Essay writing, lyric diction and poetic translation  
in the work of Franco Fortini  

by  
Erminia Passannanti  

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Abbreviations

In the notes I have used the following abbreviations for works by Franco Fortini cited in the main body of this text. The edition of *Verifica dei poteri* referred to in the footnotes is the one republished in 1974.

AP    Attraverso Pasolini
BSN   Breve secondo Novecento
CS    Composita solvantur
D    Disobbedienze (I, II)
DCP   Dei confini della poesia
FDV   Foglio di via
FLS   Fortini: Leggere e scrivere
IN    Insistenze
LDC   Il ladro di ciliegie
LOI   L'ospite ingrato
NSI   Nuovi saggi italiani
PCS   Paesaggio con serpente
PE    Poesia e errore
PI    Poesie inedite
PN    Penultime
PS    Poesie scelte
QF    Questioni di frontiera
QM    Questo muro
RPTP  Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica
SI    Saggi italiani
SINA  Summer is not all
VDP   Verifica dei poteri
UVPS  Una volta per sempre
UFA   Una facile allegoria
VS    Versi scelti
Abstract

‘Essay writing, lyric diction and poetic translation in the work of Franco Fortini’
by Erminia Passannanti

Franco Fortini was an outstanding scholar and polemicist who exercised a very significant influence over the post-war generations of Italian writers and intellectuals. Although much has been made of Fortini’s sharp analytical ability as a literary critic, political essayist and opinion-maker, he was fully appreciated as a lyric poet in his own country only later in his life. The magnitude of the revival of interest in Italy is demonstrated by the existence of a foundation, the Centro Studi Franco Fortini in Siena, which brings together a rich variety of the author’s writings and numerous monographs on his work. However, a preliminary survey of available studies in English showed that, with the sole exception of Thomas E. Peterson’s The Ethical Muse of Franco Fortini, little attention had been paid to Fortini’s oeuvre in English-speaking countries.

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to be the first comprehensive study to explore all three of the principal modes of writing practiced by Fortini – essays, original poetry and translation – treating these individually in following chapters. Because Fortini’s political ideology matched theory to creative writing, attention is paid to the links between criticism, poetry and translation both from a theoretical point of view, as genres, and from the particular standpoint of Fortini as an author who exploited this relationship as an hermeneutic and a poetic practice. My investigation into these interrelated languages then continues with an analysis of those intertextual components activated by Fortini’s practice of translation, which greatly influenced and stimulated his own poetry. The relationship between poetry and poetic translation is a fundamental aspect of this research.

In the first chapter, attention is focussed on a wide selection of critical works by Fortini himself, which range from Verifica dei poteri (1965; 2nd ed. 1974) and Saggi italiani (1974), to Nuovi Saggi Italiani, published in 1987, and the two volumes of political journalistic writings, Disobbedienze (1997), edited by Rossana Rossanda. The second chapter analyses poetry collections including Paesaggio con Serpente (1984) and Composita solvantur (1994) in order to highlight constants that mark Fortini’s strength not only as an ethical writer but as a poet. The third chapter displaces the theory of translation from the world of the sign to that of political and aesthetic discourse, and puts the practice of translation at the centre of
Fortini's work. In order to prove how translation can resolve the difference, indeed antagonism, between translator and poet, fragments of Fortini's *Il ladro di ciliegie* and *Lycidas* are analysed and the original texts are compared with the translations. Finally, the intertextual connections between Fortini's translations and his original writings are considered, not only his later poetry but also his criticism. Although permeated by an ethical sense of intellectual responsibility, on a purely artistic level, Fortini's oeuvre is also suffused with a progressive attempt at liberating his expressive potential as a poet. In fact, while his concern was to safeguard some of the most acclaimed literary traditions, such as the Cinquecento, the Baroque and the Romantic in their highest forms, he also contributes to their restoration and readaptation in the present, as is evident in his commitment to poetic translation.

In the Conclusions, the reconstruction of such a vast scenario, which, hopefully will be clarified in the course of this thesis, emphasizes the remarkable number of foreign poetical and artistic discourses that have penetrated Italian culture through the relentless mediation of Fortini as critic, poet and translator.
Chapter 1

Il sarcasmo che è nello sguardo di ogni parola intesa alla poesia oggi mi deride da ogni riga di prosa (FLS, 1993).

1. Essay writing

Franco Fortini, the leading Marxist Italian critic, poet and literary translator, occupies a major position in twentieth-century Italian literature: an outspoken anti-Fascist, attentive to the work of the most significant European thinkers, his influence as both literary critic and militant socialist intellectual has been far-reaching. Yet his work sits uneasily in any one specialist literary field because of the very nature of the tightly interrelated languages and genres he employed which make his critical volumes such as *Verifica dei poteri* (ed. 1974), *Saggi Italiani* (1974), *Nuovi saggi italiani* (1987), *Extrema ratio* (1990), and *Attraverso Pasolini* (1993) complement in a dialectical and almost intricate way his poetry collections such as *Poesia e errore* (1969), *Questo muro* (1973), *Paesaggio con serpente* (1984), and *Composita Solvantur* (1994). In the context of Fortini’s marked infratextual tendency, in his preface to *Il dolore della Verità*, Erminio Risso claims:

> il suo procedere dialettico è fondato non su tesi ed antitesi, intese nella loro accezione classica tradizionale, ma si fonda sulla presentazione di un bilancio. Che può essere sia interpretativo esegetico sia semplicemente descrittivo, e su una continua messa in crisi e in discussione, attraverso accurati e sottili procedimenti di rovesciamento, di straniamento, di continua oscillazione del punto di vista e di osservazione.\(^2\)

Despite the centrality of his oeuvre, because of this complexity, the past decade, since Fortini’s death in 1994, has seen the author’s reputation recede, due to the postmodernist attack on the intellectual pillars of the Italian post-war high culture. In fact, nowadays, Fortini’s claim to establish enduring literary criteria of value is somehow regarded as an attempt to legitimate those exclusive canons established by the intellectual hegemonies of the Novecento. Although Fortini’s main influence, Bertold Brecht, had conceived an aversion to high bourgeois culture, Fortini did not have the same scorn for its canons. From this specific angle, the author’s insistence on the importance of the classics may indeed make his theories appear as a rigid body of received wisdom, allowing little space to innovation. It is certainly this attitude towards literary canons that caused him to be considered a ‘modern classicist’.

Yet, contrarily to what is believed to be Fortini’s modern classicism, the importance that Fortini attributed to the European literary heritages was somehow anti-traditionalist, since it

\(^2\) Erminio Risso, *Il dolore della Verità*, Maurizio Maggiani incontra Franco Fortini, Lecce: Manni Editore, 2000, p. 15. In his preface, Risso adds: ‘Volendo fotografare questo modo di operare, si potrebbe ricorrere all’immagine del dialogo, dove a una voce che tenta una interpretazione esaustiva del mondo ne segue immediatamente un’altra che propone una serie infinita di obiezioni pronte a smontare quello che pareva un momento di equilibrio, sebbene instabile.’ (p.15)
constantly stressed the problematic relationship between individual poets and those literary standards, which act as ideological weapons in class warfare.

In this sense, Fortini’s standpoints have affinities with the theory of literature and art which Giacomo Noventa promoted through the Florentine review *La riforma letteraria*, the literary review founded in 1936 by Noventa himself and Carocci, which was an original synthesis of Catholicism, liberalism, socialism, anti-idealism and finally anti-hermeticism. Fortini started contributing to *La riforma letteraria* in 1938, at an early stage of his career publishing *Anna*, the drama in three acts, dedicated to the composer Valentino Bucchi. As a young and talented collaborator, he shared with Noventa both his willingness to address the agenda of art and ideology and his distrust in the ability of highly conscious élites to shape a culture for the masses. The similarities between the two writers are numerous also from a stylistic point of view. Indeed, as Noventa, Fortini recorded in his poetry a constant search for balance between tradition and innovation, displaying a problematic, yet elegiac identification with the landscape and themes following two opposite veins, one subjectively expressionistic, and the other more allegorical and edifying, envisioned in the service of historical truth.

1.1. The politics of literary theory.

The documents Fortini left are remarkably varied: they range from scholarly texts, such as anthologies and monographic studies on European literature, to poetry collections and literary translations, with interviews, seminar lectures, articles and reviews in the major Italian newspapers and magazines. Each text bears the imprint, in some way, of Fortini’s personal interpretation of Marxism, revised and personalized on the basis of the author’s interpretation of Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and the Frankfurt School, primarily through Horkheimer’s critique of post-capitalist societies in *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception* (1944). Influenced by these theorists, Fortini produced a significant revision of the Italian culture industry and wrote extensively in the field of the sociology of literature and mass culture. He thus entered into bitter *querelles* on the relationship between art and politics, and societies, challenging notions such as artistic ‘engagement’ and ‘autonomy’, which dominated the Italian literary scene from 1945 up to the late 1970s. Through a systematic revision of the Marxist principle of political commitment,
the author was in fact supportive of Engels’s idea that it was wrong for artists to be openly partisans, thus providing a contrast with his fellow writers such as Elio Vittorini, Alberto Moravia, Cesare Pavese and Beppe Fenoglio, who were engaged in the political strategies of the Neo-realist movement.

In literature and criticism, as in philosophy, the ethics of ideology and politics attracts the strong mind, and Fortini was one of those great writers who were always ready to persuade the reader that ethical ideologies and forms of government are remedies against inescapable human misery, as he explains to Maurizio Maggiani, in the 1983 interview published posthumously in *Il dolore della verità* (2000): “‘L’ideologia della non ideologia’ [...] è una regola ottima per vivere sotto le dittature o in un campo di concentramento, e tuttora valida nel mondo contemporaneo. [...] È necessaria la presenza della coscienza, non si tratta di un’invenzione marxiana.” As this statement illustrates, Fortini took up the role of cultural ‘mediator’, documenting, over the course of almost fifty years the vicissitudes of the most critical movements and political trends in twentieth-century Italian history and literature. Indeed, according to Jean-Paul Sartre’s definition in *What is Literature* (1947), a writer is a mediator ‘par excellence’, and his task is to be committed to dialogue. A critic of the parliamentary establishment and of those parties, who disturbed social dialogue, he engaged constantly in historical and ethical issues, judging reason an essential faculty, yet often incapable of effecting any lasting changes for the better, as Paolo Jachia claims:

Alla luce di quanto detto, mi pare poi importante notare che la dialettica di Fortini è sempre dialettica storica, che di quotidianità e storia si sostanziano i suoi scritti. Si trovano così intrecciati e sottintesi alle sue pagine i grandi nodi della nostra storia, la seconda guerra mondiale e la lotta al nazifascismo, la destalinizzazione e il 1956, il dopoguerra e il fatuo boom economico degli anni sessanta, il ‘68 e il Vietnam, il terrorismo e in trascolorare evanescente di quest’età postmoderna.

As a functional framework in which some of the wide-ranging interactions that the author maintained with the most authoritative interpreters of the war and post-war historical catastrophes will be better understood, this chapter puts side by side Fortini’s prose writings with those of Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno, in order to indicate the remarkable similarities which permitted Fortini to be ideologically grouped together with these authors. Tracing these connections through a variety of Marxist texts will in fact clarify Fortini’s linkage to the

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6 See, in particular, Terry Eagleton, ‘The writer and the commitment’, in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, London: Routledge, 1976, pp. 37-58. Engels expressed this belief in a letter addressed to Minna Kautsky in 1885. While not being adverse to fiction with a political tendency, he discouraged the young novelist from pursuing a direct political involvement in her subject matter, suggesting she expressed her opinion in a more indirect and dramatized fashion in order to touch the conscience of the bourgeois readers more effectively.

7 Ibid., pp. 41-44.


Frankfurt school and his incorporation of their discourses into his critical essays and poetry also through translation.

To begin with, it is useful to underline the fact that, in the decade after the Second World War, European Marxism came under the influence of the early Lukács as a whole generation of social and political theorists sought radical alternatives to the dominant Stalinist orthodoxy. In his famous essay, *What is Literature?*, published originally in *Le Temps Modernes* (1947), Sartre had claimed:

Most of the radicals are silent. The reason is that the gap has been revealed not between the author and his public [...] but between literary myth and historical reality. [...] From 1930 on, the world depression, the coming of Nazism, and the events in China opened our eyes[...] Is there a possible synthesis between our unique and irreducible consciousness and our relativity? [...] What is the relationship between morality and politics?"

Following this trend, Fortini wrote a conspicuous number of political essays on post-war European cultural debates, which he published in *Dieci inverni* (1957), and, eight years later, in 1965, in *Verifica dei Poteri: Scritti di critica e di istituzioni letterarie*, a volume which came out in a second, revised and amplified edition in 1974. As Tito Perlini discusses in his essay ‘Avanguardia e mediazione. A proposito di un saggio di Franco Fortini’, Fortini did not contest so much the general notion that art requires political awareness, but he was sceptical of the sincerity of those artists who put politics before their artistic goals. Agreeing with Adorno’s statement, in *Aesthetics and Politics* (1965), that ‘this is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more than where it seems to be politically dead’, Fortini equally opposed the idea that an investigation of culture can be for culture’s sake in the manner that aestheticist art claimed to be independent of political, moral, economic concerns: poetry, in fact, should neither be ancillary of political struggle, nor threateningly gratuitous, as it became apparent in the self-referential jargon of the new Italian avant-garde, with its ideological battles, causing the freezing of art’s historical

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10 One of the most famous texts in this trend is Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Adventurers of the Dialectic*, which first introduced the notion of ‘Western Marxism’ to denote the tradition stemming from *History and Class Consciousness* (1920) and its main themes of ‘reification’ and ‘class consciousness’. Lukács’s perspective represented an alternative to the official Marxist dogma of the party as surrogate subject of the revolution, and asserted the primacy of working class praxis, articulated ideologically by the party but not replaced by it.


12 See Tito Perlini, ‘Avanguardia e mediazione (a proposito di un saggio di Franco Fortini)’, *Nuova Corrente* 49-50, 1966 (pp.69-84), where the author presents an insightful analysis of Fortini’s positions towards the role of the avant-garde from a theoretical and political point of view, implying a critique of the Gramscian notion of ‘intelletuale organico’.

specificities. In this respect, Fortini claimed: ‘L’avanguardia dei nostri giorni continuerebbe soltanto la tradizione letteraria che (rendendo esplicito un momento implicito in qualsiasi fare artistico), almeno da Balzac a noi, ha posto l’artista, lo scrittore e il suo operare al centro del proprio discorso’ (VDP, p. 225).

Throughout his long career, Fortini’s interventions on the right and wrong political use of literature, that the function of the artist’s political engagement was so strong that even a theoretical experimentalist such as Calvino, in a 1976 lecture, finally admitted: ‘there are two wrong ways of thinking of a possible political use of literature. The first is to claim that literature should voice a truth already possessed by politics […] The other mistaken way is to see literature as an assortment of eternal human sentiments, as the truth of a human language that politics tends to overlook.'

Fortini’s preoccupation with the epistemological connections between art and politics, culture and life thus suggests the complete anachronistic state of criticism. Indeed, the so called ‘crisi della critica’ is shown to have reached an irreversible stage. In the cited Il dolore della verità, the author claims: ‘Il mandato che la classe borghese ha conferito all’arte e alla letteratura, un mandato di supplenza pedagogica e religiosa nei confronti dell’umanità, si è esaurito: vent’anni fa io potevo pensare esaurito soltanto il mandato dello scrittore, oggi questa situazione è globale, coinvolge totalmente i ruoli intellettuali. An adherent of old traditions, such as the Enlightenment and the Romantic, which were in a state of fundamental crisis it was only predictable that Fortini would have encountered the claims of some particular rival theorists such as the neo-realists and the new experimentalists. Since, Noventa, he had understood the values and beliefs of those past traditions, Fortini found himself compelled to state that, beyond the so called ‘morte dei valori e dei controvalori’ (see VDP, p. 199), it was feasible within these new movements to construct from the concepts and forms peculiar to those past traditions what they might have been unable to provide solely from their own conceptual and formal resources.

As we will see, despite the acknowledged ‘crisi della critica’, the privileged role that Fortini was called upon to play both on the literary scene and in the Italian academic system during his Professorship in Literary Criticism at the University of Siena adequately positioned him at the heart of the Italian debates on the role and function of literature. This is indeed a time during which Fortini authored literary and political works of undisputed intellectual rigour and critical authority. Moreover, his literary companionships, especially that with

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Vittorini, editor of the anthology *Americana* (1942) and leading post-war advocate of social realism, favoured his transcultural role as cultural activist. Invited by Vittorini to collaborate in producing the journal *Il Politecnico*, Fortini, who had become literary editor of the poetry section, conducted several important interviews with authors such as Paul Éluard and Eugenio Montale. Yet, the most relevant part that Fortini played was opening up the Italian academic world to the philosophical and political perspective of the cited German Marxist thinkers by letting the subtext of these authors gradually emerge in his own writings so to show how literature can become a mere vehicle of what Engels had called the bourgeois 'false consciousness' and underline certain fundamental aspects of the inevitable dependence of the discourses of the avant-garde on the logic of the media market. This was a notion which Lukács had introduced in *History and Class Consciousness* (1920) where the proletariat, as a possible universal class, is seen both as the product of the historical crisis which affects the totality of society, and the instrument of the tendencies that produce the crisis.

As an expert reader of Lukács's work, such as *Essays on Realism* (1948-55) and *Contributions to the History of Aesthetics* (1953), which Fortini revised in the 1974 amplified edition of *Verifica dei poteri*, he focussed his attention on the cultural patrimony passed on by the greatest European literary traditions in order to discuss the phenomenon of 'reification' in bourgeois post-industrial societies, dominated by the 'fetishism of commodities' and suggest a resistance to this crisis. A fundamental distrust in the institutionalized systems of cultural centralism is indeed the issue outlined in many of the essays in *Verifica dei poteri, Questioni di frontiera* (1977), *Extrema ratio* (1990) and *Disobbedienze* (1997), where the dialectical approach to the afore mentioned political and literary matters supports the writer's duty to witness history with intellectual integrity, a belief which he lately summarized in *Rose dell'abisso* (2000), a series of lessons on Dante, Tasso, Manzoni and Leopardi.

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17 Fortini's appreciation of and constructive attitude towards European poetry, stimulated by the need for new fields of formal research into poetic language, was corroborated at an early stage by his adherence to Vittorini's publishing policy of allocating a section to foreign works in translation, as well as by his editorial experience within Pasolini's *Il Politecnico*. Moreover, his promotion as a poet was supported by Vittorini, who published some of Fortini's poems, such as 'La gioia a venire', 'Ottobre', and 'Europa' in no. 35 of *Il Politecnico*.
18 *Americana*, the anthology edited by Vittorini between 1938 and 1940, was censored by the Fascist regime and released only in 1942. The volume included writings by authors such as Hawthorne, Poe, Twain, Faulkner, and Hemingway. Vittorini obtained the collaboration of translators such as Pavese and Montale.
20 For the notion of 'false consciousness', see Frederick Engels, *Dokumente des Sozialismus* III, Stuttgart, 1904, p. 76.
22 The writings published after the decade 1974-1984, such as *Extrema ratio* (1990) and *Disobbedienze* (1997), cover a period of time during which Fortini's poor health, together with his retirement from his Professorship at the University of Siena, imposed on him a gradual withdrawal from the political and social activism which had informed the essays he produced during the 1960s.
In the immediate post-war period, it was unavoidable that the neorealist movement should share with other aspects of post-1945 literature a propensity to assess the Italian political ‘conduct’ during the war years and to pass judgment on it, as Moravia did in *Il conformista* and *La ciociara*, Pasolini in *La meglio gioventù* and *Ragazzi di vita*, or Pavese in *Il compagno*; in all these works, a literature of amnesty and sympathy for the victims was promoted. From a general perspective, Fortini did sympathize with this project, yet unlike other anti-fascist writers such as Moravia, Calvino and Pavese, who each played a part as an ‘intellettuale organico’ in this movement, and were involved in the post-war agenda for a literature committed to social change and cultural renovation, he never fully trusted ‘reformist’ poetics and politicized alliances. In conflict with this programmatic pursuit of dignity in depicting the working-class struggle, as well as with the new trend for strict objectivity, in ‘Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell’antifascismo, he noted:

Oggi, quando la condizione di ‘emigrato intemo’ è l’unica condizione possibile per l’intellettuale che non abbia rinunciato alla prospettiva socialista, l’invito a parlare di ‘rapporti di proprietà’ e a discenderne gli inferi dove ‘una minoranza ha ancorato il proprio spietato dominio’, contiene una difficile profezia e una direttiva tanto più ardua a seguire e a sostenere quanto più quell’invito l’ultimo venticinquennio sembra averlo reso derisorio e desueto. (VDP, p. 170)

As an ‘emigrato intemo’, he rather supported the renewal of national identity, assigning to the classics the cultural and political responsibility of challenging the present by looking at contemporary society from a self-critical angle.

From 1963 onwards, after the initial neorealist phase, Italian ‘reformist’ writers had moved to an opposite extreme, beginning to create various *avant-garde* labels, and to close ranks in literary groups, with reviews such as *Il Verri*, *Malebolge*, *Marcatre*, and the anthologies *Gruppo 63*, *La scuola di Palermo*, and *I Novissimi*. A decisive role was played in these circles by the emphasis that the Gruppo 63 – which was consolidated, in 1963, at the Palermo poetry festival – placed on linguistic experimentation, as well as on the search for new compositional techniques. These new forms were believed capable of resisting the ongoing phenomenon of reification fostered by the culture industry. In *Laborintus* (1956), Edoardo

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24 The official foundation and first meeting of the Gruppo 63 was on 3 October 1963 at the Hotel Bagarella in Solanto (Palermo). Among the guest readers, were Umberto Eco, Renato Barilli, Enrico Filippini, Angelo Guglielmi, Alberto Arbasino, Germano Lombardi, Lamberto Pignotti, Amelia Rosselli, Francesco Leonetti, Furio Colombo, Valerio Riva, Giulia Niccolai, Carla Vasio, Lamberto Pignotti and the five poets of the newly published anthology, *I Novissimi*, Nanni Balestrini, Alfredo Giuliani, Elio Pagliarani, Antonio Porta and Edoardo Sanguineti. Its name was fashioned upon the German Group 47 and was the logical consequence of a cultural initiative that had been promoted by Luciano Anceschi within the pages of his journal *Il Verri* back in 1956. A report of the event was written by the literary journalist Andrea Barbato, and included in the anthology *Avanguardia e neoavanguardia* (SugarCo, 1966).
Sanguineti had anticipated these stylistic and ideological features, which Cesare Pavese refused to consider seriously, and Andrea Zanzotto defined the record of a ‘nervous breakdown’. At that time, Fortini’s formalist perspective, his love for poetic complexity - made of an elaborate pattern of syntax, prosody, imagery, tone, and doctrine - along with his didactism, must have appeared autocratic to the poets included in the anthology *I Novissimi*, who believed in a subversive method of intervention, in open antagonism to a sophisticated, lyric heritage.

Speaking of the crisis which, in the post-industrial world, affects also poetry, and noting the consequent tendency of contemporary poets towards a poetry of nostalgia for a lost integrity, Montale too noted:

Poiché la poesia – come il romanzo, sebbene in scala ridotta – sta diventando un prodotto industriale, è ovvio che anch’essa subisca le oscillazioni causate dalla domanda e dall’offerta, cioè dal mercato. La poesia è dunque in crisi, né più né meno di tutto il resto: un prodotto, se non si rinnova, magari peggiorando, perde la sua clientela.25

In the essay ‘Astone come colombe’, discussing the increasing control of the Fascist regime over the arts, Fortini agrees with Montale’s thesis:

Non dovremo più chiederci, dunque, mi domando, se – come pur ha pensato il più lato pensiero moderno – nell’industria, nel modo di produrre e nella struttura della proprietà dei mezzi di produzione, si annidi ancora o no la più profonda causa della divisione degli uomini tra loro e delle parti di ogni uomo in se stesso? Cioè la causa più potente delle tensioni e dei paradossi di che appunto vivono letteratura e poesia? (VDP, p. 81)

Fortini himself often pointed out, in various essays included in *Verifica dei poteri, Questioni di frontiera, Saggi italiani, Nuovi saggi italiani* and *Le rose dell’abisso*, how literary originality and the ability to rework past traditions are the hallmarks of the best canonical texts.

The secondary concern of *Verifica dei Poteri* is therefore to come to terms with a problem of the historiography of Italy, exemplified by the perception of two contradictory cultural elements: a bourgeoisie dominated by a high ideal of humanistic self-cultivation along with an almost religious veneration of culture, in opposition to the bureaucratic, authoritarian, and militaristic past of the fallen Fascist regime. Fortini’s criticism obviously outlines the crisis of the European intellectual faced with the paradoxes of his time: sceptical of mass politics in relation to the new realities of post-capitalist societies, he foresaw the end of the ethical-

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political function of literature. In 'Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell’antifascismo' and 'Lo Spettro Cinese', he investigated questions such as how writers with the highest possible awareness of humanistic principles could ever have supported the ideologies of authoritarian regimes: ‘Quella particolare forma di potere che è il potere ideologico è tanto più impietrito quanto più è cosificato, prossimo a farsi struttura, ad esserlo. Di qui l’ordine rivoluzionario di colpire alla radice; ma essa è, lo sappiamo, “l’uomo stesso”’. (VDP, p. 331)

In the phase of the author’s career that ranges from Dieci inverni (1957) to Verifica dei Poteri (1965/1974 se.ed.), at the time he closely examined the relationship between art and history, power itself appeared as the evident dysfunction of a society in transformation. Like Vittorini’s Conversazione in Sicilia (1938), Fortini’s Foglio di via (1946) and Agonia di Natale (1948) prove that literature cannot avoid the detrimental impact of politics, and that political repercussions may exceed even the author’s conscious intentions. In fact, since the war, Fortini kept political issues at the forefront of his literary endeavours, as he stated in La generazione degli anni difficili (1962, p. 147): ‘Non fui io a impegnarmi nella politica attiva, fu la guerra che mi impegnò’. In his political essays, collected in Dieci inverni: 1947-1957. Contributi a un discorso socialista (1957), he vigorously emphasized the deep ideological crisis that had occurred among the Italian socialist intellectuals, following Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s crimes in 1956, and asserted the autonomy of literature from the kind of political militancy solicited by Pasolini. From the late 1960s, discussing current issues about the trade union movements and the student protest in 1968, he contributed actively to the country’s growing political awareness and dissent by bringing his work closer to the people and using literary journalism to demystify the culture industry’s self-contained literary circles. For this reason, his early work is remarkably anti-hermetic and theoretical both when he engages in criticism and when he composes poetry. In the field of literary criticism his observations on the dialectical function of literature within society and on the role of intellectuals found a new methodological setting with the publication in 1951 of the two essays ‘Per una critica come servizio’ and ‘La biblioteca immaginaria’, later included in Dieci inverni (1957), where, from an unorthodox communist perspective, his analysis involved a re-interpretation also of Antonio Gramsci’s reflections on advanced industrialised countries.

As I shall mention in 1.4, Fortini opposed the kind of Russian Marxism which had settled down into Stalinist orthodoxy and noted how Marxist dialectic, in post-war socialist countries, had become a sort of scholasticism, obstructing new reformist movement of thought. Like Adorno and Marcuse, Fortini lost confidence in the possibility of true revolutionary practices, and showed how Marxist writers had retreated into pure forms of intellectualism and self-referential, hermetic jargon, as testified by the so called ‘crisi della critica’ (2.5).
As Pasquale Sabbatino points out in his monograph *Gli inverni di Fortini* (1981), in order to promote a re-evaluation of the humanistic and social components of the work of art, ‘la rifondazione della funzione critica passa, secondo Fortini, attraverso la dissoluzione totale della concezione religiosa e contemplativa della letteratura’²⁶ Yet as Sabbatino observes, ‘la desiderabilità dell’opera d’arte, comunque, non viene identificata da Fortini, con il contenuto dell’opera, ma ricondotta al piano dell’artisticità, cioè della forma del contenuto.’²⁷ For this reason, this issue will be addressed in a separate section, ‘The problematic of form’ (2.2). The new method that Fortini supported in *Ragionamenti* and *Officina* aimed at underlining and disclosing problems and contradictions of the official Marxist critique. In relation to the influence of Fortini’s philosophical referents, the many ways in which the theories of Adorno, Benjamin, Lukács, Barthes and Merleau-Ponty shaped his critical writings will be analysed in detail. In order to accomplish this task, clarification will be sought of his position in the Italian literary field as one of the most broad-minded critics who influenced and substantially modified the panorama of the literature he examined while changing the categories according to which the value of these works had been previously judged.²⁸

In the second half of the twentieth century, a particular order of writer imposes itself on the literary scene, the critic as ‘legislator’, inspired by the example of Croce, who ventured beyond the sphere of critical theory, producing personal writings as a platform for expressing himself and his own vision of the world, in parallel with the analysis and criticism of texts by other writers.²⁹ In this particular genre – which was a combination of essay writing and poetry – Fortini followed not only the authority of Lukács and Benjamin but, as I have pointed out, predominantly that of Noventa, whose work he considered ‘il virile controllo dei sentimenti e la capacità di autocritica morale.’³⁰

After the violent suppression by the Soviet Union of the 1956 Polish and Hungarian revolutions, Fortini, like many other left-wing intellectuals, became painfully aware of the artist’s ambivalent role as ‘moral authority’. He was, in fact, one of the first among the Italian socialist activists to exhibit scepticism regarding the supposed centrality of political affiliation in literary matters. In the preface to the 1974 edition of *Verifica dei Poteri*, Fortini criticized the problematic principle of all attempts to create the civic unity of a nation through intellectual fellowship:

²⁷ Ibid., p. 117.
²⁸ In an article published in *L’Immaginazione* (May 2000, no. 168), Luperini informs us that the power to modify and influence the literary canons of an age is one of the major indications from which the greatness of a literary critic can be established.
²⁹ See for example, Croce’s intellectual autobiography in *Dalle memorie di un critico* (Rieti: Bibliotheca, 1929).
³⁰ See the author’s note on Noventa in Franco Fortini, *Breve secondo Novecento*, Lecce: Manni, 1996, p. 47. Fortini shares Noventa’s apocalyptic vision of the ‘economic progress’ that has turned out to be the antithesis of human progress. In Noventa’s work, he states, ‘La figura dell’iniquitudine si associa a quella del rimorso.’
Per qualche anno ancora avevo continuato a illudermi di avere le spalle guardate da una parte della politica e da una solidarietà di opinioni. Si credeva che il dibattito e la ‘battaglia delle idee’ sulla stampa chiamata di sinistra potessero ancora distinguersi dalla circostante pubblicistica. […] Con le apparenze di una convulsione vitale, la storica grande pretesa delle guide morali e intellettuali della Sinistra dava – insieme alla Sinistra medesima – gli ultimi tratti. In questo volume, per esempio, c’è lo scritto che gli dà il titolo e che è del 1960. Vi tornavo a proporre una figura del critico che è di un’altra tradizione: il critico come diverso dallo specialistà, come colui che discorre sui rapporti reali tra gli uomini, la società e la storia loro, a proposito e in occasione della metafora di quei rapporti, che le opere letterarie sono. (VDP, p. 23)

In this extract, Fortini disapproves of the fact that literary criticism had become the occasion for subjective, non-verifiable judgements. These political and ethical objections to the idea that it was the responsibility of intellectuals to support the manoeuvres of the official Left provide a clear context in which to evaluate the author’s criticism of the times. In fact, in many of his essays he underlined the importance of promoting a culture of dissidence which could undermine the legitimacy of the existing political alliance between the PCI and socialist intellectuals; he pointed out that ‘noi non siamo né vogliamo essere i Marescialli della Grande Critica’ (VDP, p. 56).31

One passage in Verifica dei poteri conveys a sense that clearly reflects Fortini’s attitude as a radical dissenter, rooting his socialism in ethics: ‘non negare mai la propria parola, dove ci sia possibilità vera di recare offesa salute agli offensori e giusta ingiustizia agli ingiusti.’32 In fact, in the light of his socialist positions – always officially maintained, as in the poem ‘Il Comunismo’, written in 1958 and published in the 1963 collection Una volta per sempre (‘Sempre sono stato comunista’, PS, p. 128) – Fortini continued to express his sceptical views on the relations of production of the artists in the centres of metropolitan dominance, inventing for themselves the false role of intellectual émigrés and taking an hypocritical anti-bourgeois stance (‘Ma giustamente gli altri comunisti hanno sospettato di me. Ero comunista/ troppo oltre le loro certezze e i miei dubbi’, PS, p. 128).33

These initial aphoristic quotations, typical of many of Fortini’s critical writings and poems, provide the key to an appreciation of his interventions in major historical crises during his long-standing collaboration as journalist and literary critic with newspapers and periodicals such as Il Corriere della Sera, Il Messaggero, L’Espresso and Il Manifesto.

After the Second World War, the desire to excavate into the foundations of social and individual unease was a motive common to writers such as Montale and Vittorini, who, like

31 See Giuseppe Vacca, Il Marxismo e gli intellettuali, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985, p. 74-84. In ‘Teoria dello Stato e funzione degli intellettuali. Il partito’, Vacca claims: ‘il rapporto fra il socialismo e gli intellettuali si definisce in relazione alla formazione di un nuovo Stato, nel quale le funzioni intellettuali (dirigenti) si caratterizzano per la elaborazione di un nuovo tipo di egemonia.’ (p. 84)
32 VDP, p. 85. Equally important in the evaluation of Fortini’s dissidence is the impact of his conversion to the Valdese faith, since it underlines the centrality of the author’s deference to the value that religion places on human life and dignity, as opposed to blind adherence to an ideological cause or political struggle.
33 See also Franco Fortini, ‘Una voce: Comunismo’, Viterbo: Edizioni del Centro di ricerca per la pace, 1990.
Fortini, had either had first-hand experience of warfare as soldiers, partisans and prisoners of war, or, as Pavese, had been politically persecuted by the regime for having expressed dissident ideas in their work. For this reason, after the Liberation, the new Republic stimulated and welcomed lively and passionate debate among intellectuals on the strategies that were needed for the reconstruction of Italian post-war cultural identity and to establish democracy. A crisis occurred within Neo-realism in 1955, following the clash of interpretations of Gramsci’s thought on Realpolitik, in relation to two major turning points: one cultural, focussed on the publication of Metello, the other political, as a response to the strategies of the Communist party under Togliatti which prescribed that art had to be anti-individualist and used as a class weapon. It is obvious that the aim of this second strategy was not only to convert art into an instrument to be used for non-artistic party purposes, but also to alter the artist’s previously-formed poetic style, and to reduce his/her way of looking at world to complete uniformity. In such a system of views, it was not by chance that for many dissenters criticism, as an intellectual function, became firstly an ethical-educational need, and subsequently an artistic responsibility. Fortini too insisted on his right to criticize and disentangle himself from both the concept of socialist orthodoxy and its enforced social-realism.


To oppose the manoeuvres of the culture industry on one side and of the DC on the other, this militant literary criticism remained active during the whole first post-war decade, especially during the period of the so-called Neo-realist tendency. From these groups of political and cultural activists – the philologists and Marxist thinkers – distinct avant-garde

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36 DCP, p. 9. Fortini added: ‘la crisi dello storicismo marxista ha indotto una brutale divaricazione di posizioni: vitalismo esasperato, che si potrebbe chiamare neo-surrealista, volto ad abolire ogni distinzione fra i momenti e livelli di esistenza e di opere, oppure formalismo esasperato, indifferente agli aspetti referenziali. […] Ne risulta una progressiva scomparsa degli “oggetti” artistici e poetici in quanto, appunto, modelli, cioè di quel che ancora sopravvive della loro latente funzione pedagogica, della loro capacità di alludere ad un fondamentale “problema della vita”. Ho impiegato questa locuzione perché si legge in una memorabile pagina di Lukács, del 1955.’(p.11)
discourses gradually emerged, in an attempt to replace strict adherence to critical rationality and dialectics with stylistic-expressive renewal. Immediately documented and systematized by Angelo Guglielmi’s anthology *Avanguardia e sperimentazione* (Feltrinelli, 1964) and by Enzo Siciliano’s ‘Avanguardia italiana: band-wagon’ (in *Prima della Poesia*, Vallecchi, 1965), the new avant-garde discourses publicized by *Il Verri* did not find immediate acceptance among the Italian intelligentsia, and were overtly disapproved of by some critics and fellow writers, including Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carlo Bo and Fortini himself. The latter, on many occasions, satirized the fact that the new type of aesthetic experimentalism championed by the Gruppo 63 had risked acquiescing in Americanized forms of capitalism. The general programmatic aim of the Gruppo 63 was to free artistic forms of expression from the constraints dictated by the Neo-realist trend and to open up new discourses with the new media culture. While these utopian phenomena were taking place, Fortini kept warning that cultural actions which did not make reference to the intrinsic contradictions and oppositions at work in the real world, and hence in history, should be considered meaningless. On the other hand, the Gruppo 63, supported by Anceschi, who was at the time professor of aesthetics at the University of Bologna, showed a true internationalism, regarding James Joyce and Louis-Ferdinand Céline as the best models of linguistic experimentalism and freedom, which only Carlo Emilio Gadda could equal.

In this complex panorama, which stimulated the homogenization of the artistic product through the world of the media, Fortini continued to express strong doubts about whether art and literature, as promoted in the second half of the 1950s by *Il Verri*’s cultural avant-gardism and hyper-‘vitalismo’, could proceed from authentic revolutionary premises. In *Verifica dei poteri*, Fortini’s opposition to the Italian neo-avant-garde writers addressed, in the first place, the claim that their theoretical discourse on the role of literature could contribute directly to changing society. For Fortini, this hope started from the false assumption that in order to change what was wrong in society it was enough to introduce aesthetic innovations. Because of the political impetus of his radical beliefs, Fortini framed his proposals antagonistically. The ethical and psychological traits of his kind of dissidence as an ‘intellettuale disorganico’ were the obvious consequence of his having developed intellectually and artistically under the influence of Noventa’s Catholic ideology; they also derived from his ideal of a constant spiritual struggle, which combined criticism with poetry. Although, in the typical style of Fortini’s prose, pessimistic tones are most often to be found in his representations of the present, both in his essays and his poetry the possibility of a

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38Anceschi’s magazine, first published in 1956 at the time of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, succeeded in highlighting a decisive turning point in the history of Italian literature, since it marked the end of the Italian
coherent and positive integration of the past with contemporary cultural life reveals some degree of hope in future generations. Yet, at the end of the 1960s, such utopian view of the future gradually faded in the face of the mounting political tensions of those years, producing frustration in those intellectuals who had believed in the possibility of helping society to achieve radical changes. From this point on, the avant-gardes of the '60s seemed to Fortini self-referential phenomena, absorbed in and neutralized as mythic moments of late twentieth-century capitalist cultural elitism. In 'Il comunismo laico di Fortini' (1996), Roberto Finelli explains:

Dire che Fortini ha avuto una concezione del comunismo come limite significa dire innanzitutto che egli non ha avuto una concezione religiosa, apocalittica e totalizzante del comunismo, come è stata per altri versi, invece, la visione ideologica di molti dei comunisti che abbiamo conosciuti.  

It had indeed been the crisis in, and the collapse of Communist ideology that Fortini reflects upon which gives clear contours to his critique of culture in Verifica dei poteri. Following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and the Russian invasions of Poland and Hungary, Fortini’s scepticism spread rapidly among other Italian intellectuals. In the essays included in the first edition of Verifica dei poteri, he thus provided an insightful scrutiny of the political and socio-economic state of affairs in advanced capitalism, implying the integration of both the working classes and the avant-gardes into those structures at the core of late capitalist consumerism. The left-wing intellectuals Fortini was at the time reading, such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, whose rejection of the consensual status quo implied a resistance to any political utopia, had fallen into a persistent pessimism. For instance, in the essay ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception’, published in Dialectic of Enlightenment (1947), Adorno and Horkheimer, as authors of this sophisticated diagnosis of the failure of modern culture, had prophesied that modernity, instead of redeeming the promises and hopes of the Enlightenment, would have turned into a sanctioned ‘barbarism’, and fallen in a state of ‘stultification of mankind’ by its regression into ideology and aestheticism per sé. Fortini too was very cautious towards political utopias:

Un ottimismo e un’illusione che gli ultimi tempi hanno distrutto, distruggendo quindi anche Pasolini. Si contempla oggi stupefatti la somma delle menzogne ‘democratiche’ intellectuals’ blind adherence to the line adopted by the PCI, mostly as a consequence of the above-mentioned revolt in Hungary and its violent suppression.


40 See Herbert Marcuse’s idea of the ‘radical imagination’ in One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 141. For Marcuse, the artist’s effort to resist the alienation and repression of advanced industrial society rests on the idea that exploitation and domination result from the asymmetrical distribution of work fulfilment, which ultimately drives people to revolt.
che ormai dalla quasi totalità dell'orizzonte le parti politiche ci vengono raccontando e che zelanti intellettuali vanno ripetendo.\footnote{Fortini, 'Pasolini e le ultime illusioni', Milan: Corriere della Sera, 1977, p. 3. Fortini added: 'Chi, come me, è persuaso che continuando per la via presente, l' 'ordine' porterà, nel giro di qualche anno, alla pratica generalizzazione della tortura sul territorio nazionale, anche in pagine come queste si interroga sul punto sociale e politico che proprio in quegli anni, fra il 1960 e il 1965, avrebbe indotto, in Italia e nel mondo, all'accellerazione del secondo quinquennio, e poi il contraccolpo di una reazione durissima. Questa ha immobilizzato e medusato tutta una generazione europea, ha ucciso i più sensibili e generosi, ha travolto nella destabilizzazione ideologica anche i maggiori centri di attività intellettuali, ha restituito milioni di giovani all'angoscia personale e lasciato le redini della società europea a politici senza speranza.'}

The above statement conflicts visibly with what Luca Girardi claims in his review of Versi Scelti: ‘Al di là di ogni contingente opinione o determinazione ideologica, resiste la verità più fonda di questi versi: il loro invocare una Città nuova meno inumana. [...] Fortini, dunque, poeta dell'utopia, ma di un'utopia radicata e, si direbbe, necessitata dalle ragioni dell'esistenza [...]’\footnote{Luca Girardi, 'Franco Fortini, Versi Scelti, 1939-1989', in L'Indice, 1991, n. 07, p. 17.} After this long political and existential turmoil, from the 1980s onwards a more pessimistic yet contemplative stage is revealed in the essays and poems Fortini produced.

As I have briefly explained (1.1), Fortini began to publish his first critical writings in 1938, in La riforma letteraria. After the Liberation, he continued to write essays in Milan during the two-year period of collaboration with Vittorini on Il Politecnico, the literary magazine published by Einaudi between 1945 and 1947.\footnote{See Thomas E. Peterson, The Ethical Muse of Franco Fortini, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997, p. 23. Peterson notes: 'The importance of Fortini's essays in Il Politecnico lie in their proposal of a new method for reading the classic as cultural, and linguistic, objects.'} In 1946, the year in which Fortini published his first collection of political poems, Foglio di via, he actively undertook the task of translating philosophical works, editing with Sergio Bologna the Italian edition of Lukács's Soul and form (1910).\footnote{Fortini wrote a critical introduction in 1991 to Lukács's Soul and form.}

In 1947, in his role as publishing consultant to Einaudi, he translated Éluard, Gide, Brecht and Proust, and indefatigably produced poetry and autobiographical prose, which was published in three important collections in the 1950s: Una facile allegoria (1954), I destini generali (1956) and Poesia e errore (1959). While contributing to Officina,\footnote{The first issue of Officina (subtitle: 'Fascicolo bimestrale di poesia') was published in May 1955 and edited by Pasolini, Roberto Roversi and Francesco Leonetti. Angelo Romanò, Gianni Scalìa and Fortini represented the unofficial sub-editorial board. Fortini's contributions in 1959 include the essays 'Contro un'idea della lirica moderna', and 'Lukács in Italia' (now included in Verifica dei poteri).} in 1956 — at the time of the denunciation of Stalin's crimes on the occasion of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU — Fortini renounced his membership of the Socialist Party, which he had held since 1944. Symptomatic of this period is his essay 'Semplificare non è facilitare', published in 1955, where he confronted the controversy surrounding Pratolini's Metello\footnote{Sabbatino, Gli inverni di Fortini, pp. 118-119. Sabbatino quotes Fortini's judgement of Metello and draws up an exemplary summary of his ideological positions: 'Metello di Pasolini [according to Fortini] è un'opera non realistica in quanto è 'per struttura, lingua, soggetto, tempo storico, ethos del narratore, un libro dal quale è affatto assente la problematica di quel settore della società italiana'. Il metellismo, allora, è il male di Pratolini, il quale nega il primato delle classi, essendo sostenuto da una concezione 'socialdemocratica' della letteratura, "funzione
the Neo-realist movement, which he attributed to a wide-ranging critical revision of both Mayakovsky’s idea of literary engagement (‘Mandato dello scrittore’) and Lukács’s critical realism. In the following decade, he published several volumes of criticism, from the anthology *Profezie e realtà del nostro tempo* (1965), to *Verifica dei poteri* (1965, 2nd ed. 1974) and *L’ospite ingrato* (De Donato, 1966). Once again, the emphasis in this series of critical writings lies in the author’s choice of dissidence and autonomy.

Fortini continued to write essays that were committed to ideological dialogue with his contemporaries, as Pasquale Sabbatino stresses in the preface to his *Gli inverni di Fortini* (1981) where he writes: ‘L’indagine critica di Fortini, che modella il destino individuale sui destini generali e sostiene il progetto dell’autonomia degli intellettuali, si allarga ai luoghi di lavoro collettivo (Il Politecnico, Ragionamenti, Officina).’ In the other section ‘Verifica dei poteri della critica’, included in *Gli inverni di Fortini*, Sabbatino explains: ‘Alla forma del saggio critico [Fortini] affida il proprio discorso, in una esposizione discorsiva ed espressiva insieme. La discorsività comunica elementi scientifici e storiografici, l’espressività è invece il ‘margin of arbitrio’ del critico, è il momento del proprio intervento e della propria interpretazione.’ Discussing the presence of two conflicting yet interacting modes – the scientific and the expressive – in the essay as a literary genre, Fortini explained:

> se per un verso tende alla lucidità e coerenza della discorsività storiografica e scientifica, per un altro verso accetta come suo strumento necessario anche quello della espressività, un margin of arbitrio che può essere una più profonda adesione ed interpretazione dell’oggetto […] Il critico di cui sto parlando non si distingue veramente dal saggista. So benissimo che oggi si guarda alla nozione tradizionale di saggismo con ragionevole ripugnanza […] Mi chiedo tuttavia se è possibile che ad una formalizzazione del discorso critico o ‘scienza’ della letteratura possa non corrispondere anche una ‘forma’. Nel senso letterario della parola.(VDP, pp. 50-51)

The first half of the 1970s was a period in which social forces and political militancy were intensifying, stirring a fervent debate, which focussed especially on Russian Formalism, French structuralism, Marxist and Feminist criticism and German reception theory. From the years of the Cold War onwards, in this political struggle at the level of theory, Fortini’s increasing interest in essay writing, as the most overtly pedagogical literary form, is evidence of his commitment to engage in dialogue with camerades and opponents, and to participate in
the controversial aspects of cultural and political public debate; these regarded issues such as the terrorism of the late 1970s, the Vietnam War, the West's policies towards the Soviet Union, and responses to Third World revolutions, each of which had provided constant occasions for his radical attacks on the capitalist world economy.\textsuperscript{51} As Fortini's activity as a literary essayist intensified, in 1971 he also began his academic career at the University of Siena, retaining the chair until his retirement in 1989. The 1970s saw the publication of his translation of \textit{Faust} (1970) with Ruth Leiser and of two other important critical works, the anthology of essays \textit{Questioni di frontiera} (1977), and the monograph \textit{Poeti del Novecento} (1977). In 1972, he wrote the first of his numerous critical contributions to \textit{Il Manifesto}, which formulated the same scepticism and ironic disenchantment we note in the poem 'L'ospite ingrato'.

Besides \textit{Paesaggio con serpente}, \textit{Poesie 1973-1983} (Einaudi, 1984) and \textit{Insistenze: Cinquanta scritti 1976-1984} (Garzanti, 1985), in the first half of the 1980s Fortini's literary output expanded with further essays, mostly in connection with his teaching position at the University of Siena, and literary translations, among which were the anthology \textit{Il ladro di ciliegie e altre versioni di poesia} (Einaudi, 1982) and a selection of poems by Marcel Proust (\textit{Poesie}, Einaudi, 1983). In 1986, a year after receiving the Montale-Guggenheim Prize for poetry, he published a version of Kafka's \textit{In the Penal Colony}. The collection of essays, \textit{Saggi Italiani}, containing important statements such as 'Scritti su poeti' and 'Su alcuni prosatori', that Garzanti had published in 1974, was followed in the 1980s by \textit{Nuovi saggi italiani} (Garzanti, 1987), which included brief critical profiles of Sereni, Pasolini, Montale and Zanzotto.

The 1980s, with its political turmoil, had a huge impact on cultural growth worldwide.\textsuperscript{52} In Italy, multiculturalism took on an important intellectual dimension in the writing of the nation's intelligentsia, including high profile socialist academics such as Fortini, Segre, and Cases. In 1981, in a letter to Rossanda, insisting on his dissident position in relation to the Communist Party, and specifying that young people would not learn any truth ('nessuna realtà') out of the mouths of politicians and still less from the mouths of poets ('meno ancora da quella dei poeti'), Fortini had claimed:

\begin{quote}
Cara Rossana, letto quanto hai scritto a Roversi (sul \textit{Manifesto} del 23 luglio) mi sono chiesto se ero tra quelli che hanno il dovere di parlare ai giovani su quanto è accaduto negli scorsi dodici anni. Mi sono risposto di no. Tu indicavi soprattutto i responsabili politici e di
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} For Fortini's treatment of issues related to the language of criticism ('linguaggio della saggistica'), and its formal aspects (saggistica e formalità') see VDP, p. 122-126, and pp. 249-254.
\textsuperscript{52} I am making reference to the Wall Street crash, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the students' fight for democracy in China, Nelson Mandela's release from a prison in South African, and the struggle of minorities for ethnic identity and multiculturalism.
cultura. Coloro che hanno un mandato e una voce. Forse per mia fortuna non ho più né quello né questa. (LOI, p. 169)

As Rossanda noted in her introduction to Disobbedienze – the two volumes Fortini’s collected critical contributions to Il Manifesto – the author’s long-standing collaboration intensified in 1977, following a long debate with Alberto Asor Rosa on the future of literature in post-capitalist societies.\(^{53}\)

A close analysis of Fortini’s essays, included in Verifica dei poteri and Questioni di Frontiera (1977) will now help clarify Fortini’s questioning of the powers and limits of the role of intellectuals in a larger framework of reference. As the title suggests, Verifica dei poteri. Scritti di critica e di istituzioni letterarie delineates a method of ‘verifica’ aimed at addressing institutionalized powers, among which are the institutions of literature and criticism. This method of inquiry systematically reveals the increasing tendency of capitalist imperialism to influence and restrain the arts politically, which results in a dull blending of life’s contradictions as a means of inducing a sort of cultural resignation. The book’s other intention concerns a revision of the ‘orthodox’ role that the strategies of the ‘Nuova Sinistra’ assigned to socialist intellectuals.\(^{54}\) It thus offers a systematic coverage of the main social and political issues of the ideological and political agenda, which pervaded the Italian anti-fascist literary scene in the post-war period, and determined its alliances and clashes. Since the first edition of Verifica dei poteri was published in 1965, only two years after Eco had published Diario Minimo (1963) and one year after Apocalittici e integrati (1964),\(^{55}\) it is likely that it contains a respond to Eco’s analysis of mass culture. Fortini revised his volume and republished it in 1974 with Garzanti, adding a critical preface, which explained his reasons for reissuing this collection of essays in which he brought together his personal responses to issues of public interest and social significance: ‘Credo di avere considerato le più serie critiche che a questo libro sono state rivolte; ma quelle veramente capitali, per essermi venute indirettamente, ossia per essere scritte in cifra nella realtà sociale in cui vivo, non possono avere in questa occasione risposta adeguata.’ (VDP, p. 9)

Another main concern of Verifica dei Poteri was to come to terms with the problematic historiography of Italy, exemplified by the perception of two contradictory cultural elements:

\(^{53}\) In 1990, Fortini published, with Garzanti, Extrema ratio: Note per un buon uso delle rovine and, three years later, before his death, Attraverso Pasolini (1993). Despite his poor health conditions, in the early 1990s, the author’s journalistic activity remained constant and grew in polemical energy between September 1990 and February 1991, beginning with the essay ‘Otto motivi contro la guerra’ (9 September 1990)\(^{52}\) and continuing through the various phases of the Gulf War.

\(^{54}\) For an insightful study of the ‘Nuova Sinistra’, see Attilio Mangano, L’altra linea. Fortini, Bosio, Montaldi, Panieri e la Nuova Sinistra, Catanzaro: Pullano, 1992 and Attilio Mangano, The cultures of the Sessantotto. Years sixty, the reviews, the movement, Pistoia: Micheletti Foundation, 1989.

\(^{55}\) The title Apocalittici e integrati refers to two opposite attitudes towards mass culture: that of the ‘apocalyptic’ intellectual, who believes that the mass media are the evil responsible for the degradation of culture; and that of the ‘integrated’ intellectual, who has a general tolerance of mass culture. Fortini seems to fit into the first category.
a bourgeoisie dominated by a high ideal of humanistic self-cultivation along with an almost religious veneration of culture, in opposition to the bureaucratic, authoritarian, and militaristic past of the fallen Fascist regime. Sceptical of mass politics in relation to the new realities of post-capitalist societies, the volume foresaw the end of the ethical-political function of literature, as we read in 'Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell'antifascismo' and 'Lo Spettro Cinese', where the author investigates questions such as how writers with the highest possible awareness of humanistic principles could ever have supported the ideologies of authoritarian regimes. In order to recover the value of the pre-Fascist European humanistic traditions, the volume also proposes new ways of reading and reinterpreting the classics, as in Fortini's reviews of Leopardi ('La leggenda di Recanati') and Kafka ('Gli uomini di Kafka e la critica delle cose'), which help the reader grasp the social and artistic value of borgeois literature. As Luca Lenzini notes, in these two essays Fortini's inclination for paradoxes ('utopia e contraddizione, affermazione nella negazione') already emerges.

The structure of the volume is arranged in four sections, each presenting readers with a critique of the political schemes that condition our modes of existence and communication in post-capitalist societies; the aim is to show how both our subjectivity and national identity are shaped and controlled by those institutional substrata which thus become our implicit roots of meaning and interpretation. Embracing the Marxist thesis of Lukács's *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), Fortini attacks the intellectuals of his time, whom he accuses of maintaining positions that are subordinate to the logic of the culture industry, thus participating in the reification and homogenization of cultural artefacts reduced to commercial objects. The ruling classes, in fact, manipulate adverse ideologies, via the promotion of literature of propaganda, in order to neutralize their opponents. In discussing these aspects, *Verifica dei poteri* extends Lukács's reflections on the dynamics at the core of the management of power by cultural monopolies, in mass societies, in order to examine the phenomena of the alliances between the progressive intellectual elites and the culture-industry.

The main concern of the 1974 edition remained that of revealing both the ideologies informing works of art and the type of engagement that they demand. The text is therefore

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58 *Verifica dei poteri* assumes terminology and themes such as the 'fetishism of commodity', the phenomenon of 'reification' ('Alienazione': pp. 41, 66-67, 137, 183) and the question of the production, in the post-industrial and post-capitalist world, of literature subjected to the logic of the culture-industry ('Industria culturale': pp. 26, 38, 41, 70, 91). Furthermore, in its attempt to expand the reader's consciousness of these processes, *Verifica dei poteri* also includes an accurate analysis of the relationship between literary discourse and ideology ('Idestogie': pp. 51, 148, 183, 243) as a way of conceptualizing and negotiating social and political experiences, rules for those things that can be expressed, and the ways in which culture is controlled and organized.
59 Fortini explains how the culture industry, displaying the false assumption of an educational function, suspends even the most radical anarchist avant-garde poetics, reducing them to the logic of commodity and consumerism.
60 The topic is analysed in another work, *Il movimento surrealist* (1959), where Fortini critically challenges the idea of 'transgression'. From this perspective, he revises the poetic strategies of the surrealist avant-garde, showing that they themselves were controlled by the structures of institutionalized power. This perspective supplants any
populated with the names of Marxist philosophers from whose work Fortini had found inspiration. Twenty years later, in the preface to *Leggere e scrivere* (1993), in discussing the intertextual strategies he used in *Verifica dei Poteri*, Fortini remarked how he practiced a complex synthesis that made him, at one and the same time, interpreter, translator and reader of those literary works implanted in the historical continuum, which he judges to be meaningful to his own discourse:

Presso a poco a partire dal 1960 le mie letture – ma solo oggi lo so – possono anche distinguersi in specie diverse. Ci sono stati i testi dei vicini, amici e avversari. Ci sono state opere, spesso inedite, che ho dovuto leggere per il mio lavoro di consulente. Ci sono le letture che hanno contribuito direttamente al mio lavoro di traduttore, di saggista e di insegnante e quindi compiute con un sottinteso flusso ragionativo e valutativo. E ci sono letture più libere, di piacere o rimorso o oltranza appassionata, spesso di inganno volontario.  

Books (‘testi dei vicini, amici e avversari’) and reading habits (‘letture’), their importance and the delight they provide, are the subject matter of his preface. The text offers the reader an insight into some personal thoughts of the author on his own literary background, to clarify his long acquaintance with the aesthetic and ethical function of reading, which stimulated his critical awareness (the ‘flusso ragionativo e valutativo’). This is a faculty which results from cultural synthesis between the poet’s individuality and his need for dialogue.

In the preface Fortini offers both embittered and humorous observations from his career as essayist, teacher and translator; thus conveying a sense of the author’s mind enjoying its own intellectual and professional status, or battling with an almost narcissistic condescension (‘piacere o rimorso o oltranza appassionata’). Fortini then offers a presentation of the ‘evils’ of capitalism, but also warns against the narrow interpretation of an engagement that cramps any form of literature shaped by ideology. Fortini, himself seems to share the formalist perspective of Bakhtin, Todorov, and Barthes. In this respect, his ideas are clarified in ‘Due avanguardie’, the essay which sets the programmatically revolutionary features of Italian politicized experimentalism against the examples of the historical *avant-gardes* of artists such as Chaplin, Picasso, Klee, Mondrian, Joyce, Musil, Kafka, and Proust, 63 artists who, according to Fortini, offered a far more effective answer ‘ad una condizione fatta all’uomo in

blind faith in the possibility of ‘planning’ an effective revolutionary action on language, since language itself is culturally enchanted by those political agencies. Consequently, poetry too, as a discourse, is inexorably linked to ideology, and trapped within systems inscribing power relations. There is no way out: political ideologies as social practices and conceptualizations impose their given angles and ways of experiencing reality even on poetry.


62 BSN, p. 16. In spite of the seriousness of the subject matter, which is openly didactic, the tone is relaxed, almost colloquial, seeking obliquely to influence the reader’s thinking and reading behaviour. Later on, in the same essay, disagreeing especially with Calvino, Fortini disregards the ‘ben architettato delirio prospettico’ of the vitalistic and labyrinthine postmodernist assemblage, which is, in his opinion, nothing more than ‘un ottimismo all’ombra del potere’, that is a way to escape from the ethical character of the literary product.

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quanto merce' (VDP, 1974, p. 107). In the same way, he esteemed Dostoyevsky's monumental representation of sin and hope, which shows how men's lives are framed by their limitations and obsessions.

The other significant essay in *Verifica dei poteri* is the cited 'Mandato sociale degli scrittori e fine dell'antifascismo', in which Fortini describes the post-war state of affairs from the point of view of an intellectual troubled by the notion of political orthodoxy. Thus, primarily, the essay questions the concept of 'mandato' itself, rejecting the obligation of the artist to become the conscience of his people. Between the alternative of remaining integral to the culture and apologetic for its modes, or resolving to express his dissidence – Fortini chose the latter – as we read the in 1948 ironic poem, 'Une tache de sang intellectuel' (*Poesia e errore*, 1959):

Una macchia di sangue intellettuale
che il sole non asciuga mai. ‘Oh, che cosa vuoi fare!’
mi gridano i compagni coraggiosi
alti tra le bandiere e le sostanze reali
della festa dei corpi naturali
di lotta e di amor vero.

[...]

‘Oh, cosa aspetti!’, mi gridano i viventi
impetuosi ancora tra le vendemmie.
‘Passa il tuo giorno’ gridano, bocche al sole.

‘Nessun orgoglio’ rispondo ‘amici miei cari!’
E mi sarebbe dolce essere anch’io
dove voi siete. Ma a ognuno le sue armi.
A voi il fuoco felice e il vino fraterno
A me, la speranza acuta dentro la notte.’ (PS, pp. 70-71)

It is, perhaps, appropriate, at this point, to turn briefly to an allegorical poem such as 'Neve e faine', first published in 1959 in *Poesia ed errore*, to show the connections between Fortini’s essay writing and his poetry. As Filippo Bettini claims in 'Allegoria e antagonismo' (1993), the use of allegory allows 'un antagonismo che non ha più bandiera da seguire, ma insiste nello scavo sotterranee della "vecchia talpa"'. Indeed, in the 1949 poem, 'Neve e faine',

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63 Fortini appreciated the significance of the bourgeois art of Proust – the tragic vision of which had irritated Lukács – and gave approval to his work by translating, in the early 1950s *Albertine disparue* (Turin: Einaudi, 1951) and *Jean Sans Titre* (Turin: Einaudi, 1953).

64 Observing how the language of mass production places imagination within the bourgeois mercantile culture, Fortini’s radical criticism of the culture industry in *Verifica dei poteri* not only has ideological links with the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* (1920), but also with Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s negative critiques of mass culture as a product of a mass industry which aims to tone down the confrontational clashes of opinion that aspire to establish a dialogic culture. This theme is in fact indebted to Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (1951) and *Negative Dialectics* (1966). Once again, Fortini’s position proves itself to be in line with the Frankfurt Marxist critique of Stalinist Russia’s demand that writers interpret local realities in accordance with the dictates of the party’s ideology.

later included also in Versi Scelti (1974), Fortini notes an irremediable flaw in reality, which is rendered by the ‘faina’ wandering with unremitting unease around the snowy countryside.

The poem illustrates the progressing thrust towards formalism and its theoretical discussion. The imagery therefore provides a central statement of the difference between the language of poetry and that of criticism: the first is conceived as ‘cadenza’ or ‘melodia’, the second as ‘incitamento’, ‘rimedio’, or ‘requie’. Allegorical writing in both genres show language conjured up as self-referential. Once again, then, Fortini reflects on the human condition via an allegorical comparison with the animal world, which also portrays the contradiction between ‘scrittura e immagine’.

Non incitamento né rimedio né requie
posso su queste cadenze darvi, miei giorni venturi.
Appena la testimonianza precisa e inascoltata
della frutta che matura, delle trote
che saltano di sasso in sasso verso la neve
e delle foglie che han cominciato a cadere.
A questo gli altri ci hanno ridotti,
nostro onore somigliare a brute cose,
non avere traccia d’uomo. Ma dunque
c’è melodia in queste parole?
Si, ma rota sul volare del vento.
Dunque un lamento in questi versi udite?
Si, ma delle faine per la campagna. (PS, p. 73)

The poem’s narrative consists of a series of peripheral traces (‘traccia d’uomo’), whose tenor the reader must keep in mind throughout until some moment of revelation will come: in fact, it is not some essential humanness or timeless truth, but language itself that is central to the poem’s message: language in fact resolves the poem’s double meaning into a unity of ambiguities (‘Ma dunque c’è melodia in queste parole?/ Si, ma rota’); beneath the shifting planes of history, there seem to be no foundational reality, except one living at the margins, generated by the need of survival ‘della faina nella campagna’; its poetic image offers the power of truth to allegory. As Paul Valéry noted in his essay ‘Remarks on Poetry’:

This is, then, the poet at grips with this all-too-impure, inconstant material, bound to speculate on the sound and sense in turn, to meet the demands not only of harmony, of the musical phrase, but also of various intellectual conditions such as logic, grammar, the poem’s subject.

The contrast between the poet writing his verse and the ‘faina’ wandering through the snowy countryside advances through a capillary antagonism, which, according to Bettini, ‘pur non dando credito alle strombazzate esequie dell’ideologia, accetta l’ideologia solo se calata nella

prassi, nei campi "specifici"." The narrator’s identity is an cultural construct: intertextual allusions to its hidden nature are made in the lines ‘A questo gli altri ci hanno ridotti,/nostro onore somigliare a cose brute’, referring to Calderon De la Barca’s secluded prince, Segismund, in La vida es sueño (1636). Allegorically, we may say, the wild ‘faina’ frames the unstable condition of the twentieth-century intellectual, caught between moral duties and claims for freedom: it is indeed an image that provides a unifying principle to the contradictory relationship of the artist to the created work.

Paradoxically, although Fortini finally assigned a precarious place to literature, he carried on his activity as a poet, writer and translator with intensity until his death, continuing to instruct his fellow artists as to the ways of achieving an understanding of the realities in which they lived. In ‘Le capre ostinate’, Rossanda describes Fortini’s didactic stance in relation to these issues: ‘Sul linguaggio Franco Fortini diceva – sui Piacentini – a se stesso e a noi quel che oggi soprattutto le femministe ripetono: che non è neutro, non è di tutti. Esse dicono: è sessuato al maschile. Franco diceva: è connotato al borghese.’ It is indeed this contradiction, based on the reciprocal alienation and coexistence of form and content, ethics and aesthetics, subjectivity and objectivity, symbolism and allegory, which Fortini scrutinized in his writings in order to fight that peculiar linguistic/ideological vice, which Pasolini’s called ‘la tendenza eufemica del linguaggio comunista ufficiale’.

The above discussion has endeavoured to show how Fortini’s oeuvre is the corpus of a complex network of verification, assimilation and reshaping, within a meaningful continuum, of the numerous ‘locuzioni e modi’ of the European aesthetic and philosophical traditions he reviewed. In the preface to Verifica dei poteri, the author had, in fact, offered a justification of this aspect of his writing:

Vorrei che nessuno si scandalizzasse perché in queste pagine passano locuzioni e modi del linguaggio della religione e della metafisica. Non li impiego a caso. M’aiutano a manifestare una continuità di intenti che credo esista fra i propositi che quei linguaggi interpretavano e i nostri. Nelle età di ripiegamento e di sconfitta – e la nostra lo è, da noi, almeno – è inevitabile che il linguaggio tradisca un’imprudenza che all’azione non è concessa. Ragione e sapere sembrano allora tutte dalla parte di chi crede coincidere con la realtà effettuale. (VDP, p. 28)

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68 Ibid., p. 285.
70 Luperini, Tradizione/Traduzione/Società, p. 334.
72 For an additional review of Fortini’s dialectical strategies and polemical activity through his essay writings, see Marco Forti, ‘La verifica di Fortini’, Paragone 16, no. 188, 1965, pp. 124-131.
According to Fortini, the ‘impudent’ language of modern aesthetics is burdened with a problem to which only thoughtful meditation (‘poesia della esistenza in lotta con la storia’) upon art, historical reality and the world of social relations (what he calls ‘il comunismo di F.’) can provide a correct answer. In the autobiographical note ‘Per una piccola enciclopedia della letteratura italiana, anno 2029’, included in Autodizionario degli scrittori italiani (1990), Fortini provides an insightful definition of this process:

Recenti studi sul linguaggio di F. (e soprattutto fra metrica e sintassi) hanno posto in evidenza tensioni non riducibili alla coscienza politica e letteraria dell’a. ma piuttosto intrinseche ad una secolare vicenda dell’Occidente europeo confrontato con l’avvenire. Il ‘comunismo’ di F. è la poesia della esistenza in lotta con la storia e quindi con la propria medesima alienazione.  

Speaking of himself in the third person, Fortini defines his own poetry: directed as it is to a limited audience, it alternates between certainty and precariousness, participation in life and its denial: ‘Se scrivere è opera di delazione e di doppio gioco né esiste altra lingua fuor di quella degli schiavi (o dei padroni), scrivere, voler poesia o letteratura, è alludere (ma non più che alludere) anche ad una diversa possibile codificazione del reale e del linguaggio.’ (VPD, p. 28) Poetic language, then, organizes forms of resistance only within the textual space in which it finds its own self-justification. In open antagonism to the criteria of Sanguineti’s avant-garde, which, according to Fortini, tended to produce a literature shaped by politics – and reacting against the students who contested his idea of the presence in art and in modern poetry of regressive elements, Fortini spoke of the limitations of poetry as an effective revolutionary practice. Years later, in a note on Sanguineti’s style, Fortini argued: ‘Nella sua posizione politica ufficiale di parlamentare, così dire ‘normalizzato’, Sanguineti sembra trovare un contenitore per i frantumi psichici del suo passato. Una ironia depressiva, comunismo e liberty, per parafrasare il titolo di un suo dei suoi saggi.’ On the whole, the author’s dispute against these ‘normalized’ forms of experimentalism seemed to respond to Pasolini’s thesis in ‘Passione e ideologia’, in which the latter, discussing Adorno’s dissatisfaction with Lukács’s lack of responsiveness to stylistic matters, offered the following analysis to the question ‘Dove va la poesia?’:

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74 See Pier Paolo Pasolini, Passione e ideologia, Milan: Garzanti, 1973, p. 133. Here Fortini imitates Pasolini’s indirect autobiography: ‘Non potendo impadronirsiene per vie psicologicamente normali del razionale, non poteva che reimmergersi in esso.’
75 ‘Resistance’ is one of the key words of Fortini’s critical terminology.
77 The essay ‘Passione e ideologia’ was first published in L’Approdo Letterario: Rivista trimestrale di lettere e arti, Eri - Edizioni Rai Radiotelevisione italiana, no. VI, April-June 1959...
78 Pasolini, Interviste corsare, Rome: Liberallibri, 1995, pp. 31-34. In this essay, Pasolini states that he had conceived four main themes of discussion for the 1959 general meeting of writers at Officina: ‘Tema 1: Lo scrittore deve possedere un’ideologia? Tema 2: Qual è il rapporto tra lo scrittore e il neocapitalismo? Tema 3: Cultura o poetica? Tema 4: Qual è il rapporto tra ideologia e stile?’
Lukács tenderebbe a supporre un nesso diretto tra pensare bene e scrivere bene, tra filosofia realistica e stile realistico: e questo vale certo quando la scrittura è usata a livello strumentale o scientifico. Non certo per la poesia che, insieme, esprime pensiero e sentimento: il pensiero e il suo sentimento dunque il grande problema di questo periodo letterario, a me, sembra il rapporto di causa e effetto tra ideologia e stile [...] (Così resterebbe necessariamente, al poeta, la contaminazione, la fusione – contraddittoria, drammatica – l’adattamento, l’esperimento.79

Disagreeing with Pasolini’s idea of metrical freedom, and uneasy at young people’s objections to his own ideas and verse, which appeared unadventurous and conservative in comparison with the innovations brought about by the political ferment that flourished in 1968, Fortini blamed writers such as Sanguineti, Eco, and Calvino for having seduced readers with void forms, merely designed to satisfy the publishing market.80 In ‘Avanguardia e mediazione’, Fortini specifies:

Chiunque è capace di ironia. L’avanguardia dei nostri giorni continuerebbe soltanto la tradizione letteraria che (rendendo esplicito un momento implicito in qualsiasi fare artistico) almeno da Balzac a noi ha posto l’artista, lo scrittore e il suo operare al centro del proprio discorso. Certo è possibile documentare l’impulso autodistruttivo della recente avanguardia. Ma chiediamo: che cosa significa ‘distruzione’? Che cosa negano, queste ‘negazioni’? (VDP, p. 109)

Fortini noted how, in certain cultural environments of the new European Left, Lukács’s Hegelian interpretation of the Marxist doctrine and idea of the ethical role of the intellectual class caused him to be accused of idealism and subjectivism.81 Lukács, in fact, had ceased to appear as the philosopher who had tried to transfer the principles of dialectical materialism to the field of aesthetics; rather he was regarded as the initiator of a kind of ‘radicalismo ascetico oltre che aristocratico, metafisico oltre che storico’ (VDP, p. 240).82

Fortini himself was much influenced by Lukács’s Marxist aesthetics, especially by his early essay ‘Aesthetic Culture’ (Soul and Form, 1910) as becomes evident in ‘Estetizzazione del mondo’: ‘Lukács ci ha insegnato che l’importanza crescente attribuita alle letterature e all’arte dall’età romantica a oggi dev’essere messa in rapporto con la crescita del processo di reificazione’ (DCP, p. 18). In fact, in Fortini’s critical writings, constant reference is made to Lukács’s Theory of the Novel (1920), Marxism and Nineteenth-century Literary Theory (1937), Balzac, Stendhal, Zola: Studies in European Realism (1945), and Essays on Thomas Mann (1947), where the Hungarian thinker showed how art was in the hands of avant-garde

79 Ibid., pp. 33.
80 This question brings us back to the controversy between experimental poetry, on the one side, and a poetry essentially attentive to its public function as a means of maintaining aesthetical standards and ethical values on the other, as occurred within Il Politecnico.
81 The chief concern of the Budapest School was the attempt to stimulate a renaissance in Marxist thinking through a return to the essence of Marxist philosophy, which from a New Leftist stance implied a rejection of existing socialism.
irrational forces, which, in his view, had contributed to the installation of the Nazi dictatorship. Fortini approved of Lukács’s interest in the intellectual tradition grounded in philosophical humanism: a defender of high literary traditions against mass culture, like Lukács, he had strong reservations about populist forms of art.

