significant role in the developing representation of Purgatory. This research therefore challenges the critical conception of Dante's middle realm as an exceptional culmination of previous traditions that transformed the later portrayal of Purgatory. By analysing a range of different media, this thesis not only sheds new light on the reception of Dante's *Purgatorio* but also provides a more detailed account of how the doctrine of Purgatory was perceived, transmitted, and developed in the Italian peninsula at this time.

**Date of conferment:** pending (due to the COVID-19 pandemic)

**Internal examiner:** Dr Lucy E. G. Donkin

**External examiner:** Prof. Matthew Treherne (University of Leeds)

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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ANDREA BRONDINO is a PhD candidate in Italian Studies at the University of Warwick. His doctoral project analyses the use of the word ‘irony’ in contemporary literary practice and debate. His thesis also investigates ironic/anti-ironic modes of representation employed by Umberto Eco and Wu Ming in their historical novels, as well as in Carlo Ginzburg’s historical writing. His other research interests include apocalypse literature, postmodernism, North-American literature, Luca Rastello, the Italian seventies, and reception theory.

MASSIMILIANO CAPPELLO is a PhD candidate at the Università degli Studi di Milano, where he is writing a thesis on the non-fiction and critical writings of Andrea Zanzotto, Giovanni Giudici, and Giovanni Raboni. His research interests include twentieth-century and contemporary Italian poetry, the relationship between poetic writing and criticism, and literary theory. He has published contributions in journals and volumes on Cesare Pavese, Franco Fortini, and Giorgio Cesarano. He is on the editorial board of the cultural magazine *La Balena Bianca*.

BIANCA RITA CATALDI is a final-year PhD candidate and Italian tutor at the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics of University College Dublin. Her research focuses on narratives of work in the Italian context, and she has published many articles and book chapters on the topic. She is a member of the ‘Transnationalising the Humanities’ Research Network at the UCD Humanities Institute, and a postgraduate representative of the Society for Italian Studies.

ILARIA CAVALLIN received her PhD in ‘Scienze del testo letterario e musicale’ from the Università degli Studi di Pavia in 2020, with a thesis entitled ‘Eredità ed evoluzione della canzonetta nel Novecento’. Her academic interests include Italian literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, contemporary poetry, and nineteenth-century translation. She has published on Soffici, Saba, and Raboni, and is a regular contributor to the ‘Segnalazioni’ section of the journal *Stilistica e metrica italiana*.

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SIMONA DI MARTINO is a PhD student in Italian Studies at the University of Warwick. Her research focuses on material and spectral representations of death in the poetry of Alfonso Varano, Salomone Fiorentino, and Giacomo Leopardi. Her academic interests include Gothic Studies, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reception of Dante, literary representations of female workers, and children's literature. She recently published the article "Questo è il libro per cui sono venuto al mondo". L'epopea storico-familiare in Canale Mussolini di Antonio Pennacchi' in *Non poteva staccarsene senza lacerarsi: per una genealogia del romanzo familiare italiano* (Pisa University Press, 2020).

CAROLINE DORMOR is an AHRC-funded DPhil student in Italian at the University of Oxford. Her doctoral research concentrates on Dante's Ante-Purgatory, with a particular focus on retrospective reading, borders, Virgil's presence in Ante-Purgatory, and the transition from Hell to Purgatory within the first nine cantos of *Purgatorio*.

LACHLAN HUGHES is Clarendon-funded DPhil candidate in Italian and Music at the University of Oxford, a Prize Scholar of Merton College, and a Stipendiary Lecturer in Italian at St Hilda's College. His research interests include thirteenth- and fourteenth-century vernacular lyric poetry, Dante Studies, and the music of the Italian *ars nova*. Forthcoming publications include an article on 'Music and Metapoesis in *Inferno* 16' in *Annali d'Italianistica* and a chapter in the edited volume *Re-Reading Dante's 'Vita nova'* (University of Notre Dame Press).

MICHELE MAIOLANI is a PhD Candidate at the University of Cambridge. His doctoral thesis investigates the relationship between anthropology and literature in the works of Italo Calvino, Primo Levi, and Gianni Celati. He has published several articles in books and peer-reviewed journals on modern and contemporary Italian authors, such as Italo Calvino, Leonardo Sciascia, Luciano Bianciardi, Andrea Camilleri, and Dario Fo.

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MARGARET SCARBOROUGH is a PhD candidate in Italian and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York. Her research explores the intersections of literary and aesthetic criticism, biography, and philosophies of existence in twentieth-century Italy.