While Fortini valued the idealism behind Lukács’s attempt to create a literature of social realism, which, in Lukács words, would be ‘a representation of life, structured and ordered more richly and strictly than ordinary life’, absolving a higher form of political and social function, Fortini came to terms in a later phase with Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), where a critical space for cognitive aesthetics was claimed, in order to support a literature that challenged all strict ideologies. He finally came to see that Adorno’s approach was an attempt to maintain a link between high art and popular culture at a time when his theory was becoming untenable because of the growing opposition to the conventional Marxism to which Fortini himself had unsubscribed. Indeed, discussing the dialectical relationship between high literature and mass culture, text and context, in ‘Poesia e antagonismo’, after Adorno, Fortini concluded:

La *Vulgärliteratur* è in un rapporto di scambio con la ‘letteratura alta’. All’ottica di chi crede che il ‘valore’ dell’opera d’arte e di letteratura consista nella innovazione invece che in uno specifico rapporto tra *ripetizione e innovazione* tende a sfuggire un fenomeno ricorrente nella storia delle scritture letterarie e poetiche: e cioè non solo la trasformazione dei testi originariamente comunicativi in testi poetici ma anche l’ inverso ossia l’uso sapienziaario e mitico o storico di opere sorte con intenti strettamente poetici e letterari: penso a Leopardi, Proust, Kafka. (QF, p. 148)

Adorno’s analysis – which supported the ability of the work of art, even at its most abstract and difficult, to convey its truth-content – anticipated many aspects of postmodern and post-structuralist theories, having also much in common with both Bertold Brecht and Walter Benjamin, whose work Fortini also admired. Brecht especially accused Lukács of formalistic prejudices. In his note on Lukács’s aversion to expressionist art, Brecht had claimed: ‘The formalistic nature of the theory of realism is demonstrated by the fact that not only is it exclusively based on the form of a few bourgeois novels of the previous century […], but also exclusively on the particular genre of the novel. […] Since the artist is constantly occupied with formal matters, since he constantly forms, one must define what one means by formalism carefully and practically, otherwise one conveys nothing to the artist.’ Lukács had in fact ideologically charged Expressionism with elitism, cultural nihilism,

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83 For the relation between Fortini and the theories of Lukács and Benjamin, see also Francesca Menci’s ‘Fortini fra Lukács e Benjamin’, published in *Allegoria* (Year XIII, no. 38, May-August 2001).
84 For the intellectual partnership between Benjamin and Brecht, see Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, London: Verso, 1998, in which Benjamin’s essay ‘The Author as Producer’ is to be found.  
subjectivism, stylization and abstraction. These antagonistic theses had an undeniable impact on Fortini, and caused him to write the 1974 pioneering essay on the Lukács/Adorno debate, 'Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell’antifascismo'. It should be noted that, in his 1959 essay, 'Lukács, Adorno e il privilegio del lettore' (VDP, pp. 232-242), despite his appreciation, Fortini neither shared Lukács’s negative evaluation of Modernism, nor Adorno’s faith in abstract and experimental forms of art, as I will demonstrate in a later section (2.2). Distrusting Adorno’s belief that art is a ‘segno che salva’, Fortini wrote:

Uno dei punti del pensiero di Lukács [...] è quello che accusa la letteratura di avanguardia di unilateralità e – è lo stesso – di mancanza di prospettiva. Adorno, forse senza saperlo, conferma il formalismo e il panteismo del gusto contemporaneo; l’illusione ottica del museo immaginario gli impedisce di vedere che la scelta, l’antologia di Lukács, non è dovuta a meri limiti di gusto ma è una scelta di valori, cioè di precedenze. (VDP, p. 234)

The contradiction between Fortini’s Lukácsian aesthetics and his hesitant outlook on the neorealist movement should be briefly highlighted; in fact while neorealist writers were mainly concerned with coming to terms with the Second World War and the defeat of fascism to establish the foundations for a new national literature, Fortini’s personal understanding of the function of art had a much wider scope, being essentially transnational and transcultural. It is worth quoting Fortini’s essay ‘Erotismo e letteratura’, which conveys the idea of the substantial unreliability of any form of art (‘ogni arte dice sempre altro da quel che sembra dire’): ‘Bisogna davvero essere molto candidi per credere di esorcizzare a così buon mercato il nostro bisogno di oscurità’ (VDP, p. 34). Equally attentive to the ideas of Gramsci on the status of the intellectual in society, Fortini’s critical writings as a whole is testimony to the principle that true literature is autonomous, although not apolitical. In the essay ‘Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell’antifascismo’, he explains his reasons for preferring the Baroque and Romantic traditions to linguistic innovation, introducing the notion of ‘coscienza di classe come omologo del fare poetico’ (VDP, p. 29). In its ability to capture both the singularity and universality of existence, poetry has in fact the power to be a real point of contact between history and individual existence, a role that Western forms of mass culture had failed to fulfill (‘una poesia può superare formalmente una “visione del mondo”’, VDP, p. 69):

Bisognerebbe allora riprendere il discorso da principio e tornare a spiegare attraverso quali mediazioni la poesia, anche grazie ai suoi caratteri ‘regressivi’, può essere un momento decisivo di quella totalità ‘uomo’ (naturalmente, nella sua specificazione sociale, di classe ecc.) che è oggetto del momento politico. (VDP, p. 9)

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85 For the debate between Ernst Bloch and Lukács’s over expressionism, in 1938, see Ernst Bloch, ‘Discussing Expressionism’, and Lukács’s ‘Realism in Balance’, both in Aesthetics and Politics, pp. 16-27, and pp. 28-59.
Believing that politics should have a limited influence in shaping the artistic product, Fortini invited poets to offer resistance to the meagre gratification of experimental forms per sé, and to develop their discourses along allegorical lines (‘la poesia insegna alla rivoluzione l’ampiezza del nulla che accompagna l’azione positiva’, VDP, p188), thereby restating Noventa’s ‘appello al valore’ (SI, p. 79). With this request, Fortini wished to promote a dialectical exchange between reality and artistic artefacts. Indeed, Noventa’s ‘appello al valore’ is constantly recalled in Fortini’s poetry, as Zanzotto writes:

(Tale creatività è) da lui stesso continuamente sospettata e tenuta a bada [...] e costretta a dissimularsi in filigrana magari in un saggio politico, o in qualche inedita, e addirittura ‘fantastica’ angolatura da cui egli pone un problema a carattere storico e sociale. Se tutto ciò ha una sua importanza, resta però il fatto che soltanto nel risucchio prevacante del lavoro poetico stricto sensu, nel tetro e goloso artigianato della costruzione, manipolazione, scoperta dei ‘versi’ può realizzarsi, appunto, un minimo di verità.

As we shall see, these ideological debates and clashes represented the very basis of Fortini’s own writings for a long time, and echoed into his poetry. In reading Fortini’s political and creative writings it becomes evident how, from an intertextual point of view, these themes non only pervaded his poetry, but also determined his choices in matters of translation, as we will see in the third chapter.

The theoretical Marxist premises in Verifica dei poteri were restated in Questioni di frontiera (1977) containing essays written between 1965 and 1977. This new collection confirmed the idea that the arts need to challenge the historical and social realities of the national institutional and political order, as Fortini stated in ‘Poesia e antagonismo’:

Quando la formalizzazione di un qualsiasi ‘contenuto’ abbia superato una data soglia, non determinabile a priori, di coerenza (coesione) fra le parti e quindi anche di tensione (contraddizione) fra esse, quella forma si manifesta come apparizione-presenza (si è parlato di ‘astanza’) che nega-everte il quotidiano, l’accentuato, il ripetuto.(QF, p. 142)

The title conveys the sense of both a political and a linguistic challenge, which is posed by ‘questioning’ the language of criticism. This metalanguage is not in complete discordance with the sense of ordinary discourse (‘forma corsiva’), as we read in ‘Due interlocutori’, the first essay of the section Le ultime parole:

La lettura di un dialogo ammirevole come quello in extremis tra Cases e De Martino, si accompagna al rammarico e alla rabbia che per troppi anni le difese del pudore, i

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87 The tension regarding the evolution of poetic forms, which pervades the perspective of historical avant-gardes, deeply influences Ungaretti’s model of a new hermetic language composed of expressive freedom and formal precision.
rispetti umani e le borie dei dotti abbiano fatto il silenzio sui temi che questo dialogo osa appena toccare, quasi scusandosene con la sua forma corsiva. (QF, p. 2)

The title of the collection may also refer to the acts of 'register-borrowing' and 'register-mixing', at the basis of that hybrid form so typical of Fortini's infratextuality.

Fortini kept stressing twentieth-century literature's servile role in relation to the ideology of the dominant class. To avoid the obligation of simply holding up a mirror to reality, and thus subverting those oppressive institutional values which claim to be unchangeable, art must perform a constant critical revision of those values and acquire a broader and more 'ambiguous' vision. In the preface, Fortini quoted Mao Zedong: 'L'ambiguo porge un aspetto in sé: quello che può essere paraffasato e tradotto, cioè passato di mano in mano. Il resto può andar perduto. Queste pagine vogliono essere ambigue. "Una situazione con una sola faccia non esiste. Il presente ha due facce".'

This statement of intention brings together multifaceted reflections on the effects of politics and ideology on artistic production, as we read in essays such as 'Le ultime parole', 'L'ordine e il disordine', 'Politica e sintassi' promote the principle of 'contradiction'. In the volume, reference is often made to Valpreda's trial, and to those issues concerning Italian political corruption in close connection with the terrorism and anarchy of the 1970s. Other important essays are 'Il dissenso e l'autorità', 'Intellettuali: ruolo e funzione', 'Politica e sintassi', representative of the ongoing debates among left-wing intellectuals on issues similar to those which animated the spirit of the literary magazine Politecnico. The second section of Questioni di frontiera presents three subsections: 'I paesi allegorici', 'I compagni separati', 'La mediazione letteraria', in which, besides reflections on Proust, Zola, and Vittorini, and a nostalgic apology to Pasolini, Fortini expresses his views on Solzhenitsyn's dissidence and the politics in post-Maoist China. In this context, it is worth citing a passage from 'Poesia e antagonismo' which mirrors Fortini's attitude towards form:

Come per Hegel la vita può mantenersi solo in prossimità della morte, così il discorso poetico può mantenersi solo se accetta la propria continua contestazione compiuta dal discorso extrapoetico ossia con una lettura comunicativa-pratica ... Anche nei confronti della negazione per mezzo di letteratura, in definitiva, dev'essere introdotto un criterio pratico-politico di risparmio: la forma letteraria che lascia trasparire al

88 QF, p. IX. For this reason, I have devoted a section in this Chapter to Fortini's interest in the theme of 'contradiction', which reflects Mao Zedong's dialectical approach to the conflicting nature of reality in social and political contexts. Mao Zedong writes: 'In studying the particularity of contradiction, unless we examine these two faces - the principal and the non-principal contradictions in a process, and the principal and the non-principal aspects of contradictions - that is, unless we examine the distinctive character of these two facets of contradiction, we shall get bogged down in abstractions, be unable to understand contradiction concretely, and consequently be unable to find the correct method of resolving it.' Mao Zedong, 'On contradiction', in Marxism, Essential writings, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 324.

89 After a long trial, in February 1979, the anarchist Pietro Valpreda was declared guilty of the bombing of a Milan bank on 12 December 1969 which left 16 dead and 88 injured. In August 1985, he was then found innocent. In April 1995, a new inquiry began, and, this time, certain neo-fascists were accused of the Piazza Fontana massacre. In June 2001, the neo-fascists were declared guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.
In the essay ‘Scrivere chiaro’, reflecting on the dialectical relationship between content and form, Fortini admits his tendency to use contradictions and paradoxes to break the expected intellectual clarity. Quoting Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), he states that art originates from a magic-ritual context (‘più iniziatico che teologico’) that fortifies its tools and methods within its own tradition:

Non sono davvero solo a credere che quel ‘silenzio’, più iniziatico che teologico, parli sempre, in Benjamin, di storia sacra, di Dio insomma.[...] Che l’ipermaterialismo rechi in sé un cuore ‘religioso’ (o demoniaco) lo si era sempre saputo. Che una lettura ‘nera’, negativa, distruttiva, nichilista della vita e della storia implichi una latente ‘riconciliazione primaverile’ è qualcosa che avevamo imparato anche in Leopardi e in Nietzsche.(D (II), pp. 100-101)

These assumptions shed light on Fortini’s emphasis on the need for a revaluation and reactivation of classic works of the bourgeois Romantic heritage such as Leopardi’s *Canti*, Milton’s *Lycidas* or Goethe’s *Faust*. In the case of foreign texts, this also emphasizes the essential role of translation in mediating themes and styles across languages, genres and cultures. Yet, unlike Benjamin, who maintained a substantial faith in art’s subversiveness, Fortini did not believe in the power of whatever is too theoretically termed ‘revolutionary’; he in fact stressed that in capitalist societies, art is not able to produce anything radically new: in spite of their utopian objectives, the discourses of the avant-garde cannot but be apologetic of their own decadent contexts. Intervening on postmodernism, he claimed:

La cultura del postmoderno non la direi solo apologia del presente ma (proprio perché inerente a quella del tardo capitalismo) una che contribuisce ad azzerrare molte illusioni dannose e va attraversata e lasciata alle spalle: ogni rilancio dell’ethos avantgardistico mi sembra oggettiva concessione al potere: diffido dell’estetica letteraria come via all’etica e alla politica, che vorrei fondate piuttosto in antropologia, storia e economia. (IN, pp. 102-103)

What, then, is the purpose of writing verse in postmodern times? Fortini explains that poetry has to believe in a paradoxical goal, that is a representation of slavery which promotes a hypothesis of freedom. Accordingly, it should never lose sight of its equivocal inner nature:

Dico di più, e lo dico proprio io che da vent’anni ho sostenuto posizioni apparentemente contrarie: perfino la ormai invecchiatissima polemica, in sede poetica, contro la cosiddetta ‘ontologia letteraria del Novecento’ e contro l’‘irrazionalismo’ e simili, fa parte dei panni ideologici di cui il progressismo neoriformistico e neoindustriale ama vedere drappeggiati i coristi del mondo letterario e artistico. Oggi, in Italia, consigliare agli scrittori l’attenzione alla sociologia industriale o l’invenzione di nuovi rapporti fra gli
Like Gramsci, Fortini believed that in advanced bourgeois societies, it would be a failure for socialist writers to proceed along a purely political line of action (the 'equivoco pseudoprogressista') since this would leave the cultural and ethical hegemony in the hands of the ruling class. In fact, the challenge should take place at all levels, the emotional, the sensual, the ideological. Like Lukács, then Fortini expected writers to maintain the integrative, positive and critical features of the great works of the bourgeois traditions and to revive them on a new level. A theory that tackles these tensions is Herbert Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1977, where the philosopher stresses the liberating function of form: 'In contrast to orthodox Marxist aesthetics, I see the political potential of art in art itself.' He too supported that the classics were able to transmit, along with the philosophical depth of their ideologies, that peculiar tension of life which translates itself into poetic language ('tensione totale della vita come linguaggio', VDP, p. 252).

In 'Il dissenso e l’autorità', an essay of 1968, speaking of the students’ revolt, Fortini noted, with irony, how naive the radical youth movements were, in their mystified ideological exaltation: 'Non si lotta efficacemente contro l’autoritarismo se non se ne sa il perché. Bisogna sapere in nome di quale autorità si combattono le forme e le armi di cui si veste l’autorità che rifiutiamo.' (QF, p. 59). Students were, in Fortini’s words, not able to read the hidden strategies of the institutions that held political and economic power.

As we shall see later in more detail, since the Second World War, Italian writers and intellectuals kept political concerns at the very core of their literary debates. This ideological movement, which originated from the Marxist phalange of the Italian intellectuals, tried to hold their coalition in a broad cultural movement under the versatile label of ‘neo-realism’: as in a sense, its basic theory owed much to Lukács’s *History and Class-consciousness* (1923), where the Hungarian thinker claimed that his intention was to base himself in Marx and free his concepts from every subsequent bourgeois distortion and to adapt them to the

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91 QF, p. 148. Fortini claimed: ‘Allora bisogna essere espliciti: bisogna dichiarare che ognuno è padrone di essere neo-nietzschiano ma non di parlare, nello stesso tempo, di condizionamento di classe e proletariato. È il caso, direi, di chiarir meglio le proprie responsabilità ideologiche. E a questo punto dovrebbe essere ripetuto senza equivoci che il discorso marxista non è però un’alternativa a quelle ipotesi di comportamento, non ha niente a che vedere con la ‘felicità’, non può proporre altro che una visione parziale del mondo e saper di proporla. Interi evi della scrittura costituiscono i testi letterari e poetici in una condizione di estrema prossimità ad un extratexto e, fra l’altro, a doctrine che negano l’autonomia medesima della scrittura e del testo poetico, in nome di poetiche moralistiche o utilitaristiche. In quegli evi, la forma letteraria, la letterarietà, pongono il proprio onore nel ridurre al minimo il loro indice di rifrazione e nel lasciarsi attraversare dal discorso comunicativo.'
requirements of the great revolutionary upsurge of the present. Needless to say that in post-war Italy Lukács’s writings became prescriptive textbooks. This is not to say that neorealist writers did not have a genuine political and ideological value. Yet, in order to avoid cultural conformism, and following Gramsci’s suspicion, in Quaderni dal Carcere, that ‘it is even possible to affirm that present-day Marxism in its essential trait is precisely the historical political concept of hegemony’, Fortini kept a marginal involvement in the neorealist trend, and based his critical interventions on more radical and dissident positions. Moreover, as Velio Abati claims, he conveyed and justified the body of his theoretical speculations with constant ‘saldezza strategica’, ‘impazienza etica’ and ‘rigore tragico’, qualities which became one with a highly complex prose style. In fact, in the post-war period, at the time of his contributions to Politecnico, Fortini’s critical writings became increasingly charged with literariness (‘lo scrivere difficile’) in order to denounce and combat the corporate media’s populism and lack of linguistic and cultural specificity, as Zanzotto remembers: ‘una ricchezza di strumenti e una forza d’implicazione incomparabili, con un animus “bellicoso” e contemporaneamente ritratto in sé, circospetto nei confronti di sé più che degli altri’. Fortini, thus, experienced a conflict ‘tra tensione verso le masse mute e l’impossibilità constatata via vie di raggiungerle’, as Gian Carlo Ferretti claims in his 1988 essay, where he points out how Fortini moved from a feeble faith in the possibility of intellectuals to reach the Italian proletariat to a recognition of the increasing difficulty to come to terms with his educational role. Indeed, the expression ‘lo scrivere difficile’, which Fortini himself employed to define his prose, conveys a distinction between an explanatory and edifying style, and another style which would challenge readers to respond to the author’s provocations. While the former is openly didactic and hierarchical, the latter is constructed on a dialogue based on equal grounds. On the other hand, Fortini’s literariness may also be considered as the formalist tendency his register had to preserve its peculiar elliptic and antithetical style of expression. As Luperini claims in La lotta mentale. Per un profilo di Franco Fortini (1986), his biography of Fortini as an intellectual, this strict challenging method provoked both positive responses and bitter diatribes in the literary world.

1.2. Intellectuals and hegemony: alliances and clashes

Gramsci believed that ‘every ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of development of this structure, has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in

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existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by
the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms. These are what
Gramsci called the intellectual hegemonies which in a given nation solicit constant struggles
among categories of intellectuals.

Indeed, Fortini found ideological debates so congenial and compulsive that empathy
with companions and esteemed colleagues such as Pasolini, Sanguineti and Calvino often
turned into open antagonism. In this ‘paesaggio devastato e avvelenato’, Fortini’s tendency to
engage in a ‘discorso crucciato e negatore’ on theoretical questions was often contested by
his fellow writers, who did not share the same severe perspective on the role of the
intellectual within society. This acute awareness of the crisis which was affecting and
deteriorating the ‘civiltà letteraria’ of the second half of the twentieth century was a definite
point of contact between Pasolini and Fortini. As Asor Rosa noted,

Questa condizione di consapevolezza della crisi è propria anche di altri. Per esempio, con
punte d’intensità altrettanto forti, di un Pasolini e di un Fortini: ma questi ultimi due, in
maniera molto diversa anche fra loro, beninteso, reagiscono alla sfida con l’incupimento
della negazione e l’accentuazione del distacco.

Although Pasolini faced this crisis with a style that favoured open political confrontation,
while Fortini resorted to a more radical kind of resistance, in both writers the ‘incupimento
della negazione’ and the ‘accentuazione del distacco’, to which Asor Rosa made reference in
his essay, reflected a desire to investigate at length the notion of ‘contradiction’. For Fortini
— as his persistent use of periphrasis, aphoristic language and caustic black humour confirms —
the expected difficulty of his counterparts in comprehending his message constituted an
integral part of his style of writing.

\[\text{See Antonio Gramsci, } Quaderni dal Carcere, \text{ Vol. III, Quaderno 12 (XXIX, 1932), ‘Appunti e note sparse per un}
\text{gruppo di saggi sulla storia degli intellettuali’, Turin: Einaudi, 1975, p. 1513}
\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 71. It is useful to quote Ferretti’s insightful comments on Fortini’s attitude towards his role, which}
\text{justifies his choice of a language ‘dove la distanza inevitabile tra il privilegio del poeta e le masse mute viene}
\text{abbastanza chiaramente denunciata’}.}
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\[\text{Alberto Asor Rosa (ed.), ‘Calvino e la narrativa strutturale’, in Letteratura italiana del Novecento. Bilancio di}
\text{un secolo, Turin: Einaudi, 2000, p. 455.}
\]

\[\text{For an insightful survey of the intellectual and artistic relationship between Fortini and Pasolini, see also}
The ideological clashes that occurred between Fortini and some Italian post-war intellectuals is best represented by his intense and distressing relationship with Pasolini. In 1954, Fortini sent a first letter to Pasolini, in which he offered an accurate account of *La meglio gioventù*:

Ricevo solo ora il suo libro [...] Faccio una grande fatica; ma è pieno di cose belle, molto belle, e molto ‘importanti’. Voglio dimenticare la lieve irritazione che mi viene dalla sua furiosa sottigliezza filologica e capire, come posso, quei marzi, quegli aprili, erbe e sudori, ‘David’.102

From a formalist point of view, it was the literariness of Pasolini’s language which, according to Fortini, demanded primary attention; yet, although the tension between his imagery and its ideological and political content imposed ‘una grande fatica’, Fortini did not isolate Pasolini’s literariness (‘quei marzi, quegli aprili, erbe e sudori, “David”’) from its social, psychological and intertextual contexts. He therefore prized the link between the author’s technique and his anxiety of experience. Indeed, for a Marxist critic like Fortini, Pasolini’s technique was valuable in so far it embodied a rich sense of artistic tension and existential oppositions, ‘un regime di doppia verità’ (AP, p. 83).103 As for some manifest contradictions in the Fortini’s liking and dismissal of Pasolini’s experimental poetry (‘furiosa sottigliezza filologica’), the author challenged it largely from a theoretical point of view, as proved by his criticism of Pasolini’s *Canto Popolare* (‘Lei comprende che questo eterno ritorno del popolare suona un po’ duro, un po’ pericoloso alle mie orecchie d’asino marxista’, AP, p. 56). The antagonism between the two writers occurred in spite of Fortini’s gradual assimilating the registers of the expressionist avant-garde in his poetry, as will be demonstrated in the second chapter.

In April 1955, Fortini sent a few poems to Pasolini as a possible contribution to *Officina* (‘Pasolini aveva ragionevoli dubbi sulla qualità delle mie poesie di allora’, AP, p. 57). Pasolini promised to publish them, as long as Fortini submitted an ‘allegato ideologico’ (AP, p. 57). At the end of the same month, the two writers met for the first time in Milan, at Garzanti, where Fortini was working as literary editor, and Pasolini had gone to discuss the publication of *Ragazzi di vita*.

On 7 January 1956, at the end of the ‘anno straordinario e tremendo che era cominciato col XX Congresso del Pcus, seguito dal ‘Rapporto di Chruscev’ (AP, p. 62-63) – a year

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103 In March 1955, while Fortini was co-editing *Ragionamenti*, Pasolini invited him to contribute to ‘una rivistina molto povera e ironica’ (AP, p. 56). To fully understand the nature of the ideological tension between Pasolini and Fortini, see Romano Luperini, ‘L’eredità di Pasolini e Fortini’, in *Il Ponte: Rivista Mensile di Politica e Letteratura* 37, no. 3-4, 31 March-30 April, 1981, pp. 356-362, where the period in which the two writers became familiar with each other’s work is emphasized, with Pasolini being eager for Fortini’s thought-provoking political contributions to his journal *Officina*. 
during which the world had followed with disconcert the Russian occupation of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland – offering his comments on the ongoing trial for obscenity in the newly published novel, Ragazzi di vita, Fortini wrote humorously to Pasolini: ‘Caro “pornografo” fortunato che almeno avrai l’onore di un processo (per ragioni stilistiche, quelle della mia tendenza preferisco in genere i tribunali militari)’ (AT, p61). Although the two writers had entered a successful partnership at Officina,104 Fortini’s disapproval of Pasolini’s cultural extremism (‘dal quale Pasolini avrebbe receduto nel corso dei due anni successivi’, AP, p. 64) acquired a tone of open criticism in 1957, when the latter published the article ‘La libertà stilistica’, in which he also offered a selection of poems by Sanguineti, Pagliarani, Rondo, Diacono and Ferretti as evidence of the possibility of overcoming the symbolist ‘obscuritas’ with the exuberance of linguistic destruction.105 From a historical point of view, this inflamed political debate originated in the crisis of Communism after the violent repression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, rather than in mere disagreements over aesthetic principles. In fact, this political crisis brought about a comprehensive revision of Marxist ideology, which deeply affected Italian left-wing intellectuals. The disillusionment is evident in Pasolini’s ‘La libertà stilistica’:

Nello ‘sperimentare’ dunque, che riconosciamo nostro […] persiste un momento contraddittorio e negativo: ossia un atteggiamento indeciso; problematico e drammatico, coincidente con quella indipendenza ideologica cui si accennava, che richiede il continuo, doloroso sforzo del mantenersi all'altezza di un'attualità non posseduta ideologicamente, come può essere per un cattolico, un comunista o un liberale: e questo, poi, implica una certa gradualità di quello sperimentare, un certo eccesso, comunque: l'attitudine sperimentalistica sopravvissuta. […] La stessa passione che ci aveva fatto adottare con violenza faziosa e ingenua le istituzioni stilistiche che imponevano libere sperimentazioni inventive, ci fa ora adottare una problematica morale, per cui il mondo che era stato, prima, pura fonte di sensazioni espresse attraverso una raziocinante e squisita irrazionalità, è divenuto ora oggetto di conoscenza se non filosofica, ideologica: e dunque impone sperimentazioni stilistiche di tipo radicalmente nuovo.106

Critical of the rigid prescriptions of political engagement that the PCI imposed on left-wing writers and its later dissolution, as to turn a dissenter such as Pasolini in a ‘un nuovo tipo di vecchia volpe, sostanzialmente cinico, distaccato, ‘letterario’ (AP, p. 78), Fortini shifted his criticism from Pasolini (‘Non si dovrebbe mai dimenticare che negli anni Sessanta Pasolini fu coinvolto, attraverso il lavoro cinematografico, in un universo eminentemente parassitario e in

104 One of the most original essays of the period between 1955 and 1959 was Fortini’s ‘Lukács in Italia’, which Pasolini published in the 1959 special issue of the journal, while Fortini was still a member of the editorial board of Pasolini’s review.

105 Sabbatino, Gli inverni di Fortini, p. 192. As Sabbatino noted, in spite of Pasolini’s openness to Sanguineti’s suggestions, the historicist assumptions of both Officina and Pasolini’s experimentalism fundamentally clashed with Sanguineti’s anti-historicism.

In più d'una occasione, mi sembra, Sanguineti ha voluto stabilire un rapporto tra mercificazione e avanguardia. Quest'ultima sarebbe relativa alle condizioni economiche in cui si sviluppa e giunge a maturazione la storia dell'arte borghese e, più precisamente, alle relazioni economiche-sociali attuali. (VDP, p. 108)

In line with Noventa and Vittorini's emphasis on the priority of culture over politics, the broad scope of Fortini's dialectics allowed him to dissent even from his own most inspiring values and principles. What Fortini dismissed most of all in the avant-garde's strategies was the illusion that they were deconstructing the dominant social and political discourses by means of premeditated counter-discourses, closing their eyes, however, to both the reality of the proletariat and to the fact that they too were taking part in a game of hegemonic strategies:

Da una parte si vuol porre l'avanguardia in rapporto con la mercificazione (altrimenti dove finirebbe il 'marxismo'?!) per non cadere nella palude dell'indifferenziata, astorica e cosmica 'alienazione', cara anch'essa all'avanguardia ma a quella di 'destra'. D'altra parte non si vuol rinunciare al gruzzolo di buona coscienza che ci viene dalle 'neoavanguardie' dei paesi cosiddetti 'socialisti'; non si vuole rinunciare al piacere di essere dalla parte della Rivoluzione e del Progresso... Un bel pasticcio, comunque. (VDP, p. 108)

In this light, Fortini judged Pasolini's faith in experimentalism as unrealistic, and he attributed a limited value to programmatic actions such as the one that took place in the early 1960s, when Italian intellectuals participated in the renewed debate around the 'questione della lingua' on the future development of the Italian language. In 'Empirismo eretico', Pasolini claimed:

poesia [...] Dentro questa istituzione stilistica che prevedeva anche – anzi, soprattutto – la libertà stilistica, non c'era dunque soluzione di continuità per le invenzioni: era comodo, rallegrante, fertile restarci.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ An accurate analysis of the epistolary exchanges between Fortini and Calvino has been edited and reviewed by Nava in his essay 'Le ragioni dell'altro: il carteggio Calvino-Fortini', published in 1998 in L 'ospite ingratato.

¹⁰⁸ See Sanguineti's adoption of a formal metrical style to satirize the political content of his dispute with Fortini and Pasolini at the time of Officina (Sabbatino, Gli inverni di Fortini, p. 192).

¹⁰⁹ See Baudelaire's comments on the issue of 'Les literatures militantes' as written in his personal notebook Mon Coeur mis à nu.

¹¹⁰ Pasolini, as the provocative organizer of this discussion, who had always rejected the existence of a unified spoken national language, raised a fundamental query on the survival of dialects, the spread of neologisms and the class status of languages. In the section 'Nuove Questioni Linguistiche', at the beginning of the collection of his critical writings Empirismo Eretico (1972), which includes essays and articles published in Rinascita, L'Espresso, and Il Giorno, Pasolini specifies the parameters of the debate, now admitting that a national language had indeed developed, as a consequence of the presence, in contemporary neo-capitalist Italy, of the technological language of industry. This new language made the existing dramatic differences in the social and economic status of each
La lingua parlata é dominata dalla pratica, la lingua letteraria dalla tradizione: sia la pratica che la tradizione sono due elementi inautentici, applicati alla realtà, non espressi dalla realtà. O, meglio, essi esprimono una realtà che non é una realtà nazionale: esprimono la realtà storica della borghesia italiana che nei primi decenni dell’unità, fino a ieri, non ha saputo identificarsi con l’intera società italiana.  

In describing the mechanisms at work in languages, Pasolini believed that the poet can criticise these processes from within the system and still remain objective. On the other hand, Fortini intensely distrusted Pasolini’s confidence in the power of poetry to overcome the class divisions inherent in the language’s structure itself.  

In *Questioni di frontiera*, he claimed that Pasolini’s theory of languages was an utopia, since in a time dominated by the economy of the media market and its logic, it was impossible to remain purely analytical:  

È difficile accusare d’ipocrisia una società che a seconda della rilevanza pubblica dei propri ruoli esige codici differenti di comportamento, quando si accettano i meccanismi, anche pubblicitari e finanziari, che si propongono appunto di trasformarti da privato, da voce singola, in mostro pubblico. (QF, p. 266)

Fortini, on the other hand, was prepared to admit that ‘come lui [that is, Pasolini] confidavo (ma erroneamente) che la scrittura poetica mi redimesse da “vizi” (i “prenatali vizi” di cui Pasolini aveva parlato in una sua poesia) di ceto e di cultura’ (AP, p. 66). In ‘Al di là della speranza. Risposta a Pasolini’, Fortini addresses his fellow writer, laying emphasis on each other’s errors:

Non la paura di tornare eguali  
a noi stessi, cristiane anime di cenere,  
né ritegno di errore ci trattiene  
fra gli errori. Dai nostri ultimi mali  
altro sangue, non gelo, hanno le vene;  
non orgoglio, ma irta carità.  
[…]
Non ti dico speranza. Ma é speranza.  
Questa parola che ti porgo é niente,

local dialect all too apparent. While the spoken language was decided by usage, the written one was decided by the literary traditions responsible for their standardization.


13 In ‘Avanguardia e mediazione’ (VDP, 1974, pp. 109-121) Fortini had already made a detailed analysis of the outcome of the past, around the so-called ‘questione della lingua’. He claimed: ‘A seguito della trasformazione portata dall’impero dello sviluppo industriale e dei consumi e della saldatura definitiva del nostro capitalismo con quello europeo e mondiale, l’autonomia “corporativa” della letteratura ha assunto, con la Nuova Avanguardia e il suo linguaggio critico, una funzione socialmente settoriale. Il ghetto sociale che ha subito e prescelto le ha dato la mistificata persuasione di una possibile e illimitata rivolta. In questo senso – e non nel senso più volgare, e tuttavia non privo d’una sua verità, che fu usato nella polemica degli anni scorsi – il capitallismo moderno ha fornito a molta arte moderna la griglia metrica, la gabbia ritmica di cui le composizioni avanguardistiche credevano essersi sbarazzate o che ritenevano, al caso, ricostruire per arbitrio soggettivo.’ A counter model to this negative state of affairs in the Western world is offered by Mao Zedong’s ‘cultural revolution’ which both Fortini and Pasolini praised in their essays.
la sperde il giorno e me con essa. E niente
ci consola di essere sostanza
delle cose sperate. In queste lente
sere di fumo e calce la città

che mi porta s’intorbidì nei viali
sui battistrada di autotreni, muore
fra ponti di bitume, fari, scorie...
Qui sarà stato io vivo; e ai generali
Destini che mi struggono, l’errore
Che fu mio, il mio vero, resterà. (AP, pp. 69-73)

Fortini accommodates an anxious 'posthumous state' ('qui sarò stato vivo') and the awareness of the linguistic function of 'errors' on the text within a realistic framework ('fra ponti di bitume, farie, scorie'). At the metatextual level, the author's stress on the problems of self-representation is far from new; in Attraverso Pasolini, a partly autobiographical volume, published in 1993, containing also abstracts from the two writers' personal correspondence, Fortini explained: 'Al lettore di oggi può non essere troppo chiaro che cosa intendessi dire con le parole dell’ultimo capoverso. Non potrei commentare quelle parole se non con quelle della poesia di Pasolini e della mia. Sentivo – e non ha ora troppa importanza se mi sbagliassi o no – che il conflitto mentale fra noi avveniva all’interno di una medesima parte dello schieramento.' (AP, pp. 79-80) In other occasions, Fortini made the point that his literary exchanges with Pasolini provided a self-conscious metacommentary, carrying a more or less explicit message about its shifts of significations, as we read in the poem ‘Per Pasolini’, which Fortini published in 1963 in L’ospite ingrato: ‘Ormai se ti dico buongiorno ho paura dell’eco’ (PS, p. 114). From this line, we see that almost any exchange between the two writers, uttered in a real-life context (here rendered by a bare ‘buongiorno’) could be symbolically transferred to many different contexts: literary, journalistic, poetic and self-referential. The central motif in the second line (‘tu, disperato teatro, sontuosa rovina’) offers an idea of Pasolini as a tragic mask.

This mirror-image, which makes Fortini’s direct addressee (Pasolini) and the reader explicitly aware of his tactic, draws attention to a process which takes place when daily communication is used aesthetically, that is literary self-consciousness. Of course, to be decoded, poems such as ‘Per Pasolini’ and ‘Diario linguistico’ require a specialist audience which is itself aware of the author’s practices, thus capable of seeing that he is laying bare his linguistic and rhetorical devices. In this sense, the poem offers evidence of the presence, in Fortini’s work, of those postmodernist traits that Mengaldo had already underlined in his preface to Poesie Scelte: ‘La lingua poetica di Fortini si offre come mezzo di estraniazione del

proprio oggetto, di impedimento alla immediate identificazione emotive: del poeta con la sua materia e, di conseguenza, del lettore con il prodotto poetico.' (PS, p. 22).

Again, the main concern of the poem ‘Per Pasolini’ is the shift from the context of reality (the Fortini/Pasolini relationship) to that of metacriticism, with the interpenetration of the two, as also the title of Fortini’s *Attraverso Pasolini* suggests. For Fortini, the consequence of moving through Pasolini’s work involved, to some extent, a process of analysing and reconstructing, rather than merely reflecting, his own artistic identity (‘ho paura dell’eco’). Fortini’s suggestion that his poetic identity may be an artefact of this subtext will be given further attention in this section.

Despite the fact that Pasolini considered Fortini a rigorous intellectual and much valued his professional advice, he too often clashed with his positions, as becomes evident in Pasolini’s response to Ferretti’s invitation, in 1973, to comment on his past experience as editor of *Officina*; here he humorously defined Fortini’s attitude as a ‘moralismo assillante’, which compelled him to undertake never-ending revisions of his own ideas. Pasolini was not the only fellow writer who disapproved of Fortini’s inflexibility. In fact, in his essay ‘I critici’, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo described his epigrammatic style as ‘un discorso critico […] stretto a pugno e percussivo’, especially in his ideological confrontations with Pasolini. In those years, *Officina* – which in Ferretti’s words, was intended to be a liberal literary review for the revival of the Italian rationalistic tradition which was ‘pre-novecentesca’ and ‘risorgimentale’ – initiated a strong polemical debate against both ‘Neorealismo’ and ‘Novecentismo’, the most prominent literary currents of the time, criticizing the latter’s decadent and quasi-mystical idea of literature. The polemical quality of Fortini’s critical writings, in this period, represents his immediate reaction to the fast developing polemics running through the literary circles in which he moved; these were provoked by the

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115 The comment is published in Ferretti’s 1975 anthology *Officina, cultura, letteratura e politica negli anni cinquanta*, comprising *Officina’s* most interesting articles.


Undoubtedly, Fortini's approach to literary criticism only marginally belonged to the former. In fact, Lukács's influence on Fortini was confined to his understanding of the Lukácsian equivalence between ‘avant-garde’ and ‘decadentism’, which Lukács employed to ‘fight’ against those decadent poetics which, in Fortini’s words, he considered ‘una forma avanzata della ideologia antisocialista’. Instead, offering personal interpretations of Gramscian Marxist aesthetics, Fortini, as well as Pasolini, wrote poetry which was intellectual in nature and able to reflect the clash of ideologies in post-war Italian culture and society. For this reason, in spite of their subsequent divergences, there were many similarities between their individual works: combined with an individual search for radicalism and integrity, their poetry developed in parallel with their essay writing on social and political issues. Asor Rosa indicates the presence of contrasts and affinities between the two writers:

La conseguenza più clamorosa sulla letteratura di questa sequenza di eventi (...) è la definitiva frattura di un certo rapporto tra scrittori e politici, quale s'era formato dagli anni precedenti la guerra, e poi, attraverso le esperienze della lotta antifascista e della Resistenza, fino ai dibattiti sul nazional-popolare, sul granscianesimo, sul realismo, della prima parte degli anni '50. Si può ora comprendere la divergenza ideologica della rivista di Anceschi e dei suoi affiliati nei confronti di Officina, che viveva una sorta di condizione di frontiera a causa dell’umanesimo storicista di Pasolini e Fortini. Questi, attraverso l’impiego, in sede di riflessione critica, degli scritti di Gramsci e Lukács, gravavano l’arte del peso del discorso etico.¹²⁰

Sadly, notwithstanding these intellectual similarities and in spite of their mutual appreciation, the two writers violently argued over the correct relationship that should be maintained with the readership, and the appropriate literary values to convey to the journal’s audience.¹²¹ The chain of theoretical and ideological disagreements with Officina’s systematic demolition of

¹¹⁸ In his Critica del gusto (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960), Galvano Della Volpe argued for the primacy of politics and ideology over cultural matters. He attempted to reconcile the principles of the ‘dialectic of opposites’ (of reason) and the dialectic of distinct entities (of idealized matter). He extended his philosophical reflections to aesthetics, claiming that the resultant meaning of an artistic work was ‘organically contextual’. Della Volpe thus dismissed the Romantic tradition by assigning greater importance to the cognitive aspects of poetry rather than to its formal and fantastic qualities, thus opposing Lukács’s Hegelian Marxism in Soul and Forms (1911) or Thomas Mann and the Tragedy of Modern Art (1953). Della Volpe considered Lukács’s analysis of the role of literature in modern ‘reified’ societies as a product of a subjective kind of bourgeois critique subservient to Hegelian idealism and historicism. Della Volpe states, in books such as Cristi critica dell’estetica romantica (1941) and Critica dei principi logici: Sulla dialettica (1962), that in Marx opposites are not logical-ideal antinomies, but ‘astrazioni determinate’ in a historical sense which then give rise to a historical-experimental form of logic; these concepts are totally different from the abstract Hegelian speculations upon which Lukács built his philosophy.

¹¹⁹ At the heart of Della Volpe’s Critique of Taste (1960) stands a ‘realist’ view of interpretation that opposes the dominant idealistic approach of both the neo-Romantic and neo-Classical critics, while presenting a new methodological system to Marxist historicism. Della Volpe sees poetry as a rational discourse exemplified by its neat organization of the ‘polysemous’ dimensions of language. Consequently, intelligibility is as much a feature of poetry as of science, since the structures of poetic speech are no more and no less intricate or ‘inexplicable’ than the processes of logical deduction and induction.

past literary traditions, especially in relation to Fortini's observation about the writer's 'fine del mandato', brought Fortini's partnership with Pasolini to an end in 1959. In this respect, Fortini's poem 'Al di là della speranza', published in 1959 with the subtitle 'Risposta a Pasolini', in the collection Poesia e errore, stands as an indication of his initial disagreement with the notion of the 'outdated' function of poetry, which Pasolini had already formalized in Le ceneri di Gramsci (1957) and which was due to reappear in La religione del mio tempo (1961): 'e ai generali/ destini che mi struggono, l’errore/ che fu mio, e il mio vero, resterà' (PE, p. 163).

Fortini shed further light on Pasolini's experimentalism in the 1960 article published in the first issue of Il Menabo, at the time when Vittorini was addressing issues such as the relationship between industry and literature. 'Le poesie italiane di questi anni', in which he reviewed Le ceneri di Gramsci, showing approval of Pasolini's political discourse on poetry's loss of power. This, however, did not help in smoothing down the main area of strong disagreement between the two writers, which was their different approach to stylistic freedom ('libertà stilistica'): its undervaluation by Fortini caused Pasolini to state that a positive aspect of experimentalism was the possibility it offered writers to engage in an innovative cultural and stylistic struggle ('lotta innovatrice') in order to undermine the socio-economical structure and the superstructure of the State ('mettere in discussione la struttura e la sovrastruttura dello stato').

Although Pasolini defended mainly popular poetry (La poesia dialettale del '900, 1952), Fortini's attitude towards tradition was not so different. In fact, Pasolini's experimental, yet highly civic poems, drew inspiration not only from Noventina's appreciation of dialect, but also from Antonio Gramsci's cultural project in Quaderni dal Carcere. In the

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121 The aim of Officina was to fill the gap between literature and politics, and to expect political commitment from his collaborators Arbasino, Calvino, Fortini, Gadda, Moravia, Penna, Sanguineti, Sciascia and Volponi.

122 Il Menabo was the journal founded in 1959 by Vittorini and Calvino in Turin. In spite of its irregular publication it hosted the passionate debate which later on gave birth to the Gruppo 63. It promoted internationalism, gave priority to issues of sociological interest, and credited the poetry of experimentalists such as Sanguineti, Mastronardi, Pagliarani and Roversi.

123 Fortini, 'Le poesie italiane di questi anni', Il Menabo, no. 2, p. 64. Discussing Pasolini's use of antithesis and contradiction, which are features of his own poetry as well, Fortini writes: 'L'antitesi è rilevabile a tutti i livelli della sua scrittura. È antitesi di 'posizioni' intellettuali e morali verso i massimi temi della passione ideologica contemporanea. Le ceneri di Gramsci ha come tema, appunto, questa contraddizione.'

124 Pasolini, 'La libertà stilistica', Officina, no. 9-10, 1957. Pasolini wrote: 'Lo sperimentalismo stilistico, dunque, che non può non caratterizzarci, non ha nulla a che fare con lo sperimentalismo novecentesco - inane e aprioristica ricerca di novità collaudata - ma, persistendo in esso quel tanto di filologico, di scientifico o comune cosciente, che la parallela ricerca “non poetica” comporta, esso presuppone una lotta innovatrice non nello stile ma nella cultura, nello spirito. La libertà di ricerca che esso richiede consiste soprattutto nella coscienza che lo stile in quanto istituto e oggetto di vocazione, non è un "privilegio di classe": e che, dunque, come ogni libertà, è senza fine dolorosa, incerta, senza garanzie, angosciante.'

125 Quaderni dal Carcere, by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, who authored a theory on the role of the intellectuals within the Party's ideological hegemony, is the 'intertext' of Pasolini's Le ceneri di Gramsci (1957). For a specialist analysis of Gramsci's Marxism, see in particular Robert Dombroski, Antonio Gramsci, Boston: J.K. Hall, 1989, p. 132. Dombroski writes: 'If Gramsci’s work is to have any bearing at all on the way we engage in intellectual or cultural practice, it will do so by developing in us a sense of our own politics: a realization that the actual workings of our critical operations depend on circumstances of which we and the “text” partake, that we, like Gramsci's intellectuals, are “agents” working within a particular hegemonic or counter-hegemonic process.'
1969 essay 'Il delitto di essere solo', Pasolini finally stated: 'Non amo la letteratura d'avanguardia, qualunque essa sia, oggi.' A similar attitude emerges in Fortini:

I have always found it difficult to accommodate the vitalistic and cynical insolence with which the literary and artistic movements of the 1950s interpreted the 'modernization' of Italy through a return to the so-called 'historical avant-garde', especially surrealism. Their claim that dynamiting syntax was revolutionary seemed to me frankly ridiculous; and poetry made up of penumbra, self-restraint, understatement, psychology and erudite recourse to everyday situations – such as that written in the two post-war decades (Sereni, Bertolucci, Caproni, Giudici) – appeared to look only obliquely at the alienating realities of modernization and mass media. (see in SINA, p. 11)

This Lukácsian assertion illustrates Fortini's response to the new directions indicated by Il Verri and the Gruppo 63. Yet in spite of his resistance and scepticism, he does borrow from these avant-garde discourses, taking motifs such as the Lacanian 'Ego-psychology' of the Self as the bête noire ('L'erba e l'animale', Questo muro, 1973), or Bataille's themes of eroticism, obscurity and cruelty, as he explains in the essay 'Erotismo e letteratura' (1961):

Ogni arte, si sa, dice sempre altro da quello che sembra dire e suo oggetto non è affatto la 'realtà della vita' [...] ma la verità della vita. Che è tutt'altro. E perché l’ostacolo, da Freud se non identificato almeno intravisto come necessaria componente della libido (e v’ha chi sostiene non darsi erotica senza violazione di tabù), non si trasferirebbe anche, clandestinamente, nelle rappresentazioni più liberatrici? (VDP, p. 34)

Fortini's claims of formal rigour and clear structure were also qualities that he was prepared to recognize in Pasolini’s poetry, although not consistently, as he stressed in 'Da un'arte poetica' ('Ci vuole sprezzo e coraggio'; 'Non puoi confidare nell’istinto'; 'Ci vuole chiarezza, un piano, un disegno'; 'Così Pasolini, se riesce', PI, p. 31)

These lines show a readiness to recognize the value of Pasolini’s poetical faculties. Fortini had initially expressed some trust in Pasolini’s experimentalism, especially in relation to his narrative strategies in Ragazzi di vita. In fact, in a 1955 review of the novel, he described Pasolini’s method as aesthetically well-grounded in the European tradition of Beckett and Genet. Moreover, Fortini considered Pasolini’s combination of languages – jargon and dialects – as ‘non dilettantismo ma scelta cosciente e precisa, critica descrizione di uno stato di fatto della nostra narrative e poesia’ (SI, p. 248). Yet he criticized Pasolini’s Tolstoyan idea of the ‘popolo’ as ‘un grande selvaggio in seno alla società’ which never acquires a real political consciousness. Fortini considered this view a sort of ‘mitologia del popolare [...] che ha doppio carattere intellettuale e sensuale’, thus being a form of populism. Fortini noted: ‘Sì, Pasolini crede al “popolo”; il popolo come ignoranza e pura vitalità.’ These

Therefore, the politics of literature is always a 'politics' of something else – of the control, the power, the dominance, however subtle, that one social group exerts over another. Culture, indeed, is the stuff of which power is made and by which it is maintained. 

considerations add to Fortini's general criticism of Pasolini's work as containing antithesis without dialectics, and thus being an 'ideologia in bilico' (PI, pp. 246-250).

The relentless quarrel between Pasolini and Fortini started up again eight years later in 1968, when they both offered a public interpretation of the student protest. In this year, Italy and France, witnessed a generation clash that set in motion the university students' political protest against the authoritarian and discriminatory politics of the educational system, which mirrored the capitalist logic of bourgeois culture. In the fervent atmosphere of the time, which exhorted writers to join the struggle of the worker's movement, the theoretical rigidity of Fortini and Pasolini brought them disapproval among those students who supported the 'neomarxismo operaistico' of the 1960s and who felt their cause to be better represented by the neo-avant-garde of the Gruppo 63. Fortini's article 'Contro gli studenti', published in Quaderni piacentini, represented a decisive response to Pasolini's articles 'Il PCI ai giovani' and 'Apologia', published in Nuovi Argomenti.127 Pasolini accused the wealthy left-wing students (i 'figli di papa') who engaged in street riots with young policemen of proletarian origin, of a mystified form of hooliganism. Conversely, Fortini considered Pasolini's idea of 'class struggle' utterly utopian and reductive, as he explained in the document to be read at the Tavola Rotonda organized in Rome by L'Espresso in May 1968, on the issue of Pasolini's scandalous defence of the police:

Nel corso degli ultimi dieci anni non mi ero latte troppe illusioni sulla tua capacità di intendimento politico. Per te la lotta di classe è quasi sempre stata soltanto la lotta dei poveri contro i ricchi e i rapporti fra borghesia e proletariato soltanto un consueto conflitto di razionalità e irrazionalità. [...] Sei confortato dal PCI e dai preti, sei ormai nella ormai certa Grosse Koalition, nella Santa Alleanza nazionale e internazionale. E sai perché? Perché hai peccato di presunzione. Hai creduto di poter cavalcare una dopo l'altra tutte le tigri del potere comunicativo. Non ti bastava essere D'Annunzio, hai voluto essere anche Malaparte. Con l'impeto della tua genialità si possono fare molte e bellissime cose. Ma non si può fare quella sola che permette di uscire dall'estetismo verso la storia e la politica: la rinuncia reale, non verbale, al monologo e ai piaceri del narcisismo.128

In the end, Fortini decided not to deliver his opinion on the matter in public, and read his statement to Pasolini in private. The tone of rebuke in Fortini's letter, embittered by cynical observations, ended any further relationship between the two writers. The controversy was caused by their two apparently different political outlooks, Fortini's dissident, and Pasolini's vehemently integrative, the one seeking intellectual 'disorganicity', the other performing the Gramscian model of intellectual 'organicity' and class affiliation.129 Fortini, in fact, did not

127 Pasolini, 'Il PCI ai giovani!', in Nuovi argomenti, no. 10 April-June 1968. Pasolini writes: 'I ragazzi poliziotti/che voi per sacro teppismo (di eletta tradizione risorgimentale) di figli di papà, avete bastonato,/appartengono all'altra classe sociale.'

128 See Antonio Gramsci, Quaderni dal Carcere, Vol. III, Quaderno 12 (XXIX, 1932), 'Appunti e note sparse per un gruppo di saggi sulla storia degli intellettuali', Turin: Einaudi, 1975, p. 1513. Gramsci wrote: 'Ogni gruppo sociale, nascendo sul terreno originario di una funzione essenziale del mondo della produzione economica, si crea insieme, organicamente, uno o più ceti di intellettuali che gli danno omogeneità e consapevolezza della propria funzione non solo nel campo economico ma anche in quello sociale e politico.'
advocate the artist’s subordination to the party, which he actually condemned for justifying the widespread Italian tolerance of political corruption. And yet, some years later, before his death, Pasolini, following Fortini’s example, distanced himself from the Gramscian idea of ‘political commitment’ exploited by the Communist Party which laid down that writers and artists had to subordinate their personal motives and works to those of the collective or party.

A change in Pasolini’s attitude towards the party – clearly influenced by Fortini – is visible in the article ‘Serietà e frazioni’, published within *Il caos*, where Pasolini speaks of the untrustworthiness of the Communist Party’s strategies; he notes:

> Sono arrivato a metà dell’articolo di Berlinguer; la seconda metà non è che una ripetizione e un’amplificazione della prima; incredibilmente ingenua, scritta evidentemente per i lettori che i dirigenti comunisti, con una insopprimibile sfumatura razzistica, chiamano ‘uomini semplici’.  

At last, Pasolini too negates the kind of political and populist education achieved through subservient forms of art. The true function of literature is, in fact, that to give a voice to those repressed ‘uomini semplici’ without a voice, against and beyond the language of politics. Pasolini’s and Fortini’s radicalism, therefore, did not differ so significantly, allowing us to extend some insightful criticism of Pasolini to Fortini.

Gianni Scalia, for example, pointed out that the very nature of Pasolini’s attack the students was to show the corrupt manoeuvres of those ‘all’opposizione’ through which they were manipulating the 1968 protest in order to acquire that very power they seemed so violently to denounce. Beyond the apparent idiosyncrasies which divided Pasolini and Fortini, a deeper, ethical communion of ideals linked their individual works, as indeed is shown by articles such as ‘Un odio difficile da immaginare’, in which Pasolini revised Fortini’s analysis of racial attitudes, articulated in *I Cani del Sinai*, or ‘Le ossessioni di Fortini’, published in *Il caos*, where, reviewing *Poesia e errore* (1969), Pasolini reaffirms this controversial brotherhood:

> Le poesie di Fortini (vecchie e recenti) sono una conferma della ragione d’essere di questa mia triste ironia. Tutte le poesie di Fortini hanno l’aria di essere scritte durante una ‘sosta della lotta’. (Cosa che del resto in sostanza risponde a verità). […] Ma è chiaro tuttavia che per lui la metastoricità dell’atto poetico (che necessariamente avviene appunto in una ‘sosta’, in un angolo fuori dall’azione, in una piega segreta

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della storia) in tanto vale in quanto è ancora ripensamento della lotta, attraverso un semplice mutamento di registro.134

The above remarks may appear almost entirely constructive and complimentary, yet there is a constant and subtle use of mockery throughout the review which, even on first reading, shows that the simple surface criticism has deeper implications. In fact, in ‘Le ossessioni di Fortini’, referred above, Pasolini openly censures, by means of satire, Fortini’s use of military jargon in his newly published poetry collection *Poesia e errore* (1969), which, Pasolini claims, fosters a utopian view of the poet’s role in society and history as a ‘partisan soldier’, which for Pasolini conveys an unrealistic ‘contenuto ritardato’:

Un’ossessione di guerra guerreggiata, dunque. [...] Ma Fortini, io penso, ha bisogno di sentirsi in guerra, perché solo in tal caso egli esiste, e trova una necessità del proprio esistere. La pace (la religione della vita quotidiana) è una cosa che egli non ha avuto in sorte: lo interessa solo come nostalgia, che attanaglia durante la tregua della lotta. Come ebreo per necessità, e come uomo politico per scelta, Fortini non ha mai avuto diritto alla pace. E questo me lo rende fratello e caro.135

Fraternal and antagonist against a scenario of political and social upheaval, Fortini and Pasolini were well aware that they might seem a *coincidentia oppositorum*, in parallel to some extent to Goethe and Schiller in their continuous testing of the power of literature to safeguard and regenerate civilization itself. Fortini’s scholarly stance had placed him on such an academic pedestal that his poetry appealed less to younger generations. As a result of Fortini’s position in the academic world and Pasolini’s fame in the film industry, the two were often ‘paired’ as critical alternatives to each other. Nonetheless, both were too self-critical ever to view their own work as prescriptive in the absolute, and therefore recognized their mutual need to come to terms with their individual differences. All too often it was generally assumed that readers who appreciated the one could not abide the other, and Fortini’s traditional qualities gave him no advantage in this conflict of style.

Despite agreeing finally that the dissident artist must follow his own road in order to determine something that may become transversally significant for political and social action, Pasolini still contests Fortini’s preoccupation with poetic decorum, which, with its ‘pudore linguistico’,136 overstressed the importance of poetry as a ‘dignified’ art, requiring an elevated diction and a heightened style. In the same review, Pasolini concludes his attack on Fortini with a political reflection which is also self-critical:

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134 Ibid., p. 111.
135 Ibid., p. 112.
136 Ibid., p. 113. ‘Non c’è chi non veda qui una insanabile contraddizione nel fondo rivoluzionario di Fortini. Del resto egli ne è cosciente: e ciò è chiaro nel senso di pudore linguistico che egli prova quando fa “il verso al poeta”’. Here Pasolini claims that Fortini’s search for an effective language-medium is kept within strict limits because of its ironic and didactic spirit which mocks his role as a poet (‘fa il verso al poeta’).
Quanto a me, quando prima dicevo amaramente che la guerra non è voluta dalla classe operaia e dal PCI, lo dicevo assumendo un atteggiamento ingloriosamente neutrale e 'realistico'. E quando dicevo che il Movimento Studentesco non può fare la guerra, volevo dire che la guerra la fanno gli eserciti, e che gli eserciti sono delle istituzioni.  

This judgement illustrates comprehensively the intricate reasons why, in spite of their unrelenting intellectual disputes, Fortini and Pasolini continued to question and challenge each other’s ideas: they also represented the reasoning of the other to the public long after their 1968 quarrel, as becomes apparent in the two essays that Fortini included in *Questioni di frontiera* (1977): ‘Pasolini non è la poesia’ (1972) and ‘Poesia e corruzione’ (1977). Indeed, in order to appreciate the bond between the two writers, which so strongly motivated and inspired their indirect correspondence, it is essential to realise that, at a deeper level, Fortini’s view of political engagement included many features of Pasolini’s scepticism towards the manoeuvres of both the PCI and its affiliate Movimento Studentesco, as Pasolini expressed in the controversial poem ‘Vi odio, cari studenti’, which he wrote in 1972. In the letter to Pasolini ‘Contro gli studenti’, cited above, Fortini stressed his wish to persuade his fellow poet to become ideologically less schematic:


Yet in 1968, Pasolini had strongly supported Fortini’s critique of contemporary society in one of his articles published in the weekly review *Il caos*, where he wrote:

Ma per tornare a Fortini e alla sua osservazione sulla polverizzazione della società dovuta al potere e alla moltiplicazione dei razzismi, forse, nei nostri giorni – e proprio in questi ultimi giorni – qualcosa è anticipatamente caduto nel cerchio della nostra esperienza diretta. Si è verificata, infatti, in certi strati che si ritenevano molto ben stabilizzati della società, una polverizzazione dovuta al movimento sovversivo degli studenti: si tratta di strati molto particolari: gli strati cioè delle élites intellettuali (si sa, estremamente sensibili e vulnerabili).

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137 Ibid., p. 113.
139 Within the pages of *Il caos*, and throughout December 1968, Pasolini had already repeatedly expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the style and nature of the Movimento Studentesco’s protest, in articles such as ‘Gli studenti danno il panico’ (no. 50, 7 December 1968), ‘Gli studenti di “Ombre rosse”’ (no. 51, 14 December 1968), and ‘Per una polizia democratica’ (no. 52, 21 December 1968).
140 Also published in *Attraverso Pasolini* (1993).
141 Fortini, ‘Contro gli studenti’, *Attraverso Pasolini*, p. 38.
Similar bitter themes of political dissidence pervade the 1962 essay ‘Astuti come colombe’. Here, recalling Lukács’s *The Destruction of Reason* (1954) and, above all, Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Fortini reflects on the explanatory function of literature within society from a negative perspective that undermines even the socialist values from which he had drawn his own criteria of judgement. He thus shows how Calvino and Sanguineti’s call for ‘freedom’, in literature, produces paradoxically forms of ideological imprisonment (‘Ridicolo agitare contro quest’arte – astratta, informale, oggettiva o come la si chiamerà domani – i vecchi argomenti di Lukács contro l’avanguardia.’ VDP, p. 76).

Returning to Pasolini and Fortini, it is somehow difficult, in view of some strong ideological affinities between the two interlocutors, to understand the level of controversy in which they so heatedly and regularly collided; the clash of Pasolini’s political activism with Fortini’s sceptical radicalism is acknowledged in the quoted poem ‘Per Pasolini’, where, in order to illustrate this interdependence, he employs the image of the echo as an ideological reverberation:

Ormai, se ti dico buongiorno ho paura dell’eco,
Tu, disperato teatro, sontuosa rovina.
Eppure t’aveva lasciata, il mio verso, una spina.
Ma va’ senza ritorno, perfetto e cieco.(LOI, p. 126)

In the last line, the loss of sight as a fundamental sensual capacity invites one to reflect on this faculty in relation to its original function. While Fortini records a tragic, symbolic metamorphosis, that of his friend’s sight – formerly undamaged and able to discern – this loss *per se*, as in Homer’s poetry, invites reflections on the power of poetry to perceive the world beyond sight. Fortini’s attacks on Pasolini seem, at this point, to come to an end: despite the past criticism of his friend’s ideological extremism, he is now ready to admit the authenticity and legitimacy of Pasolini’s subversive positions, which was at the same time emotionally and ideologically intense, unswerving and histrionic, as he made clear in an essay included in *Saggi Italiani:*

    il suo sperimentalismo non è dilettantismo, ma scelta cosciente e precisa, critica descrizione di uno stato di fatto della narrativa e della poesia. Si esce dunque da questo libro turbati e scossi; primo, perché il peso del ‘documento’, cioè dell’orrore umano è doloroso come un pugno; secondo, perché lo sfogo spiegato per dominarlo e stravolgerlo in forme di poesia è grande e spesso riuscito e talvolta in modo ricchissimo. (SI, pp. 249-250)

However, the clash between the two writers re-emerged in public in 1971, at the time of the publication of Pasolini’s *Trasumanar* . . *organizzar*, when Fortini disagreed with Pasolini’s message of political militancy, proposing instead a form of dissidence that highlighted the
long-term force of works of art, that is the timeless value and irrepressible dialectics of the classics such as those of Homer, Shakespeare, Ibsen and Tolstoy. Pasolini’s non-conformity did not prevent him from appreciating and praising Fortini’s intellectuality: indeed, although the latter contested Pasolini’s verbal extremism in books such as *La meglio gioventù* (1974), which Fortini judged to be ‘l’atroce libro di un morto vivente’; Pasolini nonetheless shared both his love for tradition and his tendency to base his poetical work and theoretical writings on antithesis and contradiction. It is important to remember that, as a result of their interest in foreign languages and cultural traditions, genres and literary heritages, both Fortini and Pasolini were dedicated literary journalists and translators as well as poets and critics. Pasolini, indeed, had much in common with Fortini in the field of literary translation, offering striking and unique renderings of Rimbaud, T.S. Eliot and Ungaretti into friulano, and showing his ability to use each of these idioms, languages and individual codes with expressive versatility, as Tullio De Mauro stresses in his essay ‘Pasolini critico dei linguaggi’ (1985):

Pasolini è un infaticato sperimentatore di linguaggi profondamente diversi. E per ciascun linguaggio, cioè per ciascuna famiglia di codici, dal pittorico al musicale, al filmico, a quello verbale, è un infaticato sperimentatore di lingue, di idiomi diversi.

Along with their interest in past literary traditions, both Fortini and Pasolini manifested a rather utopian representation of the precapitalist past – Fortini looking towards the classical literary heritage and Pasolini towards the anthropological richness of rural folk traditions. Despite this concurrent, if not quite simultaneous, artistic compatibility, the ideological friction between the two writers never cooled, exacerbating their quarrels, shaping and intensifying their controversy, with both writers resorting to a derisory tone. Typical of this is the cited ‘Diario linguistico’:

Non imiterò che me stesso, Pasolini.
Più morta di un inno sacro
la sublime lingua borghese è la mia lingua.
Non conoscerò che me stesso
ma tutti in me stesso. La mia prigione
vede più della tua libertà. (PS, p. 116)


144 Fortini’s classicism tended to emphasize the value of bourgeois literary heritage; Pasolini’s that of a ‘poesia dialettale’.

145 Tullio De Mauro, ‘Pasolini critico dei linguaggi’, *Galleria*, no. 35, I-IV, 1985, pp. 7-20. For Tullio De Mauro, Pasolini’s various languages and genres are a coherent unity, that is, aspects of the same phenomenon which contributed to the myth surrounding the life of Pasolini.

146 Noticeable, for example, are the thematic similarities in the articles that both authors produced in their fervent journalistic literary activities which led Fortini to collect the essays he had written between 1965 and 1977 in *Questioni di frontiera* (1977), and Pasolini to collect the newspaper articles he has published between 1973 and 1975 in *Scritti corsari*. 

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While the poem exposes, ironically, the author’s refusal to accept Pasolini’s influence on his poetry, the text sets abruptly their dialogue between two antagonistic poles: Fortini’s use of a ‘sublime’, ‘bourgeois’ and ‘dead’ language and Pasolini’s exploitation of popular forms. The former is said to resist being assimilated into the latter, stressing Fortini’s fear of being incoherent. The statement ‘la sublime lingua borghese è la mia lingua’ does not really intend to prove the moral or artistic superiority of Fortini’s poetry, as the line ‘Più morta di un immo sacro’ soon specifies. As suggested by the title ‘Diario linguistico’, which refers to a case of speculative disagreement, the quality of the language here is close to prose. The polemical line (‘Non imiterò che me stesso, Pasolini’) evidently relates to some other pre-existing controversies between the two writers. The text’s strength is secured by the image of lyric poetry as ‘prigione’, which places on conflicting planes Fortini’s poetic diction and Pasolini’s experimental linguistic ‘libertà’. The text’s binary oppositions are brought to closure in the paradox ‘la mia prigione vede più della tua libertà’, with the reappearance of the theme of ‘sight’ which here stands for ‘critical insight’. The text’s final aim is to show how ideological affiliation can compromise ‘pure poetry’.

Despite this antagonism, in the obituary ‘In Morte’, published in Il Manifesto on 17 November 1975, Fortini noted: ‘Il solo modo decente di parlare di Pasolini in mezzo al vocio autopunitivo di questi giorni, è leggerlo.’ A deep sympathy breathes through a final poem addressed to Pasolini, in which Fortini used words suited to an anti-hero, whose tragic character (‘o infelice’) determined his own death (‘Tu mostruosi gridi’):

Così l’inganno
di oggi ti rivelava quello di allora, o infelice.
I tuoi versi stanno. Tu mostruoso gridi.
Così le membra dello squartato sul palco.

The expressionist imagery in this fragment, evoking Pasolini’s violent and self-destructive conduct, is yet an oblique tribute to his style (‘I tuoi versi stanno. Tu mostruoso gridi’). The allusion here is to capital punishment (‘Così le membra dello squartato sul palco’), which recalls the way Pasolini was horribly assassinated.

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147 Fortini is not alone in this enterprise: Segre is engaged in the same struggle. In I segni e la critica (1969), as well as in his subsequent book, Notizie dalla crisi (Turin, 1996), he joins Fortini in proposing an ethical verification of the methods of literary criticism, in order to fight the decline of structuralism and oppose the emergence of neo-hermeneutics and deconstructionism, which were responsible for opposing the authority of Marxist historicism.


149 The only critical writing where stylistic similarities between Pasolini’s and Fortini’s individual poetic dictions have been underlined is Raffaele Cavalluzzi’s ‘Fortini e Pasolini. Due strade al visionario’ (in Bérénice, IV, no. 10-11, March-July 1996).

150 Ibid., p. 235. In ‘Poesia e corruzione’, speaking of his deep solidarity with Pasolini, Fortini defends his murdered friend: ‘Dire che se il grano non muore non darà frutto vuol dire riconoscere la necessità della dissoluzione di ciò che è saldo, dialettica del passaggio ad altro stato. Su questo trincio di trasmutazione è
In this chapter I have endeavoured to show that, whereas Pasolini pushed his estranged art to an extreme, both politically and artistically, attracting admiration as much as contempt, Fortini believed in the adequacy of not diverging entirely from the values of the pre-industrial bourgeois society. He tried to reconcile his criticism of institutions with his attachment to some of the ethical and civil values that had developed within bourgeois society. The friendship between the two poets was undoubtedly tempestuous and, in some way, peculiarly productive. Fortini evokes this acutely in *Questioni di frontiera* (1977), he evokes his passionate friendship with Pasolini: ‘Aveva torto e non avevo ragione. Una differenza c’è, la conosco. Il conflitto di indoli, poetiche, intelligenze e impegni, che fu il nostro, il tempo non sopravviene a renderlo illusorio più di quanto non faccia con ogni impresa ed esistenza.’ (QF, p. 235) Mengaldo, on the other hand, described most clearly how complementary the two writers were. In his cited article, ‘I critici’ (2000), he writes: ‘Sicché Fortini è bravissimo a inchiodare con ossimori i suoi autori, abitati da quello che in un luogo si chiama ‘compresenza degli opposti’.’

In ‘Poesia e corruzione’, a section of the third chapter ‘La santità del nulla’ (*Attraverso Pasolini. Storia a due voci e una passione di cultura, letteratura e politica*, 1993), Fortini claimed:

Nel suo rifiuto delle valutazioni morali, che si chiamava furiosamente moralismo, Pasolini non è mai riuscito ad esprimere uno dei due soli criteri che consentono di andare al di là del giudizio morale: quello religioso, per cui tutto è grazia, e quello politico, per cui nulla lo è. Pasolini, nel suo Vangelo e in Teorema, ha cercato di riunire, al di sopra della morale, quei due criteri. La trascendenza religiosa avrebbe dovuto farsi assolutamente terrestre e politica. Ma Pasolini non era Dreyder. Non credeva veramente né in Dio né nella storia.

I shall cite one of Fortini’s more poignant definitions of the two different modes in which writers can absolve their responsibility towards the arts:

All’interno di questo volgo disperso (la lingua unitaria), gli operatori del linguaggio, cioè i poeti, hanno dato due risposte polari, una è quella di una nostalgia, appunto, arcaico-unitaria, l’altra è quella di una deriva nel precipizio dove è possibile ritagliarsi un gergo nel gergo, una lingua nella lingua.

avvenuto che da sempre la Città (che si vuole unità e resistenza) abbia condannato – quando non assunto invece nel rito – la dissolutezza e il corruttore degli spiriti, mettendolo a morte. Mi chiedo ora se nell’opera di Pasolini vi sia stato questo intento di eversione spirituale e intellettuale. Direi di no. La voce pubblica fece tutt’uno delle accuse di oscenità all’opera, ossia di disprezzo per gli dei della Città, e della corruzione di minori, attribuita alla vita dello scrittore.’

151 Mengaldo, ‘I critici’, *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, p. 58. Mengaldo adds: ‘Certamente sua non è quell’arte della mediazione che era somma in Lukács, così diverso da lui, ma è anche in Cases; e di cui rimprovera la mancanza in Pasolini, senza accorgersi che almeno da questo punto di vista lui e l’altro, uomini dell’impazienza e della non tessitura, del fulmine e non del fuoco lento, erano un po’ come i teologi nemici e medesimi di cui parla Borges in un racconto.’


1.3. ‘Perché si scrivono poesie’

I have already indicated the presence of infratextual connections between the various languages, styles and themes at work in Fortini’s poetry in order to relate them to his ideological and theoretical apparatus (1.2, 1.3). This interconnections can be traced back to the years when Fortini’s contribution to the first series of Officina. At the time, he wrote the poem ‘L’altezza della situazione o perché si scrivono poesie’, which, for its content, almost amounted to an essay. Indeed, Fortini’s creative writings are often acts of criticism, declarations of poetics, metacritical practices, supplementing poetry with theoretical discourse. Consequently poetry, which is normally specific, emotional and contingent, acquires an extra-value by coming into close contact with the universal and abstract qualities of speculative thought, as in T.S. Eliot’s ‘sensuous thought’. In order to understand what was the status of Fortini’s aesthetics we shall in due course look at his collections, and see how they manifest or dissimulate or disclose the author’s ideological apparatus. This verification will be inevitable, since, very often in Fortini’s work the object of discussion is partly the meaning and value of the literary creation, and partly the modalities of its production, as the title ‘All’altezza della situazione. Perché si scrivono poesie’ suggests.

Fortini has been defined a modern classicist by both Luperini and Mengaldo mainly, I believe, for the nature of his poetry, which was inspired by the wide humanist curriculum he taught. In my view, this classic background merely determined the presence of a specific range of themes in his poetry, which was strengthened by his interest in ancient rhetoric. For this reason, when approaching the poetry that Fortini produced after the war, it is essential an understanding of the way he matched his love for the classics with the socio-political situation of the new Welfare State democracy and the retrained climate of the Cold War Europe. In his poetry, in fact, lyricism is laid out on the line of historical discourse. Yet, Fortini knew well that poetry cannot be a mere expression of the poet’s ideology: it needs formal materials to accomplish its aesthetics, and these materials are not always accessible from past literary traditions; hence the conflicts, the contrariness of every artistic work, the clash between the existing fix definitions of poetic forms and the many ways these forms evolve.


156 The complex network of Fortini’s sub-references, along with the plurality of codes and sub-codes to be found in his poetry, of course, shows traces of many other authors who influenced his aesthetics, among which Schiller, Goethe and Brecht. Evidence for these assumptions will be provided by the selection and close analysis of those texts considered to be contributors to the heterogeneous genesis of the author’s ars poetica.
reasons, I shall frame Fortini alleged 'modern classicism' in quotation marks, since, beyond the constant effort that the poet made to show the value of poetic traditions, it does not define a specific aesthetics in Fortini's work but rather illustrates a concept standing in opposition to the modernist sanctioned forms of avant-garde poetry.

Without a doubt, the Cold War tended to freeze public opinions and counselled silence about private attitudes, recommending a 'guarded' style of writing, in which only 'composed' and conventional gestures were possible, gestures which would give expression to the difficulty of articulating public speech. This post-war stylistic orthodoxy, along with the need for defence and ethicality, is evident in the work of many neorealist writers, who broke with the uncomfortable pretension of both the symbolist and modernist movements. However, that is not to say that post-war writers did not absorb and adopt aspects of their original precursors. Certainly Fortini did: in fact, if Foglio di via (1946) was conceived in a rather economical style, with the 1963 publication of La poesia delle rose, the author's voice suddenly turns it into something disquietingly violent. What is no longer constant, in La poesia delle rose, is the ethical composure that was the focal point of Fortini's early poetry, which in Dieci inverni: 1947-1957. Contributi a un discorso socialista (1957) he had theoretically justified as a nearly exclusive literary preference. In his essay 'Intellettuale e poeta' Giovanni Raboni discusses Fortini's alleged modern classicism:

> Che cos'era, che cos'è, nella sostanza, nel suo senso più intimo, il classicismo di Fortini? A me sembra che sia sopratutto la scelta di parlare del presente rifacendosi al passato, e nello stesso tempo, in nome del futuro', without avoiding 'un compromesso linguistico con il presente, in qualche forma e misura di anticlassicismo.'

Raboni too here claims that Fortini's classicism, rather than representing a rigid definition for his own aesthetics, merely illustrated a way to counterbalance the aesthetic exuberance of the avant-garde. In the period that saw the drastic historical changes that brought about the 1968 world cultural revolution, Fortini was moving artistically towards an adaptation of the classics to the spirit of the times. As Mengaldo claims, during this phase, in Fortini's poetry 'la stilizzazione intellettuale rigorosa, veicolata dalla "sublime lingua borghese", che così spesso si chiude nel giro breve dell'epigramma di stampo cinese o brechtiano [...] suggerisce un rapporto necessariamente straniato della poesia con la realtà.'

Noventa, Fortini wished to resume the major eighteen-nineteenth century literary trends, especially those of Goethe and Heine, not only for a formal retrospective rendering of their specific styles, but for a wider cultural and intellectual operation which would bring back together aristocratic and popular lyric forms. Indeed, Fortini's appreciation of Leopardi's poetry relies on the odd, dialectical balance between elitist pessimism and

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democratic hope in his philosophy: 'Mi rifiuto di credere, certo di andare d'accordo con Timpanaro, che la “poesia” di Leopardi sia un alcunché di ineffabile e di intraducibile, di “puro”, e dunque di separato dal “pensiero”. Non sarebbe la prima volta che un pensiero introduce in se medesimo la spina d’una contraddizione, del tipo di quella di cui parla Kierkegaard ‘che se me la tolgo, muoio.’ (VDP, p. 251).

In order to document Fortini’s shift from a kind of modern classicism to a more contemporary choice of style, we shall see how his poetry gradually became an acute rendering of man’s existential discomfort, with the rhetorical recourse to the semantic fields of ‘error’, ‘contradiction’, and ‘denial’, the intertwined pattern of broken syntax and nightmarish sequences. As Lenzini notes in his essay ‘Il paesaggio della gioia. Osservazioni su Leopardi in Fortini’, the influence of Leopardi’s Canti, for instance, it is not central to Fortini’s mature poetry: ‘Non in senso statistico, al livello dell’interstualità nel senso più ampio (lessicale, metrico, tematico) […] Diciamo allora […] che la presenza di Leopardi è facilmente avvertibile soprattutto nella prima fase della poesia fortiniana: tra Fuglio di via, la raccolta d’esordio (‘46), e Poesia e errore (del ’59). Fortini did regard his discourse in the light of tradition, but did not make reference to the classics as to a body of commandments. Therefore, although rooted it in the Italian and European literary heritages, his poetry is also heir to modernism, resulting from a tensed focus on textual complexities.

Fortini has generally written intellectualist and ethical verse, which was half way between poetry and literary criticism, linking together politics, art and writings as interrelated instruments of his ideological discourse. Paolo Bonoldi notes:

> Ora elegiaci ora privati, ora di brutale graffio, ironia, denuncia, i suoi versi tracciano un percorso arduo e incerto, pieno di errori e inceppi, ma anche di minime, essenziali conquiste. L’autobiografia diventa storia autobiografica di una condizione e generazione storica, e la poesia va in cerca della verità, inquadrando scelte e contraddizioni, individuali e collettive, preliminari e parallele a questo tragitto.\(^{160}\)

Based on sociological and historical issues, his poems often addressed aspects of modern Italian civilization such as Fascism, the Resistance, industrialization, language and mass-media, the generation of ’68, terrorism, and political ideologies. For this reason, his poetry can be better understood by looking at its evident connections with the intertext of his critical writings in Verifica dei poteri, Saggi italiani (1974), Questioni di frontiera (1977) and Nuovi saggi italiani (1987), where there are two identifiable responses to the author’s sense of his role: one being a movement towards a dissenting, non-conformist use of materialist dialectic, the other a reconfiguration of the Renaissance pastoral mode and mindset, concerned with

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158 Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, Poeti italiani del Novecento, Milan: Mondadori, 1978, p. 830
159 Lenzini, Il poeta di nome Fortini, p. 53.
reconciling intellectuality with the irrational energies of nature. Fellow critics, who were close to him, such as Asor Rosa, Cesare Cases\(^{161}\) and Romano Luperini, tended to classify Fortini as a censor of any ethically ungrounded experimentalism.\(^{162}\) Yet as Mengaldo noted, Fortini also possessed the typical features of the lyric poet, who framed emotional and psychological questions in connection with feelings of fear, pain, and regret – poems that seem to contradict this rather ‘puritanical’ reputation.

In order to soften the severe judgement, I am here considering Fortini’s disposition towards an expressionist use of language, implying violent imagery, contradictions and paradoxes. In the above-mentioned works, which contribute to a correction of the ‘immagine vulgata’ of his modern classicism, Fortini’s poetic voice gradually renounces the strict criteria of measure, formal equilibrium and thematic sobriety to become more immediate and authentic. In pursuing this line of enquiry, I discuss the existence of themes derived from German Expressionism in Fortini’s later poetry, and identify the linguistic and thematic changes in the work he produced at the time when his discourse drew greatest profit from Adorno’s concept of the work of art as an indicator of the contradictions ingrained in reality. In each case, my approach aims to interpret the author’s ideological and aesthetic reasons for this change in style. Attention must now be focussed on Fortini’s assimilation of the discourses, codes and modes of the early German avant-gardes, in the second chronological block of his production.\(^{163}\) The Expressionist mode is, in fact, one of the most significant changes in Fortini’s poetry: influenced by Brecht, it displays an intensely radicalized political quest and a willingness to condemn its weaknesses and contradictions. This new stylistic direction is most fully worked out in his critical prose. In ‘Mandato degli scrittori e fine dell’antifascismo’, Fortini identifies the signs of Brecht’s dialectic discourse, and evaluates it from a largely sympathetic standpoint:

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\(^{161}\) Cesare Cases, one of Fortini’s closest fellow intellectuals, who under his influence published the critical study *Su Lukács. Vicende di un’interpretazione* (Turin, 1985) is one of those implicitly interactive presences in Fortini’s *oeuvre*. As Mengaldo observes in ‘I critici’, the two writers have much in common: like Fortini, Cases also exploited the semantic field of conflict and contradiction for his expressive critical register; both wrote extensively about Mann and Brecht and became involved in the theory of literary genres and their dialectic applications; for both, irony and aphoristic ability is the link between these different genres; and finally, Cases also frequently used the technique to compare classic authors with modern ones, or philosophers to writers. Yet unlike Cases, Fortini was also and foremost a poet, and thus, he could not avoid analysing poetry and literature from a deeper and more intimate angle. In ‘Leggendo Spitzer’, for example, commenting on Cases’s theory, via Lukács’s, about the artist’s partial awareness of what he is thinking in relation to what he is achieving, he comments: ‘L’opera d’arte non si risolve in critica. Non si media con il pensiero storico e filosofico’, ([Verifica dei poteri, p. 208](#)).

\(^{162}\) See in *Letteratura Italiana del Novecento*, both Mengaldo (pp.56-60) and Asor Rosa (p.445) on Fortini.

\(^{163}\) For useful surveys of German avant-gardes, see E. Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, 1997. It is important to mention the debate between Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács over the nature of Expressionism and the politics of the avant-garde, which took place in the pages of *Das Wort*. In one of the issues published in 1938, Bloch attacks Lukács both for having elaborated a doctrine of permanent neoclassicism that rejects the possibility of the avant-garde in capitalist society, and for dismissing any experimentation in the arts as decadent. In his response, Lukács stresses that all modern literary movements achieve only a frozen and superficial image of reality, because the social alienation of modern writers is such that they cannot portray any truth about society. The controversy expands to Brecht, who, in ‘Against Georg Lukács’– a ‘coda’ to the debate which for a long time remained unpublished – attacks Lukács’s dogmatic misinterpretation of Expressionism.
Brecht raffigura se stesso come uno dei 'savi e cortesi pieni d’ira e di speranza'; eppure non sa quanto anacronistica, medievale affatto, sia questa raffigurazione dello scrittore rivoluzionario. Meglio quando, nello stesso anno, parla del tetto di paglia danese e dice che i libri ingialliti, consumati rapporti/i mi sono scrittoio. Si è che in realtà Brecht visse l’una e l’altra funzione. (VDP, p. 153)

In order to better understand the way Fortini also sees himself as one of those ‘savi e cortesi pieni d’ira e di speranza’, and to amend the notion of his modern classicism, the canons of the classicist paradigm is reviewed in this chapter, relating as they do to the new themes and motives in the afore mentioned collections, Paesaggio con serpente and Composita solvantur. In fact, the definition of modern classicist applies to Fortini’s position with regard to the classical heritage rather than to his own poetics, which indeed shows a definite tendency towards expressionism. Fortini’s concern for the Italian literary heritage as a search for commonality is implicit in the very title of his 1990 collection of essays, Extrema ratio. Note per un buon uso delle rovine, which suggests that literary traditions are spaces which need to be radically restored. Fortini’s extremist ‘ratio’ thus implies choosing between history as memory and the poet’s virtue of relinquishing rhetorical control, as the poem ‘Il falso vecchio’ (Questo muro, 1973) obliquely states, with its clash of living and dead voices in the symbolic urban chaos:164

Quando si avvicinano i colombi i tacchini gridano.
Il muratore picchia sul muro col suo Martello.
Le auto inferocite assaltano le vie e le piazze.
I rumori più piccoli si posano dentro i più grandi
poi attraverso i viventi vanno via. (PS, p. 180)

As Mengaldo noted in his review of Questo muro, Fortini ‘si conferma grande poeta dell’allegoria e della parabola’.165 In this poem, the power of political discourse moves on several levels, the figurative and the theoretical, as Leonardo Lattarulo claims in his essay ‘Questo muro di Franco Fortini’.166 The attributes of the personifications, as they appear in the lines ‘Quando si avvicinano i colombi i tacchini gridano’ and ‘Le auto inferocite assaltano le vie e le piazze’, present the reader with a grotesque scenario of screaming turkeys, giving a comical warning of an imminent menace, and vehicles jammed in the traffic, interpreting the frustrated life style of the general public. This grotesque style of speech, which Fortini sets

within the urban environment, indeed 'scava la superficie oleografica dell'immagine dei luoghi, ne smaga l'aura e ne corrompe l'incanto. Insomma: ne interrompe la smerciabilità.'

At the metalevel, the evident density in the figures of speech, which present both allegories and symbols, indicates the poet's intention to obtain a formal representation of the very idea of 'contradiction' ('I rumori più piccoli si posano dentro i più grandi'). The violent atmosphere in the line 'Il muratore picchia col suo Martello' signifies the 1968 power-relations among those socialist writers who fought to define the party's strategies; at the iconographical level, the hammer may symbolize their attempt to solve the political impasse with obtuse determination. This imagery of a strident and inhospitable urban environment, which suggests both the construction and the demolition of an implicit dividing wall, gives an insight into the state of conflict of national life. As in Poesia e errore, here too Fortini adopts the dialectic expressionism ascribed to Brecht's critical materialism in order to highlight the conflict between the text's poetic function and critical discourse.

Similarly, Paesaggio con serpente and Composita solvantur make reference to those political issues to which Fortini also responded promptly in his journalist articles. Fortini's polemical interventions, whatever form they took, convey a radical critique of those historical phenomena of social and political tension which first characterized the 1968-1969 student demonstrations and political riots in the labour struggles of the 'Autunno caldo', and subsequently the chain-reaction of right and left-wing terrorism; this led to the so-called 'stragismo' and, in 1978, to the assassination of the Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, followed by the 'Compromesso storico', a pact between the Communist Party and the ruling Christian Democrats.

The other significant poem which discusses the continuous ideological clashes among post-war Italian intellectuals is 'Per un convegno di intellettuali', appearing in Una volta per sempre: 'Nelle menti come lo spazio è poco [...]/ Deformi anche i lamenti./ Ognuno pensa alla sua vendetta e vorrebbe esser morto.' (UVPS, p. 7). The poem underlines the existence of a twofold discourse in Fortini's poetics: the first is based on the determination to give predominance of the poetic 'logos', the second rooted in the theorization of 'contradiction' as the sole attainable reality, as noted by Luperini in his monographic study La lotta mentale and by Mengaldo in 'I critici', included in Letteratura Italiana del Novecento (2000). This feature was already visible in Fortini's 1954 poem 'Una facile allegoria':

Se domandi perché scrivo le parole  
e ascolto dove le scrivo gli accordi e i riposi,  
e come mai questo piacere e fatica,  
guarda questo pezzo di legno, la scheggia  
che la mano tocca, il secco della corteccia,

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167 Bettini, Terza ondata, p. 224.
Fortini here indicates very explicitly to the reader (‘Se mi chiedi perché scrivo’ [...] ‘e vedrai che è una facile allegoria’) that there is ‘another sense’ to which his poem refers (‘guarda questo pezzo di legno’). The intention is to abstract what is logical and intelligible from the elusive procedures of poetry’s rhetorical planes, thus creating a dialectic exchange between the text and the concept behind it, the text and history, the text and its structure, and finally between the text and its manifold interpretations. The internal strain between the poet’s tacit motives for writing verse (‘questo piacere e fatica’) and the chipped ‘pezzo di legno’ directs the reader towards the usefulness of allegorism (‘la scheggia che la mano tocca’, my emphasis). In a collection such as L’ospite ingrate, in addition to the demand for clarity and ethicality, a dark side of the author’s existential experience surfaces, through which he reworks the complex and self-contradictory genesis of his aesthetic and ideological theories. The relationship between what is observable in Fortini’s poetry, and what resolutely resists explanation will briefly be explained, and finally the gap between what is uttered and what remains unmistakably unspoken will be shown, looking especially at the poems in Poesia ed errore, and at those later texts such as L’ospite ingrato where Fortini attempts the oblique narrative of dream.68

Along with that of Ungaretti, Montale and Pasolini, Fortini’s poetry, then, represents an important part of the history of the post-war Italian literary scene. The close circle that his poetic discourse forms with the themes of these writers also encloses those of many foreign authors, including Brecht, Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Simone Weil, Kafka and Proust: it is therefore wholly appropriate to read his lyrics as a multiplicity of voices containing allusions to a large number of texts. It is also appropriate to open a comparison between Fortini’s speculative work and his poetry with a reflection on the problem of the inter-related languages in action throughout his production; this implies both a philological perspective and a thematic analysis of the author’s multi-layered cultural, rhetorical and stylistic codes and systems. This problem, which is related to the various genres that Fortini employs and to the analysis of their form, represents a fundamental theoretical complication not only for Fortini’s work but also, in a wider sense, for the many theories and discourses involved in the European post-war literary and political debate on the problem of language. In this, structuralism, neo-hermeneutics, deconstructionism and postmodernism all challenge the reader to play their part in contributing to a deeper awareness of poetry as a dialogic form. In a number of poems such

68 SINA, p. 12. In the preface, Fortini explains: ‘I lived the first part of my life convinced that poetry could act in some way against what I would call the “triumphant organization of bastards”. I do not believe this today. On the other hand, I have always distrusted politically committed poetry and to avoid this it is best to follow Brecht’s advice and switch on all the stage lights; in the stark glare the sense of statements is changed. Only this distancing effect and deliberate ambiguity make it possible to speak about contemporary history and our coordinates.’
as 'Il monologo del Tasso con Sant'Anna', 'Traducendo Milton', 'A Delio Tessa', 'Per le opere di Isaac Babel', 'Sereni esile mito', 'Per Pasolini', 'Diario linguistico', 'A Carlo Cassola', 'Da un verso di Corneille' and 'Traducendo Brecht', Fortini addresses his favourite authors. The intertextual nature of these poems is made apparent and even enhanced by the overt references in the titles, which clearly indicate Fortini's dialogic voice.

Because dialogism was going to become a marked feature of postmodernism, it is worth looking at the authors with whom Fortini entered into literary dialogue. In fact, in his poetry the practice of quoting from other works and other disciplinary fields, as in modernist theories such as those of Pound’s intertextuality and Eliot’s impersonality, recalls Lukács theory of the dialogue of genres. In this sense, the consciousness that the artist develops in relation to the formal way he perceives the world, does not in itself constitute an absolute guarantee that he is equally aware of the way he is ‘thinking’ the world: the artist’s consciousness of his tasks and achievements could in fact fail him, and negate his efforts to find a coherent system for his discourse. As grounds for this hypothesis, reference will be made to the question that occurs in the poetic language of Fortini in both *Questo muro* (1973) and *Paesaggio con serpente* (1984); this will provide a measure of his response to the appeals of literary traditions and movements as varied and irreconcilable Expressionism and the Baroque, one having its roots in the modernist crisis of realist and linguistic mimesis, the other in melodramatic mannerism. Although unrelated, no real idiosyncrasy can be detected between these modes and Fortini’s political posture, if we see, for instance, the Expressionist side of his poetry as a result of the intimate, lacerating impact of historical forces on the author’s writing.

In his monograph essay ‘Fortini e la contraddizione del poeta’ (1996), Nava endeavours to substantiate the dichotomies and contradictions in Fortini’s writings, making the elements of the divided image that the poet provides of himself converge. Nava acknowledges the poet in Fortini before the intellectual: ‘Nessuno più di lui è stato consapevole dell’irrilevanza e della marginalità a cui la società del tardo capitalismo ha ridotto l’attività del poeta, e più in generale la funzione dell’intellettuale’. The same judgement was expressed by Vittorio Sereni in ‘Un destino’, from *Per Franco Fortini* (1980), where he writes: ‘Perché è scomodo Fortini anche con la sua poesia? Probabilmente per la sua tendenza [...] alla traslazione [...] secondo parametri sociopolitici o più estesamente culturali [...] È la sua ascenzionalità.’

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169 In the *Sacred Wood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), Eliot claims that the artist must be conscious of the ways in which his work compares to that of its predecessors. He must be conscious of that peculiar borrowing which will lead to the exercise of what he calls the ‘continual extinction of personality.’ (40)


Like Nava, I here endeavour to reconnect, in one comprehensive portrait of Fortini, Fortini’s rigorous criticism and the expressionist and autobiographical elements in his later poetry. Yet, this combination of being both a critic and a poet was not particularly rare; in fact, a proportionately large number of the intellectuals involved, or associated with literary criticism in post-war Italy were practicing writers. Somehow, this domination of criticism by poets and novelists, which had mostly held from Pavese to Pasolini, intensified towards the end of the sixties when the neo-avant-garde, refusing to suppress the text’s discontinuities to produce illusory coherence, tried to assert some control over poetic technicality. The essay which best exemplifies Fortini’s position in the dispute is ‘Due avanguardie’, where talking about the avant-gardes, he alludes to his own vicissitudes as author:

La antitesi razionalità-irrazionalità, lo sappiamo tutti che è esaltata dalla cultura borghese ma non risolta dall’avanguardia se non nella simultaneità dei contrari. Continuiamo quindi ad impiegarla proprio perché allude ad una ben precisa eredità storica: è uno dei punti nei quali l’avanguardia non ha certo superato in nulla la cultura che credeva di combattere. (VDP, pp. 95-96)

As a matter of fact, the ‘way’ in which language controls the relationship between the poet and the world is particularly significant in Fortini’s ‘La partenza’ (‘Ti riconosco antico morso, ritornrai/tante volte e poi l’ultima’, Una volta per sempre, 1963) where these considerations substantiate his theoretical claim that ‘l’opera d’arte non si risolve in critica’ (VDP, p. 208). In poems such as ‘Dalla collina’ (see section 2.3), the poet’s reflections on knowledge and consciousness turn into questions about language itself – language as social practice, as political action, and as an ethical regulator within human relationships; in short, questions about the poet’s encounter with other people in given situations, whether culminating in effective dialogue or not. According to this view, language, the medium of the poetic Self within the external world, would assume its forms not so much from the lived personal experience of the poet, but from a sphere beyond the Self, culturally constructed from linguistic entities of a socio-historical nature.

From Poesia e errore (1969) on, Fortini’s attention to both contradiction and paradox, in language as in life, increases until it becomes all pervasive in Composita solvantur (1994) where he once more acknowledges the marginality of the poetic function. In the article ‘Le ossessioni di Fortini’, Pasolini explains the underlying theme of the new texts which Fortini adds to his previously published poems:

Si tratta di un gruppo di venticinque poesie recenti, scritte dal ’61 al ’68. Esse non rappresentano stilisticamente una novità, rispetto all’opera precedente. Si configurano anch’esse come una ‘fuga dallo zelo’, un ripensamento in una zona patetica – con caratteri un po’ crepuscolari e metafisici, che fanno pensare un po’ a Luzi – su argomenti trattati altrove, e con tanta maggior forza, necessità e genialità dall’autore in veste di saggista e di moralista: di uomo politico. Ciò che è curioso in queste poesie,
Per quanto riguarda il mio attuale interesse per la situazione politica, sono i riferimenti stilistici, su un piano un po’ ingenuamente metaforico, al mondo terminologico della guerra.\textsuperscript{173}

Pasolini continua: ‘Non c’è chi non veda qui una insanabile contraddizione nel fondo del rivoluzionario Fortini.’\textsuperscript{174} In fact, for Pasolini, the war to which he makes reference is not historical but purely imaginative and metaphorical, a curiously archaic and mannered conflict, producing, in Pasolini’s words, a kind of poetic remaking (‘poesia rifatta’), ‘che rivive, in falsetto,\textsuperscript{175} i sentimenti dei poeti seri (i padri)’, since it tries to decipher and make comprehensible the Leopardian and Montalian ascetic codes of expression. In the texts produced between 1987 and 1991, up to the Gulf War, Fortini’s style becomes the backdrop for an art that fights against a unified idiosyncratic poetry, by pervading it with melodrama and the logic of grotesque. The problem, thus, is to decipher this pastiche of styles, influences, and poetic symbolism and bring together the various levels of meaning.

In ‘Arte poetica’, one of the central poems in Poesia e errore, Fortini portrays the poet as a rigid public figure who, drawn into a sterile routine of aesthetic narcissism has lost the capacity of writing against the current political state of affairs. The underlying concern of the poem is with the ethicality of poetry. The poet seeks to explain his understanding of the role of his words, and subtly develops this argument against the censorship of books:

\begin{verbatim}
Tu occhi di carta e labbra di creta
Tu dalla prima saliva malfatto
Anima di strazio e ridicolo
Di allori finti e gesti

Tu di allarmi e rossori
Tu di debole cervello
Ladro di parole cieche
Uomo da dimenticare

Dichiara che il canto vero
È oltre il tuo sonno fondo
E i vortici bianchi del mondo
Per altre pupille in avvenire.

Scrivi che i veri uomini amici
Parlano oltre i tuoi giorni che presto
Saranno disfatti. E già li attendi. E questo
Solo ancora il tuo onore.

E voi parole mio odio e ribrezzo
Se non vi so liberare
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{173} Pasolini, Dialoghi, p. 593.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., p. 595.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p. 662. Recalling a term that Fortini had used to describe his juvenilia, in the brief article ‘Fasti autobiografici’, Pasolini offers a definition of ‘falsetto’ as a ‘sentimento formalizzato’. 
The poem offers a sarcastic definition of the author’s self-righteous stance, counterbalancing it with the prophetic capabilities of poetry (‘parole cieche’, ‘per pupille avvenire’) which enable it to the challenge and the assaults of time. Here the poet claims to hate his words and to disparage their rhetorical power (‘parole mio odio e ribrezzo’) which resulted in incomprehension for his readers. The statement can be transferred to the thorny nature of those inevitable interpretative processes which are triggered by any attempt at communication (‘dichiara’, ‘scrivi’, ‘parlano’). In fact, in the first stage of this process, when, characteristically, ‘a poem says one thing and means another’, the text presents itself as a cryptic system of a metrical, phonological and rhetorical nature, which should positively challenge the reader with its difficult signs to be interpreted. Fortini seems to claim that form has a tendency to be deceitful about its content, that is to be ‘tanto strumento di liberazione - o meglio: proposta, “spettro” di essa - quanto sua illusione.’

In fact, Fortini noted that to strengthen communication, while showing its impossibility, is an ideal weapon for any poet to achieve ‘de-realization’ and ‘estrangement’.

The verse sequence provides an understanding of Fortini’s inter-related discourses, which occur not only on an ideological level but also on the level of his stylistic strategies, which are better understood in terms of what they break away from, than by what they move towards. Stylistically, the language appears regressive, almost archaic, with a forcefully old-fashioned syntax. Similarly, the excessively elevated and literary nature of the content presents images of what constitutes a classic poet (‘Tu occhi di carta e labbra di creta’). A strong and firm voice, abstract and academic, can be clearly perceived, addressing the issue of _Ars poetica_ from an academic point of view (‘di allori finti e gesti’). A sense of painful isolation is equally emphasized in order to dramatize the poet’s feeling of seclusion, which arises from an internal struggle leading to mental and emotional instability (‘debole di cervello’, ‘dichiara che il canto vero/ è oltre il tuo sonno fondo...’). While calling on the readers as spectators (‘pupille in avvenire’), the text puts the blame on its very instruments, the words, which are charged with blindness as a synonym of insensitiveness.

Sight is recurrent in Fortini’s poetics (2.3), whereby the truth that opens up before the readers’ eyes is neither simple nor coherent, and it imposes on them its quarrelsome vocabulary of ‘contraddittorietà’, ‘conflitto’, ‘opposizione’, ‘disunione’, ‘sdoppiamento’, as Mengaldo points out. The poem’s ultimate message is that the true rhetorical virtue of

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177 Ibid., pp. 142-144.
poetry lies in its ability to unchain its language and confront censorship with its liberated words. As a result, the imperative ('non vi spezzate'), used in the final line to address the poet’s words themselves, suggests the hope and will to resist dissolution. This theme will return in *Composita solvantur* (1994),\(^{180}\) where rhetorical constraints are unlocked by recourse to the semantic fields of death and rebirth, and the use of keywords from the Natural world, such as ‘air’, ‘roots’, ‘plants’, ‘grasses’, ‘animals’, ‘months’, with the latter playing at the edge where the city dissolves into the countryside, summer into autumn, night into dawn, bringing to mind memories.

Politics and ideology are the controversial matters which inspire another remarkable text, ‘E vorreste non parlassero’, published in 1980, which alludes mordantly to the notion of turning poetry’s ideological battles into a conflict of aesthetics. Noticeable is Fortini’s frequent use of key words that refer to an aesthetic and ideological type of ‘battle’, in order to assert the autonomy of the arts through form. In this context, it is worth remembering Brecht’s poem ‘A coloro che verranno’,\(^{181}\) which acts as a model for Fortini, with its incitement to enact a struggle against the negative aspects of western civilization: ‘Il mio pane lo mangiai tra le battaglie/ Per dormire mi stesi in mezzo agli assassini’.\(^{182}\) On the other hand, Fortini’s frequent use of aphorisms and theoretical statements seems to balance the tendency towards poetic negation and self-negation: in fact, the line ‘Ah, la lingua *combatte*/ dove il *niente* duole’ (LOI, p. 334), reflects the judgement of the reasoning mind over the inclination to pessimism characteristic of Fortini’s poetic language. In an article ‘Poesia e libertà’, which appeared in *Il Politecnico*, Fortini writes:

> Scrivere poesie è un modo difficile e severo, come quello dello scienziato, dell’economista e dello storico, di comprendere e di spiegare il mondo. [...] Ma nella poesia del poeta, quelle parole che ciascuno poteva comprendere, non sembrano più essere le solite; qualcosa le ha trasformate e fatte come nuove [...] dicono una cosa, ma insieme ne dicono un’altra, e un’altra ancora, dietro, in penombra, come se risuonassero. Perché infatti c’è dentro una musica nuova; e un modo di presentarsi delle parole, d’accostarsi e d’echeggiare, che non si richiede più se quel che dicono sia vero o falso o a che cosa serva, anche se pur si senta dentro, come riunita e serrata, tanta sapienza, esperienza, amore.\(^{183}\)

In this extract, the author’s idea of *ars poetica*, with its ethical substance and loftiness of theme, informs form itself,\(^{184}\) and is in turn informed by it. Nevertheless, Fortini does not fail to acknowledge the fact that contemporary poetry, overwhelmed by all the contradictions of the culture-industry, has become ‘lettu ra e amore di minuscole minoranze, borghesi e

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180 The title suggests the idea that what was joined must be dissolved.
181 For Fortini, the translation of Brecht represents a symbolic passage in the history of twentieth-century Italian aesthetic and ideological debate. In the issue no. 10 of *Il Politecnico* (1946), Vittorini welcomes Fortini’s ‘La ballata del soldato morto’, and soon thereafter ‘L’opera da tre soldi’.
The author is aware, as has already been noted, that in modern times poetry belongs to a privileged bourgeois group of intellectuals and speaks a metalinguistic language, even when it seems to be expressing ethical and political concerns. During an interview with Éluard (1946), Fortini questions the poet as to whether a universal poetic language is possible — that is, if the superior linguistic stage that poetry allows, theorized by Walter Benjamin, is ever achievable. Éluard replies:

La poesia non è eterna. O meglio, il concetto di poesia sparirà il giorno nel quale la capacità poetica di ogni uomo sarà liberata. Non vi saranno più poeti laddove tutti lo siamo. Non esistono, per me, tecniche poetiche né assoluti poetici. E non credo nemmeno a una differenziazione profonda delle tecniche: un legame costante lega gli uomini in tempi e situazioni dissimili. Naturalmente quest’immediatezza della poesia implica un’oscurità che la filologia è incaricata a chiarire: ma ogni vera poesia resiste all’indagine.

Éluard defines poetry in its complex and obscure philological depths, which resist explanation: poetry negates any impositions coming from authority and is faithful only to its own causes and effects. These suggestions and themes animate Fortini’s early collections Foglio di via (1946) and I destini generali (1956), but remain influential indeed throughout his entire career as a poet; we see their presence in poems as distanced in time as ‘Cimitero degli inglesi’(1947), ‘La realtà’ (1984) and ‘Canzonette per il Golfo’ (1994). Yet Éluard represents an authority to which Fortini conforms only relatively, as is the case with Éluard’s idea that political activism serves ‘civil’ struggle — a function embraced by the European communist artists, and, in Italy, by Pasolini; Fortini remains partially sceptical of this notion, as he states in his critical book Il movimento surrealista (1959), preferring the tragic appeal of anarchist discourse. In the essay ‘Le ultime parole’(1974), he states:

Il discorso anarchico tende ad essere un monologo e un esempio. È una finzione di comunicazione, aggredisce, contrappone rigidamente due blocchi. Fra i tempi verbali, domina il presente. Il futuro — di vendetta o trionfo — è vissuto come qualcosa di separato, come l’ambito di una resurrezione, non di una continuità. [...] In conclusione, il discorso comunista nega la morte, quello anarchico vuole sostenerne la vista. (QF, p. 32)

This extract contains two important sub-themes for Fortini’s poetry — the theme of the present (1.2) as the affirmation of the necessity for poetic inspiration, and the theme of sight (2.3) as an epistemological search for the connection between subject and reality — destined to become central issues in his whole production, as Nava states in Fortini e la contraddizione del poeta

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184 See Fortini’s use of ‘alloro’, ‘allori’ in both ‘Arte poetica’ and La poesia delle rose.
186 Ibid., p. 38.
In 1980, in his introduction to *Una obbedienza*, Andrea Zanzotto comments on these stylistic and thematic features:

(Tale creatività è) da lui stesso continuamente sospettata e tenuta a bada [...] e costretta a dissimularsi in filigrana magari in un saggio politico, o in qualche inedita, e addirittura 'fantastica' angolatura da cui egli pone un problema a carattere storico e sociale. Se tutto ciò ha una sua importanza, resta però il fatto che soltanto nel risucchio prevaricante del lavoro poetico *stricto sensu*, nel tetro e goloso artigianato della costruzione, manipolazione, scoperta dei 'versi' può realizzarsi, appunto, un minimo di verità.\(^{187}\)

Following this indication, I shall now investigate Fortini's ways of identifying the different lyric 'selves' at work in his poems and how this awareness allowed him formal control over his underlying discourse. Intertextuality and metacriticism constitute essential components of this process, for which the Self is a perpetually renewed and rewritten narrative, as claimed by Jerome Bruner. From this perspective, poetry is one of the many ways we use to make sense of the world.\(^{188}\)

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Chapter 2

2. The poetry

Essere scrittore significa sapere portare al massimo di coerenza questa diversità, usando il linguaggio, non già essendone usati. Essere poeta significa arrivare a fingere di essere usati dal linguaggio, di essere attraversati come da un dio, di diventare tramite (LOI, 1988).

In the first Chapter, I have examined how, in the second half of the twentieth century, the vast range of Fortini’s writings in the field of politics and sociology of literature contributed significantly to establish his role as an intellectual authority; as a result, this fame in some way overshadowed his importance as a lyric poet. In fact, if on one hand, the present age demands that poets be ‘self-conscious’ about their roles and deeds, on another hand, an excessive engagement in criticism may be counterproductive. Despite Fortini was well aware of the risks of maintaining a poetic discourse, which too explicitly disclosed its method and ideology, he never restrained from critical and theoretical activities; indeed, his political engagement, which amplified and improved the focus of his criticism, informed, reinforced and constantly transformed his poetry, as documented by the two volumes Disobbedienze. Gli anni dei movimenti: scritti sul manifesto (1997). I believe that his best lyric qualities were actually revealed and reinforced by Fortini’s efforts to hold together these different forms of expression. In the overall balance of these literary activities, Fortini’s career as translator acted as a bridge between these two intellectual and artistic landscapes. This complex system of infra and extratext sets Fortini’s oeuvre very much in tune with its literary and cultural moment, since a knowledgeable self-consciousness about the act of writing, and specifically, about the congruence between poetry and literary criticism, has characterized the academic world since the early 1960s. Technically speaking, these fields widened Fortini’s spheres of interventions from textual analysis to ‘metapoetry’, that is, to the kind of self-conscious poetry, which constantly sought to justify itself and its existence, as we shall see in this second chapter.

Fortini’s relative marginality as a poet was not only due to the preponderance of his academic role, but also to the ‘unpalatability’ of his arguments, whose content may have at times appeared too knotty or disagreeable to the surrounding audience, as we can grasp from the violently surrealistic image of a ranting ‘testarecisa/ che apre e chiude sempre più lente le

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1 In relation to the idea of poetry as a sacred type of language, see Roberto Bugliani’s analysis of Fortini’s idea of poetic language, in Poesia e divinità. Di alcuni luoghi nella poesia di Franco Fortini in Allegoria, VIII, no. 21-22, N.S. 1966, pp. 91-108.
labbra’ in the poem ‘La posizione’ (*Questo muro*, 1973). We can interpret this image as the personification of ‘criticism’ itself:

\[\text{E se altre notizie volete possiamo dirvi che su nel cielo il freddo animale immaginario piange. E se taluno troverà nel portabagagli una testa recisa che apre e chiude sempre più lente le labbra talaltro avrà i giornali e i mirtilli d’una volta. (PS, p. 153)}\]

I am not arguing here the priority of the political interpretation of these lines over the psychoanalytic, the stylistic, the ethical, or the structural, since the huge relevance of Fortini’s political perspective, as an essential method to decode his message, is self-evident. The daintily symbolism of the ‘freddo animale immaginario’ brings back to mind Luis Buñuel’s surrealistic violence; the narrator informs us of the way the self-absorbed critic, utterly preoccupied with his own subject and his own forms of expression, broadcasts his unreliable opinions through the media. We can clearly sense the vehemence of Fortini’s instructive moralities, placing imagination above the historical world, yet submitting that world to scrutiny from a perspective that is beyond its reality. The different modes of these lines – the lyric, the surrealist, the narrative, and the dramatic – are designed to convey a sense of unity of the author’s discourse; analytical and dialectical, yet also aggressive, emotional and introspective, Fortini’s verse had to struggle to finally gain the readership that the author deserved.

To investigate the reasons behind this relative unpopularity, I therefore aim to look especially at the poetry collections that Fortini produced soon after the Communist crisis in 1956 and during the turbulent year of ‘68, in the period when Fortini’s political involvement on the literary scene became highly provocative and controversial; these two periods reveal the struggle for expression of a poetic Self that was learning the relativity of its values, while still striving to portray the contradictions of an age in crisis, as we shall see in *Poesia e errore* (1959), *Poesia delle rose* (1962) and *Questo muro* (1973).

Since the ethical components in Fortini’s work have been extensively underlined by critics such as Romano Luperini, Giuseppe Nava, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, Alfonso Berardinelli and Thomas E. Peterson, clarification will now be sought of his distinctive skill in keeping the complexities of his own multifaceted point of view on poetry in dialectical balance.\(^3\) In fact, although civic society, even in the more intimate poems, is a vital part of Fortini’s poetry, signifying a normative tendency, which tries to transcend mere subjectivity,

\[^2\text{It is interesting to note that, one year later, the image of a severed head appears also in one of Antonio Porta’s surrealist poems in his collection \textit{Week-end: Poesie: 1971-73}, Rome: Coperativa scrittori, 1974.}\]

\[^3\text{The most helpful critical study for understanding the presence of dichotomous forces in contemporary poetry is Alfonso Berardinelli’s \textit{L’esteta e il politico}, published in 1986. Indeed, in Fortini’s collections, the stylist and the moralist closely collaborate in his exploration of imagination.}\]
in his late poetry, society, like politics, becomes deeply contradictory and is treated with bitter irony, as Walter Loddi suggests in his essay ‘Metafisica dell’ironia: note all’ultimo Fortini’. Leaving behind both the sectarian disputes raging among his fellow writers and the historical pressure of the times, and shifting from strained irony, measure and neutrality to wholesome lyricism, and from political vehemence to emotion and compassion, Fortini finally gave his poetry a greater freedom to assert the natural expressionist tendencies that had already manifested themselves at the time of *Poesia e errore* in poems such as ‘I destini generali’, and ‘Al di là della speranza’.  

In order to approach Fortini’s poetry, I will first consider one particular recurring topic, present and prefigured in his theoretical discourse on poetics, that is, his notion of ‘form’, which is central also to my analysis of the various languages and genres employed by the author. In fact, this argument will help to demonstrate how Fortini’s notion of form matches what takes place in some of Fortini’s metapoems, but at a less abstract level. With a bit of luck, the following considerations will give a fuller sense of what he meant throughout his theoretical writings on the shape, structure and manner in which poetry achieves its effects.

### 2.1. The question of form

If literariness is the primary objective in interpreting literary works whose value is expressive rather than scientific, then, in Fortini’s writings, the notion of form ought to be given central importance. Most critics who have intervened on Fortini’s formalist perspective would probably agree that his writings on this matter are difficult, highly theoretical and, at times, contradictory: occasionally, he offered suggestions, which were made in the most tortuous way. In fact, as Mengaldo noticed in his preface to *Poesie scelte*,

> avversa alle tendenze e quasi in lotta con il suo stesso autore, la poesia di Fortini si è definita ora interprete ora antagonista della sua persona lirica e della storia di tutti. [...] Così la poesia di Fortini si trova esposta a due forme opposte e speculari di accusa. Da destra, e sulla base di non spenti di ideali di poesia ‘pura’, quella di essere gravata da un eccesso di contenuti ‘pratici’, impoetici o extrapoetici; da sinistra quella di risultare invece defilata, o peggio, arretrata rispetto alle posizioni ideologiche di cui il Fortini politico si vuole partecipe [...] Non è il caso di analizzare qui i precedenti, nell’ambito del pensiero marxista, di queste tesi (i ricordati Benjamin e Adorno ma anche Brecht [...] e naturalmente, fra i classici, Schiller [...]); né di discutere la consistenza teorica, che comporterebbe il riesame di tutto il pensiero fortiniano sull’argomento, estremamente fluido e anche, perché no?, contraddittorio. Certamente le perplessità non mancherebbero. (PS, 12-13)

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Fortini's poetry, in Mengaldo's words, shows contradictory traces of both his intellectual dialogue with Benjamin, Adorno and Brecht ('Fare e disfare', 'Traducendo Brecht', 'Dopo una strage', 'I destini generali') and a preference for classic poetry ('Sestina di Firenze', 'Da un verso di Corneille', 'Traducendo Milton', 'Metrica e biografia'). Mengaldo added: 'Ma resta che queste, o analoghe, posizioni teoriche illuminano vivacemente il fare poetico di Fortini, e ne sono a loro volta illuminate.' (PS, p. 13) In what follows the majority of what I consider to be Fortini's most provocative and productive notions on form are to be found. I hope that this discussion will reveal some of the utopian inferences of Fortini's theory on his principles of poetic praxis, which somehow were reluctant to acknowledge that 'ideology's essential weakness is that it can never recognize for itself its own real limits: at best it can learn these limits from elsewhere, in the action of a radical criticism'.

In an interview with Alfonso Berardinelli, published in June 1978, Fortini listed the three fundamental issues at the root of the tension between his critical writings and his poetry:

vent'anni di esperienza, prima come giornalista, poi come copywriter [...] e poi un decennio di insegnamento mi hanno reso professionalmente capace di scrivere 'chiaro', se voglio, ossia di scrivere nel modo che molti credono sia quello della chiarezza. Ma l'oscurità o l'intrico, quando non si tratta di incapacità tecnica, mi nascono dalla concorrenza di almeno tre elementi. Il primo è la scelta, più o meno cosciente, dei destinatari; e va da sé che non si parli qui di difficoltà derivanti dall'uso di terminologia tecnica. Scegliere dati interlocutori è scegliere un codice di riferimenti e di allusioni [...]. E ho parlato nel gergo di una setta. [...] Il secondo elemento è la condizione del linguaggio nella cultura circostante; dico del linguaggio, dovrei dire di tutte le forme della comunicazione. Il caos e l'arbitrio, il rifiuto di ogni convenzione formale, la pretesa di un diritto spontaneo della parola: sono cresciuto nell'assenza di 'forme', nella esaltazione dell'anarchia espressiva. Ma il terzo elemento è il più importante dei tre: ed è che la difficoltà, l'oscurità, il fumo si accompagnano necessariamente ad ogni discorso che si rifiuta di piegarsi perché ha al proprio centro una proposta o una allusione di totalità.'

Fortini claimed that the obscurity and complexity of his literary practices originated firstly from a conscious sociolinguistic choice ('gergo di una setta'), and secondly from the 'state' of the language he employed in a specific time and culture: 'Ma il terzo elemento è il più importante dei tre: ed è che la difficoltà, l'oscurità, il fumo si accompagnano necessariamente ad ogni discorso che si rifiuta di piegarsi perché ha al proprio centro una proposta o una allusione di totalità.' Thus, the analysis of a given aesthetic form would basically imply the assessment of the poet's inner resistance to conventional literary codes. This requires a positive value to be attributed to obscurity itself as capable of contributing to the polysemy of

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Fortini here indicates the existence of a specific variety of academic jargon, which gives readers clues about its social background and hierarchical stratification. See Peter Trudgill, Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society, London: Penguin, 1974, pp. 22-23: 'The internal differentiation of human societies is reflected in their languages. Different social groups use different linguistic varieties.'
Berardinelli, Fortini, p. 2.
poetic discourse. A strictly conceived, utopian clarity can indeed become ‘la spia della oscurità connessa alla parola, all’organismo e al suo morire’. Fortini attributed his ‘scrivere difficile’ also to the very turbid nature of his own way of thinking, incapable of transparency and prone to ambivalence, tension, ambiguity, dichotomy and even paradox, as proved by the recurrence in his writings of antonyms such as ‘order and disorder’ and ‘clarity and obscurity’. Such self-mocking definition aims to emphasize the value of complexity as such: in the instance of Fortini’s own poetry, this deliberate obscurity implied an elliptical style with constant, recondite allusions to past and/or foreign traditions:

Sono, nonostante tutto, così persuaso della necessità profonda di insegnare a tutti la complessità, di lottare contro le semplificazioni apparenti e ingannevoli, che la sola via diritta a dire una cosa mi pare quella obliqua.\(^\text{41}\)

The paradox ‘mi pare che la sola via diretta sia quella obliqua’ tells us that the terms ‘complexity’ and ‘obscurity’ are used here as substitutes for ‘literariness’ and ‘intertextuality’.

In ‘Poesia e antagonismo’, a central essay in Questioni di frontiera, we find a meaningful analysis of literary forms, which explains how the phonic and morpho-syntactic elements in a text, that is, its thematic, ideological and historical components, are in a hierarchical relationship of importance, or of dominance, within the institutions of power. Fortini claimed: ‘Da Tynyanov assume la definizione di forma come unità linguistica dinamica nella quale i fattori sono gerarchicamente distribuiti in presenza, di volta in volta, di una dominante’ (RPTP, p. 16). If, from a formalist perspective, Tynyanov’s analysis of the Gogol-Dostoyevsky relationship influenced Fortini’s idea of the mutual relationship between style and genre, it is the works of Lacan and Kristeva which support his understanding of the poet’s poetic experience (of the world) as attained within language:

I significati dei significati fonosimbolici, per esempio, e quelli del sistema delle convenzioni ritmico-metriche, per non dire le aree connotative delle scelte lessicali, sono significati costituiti storicamente che dalla dimensione esplicitamente ‘contenutistica’ posseduta in altre età sono entrati nella penombra e ora parlano o sembrano parlare con la voce dell’inconscio, col ‘mistero della parola’, con la grammatica dell’Altro. (QF, p. 144)

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10 Ibid., p. 2.
11 Ibid., p. 3
12 This follows Tynyanov’s argument in the essays ‘Dostoyevsky und Gogol’ (1921) and ‘Über literarische Evolution’ (1927), published in Die literarischen Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur. Tynyanov, whose theory of genres and genre dynamics illuminates Fortini’s own theory of translation in Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica (1989), discusses the mechanisms of the dialogic relationship between genres, styles, and their parodies. Drawing mainly on Dostoyevsky’s relationship to Gogol, Tynyanov demonstrates that in contemporary criticism this relationship has primarily been perceived in terms of categories of intertextual influence. Yet Tynyanov discards this perception as unsatisfactory, showing that Dostoyevsky absorbs Gogol’s influence in a way that utterly transforms and transcends it.
While intertextuality, in terms of the poem’s ‘significati costituiti storicamente’, is seen as a compositional device, Fortini stressed that literary language, as a set of conventions, often transcends the poet’s awareness of his/her own tools (‘parlano o sembrano parlare con la voce dell’inconscio’). The content of this passage from *Questioni di frontiera* is the very theme of Fortini’s metacriticism in ‘Metrica e biografia’:

In alto, all’aria erta, ai fili d’erba,
Ai voli esili e ripidi dei rami:

Nella grotte più chiuse dove cupa
Molto contro le mura, onda, tu tuoni;

Dentro l’afa di calce media e merce
Dove l’ossido falso di disfa;

Una ho portata costante figura,
Storia e natura, mia e non mia, che insiste;

Derisa impresa, ironia che resiste,
E contesa che dura. (PS, p. 96)

The poem’s final horizon is ‘a space in which History becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding’ of the world, ‘in general and our textual interpretation in particular’ (‘Derisa impresa’), as stressed by Fredric Jameson: ‘It would seem therefore more useful to ask ourselves, in conclusion, how History as a ground and as an absent cause can be conceived in such a way as to resist (‘E contesa che dura’) such thematization or reification.\(^\text{13}\)

If one can assume Pierre Macherey is right in asserting that ‘the text says what it does not say’,\(^\text{14}\) one is drawn to investigate Fortini’s notion of ‘form’ as an all-important tool for the ‘recognition of the area of shadow’ in or around his work and to see it as being indispensable for a critical understanding of his poetic voice. I shall draw attention to a crucial passage in ‘Poesia e antagonismo’, in which Fortini criticizes Adorno’s faith in poetic language (‘ripresa dal vecchio tema di Lukács, secondo il quale la “superiore onestà dell’artista” [...] può averla vinta sull’ideologia’, QF, p. 142) as a potentially revolutionary form (‘portata morale e rivoluzionaria’, OF, p. 142). On the contrary, Fortini claimed, ‘al di là della poeticità corrotta e del linguaggio artistico logorato, la “forma letteraria” ha a che fare con un universo ideologico e storico, una parte del quale ne legittima l’esistenza formale mentre un’altra glielo nega’ (QF, p. 147). This statement seems to clash with a former


hypothesis in the essay ‘Leggendo Spitzer’ (Verifica dei poteri), where, commenting upon Spitzer’s claim of the supremacy of form over discourse, Fortini noted:

L’opera d’arte non si risolve in critica. Non si media con il pensiero storico e filosofico. Quel che ha da essere, lo è direttamente: educando a rilevare e ordinare il mondo secondo moduli suoi propri, con una continua ‘proposta di essere’ che chiama la trasformazione. L’opera di poesia ci sta di fronte. (VDP, pp. 208-209)

As it is evident, the extract is concerned with discussing the artistic function, which resides in the work of art’s intrinsic form as opposed to the ideological superstructure, which regulates its motives and raison d’être. Form and content, medium and concept, are thus inseparable, with the formal features shaping the poem’s content. This owns much to Lukács’s idea that,

in order for the form to reign, there must be resistance [...] because power without resistance is dysfunctional [...] The essence of art is to formulate things, to overcome resistance, to bring under yoke the hostile forces, to forge a unity out of the diverse and divergent. To create form: to pronounce the last judgement on things; this last judgement redeems what is redeemable, and its near-divine power dispenses grace. The form: the maximum expression of potential forces in a given situation: this constitutes the true ethic of forms.

The romantic theory of organic form, developed by New Criticism in the twentieth century as a comprehensive definition of poetic form, has also some relevance here: the various formal features of poetic language are in fact said to embody (‘carica di energia potenziale’), rather than merely be a sign of, a poem’s meaning:

Apparentemente, essa [la poesia] non chiede nulla [...] si può aggiungere che l’opera d’arte appare carica di energia potenziale e non attuale proprio perché unisce l’apparente casualità di un oggetto di natura con la latente violenza d’una intenzionalità umana. (VDP, pp. 208-209)

The text is not simply a montage, but a reworking of these utterances, which results in a lying bare of their ideologies.

15 In the same essay, Fortini noted how, in Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1796, New York, 1966), Schiller’s search for the sublime already underlined the inner conflict between ‘nature’ and ‘freedom’, ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ that modern poetry tries to reconcile in the ‘sentimental’. The perspective of this essay finds inspiration in Fortini’s appreciation of Schiller’s Aesthetic Education of Men (1795, trans. Oxford, 1967), a work that had a notable influence on his critical ideas about the role of literary institutions in both the social and political spheres. Schiller’s sceptical thought feeds Fortini’s doubts as to whether rebellion itself can offer real resistance to institutionalised powers. Devaluing the mere linguistic nature of the ‘neosperimentalismo antididascalico’, Fortini laments the loss, in the present, of the kind of equilibrium that transfigures Schiller’s work with an invaluable ‘energia potenziale e non attuale proprio perché unisce l’apparente casualità d’un oggetto di natura con la latente violenza d’una intenzionalità umana.’ The model for this criticism is Lukács’s seminal essay ‘Aesthetic Culture’ (1910), which analyses the work of Thomas Mann, Arthur Schnitzler and August Strindberg, placing stress on the effects of permanent tragedy.

16 Kadarkay, The Lukács Reader, p. 150.
Thus, readers should pay attention not only on what a poem says but on ‘how’ it says it. Fortini came closer also to Pirandello’s understanding of form: ‘l’opera proprio perché chiusa potrebbe essere arma a comprendere la realtà aperta e informale’ (DCP, 20). For a closer insight into the above statement, reference must be made to Goldmann’s Marxist epistemology, in particular his chapter in *Recherches dialectiques* (1980) on dialectical materialism and the history of dialectical literature. According to Goldmann, whether or not dialectical literature will influence the course of history and effect changes in society is a matter of necessity and not of programmatic intention. Inspired by Lukács’s discussion in ‘The writer and the critic’, the sub-content of Goldmann’s theory is a criticism of the very notion of *littérature engagée*, which attacks the revolutionary claims of the new **avant-garde**. Goldmann’s sociological analysis of literature is discussed by Fortini in ‘Deus Absconditus’, where he writes:


Fortini here recalls the existence of two conflicting poles in Marxist literary criticism: firstly, that of a militant, normative criticism, representing the official doctrines of the parties, or the State, which denounced formalist artists as potential reactionaries; and secondly, that of the multiple Hegelian-Marxist orientations, represented primarily by both the philosophical criticism of Lukács who recommended a committed literature of social realism and that of the Frankfurt School of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, and Marcuse, which stood for a kind of criticism that attempted to explain literary phenomena and the genesis of art forms via a negative dialectics: ‘La contraddizione in questi pensatori non è più scandalosa, ma istituzionale’, (VDP, p. 225). Years later, in the occasion of the 1993 interview ‘Come si scrivono le poesie’, Fortini offered another definition of form which goes beyond the opposition ‘true/false’:

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18 See L. Goldmann, *Recherches dialectiques*, Paris: Gallimard, 1980, p. 45. For Goldmann, the true spiritual values of a work of art are not independent of its socio-economic reality. In fact, the work of art relates precisely to this reality by trying to solicit human solidarity and a sense of community. It is not a question of explaining a given work by looking at the biography of its author and the social influences which it received. Work proceeds by an autonomous, internal logic, which is the expression of a vision of the world which should be considered: it is the creation of an autonomous universe. This romantic, theatrical, poetic universe emerges out of the conscience of the artist, not according to any linear determinations, but according to a hidden scheme, which translates the visionary, imaginary world interiorized by the author.
19 For the author’s early discussion on Lukács, see Franco Fortini, ‘Lukács in Italia’, published in *Officina* (no. sp.2, 1959).
Essi, [i poeti] per esprimersi, adoperano delle parole, una lingua; che è talora quella della madre loro, della loro strada o del loro popolo; o che spesso è antica e consunta come un pietra levigata. Ma nella poesia del poeta, quelle parole, che ciascuno poteva comprendere, non sembrano più essere le solite; qualcosa le ha trasformate e fatte come nuove... Percé infatti c’è dentro una musica nuova; un modo di presentarsi delle parole, d’accostarsi e d’echeggiare, che non richiede più se quel che dicono sia vero o falso e a che cosa serva.21

Fortini here seems to assert that poetry needs authors able to oppose, from within ‘language’ and ‘form’ themselves, those tensions which distress the artist and, at the same time, motivate his/her actions. Indeed, through devotion to poetic form, in Lukácsian terms, the artist can help resist the damage caused by capitalism:

Cioè lì, nella pagina scritta, in quella nuova musica a cui non si può togliere nulla, perfetta. È la forma, quella, il lavoro del poeta, un prestito che egli fa con la sua fatica a chi voglia avere la pazienza di saperlo leggere, perché ciascuno possa vedere quel che egli ha veduto, amare quello che egli ha amato e dirselo, il lettore, esprimerlo a se stesso tutto questo, con quelle sue medesime parole; e quindi chiedere la pagina, divenuto per quel suo regalo più ricco di coscienza, che è come dire: più uomo.22

The cited passage conveys the idea that a good poem’s content ought to deal with the full complexities and richness of human life, and that its form as the interplay of all the poet’s technical devices ought to present an equivalent richness and complexity.23 Fortini explains that, in mass society, there are negative forces, which defeat the artist’s integrity, and endeavour to seduce his/her art into accepting an invitation to sit at the table of the mighty wielders of institutional power. In the 1967 essay ‘Il paesaggio della gioia’ on Leopardi’s poetry, facing the issue of the poet’s contradictions, Fortini noted:

La poesia, o meglio la poesia lirica (o meglio ancora la poesia lirica dell’età moderna) è stata (e non lo è più) quella contraddizione e quella spina nel costato del pensiero dei pensatori. (VDP, pp. 253-254)

In La lotta mentale, Luperini points out how this paradox represents Fortini’s belief that it is possible to secure the historicity of poetry and preserve its past by safeguarding poetic form as such: ‘La forma, infatti, per Fortini, non è solo annuncio di futuro, è anche realtà di presente e peso di passato; non è solo anticipazione di un nuovo assetto sociale, è anche attributo della classe dominante.24 This attitude towards form is highly sophisticated, since, as Luperini notes, by ‘riducendola a maniera, essiccandola in pura retorica’, Fortini enhanced

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20 The impact of Goldmann’s defence of the spirit of tragedy is strong on Fortini’s critical writings, also in Le rose dell’Abisso (2000).
21 From the interview ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’, RAI Educational, Milan, 8 May 1993.
22 Ibid., 'Che cos’è la poesia?', RAI Educational.
its power. In fact, his recourse to traditional rhetorical tools, paradoxically, cultivates poetry as a ground for a more effective form of revolt: ‘La rosa è la rivoluzione e il desiderio inconscio’. In Summer is not all, Fortini is willing to clarify this concept:

I have always distrusted ‘inspiration’ and I have put my money on rhetorical organization. What many have sought in the centrifugal breaking down of the linguistic cell, or in the mimicry of ordinary speech, or in a disregard for syntax, or even in the retrieval of dialect and jargon, I have found in the museum of forms. Mannerism.

Yet, the simple sabotage of all the rules that govern poetic utterances, Fortini explained, does not alone constitute a revolutionary tool, as Adorno claimed, in his defence of the avant-gardes. Fortini then assured, ‘l’esito formale, l’intima coerenza eccetera non sono il criterio di eccellenza ma solo una sua frazione’ (QF, p. 147). Having stressed this, he then claimed to prefer Baroque mannerism and the Romantic stance to the avant-garde idea of formal disorder:

Someone said that classicism is only a Baroque rope drawn tight, and Mandel’štam claimed that classical poetry was the poetry of revolution [...] For my part, I have always preferred the death-mask of classicism to the convulsive cast of the surrealists — unless the two can be superimposed.

In Fortini’s poetry, these two styles — that is classicism and expressionism — can, in fact, be superimposed, as it will be proved; moreover, the inner scope of classic texts that are ‘re-written’, or imitated belong exactly to this intertextual formalism, as it will be shown in some fragments of La poesia delle rose (2.4). Thus, despite the cited theoretical assertions, Fortini occasionally allowed himself some degree of ambiguity and uncertainly on what form ought to be:  

Non mi chiedete cosa sia la poesia. Piuttosto, sono io stesso a chiedermi cosa da sempre mi aspetto che sia. E la mia risposta sarebbe: una costruzione verbale in cui una persona diversa da me — come un vicino di casa, non necessariamente ostile, ma certamente diverso da me, una sorta di estraneo che ‘parla una lingua che mi è in parte

24 Luperini, La lotta mentale, p. 18.
25 Ibid., p. 19.
26 Ibid., p. 23.
27 SINA, p. 10. The allusion is to numerous critical interventions by other poets in favour of the ‘poesia dialettale’, which Pasolini promoted in articles such as Dialetto e poesia popolare, published in Mondo operaio, 14 April 1951; I dialettali, appeared in Paragone, no. III, in 1952; and Presentazione di alcuni poeti dialettali was published in 1955, in issue no. X of Fiera letteraria.
28 Ibid., p. 11.
29 Ibid., p. 11. Fortini states: ‘My own translations of poetry that reach out [...] to the very edge of paraphrase and imitation, stem from this same classical impulse’.
30 The term ‘artificial’ recurs at regular intervals in Fortini’s writing as a synonym for manneristic. Indeed, artificiality, as the hallmark of Mannerism, represented the topic of Fortini’s thesis on the Florentine painter Giovanni Battista (called Rosso Fiorentino), who, between 1515 and 1524, together with Jacopo Carrucci, broke away from the harmony and naturalism of the High Renaissance style.
estranea e di qualcosa che mi preoccupa in modo straordinariamente ma che non riesco pienamente a comprendere, come accade in sogno.\footnote{31}

The simile, ‘come un vicino di casa’, conveys the poet’s feelings of being estranged from his own area of expertise: poetic form itself. In \textit{Summer is not all} (1992) he added: ‘My verses always have the intention – or illusion – of indicating coordinates (even if hidden in the choice of an adjective, or a comma) and a ‘specific point in time and space’, and this not just for the imaginary individual who speaks in the first person singular in the lines.’\textit{(SINA, p. 12)}. What is important here is the author’s insistence on a notion of ‘distance’; this can be interpreted as suggesting a transindividual perspective. As in Novalis’s \textit{Great General Repertory. Future Literature}, here too the individual poet is only a mask borrowed by the unique subject of any utterance, language itself: ‘Disconnected, incoherent narratives that have associations nevertheless, like dreams’: \footnote{32}

When the autobiographical ghosts of the past and, along with them, the streets of Florence and Milan fade away, little animals from the underground and burrows will scurry through my poems, ‘little miserable creatures’ that accept fate and relentless work; and the heraldic roses, emblems of redemption as well as corruption, will quiver; the demented birds in their nests will scream in the early chill of a Lombardy spring … I am told that all these are allegories of us, the ruthless ones. So be it.\footnote{33}

It should be noted, at this point, that Fortini’s idea of form translates mainly into his use of allegory, by which poetic language serves a didactic purposes. Allegory, which constitutes a predominant stylistic feature of the author’s \textit{oeuvre}, is particularly present in \textit{Paesaggio con serpente} and \textit{L’ospite ingrato}, where Fortini evoked Renaissance and Baroque allegorical paintings.

The notion of formal decorum \footnote{34} represents a problematic aspect of Fortini’s \textit{oeuvre} and requires a detailed investigation. Indeed, Fortini’s early rigorousness all of a sudden seemed to have little to say about the crude world the ordinary readers lived in, as Pasolini noted in his essay ‘Le ossessioni di Fortini’ (1969). When Fortini turned away from his alleged classicism, and moved towards mannerism and expressionism, showing the world from new unfamiliar angles,\footnote{35} he still opposed Adorno:

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\footnote{31} Fortini, ‘Cos’è la poesia’, RAI Educational, 1993.  
\footnote{33} \textit{SINA}, p. 12.  
\footnote{34} The notion of literary decorum pervades both Leopardi’s \textit{Operette morali} and his \textit{Zibaldone}.  
\footnote{35} See Paul Lucian Garvin, \textit{A Prague School Reader on Aesthetics, Literary Structure}, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1964. As we read in Garvin’s book, the effect of ‘defamiliarization’ equals the ‘foregrounding’ pointed out by Mukarovsky in \textit{Standard language and Poetic Language} (1964). In Mukarovsky’s semiotics of the poetic text, foregrounding enables poetry to present meanings with an intricacy that daily language would not normally allow. The effect, which Fortini discusses here, is the result of a process much like the one described by Mukarovsky’s. In fact, by ‘intensità e nettezza della formalizzazione’, he intended the amount of foregrounding laid down to achieve defamiliarization.
\end{flushleft}
Adorno ha affermato che in un’opera (riuscita) di poesia lirica la specificazione formale costituisce e determina un antagonismo al suo contesto storico-sociale. Quando la formalizzazione, di un qualsiasi ‘contenuto’, abbia superato una data soglia, non determinabile a priori, di coerenza (coesione) fra le proprie parti e quindi anche di tensione (contraddizione) fra esse, quella forma si manifesta come apparizione-presenza (si è parlato di ‘astanza’) che nega-everte il quotidiano, l’accettato, il ripetuto. Da questa premessa avevo potuto trarre la conseguenza, come molti altri, che la portata morale e ‘rivoluzionaria’ di un’opera consistesse-coincidesse con la intensità e nettezza della sua formalizzazione. Era una ripresa del vecchio tema di Lukács, secondo il quale la ‘superiore onestà dell’artista’, ossia l’etica della inflessibile volontà formale può averla vinta sull’ideologia, eventualmente arretrata e comunque ingannevole, delle sue intenzioni coscienti [...] Alla richiesta se ‘una messa in forma liberante potesse nascere egualmente da contenuti reazionari come rivoluzionari’ rispondevo quindi di sì. Nel corso della medesima risposta tendevo però a stabilire una distinzione molto approssimativa fra apporto conscio e apporto inconscio di elementi ‘reazionari’ o ‘rivoluzionari’ [...] e mi rifacevo a una tesi che, come dirò, mi pare tuttavia valida, quella di una ‘contraddittorietà organica’, fondamentale, della forma. (QF, p. 142)

Adorno’s theory on the rationality and ethicality of the artist’s commitment to form, in fact, must face the unresolved clash with its antagonistic dimension, the unconscious. Once again, Fortini is reflecting on the very nature of poetry, which can be both an instrument of liberation and a means of self-deception. The most pleasant form can, in fact, hide an unreliable, unsettling content.

Central to Fortini’s idea of ‘form’ is also Lukács’s essay, The Soul and the Forms (1910). According to Lukács, in Kafka’s work, the soul’s tendency is to transcend the temporality and causality of the world. In so doing, it is also likely to achieve fullness in the poetic, philosophical and tragic absolutes that characterize artistic forms. Fortini traces a similar drive in Leopardi’s proclivity for transcending the pain and inadequacy of the world in art, while facing the necessity to convey and restrict such a drive towards the absolute within the limits imposed by form as such. In fact, investigating Fortini’s notion of form, one observes a sensibility, which echoes Leopardi’s notion of poetry. In the September-December 1946 issue of Il Politecnico, Fortini – reflecting on the supremacy of aesthetics over content in Leopardi’s poetry, claimed:

Nel Leopardi si trova, in forma estremamente drammatica, la crisi di transizione verso l’uomo moderno, l’abbandono critico delle vecchie concezioni trascendentali senza che si sia trovato un ubi consistam morale e intellettuale nuovo, che dia la stessa certezza di ciò che è stato abbandonato. [...] Oggi noi vogliamo sapere che la poesia ha per oggetto una verità e non un piacere, o almeno il piacere della verità: lo sapeva quanto noi Leopardi. 36

Metaphorically comparing the ‘rovo’ to life and the ‘rosa’ to poetry; Fortini explains how, in Leopardi’s philosophical system, the coming together of the universal (and its disillusionment) with the historical achieves a highly dramatic form:

Ora, l’ideale della purezza artistica ha due aspetti: uno metafisico e religioso, come esigenza di eternità e antistoria; e uno invece, legato alla classe e al tessuto storico, come bisogno di autodistruzione, di adempimento illusorio di una funzione sociale […] Alcune parole dicono ancora solitudine e pianto; ma in troppe altre le cose create sono presenti, splendide come dopo la tempesta o come prima del peccato; e il pastore sente ancora, è vero, la propria pena ingombrargli la mente; ma la possibilità di vedere e di volere un mondo luminosamente lieto offerta a tutti, pur che ci si faccia pastori.

Leopardi’s ‘purezza artistica’ anticipates Fortini’s reflection on the poem’s metrical, phonological and rhetorical features as the rendering of an emotional content. At the same time, Fortini warned against the ‘gratification of form’: ‘l’industria culturale predica l’uso formale, pseudo-religioso della poesia’ (VDP, p. 188). In the 1946 article on Leopardi, Fortini therefore offered a comprehensive definition of form, anticipating what would be his own theoretical formulations. The prestige of Leopardi’s poetics, Fortini claimed, is ensured by the co-presence of many of its constituents, ‘la religione della poesia, il riscatto formale, l’ascesi letteraria.’ Form allows Leopardi ‘una fuga dalla propria condizione storica’, transforming ‘il suo messaggio eroico’ into ‘poetica’. As a verbalization of individual and collective occasions, poetic forms originate from ‘biographical residues’ – as in the poetry of Baudelaire, Rilke, Rimbaud and Hölderlin – which become syllables, words and rhetorical devices. From this angle, Leopardi’s poetic is defined by the transposition of the disillusionment of his faith in life into the purity of ‘lyric song’. Yet Leopardi is also aware of the illusoriness of this idea of lyric purity in poetry, which would transform mundane and pessimistic scepticism into ‘impronta religiosa’, or ‘fede’. Such faith, explains Fortini, can be found in Leopardi’s respect for poetic forms as aesthetic and ethical authorities that negotiate existential dichotomies such as order/disorder, life/death, or hope/despair, transforming the elegy into a hymn of praise: ‘Il giuoco è fatto: Leopardi è sacerdote della poesia, è poeta della poesia.’

However, although some formalism is evident in Fortini’s late poetry, the author’s main purpose continued to be the ethicality of writing verse. We see this in an interview with Éluard, ‘La poesia non è sacra’ (1946): in response to a final question as to whether poetry operates in a revolutionary manner, Éluard answers: ‘la poesia è rivoluzione, non rivolta; è

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37 I am referring here to the presence of the ‘rose’ in German poetry, from Hoelderlin to Rilke and Trakl.
39 Ibid., p. 34.
logica. Essa ha per scopo la verità pratica'. In ‘Letteratura’, another essay on the same theme, which appeared almost thirty years later, in *Nuovi saggi italiani* (1987), Fortini, again, faces the task of clarifying his understanding of the relationship between content and form. The equilibrium between ‘form’ as an aesthetic pleasure, absolving an ‘alta funzione simbolica’, and ‘content’ conveying the poet’s ethical-communicative needs, represents therefore the polarity, or internal conflict within Fortini’s literary and ideological plan to develop a poetics capable of the highest intellectual control:

The extract underlines the ways in which great poetry of the past – the poetry which corresponds to the language of the bourgeois class struggling for hegemony – not only had the grandiose ideological and pedagogic assignment of transmitting a daunting body of values, but also had a mystical and religious role. In its verbal essence, a poetic utterance is homologous with its content since it forces content to enter a dialectical relationship with form, becoming ‘metafora di un modo d’essere degli uomini’ (NSI, p. 155). In another excerpt from the cited article, ‘Il passaggio della gioia’, Fortini examines the question of the connection between content and form, describing the experience of poetry as an all-encompassing, fulfilling and quasi-religious experience (‘una esperienza totalizzante’), leading to ‘corti circuiti dell’assoluto’:

Quale correzione, dicevo, viene al ‘pensiero’ leopardiano dalla ‘poesia’ dei *Canti*? Questa, intanto: che agli uomini sia dato consumare nella ‘forma’ una pienezza vitale o (se si preferisce) godere una esperienza ‘totalizzante’, in altri tempi o società configurata come religiosa o mistica e in Leopardi estetica invece e poetica. Onde la sua poesia, conforme la natura necessariamente mistificata, larvale, formale di quelle ‘totalizzazioni’, di quei corti circuiti dell’assoluto, contiene, simultanei e contraddittori, due movimenti: il primo (né mi riferisco solo all’appello della *Ginestra*) implicitamente pedagogico [...] il secondo, che, rinunciando al primo, rinunciando a universalizzare il proprio esempio e quindi a esigere un adempimento storico della propria profezia,
divora se stesso sul posto, in perfetta coincidenza di solitudine e di forma, di suicidio e di gioia. (NSI, 254)

The notion of form as a perfect coincidence of ‘suicide and joy’ contains somehow a defence of Kafka’s aesthetics against Lukács’s criticism. In his essay ‘The Ideology of Modernism’, Lukács in fact criticized Kafka for having interiorized and mirrored reality so intensely as to perceive it with an anguished, nightmarish and suicidal drive:

He is aware that individual detail must point to general significance. But how does he go about the business of abstraction? He has emptied everyday life of meaning by using the allegorical method; he has allowed detail to be annihilated by his transcendental nothingness. [...] Kafka’s method is typical, here, of modernism’s allegorical approach. Specific subject matter and stylistic variation do not matter; what matters is the basic ideological determination of form and content.

Poetic thought as such consumes itself in effigy, operating within the limits of a libidinal cycle of dissipation and reconstruction, as we read in ‘Per tre momenti’, included in Questo muro:

Sono io
che la mia forma effondo
in quella definita forma e ingenuo credo
realtà la metafora. (PS, p. 161)

We should note that in the above lines, Fortini claims that the poet’s reflections on poetry as medium ultimately models the proper understanding of what form is. It is useful to quote again Shklovsky’s maxim: ‘Art is thinking in images [...] Without imagery there is no art, and in particularly no poetry’. One way or another, poetry as self-understanding makes use of imagery and forms (‘definita forma’), locating lyricism (or else, one’s lyric autobiography) in a cultural-historical context. This idea emerges in the following extract from Dei confini della poesia (1986):

Ancora pochi anni fa (queste considerazioni risalgono al maggio del 1986) indulgevo anch’io a credere che la forma poetica avesse una sua autonoma forza liberatrice relativamente indipendente dai suoi contenuti ossia dal suo ‘soggetto’. Era un modo di reagire alla precettistica dei progressisti e al loro opaco ottimismo. Eppure mi è sempre stato chiaro che la poesia, proprio in quanto forma che si oppone al

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42 Georg Lukács, ‘The Ideology of Modernism’, in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, London: Merlin, 1963, pp. 17-46. This essay exemplifies Lukács’s idea of social realism: ‘Content determines form. But there is no content of which Man himself is not the focal point. [...] The ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers is the exact opposite of this. Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings’, (p. 20).


44 Luperini, La lotta mentale, p. 24. Luperini notes that a line such as ‘e credo che una rosa esiti dentro il sasso’ (‘In una strada di Firenze’, UVPS, p. 277) reflects Fortini’s way to look into himself.

45 See K.M. Newton, Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader, Basingstroke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 3.
mutamento, ha una sua dimensione conservatrice e conciliatrice. Come gli stessi Horkeimer e Adorno hanno scritto, il canto della poesia e dell’arte è al servizio del dominio non solo perché è frutto dell’agio e del consumo come spreco e piacere ma perché la promessa di felicità e l’immagine di pienezza, che arte e poesia portano con sé, non possono essere altro che promesse e immagini, fiori sulle catene. (DCP, p. 16)

This is an aporias since we understand individual forms only from the cultural-historical contexts they use to define themselves, yet this objective and shared understanding of forms is nothing other than historical uses to which it is put by individual poets (‘fiori sulle catene’).

The contentious rapport between content and form receives further attention not only in Fortini’s critical writings and poetry but also in his theory of translation (see also Chap.3). Speaking of the clash between the improvable intentionality of poetic utterance and the desired intentionality of interpretation, he analyses the complications created, in the field of form, by the relationship between the original text and its version/s. The problem had already been explored by Benjamin in his essay ‘The task of the translator’: while the author of the original text can elude purposeful communication, displaying other intentions, the translator faces the obligation of getting meaning across. This is especially evident in the case of the ‘servile’ translation, which privileges the content or truth of a given text as such. Benjamin explains:

This is the hallmark of bad translations. But do we not generally regard that which lies beyond communication in a literary work – and even a poor translator will admit that this is its essential substance – as the unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic’? And is this not something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also – a poet? Fortini’s notion of ‘form’ could ultimately be connected with Benjamin’s theory that the mystery of the world’s lyricism is a kind of remote language, which discloses itself only on the acceptance of its most secretive and factual non-translatability. These ideas find expression also in ‘Da un’arte poetica’,47 which is an attempt at valorising the aspects of the poet’s formal linguistic experience over primeval incoherence and chaos (‘precipitando verso più inflessibile ordine’):

Non sanno che sempre fu rotto, che sempre
fu ineffabile il mondo: che il primo dolore
è dell’inestinguibile incoerenza
degli oggetti, dei volti e della parole: ma sempre
chi può vinse quel primo disordine, salvo
un altro, più fondo, scrutare e anche quello
vincere e ancora un altro, precipitando

46 Ibid., p. 253.
47 Fortini, Poesie Inedite, p. 31. The allusion here is to Bertolucci ‘E invece un Bertolucci divaga e il suo zirlo’ è quello gentile del grillo,/ lo ascolti ma poi ti distrai.’ In spite of Fortini’s ironical dismissal, Bertolucci, one of Italy’s greatest twentieth-century poets and a prolific translator, essayist and editor, was a recipient of both of the prestigious Viareggio and Montale prizes, and honoured by the ‘Accademia dei Lincei’ (an institution founded in 1603 by eminent protagonists of seventeenth-century Italian culture, such as Federico Cesi).
verso più inflessibile ordine, organizzando
sempre più indicibile caos. (PI, p. 31)

In conclusion, the line ‘chi può vinse quel primo disordine’, pushes poetic form theoretically towards praxis, with a greater awareness of the contingency, finitude and relativity of the poet’s task, in order to create a deeper ethical sense of accountability and militancy:

la forma in tanto esiste in quanto si pone entro un altro da sé, un informe, ossia una realtà convenzionale, quella oggettiva e necessariamente mistificata. Però la negazione di questa realtà convenzionale, fittizia e pseudoggettiva non avviene davvero, come sappiamo, solo ad opera della forma ‘astante’ letterario-artistica; avviene nell’azione politica e morale, nella decostruzione e ricostruzione delle istituzioni affettive e dei rapporti interumani. (QF, p. 149)

2.2. The ‘otherness’ of poetry: the theme of sight

Ora sul fondo delle tue pupille
il mondo senza fine vero appare. (CS, 26)

This section deals with two major themes, ‘otherness’ and ‘sight’. The primary concern here is with the notion of the ‘other’ as used in phenomenology and psychoanalysis, referring to one pole of the relationship between a non-self – a person, or thing constituted as different, or other – and the perceiving ‘I’. Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty define the ‘other’ as a threat to the freedom of the subject, who exists alongside other subjectivities by which s/he is seen. Yet the first canonical designation of this mode of being is to be found in Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (1943) in the theme of the other’s gaze, a phenomenological account where the expression ‘being-for-others’ (être-pour-autrui) is reformulated in order to define the self’s struggle for dominance negatively.

The Sartrian exploration of sight as the ‘other’s gaze’ is reintroduced by Merleau-Ponty in close association with his theories relating to the dialectic rapport between image, reality and perception. This issue also permeates his phenomenology of perception in ‘L’oeil et
l’esprit’ (Le visible et l’invisible, 1964), an essay in which, side by side with the problem of the self as perceiver, the author emphasizes the bond between the perceiving mind and the material object represented in painting. Painting offers to the eye a ‘third dimension’, the essence of a truth, which is not immediately visible in reality and yet is deeply rooted in it: ‘Turning to colour leads us somewhat closer to the “heart of things” [...] which at the same time hides beyond the colour-space-boundaries.’ In the visual arts, intellectual grasp and technical manipulation are achieved simultaneously. Moreover, the technical and procedural rendering of a given reality through colour and texture can solicit the subject’s empathy and understanding for the reality beyond the image. These mechanisms cannot be discussed without reference to the mechanical physiology of the human eye confronting the phenomena to which it relates.

Along with Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s problematic representations of the ‘relationships of Self with the ‘other’, a brief review will now be made of Lévinas’s analysis of the relationship between literature and ethics, and his enquiry as to whether criticism can be seen as an ethical task; this more closely relates to Fortini’s essay-writing, concerned, as it is, with the communal, political and ethical dimensions of human existence in society. Furthermore, in Lévinas’s ethical philosophy, the task of criticism is to reflect upon the unobtainable ‘Other’ who represents the ‘externality of the inward’. This ethical appeal helps the subject take responsibility for the other, recognize the mutual dependence between human beings, and accept ‘otherness’ as oneself.

As will become apparent, this process is fostered by sight as an essential component of any cognitive process dealing with the problem of understanding reality. In psychological terms, the most powerful account of the other, which I shall explore in relation to certain poems by Fortini, is offered by Lacan’s theory of ‘autre’ (‘other’) and ‘l’Autre’ (‘the Other’) as a analogous image with which the subject identifies in the ‘mirror-stage’. There would seem to be a connection between the theme of sight and the theme of poetic language, following Lacan’s theory according to which speech does not originate in the subject, or the Ego, but in the Other. Fortini too, in his exploration of the role of sensory/visual perception in artistic production, indicates how the artist inevitably reacts to the surrounding

which goes beyond memories or free associations. Merleau-Ponty underlines the dynamics of moving from the known to the unknown/unobserved. His study places emphasis on the truth achieved through the senses in relation to the poet’s own body and the surrounding environment.


51 This theme is clearly expressed in Benjamin’s essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), which is similar in tone to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘L’œil et l’esprit’.


53 Lacan’s notion of ‘the Other’, which is a metaphor for subjectivity, was presented in the 1949 lecture ‘The Mirror Stage’, which describes the alienating phase which the subject experiences in relation to the outside world through the eyes of the other. The paper was published in the collection Écrit (trans. 1977).
environment from his own limited standpoint, which ultimately generates misunderstandings and disagreements among interpreters of his work. Yet in his poetry the theme of sight is an important element involving the consideration of the rhetorical interdependency of the visual with the verbal: sight indeed plays a primary role in the acquisition of the skills needed to transpose reality into communicative language. As has been suggested, in Fortini’s mature poetry the significance of image, shape and colour is transferred from vision to logos, and pervades poems about photography and painting.

These subjects are linked with the poetics of *Les yeux fertiles* (1936) by Paul Éluard, and his search for a more immediate poetic knowledge of the tangible world. In Éluard’s poem, ‘Tes yeux dans lesquels je voyage’, the eyes guarantee an adventure through the eloquence of the image. Sight brings to mind its representations, which are, in their turn, turned into simulations. This theme, decreed by the fusion of Éluard’s aesthetic discourse with his ideological one, recognizes that words cannot render the true essence of a material object: they can only sublimate it to a literary ‘form’.

In Fortini’s collection *Questo muro* (1973), the integration of colour perception into the complex sensory-motor organizations of the poet’s vision offers the reader the sense of a lived spatiality. Yet sight conveys to the mind a reality, which is then transformed into an imaginary world, rendering the discovery of the real difficult, if not impracticable. In the poem ‘Dalla collina’ the subject-matter is dealt with in three fragments: in the first, reality is observed from the point of view of the microcosm of a small rodent that scans (‘scruta’) and searches (‘fruga’) its surroundings. Its presence in the landscape is captured by the poet’s eye as a camera. The strategy emphasizes the interconnection of the contextual, intellectual and historic-cultural dimensions. The two stanzas give a balanced, comprehensive account of the natural landscape, embodying past and future in a single instant caught by sight in the first and last line (‘Tutto è d’accordo’, ‘Tutto quello che vedi’). Yet, nature is present only to witness the poet’s human existence, which contemplates and expresses itself through poetic language:

Tutto è d’accordo. Se tendi la mano
puoi di quassù toccare i monti,
la città dov’eri una volta esistito,
gli ingombri di forme del cielo e del tempo,
il passato stanchissimo.
Vuoi sapere che cosa sarà di te?
Vuoi ancora naturalmente saperlo.

Molti secoli riposano sotto le nuvole
Nella mezza luce sul pendio
Dove tra pigne il piccolo roditore si rallegra
E un ragno si consuma nella fossa di spine.
Tutto quello che vedi sarà ucciso. (PS, p. 159)
Here we can trace the idea of nature as being no longer capable of connecting with man’s spirit (‘gli ingombri di forme del cielo e del tempo,/ il passato stanchissimo’), as expressed by Hölderlin’s in his preface to *Hyperion* ((1797-98). Nature and history, thus, offer the pretext for a kind of self-referential and transcendental landscape. The poem juxtaposes the countryside’s minimalism with the city’s bleak profusion of temporal and spatial density, further dramatized by the grammatical plethora of the superlative and the anxious use of the self-questioning anaphora (‘Vuoi sapere’, ‘Vuoi ancora naturalmente saperlo’); this strategy presents the obliqueness of the poetic message to an ideological reasoning, as observed by Mengaldo. Furthermore, sky and time, when observed from a distance, make it possible for the poet to experience estrangement.

The imagery tries to transmit the experience of viewing a landscape in a manner which is not merely descriptively picturesque: the reader is not presented with a simple recreation of the natural environment, but with the dramatization of an art/nature dialectic, suggesting both emotional proximity and rational distance, but above all the ability to predict the (perhaps natural, or perhaps historical) catastrophe (‘Tutto quello che vedi sarà ucciso’). This creates a reorientation of perception, which is enhanced by the feeling of the poet’s long absence from that scenery (‘la città dov’eri una volta esistito’). In this schematization of a place of natural harmony, representing the artistic transformation of that very first basic reality from which it draws its statements of truth, the countryside is imbued with metaphysical significance; this dimension situated beyond reality is what Maria Corti defines as ‘realtà seconda’/’linguaggio secondo’: ‘Come dire che l’allontanarsi dell’artista da una riproduzione diretta del reale lo avvicina al senso vero del reale stesso’. The poet’s sense of universal catastrophe is marked by a modernist kind of formal dislocation and alienation. The poem, in fact, seems to capture a memory, which encompasses spiritual aloneness. The recollection of the hill’s half-light suggests that the poet was formerly one with the organic world; it conveys an image of this utopian landscape as a ‘souvenir’ he can take with him as he returns to the denatured and overcrowded city. The moment being captured emphasizes the relation of the subject not only to phenomena but to time (‘Molti secoli riposano sotto le nuvole’; ‘gli ingombri di forme del cielo e del tempo’), thus introducing another important question, time as social history, complicated here by the

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55 See Maria Corti, ‘Reale e realismo’, in Asor Rosa, *Letteratura italiana del Novecento*, p. 413. Corti claims ‘lo scrittore se è vero artista non riproduce il reale, non lo fotografa, ma crea una “realtà seconda”, portatrice di un linguaggio secondo; cioè la crea a livello sia tematico che formale.’

56 Ibid., p. 413.
author’s use of allegory (‘Dove tra le pigne il piccolo roditore si rallegra/ E un ragno si consuma nella fossa di spini’).

The microcosm of the animal world, seething with dangers, reflects the mind’s enduring cognitive processes. The poet witnesses the passing of a group of people he knows who pay no attention to his presence. Accidentally stepping into their field of vision, the persona in the poem feels himself being turned into an object of scrutiny, and, thus, denied an existence as such (‘essi vanno e guardano gli sterpi e le siepi’, ‘gente che non ha bisogno di te né di sé’):

Già quello che sei è una cartilagine delicata.
Gente viene, ti pare di conoscere le voci,
senti che ragionano salendo.

2
Non riposano secoli ma solo qualche estate
nella mezza luce del pendio
Dove le pietre non meditano nulla.
Tra gli incisivi e le piccole zampe
fanno viaggio le formiche.
La felce si essicca e si contrae.
I semi sgorgano dai loro astucci.
Provi la forza dell’erba con la mano.

Questo resterà di tutto quello che vedi;
uno schema di pino e una coppa di ghianda.

(PS, pp. 159-160)

The stress on the poet’s role as fragile outsider is enhanced by the synecdoche ‘Già quello che sei è una cartilagine delicata’. The line ‘Gente viene, ti pare di conoscere le voci’ echoes in some way Sereni’s ‘un bisbiglio di gente per le strade’, from his 1937 ‘Inverno a Luino’ (Frontiera, 1941). The poet perceives the voices of a group of people with whom he wishes to establish a friendly contact. Their presence makes him recognize what he thinks he ‘should be doing’, according to rules and images to which he should conform. The poet forces himself to stand up, to be seen and speak his thoughts (‘Alzati parla’). Yet a malfunction of his linguistic faculty occurs, and the persona’s plan to address the community of men in his speech fails. In the crescendo of indistinct voices, and despite the attempts to clarify and structure reality through sight, the poem acquires a pessimistic tone as the poet ceases to gaze at the world before him because of the unease he feels, caused by the difficulty of communicating his subjective sense of transience to others. Sight not only draws memory into relation with the reality of the observed natural scenery; it also grasps the future dissolution of what is alive, which palpitates at the core of the ongoing phenomenon (‘il ragno si consuma nella fossa di spini’). The opposition between macro-cosmo and micro-cosmo (‘non riposano secoli ma solo
quelche istante’), which also informs Montale’s ‘Meriggiaire pallido e assorto’ (*Ossi di seppia*, 1925), bears witness to the resistance of the objective world to the poet’s subjective intervention.

In section three, Fortini employs the linguistic register of the eye-witness, who appeals rhetorically, but in vain, to break the blind cycle of birth and death in which reality is trapped:

Parla dell’amore che bisogna spezzare e mangiare.  
Comanda che tempo non c’è, che per sempre  
Tutto se non si vince ritornerà.  
Di come ci hanno uccisi e i nomi dei nemici.  

Ma il sasso smosso rotola e sta.  
Essi vanno e guardano gli sterpi e le pietre,  
le pigne, le cortecce ancora tiepide,  
gli incontri del cielo tanto lenti e del tempo,  
il passato stanchissimo.  
Vogliono sapere che cosa sarà di loro.  
Calpestano più lontano.  
Le voci che ragionavano non si sentono più.  
Sono passate e tu sei passato.

Lo spino, il seme del ragno nell’aria sfinito,  
dentro la piaga del pino la piuma presa,  
il pendio che riposa,  
tutto quello che vedi è ancora tuo  
eppure volgi il capo e non vuoi guardare. (PS, p. 160)

A sense of peacefulness and greenness pervades the scene, yet this soothing landscape (‘il pendio che riposa’) is irreconcilable with the poet’s awareness of what lies beyond it. The troublesome relationship between sight and mind causes the poet tangible discomfort, for it renders the observed reality uncertain and equivocal, above all the poet’s libidinal desires which are visibly under threat. The intellect is charged with decoding the things that can be possessed but also the things that need to be renounced. Yet this clash itself comes to constitute a source of knowledge. Here Fortini echoes Foscolo’s dejection at the dissolution of man as body and mind: the poet’s awareness of the world has been shaken by the disappointment of his utopian view of the future (‘eppure volgi il capo e non vuoi guardare’), and he is now faced with a subjective, almost artificial truth. From an existential point of view, this shows reality as impermanence, but from an artistic one, enriches it with imagination and insight. It is helpful to refer to Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on this solipsistic inward turning of the subject:

I escape from every involvement and transcend others in so far as every situation and every other person must be experienced by me in order to exist in my eyes. […]
Consciousnesses present themselves with the absurdity of a multiple solipsism, such as the situation, which has to be understood. [...] Solitude and communication cannot be the two horns of a dilemma but two ‘moments’ of one phenomenon, since in fact other people do exist for me.\[^{57}\]

In ‘Dalla collina’, the poet’s solitary view of the natural world, which is dramatized by the sudden perception of the passing ‘voices’, dissolves because of his refusal to mediate between the visible and the mental, thus introducing doubts about perception, and offering a negative response to the stimuli produced by the appearance of the group of people. In this disequilibrium of chaos and order, Fortini restates a predilection for the normative ratio, which is characteristic of Poussin’s paintings. In *Paesaggio con serpente* (1984), in fact, Fortini tends to subordinate the linguistic and thematic substance of each individual poem to the preponderance of the landscape’s figurative components, whose impact on the logos is as evident as in Zanzotto’s *Dietro il paesaggio* (1951). The granting of a gnoseological value to sight as to the *verbum* reflects Fortini’s interest in the visual arts to which he equally devoted himself.\[^{58}\]

In *Paesaggio con serpente* (1974), Fortini accordingly moved to the rediscovering of the Baroque, a system of folds within folds. There he aimed to probe the unfathomable strata of reality with remarkable textual effects, creating equilibrium between opposing forces: objective truth and the poet’s use of imagery, the sensuality of sight and the abstractions of the intellect, in a tension of objectivity and subjectivity. And in fact, in Baroque art, objective reality is a virtual gathering of forms. Fortini reached the conclusion that the best an individual can achieve is a proximity to truth. He therefore deemed his old search for certainty obstinate and mistaken. As Elisa Gambaro has also noted in her essay ‘La contraddizione della poesia’, here Fortini restates the idea of poetry as error. Yet it is thanks to this error that the poet’s voice from being an ‘opaca eco’ turns into a ‘grido acuto e sommesso al cuore degli altri’.\[^{59}\]

The shift from a polarity of reality and language, via the symbolic juncture in which reality in part merges with language, to a total separation of both is complete. The poet’s psychological landscape laments its exclusion from the observed, external reality; incapable of connecting to language, his problem is, on the contrary, that he is fully responsive to the impressions which make an impact on his mind through sight. The outside world, against which the erroneous constructions of the text have to be measured, is dramatized; indeed, the action of writing, reproducing linguistic signs, here implies senselessness and negativity. The alliterative line ‘L’ostinato che a notte annera le carte’, which places emphasis on blackness, acquires a tonal and rhythmic power, dramatizing the


connection between sight and logos. The imagery indicates an antinomy between the poet’s perception of the world as reality and actuality, and his writing as memory and history, as in Benjamin’s observations on how the picture of the past is sized. The poem thus unites extreme objectivism and extreme subjectivism, resulting in a kind of anti-phenomenology that partly reminds us of Sartre’s *The transcendence of the Ego* (1957), where he discusses the rational processes through which the subject acquires awareness of him/herself by recollecting facts from a personal point of view, which can render his/her ‘errors’ if not tolerable, at least manifest: (‘l’ostinato [...] che replica il suo errore’, SINA, p. 110)

As in Montale’s ‘Piccolo testamento’ – ‘Solo quest’iride posso lasciarti a testimonianza di una fede che fu combattuta’ – in *La bufara e altro* (1956), the theme of sight, representing the subject’s concern for what is beyond the visual, is widely employed by Fortini to act as a medium to connect with what is uncertain and unverifiable. It refers to the poet’s role as eye-witness and to the readers’ position as spectators, implying an extratext of photographic and cinematographic references which recalls Barthes’ reflections in ‘The Photographic Message’ (*Image-Music-Text*, 1977). Fortini’s poetic treatment of the significance and function of sight calls to mind principally Barthes’s last work, *Camera Lucida* (Toronto, 1981), a meditation on the ‘absence’ inherent in the photographic depiction of something that was there at a particular time and is now gone, leaving traces of an irreparable loss; this is precisely the case with the paradoxes in ‘Molto chiare’ (‘Lo sguardo è là ma non vede una storia’).

The poem’s main theme recalls Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), which looks at the consequences of the processes through which creative artefacts are subjected to mechanical reproduction, as in twentieth-century industrialized entertainment. As Benjamin notes, seeing is by no means a simply visual act, as it is always part of the process by which an artefact, which invites critique and is itself a critical act, is conceptually fashioned. Benjamin also observes how, although the artificial procedure of the mechanical rendering of an image, which is rooted in the immediacy of seeing, constitutes the imaginary sphere in which reality is arranged and recomposed, it also

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61 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, translated by G. Hopkins, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York: 1957, p. 40. Sartre argues: ‘If, for example, I want to remember a certain landscape perceived yesterday from the train, it is possible for me to bring back the memory of that landscape as such. But I can also recollect that I was seeing that landscape...In other words, I can always perform any recollection whatsoever in the personal mode, and at once the I appears.’

62 See *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, 295, on de Man’s * Allegories of Readings* (1979) and the concept of ‘political error’, which, according to de Man, is derived from a linguistic model. This erroneous application of linguistic reality to natural reality provides the quaking foundation of the social contract.

serves to annihilate its aura, neutralizing every concept of authenticity, the *hic et nunc* of the art as such. These reflections are crucial for the relationship between various artistic disciplines, and in particular, between the visual arts and literature: 'In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance.'

In *Paesaggio con serpente*, Fortini transfers the conventions of photographic procedure and painting technique to the construction of textual matter. Both the pictorial and the photographic production of an image come to fix their own fields of action in the dialectical interface of reality with the function of the self-image – or poetic utterance – to preserve the object and the Self from the destructive effects of time. Fortini reflects on the forms which a set of perceptions take on when translated into images; but at the same time he reproduces another experience, which is the ability to speculate on the connection that those mental images have with verbal utterances printed on the page, a translation that mediates knowledge. In ‘*I lampi della magnolia*’ included in the section ‘Il vero che è passato’ (*Paesaggio con serpente*, 1984), the theme of sight as an objectifying faculty is introduced once again to compensate for the tendency of the ‘word’ to reduce reality to mere speculation. Indeed, the careful description of the observable data is left to utterances capable of capturing the beauty of the world through composition, graphic tonality and linear perspective, in order to show that ‘the field of vision simultaneously conceals and needs the invisible.’ Alternating warm expression of feelings with sober lines of meditation, ‘*I lampi della magnolia*’ exemplifies the aesthetics of a materialist dialectics that considers perception to be the *primum* for any cognitive process. It should be noted that the theme of sight was already present in Pasolini’s poem ‘*Una polemica in versi*’ (in *Poesie*, 1970), where the reader is made to perceive the poet’s mind through the metonymy of his all-absorbing ‘eye’:

Ho fissato con il mio occhio inesperto  
divenuto atrocemente esperto – umile  
fotografo che la notte inerte  
batte dietro l’immoto miraggio del costume –  
gli inutili angoli sperduti  
del mondo, con qualche grido, qualche lume,

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64 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, *Illuminations: 1892-1940*, London: 1992, p. 127. Benjamin adds: ‘It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty. But as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value.’

65 The definition is by Lyotard in ‘Presenting the Unpresentable: the Sublime’, *Artforum* 20.8 (April 1982): pp. 64-69. Lyotard’s observations – on the issue of postmodern aesthetics – can be applied to ‘*I lampi della magnolia*’, as I will show.
The ‘occhio’ is a mirror in which the object expands, becoming a ‘miraggio’. Sight as camera (‘umile fotografo’) of the world’s illusory reality, which measures nothingness (‘inutili angoli sperduti/ del mondo’), replaces speech, here perceived as Munch’s inarticulate scream (‘con qualche grido’), or, conversely, as Adorno’s appeal to silence after the world’s holocaust (‘attestati muti’). Artistic creation is represented as a mystified product, with which the culture industry dissimulates the origins of capital and surplus (‘qualche parola di uomini venduti’). Thus, the shift of objective reality into intellectualization underlines the problem of value. Similarly, Fortini employs a high degree of metonymic profusion, which borrows its effects from a variety of Montale’s tropes (‘iridi’, ‘lampi’, ‘magnolia’) in ‘Carnevale di Gerti’, ‘L’anguilla’, or ‘La bufera’.

The poem begins with a verb in the conditional mode, which translates the poet’s desire to communicate reality in an objective way (‘Vorrei che i vostri occhi potessero vedere questo cielo’). In this opening line, the poet invites the reader to share his appreciation of the landscape, thus making the procedures and conventions of the author/reader exchange explicit, and calling for the reader’s creative interpretation. In the first and third stanzas, in order to create an idyllic scene, Fortini uses classic words and expressions, such as ‘rivo’, ‘la bella curva’. The first stanza is placed in open contrast to the exacting attitude in the second strophe, which strains the tension between the words and what they designate (‘la parola è questa: esiste la primavera/ la perfezione congiunta all’imperfetto’). A palpable tension develops between the two poles of the visible and the invisible. The accumulation of images in the entire sequence of verses suggests an epiphanic event, which is provoked by the collision of the world’s cyclical rhythms and the poet’s intellectual recourse to metaliterariness:

Vorrei che i vostri occhi potessero vedere
questo cielo sereno che si è aperto,
la calma delle tegole, la dedizione
del rivo d’acqua che si scalda.

La parola è questa: esiste la primavera,
la perfezione congiunta all’imperfetto.
Il fianco della barca asciutta beve
l’olio della vernice, il ragno trolta.

67 In Pasolini’s poem, note the presence of the theme of life as squalid negotiation (‘uomini venduti’, ‘mercati della vita’), enhanced by words pointing to the semantic field of ‘trade’.
Diremo più tardi quello che deve essere detto.  
Per ora guardate la bella curva dell'oleandro,  
i lampi della magnolia. (PCS, p. 9)

The flowing river here (‘rivo d’acqua che si scalda’) symbolizes a process of purgation, as well as the ability to express a new self, whereas the boat (‘barca asciutta’) implies the idea of an incomplete journey, standing as a metaphor for an inactive life. The threatening presence of a spider, indicating man’s fear of the unconscious, opposes the feelings of pleasure and beauty stirred by the sight of the ‘magnolia’. On the level of the poem’s content, it would seem that Fortini is positing the question of impersonality or objectivity. The line ‘Diremo più tardi quello che deve essere detto’ is an allusion to a discussion to occur at a later time – perhaps in Fortini’s other chosen genre, the critical essay – about the possible meanings of the text’s central topic, ‘la primavera’.

The interlocutors are represented in terms of their ability to gaze the reality described, and acknowledge it. In fact, in the last two lines, the poet invites the reader not only to admire the beautiful shapes of the ‘oleandro’ and the ‘magnolia’, but also to learn the process whereby the pictorial affects the poet’s use of language. As co-perceiving subject – the reader thus acquires awareness of sight as an ontological medium. Fortini here proposes ‘representationality’ as a key concept: verbal expression attains a status homologous to that of the visual arts, becoming a window that looks onto a world waiting to be portrayed and transfigured. The compositional elements not only begin to enter a new dimension, they are also situated beyond everyday consciousness. Brightness (‘i lampi’), in partnership with the ephemeral fullness of Spring, carries with it the signs of its future decline, and therefore an additional symbolic value. In the intensity of the light, imperfection (‘la perfezione congiunta all’imperfetto’) melts provisionally with perfection in the frame of a dazzling image that opens up as a mirage of possibilities, which, of course, are false.68

In ‘I lampi della magnolia’, although poetic diction does not abdicate its legitimate high status, picking up fragments of objective truth in order to refine and redefine them, essentially it invites the reader to a dialogic exchange in producing meaning. In the antithesis between reality and concept, the reader’s eye prepares itself to welcome the non-identical, to individualize its rational and irrational aspects. The imagery somehow recalls Montale’s ‘Piccolo testamento’,69 where the poet searches for a transitory truth in the natural order of things, away from the infernal ‘sardana’ of history. Montale’s existential quest is revitalized in Fortini’s ‘I lampi della magnolia’ by the poet’s transcendence of pessimistic individualism.

68 As in Poesia e errore, the general point that Fortini makes about reality and perception in ‘I lampi della magnolia’ is complicated by issues involving the possibility of errors, such as errors of conceptual construction.
which is achieved by calling on the reader's participation: ('Per ora guardate la bella curva
dell'oleandro').

This poem is aptly followed by 'Il temporale', which, besides its range of phonosymbolism, possibly derived from Montale's 'La bufera',\(^7\) refers not only to a set of observable phenomena, but to an allegorical representation of the author's psychological state:

La cagna Dora inquieta fissa il giallo  
Dei nuvoli e del mare  
L'indaco. È la bufera  
che si annunzia. Stusera  
saranno lampi e fulmini, il gran crollo  
degli elementi; e dentro l'aria nera  
vacilleranno i culmini dei tetti  
e correranno i letti,  
risa, grida, spaventti.  
Noi tutti desti e tesi ad ascoltare  
cigolii di catene, di lamier  
straziate e strida e il tuono  
di enormi onde sui moli alti del porto.  
Domani pace avrà riavuto tutto. (PCS, p. 10)

The text sets 'momentariness' as violent immediacy of perception ('tesi ad ascoltare') against 'tomorrowness' as peaceful self-reflexiveness ('Domani pace riavrà tutto'). The image of the storm serves as a disguised representation of the poet's imaginative faculties, which instantaneously changes the face of things: the meteorological phenomenon is the embodiment of the abstract qualities which support the creative act. The tone is drab, and yet exciting in the expectation of the storm to come ('risa, grida, spaventti'). Rich in both visual ('il giallo dei nuvoli e del mare l'indaco', 'lampi', 'fulmini', 'aria nera') and sonorous effects ('grida', 'cigolii', 'strida', 'tuoni'), the text's underlying technique is that often seen in expressionist poetry.\(^7\) The storm is made 'strange and wonderful',\(^7\) caught in a baffling

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\(^6\)Montale's metaphysical quest in 'Piccolo testamento', included in *La Bufera e altro. Poems 1940-1954* (1956) associates the 'bufera' with the horrors of the finally defeated Fascist regime.

\(^7\)In Montale, the 'bufera' is a metaphor for the devastating effects of the Second World War.

\(^7\)Fortini's metonymical use of language in this poem is similar to that of Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, in 'I lampi della magnolia', the appeal to the intensity of light, colour and sound recalls the visual and sonorous effects in Eliot's 'Ash-Wednesday'; similarly, in 'I lampi di magnolia', 'la primavera' has the same value as do the months in Eliot's famous line 'April is the cruellest month'.

\(^7\)Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *The Technique of the Writer's Craft* (1928). Here Shklovsky argues that literature should be seen as a collection of stylistic and formal devices that allow the reader to view the world afresh by presenting old ideas or experiences in new ways. Images, Shklovsky argues, are at the disposal of poets: what poets are concerned with is arranging these images in a formal unity. This principle pervades the entire essay 'Art as Technique'. Shklovsky refers also to another device which results in defamiliarization, that is, the laying bare of the poet's techniques, in the form of internal didascales and commentaries on the style and structure of the text itself, thus anticipating both Brecht's 'alienation' and the postmodern metafictional modes.
mixture of reality and unreality, and suffused throughout with a leaden atmosphere, pregnant with electricity and metaphysical mystery.73

Sight is a central motif also in the poem ‘Il vero che è passato’, which may owe its title to the Proustian idea of time as a dimension set beyond the artist’s consciousness. The unity of the two dominant motifs – the ideological and the lyric – is ensured by strong allegorical/symbolic oppositions. Fortini gives an iconographic sense to the subject matter by placing a holy figure (San Martino) next to a secular one (Lukács). The photographic medium substantiates historical truth, while the oxymoron of the title helps to convey the sense of the opposition/integration of the two figures. The paradox in the title itself states that the old, past truth (‘il vero che è passato’) can be made meaningful by reinterpreting it.

Taking advantage of some arbitrary similarities to be found between Lukács and the statue of St. Martin, seen in the background of the photograph, the text opens up an interesting superimposition.74 This twofold context, the sacred and the profane, deliberately constructs semantic ambiguity:

Le scarpe pesanti il gomito sui libri
il sigaro spento non per il dubbio
ma per il dubbio e la certezza
nell’ultima foto
dall’altra parte del vero
occhi smarriti guardandoci.

Alle tue spalle guardiamo i libri deperiti
i tappeti il legno gotico
del San Martino a cavallo
che si taglia il mantello
per darne metà al mendicante.

Gli uomini sono esseri miserabili. (PCS, p. 21)

The poem depicts Lukács in a modest, realist fashion (‘le scarpe pesanti’, ‘il gomito sui libri’, ‘il sigaro spento’), thus translating Lukács’s call for realism at the core of his idea of socialist art. Therefore, Fortini here highlights his ideological affiliation with the subtext of Lukács’s Marxist ethics. The main textual semantic field is permeated by things that are for ever dead, or else extinguished (‘sigaro spento’, ‘ultima foto’, ‘libri deperiti’, ‘legno gotico’). A sense of loss and defeat (‘nell’ultima foto’) increases our perception of the philosopher’s state of ‘dubbio’ and ‘incertezza’. The repetition of the term ‘dubbio’ itself (‘non per il dubbio’/ ‘ma

73 At the thematic level, this poem, as much as ‘I lampi della magnolia’, represents a useful rendering of Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarization referred to above.
74 The tale of St.Martin was written in Northern Italy, probably in Verona, in the second half of the fifteenth century. The annotation written by Maggio Maggi, a Veronese jurist, in the margin of his manuscript refers to an incident in the life of Saint Martin, when the saint, upon meeting an ill-clad beggar, takes his sword, cuts his own cloak in half and gives half to the poor man (Vita S. Martini, Bryn Mawr College Special Collections, MS 10, Goodhart 11, Italy, XV).
Fortini, as the narrator, addresses Lukács in nostalgic tones, therefore, he is not only a mere medium between the image and the reader. In fact, the Lukács portrayed in the photograph, on the torn page of an old daily newspaper, is said to stare back at the community of observers with humility ('con occhi smarriti, guardandoci'). From an angle that recalls Emmanuel Lévinas's theory of the Other as the being at once different and the same, an identical humility is suggested by the presence of St. Martin in the background, cutting his mantle into two halves for sheer love of the beggar. 

To grasp the ethical message of this poem, it is useful to look closer at Lévinas's notion of the Other, in *Totality and Infinity* (1961): 'A calling into question of the Same – which cannot occur within the egoistic spontaneity of the Same – is brought about by the Other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics.' This notion may elucidate Fortini's ethical aim which, in Lévinas's terms, is showing what is lost in life in order to preserve it. Lévinas adds that 'existence' is the *one* thing that cannot be communicated: in fact, it can be 'told', but not 'shared': as a result, solitude appears as the central element, which marks the very fact of being.

Fortini's poem about the dialogic Other (Lukács, in this case) highlights, somewhat, the pessimistic side of this theory, since it asks the reader to reflect on man's fundamental misery ('gli uomini sono esseri miserabili'): its implicit assertion puts a negative slant on the way the Other's strangeness impinges on one's own experience. In the poem, Lukács's human reality is that which seems most incommunicable; the poem, therefore, reveals two conflicting dimensions, the first communicative and iconographical, the second conceptual and inexpressible ('dall'altra parte del vero'); consequently, Lukács's solitude and remoteness from us, while being meaningful, remains irrevocable. This twofold representation of the true Lukács in the photograph, and the mythologized Lukács-St. Martin, challenges the very notion of absolute truth, as we observe a historically figure turning into a cultural, and semi-religious stereotype. Indeed, the fracture, which occurs in the photographic image, reveals also the instability of the perceiving subject. Finally, the Hungarian thinker's sceptical materialism blends into this new transcendental dimension, which suggests connections between Marxist ideology and the Christian faith.

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75 The notion of ideological unity plays an important part in Fortini's representation of the endangered oneness of Lukács as man and thinker, conveyed by the opposition 'dubbio/certezza'. Abstract ideas such as moral integrity and the absolute power of the mind are here expressed concretely in semi-religious terms.

76 The mantle cut into two carries two symbolical meanings, one ethical, the other hermeneutical and metaliterary.

77 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, (Totalité et infini, 1961), trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, 1969, p. 33. Lévinas claims: 'The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the Other by the Same, of the Other by Me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the Same by the Other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge.'
The influence of Barthes' essay 'The Photographic Message' is prominent. The inherent dualism of the photographic image, for Barthes, brings about a paradox, which reaches the reader through a process, which splits its message in half, setting the two new meanings side by side: the paradox of the photographic message appears precisely in the duality of that message, which tends towards both an objective and a trans-objective dimension. "Il vero che è passato" thus relies on two divergent functions, the critical and the creative. In fact, the language of poetry, which evokes, primarily, the iconographic aura of Lukács's stance, gradually turns into the language of criticism. I have here endeavoured to show how this poem questions the realm of the logical, revealing the inevitable duality of any act of interpretation. Fortini's representation of perceptual/intellectual dichotomies does not simply originate in a 'rifuito della istantaneità della sensazione', as stressed by Luperini, but in a far more complex interest in it.

The theme of 'sight' returns in 'Stammheim', the title of which refers to the State Jail in the German Federal Republic that housed three of the members of the Baader-Meinhof gang during the trial at the end of which they were found dead. Fortini's investigation into the visible and the invisible extends the ambiguous borderline between true and false. Once more, Fortini relates to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception in Le visible et l'invisible (1964), thus creating the dialectical clash of intelligibility against unreliable, perceptual data. In fact, the line 'secondo gli ordini della città non visibile' turns into its opposite, 'secondo gli ordini della città visibile', with the conflict 'visible'/non-visible' mirroring the refusal by the authorities to shed light on the suicides of the three accused terrorists:

Essi hanno fatto quello che dovevano secondo gli ordini della città non visibile.
Hanno studiato i libri antichi e moderni.

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78 Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 15-31. 'The press photograph is a message. [...] The emission and the reception of the message both lie in the field of sociology: it is a matter of studying human groups, or defining motives and attitudes. [...] its objectivity (denotative status) has every chance of being mythical. Connotation is not necessarily graspable at the level of the (photographic) message itself. [...] Since every sign supposes a code, it is this code (of connotation) that one should try to establish.'

79 Ibid., p. 32. 'According to an ancient etymology', Barthes informs his readers, 'the word image should be linked to the root imitari. Thus we find ourselves immediately at the heart of the most important problem facing the semiology of images. [...] Is it possible to conceive of an analogic code?'

80 See Lukács, 'Aesthetic culture', in Kadarkay, *The Lukács Reader*, p. 146. It is by no means unintentional that the image of the text's 'instigator', Lukács, is placed side by side with the statue of St. Martin; in so doing, Fortini gives himself the opportunity to allude to the philosopher's interest in religious iconography and in the problematic relationship between society and art, as Lukács himself argues in his essay 'Aesthetic culture'. Lukács thus claims: 'If there is a culture today, it can only be an aesthetic culture [...] The fundamental lie of aesthetic culture, or (in some of its serious representatives) its tragic paradox is that it has proscribed all real spiritual activity, and equated all manifestation of life with an affectionate surrender to transient moments. [...] It regards any work of art, which is monumental as obsolete.'


82 The section in which the prisoners were kept was known as the most secure prison block in the world but this didn't prevent Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin and their co-defendants from having guns smuggled to them by their lawyers. The word 'Stammheim' took on a greater meaning after the events of the 'Death Night' in 1977 when Baader, Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe committed suicide. 'Stammheim' came to symbolize the abuse of power by the federal government.
L'acciaio dei padri recide i più piccoli nervi.
Sono stati uccisi.
Nessuno fu più obbediente di loro.

Essi hanno fatto quello che dovevano
secondo gli ordini della città visibile'.
Hanno studiato i libri antichi e moderni.
La chimica dei padri bagnava la chioma dei nervi.
Si sono uccisi.
Nessuno fu più obbediente di loro.

Noi abbiamo fatto quello che abbiamo dovuto
Wo eine fremde Sprache herrscht 83
Secondo gli ordini di due ordini secondo due leggi. (PCS, p. 33)

Obviously, the poem's binary structure ('Sono stati uccisi/ Si sono uccisi') does not claim to be able to disclose the truth, but rather to open up unsettling hypothesis.

Other references to the problematic function of sight are to be found in 'Incontra nel bosco', where the filtering of the scene through the poet's Polaroid spectacles delicately frames and alters his visual perception in a more insightful way; the dark lenses allow a symbolic 'palo di legno fresco' appear as a sudden revelation ('d'una misura pulita e amorevole'): 'ho veduto nella luce del pomeriggio ventoso' — meno crudo alle pupille attraverso le polaroid — infisso nel terreno un palo di legno fresco' (PCS, p. 42). The poem continues:

C'era nell'aria del pomeriggio ventoso
qualcosa che non intendevo, che non sapevo. Comparvero
una donna e una bambina e mi vennero incontro
dal bosco. Sottobraccio la bambina
aveva un piccolo cestello tutto colmo di mirtilli.
La donna invece non la ricordo. Vorrei
che questo fosse tutto. (PCS, p. 43)

The verbs in the first stanza in fact relate to the semantic field of physical perception ('guardare', 'vedere', 'udire' and 'sentire'), while those in the second stanza relate to reasoning ('intendere', 'sapere', 'ricordare', 'volere'). This opposition helps the poet explains how 'matter' becomes 'imagination' through a phenomenological experience, its most meaningful component consisting of the condition of the poet as the unseen observer. In the second stanza, the poet's thoughts are disturbed by a stream of sudden apparitions: no longer in control, he is captured by these simple images ('Vorrei che questo fosse tutto'). It should be emphasized that the poem recalls a day through the reactivation of the poet's memories: in the reshaping of this past day, visual perception vastly contributes to the poem's creation. The
exclamation ‘Vorrei/ che questo fosse tutto’ stands for the author’s self-critique; in fact, it amounts to a conscious process, which opens us to the poet’s discomfort regarding the clash of his intellectual reflections with the wholeness of the natural background. Indeed, this exclamation does not really favour the soothing effect of the landscape over the mind’s speculations, since the verb in the conditional mode (‘vorrei’) reinstates the paradigms of reason.

‘La risposta’, one of the poems which deals with the memorialization of the paternal figure, is also based on sight. Its content recalls an unhappy moment in childhood, which conveys crucial aspects of the oedipal complex made of fear, antagonism and guilt. Again, Fortini uses binary oppositions, such as ‘presence/absence’, and ‘vigilance/oblivion’, to express a moment of deep, existential crisis. The first stanza opens with the image of the poet’s father lying in a manifest state of physical and spiritual suffering (‘per disperazione si contraeva’):

Disteso sulla cassapanca del corridoio  
per disperazione si contraeva.  
Mia madre voleva consolarlo. Dino ti prego  
non fare così c’è il tuo figliolo.  
Contro i suoi occhi che chiedevano perdono  
gli occhi li ho avuti sempre aperti.  
Le voci non le avevo intese più.

Ora chiamano me  
non miti e non crudeli le voci grigie.  
Verso il loro mormorio  
nella sera calma e certa dopo il pianto  
va questa mia risposta. (PCS, p. 52)

In the poem’s first and second stanza, the presence of the father is turned into an object of sight. The tone suggests confusion and bewilderment as the poet attempts to face his father’s degraded conditions, dramatized by his imploring eyes, juxtaposed with the poet’s visual responsiveness. While the poet as a young man witnesses this family crisis, his anxious mother tries to minimize the trauma, acting as a filter for her husband’s undignified behaviour (‘Dino, ti prego, non fare così c’è il tuo figliolo’). This oedipal triangle may be seen as the son’s culpable aim to report on the page his father’s weakness, and its following punishment (‘ora chiamano me/non miti e non crudeli le grigie voci’). The adverb ‘contro’ reinforces the

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83 ‘Where a foreign tongue prevails’ translates the line that Fortini preserves in the German, which is also an adaptation of a line by Brecht, ‘Es hilft nur Gewalt, wo Gewalt herrscht’, from the last scene of Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe. SINA, p. 133.

parameters of the oedipal conflict ('contro i suoi occhi'), setting the father's disadvantage against the son's intelligence and acumen.

In the second stanza, the poet's discourse is somehow marked by a verbal caginess, since these memories evoke an inner guilt, which he carries like a hereditary disease. The dejected state of the father stresses the existence of forces in the psyche that, acting as a chain, will in the future deprive also the poet's Self of its logical apparatus. The poet's schizophrenic perception of grey murmuring voices, emerging from the darkness, does not relate simply to his Super Ego, but reflects the internalization of the father's misery as 'sameness'. The poem reveals a Kierkegaardian sense of broken religiosity, surrounding the father figure. Sight and hearing are once again destabilizing faculties since they provide important clues, which help resolve the poem's father/son opposition: this is symbolized by the apparent dissimilarity in the behaviour of the two men, which only superficially suggests a sense of broken continuity in the father/son relationship.

The opposition in the lines 'I suoi occhi che chiedevano perdono'/'gli occhi li ho avuti sempre aperti', reversing the conventional family hierarchy, elucidates the poet's fear of his future decline, that is of inheriting the misery of his father as man; the father's decline shows the present pointlessness of the poet's struggling against parental authority. The mirror-image father/son now makes him aware that what he fought was, in fact, the Self. Therefore, the father's defencelessness is memorialized, since it retains the power to influence the son's destiny, representing the Lacanian 'otherness'. The father's existential breakdown, which so deeply affected the poet as a young man, hardening his emotional and intellectual response ('le voci non le avevo intese più'), was thus gone but not forgotten. Once the father is dead, the poet finds himself deprived of meaningful articulation: no longer given the opportunity to fight against his authority, he must content himself with a mimetic designation as mere mirror, reflecting passively now the activity of male subjectivity; the murmuring grey voices, that he used to hear now return to pass on to him man's fear of nothingness.

This fearful dimension, from which the subject must be distinguished in order to be visible, is nevertheless of the same construction of the Self. This awareness restates the broken law of the symbolic order, which encompasses Self and Other. The poem's message

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85 Lacan, Écrits, p. 153. The 'signifying chain' in Lacan's theory of subjectivity is diachronic, caught in a continuous process of unfolding. The chain of signification belongs only to the symbolic order, though it has an effects on, and is affected by the imaginary as well.
86 Ibid., p. 104. The subject, as Self, in Lacanian terms, is nothing but the result of the traumatic impact of the subject with the symbolic and the need to differentiate himself/herself from it.
88 Ibid., p. 66. The distressing moment of the child's entry into the father's symbolic order, in Lacan's theory of childhood development, is his/her initiation into the law as the effect of the father's interdiction. In the child's experience of his mother as comfort, he/she perceives this enjoyment as an integral part of an order of things that regulates their imaginary identifications. When the child learns that the father has precedence over the infant's right to enjoy the mother, he internalizes the symbolic order, since this apprehension of the father's precedence is conveyed as an original verbal prohibition of access to the mother's body, which forces the child to create the
which thematically captures both the historical and personal adversities hidden behind the screen of a dormant, guilty consciousness – bears resemblance to Brecht’s ‘A bad morning’ (1953):

Last night, in a dream, I saw fingers pointing at me as if I were a leper. They were weary with labour and blistered.
‘You do not know!,’ I cried, awoken by my guilt.\(^8^9\)

Here too the poet is haunted by indistinct and vexatious presences, which reveal a dimension beyond sight. In this dream-like, yet lucid circumstance (‘in a dream, I saw’), seeing serves the moral purpose of indicating the poet’s errors. For instance, the presence of a leper indicates Brecht’s fear to be shunned for moral or social reasons (‘awoken by my guilt’). In fact, this expressionist poem, speaking out the misery of men (‘weary with labour and blistered’), allows the phrasing of the poet’s fear of public dishonour.

In this chapter it has been proposed that sight should be adopted as a central device to bear poetic testimony; in fact, in ‘L’educazione’ and ‘Il seme’ (*Questo muro*, 1973), Fortini’s investigation into the complexity of the Self relies again on sight.\(^9^0\) These poems too convey the idea of poetry as the expression of the inner tension between individuality and ‘otherness’.

In ‘L’educazione’, the poet observes the surrounding natural world:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Caduti i cartocci giù} \\
\text{le foglie luccicano come piccioni} \\
\text{della magnolia altissima. Sotto i cedri} \\
\text{dove la luce del pomeriggio è fitta} \\
\text{vedo l'erba crudele acida profonda} \\
\text{e l'interrogazione ritorna} \\
\text{ai colpi di vento si curva} \\
\text{si divide ritorna ma dicono i merli di no} \\
\text{camminando o fermi.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mio padre} \\
\text{s'inteneriva sulla propria morte} \\
\text{udendo l'allegretto della Settima.} \\
\text{Negli angoli dove c'è a marzo maceria} \\
\text{con gran pianti i bambini seppellirono} \\
\text{gli uccelli caduti di nido. Ma nulla} \\
\text{sa più di noi e discorre da sola} \\
\text{coi suoi corni e le trombe la musica}
\end{align*}
\]

symbol of the absent mother as a compensatory companion. For this reason, the initial paternal interdiction is the key for the child’s participation in the symbolic order and to make of it the very root of the father’s law.

\(^8^9\) In this poem, included in the original collection, *Gedichte*, 1913-1956, here in my translation, Brecht speaks of a famous workers’ revolt which took place in 1953.

\(^9^0\) Postmodern psychoanalytical and sociological theories posit that identity is socially constructed. The self, according to Foucault and others, as subject of discourses is what is defined and categorized by differences. Therefore subjectivity is always contextual, gendered, rooted in class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.
tra questi muri sudati.
In luogo di lui ci sono io
o mio figlio o nessuno.

Tutti i fiori non sono che scene ironiche.
Ormai la piaga non si chiuderà.
Con tale vergogna scenderò
i seminterrati delle cliniche
e con rancore.
Non è ancora luglio
non ancora scaldato asciutto assoluto
il seme. (PS, p. 163)

This poem exemplifies the subject matter of the entire collection: cultural decadence symbolized by an act of ‘seeding’, which fails to produce the desired fruits. Fortini portrays himself symbolically at his father’s side before the latter’s death: (‘In luogo di lui ci sono io/ o mio figlio o nessuno’). Father and son are in antithesis to each other: their Freudian opposition remains obscure and unsolved. The tone of the penultimate stanza is best captured where the poet declare his shame of not having honoured his father. The pathos increases (‘con che vergogna’) while pity diminishes (‘con che rancore’) as the voice tries to account for his changing feelings by making detached observations about human nature, seen as the seed of man’s misery (‘il seme’, ‘la piaga’).

The poem deals also with the bourgeois concept of family, the poet’s intention being to challenge the idea of patrimony, which insists on lineage as a value beyond price. Fortini asks whether it is possible to break the ancestral bonds, which make individuals suffer a social malfunction inside and outside the family unit. The poet’s father returns as an enigmatic figure to initiate a symbolic exchange between life and death. As in Hamlet, the father’s ghost is threatening; his presence/absence visually represents the son’s anxiety regarding the father’s authority. Yet he is aware of the fact that the father is a cohabitant of his own psyche: the poet looks into his eyes and sees a self-reflexive representation, experiencing what in Lacan’s theory is designated the mirror stage, that is the misrecognition of oneself as an autonomous subject. Finally, the characteristic antagonism of the child/parent duality in the poem grants validity to the culture over which the father has authority, as suggested by the imagery of the seed as human semen (‘non ancora scaldato asciutto assoluto/ il seme’). It is worth quoting from ‘Che cos’è la poesia’, where the antitheses ‘Other’ and ‘Self’ are made clear:

la poesia è un ragionamento fatto in presenza di un sogno, cioè un discorso che in apparenza è un discorso come un altro cioè un discorso di amore, di dolore, di descrizione, di esortazione, di sapere, di sapienza che è fatto sotto lo sguardo di un fantasma, sotto uno
This definition succeeds in rendering that peculiar transposition of external phenomena into poetic inwardness, characteristic of both the expressionist and surrealist modes. Sight (Io sgardò di un fantasma’) thus formalizes the encounter of the mind with the universe of physical phenomena, enhancing the role of poetry in the relationship between reality and the Self (‘sguardo che tutto tramuta’). The poet is no passive bystander: he plays an active and self-affirmative critical role (la poesia è un ragionamento’) over both the ‘seen’ and the ‘unseen’, as intuition and imagination.

We have seen how the poet’s awareness of the world is slowly destabilized by illusions, doubts and even hallucinations, which make him aware of the self-contradictory nature of what is believed to be real. In a late poem such as ‘Il custode’, published in Composita Solvantur (1994), Fortini presents himself as a broken subjectivity, which owes much to Adorno’s idea of the ‘liquidation of the subject’, which is the centre of a false unity of perceptions (‘l’uso delle pupille’, ‘il residuo’, ‘cerco di spiegare alle pupille ironiche’).

Also here, the Self describes the world as fragmentary, false and the paradoxical, as we read in these stanzas of ‘Il custode’. The scene relates to the poet’s late-night encounter with the watchman Rolando. Here we see a Brechtian, or Pasolinian kind of focus on the lower classes (the poet calls the young worker ‘compagno’): to Rolando’s sense of duty and practicality as a ‘custode’, the poet’s intellectual troubles may in fact appear as a self-indulgent and pathetic escape from reality.

‘È tutto, eccolo, l’esito, il residuo’
e sul palmo della mano destra ora vedilo, guardia
notturna, guardia giurata. È il concetto
di tutta la mia, odimi, esistenza.

[...]
‘È questo’, cerco in fretta di spiegare
’il punto, l’ergo’ alle pupille ironiche
sotto il tettuccio del berretto militare.

‘Ho saputo soltanto una parte,
ho inteso soltanto la vita che mi era nemica
e non l’amore, che esiste’. Scuoti il capo

[...]
Cerco dove distendermi, compagno,
dove posare il respiro.
Neanche sono depreso, vorrei solo

91 Fortini, ‘Che cos’è la poesia’, RAI Educational.
92 For Adorno’s ‘ontology of false conditions’, see Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1951), trans. E.F. N. Jephcott, London: 1974, pg. 16, where the philosopher claimed that in the light of man’s endangered subjectivity the ‘whole is false’.
Fortini stresses the lack of unity of the poet’s speech, perfectly seized by Rolando’s ‘pupille ironiche’ – ‘vorrei solo/ un po’ meno debole la mente’ – which gives vent to the poet’s own fears and insecurities (‘ho saputo soltanto una parte/ ho inteso soltanto la vita che mi era nemica’). The poem’s content is therefore atrophy and fragmentation, opposed to the poet’s past idealistic sense of totality. The poet, now old, tries to explain to the young ‘custode’ the crucial ‘point’ that has regulated his entire life (‘cerco in fretta di spiegare/ il “punto, l’ergo”’), yet he becomes slowly aware of the pointlessness of this attempt. Language will entrap him once more in a self-addressing speech, and the obscure web of its subtext, that is, the language of devotees in search of the meaning of meaning.

This self-questioning mode possibly originates in Fortini’s translation of Brecht’s theatre, as attested by Poesia e Errore (1969), which significantly shows Brecht’s influence. This style evolves also from the poet’s study of self-expression in Paesaggio con Serpente (1983), which, in Penultime (1990) and Composita Solvantur finally finds an existential anchorage in the gathering of fragments (‘Cerco dove distendermi, compagno/ dove posare il respiro’). These late collections put forward an ontology of the relative (‘esito’, ‘residuo’), and set aside the precarious condition of the poet’s subjectivity – a condition which Adorno had explored in Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1951) – in order to underline the ontological value of negation, as the fatal consequence of the progressive dissolution of the perceiving subject’s authority.
Poetics, like any living entity, undergoes change. Some changes are gradual, epochal processes, originating from conditions of stagnation in some or all spheres of a cultural tradition. Others arise abruptly out of the style and subject matter of individual artists or groups of artists, in connection with some crisis in their ideological, political, or emotional lives. This second type of transformation is enhanced by the tendency of artists to interrogate and exploit the contradictory relations inherent in their use of a given genre. The disquieting and yet formative experience of going through the sort of turmoil from which such changes originate always brings about new mediated forms and theoretical stand points. With this idea in mind, I question the widely held notion of the author’s ‘modern classicism’.

While researching Fortini’s oeuvre, I began to agree with Luperini that there should be more emphasis on the importance of his reaction to the dominant Hermetic trend, which had tangentially affected his poetry at an early stage, from Foglio di via (1947) to I destini generali (1956). Luperini stated:

Fortini, che ama la distinzione e la dialettica, decisamente si distanza dal regime di equivalenze su cui si regge il sistema letterario degli ermetici. Alla radice del ripudio si no, uniti, – ed è il primo dei paradossi cui dobbiamo abituarci per capire Fortini – Noventa e Marx.

In particular, while looking for a wider definition of the author’s artistic development towards what I call a poetics of self-contradiction, my investigation into the language and compositional style of La poesia delle rose, revealed a remarkable presence of the expressionist features which Mengaldo had indicated in his preface to the ‘poemetto’. I drew further inspiration from Giuseppe Nava’s essay ‘La condizione espressionista’, and Thomas E. Peterson’s The Rose in Contemporary Italian Poetry (2000), which clarified the incidence of the expressionist mode in the twentieth-century Italian literary scene in relation to the treatment of the ‘rose’ as a literary topos.

95 Luperini, La lotta mentale, p. 15.
La poesia delle rose is Fortini’s first, composite treatment, in verse, of the vitality and strength of Italian literary traditions. In it he also explores the problems of representation, self-representation, and imitation within the twofold baroque and neo-classical connection. Poetry, by its very nature, cannot help but be a means of underlying meshes, and of cultural appropriation; La poesia delle rose affirms the continuity of literature, but it does so by recombining traditional strands of thought and styles into a new aesthetics in order to record the impact of past poetics on the poet’s consciousness. With a distinctive modern touch, Fortini refers in the poem to the work of various authors, such as Torquato Tasso and Jules Michelet. His presence in the text is simultaneously that of the author of a daringly innovative poem and that of a writer who confirms the traditional function and cause of poetry. This metacriticism is conveyed obliquely to the reader through the composite and even violent symbolism of the rose, which is taken to expressionistic extremes, as we shall see. At the infratextual level, Fortini refers also to his personal use of the rose, as in his 1944 poem ‘La rosa sepolta’, included in Foglio di via (1946).

La poesia delle rose was written in 1956, when the crisis of Communist ideology was giving rise to widespread dissatisfaction among Italian socialist intellectuals. Fortini confronted this crisis both as a political and as an existential, personal defeat. He then felt obliged to deal with the shame of it allegorically, as in the following lines from Composita Solvatur, where years later the author faces the sceptical question ‘Dimmi, tu conoscevi, è vero, quanto sia indegna/ questa vergogna di vecchiezza? […] Lo scorpione ha serrate nel nido di rena/ la mente, rattratto riposa’ (CS, p. 9). Words such as ‘vergogna’ and ‘vecchiezza’ are here metaphors for the decadence of dogmatic side-taking. A fragmented dialogue between various selves and souls, which converge and disagree with each other, informs both the content and the form of La poesia delle Rose. This moral search for freedom, or self-determination, here based on a self-cognitive technique, generates an enduring warring between opposites, in a dialogue which involves a constant allusion to a number of literary interlocutors and historical facts. As a result, reading La poesia delle rose’s riotous eloquence, is like being invited to a poetic symposium on the role of poets in society, which never really attain reconciliation. Years later, in his preface to Poesie scelte (1974), Mengaldo indicated the presence, in Fortini’s poetry, but especially in Questo muro (1973), of some cryptic experimental codes and modes of expression that had already been introduced by Balestrini and Sanguineti. These new codes, such as the textual saturation, the subtle collage of mixing literary quotations from a variety of texts, and the multifocal narrator to be found in La poesia delle Rose, should be considered Fortini’s personal ‘sabotage’ of those themes and styles that poetry, as intertextuality, rewrites.

Nava offers a clear-cut definition of the general sense of ideological and spiritual apprehension, which pervades the work of the expressionist writer:
Nei riguardi della società, l’espressionismo è generalmente contrassegnato da una condiizione di spaesamento e di subalternità dell’intellettuale, che si riversa in una posizione di isolamento e/o di opposizione rispetto al sistema sociale e che alimenta tematiche apocalittiche o palingenetiche e, sul piano dell’interiorità, una dimensione ‘religiosa’, o più generale utopica, un ‘astratto furore’.

According to Nava, the expressionist artist suffers the universe as a fragmented absolute, one that cannot be restored to its lost integrity. The expressionist poet struggles to express this inner lacerating experience through a distorted rendering of the world, and subjectivity becomes noticeably significant. An expressionistic and, at times, surreal atmosphere is unmistakeable both in La poesia delle rose and in some of the poems in Paesaggio con serpente (1984) and Composita solvantur (1994), two collections which emphasize the ultimate ‘crisi della soggettività, dei rapporti del soggetto con il mondo’, within a surrounding ‘realtà pietrificata’. As expressions of an inner ‘catastrophe’ acknowledged and formalized within neat lyric frames, both volumes involve a process whereby imagination and inspiration are moulded by solitude and by intellectual and spiritual affliction.

From the early 1960s Fortini’s work begins to evoke the ‘clima espressionistico’, which had affected the ‘Vociani’ in the first two decades of the century: this becomes apparent in his recurrent use of themes such as ‘corruption’, ‘illness’ and ‘tribulation’. In one of the fragments, which compose La poesia delle rose, the author’s imagery is also reminiscent of Clemente Rebora’s Frammenti lirici (1913): ‘Nell’avvampato sfasciume, tra polvere e peste, al meriggio/ la fusa scintilla di un demone bigio/ atterra affronta assilla’.

With a similarly premeditated stylistic sophistication, La poesia delle rose too translates a sense of existential isolation, while indulging in the obscurity of its message: this is a process which let poetic language wave semantically between meaning and nonsense in order to contradict and deconstruct cultural mythologies and stereotypes.

I now propose to trace the structural and stylistic developments of the text’s macro-content and show the author’s new expressionist use of language through a detailed

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97 This is the anti-positivistic revolt that also pervades Pasolini’s and Sbarbaro’s expressionism.
99 Ibid., p. 341. In the editor’s notes, Mengaldo informs the reader that Fortini’s Poesia delle rose (Bologna: Palmaverde, 1962) contains several quotations from Georg Friedrich Händel’s libretto, Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno.
101 Clemente Rebora, in Frammenti lirici (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1913).
102 The term ‘macro-content’ is employed by Riffaterre in his Essais de stylistique structurale, Paris: Flammarion, 1971.
commentary on the seven stanzas of *La poesia delle rose*. The following textual analysis will therefore clarify some of the literary references which govern the narrator’s theatricality by drawing attention to alienated and estranged aspects of the ‘rose’ as a living entity. However, it is important to state that, although certain features in this text bring Fortini quite close to the German avant-garde, he was not a true expressionist writer, but rather the author of a unique collage of languages borrowed from expressionist poetry through translation and literary criticism. In fact, he is merely using expressionism as a pseudo-style, a technique. *La poesia delle rose*’s aesthetic results also prove that Fortini did not seek readability at the cost of making simplifications. Needless to say that the text’s true value relies exactly in its puzzling obscurity which goes beyond mere representation; it does so by using non-objective features that make no reference to reality by virtue of resemblance, since ‘a work justifies and explains itself in the effect which it communicates’.103

The seven fragments follow each other along a line of discourse which is held within the frame of a ‘dramatic monologue’, having at its core a semi-fictional character, metamorphosed into many Selves,104 who conveys a sort of intoxicates sense of displacement (‘brow bending into nothingness/ as wound’), and makes continual references to other lyric ‘voices’.105 Many of these intertextual allusions evoke expressionist and surrealist moods, tainted with the unsettling and sporadic flavour of a subdued and elegant baroquism.106 However, as Asor Rosa has noted, *La poesia delle rose* draws inspiration primarily from the long-standing fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian lyric tradition, a time when the rose was a prevalent and recurrent symbol for poets.107

*La poesia delle rose* is made up of eighteen octaves in free verse, divided into seven numbered segments, each with a variable number of stanzas. The sequence of interdependent poems contains 144 lines, the exact length of Manzoni’s ‘Pentecoste’. The style (especially paragraph structuring and lexical texture) is somewhat archaic or outmoded, exhibiting personalized caesuras as well as typically intricate clause patterns. The content is based on philosophical reflections, as well as on the formal, elevated tones and intellectual mannerisms

104 The reader will follow the *personae*’s state of pure intellect through his speech, ranging from aphoristic and absurd to sensual, elegiac and meditative.
105 As Mengaldo claims in his analysis of Fortini’s *Questo muro* (*L’Immaginazione*, Lecce: Manni, June 1996, p. 5-12) from this collection on, the style and tone of Fortini’s poetic diction will tend towards the ‘recitativo (drammatico) e l’antimelodismo’ (p.9).
107 Relying on the rose as a universal symbol, Fortini’s poem challenges the Dantesque model of the rose as a geometrical reproduction of divine harmony. Graeco-Roman Egypt provides many examples of the use that practical occultism made of roses. In fact, the rose, as a symbol, carries an archetypal power, and is first found in Western tradition as an attribute of Venus. Filtered by Christianity, the rose’s symbolism is re-directed inside the values recognized by the Catholic Church and will become, with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the principal icon of the Virgin Mary. The apex of the concept of Love, both in its earthly and spiritual form, is synthesized in the rose as found in Dante’s *Divina Commedia* as a theological interpretation of divine love; the last cantos of the *Paradiso*
found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry. The architectonic background aims at revisiting certain classical canons in order to ascribe to ancient works the authority to promote transformation and cultural rebirth. By its revitalizing of lyric traditions and voices,\textsuperscript{108} the allegorical quality of \textit{La poesia delle rose} enables past texts to spill over into the new poem.\textsuperscript{109}

As Peterson has suggested, the imagery in the opening fragment alludes to erotic encounters in a city park at night. The reader can almost perceive the narrator witnessing the scene as he drives through half-deserted streets:

\begin{quote}
Rose, rose di polvere, quanta durezza
nei ceppi a notte, rose arcuate
di spine quali i tendini robusti
e i muscoli dissecati della ragazza
che nell'auto seta manovra e cuoio.
Ma molle se un abbagliante la sbatte ma maculata
lungo la gola come le rose contuse
nel lavorio di mezzanotte e ortiche.(PS, p. 144)
\end{quote}

The poet's use of imagery in the opening is characterised by violent contrasts and a highly theatrical set that deals with the supernatural. The reference to frenetic midnight sexual trading among the nettles ('lavorio di mezzanotte e ortiche') suggests the existence of a mysterious world at the margins of Rome's ancient sites. As Peterson has noted, the image in this opening stanza is that of a witches' Sabbath,\textsuperscript{110} and implies a view of poetic power as obscurity and misrepresentation.\textsuperscript{111} As Peterson has noted, the image may also be a reference to Jules Michelet's \textit{La sorcière} (1911),\textsuperscript{112} which Fortini had read in the 1959 edition with an introduction by Barthes,\textsuperscript{113} he had also read Barthes's biography of Michelet, \textit{Michelet par lui-même} (1954). In 'Michelet, la negazione e il rito', the essay included in \textit{Questioni di frontiera}, Fortini noted:

\begin{quote}
are dominated by the mystic rose on whose white petals the saints are enthroned. It also occurs in the Middle Ages, as a symbol of courtly love.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{108} Fortini substitutes the traditional metrical forms with uneven strophes in blank verse, which may recall Ugo Betti's early phase in \textit{Il re pensieroso} (1922), characterized by expressionist imagery. What Fortini may share with Betti at the thematic level is his pessimistic outlook, and his concern with man's moral responsibility and sense of guilt.

\textsuperscript{109} It is important to underline that Fortini's focus on classic heritage suggests no sterile idealization of the past, as such.

\textsuperscript{110} See Peterson, \textit{The Ethical Muse of Franco Fortini}, in 'Paradox and Redemption in \textit{La poesia delle rose}', p. 71. Peterson writes: 'An eventual rite involves violence and a confrontation with delirium amid a flurry of gods of \textit{dramatis personae} named or alluded to as the "figures" of the false consciousness [...] The events of the poem are fragmented pieces of a collective occult memory.'

\textsuperscript{111} Seeing a witch in one's dream represents evil, destructive, and dangerous feminine forces. From a misogynist point of view, it may point to negative experiences and ideas of the feminine. Alternatively, a witch can be symbolic of goodness, power and enchantment. However, thinking or dreaming that one is a sorcerer is believed to represent a given person's talents, inner strengths, and creative ability.

\textsuperscript{112} The nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet's theory of witch-hunting, in \textit{La sorcière} (1911), is based on the understanding of female practices as erotic and magical rituals of collective solidarity for the liberation of women from social injustice.
Gli storici hanno sempre maltrattato il Michelet di questo capolavoro: sempre i critici letterari lo hanno esaltato. [...] Baudelaire fu sollecito lettore de La strega. [...] Barthes ha visto nel Michelet [...] una "formidabile ambiguità" fra il romanziere (lo scrittore) e l'analista-storico; ha identificato in quella la ragione della vitalità del libro.'(QF, pp. 271-274)

The other reference in this passage is, consequently, to Barthes's Mythologies (1957), a study of myths and signs in contemporary culture. The Expressionist mode supplies the iconography to portray the witches involved in the night ritual, underlying the artist's attempt to discover unspeakable, underlying truths. The obscurity of the poem itself seems to discourage any rationalist explanation about the irrevocable decline of society. The theme of sexuality as possession and witchcraft, decadence and depravity, is opened in an elevated register and then suddenly modulated with extremist chords, producing grotesque imagery ('ma molle se un abbagliante la sbatte ma maculata/ lungo la gola come le rose contuse', 'ma sempre i fari ai tornanti a infocare teatri di roseti'). By synthesizing an ambience of ersatz modernism and pseudo-archaism, Fortini counterbalances the poem's assuredness and gives salience to its more literary textual elements, thereby celebrating the poetic faculty per sé.

In the quasi-erotic opening, a woman struggles with an unidentified sexual counterpart ('delle rose l'empietà ne gode'). While handling 'seta e cuoio', she ('la ragazza', or 'la dama') is fouled and wounded. Yet masochistically, she exacts more cruelty ('Scalci la dama, perde il sandalo, esige / immanità, si lorda tra erbe e bava'). In losing her 'sandal', she metaphorically loses control over morality. For the reader, this part of the text seems to perform an unsettling function, to preclude any clear aesthetic or ethical judgement of the poem's content and style. Fortini seems to be pointing at life's vanished sense of unity in order to represent the loss of true eroticism in modern times.

Fortini's early poetry had little taste for the expressionist and surrealist innovations which he uses here. Yet, his formalized ethicality was not concerned with self-expression so much as with the moral and social function of poetry. The impasse generated by the poet's political disillusionment in the late 1950s was assuaged neither by the special relationship

113 The book was also published in Italy in 1977 with the title La strega.
114 Fortini, Questioni di frontiera, Turin: Einaudi, 1977, p. 272. The gathering of witches is interpreted as an anarchic rebellion against superstition and persecution: 'Le streghe vengono dal fondo, dal basso, ma sono le profetesse dell'uguaglianza'. The topos is channelled via Barthes's interest in the erotic fascination for female blood, which comes into play in his critical introduction to the 1959 edition of Michelet's La Sorcière.
116 I am adopting Derrida's idea of 'dissemination' in La dissémination (Paris, 1972). For Derrida the meaning of any spoken or written utterance is ineluctably disseminated by the action of opposing internal linguistic forces. It thus disperses itself among innumerable alternatives, so negating any definitive signification. This incessant play of differences, which he calls polyseme, is what constitutes the verbal ambiguity.
between his art and the phenomena of nature, nor by his privileged connection with the

Fortini, writing in a non-Communist country, needs no disguise either for his own person,
or for the cause of his sadness. Fortini’s poem is about politics and poetry, about political
commitment and its frustration by the complexity of events. Its wisdom and honesty,
confirmed by the dialectical twist at the end (of the poem ‘Traducendo Brecht’) enable
Fortini to combine the language of anti-poetry with the traditional dignity of Italian
verse.117

Widely recognized as a stern ethical poet, Fortini went through a sudden ‘turn’ in an essay
included in *Questioni di frontiera* (1965-1977):

Chi di noi non ha conosciuto e non intravede, ancora oggi, i ‘dannati’ e ‘le streghe’? [...] il
cui riso ci balena per le vie nei momenti di smarrimento. Coscienti appena della
perversione che perseguono, distruttori disperati...Una soggezione infantile a un potere,
tanto più forte quanto meno motivato, ci propone in costoro la seduzione e la brace118 del
male, immutabile e finita. (QF, p. 279)119

In *La poesia delle rose*, then, the presence of ‘riso’ is extremely significant for the
expressiveness of this new Pasolinian register of ‘tragica recitazione [...] che “nega” le anime
per riconoscere solo i “corpi”’ (QF, p. 265). In fact, ‘Una soggezione infantile a un potere,
tanto più forte quanto meno motivato’ gives an adequate idea of Fortini’s reversion into a
poetics of the emotional and the irrational: in this realm, ‘la corruzione perde insomma o
attenua al massimo i suoi caratteri negativi’, as he claimed in ‘Poesia e corruzione’ (QF, p.
264). Yet at the same time, since the poet know that ‘una delle astuzie dell’erotismo è di
accentuare i divieti per accrescere il livello libidico’, s/he learns how to control this
subjugation. The acquisition of language will gradually divide the poet from the world by
allowing him/her to develop verbal habits, which replace the true objects of fear or desire
with symbols. This is made possible by the paradoxical status of the word, with its power to
make a presence out of an absence. Through language, the rose (for example) is separated
from the material world and transfigured into a symbol attached to an archetypal system of
meaning.

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118 ‘Brace’ here suggests the destructive powers of evil, but also its ability to swell and propagate.
119 See Fabrizio Podda, “All’oscillio del riso”. Strategie ironiche in *La poesia delle rose* di Franco Fortini’, in
tr. it.: 86-87]: “se il riso è rimasto, fino ad oggi, il segno della violenza, l’eruzione della natura cieca e indurita,
esso ha tuttavia in sé anche l’elemento opposto: e cioè che nel riso la cieca natura si rende conto di se stessa come
tale, e si libera così della sua violenza distruttiva’ (p.1).
In one sense La poesia delle rose inverts the standard psychoanalytic approach to art by showing how, in Jungian or Lacanian terms,\textsuperscript{10} it is ‘la seduzione del male’, that is, the rhetorical strategies of language itself, that provide the key to transformations of the poet’s style. This is why the language of this ‘poemetto’ is overtly figurative, as its author’s discourse intervenes to subjugate desire and fantasy. On the iconographic level, indeed there are noticeable contrasts in the connotations of symbols and metaphors (‘scava balordo lo scarabeo’, ‘Miele occlude i trionfi’,\textsuperscript{11} ‘meteoriti di ferro mentale’, ‘ultimi fiumi di un ironico inferno’). The clash between radical and quasi-devotional expressions is solved through lexical accumulation (‘rose di polvere’, ‘rose arcuate di spine’, ‘teatri di roseti, ‘o ape latina’,\textsuperscript{12} ‘beate le rose’). While the allusion to an orgiastic ceremony, in the second fragment, could be interpreted as the poet’s intuition of the unsettling powers of poetic language. Ambiguity and defamiliarization are further key features of the opening ‘Rose, rose di polvere, quanta durezza’, which presents an enigma on the nature of art, thus the reader is constantly forced into a substantive doubt about the meanings of the poem’s symbolic codes. Stylistically, the poem tends to use an elevated literary register, with frequent inversions and highly Latinate phrases. There is also a contrast between modernity and antiquity in the first stanza\textsuperscript{13} where the landscape comprises movement, violence, exuberance, exaggeration, and strong chiaroscuro, characteristics of the neo-baroque style. By contrast, neo-classical elements, derived from Greek and Roman antiquity, are also present, with their emphasis on order, balance, rationality, restraint, and clarity. This poem is an example of Fortini’s mastery of a variety of ancient and modern styles. Thanks to this technique, which adds to the clarity and force of his vision, the versatile and almost alchemical power of the rose binds together secularity and transcendence, carnal love and veneration:

\begin{quote}
Ah contro i fiori aperti all’afa \\
com’è dolce l’affanno dell’ape, \\
come i cuori vorrebbero non venisse \\
mai giorno ma sempre i fari ai tornanti \\
a infocare teatri di roseti \\
nel parco immenso arido romano! (PS, p. 144)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} For both Jung and Lacan, it is language, and not the ego, what places demands upon the mind. We are taught how to provide our emotional response by language itself. When a poet writes, s/he experiences the claim that language makes upon his/her skills, for words come to the poet already pregnant with signification.

\textsuperscript{11} The term ‘miele’ may allude to Virgil’s elegiac style.

\textsuperscript{12} In order to understand the allusion to Virgil’s (‘ape Latina’) use of the pastoral elegy (‘miele’) in La poesia delle rose, it is helpful to cite Ben Jonson; speaking of the cult of imitation, and recommending caution on the grounds that a copy is almost invariably substandard to its model, Jonson cited Horace in connection with classical forms being assimilated into a personal idiom: ‘to draw forth out of the best and choicest flowers, with the Bee, and turns all into Honey’ (Timber, 1620, p. 35).\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{13} A similar contrast between modernity/antiquity is exploited by Pasolini in his 1964 ‘poemetto’, Poesia in forma di rosa, which may be considered a challenging response to Fortini’s 1962 La poesia delle rose.
In these lines, the words seem to expand and vibrate, liberating desire, which is here associated with eroticism and transgression (‘infocare teatri di roseti’). The ecstatic hearts and orgasmic bodies are eager to transcend reality and sink in a pleasurable oblivion (‘come i cuori vorrebbero non venisse/ mai giorno’). Eroticism is, then, a revolt against time and space (‘parco immenso arido Romanol’), replaced here by fervent dance and emotional fluctuation. The reference to an immense and arid Roman park offers the crucial arena where, through eroticism and fire, death is symbolically experienced. Thus, language, becoming incapable to say what it cannot, turns into a theatre of sacrifice and excess, a space where a negative synthesis occurs, or else it turns into an escape towards the impossible, as stressed by Georges Bataille in ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’. The sensuousness of the lines ‘Ah contro i fiori aperti all’afa/ com’è dolce l’affanno dell’ape’, which conveys satisfaction (‘com’è dolce’) and disquiet (‘affanno’), seems to justify the non-sequitur in the list of artefacts and natural elements at the end of the second stanza (‘polvere’, ‘ustioni’, ‘curve’, ‘colombari’, ‘ghaie’, ‘anfore’). The device tells the reader that the poet’s discourse will be shrouded in symbolic elements, and indirect. Its internal logic consists of cryptic relationships, for example, between ‘colombari’, designating a Roman sepulchre, and ‘anfore’, referring to archaeological findings. Here language ‘stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits’, resisting direct signification and mimetic representation.

The landscape is dramatized by setting bonfires (‘ustioni di curve’) at the periphery of the immense Roman park. This blazing source of energy coincides with deconstructing the fundamental illusion of any monolithic ego or truth (‘Dove si schiude una rosa decade una rosa/ e uno è il tempo ma è di due la verità’), and counterbalances the neo-classical monumentalism of the background, with its grottos, fountains, parks, and amphitheatres (‘teatri di roseti’). Thus, the human longing for wholeness and absolutes is set against life’s bipolar flux and the existence of irreducible antagonisms:

Ma riconosci questo indizio. Da grotte, fontane
i contrari respirano immobili.
Dove si schiude una rosa decade una rosa
e uno è il tempo ma è di due verità.
Vieni al gelo e al gran caldo. (PS, p. 145)


In her review ‘Fortini sceglie versi’ (in L’immaginazione, Lecce: July-August, 1991, p. 6), Rossella Nicolucci emphasises the presence in Fortini’s poetry of a stylistic ‘viaggio attraverso un paesaggio storico pietrificato […] la cesura che ordina il verso, ovvero la conclusione, al presente, che interpreta il passato, e su di esso getta la propria ombra’
In spite of a pessimistic opening (‘Rose, rose di polvere, quanta durezza’), the poet’s epigrammatic force and probing desire (‘come i cuori vorrebbero non venisse / mai giorno’) creates sense out of contrast and negation, exploiting the overabundant totality of inner experience. Here, the binary opposition between nature and poiesis, which generates mystification, emphasizes the philosophical at the expense of the biological. Granted, the aphoristic line ‘Dove si schiude una rosa decade una rosa’ proposes an image of decay, as generations (possibly of poets) succeed each other; but it also marks a vital dialectical relation between them, which proceeds despite Rome’s decayed monuments with their odour of dust and dead flowers. In the first two lines the conflict between past and present is gradually resolved; faced with the fragmentation of culture and society, art can counteract the chaos of industrialization. But any desire for an effective compositional and ideological coherence, a focus, or a central narrative persona, is upset by the polarity inherent in all existing things (‘uno è il tempo ma è di due verità’).

The poet solicits awareness (‘Ma riconosci questo indizio’) of the inter-changeability between opposites: good and evil, rationality (‘Vieni al freddo e al gran caldo’) and irrationality (‘caldo’), the birth of a literary tradition (‘si schiude una rosa’) and its consequent decline (‘decade una rosa’). This alertness escapes total dissolution by invoking the principle which underlies the variety of truths that comprise reality. In the second line (‘i contrari respirano immobili’), a paradox re-emerges to eclipse the search for intellectual coherence. The conflicts between past and present, life and death, order and disorder are only apparently resolved in a well-designed sequence of dignified words, which introduce the figure of the poet laureate (‘appari tu’):

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appari
tu ai lampi illuminata tempia
che eri slancio d’alloro nella calma
e arco di cipresso e sempre sei
con altro nome e tornerai con altra salma. (PS, p. 145)
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What may appear to shape a varied list of decadent and almost gothic images, traces in fact a steady, culturally insightful profile of the laureate poet, here characterized by a haughty, aristocratic pose, stylistic refinement, and gloomy sepulchral fascination. The verb ‘apparire’
lays emphasis on the phenomenology of perception, which here fulfils the poet’s idea by
giving it flesh, thus recalling Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the role of the body, owned and
lived through by a transcendental ego. The synecdoche (‘ai lampi illuminata tempia’),
designating the classic lyricist, compensates metaphorically for his/her posthumous status as a
‘salma’. Accumulation returns in the line ‘squama di serpe ago unghia lama’, which suggests
an esoteric relationship between language and accumulated objects. There is a formal process
of interrogation and meaning, which makes no claim to transparency and a rhyming
naturalism to create the world it is examining, and which includes, rather than excludes,
intertextual inferences. Accordingly, the following stanza of the second fragment announces:

Ora tu tremi,
    rivedo, traverse le erbe
e come t’anneri e tramuti
so e all’oscillio del riso già sei
squama di serpe ago unghia lama
che la lingua delle rose affili
e per crepitio di stipe soffiano, frugano
la scena i semivivi sinché dilaghi
l’arteria e ne derivi la riga tu
a Ecate. Una vecchia ti liscia l’anca. (PS, p. 145)

The systematic distortion and introspection characteristic of La poesia delle rose results in its
poetics to be self-derided. Interestingly, in the cited lines, we distinguish both Tasso’s style
and Fortini’s mocking his solemn, dramatic tone (all’oscillio del riso’, ‘rivedo, traverse le
erbe’, ‘frugano la scena i semivivi’, ‘derivi la riga tu’, my emphasis), seeming intentionally to
conflate the pathos of the dead lyric poet and the writing techniques of the ‘rifacitore’. The
excess of connotation is released through an over-determined authorial awareness (‘rivedo’,
‘so’); as Peterson claims in ‘Paradox and Redemption in La poesia delle rose’ (1997), ‘an
occult memory is not only at work here, but is, in a certain sense, the subject of the poem.’

The poem is deliberately enigmatic, inviting the reader to ‘collaborate’ in identifying the
authors of the intertext (‘con altro nome e tornerai con altra salma’). However, calculated
obscurity is not the only difficult aspect of the poem. There is also the question of the resolute
voice that speaks through these seven fragments: is it Fortini, or one of his several poetic
alter-egos? Perhaps the author intends to render both dimensions in his own voice. The poetic
diction is certainly dense and multi-layered, relying on an archaic and ornate use of literary
jargon. Fortini’s technique aims to achieve linguistic instability possibly to echo Zanzotto’s
elliptical metalanguage, where poetic subjectivity is charged with constant allusion to other
authors and other texts. The main traceable influences are Tasso’s Discorsi del poema

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131 Peterson, The Ethical Muse of Franco Fortini, p. 71.
132 Fortini, Breve secondo Novecento, p. 73. In relation to the awe-inspiring and mysterious themes in La poesia
delle rose, the portrait of Zanzotto, which Fortini offered in Breve secondo Novecento, is suitable for describing
eroico (1564), in which the author states the presence of a micro-cosmos in the work of art, based on the same order that regulates the universe, 'la qual è composta di contrari, come la ragion musica: perché s'ella non fosse molteplice, non sarebbe tutta, né sarebbe ragione, come dice Plotino', and the same author’s Dialoghi, which treats of demons, ghosts and witches.

Whereas the first two fragments are deliberately burdened with allusions to sexual excess, in the third, the poem's oxymoronic combination of mystery and farce, urban life and spiritual apartness suggests iconographic worship: ‘Affondati allora/ nel calpestio, ingorgati, adora’; the unconscious is made to flow, to simulate desire. The reader is thus shown how an extraordinary individual experience, such as poetry, can be given different explanations, either as witchcraft, madness or religious revelation. Rather daringly, the author’s allusions to worship are visually linked to sexual intercourse, abuse and perversion.

The poem’s central argument addresses the Western stereotype of the organic Self, centre of all meaning, as in the depiction of the poet as Narcissus, and revises the outcomes of the humanist’s appeal to rationality. Even at its most abstract and difficult the poem’s self-conscious discourse has palpable truth content, suggesting that the brutally concealed realities of our society should be exposed. Thus it functions, in an Adornian mode, as an assessment of the ideologies that mask our times. The fragment conveys a modern understanding of what humanism has produced, as a deviant formulation of the Renaissance fascination with man’s ability to pursue, harmoniously, his spiritual and material progress. From Fortini’s pessimistic perspective on these derogatory processes, the ‘inhuman’ (‘inumana bocca’) has massively infiltrated the poet’s daily experience, suppressing all that is ‘human’ in his language. Politically, the poem adumbrates a critique of the authoritarian State, which reinforces its power through cultural stereotypes and through language itself. Since language is the outcome of manipulative strategies, reality also becomes distorted and manipulated. Language mediates a dictatorship of consciousness; those who control the word control the world.

If reality has been usurped by ideology via the distorting power of language, poetic language is also seen as ‘contemptible’, as in the line ‘solo hai questa lingua di gloria vile’.

his own style: ‘L’allora giovane poeta di Pieve di Soligo sembrò e fu schierato con la conservazione delle forme e delle poetiche degli anni Trenta e con l’immagine del poeta profetico e sacerdotale. I suoi primi versi si sostengono nella durezza e nella castità della scansione, doce c’è soprattutto Orazio, corretto dal miele virgiliano, naturalmente Ungaretti e persino Quasimodo [...] Era, il suo, un dettato volto a raccontare, al modo dei romantici, vicende dell’animo attraverso il paesaggio, ma come si dice ‘attraverso uno specchi’. Another analogy between Virgil’s poetry and honey (‘miele virgiliano’) is being introduced here.

As the moral and philosophical doctrine of the Enlightenment, lying at the heart of modernity, Humanism comes in for serious criticism here via the theories of Marxist thinkers such as Adorno, Horkeimer and Marcuse, who claim that Western civilization has turned into a self-apologetic violent structure.

An echo from Tasso’s last letter to his friend Antonio Costantini can be traced in this line: ‘Quando io pensavo che quella gloria che, mal grado di chi non vuole, avrà questo secolo dai miei scritti, non fosse per lasciarmi in alcun modo senza guiderdone’ (from ‘Il poema eroico e Torquato Tasso’, in La letteratura italiana, Rinascimento e Barocco, Salvatore Battaglia & Giancarlo Mazzocurati (eds.), Florence: Sansoni/Accademia, 1974, p. 212.
The poet expresses the contemporary notion that poetic language, while remaining at the core of men’s emotional perception of the world, finally lacks a reliable foundation. In short, Fortini’s *Poesia delle rose* not only conveys a new expressionist use of language but also presents a critique of ideological idealism. Although poetic language is seen as potentially able to liberate the poet from ideological servitude, through a reassessment of the significance of the human and a realignment of the poet’s relationship with its expressive medium, its public strength is limited, as Fortini has stressed elsewhere: ‘La poesia non muta nulla. Nulla è sicuro, ma scrivi.’

In *La poesia delle rose*, as in many other poems, Fortini’s double-thinking distorts the logical structure of the poem’s language, so that the contradiction between two statements is neglected. The nihilist anger of the German expressionist poet George Trakl may be another influence here, with his sad, decaying and harsh world of autumnal shadows full of dream-like images and insanity, together with the theme of sexuality as the ultimate guilt, the soul’s disease, a symbolic, incurable wound. The similarities between Fortini’s *La poesia delle rose* and Trakl’s poetic diction are striking, with their themes of death and corruption, transcendence and religious yearning, the fall of man and despair, and the glimmer of redemption through love and purity. Both are at once figurative and crude, richly baroque and cruelly expressionistic, without losing their elegiac tone. In the same way as in Trakl’s *Helian* (1915), or in Egon Schiele’s paintings, bodies and objects in *La poesia delle rose* seem to suffer from a mysterious corruption (‘come t’anneri’, ‘frugano la scena i semivivi’, ‘tu che ti acchi se li fissi e rantoli con loro!’, ‘E come si scuoiando intrisi di linfa’, ‘come il tetano scatena morsi’). The tone and progression of the images of death, twilight, nature in decay, and religious symbolism are more akin to nightmare than to imagination. The following verse is austere and bleak, but also sombre, and with a sudden hint of warmth and transcendence:

*Smaglia le carn i la rosa, si sbra na*
*che al mattino intatta deriderà.*
*Non altro modo di profondere, di denu dare alla notte la delizia e il ribrezzo che tanti anni maligno in sé ti stringe, stemma che i vecchi diramano per le meningi a te e la rabbia dei defunti canina e qui sfami a questo pasto di rose, bestia, stracciate. (PS, p. 146)*

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135 *Poesie scelte*, p. 125.
136 Trakl could, in fact, be behind Fortini’s critical evaluation of the fundamental discord between the sexes, which becomes the ‘indizio’ for a malady that is generational and perceived as an endless state of mourning.
In this stanza, an erotic convulsion marks the physical lacerations which the rose inflicts to its own body (that is, poetry), in order to devours itself (‘Smaglia le carni la rosa, si sbraña’). The line evokes an eroticized death-drive, which reaches a degree of intensity beyond the pleasure principle. Here Fortini borrows Rilke’s idea of the wound caused by the rose’s thorns as a spiritual necrosis. Language is disfigured, pushed to its limits, and so poetry, which is condemned to autoeroticism and automutilation. The semantic energy generated by the slang of aggression (‘rabbia dei defunti canina’) creates a palpable density in the figure of speech. Here, the semantic field of ‘hunger’ (‘cami’, ‘morsi’, ‘sbraña’, ‘canina’, ‘sfâmi’, ‘pasto’) may refer both to the poet’s imagination and to the corpus of traditional literary works, conveying the notion of the rose as an exploited symbol.

Taken into the domain of expressionistic writing this violence is charged with a devious mannerism, poetically linking pleasure to disgust (‘delizia’/‘ribrezzo’); poetry is to oppose theoretical measure and meaning with a radicalized dichotomy made of pleasure and horror. Its abandonment to desire, then – its readiness to disequilibrium, consummation and self-destruction – silences the author’s nostalgia for continuity and rationality. The rose demands and finds in itself the impossible: it is outside the ethical law, as in Bataille’s idea of poetry.

The first, second and third fragments thus convey a contemptuous dismissal of the self-righteousness of poetic language towards the liberating fury of the body. The contrasts between body and soul, rewards and punishment, blossoming and decay, and virtue and guilt all proceed through a profuse range of terms, which relate to the semantic field of sexual craving (‘ne gode’, ‘la sete si esalta senza posa a colpi di sangue’, ‘si lorda tra erbe e bava’, ‘ago unghia lama che la lingua delle rose affili’); the decadent morbidity of these expressions shows the influence of Baudelaire, while recalling, at the same time, the *danse macabre* with its demons in human and animal form. The line ‘una vecchia ti liscia l’anca’ is a reference to the mythological three-headed Greek deity, Ekate, lunar goddess of birth, life and death, who watches the streets at night to show the dead the way, is particularly gruesome, given her preference for sites where human blood has just been shed.

The liberating anger of the first three fragments may echo Rainer Maria Rilke’s ‘rose themes’. In ‘No-One’s Sleep’ the German poet linked his idea that all beauty is reflected in plants and flowers – as an incessant idea of love and yearning – with an account of how a rose

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139 The stanza exhibits the kind of necrosis which characterizes Baudelaire’s poetic subjects.


140 Ekate was believed to be the queen of ghosts and demons. For the presence of this goddess (associated also to Moon) in Greek and Latin literature, especially in Seneca (*Medea*, p. 790), Plutarco, Horace (*Saturnae*, I, VIII, p.
had injured him (‘Rose, oh pure contradiction, desiring to be no-one’s sleep under so many eyelids’). In Fortini’s lines ‘Non altro modo di profondere/ di denudare/ alla notte la delizia’, the fear of damnation and physical decay (‘il ribrezzo che tanti anni maligno/ in sé ti stringe’) threatens call for redemption. The allusion to Judaism underlines the poet’s criticism of sectarianism (‘stemma/ che i vecchi diramano per le meningi a te [...] e tu che ti accechi se li fissi e rantoli/ con loro!’). These oppositional tensions of eroticism and repulsion breathe a deceitful new life into his emblems. Thus, with the line ‘i simboli distorti dell’avvenire’, the third stanza of the third fragment conveys a critique of history; the sinister, uneven register of its linguistic extremism indicates the poet’s repugnance for the present.

The denigration of insanity, explained by Fortini in a note to the Versi scelti, recreates the theme of Canto XXVI in Dante’s Purgatorio, where two eminent lyric poets, Guido Cavalcanti and the Provencal troubador, Arnaut Daniel, are compelled to do penance for their sins of lust, which were committed ‘seguendo come bestie l’appetito’. In ‘Erotismo e letteratura’, criticizing the notion of sexual emancipation as hiding the principle of bourgeois commerce, Fortini noted:

Insomma la direzione di mutamento sembra andare da forme arcaiche di forte pressione e quindi di forte tensione erotica, a forme di libertà mistificata, che recitano il copione dell’erotismo, ma in realtà alludono ad altro: ambizione, invidia, potere, vanità.’ (VPD, p. 36).

To an extent, unlike in the world of consumerism, Fortini adds, the idea of sin, in the Christian tradition, stands for a less demystified form of liberty: ‘Oltre all’arrossirsi allora il rapporto fa repressione socio-economica nel mondo del profitto [...] e apparente non-repressione e licenza nel mondo dell’erotica.’ (VDP, p. 36) Indeed, not only ‘la produzione determina l’erotica’, but the interaction of eroticism and sexual ethos become a virtually reactionary form of ‘etica produttiva del profitto’ (VDP, p. 35).

In the fourth fragment, the opening ‘E ora la passione per gli alberi alta ritorna’ reflects the narrator’s need to be rescued from the degenerate conduct which is destroying the beauty of the rose. Via Barthes’s Writerly and Readerly Texts (1970), Fortini may suggest here a distinction between the potentially antisocial theories of the ‘predicatori’ of the sexual revolution – that is the detrimental, rationalistic optimism of the ‘le avanguardie sessuali’ (VDP, p. 38) – and the intellectual delight afforded by the mastery of regular forms. A move

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12 Another major point of reference in La poesia delle rose is Bataille’s erotica, represented in the violent images of sexual degradation that pervade the three stanzas of the first fragment (‘i tendini robusti/ e i muscoli disseccati di quelle ragazze/ che nell’auto seta manovra e cuoio’). An additional point of reference for La poesia delle rose is Stendhal’s aesthetics of cruelty, which, at its most intense, suggests the painful disintegration not only of the mind and the body, but of language itself.
is also made from Freudian individualism to Jungian collectivism (‘chi siamo’, ‘verso di noi’, ‘dal sogno usciremo’). These two dimensions, the psychological and the archetypal, are aptly juxtaposed in order to intensify the oxymoric effects to be found in the text:

E ora la passione degli alberi ritorna.  
Il desiderio e la separazione  
onon ci saranno più. Chi siamo stati  
saremo e senza dolore. Già verso di noi  
quel che vi parve favola viene e sarà,  
figli di questo secolo, ironie.  
Noi dal sogno usciremo per esistere  
in una sola verità. (PS, p. 147)

The reference to trees and foliage here is symbolic of the process whereby base libidinal instincts are sublimated and reworked into a higher, nobler order, that is poetic logocentrism, which is in fact a masquerade of the poet’s true Self. On the intertextual level, the symbolism of the tree as an image of integrity\textsuperscript{144} recalls certain of Brecht’s critique of idealism in ‘L’albero in fiamme’, ‘Il ladro di ciliegie’, ‘Saluto mattutino a un albero di nome verde’, and ‘A quelli nati dopo di noi’.\textsuperscript{145}

By following an allegorical/symbolic line, which includes Rilke and Brecht, the imagery of ‘roses’ and trees\textsuperscript{146} may be underlining the condition of writers as co-writers. For instance, a definition of the rose as ‘pure contradiction’ can be found both in Rilke’s epitaph on his own grave and in his ‘Sonnets to Orpheus’ where roses and trees emerge profusely (‘Tree arising! O pure ascendance!’, Part I; and ‘Give thanks should he sometime outlive the rose’, Part V).\textsuperscript{147} Self-referential aspects arise in the fourth fragment, where similarities with Brecht confer an ironic touch to the poet’s wilful self-dissolution (‘stupiti identici spiriti pazzi di risa’). A symbolic ‘tree’, here, embodies an all-embracing hierarchical order, which annihilates bourgeois individualism. The narrator, thus, announces a return to

\textsuperscript{144} Dante Alighieri, in \textit{La Divina Commedia}, \textit{Purgatorio}, XXVI, vv. 82-87. The reference to the rose’s perfection also recalls Dante’s idea of celestial harmony in \textit{Paradiso}, XXX.


\textsuperscript{146} Brecht aims to represent the political limitations under which poets write (‘discorrere sugli alberi è quasi un delitto’). In ‘A quelli nati dopo di noi’, he alludes to the Party’s aversion for his cryptic use of allegorical discourse. In Fortini’s version, the poem recites: ‘Davvero, vivo in tempi bruti/La parola innocente è stolta. Una fronte distesa/vuol dire insensibilità. Chi ride,/la notizia atroce/non l’ha saputa ancora./ Quali tempi sono questi, quando/ discorrere sugli alberi è quasi un delitto,/perché su troppe stragi comporta silenzio!’

\textsuperscript{147} In the preface to \textit{Summer is not all} (1992), the collection of poems edited and translated into English by Paul Lawton, Fortini explains the genesis of his own poetic growth: ‘In Florence between 1935 and 1940, literature was considered among those around me as a sublime refuge from history and politics – that miserable theatre of the world’ – not so much on account of the Fascist government’s authoritarian edicts as because of our own willing and zealous servitude to the subject.’ This tendency to avoid getting involved in everyday life was embodied, Fortini explains, in his attempt to get wholly absorbed into a pure literariness (that is, in his readings of Leopardi, Rimbaud, Joyce and Kafka). On the other hand, from Brecht’s call for new styles, Fortini learned how to pay tribute to poetry as an expression of individuality, thus also reconciling his originally conflicting understanding of form and content.
Romantic-Symbolist poetry (‘E ora la passione degli alberi ritorna’). A mordant critique of populist art is here conveyed (‘noi’, ‘figli di questo secolo, ironie’ [...] Noi dal sogno usciremo per esistere/ in una sola verità’) by stressing that changes, in art, are in fact shaped by an élite.

To continue this analysis of symbolist elements in *La poesia delle rose*, it should be noticed that the ‘poemetto’ may be an appeal to the rose as symbolizing the essence of poetry itself. The theme refers back to Saba’s collection *Preludio e fughe* (1928), which emphasizes a division in art, as in the poet’s fractured singularity caught in the circle birth and death. Since Eros tends to generate an art that refuses the conditions of agape, poets must struggle to preserve their ethical stance.

Another major study on the rose which may have influenced Fortini is Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of Paul Klee’s ‘Heroic Roses’, in ‘The Essence of the Truth’ (1930). Heidegger sees nature and thoughts about nature as a way to portray Being in its corporeal and theoretical inextricability. Klee’s roses offer a labyrinth into which the viewer is drawn, but their search for the secret of roses will end in pointlessness. Klee’s roses may be called ‘heroic’, but chasing them hardly brings dignified outcomes. As in Klee’s painting, so in Fortini’s *Poesia delle rose* the task of discovering the secret of the roses is paradoxical, since it manifests both a superior, ontological quest, and a realistic appraisal of one’s loose expectancy of success.

*La poesia delle rose* proceeds by rationalizing the poetic medium itself (‘Fuggite, allegorie’), and thus removing all previous hellish inputs (‘E no. Ultimi fumi di ironico inferno, precipitate, fontane, gli scorci’). But the poet’s consciousness is harassed by enduring enigmas. By the end of the seven fragments, however, we learn that the rose will preserve her mystery as a vessel of binary emotions, remaining strange and unknowable. Finally, Fortini establishes a parallel between *La poesia delle rose* and his translations of Brecht’s poems ‘Sette rose sulla siepe’ and ‘Come schedarla la piccola rosa?’

It is appropriate to address specifically now the expressionist atmosphere of *La poesia delle rose*, which Mengaldo singled out. It is unmistakably present in the recurrent use of terms such as ‘sangue’, ‘ferita’ (also as ‘piaga’ in the same poem), ‘unghie’, ‘lama’, ‘tetano’, ‘rabbia’, ‘disgusto’, ‘addomi tronchi’, and ‘viscere’, all of which suggest an injured being,

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148 For a wider representation of the rose in literature, see also *Elogio della Rosa*, (ed.) Carla Poma, Turin: Einaudi, 2002, which includes poems by Blake, Tasso, Éluard, Rilke, Ungaretti, and Benn on this theme. From a general perspective, the rose represents the Western patriarchal prejudice about the ‘true’ nature of women. The other assumption, in Saba’s collections *Preludio e fughe* (1928) and *Il canzoniere* (1948), is that a poetics of pure Eros, being an experience of love as self-consummation, tends to have narcissistic outcomes. Saba’s typical self-accusatory lines, such as ‘O mio cuore dal nascere in due scisso,/quante pene dura per uno fame!//Quante rose a nascondere un abisso’, or ‘Dell’inesausta tua miseria godi’./ Tanto ti valga, anima mia, sapere’, convey the impression misery is imposed on the poet’s soul not only by historical events, but mainly by an ill-fated self-pity. This enhances the element of sublimity in the notion of poetry as the tragic rose, an overwhelming experience of moral struggle, beyond the self-consuming Self (‘rose arcuate/ di spine’, ‘tumefatte le rose’). The theme of the ‘divided Self’, employed by Fortini, is at the very core of Tasso’s feverish state of mind in his *Lettere*. However, unlike Tasso, who perceived his frailty as a burdensome sin, Fortini’s acknowledges it as way of poetic expression.
portrayed in a tragi-grotesque pose. As in dreams, the wound here symbolises a violent yet crucial experience that the poet, whether victim or persecutor, has taken note of and learned from. This echoes Brecht’s poem ‘La ragazza sedotta’, with its imagery of an abused body, linked to the idea of cultural decadence and contradictoriness. In Fortini, these dichotomies are stressed by a mocking sequence of rhyming couplets:

Tutti i perfetti amori un solo amore.
Tutti i giorni più belli un solo giorno.
Corpi spariti che avevamo amati,
dai miserabili resti ricreati
ritornate di pietà beati
stupiti identici spiriti pazzi di risa,
centifoglia rosa indivisa
che già la mente incredula abbagli. (PS, p. 147)

Here, Fortini’s portrays with evident irony Plotinus’s universe as a vast chain in which every being forms a link: from this Universal Good, there emanates the Universal Intelligence or Mind of whom all other minds partake (‘Tutti i perfetti amore un solo amore’[...]/ Queste emanazioni sono anime’), which occupies the world of Ideas and self-conscious reason. The line ‘centifoglia rosa indivisa’ evokes the spiritual world: all that is seemingly mortal is recomposed in God. The affected image of the ‘souls’ of men as not disconnected from their origin is reinforced by the line ‘identici spiriti pazzi di risa’, which refer to an unknown cohesive force beyond the Self. The continuous unfolding of paradoxes in the poet’s use of tragic imagery seems to arise either from a state of ecstasy (‘vedi schierarsi i regni’) or from self-sacrifice: despite the dazzling light ‘che la mente incredula abbagli’, a hidden, inner darkness continues to dominate the poet’s mind, as in certain German and continental mystics, such as Meister Eckhart, for whom, the soul, in order to attain purification, must perform the ultimate sacrifice, and even lose contact with God. This morbid preoccupation with the startling physical appearance of dead bodies (‘Corpi spariti che avevamo amati’) introduces the issue of death as desire, that is the elaboration of an ars morendi, as dying comes to be felt by the poet more acutely than ever before, as an annihilation of personal identity. Death is, thus, perceived as an anti-Self, a veiled double, which will reveal himself at the appointed hour (‘È l’ora che i liquidi essicca e accaglia’).

In line with Goldmann’s explanation of the ‘tragic thought’ as a state of mind which is aware of the world’s dichotomies and refuses to accept them as the only prospect for men, Fortini seems to claim a return to the artistic and the religious:

150 In Le dieu caché. Étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine (Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Idées, 1959), the tragic vision in a classic author such as Racine, Goldman explains, proves the radical insufficiency of the world to provide justification for human lives and actions.
È l'ora che i liquidi essicca e accaglia
e queste emanazioni sono anime
ma storte, nane, sotto il ferro lunare.
Vedi schierarsi i regni. Varcano obliqui
per i cortei del cielo neri i Santi
vuoti come velieri. È l'assenzio? È il giudizio?
Sono le povere femmine ch'ebbero il viso
squarciato dai soldati? Le chiarine celesti? (PS, p. 147)

As in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, which underlines the links between physical, psychic and social repression, an association is made with the sadistic brutality of war in terms of its repressive forms. The 'rose' is to become the symbol of a tender, violated female body, raped by soldiers, who will suffer no guilt for their crimes, while treasuring their degraded and servile ideal of life. Yet, as stressed by De Sade, the denial of others ('le femmine') is always a denial of one's humanity: thus, the sovereign men ('the soldiers') have no other power but their brutality.

Here Fortini's anti-lyric stance has something in common with the post-war insistence, among German poets such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Gottfried Benn, on the removal of illusion from poetic language. In 'Erotismo e letteratura', Fortini himself claimed: 'Medea non ammazzi in scena, è valido precetto di poetica non di erotica. Per essere più precisi: erotica e poetica fanno un uso diverso delle figure o metafore'. (VDP, p. 33)

The violent context in which the semi-sacred diction of this stanza is deployed produces an apprehensive tone, which is broken by four question marks invoking a return to ethicality. An existentialist angst is unmistakably present in the half-mythical, and half-historical evoking conflict, doubt, fear, exile, and loss, transformed into elusive metaphors. The religious register ('emanazioni', 'anime', 'cortei del cielo', 'Santi', 'celeste') is strengthened and embellished by the juxtaposition of several Latinate terms ('regni', 'anime', 'cielo'), while everyday expressions connected to real-life experiences are marked by a lowering of the vocabulary ('femmine', 'sfregiato', 'soldati'). Fortini's intention here may have been to be faithful to each sphere, so that art and religion are aestheticized, while history and politics are appropriately rendered in their authentic viciousness. Furthermore, the lines 'Sono le povere femmine ch'ebbero il viso/ squarciato dai soldati', may refer to the poet's own experience as a partisan in the Second World War, when he passed through villages where enraged soldiers had revenged themselves on the women.

In a single fragment, the text presents both the idea of the poet as a 'representative hero' — a quasi-hieratical, hyper-subjective figure, who is separated from humanity and lives in the celestial spheres — and that of the poet as a common everyday man, wearing the sad mask of impersonality and sharing his life experience with others. The rapid shift in register,
from hieratical to secular, undermines the reading process itself: not only does it produce a disturbing effect, but also it raises questions about the real identity of the speaking voice. In the lines which follow there is an impressive concentration of objects (‘viscere’, ‘addomi tronchi’, ‘bisce’, ‘funi’, ‘maschere scorticate’) immersed in the dim light of the back-stage once the show is over. These ‘burning roses’ (‘tra carboni di rose’, ‘a spettacolo spento’) are the legendary Phoenix, which will rise from its own ashes:

O tra carboni di rose un fosforo, un verme,  
la sola via? A cripte, aule, visceri  
dove a spettacolo spento pendono mucchi  
di addomi tronchi, criniere di bisce e funi,  
maschere scorticate, Sisifo, Oiritò, Tieste  
e le Erinni. A tufi di catacombe, dove  
sotto le larve di noi futuri murate  
un senato di insetti gesticola. (PS, p. 148)

The fragment is a forerunner of the future poem ‘A Santa Croce’, in which Fortini minutely and morbidly describes how the exhumed body of Ugo Foscolo is almost theatrically deified by the fascists (‘fetido lenzuolo’, ‘lezzo d’assi cadaveriche’ ‘marcio storto maccabeo’) and reburied in the church of Santa Croce in Florence. Like Tasso’s Dialoghi, Foscolo’s Dei sepolcri (1807) can also be intertextually detected in La poesia delle rose, with its Gothic elements and theme of burial, alongside the treatment of the meaning of poetry in a country’s process towards civilization, and of the poet’s individual and social identity.

Fortini often assimilated paintings to his poetical quest for truth; therefore the entire fragment may also evoke the mood of expressionist anxiety and anguish in Klee’s ‘The Outburst of Fear’ (1939), which appeared the year in which Second World War broke out. As in Fortini’s sixth fragment, the painting displays a dismembered and decaying human figure in a catacomb, with its limbs, torso, and possibly bowels splayed out:

Paul Klee, ‘The Outburst of Fear’ (1939)
This fragmented body recalls Lacan's *corps morcelé*, which refers to an Imago-in-pieces, as the image of castration and evisceration, which renders the poet’s fear that his body lacks any substantial unity. This dissection is a species of didactic tragedy that dramatizes in public the human encounter with death, with a moralization and, at the same time, celebration of man’s imperfection, as in the ‘theatre of cruelty’.  

Fortini does not seem here to reject expressionist techniques as ‘psychologistic’; their essential significance does not arise out of mere emotional agents. In fact, in his late poetry, emotional outpourings will not be seen as unethical or undeserving of attention. On the contrary because art is not a mere instrument for a political ideology, Fortini’s aesthetics rejects those artistic forms, which may give way to political propaganda. He also repudiates the simple formula that art expresses the artist’s coherent world view. Indeed, in *La poesia delle rose*, the emphasis on physical dismemberment can be interpreted as the symbol of a plurality of perspectives, which are less psychological endeavours than ontological ones.

At the thematic level, the image of a massacred body may refer to the destructive forces triggered by a historical and growing evil, common to most expressionist art. The stanza suggests intense physical trauma, which silences creativity and suffering transforms the body into an engine of self-obliterating pain. The poet’s voice here verges on the threshold of what cannot be uttered, reaching the point where language meets a fatal stage, and a gap opens up in which it creates its own denial; evidence of this condition lies in the semantic field of muteness. Poetry in fact takes place when the artist becomes aware of the gap between content and form and learns how to modulate its tensions. Exhumed from its lofty hermeticism, poetic language re-illuminates ‘cripte’, ‘aula’, ‘catacombe’ in some disturbed or shattered way, like a medium which introduces its own formalities, creating portrayals of existential pain, political frustration and anxiety.

As mentioned above, the initial imagery of *La poesia delle rose*, which compares the act of poetry to an orgiastic ritual, can be interpreted as a speculation on some of the options open to poetic language, such as: firstly, to exercise the magic power of its symbolic creations (second and third fragments); secondly, to celebrate the realm of literariness (fourth and fifth fragments); and thirdly, to express the body’s finitude through the expressionist mode (sixth fragments).

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151 Similarly, the paralysis of the limbs in a later poem, ‘La buonanotte’ (2.6) suggests the subject’s hallucinatory imagination, envisaging his own death.


153 The aching astonishment in the line ‘sotto le larve di noi futuri murate’ recalls Akhmatova’s *Requiem*, conceived to bear witness to the Yezov terror of Stalinist Russia. In the collection, the poet’s voice becomes the voice of those she has outlived: ‘No foreign sky protected me/ no stranger’s wing shielded my face./ I stand as witness to the common lot, / survivor of that time, that place’ (from *Requiem*, 1963).
fragment). In the seventh fragment the poet’s voice enters an agony of hyper-consciousness. The reference to the ‘lumi’, which are ‘tanto deboli’, symbolizes the loss of mental strength. The reader will also detect a rejection of earthly desire (‘Il desiderio e la separazione/ non ci saranno più’), which recalls the pseudo-monastic and ascetic practices alluded to in the fourth fragment; ‘Heaven’ is only real in memory and imagination. Furthermore, consciousness — the moment when the poet realizes that the world is other than himself and that he is finite within it — is the constituent ground for the schism between mind and body: to realize one’s self is to realize solitude. Putting it in Christian terms, consciousness is not so much sin as tragedy. At the same time, the poet’s use of language is not neutral, but a central plank in the critique of this lost utopia. Biographically speaking, Fortini begins to focus his attention on the inner journey, and to apply this kind of expressionistic eloquence to it, in his late forties. Previously the journey had been an intellectual exercise; now it becomes an imaginative one. Indeed, the seventh fragment conveys a sense of the coming together of neglected inner voices (‘le favole di morti’); the poet draws the reader’s attention to them, and offers these ‘dead fables’ the space they need to express themselves. The image which follows, that of an airplane brooding over the city’s cupolas, conveys a powerful sense of the poet’s meditative mood at night, when his wakeful consciousness, vexed by the spectres of imagination, undergoes painful moments of recognition:

L’aereo che grave le cupole rade
combatte, cabra, va; non per noi. Qui abito
dove una notte l’incenerirsi del secolo
persuade, e mi stermina lenta e tremo. (PS, p. 149)

We have seen Fortini both evoking images of violence and melancholy, awaken by uninvited phantasms and fancies, and using expressionist imagery of machines and soldiers, perhaps adopted in response to his experience of war. The key aim of the expressionist mode (‘incenerirsi’, ‘stermina’) in La poesia delle rose is to set ‘artistic individualism’ against ‘political collectivism’. The poem uses various forms of alienation, including madness, perversion and dementia, which represent paradoxical attempts at spiritual liberation. The lines ‘Qui abito/dove una notte l’incenerirsi del secolo persuade, e mi stermina lento’ exacerbate the internal tensions between Self and Mind (‘Qui abito’ should, in fact, be read as ‘Qui ragiono’), by confronting the notion of rational synthesis and announcing that the critique of idealistic rationalism must also be a critique of the ‘irrational’. Although bourgeois idealism tries to give a rational meaning to human existence, the endurance of unresolved

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134 See Jean-Jacques Lacan, (1966), Écrits, London: Tavistock, 1977, p. 691: ‘Desire is never the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love but the difference obtained by subtracting the first from the second.’ Language, thus, becomes the substitution for the forbidden part of the Self, which is the body of the mother, the rose, the devalued ‘other’ that language must reject.
contradictions and irreducible forms of violence annihilates the significance of such a gesture.
The madman's morbid psyche, which indulges in the horrors hidden inside the tomb, is, in
reality, distressed by the normative codes of a world of ruthless powers which he resents and
negates.

In the fifth fragment, the poet's awareness of the human condition ('Le tue figure/
sempre, falsa, coscienza cosi le ripeti?') is fraught with dilemmas ('ma come domani sapro
riconoscere/ le rose uccise, le vive?'); as in Tasso's Lettere, distant voices are said to torment
the poet's consciousness: immersed in his reading, Tasso feels possessed by evil spirits which
envy his spiritual and intellectual peace ('quando io prendo il libro per istudiare, o la penna,
odo sonarmi gli orecchi d'alcune voci [...] che sono maligni e della mia pace invidiosi').
The sense of vanity and existential disorientation in this fragment arises from binary
oppositions (reality/dream, reason/madness) which defy resolution. Moreover, in this probing,
surgical mode, the text seeks to integrate these paradoxes by using insanity to overthrow the
despoticism of rational thinking ('giustizia e amore'): 'Voi in sonno ancora: voglio che nulla si
perda.' The seventh and last fragment announces:

Mi volgo di qui
dov'è passata, e tornerà, la mia demenza:
anche per essa chiedo giustizia e amore. (PS, p. 150)

The cited lines refer to Tasso's mental illness: the poet's conscientiousness and sensibility,
veded by his fear of 'demenza', captures the mood of a man who is too proud to give up his
role. Madness, whose obsessions have become permanent, is kept back by exercising the right
of retaining a sense of identity and decorum ('anche per essa chiedo giustizia e amore').

The allusion to Tasso here seems to me to be of great importance in any consideration
of Fortini's career as poet. In fact, this oblique self-portrait, which inevitably contains certain
disturbing glimpses, serves as a means for maintaining his attention focussed on the creative
process with a view to constructive self-criticism; the crucial point for this self-analytical
function is Fortini's general attitude before literature as his mirror. The identification with
Tasso is here particularly indicative where it can be seen to influence Fortini's style and his
dialogic relationship with the literary tradition in which Tasso lived and worked ('mi volgo di
qui/ dov'è passata, e tornerà, la mia demenza'). The concept of a vigilant 'demenza', and of
the "vivre indigné", inspires also Fortini's analysis of Zola's eroticism, in 'Le figure del
discorso':

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155 Battaglia & Mazzacurati, 'Il poema eroico e Torquato Tasso', in La letteratura italiana, Rinascimento e
Barocco, p. 214.
156 Here again, we can trace the influence of Tasso's Dialoghi.
L’essere umano non può che decadere, dall’infanzia alla maturità, dalla speranza alla cecità del vizio. Il disgusto e l’indignazione [...] si placano, ossia si esprimono solo negli esseri che sono o si avviano ad essere “cose”: il debole di mente, la prostituta..." (QF, p. 282)

This is the analytical, moral mind at work on the immoral and non-introspective (‘L’essere umano non può che decadere’). Yet, Fortini does not encourages this way of looking at the Self: the ‘cecità del vizio’ is not a comfortable escape from one’s reality. Awareness and resentment (‘disgusto e indignazione’) in fact remain in the mind of those who are physically impaired or dispossessed.

The poet continues his struggle to generate unity out of oppositions and discrepancies (‘se colpa e speranza/ sono un unico male’); comprising three octaves in irregular metre, with several rhymes (‘ostina’, ‘fina’; ‘nera’, ‘primavera’; ‘fiore’, ‘dolore’; ‘salici’, ‘baci’), this final fragment turns its gloomy themes into the paradoxical, epigrammatic exuberance of the penultimate line ‘Viva la rosa della primavera’, with its positive, yet ironic, allusion to the rose’s purity and beauty. Yet the mordant rhyme ‘nera’ and ‘primavera’ mocks the reader’s attempt to reach a coherent interpretation of the poem’s wholeness.

Following Jameson in his essay ‘Beyond the cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism’, one could say that, especially in its last two stanzas, the counter-discourse of La poesia delle rose relies on its resistance to being decoded, and on its will to assert creative freedom – that is, far from rejecting artistic ‘responsibility’, it draws upon tradition and form, yet professes to do without faith and illusion. The contrapuntal liveliness of the last line summons ‘viva’, ‘baci’ and ‘dolore’ in a rather awkward fashion, as though the line is being uttered by a semi-logical mind. It should be noted that, when Fortini speaks of states of dementia, he is alluding to a particular trait in some of Hölderlin’s and Trakl’s fictional ‘voices’, and even more so to Zanzotto’s condition of psychological and cosmic dread. Zanzotto, for instance, commented on Fortini’s insight into such epochal ‘nothingness’, stressing that ‘egli fu l’unico a capire i veri motivi di un mio, per così dire, “rapporto con il nulla” soprattutto nei periodi di enormi vuoti depressivi e ossessivi (da cui egli mi parve immune, almeno in quelle forme’). It is also worth remembering Fortini’s unreserved admiration for the theme of cruelty in Zanzotto’s Vocativo (1957). Zanzotto’s lines ‘Chiarore acido che tessi/ i bruciori d’inferno’ and ‘conato/ torbido d’alghe e di vermi’ prefigure the content of certain lines in La poesia delle rose, such as ‘O tra carboni di rose un fosforo, un verme,/ la sola via?’ Both authors use chemistry as a metaphor for the abstract and physical processes which poetry witnesses, activates and exploits. Mengaldo, however, has interpreted the linguistic expressionism of La poesia delle rose, not as Fortini’s surrender to the appeals

of neo-avant-garde discourse, but rather as an escape from the oppression of logical thinking, towards the treatment of those

tcontenuti psichici inconsci sui quali sarebbe fruttuosa indagine competente, centrata ad esempio sul valore di certe costanti imaginative: come il motivo ricorrente dell'inverno e della glacialità in genere, dove l'allegorizzazione di una situazione storica si sovrappone certamente all'espressione di un motivo psicologico profondo.159

In other words, the allegory of the rose may present a vision of fear and desire, repulsion and attraction, alluding to an intra-psychic schism within the Self which verges on both the tragic and the satirical. Mengaldo saw La poesia delle rose as representing Fortini's adhesion to the poetics of the unconscious; but he also suggested that, beyond any mere expression of poetic individualism, this alliance offered solid ground for Fortini's philosophical and aesthetic 'eresia individuale'. Mengaldo adds: 'Fortini sa bene che se è impossibile non parlare della propria storia individuale come luogo di resistenza, è anche impossibile parlarne oggi se non attraverso lo schermo dell'allegoria e il conseguente distacco ironico'.160

I have endeavoured, in this section, to explain that La poesia delle rose is not just a pervasive allegory of certain ineffable aspects of human nature, but a remarkable metacritique of the poetic process itself, a rendering of Fortini's mature discourse on intertextual procedures and principles. Having identified a logical path through the semantic complexities of this 'poemetto', I have come to appreciate that its obscure details must all be earned and treated as 'indizi' in order to decode the author's sub-textual order, in which the central rhetorical device is a personification of the rose as an entity both worshipped ('beate le rose') and dishonoured ('rose contuse', 'rose tumefatte'). The symbol of the rose itself, with its wide range of secondary connotations — implying at one and the same time 'virgin', 'witch', 'prostitute' and 'victim of war rape' — was found to emerge from the many matrices provided by Fortini's exploitation of past literary traditions.161 Furthermore, Fortini's mosaic of references constitutes an original representation of the rose; we may note, indeed, the author's shift from the tragic intensity of 'centifoglia rosa indivisa', 'tumefatte le rose', 'rose sopite', 'carboni di rose', 'le rose uccise, le vive', and 'rosa della primavera', in La poesia delle rose, to the philosophical discursiveness of his other 1963 poem, 'Ultima sulle rose':

159 Andrea Zanzotto,'Passione e acutezza', in L'immaginazione, p. 18.
158 Ibid., p. 23.
161 With this poem, in fact, Fortini stresses the long-lasting significance of the 'rose' in the Italian literary traditions. These range from Cielo D'Alcamo's 'Rosa fresca aulentissima' and Dante's Paradiso to European chivalric and romantic sources, such as the Roman de la rose, the French medieval allegory, or dream vision, in which a young man endeavours to possess the rosebud with which he has become enamoured. Beside the courtly love tradition, Fortini also makes reference to more contemporary developments of this symbolism, sub-citing both Rilke ('in his mortal stead behold the rose in bloom', Sonnets to Orpheus, 5) and Saba ('Rosa d'ogni bontà', Canzoniere).
Quando da qui si guarda l'età del passato
veramente diventa possibile l'amore.
Mai così belli i visti e veri pensieri
come quando stiamo per separarci, amici.
Esercizio della ragione e sentimento
sono due cose e vivacemente si legano
come la rosa è forma di mente e stupore.\(^{162}\)

In order to formalize his/her desire to recompose this lost totality the poet must remain within the boundaries of the symbolic.\(^{163}\) These boundaries are further defined by the poet's belonging to a given literary tradition, or by his/her making reference to a foreign one.\(^{164}\)

Almost ten years after *La poesia delle rose*, Fortini returns to the same theme in *Paesaggio con serpente* by ironically posing the following rhetorical question, in ‘Allora comincerò…’:

Da quanti anni sappiamo, no? Che una rosa
non è una rosa, che un'acqua non è un'acqua,
che parola rimanda a parola e ogni cosa
a un'altra cosa, egualmente estranee al vero? [...] 
Almeno un'immagine, una visione sabbatica
queste cadenze miserabili animasse!
Ma no, senza conoscenza né buona coscienza,
senza teologia, senza arte manuale
e nemmeno poesia, sebbene più ilare
che triste, più ansioso che sazio, più indistruttibile,
anche nella stanchezza di tutto il vissuto secolo,
mi avvii veloce verso il mio rancore. (PCS, p. 102)

The madman’s style of speech, made of tired wisdom and melancholy, resulting from the kind of ‘stanchezza di tutto il vissuto’, which recalls Tasso’s *Lettere poetiche* (1587), is again at work in this new poem (‘senza conoscenza, né buona coscienza/ senza teologia/ senza arte manuale/ e nemmeno poesia’), which is a negation of literary speech as such.

Since, in *La poesia delle rose*, the numinous nature of the rose, as that of any other cultural simulacrum, transfigures the past into a new creative order, its metacritical and intertextual function situates Fortini’s poetics within a theoretical and literary continuum.

\(^{162}\) Fortini, *Una volta per sempre*, Milan: Mondadori, 1963, p. 32. As in *La poesia delle rose*, here too the text achieves unity through the interrelation of conflicting forces (‘esercizio della ragione e sentimento’), with each fragment playing its special part in sustaining the central idea of a broken harmony.

\(^{163}\) This notion is to be found in Lacan’s *Écrits*.

\(^{164}\) The use of ‘literary reminiscence’, which was Eliot’s claim of originality, as well as the procedural trait of both modernist and postmodernist literature, is not a new twentieth-century technique at all, but the very core of writing poetry, that is, an old, natural method allowing the artist to draw on a wider and complex range of materials that his own isolated, circumstantial experience could provide. Therefore, in order to survive self-deceit, the poet has to create new forms within this *continuum*. For instance, Goethe derived the metaphor of the ‘rose and the nightingale’ from Persian literature. Moreover, when he spoke of ‘wine’ and ‘divine drunkeness’, which is a recurrent theme in his work, he meant creative power (Goethe 1965, IX, p. 10). From an intertextual point of view, his metaphor of ‘pearls’ for poetry (Goethe 1965, VI, p. 16), which he also derived from Persian literature,
Thus the domain of poetry is embodied in the rose itself (‘come la rosa è forma di mente e stupore’),\(^\text{165}\) as Fortini was to make explicit in his late essays *Le rose dell’abisso* and *Dialoghi sui classici italiani*, published posthumously in 2000).\(^\text{166}\) *La poesia delle rose*, then, is concerned with the suggestive power of the rose as a catalytic element, conveying images, metaphors and visions in a stirring creative tension. Its polysemic elements are endowed with sedimental meanings accumulated, indeed, over centuries of fertile and dynamic literary treatment.

### 2.4. Poetry and dissidence

Fortini experienced the war both as an officer in the Italian Army and as a partisan. After a failed attempt to organize a revolt against the German invaders in his Milan barracks, he flew to Switzerland where he remained for five months, before he decided to return to Italy and join the Italian ‘Resistenza’, as the author himself described in *La guerra di Milano* (1943) and *Sere in Valdossola* (1946-52).\(^\text{167}\) There he met his future wife, Ruth Leiser, who increasingly became the regular co-editor of many of Fortini’s translations from the German. At the end of the war, he returned to Milan where he began studying his favourite authors, Gramsci, Sartre, and Lukács. From 1947 to 1957, Fortini published *Foglio di via* (1946), whose lyrics underline the limited ability of poetry to bring about changes in history. He also contributed to literary journals and newspapers such as ‘Politecnico’, ‘Ragionamenti’ and ‘L’Avanti’, and wrote the essays contained in *Dieci inverni. Contributi a un discorso socialista* (1957), where he addressed issues such as the history of Italian Socialism and the international tension of the Cold War between the two major power blocks, Stalinist Russia and American Capitalist Imperialism. In 1956, having left the Socialist Party, Fortini moved on to discuss Lukács’s and Adorno’s critical Marxism, asserting the notion of the autonomy of art, a debate that lasted nearly a decade, from *Dieci inverni* (1957) to *Verifica dei poteri* (1965/1974). In 1969, Fortini published *Poesia e errore. 1946-1957*, a collection of his earlier poems with an additional group of texts in which Fortini developed a metadiscourse on the subject of war. As I have explained (1.3 and 1.4), taken together, these critical essays and poems give us a comprehensive view both of the struggles within the Italian post-war intellectual hegemonies and of Fortini’s engagement in their controversies. In treating the issue of democracy, in no way Fortini believed that poets would ever avoid making

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\(^{165}\) It is worth recalling the impact on Western esoteric and literary tradition of the rituals of the *Confraternity of the Rose Cross*, and the kaballic studies of the Rosicrucians.


\(^{167}\) For Fortini’s experience of the Italian ‘Resistenza’, see also *Gli intellettuali in tricea: politica e cultura dell’Italia del dopoguerra*, (eds.) Gian Mario Brunetta and Saveria Chemotti, containing an essay by Franco Fortini, Padova, CLEUP, 1977.
ideological distinctions between right and wrong. To appraise the issue posed by the title of *Poesia e errore*, it will be useful to look at the poem ‘Il poeta servo’:

Ho preso  
la mia fatica  
come un peso  
e la porto.  

Voi che da mille anni  
portate il male del mondo  

e ne ridete  
e ne morite  

perdonate se vado così da solo,  
se vado lento  
se non canto:  
sono un servo  
di molti padroni. [PE, in SINA, p. 34]

As Nava pointed out in ‘Fortini e la contraddizione del poeta’, the lines ‘sono un servo/ di molti padroni’, which express the poet’s existential and political sense of disillusionment and alienation, inform the reader of the poet’s marginal role and forced mandate.\(^{168}\) Furthermore, Fortini’s use of antithesis and contradictions has been already highlighted as, for example, in Luperini ‘La poesia come contraddizione’, included in the already cited *La lotta mentale* (1986), and Elisa Gambaro ‘La contraddizione della poesia’.\(^{169}\) Fortini’s ‘allegorismo’ may, therefore, be seen as the rendering of a specific materialist form of writing, a practice which allowed him to react promptly to ‘il rifiuto della politica, la morte delle ideologie, il trionfo dell’effimero, il dominio acritico e incontrastato del consumo e dell’immagine, lo sfaldamento delle prospettive politiche e formazioni economico-sociali di portata secolare’.\(^{170}\) In another poem from *Poesia e errore*, ‘Dico a te’, poetry is polemically defined as the ‘vino dei servi’. Throughout this collection, indeed, the conflict between being a ‘poeta servo’ and poetry’s call for liberty turns into a permanent state of contradiction. An useful commentary on Fortini’s contribution to Brecht’s idea of the declining power of poetry was offered in 1994 by Emanuele Zinato:

> Come Brecht al Congresso degli scrittori antifascisti del 1935 così Fortini fra gli intellettuali degli anni Sessanta è la voce inascoltata di chi, guardando ai rapporti di

\(^{168}\) See Carlo Milanini et al., *Neorealismo, poetiche e polemiche*, ‘Carlo Cassola: Ideologia e poesia?’, Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1980, p. 229. Fortini’s negative critique opposed that of Cassola who, in an intervention in issue no. 60 (1958) of *Comunità*, denied that poetry and poets had to face an inner crisis and, in contradiction to Fortini’s position, insisted: ‘“Letteratura della crisi” è un non-senso, è una formula inventata a giustificazione della cattiva letteratura. Qualsiasi soggetto tratti, la letteratura non può esprimere la crisi, la lacerazione, lo squilibrio e via discorrendo: per la semplice ragione che la poesia è frutto di equilibrio spirituale, di armonia col mondo.’

\(^{169}\) See Elisa Gambaro’s ‘La contraddizione della poesia.’, p. 240. Gambaro has defined Fortini’s poetry as ‘la testimonianza della mancata conciliazione tra poesia e momento ideologico’.

classi, e desumendo da Lukács e da Adorno i propri strumenti, svela il nucleo falsificante delle ideologie riformiste e neoilluministe dominanti gli anni del 'miracolo'. La sua rara capacità di guardare fissamente il cuore delle contraddizioni, tratto "cinese" oltre che profetico del suo disegno ideologico, ne fece un severo maestro e un testimone delle lotte studentesche e operaie del decennio 1960-1970 e un implacabile avversario dei modi in cui il PCI realizzò la propria ipotesi di coalizione o 'solidarietà' nazionale, sacrificando quel ciclo antagonista alle compatibilità dello schieramento istituzionale.\textsuperscript{171}

Untroubled by theorization, always eloquent and combative, and, in certain cases, not dissimilar to what he impugns, Fortini evokes a sacerdotal form of poetic function – that of Holderlin, Mallarmé, Rilke and Leopardi, for instance – yet, as Brecht and Éluard, he places it in a position of negation and contradiction. In 	extit{La lotta mentale}, Romano Luperini notes: 'Sarà Fortini stesso a dire che Noventa aveva indicato i 'limiti della poesia'; egli ci aggiunge la sua consapevolezza della contraddittorietà intrinseca del lavoro portico, almeno per chi intenda lottare contro quel sistema di privilegi di cui la poesia fa parte.\textsuperscript{472} It is no accident, moreover, that both Fortini and Pasolini used the 	extit{topos} of 'contradiction': it is interesting to note that Pasolini’s radical aim to touch the world’s paradox at its very heart, in 	extit{Le ceneri di Gramsci} (1954) ('Lo scandalo del contraddirmi, dell’essere/ con te e contro di te’) is noticeably present in Fortini’s ‘godi delle/contraddizioni della vita macchiata di sangue’ (PS, p. 189). Sarcastic, like Pasolini, blood-letting and hurt by his own hurts, Fortini generates parody in the language of self-pity itself.\textsuperscript{173}

	extit{ Questo muro,} published in 1973, ten years after 	extit{Una volta per sempre} and including poems written between 1961 and the 1972, marks once again, as Cases points out in his 1974 essay 'Fortini politico', a sense of dissatisfaction with the role of the arts in contemporary society, and reactivates the polemic in verse against the supposedly edifying function of literature.\textsuperscript{174} In his introduction to 	extit{Poesie Scelte} (1974), In discussing 	extit{Questo muro}, Mengaldo explains Fortini’s essential revision of many of the political and social artistic discussions of his time:

Il senso di queste posizioni non sta tanto nel loro contenuto di verità teorica, per la coincidenza con l’assioma dei linguisti sulla relativa stabilità e neutralità del mezzo linguistico; quanto nei loro risvolti politici e operativi. Per un verso infatti l’opposizione all’anarchismo linguistico, con la denuncia della sua natura individualistica e piccolo-borghese, va a raggiungere la battaglia ingaggiata da Fortini contro le forme spontaneistiche e anarcoidi di lotta politica proprie di certa sinistra. [...] Qui si colloca il carattere anti-sperimentalistico della poesia di Fortini. Ovviamente si tratta di intendersi. Varietà (se non incroci) di registri ed aperture

\textsuperscript{171} Emanuele Zinato, 'L'eredità di Fortini', in 	extit{Il calendario del popolo}, 1994. See also E. Zinato, 	extit{La battaglia per il 'sapere comune': Fortini e l'insegnamento}, in 	extit{Allegoria}, VIII, no. 21-22, 1996, pp. 204-221.

\textsuperscript{172} Luperini, 	extit{La lotta mentale}, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{173} See Vehio Abati, 	extit{Un dialogo ininterrotto}, 1 Interviews 1952-1994, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003, where the author traces the presence of this driving force in Fortini’s poetry.

sperimentali non mancano certo: l’ultimo libro, *Questo muro*, dà anzi la chiara impressione di approfondimenti in questa direzione, con certa sua scrittura *satura* […] E si accentua l’uso della tecnica del collage – *Collage per i miei cinquanta’anni* è interamente montato con brani in francese. (PS, p. 2)

Mengaldo indicates the presence, in *Questo muro* of some cryptic experimental codes and modes of expression that had already been introduced by Balestrini and Sanguineti, such as the textual *saturation*, created by the *collage* of mixing literary quotations from a variety of texts, often referred to as the ‘sabotage’ of what poetry, as intertextuality, rewrites. Mengaldo also clarifies the connections between Fortini’s poetry and French Surrealism: the latter, from being a ‘poetica dell’invasione dell’inconscio nella ragione’, becomes a ‘poetica dell’assorbimento del primo nella seconda per via di simboli concettualizzabili’ (PS, p. 24). At the same time, Mengaldo refers to the value assigned by Fortini to the ‘senso minoritario-religioso del valore della testimonianza personale’ as ‘eresia individuale’.

In his opinion, Fortini’s need to explore the collision between consciousness and the inner Self in his writing, facilitates his adhesion to a poetics of the unconscious; this reflects the will to oppose ‘il crescente livellamento e, nello stesso tempo, l’atomizzazione del tessuto sociale imposti dal capitalismo, e d’altra parte la inevitabile rottura delle solidarietà politiche fra gli oppositori del sistema.’ (PS, p. 24)

The turning point in Fortini’s poetics, as indicated above by Mengaldo, allows him to distance himself from his role as a critic and to say openly what would otherwise have remained subject to the imperatives of his stern ethics: the experience of uneasiness within the Self, and of the Self within his world’s scheme of values; this creates an interesting thematic corpus, based on the idea of the entrenched contradictions inherent both in the processes of socialization and in the verbalization of the human condition, as will be discussed in the third chapter (in connection with *La poesia delle rose, Questo muro, Paesaggio con serpente*, and *L’ospite ingrato*). In Fortini’s constant deployment of multiple genres and languages it is not difficult to identify the fertile interrelation of formal and discursive structures with informal and intimate ones, as shown by the meticulously complex language of his essays, which come to terms with the more relaxed and casual vocabulary of his personal lyrics. The coming together of the intellectual and official poetic diction of the classics with Fortini’s idiolect had already become evident in a poem such as ‘Cesano Mademo’, included in *Una volta per sempre* (1963), where the theme of alienation in the post-industrial era is matched by the intimate question of the poet’s role within the community to which he belongs. The poem’s subject matter is domestic, crowded with ordinary people, but who are presented as psychologically complex. The language does not draw particular attention to the poet’s use of rhetorical devices, yet an appeal to different cultural codes of perception is clearly being made, underlying the authorial presence of the poet, who can ‘balance’ the experienced data.

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Emphasis is placed on the function of intellectual analysis ('si può riflettere') and on the illusion of trustworthiness which analytical thinking may confer on reality ('ogni cosa', 'ha un senso', 'che sembra vero'):

Il paesaggio non è triste né splendidio.
È la campagna industriale
dove si può riflettere normalmente
e ha un senso, ogni cosa, che sembra vero.

Di qui si vedono però bene le anime
di quelli che han saputo fermare i passi
nel luogo dove il tempo li aveva posti
e si allontanano senza mutare.

Non parlano, o poco. Sanno e lavorano.
Il grande rumore e il piccolo rumore
che porta via spaventosamente altri
non li raggiunge e stanno in calma.

Come in altri secoli dormono le notti
e si rallegrano delle mattine.
Vedi Carlo che ancora discorre
con un amico di quando era ragazzo.

O Michele che quando è stanco è cupo
ma sorride se in una riunione
s'avvede che lo guardi; e non uccide
nessuno nel pensiero ma se stesso misura
sulla buona paura della morte,
il timore che è inizio di sapienza. (PS, p. 140)

Symbolic meaning is given to the town represented ('Cesano Maderno'), which is a key to the low middle class social realities that the author is observing ('È la campagna industriale/ dove si può riflettere normalmente'). 'Carlo' and 'Michele' as names refer to particular individuals who also stand for general character types ('le anime/ di quelli che hanno saputo fermare i passi') and their ability to relate to abstract feelings and conditions, such as 'paura', 'morte', 'timore', and 'sapienza'. In fact, whilst this text describes a specific geographical situation and a set of previously unreported events, at the same time it represents, allegorically, a more universal existential condition ('Non parlano, o poco. Sanno e lavorano'). The choice of language is colloquial, sombre, discursive and sympathetic ('e ha un senso, ogni cosa, che sembra vero'), while the oxymoron 'buona paura' is symbolic of the poetic process of uttering conflictual thoughts and emotions.

The poet's use of 'sight' (see also 2.3) returns in the fourth stanza ('Vedi Carlo che ancora discorre': line 3), and is effectively restated in the fifth stanza as a dialogic exchange between interacting beings ('s'avvede che lo guardi': line 3). With its apparent documentary realism, the text acts on two distinct levels, the private and the public by posing the difficult
question of Jewish identity, which Fortini will later explore this issue in *I cani del Sinai* (1979), in which, displaying an alienation from his own original community because of his intellectual lack of sympathy with Zionism, he prophesizes the ill-fated endurance of racial hatred.

In spite of taking a challenging standpoint, in ‘Cesano Mademo’, Fortini reports the suffering that he witnesses in other people, as also does Pasolini in ‘Canto civile’.

The relationship between Fortini’s text and the depicted reality is direct and immediate, yet its straightforward style of diction is toned down by the presence of the author’s torment, which confers a tragic quality to his attitude. The final line ‘il timore che è inizio di sapienza’ makes it clear that language is there as a transparent medium to draw attention to the different viewpoints of the two men involved (Carlo and Michele as social stereotypes) as well as to their individual ways of perceiving and gaining knowledge of the world. In this poem, traditional realism, used to describe reality, is being subtly challenged (‘e non ci può essere niente che umilia/ in chi non si può ancora giudicare’), since it is shown to be tied up with provinciality. Yet, despite the presence of Carlo and Michele, the text follows a hierarchy of discourse: in fact, their humble viewpoints are not put on an equal level with that of the poet. Thus, their realities are shown to be subjected to the poet’s dominating rhetorical authority. Therefore what Fortini’s poem ‘Cesano Maderno’ does is to introduce a contradictory realism in order to challenge the way in which Neo-realist literature, even with its best Marxist intentions, claims to present a reliably coherent vision of reality.

Whereas in *Poesia e errore* and *Una volta per sempre* the inspiring *auctoritas* is that of Brecht, the voice behind *Questo muro* is that of Goethe, whose *Faust* Fortini was in the process of translating. In a paragraph from the preface to *Poesie Scelte*, Mengaldo refers repeatedly to Fortini’s poetics as to a set of ‘temi mentali’, stressing the author’s Hegelian idealism, as being embodied in his language.

Conceptually, ‘disorder and ‘anarchy’ are but the other face of an individuality seeking to face life’s contradictions:

Ma si guardi alla sostanza del pezzo, questa sorta di taglio sanguinoso: vi si celebrano quasi riassuntivamente, in un linguaggio teso che alla fine diventa nulla meno che hegeliano, le ragion contemporanee di ordine e disordine, e la necessità di trasformare

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175 Pasolini, *Roman poems*, San Francisco: City Lights books, 1986, p. 114: ‘Visti di spalle, quando le voltavano/ per tornare nel tenero gruppo, erano più adulti, […] La loro povertà dimentica che è il freddo inverno […] /Per quanto lo facciano/con tanta, incredibile naturalezza, essi si offrono alla vita.’

176 See *Ways of Readings*, (ed.) Martin Montgomery et al., London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 217. Montgomery writes: ‘Within a Marxist frame of reference critics have particularly debated about the progressive or reactionary nature of realism. […] Lukács, indeed, championed the cause of realism against the rival claims of modernism, rejecting the latter on the grounds of its subjective, fragmentary, and disconnected modes of representation, which he felt amounted to a retreat from society into pathological individualism.’

177 Given the presence in the title of the term ‘muro’, the influence of Sartre’s *Le mur* should not be ignored.

Mengaldo underlines Fortini’s use of the notion of poetry as ‘dissidence’, which is the major feature of *Questo muro*. It should be mentioned that *Questo muro* was published at the time the ‘Historical Compromise’ was announced, the project of an alliance between the two biggest Italian parties, the PCI and the DC. The poems that Fortini included in this volume, therefore, condense one decade of radical changes both in the international political scenario and in Italian socio-economic affairs, with the exacerbation of regional forms of organized criminality, political tension and finally, the advent of terrorism; as I have already mentioned (2.1), with the assassination of Moro, in 1978, in the 1970s, terrorism drove Italy to the edge of ungovernability, with the result that the residual post-war political optimism that had motivated and animated the aesthetics of the Neorealist movement was driven into crisis. The ruinous consequences of the terrorist episodes in the political and social spheres were to leave deep scars on the work of Italian writers and a profound dissatisfaction with the culture of the nation, which was augmented by the unanswered demands of the ’68 protests, and by apparent government corruption.

In the years following this radical crisis in Italian political and social life, a further change is to be observed in Fortini’s poetry, during the ’80s, which begins to show the distortion of reality through the eyes of the individual. Although there is evidence of the beginning of a phase of ideological pessimism as far as the real possibility of intervening in the present is concerned, Fortini’s poetry argues strongly for a return to a humanistic view of moral, political and literary values, grounded mainly in classical literature. As Mengaldo observes:

Poeta sempre politico, nel senso migliore, anche quando parla di alberi e nidi, Fortini ha avuto l’intelligenza di sfruttare appunto di direzione mediatamente politica la stessa autonomia e specificità del testo poetico, il quale tende a diventare in lui il luogo tipico dove s’annidano le sacche di resistenza del soggetto individuale e si tenta di rovesciare profeticamente il presente in utopia.

In relation to what Mengaldo calls ‘le sacche di resistenza del soggetto individuale’, this supports my hypothesis that, from the end of the 1970s onwards, Fortini gives up his strict adherence to the canons of the lyric tradition and the general linguistic-expressive moderation of *Foglio di via* (1946), *Una volta per sempre* (1963) and *Poesia e errore* (1969). Intensifying the expressionism that had characterized *La poesia delle rose*, Fortini now penetrates, at times

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179 After the coup in Chile, Enrico Berlinguer, secretary general of the PCI, assumed that the Left could not govern alone, thereby Italy had to give up the *conventio at excludendum* imposed by the United States and accept the PCI in the government coalition. The DC responded with hostility, never the less Berlinguer persisted and explained his position at the 14th Congress of the party (March 1975).
with unusual acuity, the twisted truths of capitalistic cultures and the distorted relationships
between the individual, industry, politics and the world of social relationships. This new
stance is perfectly exemplified by ‘Un’altra allegoria’ (Questo muro, 1973):

Un piccolo luccichio nella mattina  
È il piccolo raggio di vetro dove si flette,  
il ramo ebete già primaverile.  
È questo l’addio, verità?

Ah, ma sul punto ormai di consolarti  
Nega e ragiona la più giusta lacrima.  
Devi saperlo, è un vivace saluto l’addio.  
Il ramo, che mori, lo sa. (PS, p. 154)

Despite its title, the poem is not so much allegorical as symbolic, yet it introduces allegorical
imagery in the personification of the ‘ramo ebete’, reflecting the awareness of its own death:
‘Il ramo, che mori, lo sa.’ The undercurrent of ideas in governing the second stanza rejects
any consolatory function of literature and restates the author’s desire to remain at a distance
from his own theme, in order to resist any temptation to fall into self-pity. Mengaldo explains
Fortini’s radical revision of many of the political and social artistic discourses of his time;
indeed, when literature is perceived to carry the weight of political hegemony, it can only
serve as a political surrogate. Literature then takes on a kind of spiritual superiority as an
appeal to cultural over political power. Through Lukács’s Soul and Forms, Fortini moves
from the texts and artists he alludes to, to the general problem of modern life and to his own
dilemma as a writer. This perspective encourages an aggressive tone in Fortini’s writings, as
he argues about the reasons for the crisis in the literature of the Western contemporary world.
Mengaldo also indicates the presence, in Questo muro, of some new styles already introduced
by Zanzotto, Balestrini and Sanguineti, such as the textual saturation created by the collage
of mixed specialist languages with literary quotations from foreign texts: that is, a
subterraneous ‘anarchismo linguistico’ (PS, p. 22).

2.5. Towards Expressionism

The artist’s consciousness and imagination is not created ex nihilo: it shifts between past and
present, sometimes reaching extreme expressive forms, as in the work of Kafka, Camus or
Brecht. Fortini’s late move away from his early hermeticism, through modern classicism and
mannerism, to a more expressionist style, brings him closer to the German historical avant-
garde and its ideological line. Like Brecht, he tried to reconcile his highly cultivated tastes
with the crudely heterogeneous demands that history was imposing on his artistic sensibility.

Mengaldo, Poeti italiani del Novecento, p. 831.
This new formalist radicalism gives Fortini's poetic speech the power to represent the
spiritual as well as physical pain of the poet as a witness of the world's atrocities.

Fortini, like Eco, was fascinated with the baroque aesthetics, since, breaking the logical
cage of classic forms, it paralleled 20th century themes and moods. The baroque sensibility,
as Eco stressed in *Opera aperta* (1962), represented an exceptional historically situation, in
which forms and genres were allowed to fluctuate in order to emphasize the artist's role.
*Paesaggio con serpente*, Fortini's neo-baroque collection, published in 1984, reveals the
development of the renewed aesthetics that emerges in the mature phase of Fortini's poetic
production, which determines a shift from the author's alleged classicism towards new tints of
baroque mannerism. This is particularly visible in his reflections on painting, as anticipated
by the title of the collection, which refers to the allegorical order in Poussin's 'Landscape
with a man killed by a snake'. As has already been underlined in 'The "otherness" of poetry:
the theme of sight' (Sections 2.3.), the entire volume is arranged consistently along a strict
line of argument, stating the primacy of perception, which recalls both Benjamin and
Barthes's interest in the visual arts, as well as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological inquiry.
This aesthetic approach is declared in Fortini's explanation of the deeper discourse hidden
behind the screen of his early allegiance to the classic heritage:

Poets like Pasolini and Zanzotto – not much younger than I – warned against surrender.
In the same manner, I adopted an approach, as the horrors of the world grew more
menacing, that held things at a distance ('landscape with ruins'); the more poetry
summoned up a dead, even vanished, tradition, the more vital it became.(see inSINA, p. 11)

Anyone who actually looks at Fortini's poems will notice that everywhere there is mention of
austere pictorial landscapes with 'ruins', which represent a concept of antiquity, condemning
aspects of capitalism and the decadence of late bourgeois civilization. Once brought into
verse, they make the poet's theoretical judgement more accessible, facilitating what in *The
Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson calls the 'aesthetization of the real': 'Such
transformations of the world into images must always be marked as the reunification of data
which were originally chaotic, or fragmentary.' 183 Focused on the author as perceiver,
*Paesaggio con serpente* exploits allegory to the full, thus leaving the impression that the
author's ultimate target is to convey a metacritic of poetry as a 'commonly shared view', to
which, however, the poet does not assign a 'redemptive' function, but a communicative one.
This becomes manifest in poems such as 'Lukács', 'Stammheim', 'Incontri nel bosco',

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181 For the various ideological lines of Expressionism, see Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis; 
182 For an insightful analysis of the revaluation of the Baroque aesthetics in postmodern Italian literature, see Peter
Fortini, while making continuous allusions to the political instability of the time, shows the contradictory nature of postmodernity through the dissymmetry arising between content and form.

The complexity of this collection is based on the emblematic presence of two interacting styles which best represent, and react, to the disharmony, horrors and paradoxes of a world deprived of balance, peace, and liberty – mannerism and expressionism. The recognition of art’s structural antinomy thus gives shape to Fortini’s writing as an attempt to both intervene in this dissymmetrical proximity of forms as well as mediate between traditions. In this sense, the book’s utopia is to strike some sort of balance between the apparently incurable forces of modernization and the desire to retain a space in society for the arts. Yet this mediatory function has the paradoxical effect of destabilizing the real, as the title suggests, staging, within a tragic and increasingly violent frame, a scene reminiscent of the painting and style of the late Renaissance, as well as the peculiar strained and other-worldly drama created by the mannerists. As a symbol, the snake takes the place of a danger that has only apparently been removed from the realm of being. In fact, the snake as a symbol is always more than a reminder or a substitute for evil. This process, underlining the poet’s testimonial discourse, traces the swing in themes and styles which informs his intertextual practices, as we read in poems such as ‘E perché…’, ‘Perché alla fine’, ‘La risposta’, ‘Lukács’, ‘Traducendo Milton’, ‘Traducendo Brecht’ and ‘Leggendo una poesia’ suggest (see chapter 3).

My analysis will now address the prominence of visual elements in many of the poems included in this collection. Fortini’s interest in painting, in fact, dates back to his pre-war university years in Siena, when he devoted his thesis to the analysis of the art of Rosso Fiorentino, and in this passion we may observe a force counterbalancing the notion of the superiority of ethics over aesthetics. Indeed, we may trace Fortini’s attention to the visual arts in a number of poems containing the theme of sight, finally led him to attempt an expressionist mode of the verbalization of sight as a metaphor for his intellectual and emotional perspective on the changing appearance of objects and realities in his field of vision. Nonetheless, as has been stressed in an earlier section (2.3), sight also introduces doubts about the author’s true knowledge of the world as a perceiver.

About one decade passes between the publication of *Questo muro* and *Paesaggio con serpente*, in which the author relates his love of painting to his interest in the visual as a component of poetic language itself directly. As stated above, the title of the volume refers to Poussin’s ‘Landscape with a man killed by a snake’, which allegorically recalls the impact of
natural catastrophes on the course of human events.\textsuperscript{184} By analogy, Fortini adopts the notion of ‘chaos’ and the effects of the ‘terrible’ on the human psyche as the book’s central theme.

For someone with the self-control and openness to spiritual values such as Fortini, it would be highly congenial to relate to the values contained in the moral rectitude and love for all things, expressed in the art of Poussin: the French artist indeed portrayed the highest ethical values as well as the principle that pleasure can come from the senses as much as from the mind. Fortini’s intention is then to recall the heroic dignity, the intellectual integrity and the aesthetic taste that the Baroque developed by virtue of its manipulation and conceptualizations of pre-existing styles and discourses. A further aim is to reduce the distance of poetry from painting. If it is true that, in painting, meaning is implicit, in the sense that it does not communicate with the audience as directly as a verbal utterance, it is also true that, unlike writing, it does not convey the illusion of truthfulness.\textsuperscript{185}

The three sections ‘Il vero che è passato’, ‘Una obbedienza’ and ‘Penultime’ of the collections support a metaphysical subjectivism that speaks of memory as a historical resentment. Poems such as ‘Lo spazio’ and ‘Una sera di nebbia’ describe the reality which is beyond appearance, a desire that fully corresponds to the late Fortini’s need, as poet and thinker, to discover the antinomies behind the visible: ‘Quasi prendesse forma quel che non è o quasi/ nell’aria ci fossero grotte di vento’ (SINA, p. 96). Equally noticeable is a system of pictographic quotation which, as I have already mentioned, ranges from Poussin to Edward Munch, an expedient widely used by Montale in Ossi di seppia (1925). Moreover, in ‘Monologo del Tasso a Sant’Anna’ and ‘Traducendo Milton’, together with the systematic recycling of Baroque forms, there is evidence of an audacious blend of modernist codes and expressionist ones.\textsuperscript{186} From a structural point of view, Paesaggio con serpente has a polymorphous and polyphonic nature, representing the dialectics at work in the relationship between what is ideological and what is purely poetical. In fact, at the intertextual level, the volume shows a wide range of traces from Tasso’s tragic individualism in Le lettere and Dialoghi, Marvell’s profane poetry with its sensuous intellectuality, Milton’s religious ethicality and sense of democracy, Goethe’s humanistic classicism, right up to Éluard’s moral brotherhood and sense of reality, and Kafka’s use of surreal and expressionistic narratives. In particular, a strong engagement with the existentialist themes of the latter can be seen in Fortini’s sense of imminent catastrophe.

A definite fear of social injustice haunts both authors, who search for ethicality and independence in the face of terror-ridden historical realities, as shown by Fortini’s translation

\textsuperscript{184} Poussin’s work — which follows a discourse of inner perfectionism, allowing ethical elements to take the lead — is, for Fortini, the true symbol of mannerist expressivism, since it reformulates existing topics and styles from previous traditions. For Fortini’s interest in painting, see Enrico Crispolti, Franco Fortini: disegni, incisioni, dipinti, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001.

\textsuperscript{185} For a survey of the liaison between poetry and painting, see particularly Merleau-Ponty, The Prose of the World (1952).

\textsuperscript{186} Added to these intertextual references, in Paesaggio con serpente, Fortini inserts quotations in various foreign languages — a technique adopted by Pound, and later by Sanguineti — as in the poem ‘Stammheim.’
of Kafka's short stories. Fruitful comparisons may indeed be made between their individual styles, which convey an original intellectual response to crisis with a typical Central European Jewish sense of the absurd. Like Kafka, Fortini too, in *Paesaggio con serpente*, deals with individualism, madness and melancholia, which frame the artist's sense of the tragic. As in the sonnet 'Per l'ultimo dell'anno 1975', dedicated to Zanzotto, Fortini's expressionist posture includes terms which are exclusive to the semantic field of man's existential struggle ('buio', 'fiele', 'deriso', 'deforme', 'lamento', 'ucciso', 'sgomento', 'è deriso'):

> Come nel buio si ritrae lento,  
> Andrea, quest'anno già da sé diviso.  
> Ora nel vischio del suo fiele intriso  
> Starà così per sempre dunque spento.  
> 
> Ma quel che in noi di anno in anno è deriso  
> O incompiuto o deforme non lamento:  
> se uno è vinto e un altro è stato ucciso,  
> uno ha durato contro lo sgomento.  
> 
> Qui stiamo a udire la sentenza. E non  
> Ci sarà, lo sappiamo, una sentenza.  
> Ad uno a uno siamo in noi giù volti.  
> 
> Quanto sei bella, giglio di Saron,  
> Gerusalemme che ci hai raccolti.  
> Quanto lucente la tua inesistenza. (PCS, p. 39)

Despite its classic structure and tone, the sonnet conveys the expressionist artist's revolt against contemporary society. Through a desecratory use of 'we' ('qui stiamo a udire la sentenza'), it gives voice to a culpable, damned man, who mirrors his own desolation in other men, and who, as in Dante's *Inferno*, has no hope for redemption. As in Dante's *Inferno* ('si che la tema si volve in disio'. III, 123) death, here, is both dreaded and longed for ('Ad uno ad uno siamo in noi giù volti'). This longing, which offers an end to all the sufferings, it is what renders meaningful the senselessness of death ('E/non ci sarà, lo sappiamo, una sentenza'). Death is indeed the mark of and remedy for life's futility.

The dedication 'A Zanzotto' acts as the spur to a bitter meditation ('fiele intriso', 'sgomento') in which to paint a wry portrait of the artist's peripheral status as a political loser ('se uno è vinto e un altro è stato ucciso'), sentenced to spiritual death. The instructive wearied morality of the sonnet makes the poet's tone predominantly restrained, self-admonitory and even gloomy, yet loyal to the melody of the rhyming scheme. Finally, the sarcastic mode of scrutiny in the final 'terzina', which borrows its imagery from the Old Testament, casts its shadow far into the three compositional forms of *Paesaggio con Serpente*,

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the lyrical, the dramatic and the theoretical: ‘Quanto sei bella, giglio di Sharon […]? Quanto lucente la tua inesistenza’.

Fortini’s *imitatio* of Tasso’s Cinquecentismo, or Milton’s ‘Seicentismo’, together with the author’s new attention to the Baroque tendency to justify the poet experience theoretically through a peculiar use of rhetorical language emphasizing the artificial, as in Marvell’s poetry, is conveyed through loose reference to pre-existing stylistic-rhetorical academies of forms. As I have indicated above, *Paesaggio con serpente* is not only heavily figurative, but also polyphonic and polysémie. In fact, in challenging the established limits of the individual arts, Baroque culture offered Fortini an ideal ground upon which to test the very idea of interdisciplinarity: for example, the Baroque hyper-intellectualized sense of physical decadence, underlying the vanity of all human endeavours, goes hand in hand with surrealist and expressionist verbal utterances, producing a multilayered style that will be redesigned in *Composita solvantur* (1994) as a compositional technique to foster the faculty of vision as the ‘epiphany’ of recognition. Much space is conceded to the theoretical and factual revaluation of the style and pose that Fortini calls his ‘maschera funebre’, to show the ambiguity and the level of suffering hidden behind the apparent harmony of reality, as Rainer Maria Rilke’s claims:

We lack all knowledge of this parting. Death does not deal with us. We have no reason to show death admiration, love or hate; his mask of feigned tragic lament gives us a false impression.

The presence in Fortini’s language of two worlds, caught in a permanent struggle, between intellectual dissidence and sensual dreaming, moral imperative and sentimentality, is typical of Baroque pose, as will emerge from the analysis of a section from *Paesaggio con serpente*, containing allusions taken both from Góngora’s ‘concettismo’ and the ‘sensuous thought’ of English metaphysical poetry (see 2.7). The idea is well illustrated in an early essay of Fortini’s on Kafka, ‘Gli uomini di Kafka e la critica delle cose’, dating from 1948:

Non può esistere vita umanamente compiuta se non dà un senso ed un luogo alla negazione, al male e alla morte; se non dà un significato positivo alla ‘comunione dei passati’. O il futuro avrà questa pietas storica verso il passato o meritera di recar sui propri stemmi il pugno babelico, il simbolo dei colpi che dovranno distruggere la città

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188 Credit goes, in the first instance, to Anceschi for having understood the impact of the Baroque tradition on twentieth-century arts and theorized these connections in his study *Barocco e Novecento* (1960).


As with the José Ortega y Gasset of the *Meditations on the Don Chisciotte* (1961), Fortini develops an interest in Tasso, Milton and Goethe, since, through their portrayal of mad characters, they turn the struggle of man against the world's destructive forces into powerful symbolisms. Thus, in *Paesaggio con serpente*, Fortini constructs a ‘cumulative’ language that complicates and dissimulates the poet’s individual ‘voice’ through the plurality of expressive utterances.\(^{191}\) Despite his past search for the agreement of ethical values, Fortini’s refusal to adopt a forced coherence – embryonic in *Questo muro* and fully matured in *Paesaggio con serpente* – can be found in his use of certain expressive irregularities duplicating those of the subconscious;\(^{192}\) his slips of the tongue, linguistic excesses show him moving towards a new poetics, which could exalt life’s contrasts and discords, as shown in *La poesia delle rose* (2.4). Caught between sensuality and rigour, Fortini’s language here surrenders expressionism.

As Stefano Agosti claims: ‘Il poeta, oggi, articolerebbe non tanto la menzogna del canto, quanto la verità della parola: verità che essendo situata su quel discrimine incerto che corre tra follia e ragione, può esprimersi, al limite, anche nel balbettio e magari nel silenzio’. The radicalization of the metonymic usage and the attention paid to sharp acoustic effects (‘grida’, ‘voci’, ‘pianti’, ‘stridii’, ‘tuoni’) in the poem ‘Il temporale’ give up any idea of strict faithfulness to objectivity, which had characterized previous collections such as *Foglio di via* (1946) and *Poesia e errore* (1969). The nucleus of the collection, which is constituted by the section ‘Di seconda intenzione’, offers fundamental clues to the understanding of Fortini’s intertextual practices. The section opens with the poem ‘Via Cardinal Federico’, which alludes to the women brought to the stake, suspected of witchcraft and sorcery during the years of Federico Borromeo. In particular, ‘Monologo di Tasso a Sant’Anna’, inspired by Leopardi’s ‘Il dialogo di Torquato Tasso e del suo genio familiare’ (*Operette morali*) is Fortini’s dramatic monologue, in which a self-mocking Tasso reveals his character and the current dramatic situation that he is in, creating in so doing a mirror-image of Fortini’s poetic voice. The poem reveals the poet’s ungratefulness towards his benefactors, owing to his untamed intellectual militancy and his will to resist any conformist affiliation. In this poem, there is a reference to what had become known, politically, as the ‘grande

\(^{191}\) Fortini’s dissimulative technique has been analysed by Pietro Bonfiglioli in his essay ‘Teoria e pratica della dissimulazione onesta’, published in *Rendiconti* 1, no. 4-6, 1962, pp. 151-167. Seduced by the simulacrum of poetry, yet, at the same time, rejecting its aura, the poet brings himself close to its core, simulating an interaction which is merely an illusion, eternally replayed as the simulation of a dissimulation.

reflusso’, that is a generalized increasing indifference towards ideology as such. *Paesaggio con serpente* was in fact published in the late 1980s, a period indeed characterized by a conservative revival.194 During this crucial decade of political crises,195 Fortini devotes his poetry to his acknowledged passion for Góngora’s baroque (‘Al pensiero della morte e dell’inferno’ is clearly a reworking of a sonnet by Góngora), Poussin’s pictorial allegorism (‘Nota su Poussin’), and Descartes’s philosophical rationalism (‘Il massimo di luce’). He also extends his extratext to Shakespeare’s sonnets (‘Da Shakespeare’) and Milton’s *Lycidas* (‘Traducendo Milton’). From this intercultural perspective, Fortini’s interest in foreign literatures, also as a translator, becomes clearer. It opens up the question of his idea of a trans-subjective literary act as a means of communication. In discussing his poetic Self, Fortini writes: ‘Ora questa persona però non è intesa nel senso anagrafico; è colui che lo scrittore o il parlante finge sia l’autore. Insomma bisogna cercare di evitare l’inganno della identificazione che è così corrente’. This quotation underlines a definite desire to overcome falsity and deception (‘il parlante finge’, ‘inganno dell’identificazione’). As can be traced symmetrically in *Paesaggio con serpente* between the opening allegory ‘Ordine e disordine’ and the last poem ‘Molto chiare’, the opposition of colour intensities, of clarity against obscurity, and known against unknown, strengthens the dialectical nature of Fortini’s language (‘l’ostinato che a notte armera le carte’).

In Fortini’s work, the question of ‘order’ as a common concern invites discussion on various topics, eliciting reflections on cognitive, political, as well as material aspects of poetry, as a way of looking at the world’s paradoxes.196 In fact, questions of order as opposed to disorder run throughout his essays, poems and translations, developing around political images, conceptions of artistic identity, and the notion of knowledge. In fact, Fortini claims that poetry, like all human practices, including religious, political, and economic ones, is grounded in and productive of a kind of order, whether deliberate or implied. Yet, in spite of the refined sensibility through which he perceives and experiences that order, it inevitably fails to correspond to the idea he seeks to grasp. Thus, order appears to the poet even more partial and precarious than in other spheres, producing a constant tension between his efforts at directing his art conceptually and materially towards the world, and the impossibility of ever achieving a durable stability. Because order is seen as unstable, it involves the

194 From 1983 to 1987, Italy was governed by the socialist Bettino Craxi, who brought stability to the country but also political corruption, determining that crisis of ideologies and of traditional values represented in the political extratext of this collection.
195 See ‘Centro d’iniziativa Luca Rossi’, *Libro bianco sulla Legge Reale*, Milan: 1990, p. 92. In this period, the PCI returned to the opposition, as Cesare Bermani comments: ‘As the PCI is entirely committed to the war on “leftist extremism extends its powers. In fact the repression of the 1977 movement, to which the party devoted all its energies, is a further reason for the extension of the armed struggle, since it was to prevent the party from secret political agreements.
196 For ‘order’, see VDP, ‘organizzazione della cultura […] e delle Istituzioni letterarie, pp. 92-93.
acknowledgement of its antagonist: disorder and the ways in which the poet deals with the inadequacy and failure of his notion of order are examines in the poem.

Initially, the traces of observable things are arranged in a mental graph, which has operated a dismantling of the real, whose signification the author can no longer trust; yet finally, he can speak of these objects with a new tender longing. The thematic content of ‘Molto chiare’ re-establishes the increasing inability of the subject to separate the anguish of his own individuality from that of others:

Molto chiare si vedono le cose.
Puoi contare ogni foglia dei platani.
Lungo il parco di settembre
l’autobus già ne porta via qualcuna.
Ad uno ad uno tornano gli ultimi mesi,
il lavoro imperfetto e l’ansia,
le mattine, le attese e le piogge.

Lo sguardo è là ma non vede una storia
di sé o di altri. Non sa più chi sia
l’ostinato che a notte annera le carte
coi segni di una lingua non più sua
e replica il suo errore.
È niente? È qualcosa?
Una risposta a queste domande è dovuta.
La forza di luglio era grande.
Quando è passata, è passata l’estate.
Però l’estate non è tutto. (PCS, p. 105)

In spite of the clarity resulting from the distance from which the subject can now view experience, Fortini’s interrogative mode, which accounts for his doubts and uncertainties, intensifies its rhetorical oppositions (È niente? È qualcosa?), as does the aphoristic mode in the final three lines. In this phase of his career, Fortini writes a certain number of poems committed to the analysis of dream constructions, mental scenarios carrying memories of traumas and wounds, as in ‘Leggendo una poesia’, a included in the section ‘Una obbedienza’ (Paesaggio con serpente) dedicated to Sereni’s 1965 collection Gli strumenti umani. The author also manifests a tendency to ascribe a higher function to poetry than that of a merely self-cognitive therapy:

Scrivere versi diventa un modo rapido, un modo economico e, ahimè, un modo illusorio di risparmiarsi una crescita psicologica o un trattamento psicanalitico. [...] Insomma, nella poesia ci si trova di tutto ma lo si trova ad una distanza tale che ricorda continuamente la necessità di prendere le distanze. Qualcuno alla fine del Settecento, scrisse che la poesia era un sogno fatto in presenza della ragione; forse sarebbe più esatto dire invece che la poesia è un ragionamento fatto in presenza di un sogno.
This text represents a true exercise in metacriticism, having as its main subjects components such as the author, the reader, the literary scene with its debates, interpretation, truth, indecipherability and, in the end, poetic language itself with its obscure signs ("Una ingiustizia strana e indecifrabile"). This notion returns in another metacritical poem, 'Leggendo una poesia', dedicated to Sereni, one of the many lyrics to be both extremely attentive to the problem of communicating ideas through verse and also willing to go beyond aesthetic preoccupations:

Non ho mai capito gli altri né me stesso
ma il modo che ho di sbagliare questo sí. Se mi arriva
una verità è nel mezzo della fronte: è
un'accusa. Ragiono
senza comprendere. Mai sono dove credo.

Avrò parlato quel mattino
come l'idiota che so essere. Qualche bava
gaia avrò avuta alle labbra. Qualche sussidio
per la mia giornata fino a notte. [...]  

Mi è stato fatto non so quando un male.
Una ingiustizia strana e indecifrabile
mi ha reso stolto e forte per sempre.
Leggo i versi di Sereni per Nicolò Gallo
e scrivo ancora una volta parola per parola.
Non tutto allora è vero quello che ho detto sin qui.
Posso anche io intendere chi noi siamo. (PCS, p. 95)

For the poet, the expressionist register presents a challenge: how could its individualistic vision be communicated to the reader? The poet takes a sort of satirical pride in weakness ('mi ha reso stolto e forte per sempre'), in the specific sense of overcoming one's pride, one's inclinations or wishes: in fact, weakness becomes a critical measure for self-respect ('Non ho mai capito gli altri né me stesso./ Ma il modo che ho di sbagliare questo sí'). Fortini here articulates the process whereby he becomes increasingly conscious of the evil effects of ideology on his art and psychology ('Una ingiustizia strana e indecifrabile'). He deeply questions, for instance, the way in which he and Sereni have recognized each other, a mutual awareness which is not always evident or correct ('Non tutto allora è vero quello che ho detto sin qui'). Encouraging a preoccupation with the problem of communication and communicability, ideology, instead of poetry, is shown to be a category we apply in order to simplify and make sense of human actions.

The hyperconsciousness at work in these lines echoes Sereni's 'Non lo amo il mio tempo, non lo amo', since it reverberates out of the poet's dismay at the decline, not only of

\[197\] Ibid. p. 305.
socialist values in the contemporary world to which he feels he has been condemned, but of
sense itself, impeded by reasoning without understanding. The poet's tragic consciousness
tries to trace back the events that have been inflicted on his mind, such an obscure and
irresolvable trauma ('Mi è stato fatto non so quando un male'). The theme of the narcissistic
'wound' resembles the melancholy of the disguised pain in Rebora's 'Curriculum Vitae':

un lutto orlava ogni mio gioire:
l'infinito anelando, udivo intorno
nel traffico e nel chiasso, un dire furbo:
quando c'è la salute c'è tutto...\textsuperscript{198}

The poem suggests that being emotional or addressing emotional states of mind is not a
defective way of thinking. In fact, giving vent to one's feeling of love, fear, pain or guilt, as
the lyric poet does, is not necessarily being 'irrational'. Psychological and historical factors,
then, influence both texts, infusing in them a state of melancholy ('un lutto orlava ognimio
gioire'), induced by a vague feeling of permanent mourning. Such romantic melancholy
('l'infinito anelando' evoking Leopardi's 'L'infinito'), mixed with the fear of one's transient
condition – which also constitutes Kafka's \textit{leitmotif}\textsuperscript{199}.

In the poem 'La buonanotte', from \textit{Paesaggio con serpente}, the dialogic perspective,
which Fortini never abandons, returns to moderate the contradiction between intellectual
impulses and emotionally self-destructive ones, which Pasolini described in 'Passione e
ideologia' (1960):

\begin{quote}
Così, lacerato da forze che lo trascinano in due direzioni opposte, egli (Fortini) ruota
un po' disperato su se stesso, si impoverisce e affabula accanitamente: trovandosi così
quasi sempre respinto magari di un soffio fuori dalla rosa del tiro della grazia. Eppure
si ha la netta impressione che egli, nel fondo, voglia proprio questo. Essere cioè
dimostrazione vissuta – 'martire' nel senso etimologico della parola – di una nuova
cultura e di una nuova ideologia letteraria, che escludono, per definizione, sia
l'umanesimo che l'irrazionalismo della poesia.\textsuperscript{200}
\end{quote}

The theme of the 'narcissistic wound' ('lacerato'), identified by Luperini, is evident in 'La
buonanotte'. The poem portrays the state of loneliness that precedes sleep, when the poet
questions himself about the reasons for his melancholy. He also recognizes that he no longer
has time to regain the lost fullness of life:

\begin{quote}
Dimmi, riesci a credere
di potere sollevare la coperta
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{198} Clemente Rebora, 'Curriculum Vitae', da \textit{Canti dell'infermità}, 1956, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{199} In Fortini's middle-class Jewish family, this conflict between son and father may explains the author's
idealization of Noventa as a more authoritative father-figure.
\textsuperscript{200} Pasolini, \textit{Passione e ideologia}, p. 469.
This self-reflective atmosphere refers back to a disseminated network of memories and impressions, which results in the poet’s self-portrait. In the first of the two stanzas, and with metaphysical sensitivity, the poet describes his peripheral vision before falling asleep. In this phase, besides the cogito (‘il differimento di te a te medesimo’), he also recalls certain features of his subjective psychology (‘brame goffe, gesti d’ira’). As in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body-mind dualism, in The Phenomenology of Perception (1962), here a monologic narrator utters his fear of being a mere non-physical being: his ‘mentalismo’ (‘dimmi, riesci a credere’) has in fact reduced the physical and the objective to the intellectual and the subjective. As Merleau-Ponty claims, freedom is not available in the discernment of one’s body: indeed, in the second stanza, the subject emerges with a sense of deep frustration from his dreary experience of ‘being his own body’ (‘an object that does not leave me [...] and ultimately [does not] disappear from my field of vision’)201 as the telephone rings, calling him back to the practicality of life. The author’s insistence on self-knowledge as the painful recognition of one’s lack of freedom acquires notable importance in this section. This is in contrast with Sartre’s idea that freedom is the subject’s capacity to make choices beyond the many things and facts that are not within one’s power. The atmosphere is here hushed with a sense of distress and awe. The subject fears that, in losing his control over reality, the ghosts of his past will trespass on the threshold of sleep and invade his room:

Verrà nella stanza da bagno un chiarore di neve.
Buon latte d’aria, mite crema, affetto
che sempre hai desiderato e ora basta com’è.
Potrei volgere la mente alle tue cellule
dove palpitano stente
desinenze, musiche orbe,
brame goffe, gesti d’ira;
e chiedere ah non pietà ma di tornare
nel letto ancora a dormire.

Finché non esiga irritato il telefono
‘Signore, prego, parli!’ – la scelta, la data
del contratto, l’ora della riunione,
il differimento di te a te medesimo,
là certezza che sono disfatti
gli antichi miceli nervosi, annientato il disegno
delle labbra in sogno ancora tenere
di chi un giorno ti chiamò amore. (PCS, p. 100)

201 See Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, trans. Colin Smith, London: Routledge, 1962, p. 90. Merleau-Ponty notes: ‘my body is distinguishable from my table or the lamp in that I can turn away from the latter whereas my body is constantly perceived.’
The poet here alludes to reality as to a nightmare from which humanity does not succeed in waking up, and into which the narrator descends, carrying with him a painful sense of alienation (‘il differimento di te a te medesimo’). The smallness of the space, which refers to a person’s most private thoughts, may suggest that the poet’s Self is seeking security from being disrupted by burdensome, hypocritical responsibilities. The personification of the telephone as the daily opponent of the poet’s spiritual isolation may mean that he is feeling threatened by the outside world, which urges him to take part in public life. The poet’s fear and desire to withdraw his aching consciousness into self-absorption is evident in the lines ‘Potrai volgere la mente alle tue cellule’/ ‘tornare nel letto a dormire’: during day-time, there is no more space for fantasies of the shadowy presence of the beloved, who is slowly conjured up before his eyes. Since the domestic environments in this poem illustrate different ways of perceptions, the bedroom may represent both the poet’s beliefs and habits, a place of safety, and his subconscious, where all the problems that may have been suppressed through an inability to handle them are now stored.

The atmosphere becomes blurred and uncertain, pervaded by melting sounds and figures. Ferretti notes: ‘In sostanza, la distanza tra intellettuale e masse via via si approfondisce, ma al tempo stesso la comune e divisa condizione di subalternità, dice che la soluzione del problema rimane comunque nella possibilità di quel rapporto.’ A feeling of anxiety and remoteness pervades the last stanza (‘annientato il disegno/ delle labbra in sogno ancora tenere’), until silence is evoked, as the poet recalls the lips of the person who proffered words of love (‘di chi un giorno ti chiamò amore’). There is a passage from interiority to exteriority between the two stanzas which encompass conflicting states of passivity and activity, as Fortini states in an essay included in Saggi Italiani, once again proving the continuous interaction of the theoretical with the poetical:

La figura del transito corrisponde a passività, pazienza: il mondo è percorso, pellegrinaggio, private di essenza. La situazione della ‘voce’ è situazione di veglia. Il soggetto si sente disincarnato, vivo d’una libertà che, se non è sempre fuori dal mondo, certo del mondo non è... È l’elegia di un mutamento che diventa immobilità. (SI, p. 108)

The detail of the mouth uttering words of affection contrasts strongly with the poet’s present infirm physical condition, as in Kafka’s Metamorphosis. The vision of the woman, who is external to the self, thus prospectively objectified, becomes equivocal, since she can no longer help render the significance of the word she once inhabited; although the poem’s last word is indeed love, it still leaves a sense of irredeemable loss. In this last tense stanza then, the poet is called back to the daylight of efficiency, to resume a public function.

As stated above, my discussion of the theme of sight in Fortini’s poetry (2.3), Fortini frequently evokes the phenomenology of perception, which brings the subject closer to reality as the source of increasingly deeper exploration. Fortini seems to see the phenomenology of the visible and the invisible as a synthesis of consciousness and physicality, caught in the unreliable balance between sleep and waking, forgetfulness and memory. A reiteration, then, of the theme of sight is traceable in ‘La buonanotte’ from Paesaggio con Serpente, cited above, weighted down with the awareness of imminent loss that will not find relief. The alienation produced by the poet’s feeling of dissociation is made almost tangible. The idea of clarity as synonymous with rationality is acknowledged in ‘limpidezza/ nelle foglie illuminate, negli intonaci/ delle case nuove, che ancora vedo’, which represents a quest for life, contrasted with the anticipated dullness of old age. The numbness that precedes sleep does not offer comfort, nor can the milky vision clarify the identity of the figure standing by the poet’s bedside. The meticulous re-elaboration of diurnal actions surging up into consciousness as ‘Vecchie sapienze, passioni vivaci’, ‘la scelta, la data/ del contratto, l’ora della riunione, il differimento di te a te medesimo’, is evidence of a previous state of dynamism, which has now turned into uncertainty: ‘Il cranio assorto dell’insonnia/ che non parla ma guarda’. The poet’s Self divides, creating an embittered antagonist:

Non ho sentimento di amicizia per te
anzi più passano gli anni
più, amico mio, mi è difficile comprendere
quello che turba la tua mente. E anche la mia! (PCS, p. 100)

Fortini speaks of this phase from a psychological point of view showing similarities with the line ‘Il mondo invecchia, ed invecchiando intristisce’, from Tasso’s Aminta: the paradox of old age being that, although it kills all desire for life, one still prefers it to death. Reality appears distorted by an interpretative error (‘mi è difficile comprendere/ quello che turba la mente’). The use of epiphonema underlines a feeling of inner division (‘E anche la mia!’): having negated his emotionality for a long time, now the poet experiences depression: ‘Questo puoi, ora questo: dormire’. Yet, the effort to draw a meaning out of this kind of discomfort (‘ciò che turba la mente’) is an attempt to recognize its function. The poet’s spiritual ache is exacerbated by his progressive inability to confer unity on a world that is loosing compactness. The agitation caused by these disturbing thoughts substantiates the poet’s fear of not understanding the world and of not being understood. Nonetheless, to speak of one’s emotiveness is, at a minimum, to try to provide an answer, as the title of the poem, ‘La risposta’, suggests: ‘nella sera calma e certa dopo il pianto/ va questa mia risposta.’ (PCS, p. 52) The unsettling convergence of ‘pianto’ and ‘sera calma e certa’ in the cited poem (2.3) celebrates the poet’s diminished ability to provide life with a coherent answer. Fortini invokes
A sarcastically assertive tone is maintained throughout this dramatic monologue (‘Comincerò/una composizione che ignoro’). The voice belongs to a character who has lost faith in the notion of an universal order, and who nevertheless places himself at the centre of this new disorder to express his obsessive thoughts. Here is a mind that has considered the oppositions truth/falseness, sanctity/damnation for a long time before arriving at such radical negation (‘La lingua sonora/degli italiani non potrà aiutarmi’). The triple reiteration of the key-word ‘sogno’ underlines the poet’s consciousness of his psychic deformations which are linked with a deep-rooted sense of dilemma (‘per domandarvi che cosa mai fosse e perché/voi e perché non voi e le bestie perché/ e perché il sogno spaventoso dello scuoiato’, PN, p. 116)

The ‘nightmare’ becomes a narrative device, where the poet’s consciousness is torn between the reality he gazes and his hallucinated presence amidst chaos (‘tutta lasciare in disordine la tua stanza sbalordita’), which is intensified by violent verbs, adjectives and nouns, expressing his suffering (‘spezzate’, ‘piangendo’, ‘scuoiato’, ‘clamoroso parlare’).

As far as the symbolic system is concerned, the poem’s logic can be grasped by inversion. The strong semantic ground of the genealogical tree (‘parenti’, ‘nonni’, ‘antenati’, ‘nipote’) is juxtaposed to the other distinctive field, recalling linguistic matters (‘composizione’, ‘domanda’, ‘sillabe’, ‘compone’, ‘parlare’, ‘lingua sonora’). Having lost
hope to ever write coherent verse, the poet creates some new order out of the disparate elements of his private and public Self ('voi tutte queste sillabe aiutare [...] con quelle intraprendendo già tronca un'azione'). This is indeed his way to resist the world's destructive forces by straining towards its master-fulcrum, that is poetic language. Fortini's metalanguage reaches an agonising self-assertion in the line 'ah nulla potete insegnarmi/ che io già non sappia', and claims ownership of one of the most compelling requirements of poetry, the poet's expertise:

Non è onnipotenza questa mia, è pianto di rabbia.  
Neanche per la mia ignoranza domando scusa,  
non c'è colpa né scusa.  
Almeno una immagine, una visione sabbatica,  
queste cadenze miserabili animasse!  
Ma no, senza conoscenza né buona coscienza,  
senza teologia, senza arte manuale  
e nemmeno poesia, sebbene più ilare  
che triste, più ansioso che sazio, più indistruttibile,  
anche nella stanchezza di tutto il vissuto secolo,  
mi avvio veloce verso il mio rancore.  
E chi aprirà i vecchi miei lessici e legga  
le carte soffiando sulla polvere, almeno  
abbia un giusto scuotere del capo, il capo alzi, guardi  
se la mattina è acuta, esca . (PN, p. 117)

At first, the author seems to apologize for his intellectual arrogance ('Non è onnipotenza questa mia, è pianto di rabbia'), only to abruptly overturn the appeal for forgiveness with his determined affirmation 'mi avvio veloce verso il mio rancore'; it is like a movement back and forth between past as memory, and future as prophecy. Yet at the exact point when the text becomes its sole object, the poet invokes an external agency, addressing his future critics with engaging propositions ('chi aprirà i vecchi miei lessici e legga' [...] / 'almeno abbia un giusto scuotere del capo').

In the second part of the poem, the sequences of images turn into statements of authorial intervention. The poet's use of the imperative exhortative tells the reader which strategy to use to decode this cryptic text, which, keeping meticulously to the semantic field of psychological and ethical suffering ('rabbia', 'pianto', 'triste', 'ansioso', 'stanchezza', 'rancore') suddenly opens up to future possibilities. The narrator here shows the inadequacy of poetic expression when faced with the objective and desperate reality; yet, despite this

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203 The line alludes ironically to the cited 'Questione della lingua', raised by Pasolini et Al.
204 On Fortini's understanding of the role of writers in the light of their duty to exploit memory to educate future generations of readers, see Luigi Lollini, 'Lettori del dopodomani', in Lingua e stile, 35, no.1, March 2000, pp. 149-167. See also Gianluca Giachery in Per Fortini, Chaos, no. 6/7, p. 90.
205 In Fortini and 'memory' see also the author's note in L'ospite ingrato, Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1985, pag.19. Fortini writes: 'se è vero che l'estremismo è malattia infantile del comunismo, e anche vero che nessuna vecchiaia è peggiore di quella che ha perduto anche il ricordo, ed il rimorso, dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza.'
distrust, his desire to keep writing eclipses his depressed subjectivity, caught between hope and despair. Indeed, the closing proposition ‘se la mattina è acuta, esca’ conveys an attitude that suggests the poet’s assertiveness in overcoming the limits and contradictions of reality. As Giulio Ferretti claims: ‘E questo è il significato di fondo di ciò che Fortini intende per letteratura ‘affermativa’ [...] intenzionata a ‘rischiare, a scommettere sul futuro’’. This will to risk is heightened in the violent allegory of the poem ‘Stanotte’, from the section ‘L’animale’, in *Composita Solvantur* (1994), symbolic of a cruel and desperate humanity set against the quasi-idyllic background of the quiet landscape:

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Stanotte un qualche animale
ha ucciso una bestiola, sotto casa. Sulle piastrelle
che illumina un bel sole
ha lasciato uno sgorbio sanguinoso
un mucchietto di visceri viola
e del fiele la vescica tutta d’oro.
Chissà dove ora si gode, dove dorme, dove sogna
di mordere e fulmineo eliminare
dal ventre della vittima le parti
fetide, amare. (CS, p. 13)
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The poem opens up with the account of a murder occurred by night: an animal has killed and devoured its victim, another animal. Allegorically, Fortini here looks dispassionately on the visceral human being and the way it responds to stimuli (‘di mordere e fulmineo eliminare/dal ventre della vittima le parti/fetide e amare’). The grand themes and truths of life are therefore the subtext of this poem, which attributes the moods and actions of the animal world to the sphere of the human relationships. At the same time, the poem creates a parallelism between a dream-work and reality, translating man’s unconscious fears and desires into an observable facts: ‘Chissà dove ora si gode, dove dorme, dove sogna’. The connections between dream mechanisms and the poet’s use of his rhetorical tools becomes evident in the line ‘ha lasciato uno sgorbio sanguinoso’, where the word ‘sgorbio’ designates both the body of the victim and the linguistic sign. The poem’s allegorical implications thus represent the inverse process of symbolisation, which is a procedure requiring interpretation. As animals are generally symbols which represent aspects of the personality which cannot be easily communicated, a possible interpretation of the poem’s allegorical content may illustrate the energies derived from one’s baser instincts.

The sinister relationship between the animal and its victim stands for dangerous passions, which reduce the ‘Other’ to a ‘thing’ (‘mucchietto di visceri viola’). In line 11, the narrator’s eyes gaze a distant vision, which underlines the paradox of the poet’s formal

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detachment ('Vedo il mare, è celeste, lietissime le vele') against the cruelty that he is
displaying. Although death is said to be an essential part of our libidinal desires, the allegory
mourns our failure as social beings. The use of violent imagery in the initial and final parts
increases the sensory shock caused by 'seeing' the putrid carcass of the dead animal placed in
sharp contrast to the central part of the poem, dominated by a tranquil and natural
background. The link between blood shedding, the violence of catastrophe and writing
prefigures the following extraordinarily allegorical scene:

e non è vero.
Il piccolo animale sanguinario
ha morso nel veleno
e ora cieco di luce
stride e combatte e implora dagli spini pietà. (CS, p. 13)

The poem is both realistic and metaphorical, being an assault on the hypocrisies of bourgeois
society. Conflicting elements are juxtaposed without any sense of incongruity. Even though
judgement seems suspended in favour of pure objectivity, the animal's agony ('stride e
combatte', 'cieco') grasps an analogical connection with the violence that controls the human
world, as Luperini claims: 'La storia in tutto quanto ha, fin dall’inizio, di inopportuno, di
doloroso, di sbagliato si configura in un volto – anzi: nel teschio di un morto (Benjamin). O
nel morso di un “piccolo animale sanguinario”'.

As the undeniably powerful image in 'L’animale' suggests, the unconscious is re-
invoked in a hallucinatory recollection of reality. The animal's state of necessity is therefore
symbolic of the negative principles that regulate man's narratives, and at the same time
criticises the logic which reproduces and legitimises institutionalized powers. We can easily
grasp the author's intention here to show that the artist can no longer claim an heroic
independence as his very materials ('la vescica tutta d’oro') are complicit with a capitalist
world ('ha morso nel veleno').

As we have seen from the textual analysis of 'Dalla collina' and 'L’animale', Fortini's
poems, which employ a wide metacritical vocabulary, are not personal expressions in the
conventional sense, but areas of discourse, establishing connections between essay writing
and poetry as weapons of critical thought. The critical theory of society designed by Marxist
aesthetics is evidently at work in these poems: yet, at the same time, we are show how
criticism and poetry become targets themselves, having come under suspicion for being part
of the very structures of thought and practice at which they are aimed.

Having set forth the basic parameters of Fortini's essay writing and poetry in the first
and second chapters, I am ready to reconstruct, in the third chapter, the claims and tasks of

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208 R. Luperini, La lotta mentale, p. 110. Luperini adds that, in fact, 'la congiunzione fra i due ordini può darsi solo
per spasimo intellettuale, con un atto di volontà e sublimazione etica'.
such a dialectical practice so as to clarify its relation to its other neighbouring disciplines: hermeneutics and translation. In arguing now for an internal relation between poetry and translation, I wish to do justice to both genres, that is provide a fair account of the modes in which they also play distinct, irreducible roles.

2.6. Poetry versus translation

Fortini’s intertextual relations, which I have already discussed in various sections of my thesis (1.3, 2.1, 2.2), are to be found supported also in the allegorical force of the poem ‘L’ordine e il disordine’, republished from *Questo muro* (1973). Based on violent antithesis, Fortini’s ‘L’ordine e il disordine’ utters a definite negative dialectics (‘Ma parlare in futuro solo del disordine’, ‘godi delle contraddizioni’):

Ma parlare in futuro solo del disordine…
in modo che questa contorta coesistenza
di nevicate…
sfruttamenti, carne lurida, giustizia di classe, non debbano
chiedere consenso a un mondo molteplice: godi delle
contraddizioni della vita macchiata di sangue
che conosci. (PS, p. 189)

The mood is visibly indebted to Brecht’s poem ‘A causa del crescente disordine’ (in Fortini’s Italian version). Indeed, at the ideological and artistic level, both Brecht and Fortini suffered the despair of the identity-seeking militant intellectual facing the Party, their fellow writers and the general public (‘chiedere consenso a un mondo molteplice’). In another poem from *Poesie scelte*, ‘Come una dopo l’altra’, the succession of visual and phonic utterances denotes a Brechtian sense of overwhelming disorder to be recomposed in a new didactic, yet false order. The effect of overlapping verbal-visual-mental elements plays an important role in the poem’s rhythm, alongside his close inspection of nature, that is, of the materialist and transcendental expansion of elements in space and time, their texture, and their resonance. The poet’s suggestion is that, in perceiving and responding to the echoes that such things generate, the poem reveals an intertwining of dimensions between the audible/visible and what is beyond it, a relationship that reason tries to tame and to destroy:

Come una dopo l’altra dall’altra una
e un’altra ininterrottamente come lente o veloci
o come stagioni o come le ore o le api o le voci

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210 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 79. As Jameson claims, ‘ideology is not something which informs, or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic, or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of investing imaginary, or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.’
The text’s phonetic and visual flow exemplifies the structural cohesion of the overlapping effects, representing the resourcefulness of the mind. The semiotic stream of visual-verbal utterances, which seem to impose an elusive slant to the poet’s message, is finally rationalized in the last two lines (‘ma sopra come la dominante ostinata ragiona E dice e ridice una verità’). Despite this thematic density, form still outweighs content at the level of the poem’s phonic, lexical, morpho-syntactical and metrical structures, struggling against the obstinate reason which threatens to disrupt the poem’s aesthetic tension (‘a sopra come la dominante ostinata ragiona/ e dice e ridice una verità’, my emphasis). Here, the world’s polyphony struggles against the narrator’s voice, which would otherwise enforce its authoritative perspective upon the poem. Stress is thus placed on the sinuous flow of non-verbal expressions, which belong to the natural world (‘stridio delle foglie’, ‘vocio delle gocce’, della fortuna il lamento’). At the metatextual level, imagination and truth, art and logic, are the driving forces that justify the poem’s oppositional structure. Thought is juxtaposed to perception, accumulation to dissipation, progression to repetition, thus liberating a seemingly spontaneous poetic act. These contrasts in Fortini’s work are discussed by Luperini in La lotta mentale. In fact, while underlining the way in which Fortini’s intellectual rigour responds to the historical emergencies of the second half of the century, Luperini also notes the clash of his artistic individuality with the world of others whom he so critically analyses. Although he was constantly preoccupied with his intellectual and social role, Fortini did not force an inflexible balance on his artistic freedom. Luperini explains how, in Fortini’s late writings, ‘il particolare non è più sacrificato all’universale’ in the name of the supposed supremacy of historicism. A similar purpose can be traced in Fortini’s Kafkaesque poems. Like Kafka, Fortini creates scenarios where a tormented ‘voice’ – caught in a world imbued with indifference and violence, and seeking a way to believe in his own identity and purpose – fails to establish communication with others. The reader can perceive an unfathomable distress at the ambiguity of a task’s value and the dismay of devotion to it, which represents both Kafka’s and Fortini’s constant preoccupation with the inaccessibility of meaning and man’s longing for it. Extensive evidence supports these claims, not only in Paesaggio con serpente, but also

211 R. Luperini, La lotta mentale, 1986. Luperini states: ‘Si parte da una citazione, la si spiega, la si commenta sul piano linguistico o metrico o stilistico o sociologico, e poi si passa bruscamente dal ‘contenuto di fatto’ al
in later poems included in* Versi scelti* (1990) and* Penultime* (1990), many of which were written in the decade 1980–90, at the time when Fortini was translating Kafka. For example, Kafka’s social criticism and the brutality of the powerful, in* The Castle* and* The Trial*, are unambiguous features of Fortini’s ‘Questo verso’ and ‘Il custode’. Moreover, the themes in Kafka’s short stories, which Fortini translated in the 1986 volume* Nella colonia penale e altri racconti*, recur incessantly in the author’s essays and his poetry; an interest in guilt and despair, as the ground upon which to build a new authentic existence, as well as the neurotic involvement with the father figure, at the heart of Kafka’s* Metamorphosis*, is unmistakable in Fortini’s poetics, as shown above in section 2.3. Similarly, Fortini’s interest in the constant intrusions of the absurd into life owes much to Kafka’s influence, as we have seen in* La poesia delle rose* (2.4). For Fortini, a suitable relationship of truth and Self is to have a formalist commitment to poetic language, and it is in this commitment that Fortini, like Kafka, posits poetic subjectivity.

*L’ospite ingrato* (I, 1966: II, 1985) is, therefore, a complex and stratified text, dense with the bitter irony that also pervades Fortini’s later production. In his intervention on Fortini’s relation to Lukács, Velio Abati claims:

> Il tratto permanente dell’intellettuale che Fortini è stato, ripercorrendo l’intero arco del suo percorso fecondo, mi pare, paraphrasandolo, la sua ‘ingratitudine’. Venuto, per storia e scelta, dopo “la fine del mandato”, o, italiano, della organicità intellettuale, egli, acuto testimone della diversa natura del suo tempo, ha sempre esibito la propria opposizione.\(^\text{212}\)

Emerging after the turn of the century, the ‘crisi della critica’\(^\text{213}\) foresees the reduction in the prestige of literature (and of those who practice it). The awareness of the ultimate decline in his powers as a militant critic allowed Fortini to regain his former composure and look for a new freedom to intensify certain leitmotifs in his essays, autobiographical poetry and prose,\(^\text{214}\) and to strengthen certain aspects of his style, including his expressionist stance. It is sufficient to reread the history of Fortini’s literary sympathies and controversies to gain an understanding of this late collection as a way of transforming these tensions into an allegory of progressive sense of political defeat and intellectual isolation.\(^\text{215}\)


\(^{213}\) For the notion of ‘crisi della critica’, see also Michele Rinaldi in* La crisi della poesia e della critica italiana del novecento*, Naples: 1969. For a fuller survey, see also Arcangelo Leone De Castris,* Le culture della crisi: ideologie, partito e questione giovane negli anni Settanta*, Bari: De Donato, 1978.

\(^{214}\) In 1991, for example, Fortini published with Manni, a memoir composed between 1949 and 1953,* Diario Tedesco*, which had never previously been given to the press. As Luperini writes in his introduction to this volume: ‘Si può tentare di comunicare – di scrivere, dunque, anche in questo diario – solo ‘a partire da una rinuncia’, ‘dall’accettazione di un ergastolo’ (Diario Tedesco, p. 7).

\(^{215}\) The quotation from* L’ospite ingrato* II that introduces this section reminds us of the theme of existential and linguistic seclusion in Beckett’s* Krapps Last Tape*, representing the struggle of the individual against the conflicting forces at work in the outside world and within his Self.
In his 1983 interview with Maggiani on the question of the new kind of gratification to be found in literature, which obliquely touched the problem of the crisis of the militant critique and the end of the pedagogical function of literature prophesied by the Frankfurt School, Fortini claimed:

Per quanto riguarda la parola letteraria è inutile annunciare morti e resurrezioni; chi vuole coltivare il culto di Iside è liberissimo di farlo e non è vero che non sa a chi parla (uno dei Quadri di una esposizione di Mussorgskij si intitola Cum mortis in lingua morta). Tutto quello che ho detto mi porta a concludere, con Asor Rosa e in parte Brioschi, mettendo l’accento su una forte ripresa del tema edonistico. Tolta la funzione pedagogica rimane il piacere, il delectando oraziano: il piacere e la vitalità. Anche se non ho niente in contrario, mi chiedo dove sia possibile questo. Questo è possibile là dove ci sia una sorta di accettazione dei limiti, dove la volta è chiusa.[...]

Le mie aderenze sono verso un passato nel quale si viveva una sorta di proiezione illimitata, e non essendosi un rapporto civile possibile, non posso guarire dagli effetti di un richiamo insensato.216

Fortini’s bibliography as a literary critic overshadows the presence, in his body of work, of autobiographical volumes in the form of mémoires such as Sere in Valdossola, or Agonia di Natale; these, nevertheless, provide equally important keys to an understanding of Fortini’s discourse, and represent a source of essential information for tracing his artistic and ideological profile.217 However, L’ospite ingrato II offers a solution to this impasse, placing autobiographical reflections side by side with exacting poetical/ideological assertions. In his preface to Diario tedesco Luperini explains:

Nessun abbandono alla cronaca, dunque, e nessun cedimento alla soggettività. Un fatto non è vero perché è accaduto, né è vero perché è stato ‘sentito’: può diventare vero attraverso un processo, fatto di documentazione e riflessione, di fedeltà al dettaglio e di teoria, di emozione e di sua immediata sublimazione etica.218

It is remarkable how intertwined historical and personal facts serve as a background to Fortini’s themes, the texts themselves springing directly from the bitter contemporary interactions between the press, the author and the public. This can be seen, for example, by the controversy surrounding Fortini’s speech against the Vietnam War to a national meeting held in Florence, in Piazza Strozzi, April 1967. On this occasion, Fortini denounced the complicity of the whole industrialized Western world in the great American war-machine.

216 Fortini/M. Maggiani, Il dolore della verità, p. 54.
217 Chronologically, these begin with the publication of Agonia di Natale, with Einaudi, in 1948. In 1956, Einaudi also published Asia Maggiore (1956). In 1957, Feltrinelli publishes Dieci inventi, republished by De Donato, in 1974. Sere in Valdossola, published in 1963, is republished by Marsilio in 1985, since it represents one of the most valid sources for the author’s La cena delle ceneri e Racconto fiorentino which were published in a joint edition with Claudio Lombardi, in 1988, with a preface by Mario Spinella. In 1972, Einaudi publishes Giovanni e le mani, a revised version of Agonia di Natale. Finally, in 1991, Manni published the memoir cited above, Diario tedesco (1949), in the series edited by Luperini.
218 DT, p. 7. In Diario tedesco Fortini analysed the effect of Stalinism and of its political failure on the international front.
Once again, wholly distrusting the false ideological unity of the Italian left-wing political alliances, Fortini’s speech – later published in *Memorie per dopodomani* (1984) – revealed his sceptical radicalism to the audience and to his comrades. The violent reaction of both students and left-wing militants to his speech hit Fortini hard, leaving him with the feeling of having once more been grossly misunderstood and rejected. The texts in the second edition of *L’ospite ingrato* (1985) reflect the isolation and consequent acrimony caused by these polemical clashes. In his review of this new collection, Walter Pedullà comments Fortini’s rigid stance bitterly:

Sintomo preoccupante del carattere di Fortini è che egli, come il suo comandante partigiano, non accetta di discutere le ragioni degli altri. [...] Non ha nemmeno per un attimo il dubbio di avere ibernato degli ideali. Invece: non c’è alienazione ma tradimento, non c’è angoscia ma debolezza intellettuale, non c’è disperazione ma viltà. Insomma, Fortini non spiega, giudica; non compie indagini, ma distribuisce condanne.219

With the title of *L’Ospite Ingrato*, in fact, Fortini’s sarcastically stresses the ingratitude the poet feels, accused of being a ‘guest’ who does not know how to maintain the reserve imposed by his status. The expression ‘ospite’ also describes the visitor’s condition of being ephemeral, that is transient, someone who finds himself in an institutional reality, whose ideas of ‘centre’ and ‘affiliation’ he does not approve of (Fortini here alludes to his Professorship at the University if Siena, as well as to his companionship with orthodox Communists).

As suggested by Berardinelli in *L’eroe che pensa* (1977),220 Fortini’s poetry deals with an end-of-millennium crisis, determined by the lack of a vital society which can create a sense of the future. Berardinelli maintains that, in contemporary society, the intellectual, the ‘thinking’ hero, is always to some extent compromised. The quality of being thoughtful (from Milton’s *Il Penseroso*, 1633) – typical of the typical militant writer, revolutionary philosopher, or misanthropic poet, inclined to divine melancholy and prophetic tension – indeed applies to Fortini. As a figure who was deeply critical of his own culture, he struggled with the dilemmas created by the tragic-ironic paradoxes he came across, on every occasion intelligence and power came into conflict, revealing their intrinsic incompatibility.

Destined for a condition of insecurity, and troubled by opposing passions – by the desire to take part in political and ideological action on the one hand, and to alienate himself from action on the other – Fortini became increasingly self-questioning. Indeed, *L’ospite*
*Ingrato* relates the story of a writer who sees his own role become obsolete, and his critical methods overcome both by other aesthetic tendencies (those of post-modernism) and other theoretical perspectives (those of neo-hermeneutics). The self-image that Fortini presents to the reader throughout this collection is, therefore, ambiguous and deliberately evasive.

From Pasolini to Mengaldo, Raboni to Luperini, many hypotheses have been developed in the attempt to render a faithful and comprehensive portrait of Fortini as poet and critic; their valuable efforts, however, approach either one aspect, or another, and so fail to convey the true complexity of Fortini’s work. To my knowledge, these critics have not singled out, with sufficient clarity, one very important aspect, namely, the way in which Fortini’s language turns towards linguistic expressionism: the celebration of new emotional and psychological depths and the tendency to dwell on the darker, sinister aspects of the human psyche. Even in a poem as celebrative as ‘Sereni esile mito’, with its concern for ‘camaraderie’, ‘truth’ and ‘age’ (‘non sempre gioventù è verità’, ‘un’altra gioventù giunge con gli anni’), Fortini resorts to violent imagery and a peremptory note:

Chiedi perdono alle ‘schiere dei bruti’
se vuoi uscire. Lascia il giuoco stanco
e sanguinoso, di modestia e orgoglio.
rischia l’anima. Strappalo, quel foglio
bianco che tieni in mano. (LOI, p. 35)

Here we sense a tone of melodrama, seeking expressionist effects (‘sanguinoso’, ‘rischia l’anima’). Fortini’s suggestion that the poem, which the poet is about to write, should be aborted (‘Strappalo, quel foglio/bianco che tieni in mano’) is a gesture both desperate and extravagant. The verb in the imperative points to the radicalisation of poetic expression, now resembling an act of rage. The poet’s anti-illusionistic exposure of his fears and desires is here burdened with pejorative connotations, underlying sarcastically the poem’s meaningless formalism (‘Lascia il giuoco stanco/ e sanguinoso, di modestia e orgoglio’) ranging between extremes. This counter-discourse achieves the dramatisation of the poet’s subjectivity through an act of desacralization – thus acquiring a critical function.

Although Fortini was keen to maintain a scholarly tone (see his aphoristic tendency and his frequent use for the imperative ‘Chiedi perdono’, ‘Lascia il giuoco’; ‘Rischia’, ‘Strappalo quel foglio’), many of his stylistic solutions, in fact, employ a particularly violent and often sinister register. This expressionist radicalism recalls Fortini linguistic extremism in his 1958 poem ‘Forse il tempo del sangue’, which stresses the questionable opposition (‘nei dilemma che abbiamo creduto oltrepasse’) between abstract ethicality and crude realism, ideological loyalty and political emergency, artistic autonomy and political militancy:

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Forse il tempo del sangue ritornerà.
Uomini ci sono che devono essere uccisi.
Padri che devono essere derisi.
Luoghi da profanare bestemmie da proferire
Incendi da fissare delitti da benedire.
Ma più c'è da tornare ad un'altra pazienza
Alle feroce scienza degli oggetti alla coerenza
Nei dilemmi che abbiamo creduto oltrepassare.
Al partito che bisogna prendere e fare.
Cercare i nostri eguali osare riconoscerli
Lasciare che ci giudichino guidarli esser guidati
Con loro volere il bene fare con loro il male
E il bene la realtà servire negare mutare. (PS, p. 188)

'Forse il tempo del sangue' announces the imminent assassination of literature, which touches upon what it is most essential in the poet's life: his artistic coherence, the loss of which is accompanied by claims of heresy and sacrilege, as in Pasolini's Empirismo eretico (1972). A quarrelsome attitude towards the literary world, and the need for political re-education can be perceived in the poet's anxious tone and sense of intellectual impotence at the ongoing 'sfacelo idologico', which here restates in verse the main themes of Dieci Inverni (1957). The poem, in fact, contains, in germinal form, the love-hate paradox which Fortini was due to formalize in his later collections. Instigated by the political doctrines that preach aesthetic nihilism as well as by self-indulgent forms of Romantic irrationalism, the almost ceremonial killing of literature denounced in these lines is rendered through the poem's broken syntax and violent terminology ('essere uccisi', 'essere derisi', 'profanare', 'bestemmiaire', 'incendi da fissare', 'feroce scienza'). The last two lines seem to suggest a call for ideological action ('con loro volere il bene fare con loro il male'). Yet, since this would reduce literature to a rationalized political struggle, what is important is to preserve a formalist perspective; in fact, for being in the truth, what really matters is how the artist relates to truth ('cercare', 'riconoscere', 'guidare', 'servire', 'negare' and 'volere').

Thus, we also grasp the metapoetic implications in the assertion 'la realtà servire negare mutare', which is constructed on the principle of a sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional truth and the laying bare of that illusion. The two methods are held together in a formal tension, which eliminates the difference between 'poetry' and 'criticism'. The question finally allows Fortini a new expressive freedom that shares many of the stylistic features of Brecht and Benn.

The first edition of L'ospite ingrato was published in 1966. After a gap of more than twenty years, in 1985, this original and eclectic collection was followed by a second, more wide-ranging volume, with the same title. The 1985 collection opens with a preface by the author,
who warns the reader about the ambivalent nature of this volume, both from a stylistic-formal point of view and from a thematic one. As Fortini argued, ‘Gli scritti antagonisti hanno spesso la sorte di somigliare troppo, col tempo, a quel che avversano’ (LOI, p. 34). The various parts that make up the collection are described as ‘omaggi ad una teoria dei generi letterari’, since they refer back to the work of the most reputable authors of the European tradition. L’ospite ingrato II comprises ninety-two fragments, almost half of which are poems, and the other half epigrammatic excerpts which resemble diary entries. It therefore contains a balanced number of texts in verse and prose, informing the reader about the way in which ‘Due voci dialogano, tanto nel primo quanto nel secondo. [...] Una voce è quella del gioco, anche pericoloso, del linguaggio, che nel verso cerca sempre di dire altro da sé. L’altra ritma invece una riflessione che in prosa cerca di dire soltanto se stessa’ (LOI, p. 34).

In Mengaldo’s introduction to the 1974 collection Poesie scelte, referring to this game of interlacing lyric poems and memoirs, essays and polemical writings, and to Fortini’s constant references to the intertextual nature of L’ospite ingrato, the critic notes:

È facile osservare come corrisponda a questa strategia del poeta quella del Fortini critico, l’unico della sinistra marxista a prestare fin dall’inizio attenzione teorica e analitica ai problemi specifici della tecnica letteraria, nel giusto presupposto che anche attraverso di ciò passi l’indispensabile revisione del classico concetto marxista, e lukácsiano, di ‘realismo’. E lo spostamento o almeno l’equilibriamento del centro d’interesse, che Fortini teorico tende a favorire, dal romanzo alla lirica – contro le abitudini del marxismo ufficiale ma d’accordo con Benjamin e Adorno – non nasce solo dall’esigenza personale dello scrittore ma implica tutte le correzioni che il carattere complesso, mediato e anti-mimetico della forma poetica può portare alla nozione di rispecchiamento artistico. (PS, p. 20)

In a broader sense, these intertextual practices offer Fortini the occasion for a persistent pursuit of lyric themes, personal reminiscences, and polemical confrontation. In fact, the ideological nature of his writings survives in the raging contradictions which result from the author’s continual revalidation and invalidation of his past assumptions. The following quotation from fragment 106 (L’ospite ingrato II) investigates the history of Italian literature from a strongly personal perspective. Fortini, now old, recalls his past, dubious affiliation to an intellectual community whose members were constantly in conflict with one another:

Finalmente capisco che cosa mosse il giovane che sono stato, mezzo secolo fa, contro l’ermetismo d’allora. Ho sempre temuto che in quei miei sentimenti ci fosse traccia di risentimento. Ma oggi vedo un nuovo ermetismo per tutti, la salvezza in dieci lezioni, facile come dimagrire. Meglio, meglio senza confronto, quelli che allora, per mia fortuna, mi respinsero.211 (LOI, p. 140)

211 The representation of the literary dinner in fragment 109 (‘Antistoricismi’, 1975) is also sarcastic, and we may note the bitter remarks in fragment 104 ‘E mascherati, gli amici ti segnavano a dito, come tu facevi con loro, e ti dicevano: Ti conosco, maschera’, which calls to mind Arthur Schnitzler’s Traumnovelle (1925), dealing with the
L’ospite ingrato can also be read as a metacritique in relation to other texts such as ‘La realtà’, which records the rupture between phenomena and the expression of them:

La città di cui sto parlando non esiste,
è un’idea della ragione e della volontà.
Nella speranza di essere compreso
la chiamo con un nome sconosciuto.
I suoi viali si aprono nel vuoto. (see in SINA, 126)

The narrator pretends that what is gone and absent is in fact present and alive, a deception that counterbalances the true ‘void’ into which the urban masses dissolve (SINA, p. 10). The text, here, in reproducing an enigmatic city, seems to come close to the metaphysical paintings of De Chirico. Emerging out of a bourgeois consciousness, the voice, denies the truth of the city he lives in and attributes to it a merely psychic existence. The governing force in the text is something other than the ‘reality principle’, which helps the individual to become aware of the surrounding environment and adapt to it. Apart from an abstract interest in reason and will, the poet’s real concern is for life’s true spatiality and temporality. Experience of the real world is always a construction of visual space and the objects that occupy it (‘la città’, ‘i viali’). Yet the poem is not concerned by the actual structure of the town, but by the pointlessness of the human existence within its spaces (‘I suoi viali si aprono nel vuoto’).

The reader can sense a degree of sarcasm in the poet’s tone, which echoes Pasolini’s line ‘Oh, fine pratico della mia poesia! [...] Io devo soffocare parlando’), in Poesia in forma di rosa (1964). In fact, paradoxically, also in Fortini’s ‘La realtà’, the whole purpose of the title is to provide a derisive remedy against the cold and objective nothingness of the world. Art, working abstract concepts as an escape from the negative power of reality, here produces the image of its own oppression (‘La città di cui sto parlando non esiste’). It is presented as negative and trans-historical. The poem denies the ideology of art as a safe architecture made on measure for the human spirit. In fact, the function of art is not to celebrate, but to render problematic the struggles of mankind: the inherent tragedy of this viewpoint is that art, in itself, contributes nothing but an eulogy, being symbolic of a liberty which has no responsibility, suffering, grounding, social presence or conscience. Having no claim on theme of illusion and reality in its many variations. In fragment 117, ‘In morte di un maestro’, the compatibility of Fortini’s political and cultural perspective with Mao’s political philosophy is made clear. This is manifest in the spiritual adhesion to the enigmatic and charismatic figure of the great Chinese statesman, portrayed as a ‘monaco pellegrino’. In fragment 126, the reader cannot mistake Fortini’s admiration for Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, exemplified by the comment ‘Non parlo e non discuto qui delle loro idee e del loro ruolo; ma come, ogni volta che guardo quel lembo di giornale, mi sento lieto per quello che essi hanno rappresentato nei miei anni’ (LOI p. 162).

Fortini writes: ‘Every word is a quotation. I do not possess the refuge of a dialect and so I use that ‘sublime language’ of the past, immersed in the Gothic and Renaissance stones of Florence.’
human experience, purely aesthetic art remains an object whose form is its only raison d'être. Therefore, this poem may convey a discourse which ties the reader into the ideological structures of dialectic materialism. Two motifs, then, emerge: a nostalgia for man's potential, and a quest for concrete, creative dialogue. Prominence is given to psychic constructs as a medium of the oppositions 'realtà'/ 'finzione', thus conferring a surreal dimension on observable facts:

Le dattilografe mettono la copertina sulla contabile.
I gatti si occupano dei fatti loro.
Nel garage puliscono i carburatori. Questa
è la realtà. Se lasci cadere un giornale
esso volteggia e raggiunge le ortensie.
La finzione è l'ultima speranza.
Qualcuno telefona, hai l'ansia nella voce. ( SINA, p. 128)

The poet names some items of every day urban life - calculators, carburettors, telephones - as if he were no longer sure of their actual functions; the emphasis here falls on reality trapped in the deadly mechanism of an intimate catastrophe. Yet he accepts the adversities of his daily life with an ironic resignation: 'Questa è la realtà./ Se lasci cadere un giornale/ esso volteggia

e raggiunge le ortensie', adding, to his repertoire of factual experiences, these new elements which verge on the surreal. The hunt for meaningful connections between objects and words allows the persona in the poem to expose his own psychology ('La finzione è l'ultima

speranza'). Despondency and optimism, then, coexist in the economy of the poem, with prominence given to the close correlations between the infra-text and the extra-text. In Senso e discorso del testo poetico (1999), Tassoni explains: 'Un risultato funzionale per ogni interpretazione o strategia ermeneutica potrebbe essere il costituirsi di una rete inter-relazionale, cioè un insieme ramificato che si identifica nella complessità come concetto epistemologico.'

The cataloguing of the antinomies 'mandato/autonomia', 'logica/contraddizione', 'verò/falso', 'autenticità/maschera' and 'forma/contenuto', which recur throughout Fortini's work, while representing the author's critical standpoints, also provides a compendium of the specific themes from L'ospite ingrato. This rhetorical use of dichotomous couplets stretches throughout Fortini's infratext, meticulously constructed, whether in the typically speculative manner of his essay writings, or in the semantic chains of his allegorical/symbolical creations. The order of the writings collected in L'ospite ingrato II is chronological, indexal and contrapuntal. The author here no longer takes the fundamental authority of reason for granted, and even mocks his own customary logocentrism. Indeed, the poet's voice becomes progressively aware of the fact that speech reflects not only reality, but power. He still relates,

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therefore, to ideas such as norm and authenticity, or authority and metaphysics, but with a new awareness of their unreliability. In its alternation of thesis and antithesis, this collection achieves unity out of opposition and negation, a notion which is also present at all levels in Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*.\textsuperscript{224} The influence of Adorno on Fortini’s work is underlined by Jachia: ‘A questa esigenza di opposizione, resistenza, volontà di non accettare” risponde anche lo stile della pagina fortiniana.\textsuperscript{225}

The author’s reliance on a multi-voiced persona sheds light on the problematic nature of a discourse accomplished through an intertextual and infratextual process of rewriting. This technique, which was available as a long-standing literary convention (starting with Dante’s use of poetry/prose alternation in *La vita nova*), gives Fortini the opportunity to apply the method of dialectic materialism to his own work. Before he died in 1994, Fortini collated his own unpublished verses, organising them into thematic groups. Mengaldo, then, made a selection from this corpus of about 250 texts, which he published posthumously under the title *Poesie Inedite* (1997). The collection illustrates the variety of styles and genres employed by Fortini, a follower in Italy not only of the ethical discourse of Brecht but also of the early expressionist mode identifiable in the twentieth-century German tradition in the works of Rilke, Mann, Trakl and Broch, who all resorted to a kind of sorrowful prophetic mood dictated by a pessimistic assessment of the future of Western civilisation. While the main theme of this last collection is represented in the commemoration of those tragic socio-political realities and historical facts which rob writers and artists of their faith in the positive function of art in society, its sub-themes are once again organized around a major topic: the extinction of man’s awareness of the ethical dimension of life as an inevitable corollary to the crisis of his position in the modern world. One of the most eloquent poems in this posthumous collection recites:

\begin{verbatim}
A lunga incomprensibile querela
costrago il fortissimo spirito.
Bagna la pioggia il viso stolto e il pianto.
Navigo i sordi mari
dell’età nuda, dell’età scortese. (PI, p. 31)
\end{verbatim}

The following passage from Nava’s ‘Ricordando Franco Fortini’ aptly comments the line ‘costringo il *fortissimo spirito*’ (my emphasis), which describes the poet’s personal struggle to appease with his tears the discomfort that is intrinsic in these dynamics:

L’asprezza della poesia di Fortini, il suo rigore tematico e formale, non sono disincarnate eticità, classicismo della ragione giacobina, ma reazione dall’interno della

\textsuperscript{224} As Nava claims, in *Fortini e la contraddizione del poeta* (1996), this device can be considered a typically distinguishing trait of Fortini’s work.

frammentazione della modernitá, volontá tesa e disincantata, che non si illude di frettolose conciliazioni, tanto meno di soluzioni finali. La sua proverbiale intransigenza non era ascetismo, e neppure dato di carattere, ma senso acuto della tragicità della storia […] Era soprattutto orrore disgusto del vizio storico degli intellettuali italiani: il trasformismo.226

I continue my analysis of Fortini’s poetry with the poignant irony (‘mesta ironia’) of two autobiographical and metacritical poems from *Composita solvantur* (1994): ‘Lontano lontano’ and ‘Che queste parole siano scritte’. These two poems represent a final claim for the necessity of poetry (‘Che queste parole siano scritte è necessario […]/ ‘Nulla sarà perduto ma anche se fosse’), despite being a restatement of the very questionable nature of writing. Indeed, in the poems Fortini published in the last few years of his life, it seems that in the technical process of writing, respecting form even to the point of irony, one can recognize a deconstructive, yet calm flaw, as if it were the acknowledgement of an incurable state.

This collection of intellectual landscapes overflows with visions, some as haunting as half-remembered dreams, others terrible or cheerful, depending on where the dreamer’s gaze comes to rest. The poetic effect of this process is compelling, as soothing as sleep but with the imperious and obsessive knowledge that one must awake and live the vision all over again, or endless variations of it, in the dimension we call reality. The reader is swept along hypnotically in the poet’s contemplation of his inner landscape and, thus, of the secret of self, his own and that of the Other. Intensely personal on one level, and powerfully ethical and public on the other, Fortini’s poetry was indeed intended for the benefit of others; indeed, he reached people in every form, language and style through criticism, poetry and translation, always acknowledging the tragic inadequacy of literature to prevent cruelty and barbarity on the evil stage of history:

Lontano lontano si fanno la guerra.  
Il sangue degli altri si sparge per terra.  
Io questa mattina mi sono ferito  
a un gambo di rosa, pungendomi un dito.  
Succhiando quel dito, pensavo alla guerra.  
Oh povera gente, che triste è la terra!  
Non posso giovare, non posso parlare,  
non posso partire per cielo o per mare.(CS, p. 32)

The light tone of compassionate love and intellectual empathy in these lines is touchingly elegiac (‘Il sangue degli altri si sparge per terra’), as the poet sees himself moving away from the political settings that he so animatedly adopted: from afar (‘lontano lontano’) the verses speak of war and victims, defeat and loss, life’s tragic limits, and poetry’s marginality, the poet’s impotence (‘non posso giovare, non posso parlare’) and the poet’s hope. They also speak of time past and of time to come, with final suggestion of redemption, achieved by

using a humorous rhymed style of speech, as if to emphasize the poet’s complete mastery of
his medium:

E se anche potessi, o genti indifese,
ho l’arabo nullo! Ho scarso l’inglese!
Potrei sotto il capo dei corpi riversi
posare un mio fitto volume di versi?
Non credo. Cessiamo la mesta ironia.
Mettiamo una maglia, che il sole va via. (CS, p. 32)

Far from identifying art with an ideal sphere (‘non credo’), the poem insists upon taking
practical action (‘Cessiamo la mesta ironia./ Mettiamo la maglia, che il sole va via.’).

As Brunella Pelizza notes, Fortini’s theoretical pathway leads once again to translation
as rifacimento across the intertext of Agrippa, D’Aubigné, Brecht, Baudelaire and Seamus
Heaney which concludes the collection, showing the never-ending cycle of birth and
dissolution inherent in any creative interaction. Pelizza claims: ‘Tuttavia anche dietro la
leggerezza apparente di questi versi si nasconde l’essenza allegorica della sua poesia, che resta
intatta dietro le fantasiose operazioni di rifacimento, estremo avviso ai lettori
dell’ineliminabile duplicità della realtà secondo il poeta.’

Because Fortini’s intertextuality can be identified throughout the corpus of his work by
virtue of these intense intellectual affinities and clashes, it would not be incorrect to say that
whereas his critical writings may at times sound unusually poetical, often his poetry appears
as speculative as one of his essays. Thus, the network of Fortini’s intertextual suggestions is
always enhanced by his explicit mention of the themes which link together his criticism,
poetry and translation. In fact, each text is constructed through networks of languages,
symbols and discourse usages in a bundle of signifying interactions. As Derrida notes in
Disseminations (1972), no text can be separated from the steady circulation of meaning in the
economy of a given culture. In short, in Fortini’s discourse, in which every text connects to,
and is constituted through and by, other texts and genres, as in the case of the poem ‘A un
traduttore’, from the section ‘Il vero che è passato’ (PS), in which he addresses the issue of
poetic translation as a process of sedimentation of meaning and forms:

Non il vento ma la pioggia. Queste
non volano via, fanno suolo.
Vedi vene ostinate, ori mesti.
Smuovile cauto, francese. Parla per loro. (PCS, p. 12)

See Brunella Pelizza, Su alcune ‘imitazioni’ in Composita salvantur, in Levia Gravia, Anno III, 2001, p. 34.
Pelizza writes: ‘Si vedrà come in Orazio al bordello basco il ‘carpe diem’ dell’Ode I venga rivisitato dal punto di
vista fonico-metrico in chiave comico-parodica o come gli epigrammi baudleriani, opportunamente interpretati, si
prestino a sarcastici doppiensi.’

Ibid., p. 34.
At the interdisciplinary level, the emphasis falls on translation as sense-making, a methodology implying erosions and sediments. The metacritic content of this compact poem may indicate the need for a more considered concept of the translator’s task, in the light of his responsibility to find the appropriate strategy (‘Smuovile cauto’) to render the complex and sophisticated realities of the source text (‘vene ostinate’ and ‘ori mesti’). Indeed, a moral code is being translated into verse, which evidently does not restrict the issue of poetic translation to the notion of fidelity; rather, it opens up fields of investigation into the problem of interpreting a foreign text, while nurturing an intercultural idea of poetic identity based on an ethics of difference (‘Parla per loro’). The poem focuses on the disjuncture between practical rewriting, translation theories and the need of a methodology that would bring together poetry and poetic translation. In order to begin to consider the full continuum of these issues in Fortini’s work as a poet-translator, however, it is indispensable to address two very essential concerns: the first concern has to do with the distinction between the poet being translated and the poet who translates in order to single out their relative moral values and aesthetics.

More specifically, this concern challenges the traditional perspective on translation, which is responsible for the over-simplified assumption that poetic translation is a ‘second grade’ form of authorship. The second issue opposes the highly polarized conceptualizations of the tasks and of role of the translator. The question in the third chapter will be how to tap into and mediate both the perspective that translators have the capacity to act freely as creative agents and the view that every poetic translation is, in some way, constrained by the structural elements of both the source text and the society into which the new text is acculturated.
Chapter 3

3. Poetic translation

Così, dunque come da un’altra riva, è possibile la letteratura (VDP, 1965).

3.1. Searching for a language between Self and Other.

This chapter seeks to evaluate Fortini’s theory of translation, which emphasizes the poet-translator’s need to establish a significant relationship with the source text by means of artistic autonomy, while retaining his/her critical and hermeneutical awareness. Indeed, in Fortini’s literary career, translation represented a dialogic form for his poetic expression, allowing him the possibility of transcending the poetic ‘Self’ by becoming a mediator across languages and cultures of what he ironically called ‘aromi spirituali’. The authors that Fortini translated according to specific aesthetic and ideological values are numerous and diverse; besides the previously cited Milton, Goethe and Brecht, are Gide, Weil and Proust. In this sense, translation represented both a form of scholarship and one of authorship, responding to Fortini’s desire to transfer foreign texts into his own poetic diction:

Ci si trova dinanzi al caso limite delle ‘imitazioni’. Si pensi all’imitazione leopardiana nella bellissima poesia che s’intitola, appunto, ‘Imitazione’ (e non ‘traduzione’), e che fa sfoggio di una tecnica, condotta da Leopardi molto lucidamente, che si costituisce come un caso di appropriazione ‘autoriale’. (RPTP, p. 2)

We will now look more closely at the synergy of the three genres which constitute Fortini’s oeuvre in order to understand their differentiation and interaction. Several terminological demarcations are essential to encompass this intertextual complexity. As I have discussed, criticism and poetry contributed to Fortini’s theory and practice of translation, and these are addressed respectively in the chapters 1 and chapter 2 of this thesis. Close attention will be paid to these existing links from both a theoretical point of view and from the individual standpoint of Fortini as an author who exploited this liaison in terms of his hermeneutic and poetic practice. This will emerge from my discussion of documents such as ‘Dei “compensi” nelle versioni di poesia’, ‘Venture e sventure di un traduttore’ and ‘Il passaggio della gioia’. I am going to illustrate how Fortini employed ‘dialogism’, as a means of transcending the traditional oppositions dominating the specialist literature on translation.

Particular attention is devoted to the unpublished document Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica, which contains the integral text of Fortini’s 1989 series of Naples
seminars. The aim of this symposium was to provoke discussion on the role of translation both as a mediating activity between poetic languages and literary heritages, and as an agent of sociocultural, ideological, and political communication. Its additional aim was to present current theories and practices in the field of Translation Studies in order that undergraduate and postgraduate students, researching and working in this field, could discuss their work in progress. On that occasion, Fortini clearly placed emphasis on the work of individual translators, and on the material conditions and educational practices that encouraged both the intercultural phenomenon they took part in, and the development of their own identity.

The seminars specifically focused on the synergy that, at the ‘meta’ level, animates the writer’s use of his various linguistic media, raising broad problems of cross-cultural criticism. The theoretical content of this unpublished document is closely related to three 1972 essays on translation, ‘Traduzione e rifacimento’, ‘Sulla metrica e la traduzione’ and ‘Cinque paragrafi sul tradurre’, as well as to ‘Montale traduttore di Guillén’ (1986), ‘Un rifacimento dell’Ecclesiaste’ (1984), ‘Una versione di Góngora’ (1985), ‘Una traduzione di Baudelaire’ (1974), and ‘Traducendo Milton’ (1986), included in Nuovi saggi italiani (1987). On the subject of the relationship between poetry and poetic translation, I make reference to the theories of translation by Goethe, Schleiermacher, Michael Riffaterre and André Lefèvre. These theories include Walter Benjamin’s The Task of the Translator (1923) and José Ortega y Gasset’s The Misery and Splendor of Translation (1937). In addition, I am taking Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogics and Emmanuel Lévinas’s ethicality as theoretical standpoints for my analysis, together with insights from a variety of Marxist, poststructuralist, and deconstructionist theories.

In his essay ‘Transposing Presuppositions on the Semiotics of literary translation’, Michael Riffaterre claims: ‘Literary translation is different from translation in general for the same reason that literature is different from non-literary uses of language’. He observes that if on the one hand literary translation forms the basis of most readers’ acquaintance with

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1 Fortini's 'Venture e sventure di un traduttore' and 'Il passaggio della gioia' are published in the journal L'ospite ingrato: La Traduzione, pp. 295-316. Also see 'Dei "compensi" nelle versioni di poesia', in Testo a Fronte, Milan: Guerini & Ass., 1989.
2 The transcript of 'Realità e paradosso della traduzione poetica', which I have edited, was included in the Archivio Fortini in August 2003.
3 These essays were included subsequently in Saggi Italiani (1987).
4 In 'Montale traduttore di Guillén' Fortini expresses a negative judgement on Montale's style of translation, making an exception for those texts in which he is able to render the metrical complexities of the original. Fortini writes: 'Invece Il cigno - El cisne - sembra un pezzo di bravura del traduttore impegnato a mantenere la struttura metrica del testo castigliano' (NSI, p. 144).
5 It is worth noticing the infratextual connection between Fortini's poem 'Traducendo Milton' (Paesaggio con serpente) and this critical account of his activity as translator, which contains the conclusions to a reading, which the author was invited to give at the 'Circolo Linguistico-filologico of the University of Padua.
6 See M. Riffaterre Fictional Truth, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Press, 1990, reprinted in Rainer Schulte, Theories of Translation, An Anthology of Essays From Dryden to Derrida, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 204. For Riffaterre, literary truth as a linguistic phenomenon serves mainly as a guideline for the correct or incorrect interpretation the reader is led to make. The formal property of literary language is there to manipulate the meanings of the mimesis into semiotic codes that are ideologically arranged.

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foreign works, on the other hand it also provides invaluable opportunities for the creative writer to experiment with new ways of working. Furthermore, Riffaterre adds: 'no literary translation can ever be successful unless it finds equivalences for those literariness-inducing presuppositions.'7 Yet Riffaterre is not suggesting that one should replace translation with paraphrase, nor is he advocating a commentary relating the essence of a text’s literariness, as Galvano Della Volpe does,8 laying stress on the concept that the essence of poetry is situational rather than lyrical.9 What Riffaterre is suggesting is the use of a ‘limited periphrasis’ which is ‘built around the matrix word of which the periphrasis is the transform’.10 The very act of translating a literary text, for Riffaterre, forces the translator to address ‘the peculiar difficulty of imitating, or duplicating text production in the target language’.11 Riffaterre’s notion of translation as ‘presupposition’ implies the reorganisation of the entire poem, ‘regulating a derivation that pervades everything and the end of which dictates the clausula and affirms textuality’.12 In due course the difference between ‘paraphrase’ and imitatio (or ‘rifacimento’), presented by other theoreticians such as Schleiermacher and Jakobson will be reviewed, and the ways in which Fortini’s theory challenges the notion of authorship, in relation to the task of the translator, examined.

In fact, following the idea of cultural recycling, the poet-translator may rewrite a given text in order to transpose the values, myths and symbolic objects of the original into the new text and repossess that text anew.

Fortini took the history of translation as a point of departure for an examination of the ways in which the various European traditions of lyric poetry entered in contact with each other. He also examined several related issues concerning the realities and paradoxes which hermeneutic practices create. Firstly he reflected upon the importance of the act of translation, its function and usefulness for literary studies, and then he illustrated its controversial nature in order to provide different perspectives on the translation process itself, thus placing those approaches in a historical and dialogic context.

Another interesting aspect of Fortini’s contribution to translation studies is that he offered an historical overview which shows how translation has passed through various intertwined phases, from the basic premises which see the amalgamation of unfamiliar subject matter into the language of the translator’s own culture, with no particular awareness of the lexical or stylistic qualities of the original source-language texts (as seen in Roman

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7 Schulte, *Theories of Translation*, p. 205.
8 In fact, it is the semiotician Della Volpe, who supports the value of paraphrase. In *Critica del gusto* (1960), Della Volpe claims that to better understand the formal characteristics of the literary text, the interpreter can make recourse to a paraphrase the content and then compare to it the original to grasp the essence of its original contextual value.
9 SI, p. 337. See also Fortini’s understanding of Della Volpe’s distinction between contextual and lyric poetic values in ‘Metrica e libertà’ (1957).
10 Schulte, *Theories of Translation*, p. 207.
11 Ibid., p. 207.
translations of ancient Greek texts), to the modern sense of responsibility towards foreign
texts (as seen in nineteenth and twentieth-century theoretical theories of translation).\textsuperscript{13}

As stressed by Foucault in 'What is an author',\textsuperscript{14} if the author-function is epitomized by
the sanctioning power of the author's name on an \textit{oeuvre}, then it should prove most
illuminating to look at the role of translation in those cases where authorship and work are
doubtful. In the case of Ossian, the author's name appears to be almost an accessory piece of
knowledge about the work itself, not an integral part of it; in Ossian, the existence of an
author-function was identified by Fortini as insufficient. MacPherson's forgeries,\textsuperscript{15} Fortini
claimed, were merely disrespectful of this author-function. The issue is not whether the
poems ascribed to Ossian had an author – either one (MacPherson, or Ossian), or many
(MacPherson and anonymous ballad-writers), but rather whether they had a particular \textit{kind}
of author, with enough authorial power to confer that particular status and discourse on that
\textit{oeuvre}. As in many other examples of literary 'fraud', Fortini here took into account the
audience as the third party profiting from the literary transaction ('Tuttal'l'Europa ha sognato
sull'onda di un Ossian inesistente'). Who will inform the reader of the set of codes that should
be employed in the case of Ossian? Inevitably, the answer will be the interpreter, the cultural
moderator; MacPherson and his fellow song-writers. In the case of Goethe, on the other hand,
Fortini stated, the author himself – with his influential personality and historical
circumstances – is as much a part of the work as the text itself. In fact, as stressed by Susan
Bassnett, 'Goethe's distinction between types of translation and stages in a hierarchy of
aesthetic evaluation is indicative of a change in attitude to translation resulting from a
revaluation of the role of poetry and creativity.'\textsuperscript{16} These two examples, each requiring
appropriate strategies, offered Fortini the occasion to analyse the various components of
translation, from the creative to the historical; these elements often become entangled, serving
in turn universal aesthetic values and contingent historical circumstances. The author
explained:

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 211. 'Derivation' here does not coincide with 'imitatio', but rather with 'periphrasis'.
\textsuperscript{13} Fortini introduced various methodologies of translation by quoting Goethe's 'Translations',\textsuperscript{13} Schleiermacher's
essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating', Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator',\textsuperscript{13} Ortega y Gasset's
'The Misery and Splendor of Translation'\textsuperscript{13} and Jakobson's 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translations'. Subsequently,
he drew his audience's attention to Macpherson's \textit{Ossian}, and Goethe's \textit{Faust}, in order to reveal the complexities
and multiple readings made by various translators who engaged in rewriting these famous texts. In the case of
Goethe's \textit{Faust}, he reviewed three different versions of 'La ballata del Re di Thule', commenting on the versions
produced by Giovita Scalvini, Giosuè Carducci and Fortini himself.
\textsuperscript{14} See Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in \textit{The Foucault Reader}, edited by Paul Rabinow, New York:
\textsuperscript{15} From 1760 to 1763, James Macpherson published three prose works, which he claimed were the works of
Ossian, a Gaelic bard from the third century AD. These tales of love and heroes, similar to the tales of Virgil and
Homer, created a sensation in Scotland, England and all of Europe, and inspired artists everywhere to seek their
past.
\textsuperscript{16} See Susan Bassnett, \textit{Translation Studies}, London: Methuen, 1980, p. 68. Ten years later, Bassnett and Lefevere,
co-edited \textit{Translation, History, and Culture}, London: Pinter Publishers, 1990, where they announced the 'cultural
turn' in translation studies: "neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational 'unit' of
translation" (Lefevere and Bassnett, \textit{Translation, History, and Culture}, 1990: p. 8).
Alcuni eroi solitari della letteratura mondiale si esercitavano a tradurre in uno stile assolutamente estraneo a quello della traduzione neoclassica. Ad esempio, come accade per la traduzione del Faust, fornita da Scalvini, che rinuncia ad appropriarsi, nei termini che sarebbero stati i termini di Foscolo, del testo tedesco e capitola, traducendo in prosa e in versi, facendo cozzare elementi linguisticamente totalmente diversi, elementi classicisti con altri stili, riuscendo così, miracolosamente, a riprodurre degli aspetti fondamentali della poesia goetheiana del primo Faust che vive, appunto, di questi cozzì. (RPTP, p. 11)

Fortini made a distinction between translation in general and 'poetic translation' in order to understand the formal qualities that distinguish the latter from other types of paraphrase and rewriting. Only to the extent that a poet-translator considers the form and function of a given text to be adequate to his own aesthetic, can he create an intertextual coherence between his work and the standards of the target culture of the author/s he translates.

Understanding the role of translation in Fortini's oeuvre as a distinct discipline, bearing a close kinship with the poetry-making process and its norms, will involve not only an investigation into his texts, which are classified as 'poetic translations', but also an understanding of their intertextual relations with metapoems which address translation as a inspiring genre, such as 'A un traduttore', 'Traducendo Brecht' and 'Traducendo Milton'. Essentially, Fortini's choice of texts for his translations could be seen as attempts to expand and explore through other voices the tensions within his own writings, between cultural experimentation and political commitment, radical aesthetics and progressive politics, as proved by his translations of Milton's Lycidas and Brecht's 'Der Kirschenlieb', which contain thematic and stylistic criteria similar to those used by Fortini for his own poetry. This continual interchange is supported by Fortini's passion for literary translation, which allowed him to transcend poetic subjectivity and thus introduce into his own poetic spirit the liberating paradox of poetry as 'legitimate' theft, as stated by the title of the anthology Il ladro di ciliegie ed altre versioni di poesia (1982). In fact, in Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica, translation is seen not as a kind of literary subordinate but as a creative and dialogic counterpart. For this reason, Fortini's recourse to the term 'paradox' in the title of this anthology conveys very effectively the complexity of the translator's task: in fact, poetic translation is the ambitious technique of recreating the intricacy and polymorphic essence of a given poet's stylistic features in a different culture, possibly as distant in space as in time and in verse. Added to this, when the translator tries to deconstruct and reconstruct a text's components in an attempt to shed light on its content, the text's inner obscurity cannot but

17 The idea of the writer's political commitment is central to twentieth-century literary debates. In 1962, Adorno authored an important essay on this subject, entitled 'Commitment' (in Bloch et al., Aesthetics and Politics, 1977) where he claims that Sartre would not accept that a work of art confronted its writer, however free he may be, with the objective demands of composition. Adorno underlines the fact that in his essay 'Why write?' Sartre claims that the author's intention is not central to the finished work.
oppose the philological process itself. Given this resistance, one of the ways of achieving a correct interpretation of the text to be translated would be to enter a hermeneutic loop, as well as enact an exchange of roles. It seems that in Fortini’s view the meaning and function of translation cannot be narrowed to a kind of negotiation between the receiving language-culture and that of the poet, a mere transportation of the style and language of the original, or a search for equivalents in syntax, grammar and idiomatic expression. In fact, beyond the preoccupation with translating the body or content of a book, the translator should be concerned with recreating the text’s Weltanschauung, its attitude to the world or, more precisely, the prevailing spirit which emerges in its form and the style.

These last definitions are generic and could sound inadequate to solve a task as complex as that of translating verse. In fact, in its etymological sense, the term ‘translation’ alludes to the action of transporting a determinate verbal content — that is, an articulated phonic structure, or the assembly of semantic fields and linguistic codes — from one system to another. When the object to be translated is a poem, this operation becomes more complicated: in fact, it implies a process of restructuring and recreating not only the specifically linguistic contents of the text, but above all its structural and aesthetic nature. Poetic translation therefore implies not only the assessment of the original author’s technique and creative means, but also the comprehensive exploration of the text’s own aesthetic and expressive faculties. Yet translation is more than a scrutiny of a literary object, and although the task might appear predominantly a practical one, it is, rather, the creation of a new object. Fortini claimed:

Se si opera su autori del nostro secolo, si arriva a delle conclusioni tautologiche e cioè che la traduzione di X fatta da Y, se Y è bravo, conferma gli elementi stilistici di Y, la sua tendenza personale. Vale a dire che Montale, quando traduce, se fa delle grandi traduzioni, è perché fa delle poesie di Montale. Per cui non è che si arrivi mai a vedere che cosa succeda realmente se uno procede in una direzione diversa. Vi sono casi in cui il poeta si avventura su una strada a lui sconosciuta; quando lo fa, si verificano degli eventi straordinari. (RPTP, p. 23)

Fortini’s concept of ‘authorial translation’ implies both a ‘poet to poet’ dialogic bond (a concept I will explore in sections 3.3 and 3.4), and the overcoming the notion of fidelity

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18 See Peter Szondi, On Textual Understanding and Other Essays, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 17-18. In his essay ‘On textual understanding’ (1978) Szondi draws a distinction between proof and understanding in relation to literary texts. He points to how philological proof is, indeed, ‘dependent on understanding in a much different way. [...] The interdependence of proof and understanding is a manifestation of the hermeneutic circle [...] Schleiermacher offered no hermeneutical solution to the problem; he simply transferred the responsibility for its solution to the field of rhetoric.’

19 From the Latin traductione(m) (deriv. of traducere, ‘to transport’, ‘to translate’, Encyclopedia Britannica).

20 As stressed by Daniel Weissbort in his preface to the anthology Translating Poetry: The Double Labyrinth (1989), translating poetry is a highly intricate and almost labyrinthine enterprise. It implies reproducing the style of a given text, its delicate equilibrium of rhetorical tools and techniques, words, sound, rhythm, and images, together with the inner connotation of lemmas in their semantic relationship to each other.
imposed by literary codes (‘tutto a un tratto, però, proprio a causa della libertà causata da questo disinteresse del poeta traduttore nel poeta tradotto’):

Un poeta che non sia ancora se stesso, traducendo dei grandi e avventurandosi per queste traduzioni, capirà che queste non lo portano da nessuna parte che a lui possa interessare e da quel momento si disinteresserà ai grandi autori. Tra questi versi non suoi, tra questi versi tradotti, tutto a un tratto, pero, proprio a causa della libertà causata da questo disinteresse del poeta traduttore nel poeta tradotto, il lettore individuerà la genialità del verso montaliano, che darà al critico gli elementi per capire le ragioni per le quali il poeta-traduttore si sia da quel momento in poi orientato in una direzione che va da tutt’altra parte. (RPTP, p. 23)

It is not the source text that tantalizes Montale into attempting his own creation, but rather the act of translating itself. In fact, Fortini notes, when the translator is a poetic authority such as Montale, his temptation to fashion a personal interpretation is for us far more interesting than any other reasonable task he might have in mind. Montale’s translation, in this sense, participate more in the genre of poetry practiced by Montale himself, than in that of translation as such.

This kind of attitude releases translation from being a ‘clone’, a retrospective recycling, or ‘appropriation’, of past and foreign models. The poet-translator’s demand for liberty thus matches Mengaldo’s description of ‘traduzione d’autore’ in his essay ‘Confronto tra traduttori-poeti contemporanei’ (1989), where a comparison is drawn between Sereni, Luzi and Caproni regarding their individual translations (or ‘varianti inter-autoriali’, as Mengaldo puts it) of Guillaume Apollinaire. Mengaldo claims:

L’utilità di esplorare diverse versioni ‘d’autore’ di uno stesso originale non ha bisogno di giustificazioni. Vi spinge l’esigenza generale che, in fatto di analisi di testo, l’immanenza sia corretta il più possibile dalla trascendenza del confronto contrastivo con altro (testo). E nello specifico l’opportunità che offre, su questo terreno, la presenza di quelle che potremmo chiamare (per non glossare ancora l’abusato termine di intertestualità) ‘varianti inter-autoriali’ di elezione.

Like Mengaldo, Fortini too was particularly interested in investigating the special nature of translations carried out by translators who were themselves poets, as in the famous cases of Quasimodo, Pavese, Sereni, Montale, Fortini, Giudici, and Pasolini, to quote only the most celebrated examples. Yet, as Fortini noted in *Realità e paradosso della traduzione poetica* the poet-translator is also often a scholar and an intellectual, who is also conducting philological and semiotic researches through translation, as in the case of Leopardi and Carducci, or Fortini himself. Indeed, because of the inherent intricacy of rendering a given work of art in another language-culture, the translator not only needs to be himself an artist to be able

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21 Mengaldo’s essay is included in *Tradizione/Traduzione/Società*, p. 244.
adequately to face his aesthetic task, but he is also required to possess hermeneutical expertise, as stressed by Schleiermacher in *On the Different Methods of Translation* (1913).

It is useful to mention at this point that Fortini does not consider it questionable, in principle, that one poet can adequately translate the diversity of another poet. We shall see in due course that he achieves such confidence not only on the basis of his sympathetic feelings towards the subject, theme and style of one author rather than another – as in the case of his inspired translations of Goethe and Brecht – but also because translation at its best presupposes the ability to transcend the concept of authorship, as well as that of cultural identity, creating a true dialogic exchange between poetic works. Indeed, as stated by Schleiermacher, the actual purpose of finding ‘enjoyment in a foreign work which is as unadulterated as possible’ cannot be attained by a method that wishes ‘to breathe into the translated work the total spirit of a language that is alien to it’. The task of the translator is complicated further by the difficulty of rendering both the characteristic rhythm and the style of diction of the original work, thus producing that peculiar and inevitable distortion from which all translations suffer.

According to Schleiermacher, then, works in translation, if they are accomplished, come to acquire ‘fictional’ qualities of ‘concupiscence and wantonness’ responding to the ‘difficult and almost impossible art of merging the spirits of the languages into one another’. Schleiermacher claims that, strictly speaking, the goal of this technique is not translation, but imitation, so that ‘the result would not be the truest possible enjoyment of the works themselves’. This method, although arising from the desire to develop an insight into the original work, turns translation into a creative act, as he points out in the essay ‘On the Different Methods of Translating’, included in *Hermeneutik* (1959): ‘A perfect understanding of language, or scripts is itself an artistic achievement which requires a theory of art, or a technique to which we assign the term hermeneutics.’

### 3.2. Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica

Each of these moments is part of a specific process that makes the translator a co-writer, in possession not only of linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical practices, but also of aesthetic inspiration and emotion. In this kind of translation, Fortini explains, there is a rebalancing of creative strengths, leaving the poet-translator with a certain degree of authority, and leaving the poem with its own inner autonomy, to be revealed through its phonic, semantic and graphic components. And indeed, beyond the author’s message and the poem’s thematic

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23 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
24 Ibid., p. 53.
content, these concrete, phonic aspects of poetry can represent an autonomous focus for inspiration and interpretation with a consequent minimisation of the thematic and semantic levels. The reorganisation of a poem’s language around these phonic substances, as a self-referring materiality, can take on prime importance in the translator’s work. Translation as a process of co-production, accomplished by means of a negotiation between the content and form of the source text and the fresh and unexpected meanings which the new version can acquire, is placed in the hands of the aesthetic sensibility and emotional empathy of the translator. It is an action imbued with cognitive value, implying the understanding and recreation of the text’s polysemy. In poetry, something moves inside the text’s rhetorical armour, beyond the syntactic circuit of its grammatical structure, and creates a dissemination of meanings; something hidden, incalculable and inexpressible springs out from the verse, offering itself to the sensibility of the interpreter. Similarly, in translation, truth does not proceed according to an order of coherence, coincidence, or exactness, but rather takes unpredictable forms. Furthermore, translation should be the expressive reconstruction of the ‘sediments’ and ‘echoes’ of a greater narrative, or a greater language, as Benjamin states in ‘The task of the translator’. As a consequence, both the original text and its translation/s are recognizable as echoes of this greater language. Between these echoes and the silent voices of things, according to Benjamin’s theory, the language of man behaves as an intermediary with a ‘divine language’; hence, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle adds, the hermeneutic chain: translation as interpretation as intervention as disclosure of a harmonic resonance.

To underline the significance of this method of translation, Fortini quotes Pasolini’s ‘L’usignolo’, which is his personal re-writing of a poem by Rimbaud: ‘In una sola parola, contaminazione, strategia di trasposizione di un dato testo non solo in un ambito culturale...’

Fortini’s interest in creative translation as rewriting makes him draw our attention to another kind of translation which he defines as ‘imaginary’, a practice he attributes to Pasolini; it represents a sort of total remaking of a text by the translator. This is the case with Pasolini’s translation into Italian of Aeschylus’s Oresteade and into ‘friulano’ of the works of Niccolò Tommaseo. In fact, Pasolini’s ‘imaginary translations’, which represent experimental aspects of translation, are not completely extraneous to the way in which Fortini thematically rewrites Brecht, particularly in the poems that have been analysed in Chapters 2 and 3, ‘L’animale’ and La poesia delle rose, which allegorically measure the rapaciousness of an ambiguous hero, who devours others and himself in a never-ending circle of exploitation.

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27 In the 1923 essay ‘The Task of the Translator’, Benjamin compares the translator to a collector of antiquities or an archaeologist: just as collectors and archaeologists reconstruct artifacts, translators reproduce the shape of a given text from the myriad of its fragments in order to restore and thus appreciate its lost integrity.

28 J. Roberts, Walter Benjamin, London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 111. As Roberts claims in his speculations on Benjamin’s essay, in this theory of translation via interpretation, the world symbolically represents a meaningful intertwined texture of languages and correspondences: ‘But in that case, what was the order that underlay these languages?’

29 Jean-Jacques Lecercle, Interpretation as Pragmatics, London: Macmillan, 1999, p. 19. Lecercle claims: ‘The metaphor for successful translation is not reproduction but harmonic resonance. [...] As a consequence, the translation that interpretation is, far from betraying the text, elevates it to a higher level of language, takes it close to divine language. [...] Interpretation is not condemned to the partial discovery of a glorious (intention of) meaning, it provides an increase in meaning.’ According to Lecercle, in the hierarchy of languages, this kind of perspective grants translation the artistic dignity of an ‘intervention’, an idea that in Benjamin’s view originates in Freud’s use of interpretation to disclose the inner truth of the narratives of the Self.
Yet every reflection on translation involves a complex and tortuous study that cannot restrict or exclude the utility of other functional translations such as the didactic translation. On the level of expression, the semiotic study of poetry contributes to a partial but nevertheless possible reproduction of its forms. And indeed, in his own introduction to the revised edition of *Foglio di via ed altri versi* (Turin, 1967), Fortini notes: ‘Nelle poesie del 1944 e 1945 si vede l’incontro con gli scarsi testi della resistenza francese che m’avvenne di tradurre per un foglio socialista di emigranti in Zurigo. [...] Era lo ‘stile da traduzione’ che avrebbe poi imper severato.31

Fortini’s *Poesia ininterrotta* (1947), which is his first important translation of Éluard, demonstrates his ideological sympathies, which Raboni defines as the sharing of the moral tension of an ideal:

Quanti avrà potuto leggerne, Fortini, nel suo esilio svizzero, di quei testi eluardiani? Sappiamo che, in questi casi, non è il numero che conta, ma la profondità dell’incontro, della ferita. Una sola poesia, al limite [...] basterebbe, forse, nella pensabile prospettiva di un’enorme solitudine e di una spaventosa sete di parole giuste, di conferma, di giustizia verbale, a spiegare il decollo improvviso e subito impeccabile di uno stile, di quel particolare declamato astratto, dove ogni pericolo di enfasi è come frantumato dalla violenza percussiva della sillabazione, al quale in fondo, nonostante mille sottili capovolgimenti, ramificazioni, dinieghi, Fortini non smetterà più, a intervalli, di fare ricorso.32

Fortini’s versions of Éluard, Raboni suggests, do not simply achieve an allusive, literary rewriting in the ‘style of translation’, but foster an ‘appropriating practice’ of poetic ‘reformulations’, often in a altered register. Raboni continues his appreciation of the originality of Fortini’s translations:

Il Fortini di queste poesie sembra avere lavorato sur le motif di un paesaggio verbale più immaginato o intuito, forse, che propriamente conosciuto, e appunto per questo tanto più durevolmente impressionante, io non mi sento affatto di sottoscrivere l’indicazione data dall’autore in veste, si può supporre, più di critico ‘professionale’ che di biografo e interprete di sé medesimo. Lo ‘stile da traduzione che avrebbe poi imper severato’ non è, volgol dire, quello che emerge da questi testi fortiniani, già così sicuri, in verità, nel ‘tradurre’ ogni sollecitazione estrema e di conseguenze perfettamente interne alle possibilità di pronuncia e di organizzazione metrica e sintattica della lingua d’arrivo.33

Raboni believes that Fortini’s creative versions result from the requirement imposed by the extratext on his own infratext, recreating in Italian not so much Éluard’s linguistic peculiarities, but his ‘contenuto di poeticità’. He notes how, subsequently, from *Foglio di via..."
up to *Poesia e errore* and *Una volta per sempre*, the rhythm of Fortini’s verse gradually passes from a ‘registro vocale eluardiano’ to a Brechtian one. This passage bears traces of other foreign influences – not only at a stylistic, or thematic level, but at a metrical and phonetic one – which Fortini acquired through his activity as a translator. This kind of communication occurs particularly when the translated text provides Fortini’s rewritings with space for personal philosophical and ethical conjecture, or artistic intervention. Giacomo Magrini claims: ‘È questo il caso del passaggio dall’ impersonale al personale […] e del passaggio inverso, nelle traduzioni di Fortini da Éluard. […] “Nous admirons l’ordre des choses, l’ordre des pierres, l’ordre des clartés, l’ordre des heures” → “Mirabile è a noi l’ordine delle cose, l’ordine delle pietre, l’ordine delle luci, l’ordine delle ore.” Così tradotta, la frase acquista il tono solenne, quasi sacro, che le è dovuto.34

This interactive use of translation – the ‘going towards’ and the ‘moving back’ of two interacting poetic identities – gives birth to composite creations belonging to more than one author and more than one genre. An example of this is provided by the alignment of poems such as ‘Canto degli ultimi partigiani’, ‘Rivolto agraria’, ‘La gioia avvenire’ (*Foglio di via*), ‘Quel giovane tedesco’, ‘Arte poetica’, ‘Une tache de sang intellectuel’, ‘Fare e disfare’, ‘I destini generali’, and ‘Metrica e biografia’, included in *Poesia ed errore*, with the themes in ‘Traducendo Brecht’ – which all show strong intertextual harmony with the political and existential themes in Fortini’s translation of Goethe’s ‘Una sottile pena giovanile’, Éluard’s ‘The wall’ and Brecht’s ‘Un tempo’.35

The influence of Surrealism on Fortini’s poetry through the translation of Éluard equals that of German Expressionism which affected him throughout his translation of Brecht. These features are particularly evident in *La poesia delle rose* (2.4.), where Fortini practices thematic interlacement with his own version of a poem Brecht had written in 1953, and which was subsequently included in *Il Ladro di ciliegie* with the Italian title ‘Come schedarla la piccola rosa’. To Brecht’s rhetorical question ‘Come schedarla la piccola rosa?’ Fortini offers two aphoristic replies, which are: ‘Rose, rose di polvere, quanta durezza’ (fragment 1, *Poesia delle rose*) and ‘Dove si schiude una rosa decade una rosa/ E uno è il tempo ma è di due verità’ (fragment 2, *Poesia delle rose*). The latter introduces, into the style of the poem, a dialogic mode which, through the personification of the poem’s prevailing symbol, echoes, among the many other texts, the admonitory tone of Blake’s ‘O Rose, thou art sick’ (‘The

35 For additional information on this subject, see Anna Manfredi, *Fortini traduttore di Éluard*, Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1992.
A statement from the Introduction of *Il ladro di ciliegie* (1982) will confirm the presence of a close interaction between Fortini's poetry and his poetic translations:

A partire dal 1952 si formò così una parte della scelta che, integrata con altri versi dagli *Hundert Gedichte* (di Brecht), sarebbe stata pubblicata, ma solo nel 1959, col titolo *Poesie e canzoni*. Non uno di quei versi mi risparmiava una priva difficile. E si ripercuoteva su quelli miei che venivo scrivendo e intitolando appunto ‘Traducendo Brecht’. (LDC, p. VI)

This ‘repercussion’, which is close to what Lecercle calls ‘interpellation’ — that is, the translation of feelings and imagery into the linguistic, cultural, ideological and political background of the interpreter — gives priority to the translator’s exploitation of that ‘pure language’, which Benjamin calls the ‘universal language of poetry’. The main thrust of Fortini’s statement lies in the principle by which Benjamin, in his essay ‘The task of the translator’, refuses to lock meaning in the author’s way of ‘seeing things’, expanding it into a transcendent and transhuman sphere. Benjamin, in fact, concludes the essay by exhorting the translator to address this transcendent dimension, to prevent the original language from being exiled in the foreign language. On a theoretical level, Fortini echoes Benjamin’s call to release the translator from strict fidelity, allowing him to set his own language in motion and produce poetry, even at the cost of losing certain echoes of the source text — as he states in his Introduction to *Il ladro di ciliegie*. Speaking of his version of Milton’s *Lycidas* (1637), Fortini notes: ‘Nell’inizio e nella conclusione del *Lycidas* sentivo […] il tema della ripetizione che attraverso cecità, colpa e morte diventa nuovo inizio. Tutto il resto non è stato, da parte mia, che ostentazione. Ho cominciato dalla ottava finale, la meravigliosa cornice, o soglia, inattesa.’ (LDC, p. IX)

### 3.3. Poet to poet: Fortini’s translation of Milton’s *Lycidas*

The history of literary translation is rich in authors who have devoted themselves to the translation of works belonging to ancient languages and cultures, or to literary traditions less distant in space than in time. Indeed, to translate poetry has predominantly been the prerogative of poets. ‘Rarely do studies of poetry and translation — Bassnett states — try to discuss methodological problems from a non-empirical position, and yet it is precisely that

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36 Blake’s poem is included in *Elogio della rosa*, p. 111.
37 LDC, p. VI. Fortini added: ‘Sono le stesse date che accompagnano libri miei. Vorrebbero ricordare al lettore, se il titolo non lo dicesse abbastanza chiaro, che quelle parole sono state scritte nel tempo, ossia mentre accadevano ’altro’, altro che le reggeva o le oppugnava e continua a reggerle, a combatterle o ad abbandonarle. In questo senso le versioni di poesia che qui seguono si augurano di non differire dagli altri versi miei.’
38 Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, p. 177.
39 Milton wrote *Lycidas: Obsequies to the memory of Mr. Edward King*, in 1637. The elegy was published in *Justa Eduardo King* (1637), which also included poems in Greek and Latin.
type of study that is most valuable and most needed. Therefore, in this section, translation will be approached as a form of participation, or collaboration, of the poet-translator in other poets' works: an opening towards other practices, other models – even beyond poetry. In the following passage, Fortini indicates clearly what it means to read a poem, as opposed to a narrative:

Leggere una poesia, anche fra sé e sé o ad alta voce, è eseguirla, interpretarla e quindi anche modificarla, ricrearla. In una certa misura criticarla. Quando si dice che un testo poetico non è interpretabile solo a partire da se stesso si allude alla sua situazione nella cultura e nella storia. Chiunque legga una poesia, indipendentemente dal suo grado di coscienza o di conoscenza culturale rapporta le parole a una sfera di competenza e di risonanza che non è soltanto linguistica ma che è di tutta la sua mente, di tutta la sua coscienza, di tutto il suo inconscio.

Fortini is here concerned with the relationship between the interpreter and the material text; he addresses the critical task of interpreting a poem as a means of understanding its formal aspects. These show the poet-translator the way to achieve a new, creative representation, or expression, of the linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of the source text. Translation is thus constantly enriched by both the inherent and unexpected possibilities allowed by the new linguistic and semantic system into which the original text is transported and by the translator's innovative intervention. In this light, each new version of an ancient or foreign text can potentially acquire additional connotations and communicative functions.

Implicit in this inquiry is thus the complex and problematic relationship between the poet-translator and the poet being translated. A point of departure in Fortini's analysis is thus the fact that poetic translation, as much as poetry itself, requires formal creative action. The following investigation into Fortini's version of *Lycidas* will help to identify and discuss the way he adhered to and freed himself from the conventions imposed by this classic. The author's considerations on 'form' ('sublime teatrale e straccione') and 'time' ('più che un arco temporale, una doppia serie di tempi in parallelo e in conflitto') in the essay 'Traducendo Milton' are relevant:

Avrei voluto che la traduzione (di *Lycidas*) fosse insieme di fredda nobiltà e di sublime teatrale e straccione; di falso oro e di vero oro: di una ormai inesistente lingua regia. Per celebrare questa vittoria sulla morte si poteva pronunciare solo una lingua tutta sterile [...] ma senza requie, come di certo Milton avrebbe voluto riverberassero su tutto il testo speranza, lamento e ancora speranza [...] Più che un arco temporale, una doppia serie di

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40 Bassnett, 'Poetry and Translation', in *Translation Studies*, p. 83.
41 Fortini and Loi, *Franchi dialoghi*, pp. 29-30. Fortini adds: 'Anzi questo avviene in un modo diverso, e possiamo dire, per certi aspetti, più profondo o più coinvolgente di quanto non sia per altre forme di comunicazione linguistica proprio perché è ambigua, proprio perché ha un'apparenza informativa, comunicativa e persuasiva che viene modulata, per dir così, in una forma. Questa forma diventa deformatrice del messaggio e lo rende risonante come avviene nel sogno, in cui certe figure, certi personaggi sono dotati di doppie identità.'
42 See also Fortini's entry on 'Classico', in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, Vol.III.
tempi in parallelo e in conflitto: quello della ripetizione ('ancora una volta') e quello della novità ('domani').

In the above abstract, Fortini explains the paradoxical plan to push the representation of an illusory order of things to an extreme: 'Quel che nel Lycidas mi ha determinato a correre l'avventura della versione è stata la possibilità di portare all'estremo la finzione dell'ordine e della costruzione del momento medesimo in cui appaiono evidenti la insensatezza e la fine' (NSI, p. 388).

As poet-translator, here, he transforms his relationship to Lycidas from one of passive acceptance to that of a continuous dialectical exchange. In the cited passage, Fortini thus lays stress on the new order which translation creates. This evident, yet positive 'finzione', which is based on the idea of 'revival' as 'renewal' ('avventura della versione'), symbolizes the very act of rewriting. According to this idea, which recalls Eco's Opera aperta, literature lives on, acquiring with each new interpretation a new audience, so that the original text will live again through its descendants. This kind of nucleus thus dominates Fortini's Lycidas, which is partly subservient to the purposes of translation as a means for the diffusion of foreign literature, and partly asserts the translator's autonomy on the basis of a planned, intertextual and self-referential network of genres. In translating Lycidas, Fortini actively engages in the continuum of the elegiac tradition which, beginning with Theocritus and Virgil, reaches English Renaissance funeral songs. Yet Milton's use of elegiac codes itself already breaks with this continuum, since he refuses simply to mourn, and posits a political invective against the clergy between the lines.

Rewriting the classics involves not only a special knowledge of their traditions: it also involves special interpretative and aesthetic skills. In fact, as Calvino claimed, the ability to rework the classics is to let their discourse 'resound clearly and articulately' in one's present, since 'a classic is a work which persists as background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway.' Hence, at the level of Fortini's intertext, the following extract from 'L'ordine e il disordine', in Franchi dialoghi, could indicate the impact of Virgil's elegiac style, Milton's Lycidas and Poussin's paintings on his poetry collection, Paesaggio con serpente:

Mi ero poi venuto persuadendo che nella pittura di Poussin, dal luogo comune correlata al nome di Milton, si celasse un discorso grave e nostro, odierno. Guardando i suoi dipinti della National Gallery e del Louvre chiedevo alle figure sgraziate e recitanti, a cieli tutti d'immobilità e minaccia, come ai crepuscoli e mosti delle ottobrate, che cosa volessero dire certi allori virgiliani disseccati tra le eriche e quei congiungimenti freddi di vigna e vischio: certo una nostalgia per qualcosa di presente ma inattingibile.

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43 Fortini's 'Traducendo Milton', which was originally a lecture delivered at the University of Padua in 1987, is now included in Nuovi Saggi italiani, Milan: Garzanti, 1987, pp. 385-391.
45 Fortini and Loi, Franchi dialoghi, p. 9.
The author’s preference for the canonical forms of both ancient and modern classics which have not exhausted their aura and their ability to surprise the reader asserts the predominance of form over content (‘una nostalgia di qualcosa di presente ma inattingibile’): ‘Di qui, la gioia di ritrovare tale struttura nel Lycidas, con la ricchezza di simultaneo situazioni contraddittorie, la capacità di dire e disdire, di scendere dal mellifluo all’ira e allo sprezzo e di farsi, a tratti, come uno spasmo che si avviva su se stesso.’\(^6\) In contrast to the idea of the translator’s fidelity and servility, the extract thus illustrates a tendency to interact creatively with the original source texts (‘come uno spasmo che si avviva su se stesso’). As it will become apparent, Fortini’s version of Lycidas acknowledges the technical conventions of classic elegy, yet the author does not completely adopt them: in fact, as poet-translator, he emphasizes the need for ‘discordance’ as a seductive convergence of paradoxes, allowing language a considerable freedom, while risking a translation which epistemologically could be seen as hypothetically arbitrary.

Fortini’s positive appraisal of the autonomous potential of poetic language in translation can be observed in his versions of Milton, Goethe and Brecht, with their acceptance of the translator’s unreliability, which theoretically anticipates Eco’s idea of ‘Intentio Lectoris’ in The Limits of Interpretation and Eco’s discrimination between ‘use’ and ‘interpretation’, at work within the unavoidable dialectic between fidelity and freedom.\(^7\)

Fortini himself stated that his interest in Milton was linked predominantly to his personal interest in the religious phase of the Mannerist and Baroque art, during which the English poet composed his work. Fortini’s purpose was to relocate these two styles in both his own and translations – making use of their decadent preciousness, developed under the influence of the Counter Reformation. He felt a definite affection for the kind of anxious pessimism that had pervaded the fine arts at the end of the sixteenth century. Indeed, in all manifestations of Baroque art, Fortini sensed a constant longing to attain a sense of the infinite and to reconcile it within the parameters of the finite.\(^8\) The awareness of the coexistence of two contradictory spheres, the immanent and the transcendent, was the very spirit of the Baroque artists: and

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 9.

\(^7\) Umberto Eco (first ed. 1990), The Limits of Interpretation, Bloomingdon and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 50 [Italian ed: / limiti dell’interpretazione, Milan: Bombiani, 1999]. Referring back to Opera aperta, and transversally to Pareyson’s aesthetics of interpretation, Eco asserts that among its various properties, an artistic text contains certain structural devices that fully ‘encourage and elicit interpretative choices.’ This relates to his reader-response theory, which lays emphasis on the reader who contributes to the text, the assumption being that the text doesn’t really exist until it is read, its meaning is potential meaning until actualized by the reader. In The Role of the Reader, he had made a distinction between an ‘open text’ that requires the reader’s deeper collaboration in the creation of the text’s meaning, and a ‘closed text’ in which most genre works would be included, because while the reader still collaborates in the creation of meaning, there is a more predetermined set of responses coming from their various conventions and tropes.

\(^8\) Milton’s Baroque is in no way affected by mystical devotion, neither does he try to impinge on the religious sensibilities of his readers through the portrayal of his personal religious experience. On the contrary, Milton’s real concerns were the intellectual problems wrought by religious life. A notable aspect of Milton’s mature literary
Fortini himself longed for verses charged with this ambitious appeal to convey the metaphysical order of things on a human terrain.  

As Mario Melchionda has claimed, Fortini’s interest in Milton is linked to his attention to Tasso, Poussin and Vallombrosa: ‘classici frugati e icone della modernità’. Melchionda continues:

E certo l’incontro deve avere avuto un carattere quanto meno ambivalente. Da un lato, la classicità dell’autore e del sistema letterario a cui era fatto appartenere [...] Dall’altro, l’interrogazione sulla condizione storica di Milton figurata come un abyme nella condizione testuale della poesia.

The extract explains how Fortini’s ambivalent use of the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of both Tasso’s poetics and the Baroque aims not exclusively at instructing the reader how to appreciate the significance of the classics but primarily at showing creative ways to recycle and transform these composite literary materials. As a consequence of this penchant for covering up controversial themes with classical restraint, proportion and balance are present both in Milton’s poetry and in Poussin’s painting. What also intrigues Fortini is Milton’s re-emphasis on form, which seems to bring him gradually closer to the art of the Renaissance. It is not difficult, in fact, to see how both the language and structure of Paradise Lost and Lycidas are based on classical poetry. This is because Milton’s poetry owes a lot to its author’s knowledge of other languages. In fact, as John K. Hale notes in Milton’s Languages, Milton’s ‘language-related arts’ implied an interaction among various specialist genres as diverse as poetry, translations, annotations of Greek poets, Latin prose and political polemic. Hale argues that it is only by understanding Milton’s choice among languages that we can fully recognize his own unique English. For example, Milton uses blank verse, which the Elizabethans considered the English equivalent of the dactylic hexameter, in which the epics of Homer and Virgil were written. He also respects several classical conventions, among which is the invocation to the Muses. In Hale’s account, Milton’s English, dynamically harbouring other languages, regenerates itself in a new, multidimensional, polyglot variety: indeed, Lycidas is informed by the new Baroque urge to transcend formal conventions in order to render the impact of historical emergencies on the poet’s language. In this light may be seen how an innovator like Milton could not help but be a powerful endeavors is religious controversy, in the form of reflections on doubt and faith, and hence his involvement was with the intellect rather than with emotions; this is also what Fortini sets out to engage with.

49 The presence of these baroque components in Fortini’s La poesia delle rose has already been acknowledged in chapter 2 (2.4) where I claim that it can be considered a provocative reutilisation of the Neoclassical cult of imitation.

50 Mario Melchionda, ‘Una versione contro’, in the review L’ospite ingrato: La traduzione, p. 205.

inspiration for a multifaceted scholar and poet such as Fortini. In attempting to give a truthful account of his interest in Milton, Fortini wrote:

> Genova era stata poco prima cannoneggiata dal mare dalla flotta inglese. E in quei versi di allora – questa è una cosa che ho scoperto solo adesso, solo recentemente – avevo già congiunto come immagine di un avvenire possibile, avevo congiunto, messo insieme due elementi contraddittori, un vero e proprio ossimoro: quello della gravità e severità e quello dell’ardore e della tensione verso l’avvenire. L’ho ritrovato negli ultimi versi che chiudono il *Lycidas* di Milton.\(^{32}\)

We can see how Fortini manages to maintain a non-subordinate role in relation to his translation techniques. As he later explained in *Realità e paradosso della traduzione poetica*:

> nelle traduzioni di poesia compiute nelle forme letterarie esistenti nella nostra cultura presente, i ‘compensi’, denotano come questa nozione che procede dall’ipotesi che vi sia un tasso di densità assoluta o relativa delle figure del discorso o figure retoriche che costituiscono e che strutturano il testo poetico. L’orizzonte al quale mi richiamo con questa nozione di ‘compenso’ e soprattutto con l’idea dell’esistenza di una densità delle figure di discorso, o retoriche, è quello abbastanza remote nel tempo, ma molto vivo, secondo me, come riferimento, delle teorie formulate dal russo Tynjanov, e dal ceco Mukarovsky. (RPTP, p. 16)\(^{33}\)

The notion of ‘compenso’ brings about a revision of the cross-cultural pluri-or polyfunctionality of sign systems, as well as an exploration of linguistic borrowing. Returning to the issue of Fortini’s translation from Milton as being ‘cultural rewriting’,\(^{34}\) it is useful to point out that the name Lycidas, common in ancient Greek pastorals, establishes immediately the very nature of the style both Milton and Fortini imitate for their poems. In this monody, Milton laments the death of his close friend Edward King, who drowned in 1637 during a crossing of the Irish Sea. In the first stanza, Milton’s ‘Who would not sing for Lycidas’, echoes Virgil’s ‘Who would not sing for Gallus?’ (*Eclogue*, 10.5). Yet, over and above this commemorative opportunity, the elegy offers an occasion for Milton to expose the fraudulent power of the clergy of his time, foretelling its imminent decline.

Fortini’s version of *Lycidas* opens the collection of translations *Il ladro di ciliegie* (1982). In the introduction, the author states that he has neither a specific linguistic competence in English nor a special plan to translate English Renaissance and Baroque

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\(^{32}\) Fortini and Loi, *Franchi dialoghi*, p. 31.
\(^{33}\) See in *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, Irena R. Makaryk (ed.), Toronto: Toronto Press, 1993, pp. 180-181. In the functional perspective of the Prague Linguistic Circle, ‘literature is a form of verbal communication dominated by the aesthetic function’. Moreover, ‘the literary work signifies the poet’s life, his personality structure and the social circumstances of its genesis’. ‘Language and themes enter the work from outside as ‘material’, to become its constituents only through aesthetic organisation (form)’.
\(^{34}\) See André Lefevere, ‘Mother Courage’s Cucumbers’, in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 234. In Lefevere’s terms, ‘cultural rewriting’ is a way to let a text achieve influence by ‘misinterpretation and misconception’. Lefevere claims: ‘Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background or, if you will,
poetry, but rather a general curiosity towards both the metaphysical tradition inaugurated by Marvell and the era marked by Cromwell’s revolution. His reasons for attempting a translation of *Lycidas* are thus mainly political and cultural. In his introduction to *Summer is not all*, Fortini’s explains this issue in more detail: ‘I have always had a lingering desire to write something like *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland*, although no present day Cromwell among the mighty seems to deserve it. The same reason prompted me to tackle the supreme test of all – the translation of *Lycidas*, written only thirteen years before Marvell’s Ode (see in SINA, p. 11).’ Fortini here justifies and theoretically endorses his desire to test the possibilities of *imitatio*. To some degree, Milton’s use of the pastoral elegy was an exercise in the emulation of Greek-Latin rhetoric and therefore had the peculiar qualities of both the *imitatio* and the ‘rifacimento’ (3.2). Hence the style employed in the text, which Milton developed from Virgil’s *Eclogues*, is believed to represent the model of a rhetorical discipline mirroring the order and beauty of ancient poetry. Yet although Milton’s verses are uttered with the austere diction of a public tribute to a friend who has died, he also remains in contact with the sublime language of the Bible, more suited to describing the decisive moment, the dramatic turn in history when a crisis occurs.

In this sense, Milton’s *Lycidas* seems almost to have been written against the tradition of pastoral elegy, as J. Martin Evans stressed in *The Miltonic Moment* (1998), that is against the very conventions of Theocritus’s first *Idyll* and Virgil’s tenth *Eclogue*; indeed, it aims to discover and express the poet’s own political anxieties. And this is precisely the style of language that Fortini utilized in translating *Lycidas* – a combination of the nostalgic mode he learned from Renaissance and Romantic poetry, matched by a substratum of classical styles and genres from Christian and pagan models. The mixture of these two modes can also be identified unmistakably in Fortini’s poems, as has previously been shown in the analysis of ‘Dalla collina’ (*Questo muro*, 1973), and ‘La salita’ (*Composita solvantur*, 1994).

The other reason that might have stimulated Fortini’s decision to translate from Milton may be found in *Nuovi Saggi Italiani*, where he states ‘Milton è sfuggente, sottile, tortuoso [...] puritano, umanista, radicale – l’ambiguità è al centro della sua poesia maggiore: quanto più diviso, tanto era migliore’ (NSI, pp. 389-390). One example of this is Fortini’s rewriting of *Lycidas* in ‘La salita’ (‘Andate via, penose antiche piante,/ felci frassini carpini larici olmi.’). As a clear imitation of Milton’s invocation to the flora (‘Yet once more, Oye laurels, and once more/ Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere’), Fortini’s lines also bring to mind Virgil’s second *Eclogue* (‘You too, O laurels, I will pick, and you there neighbour myrtle’,

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55 In the Italian literary tradition, bucolic elements are traceable not only in the work of Tasso, but also in the ways in which Leopardi, Verga and D’Annunzio experimented with pastoral drama, adapting it to the changed realities of their times, to give voice to the sense of tragic failure in the relationship between man and nature.
54). In spite of Lycidas' apparent structural sense of balance – the monumental with the ornamental, the mythical with the historical, the scholarly with the bucolic, the individual with the collective – the world here described is punctured by the accidental, where order is threatened by unforeseen death: the unreliable façade erected by these ceremonial structures hides inner feelings that take place within the ephemeral, a dimension that Fortini wished to display in order to show how it may threaten the endurance of this false equilibrium. What Fortini's version of Lycidas aims at reproducing, then, is exactly this kind of instability, that is, Milton's accommodation, in his own present, of fragments and echoes from the broken and illusory ancient sense of proportion and balance, or rather his fusion of multiple elements, metric structures and lexical repertoires. These features return in Fortini's 'Sopra questa pietra', another text from Composita solvantur (1994):

Sopra questa pietra
possò ora fermarmi. Dico alcune parole
nello spazio vuoto preciso.
Le grandi storie
tentennano in sonno, vacillano
nelle teche i crani
dei poeti sovrani.
L'enigma verde ride la sua promessa.

Olmi e oh vetrate di Trinity illuminatevi!
Ecco il fulmine di giugno.
Batte l'acquata grande e guglie.
Lo spazio dei dilemmi è verde e vuoto.
Non può vedermi più nessuno qui, nessuno
mi farà male mai più. (CS, p. 54)

The poem's intertextual references come to have a definite influence; in fact, the 'poeti sovrani' evoked here are Milton, whose Lycidas reverberates in the first line of the second strophe ('Olmi e oh vetrate di Trinity illuminatevi!') and, possibly, Ungaretti, whose first line 'Come questa pietra del San Michele' echoes in Fortini's incipit 'Sopra questa pietra' (CS, p. 54). Yet the main intertextual element in this poetic journal is Brecht's 'Salutomattutino a un albero di nome verde', included in Il ladro di cicogne. Fortini's other concern in translating from the classics is to underline the thematic and aesthetic connections that place works as geographically separate as Milton's Paradise Lost, Tasso's Mondo creato, and Poussin's pictorial allegories alongside one another, bringing them all back to the model posited by Virgil. In fact, all three authors share the same tendency to transcend the order of the pastoral elegy in order to investigate politics and religion. A brief comparative analysis of the original Lycidas and Fortini's version will help understand Fortini's modus operandi, aimed at echoing the poem's form, which itself can become 'deformatrice del messaggio', while
making it ‘resonate’, as stated in Franchi dialoghi (1988).\textsuperscript{56} The raison d’être of the following analysis, then, is to trace the complex ways in which cultural values and ideologies pass from one text to the other through the means of the translator’s choice of language. Presenting the texts side by side in a table will enable us to see clearly the changes (involving sound, rhythm, lexicon from a specific semantic field, syntax, etc.) in the Italian version. Those conventional poetic elements of the equation that are missing will also be indicated, in order to clarify any intentional modernisation or estrangement enacted by Fortini. Both sequences (1-24 and 165-185) will reveal an attempt by Fortini to intervene not in the structure of Lycidas but in its lexical semantics.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-24</th>
<th>1-27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more</td>
<td>1 Anche una volta a voi, allori, e anche una</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,</td>
<td>2 a voi, oscuri mirti con le sempre verdi edere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,</td>
<td>3 sono venuto e la mia mano coglie,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 And with forc’d fingers rude</td>
<td>4 prima che l’anno maturi,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.</td>
<td>5 le vostre bacche aspre acerbe e vi straziano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear</td>
<td>6 dita crudeli le foglie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Compels me to disturb your season due;</td>
<td>7 Obliggo amaro, evento triste e caro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,</td>
<td>8 vuole da me che alteri la debita stagione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.</td>
<td>9 perché Licida è morto prima del fiore,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew</td>
<td>10 Licida, così giovane! Né lascia chi lo valga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.</td>
<td>11 Chi negherà il suo canto a Licida? Sapeva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 He must not float upon his wat’ry bier</td>
<td>12 anch’egli il canto e costruire il verso eletto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,</td>
<td>13 Non dovrà navigare nella sua bara d’acqua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Without the meed of some melodious tear.</td>
<td>14 nudo di pianto e rotolare nell’accredenza del vento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well</td>
<td>15 senza qualche armoniosa eco di gemiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;</td>
<td>16 E dunque incominciate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.</td>
<td>17 sorelle della fonte sacrosanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Hence with denial vain and coy excuse!</td>
<td>18 che sgorga dal celeste altare; incominciate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 So may some gentle muse</td>
<td>19 e forte un ritmo urti le corde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 With lucky words favour my destin’d urn,</td>
<td>20 Inutile negarsi per scusa o per modestia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 And as he passes turn</td>
<td>21 Così una qualche Musa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!</td>
<td>22 cortese all’urna che mi attende in sorte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 For we were nus’d upon the self-same hill,</td>
<td>23 per il mio sudario nero preghi pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;</td>
<td>24 Che noi siamo cresciuti sulla stessa collina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 e un medesimo gregge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 abbiamo pascolato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 per sorgenti ombre acque;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As Lefevere maintains in Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary fame (1992),\textsuperscript{57} all translations, whatever their intention, translate in a formal structure the translator’s ideological project. As soon becomes apparent, on the technical level, Fortini’s translation undergoes a number of noteworthy shifts, beginning in the first six lines with the change of the poem’s syntactical order. Moreover, he does not reproduce the metrics of the source text: the liberally altered order of the metrical structure and line distribution is especially evident in lines 14, 18, 20. The rhythmic homogeneity of Milton’s use of the

\textsuperscript{56} Fortini and Loi, Franchi dialoghi, pp. 29-30.

\textsuperscript{57} For a detailed analysis of translation as ideological manipulation, that is a ‘fictional replica’ of an original text through form and subject matter, see André Lefevere, Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame, London: Routledge, 1992. Lefevere used the imagery of ‘refraction’ to describe the process at the heart of any successful translation, achieving a refocusing, that is a redirecting of a source text into a target culture.
decasyllabic in *Lycidas* is further broken in the octosyllabic sequences of lines 23-24. Equally freely handled, throughout this version, are the lengths of the stanzas, which are frequently expanded by one or more lines. Not only are the length and distribution of the lines of the original text not maintained (see, for example, the discrepancies between lines 19-24 of the original and lines 19-27 of Fortini’s version), but neither is the rhyming scheme of the original text reproduced. In fact, a phonic equivalence occurs not between the sounds of words which in the original may rhyme – as in the heroic couplet ‘hill’, and ‘rill’ of the iambic pentameter in line 23-24 – but rather between groups of words and their syntactic order, which enhances a parallelism in the words’ connotations in terms of the emotions being aroused. Fortini is not completely faithful to the content of each line either (see, for example, lines 1-7) as the choice of lexis aptly emphasises both formal and ideological modifications, highlighting the translator’s predilection for mannerism. On the other hand, the translation preserves the syntactic subtleties of the original text with reasonable accuracy: Fortini, indeed, reproduces the erudite and composite diction of Milton’s blank verse, which is full of modulations and dissonances controlled by a harsh and unnatural melody of remote intonation and constrained emotion.58

Immersed in an uncontaminated rural setting, Milton’s delicate and mournful voice here builds a bridge of melancholia spanning the poles of what is visible and what cannot be expressed, a typical aesthetic trait which sets ‘clarities and balance’ against ‘ambiguity and instability’, qualities which have a great impact on Fortini’s idea of classical art. Yet, the dejected melody of Milton’s *Lycidas* is somehow overloaded by Fortini’s strained formalism. In fact, in order to reach the age of the original text, and increase his translation’s literary effect, he makes use of frequent Latinate words, antiquated words and phrases that deviate from contemporary expressions. Yet, the delicate Latinate nouns and adjectives (‘laurels’, ‘myrtles’, ‘melodious’, ‘sacred’) that articulate Milton’s elegy, which are imposed by the conventions of the pastoral elegy, in Fortini’s version are somewhat burdened by a surplus of lexical elevation (eg: ‘oscuri mirti’, translating ‘myrtles brown’). For instance, in line 15, he translates ‘meed’, commonly used as a Anglo-Saxon synonym for ‘elegy’, with ‘eco’, adding a superfluous metaphysical emphasis to the line. Moreover, syntactically, rather than importing Milton’s English structure and accentuation, we can note in Fortini’s translation a tendency to shape his clauses and sentences on the models offered by Italian classicism.

In the supplication to the Muses in lines 15-16, Milton makes reference to Aganippe, the mountain spring beside one of Zeus’s temples. In the Italian version, the pagan connotation of poetry as the ‘sacred site’, which Milton takes from Homer and Virgil, assumes a different religious nuance, given the expression ‘sorgente sacrosanta’, which is

58 Miltonic blank verse is characterized by the abandonment of rhyme, after the Renaissance discovers Latin and Greek prosody, which is unrhymed. The years following Milton saw the rise of the heroic couplet.
closer to a Christian baptismal spring. Likewise, Fortini replaces the throne of Jupiter (‘seat of Jove’) with the ‘celeste altare’ in line 18 of the Italian version, preferring the register of Christian mysticism and, in the literary field, that of Dante’s *Paradiso*, to the lyrical-allegorical and metaphysical-theological power characteristic of Milton’s style in *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*. On the lexical level, in spite of the ideological adherence to the original style, nonetheless there is a slight modernisation of the poem’s tone, which is obtained by choosing cruder words and expressions, as in line 14 of the translation (eg: ‘*nudo di pianto*’, replacing ‘unwept’, and ‘*rotolare nell’acredine del vento*’, translating ‘welter to the parching wind’).

What makes Fortini’s line seem innovative is in fact the hard-edged modernist precision of the entire line, which turns away from Milton’s ornate lexis. Moreover, the allusion that Milton’s lines 19-22 – ‘So may some gentle muse/With lucky words favour my destin’d urn,/And as he passes turn/And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!’ – make to the poet’s future Muse as being a ‘he’, is totally abolished by Fortini’s traditional understanding of the Muse as a ‘she’ (‘Cosi una qualche Musa/Cortese all’urna che mi attende in sorte/Per il mio sudario nero preghi pace.’, 21-23).^9^

Although the Baroque taste for grandeur, emotion, contrast, struggle, and immensity is overall kept, manipulation of form in Fortini’s translation appears to have overridden the initial declared objective of transferring the meaning of the source text into the Italian lyric tradition, reminding us that ‘translation of poetry is the field where most emphasis is normally put on the creation of a new independent poem, and where literal translation is usually condemned.’ Fortini produces an idiomatic reformulation of line 24, ‘a same flock we have pastured’, replacing the verb ‘to feed’ (‘Fed the same flock’), with the verb ‘pascolare’ in line 26, evocative of Virgil’s bucolic tone, but also of the Christian idea of Jesus as a shepherd. It is also important to note the alteration of the original text’s rhyme scheme throughout Fortini’s version, and the subtle modernisation provided by the abolition of punctuation, particularly evident in lines 24-27. Such non-observance should not be surprising, since Milton himself did not use a technically rigid versification formula, shifting between octosyllable, decasyllable and blank verse.^61^  

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^9^ See *The Riverside Milton*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1998, p. 36. Citing the OED, Roy Flannagan’s note suggests that ‘Muse’ here is used in a transferred sense, not the Muse herself but one inspired by the muse, a poet. Thus Milton, imagining his own death in turn, hopes that a later poet will favour him (as he does Lycidas) with some elegiac words. More broadly, the change in the concept of the muse-figure in Western European poetry, from the divine to the human, occurs with the ‘stilnovisti’ and later Dante and Petrarch, where the muse is a human female, inaccessible because of her virtue. The obvious case of a male muse is in Shakespeare’s Sonnets.  


^61^ See Fortini, *Faust*, Milan: Mondadori, 1970. From the Introduction: ‘Tradurre in versi il Faust o tradurlo in prosa non è un falso dilemma perché comporta, fra due sistemi diversi di allusioni all’originale, una scelta più radicale di quanto non sarebbe per un’opera a struttura monometrica, come il “Tasso” o “Arminio e Dorotea”’. Il nostro secolo ha disfatto il credito secolare di cui avevano goduto quelle nostre forme che almeno fino a ieri potevano essere avvertite come equivalenti della versificazione goethiana. Tradurre in versi tradizionali avrebbe voluto dire parodiarne. Lo vetrava, oltre tutto, proprio il carattere di parodia che Goethe aveva inteso conferire a non poche sue scene.’ In the same Introduction, Fortini explains the criteria adopted in his translations: ‘Non mi sono
Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor;
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves;
Where, other groves and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozey locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more:
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Non più, pastori tristi, non più lacrime.
Licida che piangete non è morto
Pur se spari sotto la soglia delle acque.
La harmadone del giorno nel letto d'oceano così,
Che già il capo reclinà rianima,
Ravviva i raggi e di lucido oro
Avvampa in fronte al cielo del mattino.
Spari in profondo Licida; ma in alto risali
Per la dolce potenza di Chi camminò sulle onde.
Dove lungo altri boschi e altre riviere
Scioglie dal fango i capelli nel nettare puro
E ode i nuziali indicibili cori
Dei reami beati di allegrezza e di amore.
Tutti lasci gli si faranno incontro i santi
In augusti cortei, cerchie soavi
Che cantano e cantano in loro gloria muovono
E dagli occhi le lacrime gli asciugano per sempre.
Ora i pastori, Licida, non piangono più. Da ora
Tu sarai delle rive lo Spirito Custode.
Largo è il tuo premio: e tu seconda noi peregrini per questa onda perigliosa.

J. Milton, Lycidas, 1637.
F. Fortini, LDC, 1982.

Fortini does not seem to have aimed at a personalisation of Milton's tragic monody, but rather attempted to find a new context to it within the traditional network of Latin references. In this second sequence, especially in the way Fortini translates the apostrophe employed by Milton in lines 183-184 to address the dead friend, we clearly see his use of the terminology and style of Catholic prayers (lines 183-184: 'Tu sarai delle rive lo Spirito Custode./ Largo è il tuo premio'), as models to render the poet's exhortation to the shepherds to cease their weeping. In fact, in the way Fortini reproduces the text's atmosphere, there are echoes from Virgil's Eclogue, from the 'Epistle to the Hebrews' in the 'Second Coming and the Day of Judgement', from the book of Revelation (12:26-27), from Dante's Paradiso, and from Tasso's bucolic settings in Gerusalemme Liberata. See, for instance, in line 172, the dramatisation of the opposition 'spari in profondo/ma in alto risali' (in the original text, line 172: 'So Lycidas sunk low but mounted high'; my emphasis), enhanced by both the verb 'sparire', replacing 'to sink', and the adjective 'profondo', translating 'low'; the same effect can be noted in the sequence of free verse 177-184, based on religious words and expressions ('beati', 'augusti', 'cortei', 'cerchi', 'soavi', 'peregrini', 'onda perigliosa', 'gloria', 'premio'), which are drawn from a variety of classic texts, including the Bible. Finally, although the use of verse without regular metre or line length may resemble the free verse found in the Psalms...
as E.W. Taylor has noted in 'Lycidas in Christian Time' (1983) – the English military expression 'solemn troops' (179) does not have the same subtle nuance of 'augusti cortei', which, as a product of a more ambiguous linguistic-historical background, renders both a secular parade and a religious procession.

As I have shown, Fortini's version of Lycidas represents an effective model of transposing a classic text to another tongue/literature, which relies as much on the translator's historical-literary memory as on his mastery as a poet in his own right. It is a reconsideration, or better, a rethinking and a retelling of a cultural period, which Fortini reshapes through translation, renovating the original text's motifs, style and subject as both an aesthetic and a political matrix. Rewriting provides Fortini with a technical and theoretical tool for representing cultural and epistemological variations and repetitions that break their way through forms and genres. Yet, while Fortini proves that translation can be seen as a form of historical research, he also shows that, for the modern poet, it can be viewed as a creative intervention on a text, which does not conceal its value as a new creation, a work in its own right. It is, of course, true that a scholarly translation, as opposed to a poetic one, in blurring the strict distinction between translation and authorship can better discover the historical truth of a text by making use of philological procedures. Fortini himself justifies his poetic version of Lycidas as follows: 'La [mia] versione ha inteso affrontare la tensione infelice, sghemba, tormentosa, penosa che si forma sotto l'apparenza eroica' (SI, p. 391, my emphasis).

In 'Cos'è la poesia' (1993), one of his last interviews, Fortini explains in greater detail what writing poetry entails, explaining that poetry, whether as the result of the original author's inspiration, or of the intervention of the poet as translator, is in any case a matter of intuition: 'la poesia è un ragionamento [...] fatto [...] sotto uno sguardo che tutto trasmuta, tutto apparentemente lasciando intatto.' Beyond any fictional literary symbiosis, whether 'imitative' or 'transformative', in Gérard Genette's terms, poetic translation, in fact, represented, for Fortini, an essential medium for reconciling the theoretical-speculative apparatus of his own critical writings on translation with his personal stylistic choices; he was bringing together the ideal of the measured impersonality of the translator-mediator with the

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63 See Lefevere, Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary fame and, by the same author, 'Beyond the Process: Literary Translation in Literature and Literary Theory', in M. Gaddis Rose (ed.), Translation Spectrum: Essays in Theory and Practice, Albany: State University of New York, 1981, pp. 52-59. For Lefevere, a 'version' is a translation in which the substance of the source text is retained but the form is somehow transformed.
64 Fortini, 'Che cos'è la poesia', RAI Educational.
65 For a detailed explanation of the idea of a 'second-grade' literature as a hybrid or 'inter-discursive' genre, see Gérard Genette Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré, Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1982.
specific creative and interpretative demands of the translator. In relation to Fortini's 1986 translation of Kafka's short-stories, for instance, Eva-Maria Thüne notes:

La traduzione per Fortini è un processo di trasposizione che avviene sullo sfondo delle sue letture innanzitutto di Leopardi e di Brecht, che guidano Fortini nelle sue scelte linguistiche e semantiche. La traduzione quindi colpisce non tanto per la sua fedeltà quanto per l'innovatività di alcune strutture, risultato del complesso processo di riscrittura che vi sta a monte.

I have indicated how Fortini's choices in the field of poetic translation are the essential parameters which can guide our understanding of his personal poetic discourse and stylistic traits. In the case of his translation of Milton's Lycidas, for instance, Fortini's work is neither a pseudo-translation nor an entirely scholarly solution to a philological and hermeneutic dilemma regarding the relationship between content and form. In his study, Rewriting, Christian Moraru claims: 'Intertwined with and growing from this (kind of) intertextual dialogue are other relations and tensions, where the politics of intertextuality, in general, and rewriting, in particular, come even more forcefully to the fore.' In fact, Fortini's interpretative endeavour benefits in every respect from this kind of composite relationship with his intertexts, rather than being merely an explicative enterprise, as he himself claims: 'Con la maggior parte di quei versi passata in proverbio e una critica universitaria che ne ha fatto tutto quello che c'era da dire, l'esercizio critico del traduttore è ridotto a ben poco' (NSI, p. 390). This idea involves the centrality of translation as interaction, aiming at the regeneration and recirculation of ideas and aesthetic values through the rewriting, which involves a radical questioning of the cultural, aesthetic, and ideological standards that are being transmitted.

The importance of Fortini's translations lies, without a doubt, in this dialogic approach to literature, which combines dialogue with the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, that is, a recombination of languages and genres, each creating a particular kind of experience, each with its own way of interpreting and assessing the world. In order to link Fortini's own poetry with his translation from Milton, I shall now return to his poem 'Traducendo Milton' (Paesaggio con serpente) where a metacritique of the procedure of translation can clearly be identified in the section 'Di seconda intenzione', the title of which lays emphasis on the

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66 Eliot's famous aphorism about writing poetry, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', could thus, in my view, be more applicable to Eliot's motivation for translating the work of another poet: 'Poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.'


69 See Franco Relia, 'Dallo spazio estetico allo spazio dell'interpretazione', in 'Nuova Corrente', no. 68-69, 1975-1976, p. 410. As Franco Relia claims, 'knowledge and sense can be grasped only in a dimension that transcends mere educational explanation.'
notion of translation as interpretation and therefore a secondary, concomitant ‘intention’. In this section, furthermore, the subject-matter of translation, seen as a form of creative transference with its immediate goals in the present of its own language, very obviously connects with the infratext of a previous poem, ‘Traducendo Brecht’ (Una volta per sempre, 1963), which makes reference to the same conflicting temporal dimensions (‘passato-maceria’, ‘futuro-potenza’).

Gli alberi i freddi fitti alberi grandi
e anche robusti ma tutti verbi bianchi
con palme e frecce diramate e fili
in vetta al bosco visi svelti gli alberi
lieti di gelo e rotondi, guaine
scuoiate di agro latte e le pasture
dilatate di grinami e scintille
i rivi accesii di spade vivaci
e la ventilazione delle cime. (VS, p. 284)

Dense with a Baroque, pastoral atmosphere, but having an unconventional linguistic structure, as a result of a syntax that uses no verbs and of a minimal punctuation, ‘Traducendo Milton’ represents a point of contact between Baroque poetry (Milton’s Lycidas) and Baroque painting (Poussin’s allegory in Echo and Narcissus). It falls within the author’s methodological plan for the strategies to be integrated into his own work through what he calls ‘versioni poetiche’.

3.4. Towards the Other: ‘Traducendo Brecht’
As we have seen so far, Fortini attached importance to translation that was not second to ‘first grade’ poetry. His constant commitment to this genre is proved by his extensive translations of Brecht’s theatre, and especially of Brecht’s poetry, carried out between 1951 and 1976. Indeed, in Brecht’s oeuvre Fortini encountered aesthetic and theoretical principles that he was ready to make his own. In a way, the revision of Brecht’s political and ideological standpoints through the practice of translation offered Fortini a way to assess and establish his own poetics. Yet, Fortini’s relationship to Brecht is not simply an attempt to absorb his style into both an intensive and an extensive rewriting process; this because Fortini tended to challenge and rework – rather than merely legitimising – the aesthetic and political features of the authors he translated. In this particular instance, for a Marxist poet of the late 1960s such as Fortini, Brecht represented the coherent model for socially and politically relevant art, a

70 See in RPTP, Fortini’s expression ‘poesia di secondo grado’, which refers to translation.
71 NSI, p. 390. Fortini expands these formulas as follows: ‘La maceria o spoglio è il trascorso millennio latino-cristiano, una forza-rifugio, sorta di fragile schema evocato nel momento stesso in cui si affacciano alla coscienza una barbarie remota e prossima.’

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model which, since 1945, had already cast a long-lasting influence over the emerging generation of European writers, presenting a new model of art engagée.

Although Fortini agreed with Brecht on the fact that poetry never accesses truth without pressure and demands, and that its task is therefore inevitably dialectical, he was less optimistic than his ideological referent about the factual outcomes of political art. Like Enzensberger in the 1962 essay ‘Poetry and Politics’, Fortini came to doubt whether the poet had a prescriptive function in society, and whether poetry could ever be politically relevant in relation to the kinds of readers it could effectively reach. For Fortini, the only self-evident function of poetry is to show the paradoxes that lie behind historical realities, paradoxes which other more explicative and rational methods and disciplines cannot fully explain.

In his introduction to Brecht’s Poesie e canzoni, which he co-translated with his wife Ruth Leiser, addressing the way in which Brecht constructed his didactic method on antithesis and contradictions, Fortini noted: ‘[Brecht] aggiunge forza diagrammatica di un’altra energia, quella della contrapposizione nuda, polare, fra positività e negatività, morale e civile, fisica e metafisica.’ Fortini appreciated the humanist perspective and ethicality of Brecht’s dialectic method, yet he particularly prized Brecht’s expressionism, a feature that, according to Roland Barthes in ‘The task of Brechtian Criticism’ (1956), had to be considered a ‘radical protest against the confusions of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois false Nature’. In similar vein, Fortini spoke of the alienating effects of artificiality as essential features of modernist poetry. Fortini claims:

Il fare artistico-letterario ha per oggetto se stesso e le proprie conseguenze, è transitivo e intransitivo. […] L’uso del linguaggio letterario propone, è vero, schemi di ordinamento dell’esistenza; ma quell’ordinamento viene consumato in figura, in fantasma. Per parlare in termini di psicanalisi, non si muta in ‘bisogno’ né chiede, come la ‘domanda’, la risposta. Rimane ‘desiderio’, e in questo senso contiene un elemento regressivo, giovanile o puerile. Per questo, solo nell’arte, intesa nel significato più vasto, e per essa, nell’uso letterario della forma, quell’adempimento assume la forma appunto di un oggetto a funzionamento simbolico, in cui la proposta e il proponente coincidono. (VDP, p. 12)

This extract from Fortini 1965 volume of critical essays, Verifica dei Poteri, offers an explanation of the poet-translator’s need to preserve the foreignness and strangeness of the

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72 For a fuller understanding of the philosophical referents of Fortini’s aesthetics, see G. Mazzoni, La legittimazione della poesia, in Allegoria, no.s., VIII no. 21-22, 1996, pp. 26-41.
73 Fortini, Poesie e canzoni, co-translated with Ruth Leiser, Turin: Einaudi, 1959, p. XVII.
74 Ibid., p. 139. For Brecht, the artist had to be critical, rather than partisan, spiritually exiled, rather than chauvinistic. As Barthes too notes: ‘He must cut off all illusions, even that of “Nature”: the sign must be partially arbitrary, otherwise we fall back on art of expression, an art of essentialist illusion.’ Brecht finally abandoned the anarchic components of the early experimentalism of a play such as The Threepenny Opera to put his audience directly in contact with the great German folk tradition and the Western pre-bourgeois medieval heritage.
75 See Roland Barthes, ‘The task of Brechtian criticism’ (1956), in Critical Essays, Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press, 1972, pp. 71-76. Barthes stated: ‘For Barthes, the essence of Brecht’s aesthetics is in fact based on his disapproval of the bourgeois principle of art as a false Nature, a pseudo-Physis; in the same essay, Barthes
original text, as well as to accommodate his language to the style of the source text, and calls the impact of its diversity ‘desire’. Year later, in his 1989 series of seminars, *Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica*, Fortini explained:

> Supponiamo invece che non in un ‘dopo’ temporale, rispetto all’età in cui è stato scritto quel dato testo, ma in un’altra attitudine ci si proponga di costruire/costituire un oggetto verbale che nel proprio sistema di significati o, se vogliamo, nell’‘idioletto’ del traduttore e quindi, in quello più vicino al nuovo recettore, introduca uno spostamento, uno spaesamento. Uno dei modi della traduzione, infatti, è quello che accetta l’urto del diverso. (RPTP, p. 18)

The translator’s acceptance of this cultural clash (‘urto del diverso’) conveys the idea of a translinguistic communication achieved through the intervention of a specialised translator, who will eventually produce the desired effect of ‘spaesamento’. Communication is accomplished at two different levels, the scholarly and the creative, continuously stretching the linguistic boundaries of the translator’s own ‘idioletto’, and revitalising its expressive potentials on the basis of an acquired insight into the above cited concept of otherness. Translation, then, comes to acquire an inspirational function, renewing the poet-translator’s ways of thinking and rewriting.

In order to broaden the understanding of Fortini’s methodology, some key concepts in the works of Emmanuel Lévinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty will be discussed, both theorists addressing the notion of ‘otherness’.

In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Lévinas stresses the importance of the face-to-face relationship with the Other, who, while immediate and singular is, at the same time, perceived as ‘transcendent’. The communicative act of re-writing oneself into the world is in fact the act of ‘seeing inwardness (identity) from outside’. By analogy with poetry, literary translation, as a dialogic practice, can similarly confer this ability to go beyond one’s own linguistic and cultural boundaries to reach the Other. Lévinas’s position, which indicates a need for ethical relativism in response to evidence of

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explanations that Brecht's theory of art is based on the notion of anti-Physis.' For a fuller understanding of Barthes's interest in Brecht, see also Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Marxist Literary Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 139.

76 See Schulte, *Theories of Translations*, 1992, p. 81. In ‘The task of the translator', Benjamin quotes Rudolf Pannwitz’s observations in *Die Krise der europäischen Kultur*: ‘Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works [...]The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.’

77 Ibid., p. 34. In ‘On Language and words’, Schopenhauer claimed: ‘This confirms that one thinks differently in every language, that our thinking is modified and newly tinged through the learning of each foreign language, and that polyglotism is, apart from its many immediate advantages, a direct means of educating the mind by correcting and perfecting our perceptions through the emerging diversity and refinement of concepts’.


79 In another work, *Otherwise than Being* (1974), Lévinas looks for linguistic forms, which might enable a meaningful exchange with the Other. Among these forms, he indicates poetry as the ‘externality of the inward’, or the way in which the poet’s inner obscurity translates itself into metaphors.


81 For Lévinas, the gnoseological and hermeneutical value of every creative writing act is accomplished only by a dialogic disposition to share one’s universe of meaning with others.
linguistic and cultural diversity, shows how the meanings a text acquires in translation are potentially boundless, so that the translation might, in the end, retain only a trace of the text's 'horizon'. Lévinas equates subjectivity with hospitality, and stresses the need for the individual identity to recognize the existence of the Other as fellow being. The face-to-face encounter with the Other is the primal moment from which language and poetry, as forms of communication, are born. Lévinas's ethical moment of dialogue, thus seems to be a helpful standpoint from which to assess Fortini's interest in Brecht's poetry. Brecht's influence on Fortini discloses not only how he affected his poetics and theoretical standpoints on art, but also how he stirred in him what Harold Bloom defined as 'the anxiety of influence'. The artistic dialogue between the interpreter and the text let the Other emerge as an erratic presence, a disturbing double, who inhabits the alien language of its object, while remaining at its margins.

The other work that may be considered relevant to this analysis, here, is Merleau-Ponty's La prose du monde (1952), in which the author claims that although the interpreting mind knows only itself, the world is in fact another 'self'. The book conveys the notion that the hermeneutic value of a linguistic/literary act becomes meaningful only when a reciprocal creative infiltration is achieved between writers, thus adding literariness to the rewriting process. In this course of action, translation, by building up a new hermeneutic structure around the old and the known, will provide the source text with those fresh semiotic features, which are required to enact an effective kind of rewriting.

As a literary practice similar to the making of poetry itself, poetic translation thus acquires also a gnoseological value, since from the dismantling of the text's unity, translation proceeds hermeneutically, undermining the text's inner structural characteristics, aiming at the same time at the reconstruction of the interlocutory object as a new unknown, unpredictable totality.

Fortini's version of Brecht's poem, 'The Cherry Thief', points clearly to a larger structure, which is the structure of Fortini's ideological inter-discourse. In fact, he often transferred and transformed the formal texture of Brecht's poetry, its irony and melancholy, its didacticism and metalanguage, into his own poetry. As a young writer, from 1942 to
Fortini enriched his cultural range by importing texts from French and German (Flaubert, Ramuz, Éluard, Kierkegaard, Gide) until Einaudi offered him the chance to publish (under the title Santa Giovanna dei Macelli) his first versions of Brecht’s plays. At both the linguistic and the thematic level, Brecht’s texts represent a traceable intertextual grid of his own work, from the theory of estrangement to the idea of the reader/spectator as interpreter/translator, the artist’s indispensable collaborator.

These motives are accompanied by a constant search for a dialectical truth, in poems such as ‘L’erba e l’animale’, ‘L’animale’, ‘Il merlo’, and ‘Il falso vecchio’, which are drawn from Brecht’s preference for allegory. The poem ‘Traducendo Brecht’, then, begins a sequence of compositions within the collection Una volta per sempre (1963), which have the German writer as their main character. Here, Fortini’s response to Brecht underlines his adherence both to his ideas and to the depths of the aesthetic compatibility between the two authors. The sequence is composed of eleven poems that refer to Marxist ideology and the crisis in European Communism, three of which are entitled ‘Il Comunismo’, ‘4 novembre 1956’, ‘Fine della preistoria’.

Fortini’s ‘Traducendo Brecht’ highlights the emergence of a transitional Self, built on the paradox of refashioning the old, concrete and stable voice of the source text into a hypothetical new form, based on the fragility of the present. The poem itself can be considered a metacritique of the act of translation; Fortini achieved this via a kind of bifocal viewpoint; in fact, it renders explicitly the dynamics between two texts and two poetic identities. ‘Translating Brecht’, in fact, represents a mirror-image of Fortini seated at a table, intent on his task of translating a poem by Brecht, while outside a storm is raging. The background imagery of ‘la tempesta’ emphasizes the creative effort needed to undertake this hermeneutic effort, implying a cycle of dissolution and rebirth, predicated on the alternation of hope and disenchantment, desire for salvation and fear of perdition.

On representing the violent phenomena that accompany a storm (‘lampi’, ‘acqua’) Fortini’s talk about the task of translating Brecht’s Gestalt, as the experience of rendering the text’s segregated ‘grida’, ‘membra’ and ‘piaghe’. At a linguistic level, the concreteness of

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85 Over a decade separates Fortini’s translation of L’opera da tre soldi from the publication in 1972 of Storie da calendario, abstracted from Gli affari del Signor Giulio Cesare e Storie da Calendario. In 1974, Fortini included three poems from Brecht’s vast lyric production in the appendix of Poesie scelte. Finally, in 1982, he completed and published Il ladro di ciliegie, the collection of poetic translations whose title was inspired by a poem that Brecht wrote in 1952.

86 VDP, p. 314. ‘L’importante che lo spettatore sia messo nella situazione di farsi traduttore; che dalla contemplazione di orbite apparenti e lontane egli tragga le leggi del suo proprio moto, e le pronunci per mutarle.’


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Brecht’s lyric is recomposed in a new brittle form of totally dissimilar texture (‘versi di cemento e vetro’), combining firmness with transparency. In the first strophe, the sequence of verses 6-10 indicates the poet’s state of mind, absorbing the strength of its counterpart, its ‘otherness’:

Un grande temporale
per tutto il pomeriggio si è attorcigliato
sui tetti prima di rompere in lampi, acqua.
Fissavo versi di cemento e di vetro
Dov’erano grida e piaghe murate e membra
anche di me, cui sopravvivo. Con cautela, guardando
ora i tegoli battagliati ora la pagina secca,
ascoltavo morire
la parola d’un poeta o mutarsi
in altra, non per noi più, voce. Gli oppressi
sono oppressi e tranquilli, gli oppressori tranquilli
parlano nei telefoni, l’odio è cortese, io stesso
credo di non sapere più di chi è la colpa.
Scrivi mi dico, odia
chi con dolcezza guida al niente
gli uomini e le donne che con te si accompagnano
e credono di non sapere. Fra quelli dei nemici
scrivi anche il tuo nome. Il temporale
è sparito con enfasi. La natura
per imitare le battaglie è troppo debole. La poesia
non muta nulla. Nulla è sicuro, ma scrivi. (PS, p. 125)

Fortini here names all the verbs by which the process of translating is achieved (‘guardando’, ‘ascoltavo’, ‘mutarsi’). The carefully observed concreteness of the world is made remote, strange, alien, and even frightful. The imagery of the storm plays on the idea of rewriting achieved through an agonising metamorphosis (‘la parola d’un poeta/ mutarsi in un’altra’). The line ‘La poesia non muta nulla’ negates the edifying power ascribed to poetry. The poem, therefore, does not simply suggest the idea of poetry as co-writing, that is the kind of sympoetry (poetry as sympathy, art as complementarity) theorised by Friedrich Schlegel. It represents poetry as a process of deconstruction and mutation, whose results are utterly unpredictable, as those seen after a tempest (see Fortini’s motives of ‘morire’ and ‘mutare’). In the course of the interview ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ (8 May 1993), talking about the process of writing lyric poetry, Fortini explained:

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89 It is worth underlying the connection between Fortini’s ‘tempesta’ and Montale’s use of allegory in ‘La bufera’, which also echos Dante’s ‘bufera infernale’ in Canto V of the Inferno.
90 In the translation of a poem’s content, while looking for more than mere denotative equivalencies, the translator will experience a fundamental interpretative uncertainty; in fact, in order to convey what the poem possessed in its original form and to cross cultural borders, the translator will encounter the poem on its native ground: that is, its otherness.
92 See Harold Bloom, Poetry and Repression, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, p. 2. According to Bloom’s theory, intertextuality is not an anonymous space, but a kind of heroic struggle between two leading authors in the ‘battlefield of poetic translation’.

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Ecco, qui bisognerebbe ricordare una cosa che è stata detta da un famoso critico canadese in modo paradossale ma anche in modo molto serio, che definiva la poesia lirica come quel genere di poesia nella quale l'autore finge l'assenza di pubblico, finge di parlare o di scrivere per se o tutt'al più per un tu o per un voi, come destinatari immaginari o reali, come destinatari di una epistola, come ascoltatori di una orazione. Insomma non c'è poesia lirica che non implichi la costituzione di una persona almeno a cominciare da quella che parla. Ora questa persona però non è intesa nel senso anagrafico; è colui che lo scrittore o il parlante finge sia l'autore. Insomma bisogna cercare di evitare l'inganno della identificazione che è così corrente scolasticamente.

The cited passage, which stresses the irreducible differences between one author and another in terms of a premeditated artistic mask, suggests a way to revise the definition of sympoetry that we obtained from Schlegel. Moreover, taking as inspiration Novalis's rejection of the tyranny of the classical notion of imitation, Fortini stresses the fact that in translating a given author, a poet is not practising imitatio; this is because poetic translation does not rewrite poetry: it is poetry. Although it remains clear that what is perceivable behind the act of rewriting depends to a degree on the poem's historical tradition (including that tradition's prosody, surviving themes, assortment of languages and notion of what a poem is supposed to be), and although to let these element remain active the translator must set up a dynamic exchange between the source poem and the literary tradition it plays against, when the translator of Brecht's verse, is himself a poet, like in the case of Fortini, he will not simply reproduce Brecht's themes and style: he will renews, extends and adapts Brecht's entire aesthetic and ideologic discourse to his own poetics.

As a result of the convergence of all these elements, the poet-translator will experience a paradox, since his poetic version will inevitably sound like something more than a simple translation, but at the same time it will not be a totally free exercise of the imagination. If one must still distinguish between poetic translation and first-grade poetry on this level, it is only to say that poetic translation brings to fulfilment in an equally dense and pure fashion the principles that are seen at work in poetry. For this reason, Fortini's theory of translation, from his personal perspective as poet-translator, tends to grant primacy to rewriting as a productive artistic act where nothing stable is guaranteed. The assimilation of the alien language of a given text into the poet-translator's own language – the linguistic experience of the Other – is guaranteed in fact only by his/her dialogic knowledge of the limits and risks of this enterprise. We see this expressed in the lines ‘Scrivi, mi dico, odia [...] / Fra quelli dei nemici / scrivi anche il tuo nome’ (PS, p. 125), where the notions of sameness and otherness dialectically converge. Is the poem (as a text about art, as high culture, as public language) still expected to negotiate a social function with both the poet and the readers? What is particularly relevant

See Franco Fortini, ‘Che cos'è la poesia’, RAI Educational.
here is the contrast between the resentful disenchantment of the author towards the bourgeois world of moral hypocrisy and self-deception (‘gli uomini e le donne che con te si accompagnano’), and the idealism of the act of writing and translating verse. Finally, a function is ascribed to translation, which turns the poet-translator into a figure committed to a highly problematic form of dialogue. Fortini’s voice as poet-translator is recalled, at the intertextual level, by the verb ‘scrivere’ in the imperative (‘Scrivi, mi dico […] scrivi anche il tuo nome’), indicating a shift from the poet being translated to the poet-translator. The metafunction of the translational process is intensified to the point where a gradual and clear distinction can be made between the two authors to whom the poem is referring – biographically to Brecht, and autobiographically to Fortini – so that the assimilation of the two is not achieved. Yet, undeniably, the poem is also homage to Brecht – that is, the expression of a dialogic moment established between two distinct poetic authorities, which have entered this meaningful exchange in spite of the evident linguistic, cultural and historical distances that divided them. In these circumstances, the task of the poet-translator will be also to render the Gestalt of the Other, learning to coexist at a distance. As we have seen, this dialogic relationship with the Other allows Fortini to achieve a high degree of autoreferentiality. The pathos in the poem’s final lines, ‘Fra quelli dei nemici/ scrivi anche il tuo nome’, while referring to Fortini’s intellectual and political clashes with his fellow poets, brings increasing attention to the language of literature itself, with its indexal evaluation of authors and works. Fortini helps the reader learn an essential aspect of the poetic function, which also operates in matters of translation: its level of self-deception and communicability.94

‘Traducendo Brecht’ thus locates the production of poetic effects historically, as part of the ensemble of literary practices, and existentially, as the poet-translator’s concern to building up forms of an internal contradiction. Through the translator’s practices, history and literature enter an intricate relationship of correspondences, which are both formal and ideological, thus overcoming the false dilemma of form and essence as set up externally to each other. In this metapoem, then, the internal conflict is set up to advise the reader not to consider poetic translation as a form to be studied from the standpoint of its supposed unity, which is, in fact, illusory, false.

A reflection on Fortini’s recourse to allegory is, accordingly, central to an understanding of his choices in the area of translation. In building up an image which displaces the literal meaning in favour of a conceptual one, allegory makes the creation of a

94 See Umberto Eco, La definizione dell’arte, Milan: Garzanti, 1978, p. 45. Eco quotes the definition of Gestalt provided by Stefanini: ‘l’unità del soggetto cosciente si distingue dalla sintesi che esso produce e si oggettiva a se stesso, riconosendosi non nella sintesi prodotta, ma nell’atto che pone la sintesi’. Thus the relationship between the ‘contenuto-di-coscienza’ of the hermeneutic moment is not only formal but ‘formativo’.
new order, beyond the one that it exploits, possible.\(^5\) In this perspective, the ‘tempesta’—an almost universal occurrence in saga, ballad, fairy tale and folk tale—in Fortini’s poem ‘Traducendo Brecht’ is symbolic of a hermeneutic drive to upset the old order and recreate a new one. Although Fortini’s reference to the tempest as to a literary topos of Renaissance pastoral drama is self-evident,\(^6\) it may also be a metaphor for rebellion and the restoration of political order.

The value of Fortini as a poet-translator in this case resides in his ability to compromise with the semantic message and formal qualities of the original text; by assimilating the text’s norms, he transcends them into his own ‘voice’. To write and translate verse is to establish a space for comparison and discussion between two poetic voices who remain at a safe margin of distance. Only with the awareness of this insuperable discord (‘Niente è sicuro, ma scrivi’) does the translator restore the insuppressible drive of the poetic text as an eternally productive medium, as in the closing lines: ‘La natura /per imitare le battaglie è troppo debole. La poesia /non muta nulla. Nulla è sicuro, ma scrivi’ (PS, p. 125). In fact, as in Schelling’s theory of poetry as revelation, rather than merely juxtaposing forms, the poet must rival the spirit of nature. In these lines, poetry, as an instrument of political and social change, is negatively presented as a hypothetical exercise in futility. Raising intellectual objections, Fortini advises the reader to doubt the poetic function. The poet here claims the ethical duty to make his scepticism manifest in order to warn readers against the dangers of uncritical reading: poetry can, in fact, be an unsuitable yet unavoidable political weapon (‘per imitare le battaglie è troppo debole’) as the epigrammatic line ‘Nulla è sicuro, ma scrivi’ stresses, underlying the potential irrelevance of literature.

3.5. \textit{Il ladro di ciliegie} (1983)\(^7\)

In ‘The task of the translator’, Benjamin noted how there are certain elements in the text of departure that are intentionally made incommunicable and which, therefore, demand the translator’s creative intervention:

\begin{quote}
Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much
\end{quote}


\(^7\) The title clarifies the composite nature of this volume, accomplished on the basis of a linguistic-cultural diversification of styles and literary traditions. The anthology has a stratified content, which ranges from Góngora, Milton, and Goethe, to Baudelaire, Rilke, Éluard, Enzensberger, Heine, Brecht, Attila József, Mandelstham and Kao Che. Fortini’s versions were particularly influential in establishing the reputation of Brecht, Éluard and Simone Weil.
from its life as from its after-life. [...] There remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated.98

It is useful to discuss Benjamin's point of view on translation by examining Brecht's poem thematically, since it legitimises a theory of paraphrase as appropriation, or interference: 'It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work.' (my emphasis).99 He/she must pay attention to the elements that the text disperses (the cherries), rather than to the ones the original author contemplated (the tree). Like an extract from an ideological memoir, the poem gives the reader an allegorical account of Brecht's classification of socio-economic categories. The thief's appropriation of another man's property thus alludes to a whole spectrum of speculative transitions, involving the articulation of different genres, literary conventions and rules. Now let's us examine Fortini's version:

Una mattina presto, molto prima del canto del gallo,
mi svegliò un fischietto e andai alla finestra.
Sul mio ciliegio — il crepuscolo empiva il giardino —
c'era seduto un giovane, con un paio di calzoni sdruciti,
e allegro coglieva le mie ciliegie. Vedendomi
mi fece cenno col capo, a due mani
passando le ciliegie dai rami alle sue tasche.
Per lungo tempo ancora, che già ero tornato a giacere nel mio letto,
lo sentii che fischiettava la sua allegra canzonetta. (LDC, p. 103)

The poem introduces the circumstance of a needy young man who is caught stealing cherries from a tree in the narrator's garden, while whistling a tune in a mood of uninhibited pleasure. Paradoxically, the thief does not appear to be furtive, nor does he show any fear of the owner — rather, he greets him with atypical courtesy, as though he is following Brecht's aphorism 'Grub first, then ethics'; the dawn light in the garden helps to create an atmosphere of unreality. Equally inexplicably, the owner of the cherry tree — the landlord or Brecht — not troubling himself too much about the theft, goes back to bed. The social and economic differences between the two men are clearly established by their symbolic relationship, as well as by the lack of an explicit moral to the story, which exists only in the poem's subtext: even though the young man is going against the law, he is frank and well-mannered. This kind of reversed logic seems to imply paradoxically that the thief's misfortunes will find

98 Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator', in Illuminations, p. 156.
99 Ibid., p. 156. In the case of 'Il ladro di ciliegie', Fortini takes up Brecht's ideological discussion through the rewriting of the socio-historical ambience and values of the original; he thereby presents a particular model of discourse, which the dialogic practice of translation allows, and reactivates it through his ideological empathy with Lukács and the German Marxist thinkers, especially Adorno.
pardon and favour in the world of rich people. This vision of utopia may be a resolution between existential demands and a repressive external reality, which can only be illusory.100

Alongside the theme of class injustice, there is also recognition of society as the place of hypocrisy: the young thief is indeed far from realising that the world pardons nothing more reluctantly than it does misfortune. As Barthes claims in Image-Music-Text, there are gestures that are social, and Brecht's thief, here, performs exactly what Barthes considers a social gesture.101

Brecht tries to smooth down the theoretical impact of his socialist realism by creating a dream-like atmosphere, which Fortini translates with the even more lofty and velvety term 'crepuscolo', renouncing the more literal 'alba grigia'. The prolific didactic elements, which originate in Brecht's allegorical representation of the cherry thief, provide us with a whole range of linked oppositions to unravel: true/false, realistic/unrealistic, and legitimate/illegitimate.102 The allegory also shows that what happens to proverbs is also observable in the language of poetry and poetic translation, both open to the proliferation of meaning and interpretations.

In this version, written in 1956, the effect of 'interference' in Fortini's idea of authorial translation ('voce che risuona dentro la voce', NSI, p. 382) is achieved by the detached and cordial tone with which the bourgeois landlord and the young proletarian thief interact. On a symbolic and metatextual level, the tree represents the social hierarchy, or the succession of generations. The allegory of the tree as the axis of economic life thus suggests a clash of interests between the two men (metaphorically representing the poet and his translator) that ends in a non-antagonistic exchange; Brecht leaves the poor young man to take the fruits of a tree which exists to be cheerfully 'robbed'.

Brecht's political and metacritical allegory of the cherry tree may thus represent the theft of the succulent fruits of tradition perpetrated by young predatory avant-garde writers. The poem seems to convey positively the content of the German proverb 'Wenn Hand etwas gern hatte, scheut Hand keine Mühe' ('if the hand likes something it spares no pains to get it'), which concerns the ability to get to the top of a tree and to gain access to its fruit. Logically, the owner's complacency in letting the happy thief go on stealing cherries from his garden echoes the self-referentiality of Brecht's representation, which alludes to the tree of the literary tradition that he, as a new expressionist writer, has exploited. Fortini too adeptly

100 On the critical function of literary theft, parody and rewriting ('il falso consacrante'), see G. Almans and G. Fink, Quasi Come - Parodia come letteratura, letteratura come parodia, Milan: Bompiani, 1976.
101 Barthes, Image-Music-Text, p. 74. Barthes writes: 'there is nothing social in the movements a man makes in order to brush off a fly; but if this same man, poorly dressed, is struggling against a guard-dogs, the 'gest' becomes social'.
102 Fredric Jameson, Brecht and Method, London: Verso, 1998, p. 131. Jameson claims: 'Certainly the proverbial structure of the Brechtian verse, or enunciation has often been remarked on (and sometimes attributed, along with the so-called 'simplicity' of his language, to the Bible, of which he was an avid reader in his youth.) [...]
embellishes the poor man's illegal appropriation by conferring him the attractive and mysterious self-confidence of the young artist. As in Barthes's The Death of the Author, this multi-dimensional tale may imply that once the original owner has been removed any 'claim to decipher a text' strictly 'becomes quite futile.' The allegory could indeed underline a discourse addressing issues such as 'rewriting' and 'plagiarism', since it points towards illegitimate appropriation. As Luperini noted in one of our conversations, referring to a previous discussion with Fortini on this matter, the author may have borrowed this Brechtian idea and exploited it in the poem 'Ars poetica' ('Tu ladro di parole', quoted in 2.1), although perhaps more sarcastically and less didactically, allowing both the thief to get on with his task and the reader to draw his/her own conclusion as to the moral of the story.

In this ethics of tolerance, the 'rifacimento' is no longer regarded as theft, or as a clash of interests, but rather as an act of intertextual alliance. Brecht's utopia rests on this pact: beauty and the manner in which this pact is formed inherently turns into a negation in the capitalist world. The rendering of a subjective experience into a utopian restructuring of existence, tradition, and aesthetic value, according to this poem, is predicated on an idealistic form of solidarity which is anthropologically repressed. By successfully transporting and enhancing the poem's stylistic traits, Fortini's version retains a balance between the allegorical and the metatextual.

Through the accurate and inspired translation of the style and content of Brecht's poems, Fortini may have asked himself whether his Marxist art was not inseparably tied to the process of transition from capitalism to socialism, as we also read in his poem 'Piazza Madonna', from Questo Muro (1973), another intertextual allusion to Brecht: 'dei mercati dove Novembre/ sodomita cuore arroste e battono/ coi ferri le grate e le braci [...] Il macellaio ritira dal marmo la carne'/ [...] 'Si abbatte la fatica dei misteri inutili' [...] 'Questo teatro è di spiriti accaniti/ che ti tengono le vesti ti baciano e tu li calpesti' (PS, p. 165-166). The considerable impact of Brecht on Fortini's own poetry should therefore be acknowledged also in relation to his own theory of translation (PRT). In fact, Fortini's adoption of the title Il ladro di ciliegie for his 1983 collection of verse translations informs the reader of the spirit in which he draws near to the 'fruits' of Brecht's poetics.

In Leggere e scrivere, a critical text published in 1993, Fortini underlined the reasons for a poet-translator to enter the 'hermeneutic circle', with its all-pervading intertextuality: 'Le scritture saggistiche, gli interventi ideologici della pubblicistica, gli scritti letterari in poesia e prosa, i discorsi critici, pongono questioni d'interpretazione che il loro autore potrebbe one to the 'hermeneutic circle', with its all-pervading intertextuality: 'Le scritture saggistiche, gli interventi ideologici della pubblicistica, gli scritti letterari in poesia e prosa, i discorsi critici, pongono questioni d'interpretazione che il loro autore potrebbe...
affrontare quasi solo a patto di riscriverli e di citarsi in continuazione’ (FLS, p. 8). Although translation activates this circle by its very nature, in order to render a deeper kind of textual value, the poet-translator must build up not only a hermeneutic perspective, but also an artistic one. In fact, while the value of translation as a social and cultural service does merit rewards, for Fortini it was, in many respects, an activity as essential to him as being a poet. Fortini explains:

Oggi si insiste sull’idea che la traduzione debba essere una collisione che deve verificarsi tra la lingua-cultura dell’opera tradotta e l’idioleto del traduttore, la sua lingua privata. L’estraneo collide solo con il linguaggio esclusivo del traduttore. […] Quanto più l’attività poetica diventa un’avventura di un’anima, tanto meno forte diventa il rapporto tra la lingua del poeta e la sua lingua nazionale. E, dunque, tanto più importante diventa, ad esempio, la lingua di Montale, il ‘montalese’. […] Montale continuava ad annettere il montalese al lavoro di traduttore. (FLS, p. 70)

At the level of creativity, Fortini’s Babel in Il ladro di ciliegie represents more than a collection of literary sources that interested him in his recreation of the plurilingual European tradition: its symbolic assemblage of authors, styles, and languages appears as a metaphor for the author’s rejection of any hypothesis of textual indecipherability, assigning a positive connotation to the interdisciplinary treatment of languages and traditions within the practice of translation. It is important to cite, at this point, Ortega’s idea of the practice of translation as ‘the revelation of the mutual secrets that people and epochs keep to themselves and which contribute so much to their separation and hostility’. Fortini too seems to reach an understanding of translation as an artistic act equivalent to political negotiation. Ortega y Gasset’s fictional interlocutor – ‘the great linguist’ – quotes Schleiermacher, to remind us of the following:

A translation can move in either direction: either the author is brought to the language of the reader, or the reader is carried to the language of the author. In the first case, we do not translate, in the proper sense of the word; we in fact do an imitation, or a paraphrase of the original text. It is only when we force the reader from his linguistic habits and oblige him to move within those of the author that there is actually translation.

Ortega y Gasset stretches his theory to the point of viewing translation as a ‘technical device’, claiming that translation is not and should not try to be a duplicate of the original text. He believes that translation does not even belong to the same literary genre as the original text, being a genre apart, with its own norms and tasks, which are both poetical and analytical. It is

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104 Fortini received a prestigious award in the first round (1971) of the ‘Premio Città di Monselice’ for his highly respected version of Goethe’s Faust, published by Mondadori, in May 1970.
105 Schulte, Theories of Translation, p. 104.
106 Ortega y Gasset, ‘La Miseria y el esplendor de la traducción’, Section 5, in Schulte, Theories of Translation, p. 108.
this theory that assisted Fortini in his translation of authors as diverse as Goethe, Milton, Éluard and Brecht; he treated translation indeed as an advanced type of literary criticism, representing a fusion of the creative and the critical. Fortini’s work as poet and translator appears to belong partly to this latter category, the critical — which opts for a comparative/interpretative approach, seeing translation as a multilayered network of allusions, mutually related motifs and forms within a set of thematic bonds, which imply the revitalisation of pre-existing texts — and to the former category defined by Benjamin’s faith in the translator’s creativity. Having worked at the translation of Goethe’s Faust over a period of five years, from 1967 to 1970, Fortini defined his commitment to this task ‘un’impresa mostruosa’, ‘un invito al suicidio’. In ‘Venture e sventure di un traduttore’, he wrote:

Io mi trovavo di fronte a testi estremamente ardui, per cui chiesi all’editore di essere affiancato da un germanista; questo germanista è Cesare Cases, mio carissimo amico e docente all’università di Torino. Cases ha compiuto con me, e per me, un’opera assolutamente straordinaria: io traducevo, gli spedivo a Torino il mio lavoro dattiloscritto, e lui rispondeva con una puntigliosa analisi parola per parola.[…] Cases recalcitrava tutte le volte che poteva comparire l’intenzione da parte del traduttore di un’eccessiva modernizzazione del testo antico.[…] mi tirava per la giacca tutte le volte che io eccedevo verso la modernità.\textsuperscript{107}

This extract sheds light on Fortini’s theory of literary translation, which seems to be structured around both communicative and scholarly aims. As I have shown, this theory is not solely concerned with reproducing the literal intention of the translated author, nor with what he/she conceals, but with producing a valuable new text, which may remain close to the essential properties of the original. There is, therefore, a partly creative and a partly philological relationship between the literary/linguistic conventions of the culture of the translator and the literary/linguistic conventions of the original text. Yet, translation tends to escape the translator’s \textit{intentio} and reach instead what for Benjamin was the ‘pure language’ of art. It therefore manifests a tendency to transform the foreign text into an original intention, that is a new independent signification. Fidelity and freedom, in Fortini’s words, keep being traditionally described as conflicting and irreconcilable tendencies.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{107} See Fortini, \textit{L’ospite ingrato: La traduzione}, p. 296.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 296.
Conclusions

Since, in this thesis, I set out to investigate the relationship between Fortini’s theoretical writings, his poetry and his poetic translations, believing there to be a close correspondence, it is appropriate to conclude the analysis of this third chapter by emphasising the following: although as a poet, Fortini may seem to have given precedence to the creative moment, the method he often employed in his scholarly translations – as in the case of his version of Goethe’s Faust – never failed to offer a comparative analysis of the way in which the sign system in this work interacted with those systems belonging to his linguistic and cultural universe as poet-translator; invariably, then, he assigned an essential value to the evolution of forms both across space and time and across languages.

In the course of this analysis, I have therefore considered a number of problems and features of Fortini’s work as critic, poet and literary translator. I have shown how, when literary theory becomes vitally engaged with the living spirit of poetry, it rejects barren conceptual enquiry, becoming concrete rather than abstract, as was proved by the importance Fortini attributed to his creative life as both poet and poet-translator; hence, my discussion of the thematic and stylistic features of Fortini’s oeuvre related to the substantial impact of literary theory and theory of translation on his frame of mind. Since literary theory, political beliefs, and ideological criticism have been shown to be bound up with Fortini’s poetry and translation, I explained in what ways the specialist languages of these genres influenced, in their turn, his essay writing.

The aim of the first chapter was to provide an idea of the kind of writing that Fortini was producing at the speculative level from the end of the Second World War on. Its central hypothesis was that, in Fortini’s work, the relationship between criticism, poetry and translation was one of constant reciprocal influence, where each became the grounding esprit of the other. This structural reciprocity was closely analysed in relation to a number of essays and articles composed within a particular temporal framework, that coinciding with the cultural and political crisis of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the second chapter, the main focus of my study, related to the first, discussed Fortini’s engagement as a Marxist poet. This chapter traces the development of Fortini’s poetic craft from the earliest poems in Foglio di via (1947), I destini generali (1956) and La poesia delle rose (1962) to the creation of Paesaggio con Serpente (1984), Versi scelti (1990) and Composita Solvantur (1994), covering, concisely and accurately, the major themes of his poetry. Here, I considered Fortini’s poetry in a later phase of his career, showing how it began to assume – over and above its being merely devoted to a modern redeployment of the classics – some of the characteristics of the historical avant-gardes, from French Surrealism to German Expressionism; hence, new modes of thinking about politics and society without
excluding the poet’s need to face issues of subjectivity and the unconscious. Thorough section 2.4, I therefore focussed on Fortini’s *La poesia delle rose* (1962), referring to a wide range of secondary references to clarify certain previously unacknowledged expressionistic features of the poem. While admitting that existentialist themes of political dissidence dominate Fortini’s later expressionist work as a whole, I have presented the poems as such with little biographical filler.

Although I moved through Fortini’s oeuvre chronologically, each chapter also addressed a particular theme in his poetic development. The third chapter was not only framed by the years his translations appeared, but held together through a discussion of the author’s creation of three interrelated cycles of discourse, allowing an interplay of themes and images. As a result, the investigation in the third chapter concerned the role of translation when set between essay writing and poetry as concurrent literary genres. My arguments aimed to demonstrate how, in Fortini’s view, translation was both a servile practice for the promotion and circulation of foreign ideas and poetics, and a private, self-referential exercise, that is, a means of developing his own poetry through the closeness with other authors’ subject matters, themes and techniques.

Literary influence alone is never enough, of course, to account for what a poet writes about and how he writes, yet Fortini was never reluctant to acknowledge these influences, and to admit, on several occasions, that he realised his poetic gifts best through translating. Speaking of the vicarious satisfaction he enjoyed in translating poetry, Fortini also stressed how healthy it is, for a poet, to get outside the Self by attempting to create a fictional poetic Self through ‘rifacimento’. Instances of such proved to be plentiful in Fortini’s work: in fact, as I have indicated in this final third chapter, translating Milton, Goethe and Brecht led Fortini to write a number of poems, explicitly connected.

Innumerable poems from collections as diverse as *Questo muro*, *Paesaggio con Serpente*, and *Composita Sovantur*, were written under the influence of Brecht’s ideological vision and aesthetical representation of contemporary Europe, and I have shown in detail the dialectics of this artistic liaison. It was thus clear that for the author, writing a poem such as ‘Traducendo Milton’ or ‘Traducendo Brecht’ implied the creation of an ‘alter-ego interpellativo’, that is, a trans-individual poetic identity. Indeed, some critics have spoken of Fortini as the ‘Italian Brecht’. In order to substantiate this assertion, Brecht’s influence on Fortini through his poetic translation was represented in an individual section of the third chapter. Here, Fortini’s critical stance and use of Marxist critique were pertinent. I do not believe, however, that the influence of Brecht on his choice of themes and style made Fortini any less an original poet. Indeed, the fundamental characteristics I have noted as typical of Fortini’s rewriting of Brecht’s poetry are not exclusively German and certainly not
exclusively Brechtian, but, largely and distinctively, his own. It was important to reiterate, then, how in Fortini's theory of translation, discussed in the third chapter, the technical problems of rendering the all-encompassing constituents of a given text led to a final view of translation as a communicative process, shifting from one poet’s Weltanschauung to the other’s, in order to achieve a regenerating of poetic skills and competencies. Thus, the task of the translator ultimately is ‘to release in his own language the pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.’

The general aim of this research has perhaps been somewhat ambitious; certainly, as I have shown, Fortini’s oeuvre requires us, as interpreters, to be conscious of its methodological density. The high level of unity in Fortini’s work should not be seen as inhibiting; rather, from the very beginning, his mutually compatible techniques, applying Marxist critique to poetry and translation, informed and stimulated my investigation into in the plurality of his discourse, enabling me to test both the cultural paradigms that made Fortini’s three chosen genres cohere, and the conditions of the historical events and influences, which produced their interaction.

In writing the conclusion to my research thesis I am aware of the vast amount of material left undiscussed. Yet, I am confident that, beyond simply restating the meaning of Fortini’s intellectual and ideological stance in twentieth-century Italian Literature, my consideration of the infratextuality in his work has presented a series of new perspectives, which will contribute to giving a wider sense of its aesthetic appeal. Moreover, I will consider my aim to construct a coherent theory of the correspondence of genres and languages in Fortini’s oeuvre partly achieved if the avenues of research and unsolved questions outlined in this thesis serve subsequently as a starting point for further theoretical reflections and investigation.

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109 Reflecting upon the dichotomical components of every theory of translation, Fortini claims 'Quello che rovina ogni discorso sulla traduzione è il dualismo di volere contrapporre un testo a un altro e voler creare un momento di partenza e uno di arrivo.' (RPTP, p. 18)

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Appendix to
Essay writing, lyric diction and poetic translation
in the work of Franco Fortini

by
Erminia Passannanti
A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
PhD

University College London
2004
Realtà e paradosso della traduzione poetica
(Napoli, 1989)

Cosi, dunque come da un'altra riva,
è possibile la letteratura.

VDP, 1965.

Trascrizione di stralci discorsivi tratti dalla registrazione su nastro magnetico di una serie di quattro lezioni di un seminario sulle metodologie traduttologiche, tenute da Fortini presso l'Istituto di Studi Filosofici dell'Università di Napoli, nell'inverno del 1989.

I (Napoli, 20/23. 11. 1989)

Quando ero ragazzo vidi una volta una vignetta che rappresentava un pittore che si apprestava a preparare una mostra con un paesaggio di una grande veduta lungo venti metri, che poi tagliava a fette per farne, di ciascuna, altrettanti quadri. È l'immagine che mi è venuta in mente, pensando alla divisione degli argomenti delle quattro lezioni di seminario, che intendo tenere. Si tratta di un paesaggio vastissimo e complesso, e quindi la suddivisione, piuttosto che essere quella indicata nei titoli, sarà quella determinata dalla vostra pazienza. Dividerò anch'io il paesaggio in quattro parti, ma non so ancora bene dove taglierò questa lunga striscia che mi si presenta. Voi sapete che, soprattutto nel corso degli ultimi quindici anni, l'interesse per i problemi teorici della traduzione è cresciuto moltissimo nel nostro Paese: non si contano i convegni, le riviste in preparazione o già in corso, gli studi, i corsi universitari. Tutto questo non accadeva una ventina di anni fa, tanto che eravamo tributari di testi stranieri: per esempio, pensate che un libro come il *Dopo Babele*, di Giorgio Stainer, che ritengo assolutamente straordinario (anche se molto criticabile) non trovò a lungo nessun editore italiano disposto a pubblicarlo nonostante le mie insistenze, per cui continuai a battere presso due o tre degli editori maggiori e poi alla fine ne uscì una traduzione abbastanza infelice con Rizzoli, della quale, tuttavia, ho l'impressione che nessuno si sia accorto.

Entrò, dunque, in argomento: da un punto di vista teorico, quanto più è sviluppata la consapevolezza della dimensione storica delle diverse culture, della pluralità dei ceppi e delle discendenze culturali, (penso alla tradizione occidentale che ha incontrato e ricevuto le culture delle proprie medesime origini medievali e dei continenti vicini, in particolare quelle asiatiche, e penso al Settecento di Vico e di Herder), tanto più la traduzione, che si era proposta per un millennio di anettere e di assimilare ciò che era diverso e lontano, cominciò ad avvertire il bisogno di restituire la specificità e le diversità dei testi che traduceva. Prima ancora di un esotismo dello spazio, si farà sempre più vivo un esotismo del tempo, con la tendenza a tradurre dall’epica alto-medievale europea, vera o d’imitazione, come Ossian – penso alla versione della cultura araba persiana, indiana, cinese e giapponese, che cominciano ad infittirsi, soprattutto negli ultimi decenni del Settecento – versioni che non avranno più nulla a che spartire con quanto era già pervenuto in periodi precedenti nei travestimenti classicistici; bastì pensare, in questo senso, a traduzioni come la celebre versione in francese de *Le mille e una Notte*, che ha fatto testo per molto tempo, ma che nelle prime decadi dell’Ottocento era già nettamente superata.

Proprio nel volume dello Stainer, del 1975, che dinanzi citavo, si legge ‘Tali esperimenti di sincronicità sono, nell’Ottocento, tra gli episodi più illuminanti. Ne troviamo parecchi nel periodo 1820-30, probabilmente su suggerimento dello storicismo romantico, nel tentativo, che è evidente negli scritti storici da Herder a Michelet, di penetrare e di ricatturare la coscienza interiore di un passato circostanziato.’ È il periodo in cui, per esempio, Leopardi si propone di tradurre Erodoto in italiano medievale al solo fine di europeizzarlo, così come avevano fatto gli umanisti del Cinquecento. E aggiungo: di quegli esperimenti di sincronicità, la storia della traduzione ne mostra esempi fino ai nostri giorni; penso, ad esempio, alla *Divina Commedia*, tradotta in francese arcaico da Pezlar (e mi permetto, con leggerezza, di dire che è quasi da ridere), o la traduzione, notevolissima, della *Divina Commedia* del
Boccard, che è tradotta da un’immaginaria lingua tedesca pre-luterana. Insomma, più il traduttore avrà a che fare con Zeus, invece che con Giove, e con la poesia vedica o celtica, invece che con quella di Orazio o di Racine, tanto più la diversità tenderà a prevalere sulla somiglianza e sull’assimilazione. In questi casi, la traduzione tenderà a porsi come servizio e anche, in un certo senso, come nota a piè di pagina. E la presenza del traduttore tenderà a diminuire, in questo senso, rifacendosi anche alla tradizione dell’ermeneutica biblica (parlo dell’ermeneutica soprattutto protestante, a partire dalla Riforma, che si proponeva la decifrazione letterale del testo sacro e cercava di ridurlo al minimo la presenza del traduttore). Se si guarda alla storia della traduzione in Italia tra il 1820-40, fino ai primi del nostro secolo, si vedrà che questa contraddizione di cui sto parlando tra la traduzione che possiamo chiamare ‘poetica’ e una traduzione che si pone invece come servizio, è forte e positiva: pensiamo, da un lato, alle versioni di Scalvini (che traduce il Faust), Tommaso, e su questa strada, alle versioni di Carducci, fino a quelle del Pascoli; e, dall’altro, alla linea filologico-storica, che va da Leopardi a Settembrini, o da Acri a Vagimigli, non senza scambi tra queste due funzioni.

Sul versante opposto di questa biforcazione c’è l’attitudine di chi vuole appropriarsi del testo, ridurre il diverso al simile, mirando a costituire un testo in traduzione che può recindere ogni rapporto ‘visibile’ con quello che l’ha originato o suggerito. In questo secondo caso, quella specie di ‘imperialismo innato’, o chiamiamolo di sicurezza nella solidità e durata della cultura d’arrivo, decresce fino a sparire. Da Annibalcaro al Foscolo, l’atteggiamento dominante della nostra traduzione è stato quello di un’assoluta sicurezza – ed ecco perché parlo di ‘imperialismo’ – nella forza e nell’omogeneità della lingua-cultura di testi greci nel Settecento, che non differivano in nulla, dal punto di vista stilistico e formale, dalle odi del tempo. Ci si appropriava, dunque, totalmente, del testo straniero, e la stessa cosa si verifica pressappoco fino al Foscolo. Ci si trova dinanzi al caso limite delle ‘imitazioni’. Si pensi all’imitazione leopardiana nella bellissima poesia che s’intitola, appunto, ‘Imitazione’ (e non ‘traduzione’), e che fa sfoggio di una tecnica, condotta da Leopardi molto lucidamente, che si costituisce come un caso di appropiazione ‘autoriale’. Il fenomeno è continuato a lungo, anche nel nostro secolo, e continua fino ad oggi come nel caso di chi vi parla in una situazione di aperta malafede, diciamo, o di doppia coscienza, che è coscienza contraddittoria: faccio, in pratica, quello che so di non dover fare. Montale, ad esempio, questi problemi non se li è mai posti, e si è tranquillamente appropriato del testo altrui, e ha inserito totalmente se stesso nelle proprie versioni, fino a potere recindere, per dire così, il cordone che collegava la traduzione col testo originale. Non è un caso che, nell’edizione curata da Contini dell’opera omnia, le versioni montaliane non siano accompagnate dal testo a fronte, e questo per esplicita volontà dello stesso Montale. Dopo che Montale aveva pubblicato le sue traduzioni con il testo a fronte, quando si trattò di fare l’edizione dell’intera opera in versi, i testi a fronte si omisero. C’è in Montale la coscienza di quest’appropriazione. Qui bisognerebbe fare un’osservazione: José Ortega Y Gasset ricorda che Schleiermacher aveva a suo tempo affermato che la traduzione è un movimento che può darsi in due direzioni opposte, o portando l’autore al linguaggio del lettore, o il lettore al linguaggio dell’autore. Così dicendo, Schleiermacher ci dimostra d’essere proprio sul discrimine storico di cui sto parlando, qualcosa che si determina, per dir così, tra la fine del Settecento e il primo trentennio dell’Ottocento. A conferma di quanto vado dicendo, è singolare che il pensatore spagnolo, Ortega, che cita Schleiermacher, dinanzi a questa doppia via proposta dal teologo tedesco attraverso la celebre frase ‘O si va dall’autore al lettore o si va dal lettore all’autore’, decida (e siamo pressappoco negli anni Trenta del nostro secolo) che la sola vera traduzione è quella nella quale si porta il lettore al linguaggio dell’autore, cioè quando si strappa il lettore alle sue consuetudini linguistiche.

È singolare che proprio questa volontà di tradurre in modo da strappare il lettore futuro ai suoi abiti linguistici è, negli stessi anni, sostenuta anche da Walter Benjamin: si considera,
in altre parole, definitivamente chiusa la lunga epoca secolare della traduzione come ‘appropriazione’, e siamo invece entrati nell’era della traduzione come ‘collisione’ tra due lingue. Ma che cosa è accaduto nel frattempo (ed ecco perché ho citato Montale, ma avrei potuto citare molti altri poeti traduttori di poesia nel nostro secolo)? Mentre nell’età romantica si trattava di fare urtare la lingua-cultura di partenza con una lingua-cultura d’arrivo – e queste cose erano appunto chiarissime nella mente di Goethe e nel pensiero della filosofia classica tedesca – oggi s’insiste sull’idea che la traduzione debba essere una collusione e non un’appropriazione, ma la collusione non avviene più tra due lingue-cultura, bensì fra una lingua-cultura, quella dell’autore tradotto, e quello che si chiama l’idiolettto del traduttore, la sua lingua privata: lo straniero collide solo con il linguaggio privato del traduttore: come a dire che Montale è il presidente della repubblica montaliana, della lingua Montaliana e che il rapporto sarà un rapporto d’appropriazione, laddove Montale chiede al testo spagnolo, inglese o francese che traduce il passaporto nella sua lingua; mentre, invece, nella traduzione romantica si trattava di fare urtare e di manifestare il conflitto fra la propria lingua-cultura e le altre lingue. Lo affermano Schleiermacher, Ortega, Benjamin: il lettore deve sentire che ciò che è tradotto fa violenza alla lingua e alla cultura di partenza. Quindi, non di tratta solo di due posizioni, quella che è appartenuta alla tradizione forte delle culture europee (sarebbe a dire della tradizione umanistica, per la quale ci si appropriava dello straniero, lo si portava in ceppi, per dir così, nella propria lingua, lo si trascinava a servire nella lingua di questa grande età, che va dal nostro Cinquecento all’inizio dell’Ottocento), e quella che spunta nell’età goethiana, per la quale si deve manifestare il conflitto.

Ma non c’è solo quest’opposizione binaria. C’è che, ad un certo momento – ed è questo, sì badi bene, il vero punto importante, significativo – quanto più l’attività poetica diventa avventura di un’anima, tanto meno forte diventa il rapporto tra la lingua del poeta e la lingua nazionale del poeta,...tanto più importante diventa, quindi, la lingua di D’Annunzio, di Ungaretti, di Montale (starei per dire, il ‘montalese’, l’‘ungarettese’, e via dicendo...). Alfred De Vigny, mentre traduceva Shakespeare, a chi gli chiedeva se conoscesse l’inglese rispondeva ‘No, io non conosco l’inglese, conosco lo shakespeare’. Questo spiega il perché continui a sussistere – come in quei Quaderni di traduzione di alcuni poeti-traduttori contemporanei, pubblicati da Einaudi quattro anni fa, uno dei quali sono io – una sorta d’appropriazione che, in termini storici, non avrebbe più ragione di esistere. L’imperialismo linguistico e culturale italiano, francese, o tedesco, che dir si voglia, non ha più ragione di esistere: è finito questo sogno. I maggiori poeti-traduttori, o filosofi-traduttori d’Europa traducono per rendere evidenti le differenze, non le somiglianze. Tuttavia, il fenomeno si riproduce all’interno delle singole opere poetiche: in pratica, Montale continua ad annettere al montalese gli autori che traduce.

Riprendiamo, a questo punto, certe celebri osservazioni goethiane: nel 1819, Goethe scrive che, secondo lui, vi sono tre livelli della traduzione (ed è curiosa questa tripartizione nella mente goethiana che non è tanto favorevole alle tripartizioni, quanto alle bipartizioni: il primo è quello della traduzione ‘didascalica’, verbum verba; poi c’è la traduzione ‘per sostituzione’, che abbiglia il testo di partenza con una veste indigena, una veste consona alla propria tradizione, quella che ha detto esistere nella tradizione classica umanistica italiana. Goethe chiama ‘parodica’ questa seconda traduzione, ma è chiaro che non bisogna intendere questo termine come una traduzione volta al ridicolo. Quindi, Goethe propone un terzo livello di traduzione, la più alta forma, che con una formula splendida definisce ‘una versione che non sta in vece dell’altro, ma sta al suo posto’, e che abbandona, quindi, ogni preoccupazione di potersi integrare ad una cultura, ad un ambiente, e conserva, in una certa misura, le doti d’estraneità dell’originale; si noti, quindi, il rapporto dialettico di questa tripartizione.

Benjamin, in pagine famose del suo saggio sulla traduzione, ha parlato di un modello ideale di traduzione interlineare – in sostanza quello che si basa sul modello dell’ermeneutica sulla Bibbia – quale forma che accresce le doti d’estraneità. Tanto Goethe quanto Benjamin formulano l’ipotesi di tre stadi del tradurre, perché sentono come fosse divenuta precaria, nel secolo che li divide e che nello stesso tempo li unisce, la possibilità di attribuire una veste indigena al testo tradotto e farne un riferimento alla propria traduzione letteraria. Entrambi
ritengono di superare questo limite con un terzo stadio o ‘momento’ superiore, in cui la traduzione si pone non in vece dell’altro, bensì al suo posto. Ma escludendo la traduzione ‘didascalica’, che è sempre esistita e sempre esisterà a livello scolastico, queste due vie, la seconda e la terza non possono conciliarsi o coesistere.

Vediamo, allora, cosa accade alla traduzione tra il 1770 e il 1830, nel cinquantennio delle grandi rivoluzioni, epoca in cui l’Europa registra la presenza simultanea di forti tradizioni preternazionali nel classicismo italiano, in quello francese, in quello iberico, i quali forniscono lessico e metro ad una materia aliena: si pensi a tutte le versioni dell’Ossian, inclusa quella realizzata dal nostro Cesarotti. In quel periodo, l’Europa si pregiava del lavoro di alcuni eroi solitari e aquilini della letteratura mondiale, che si esercitavano a tradurre in uno stile assolutamente estraneo alla traduzione del classicismo, tra questi il nostro Scalvini. Se si prende la traduzione del primo Faust, fornita da Scalvini, che è una traduzione straordinaria perché rinuncia, nei termini che sarebbero stati, per esempio, quelli di uno dei suoi grandi maestri, il Foscolo, si vede come egli rinunci ad appropriarsi del testo tedesco e ‘capitoli’ dinanzi al testo tedesco, traducendo, in parte in prosa e in parte in versi, facendo cozzare elementi linguistici totalmente diversi, elementi di tradizione classicistica, che erano i suoi con altri stilemi estranei, riuscendo così, miracolosamente, a riprodurre degli aspetti fondamentali della poesia goethiana, in particolare quella del primo Faust, che vive, appunto, di questi cozz. E non è un caso che, come me, Montale abbia avuto viva stima della traduzione del Faust di Scalvini: insomma, sono due anime, quelle compresenti in questa egregia traduzione, che si riproducono in modo impressionante nel grande Tommaseo. Anche Tommaseo traduce in modo ‘lacerato’ quando offre le sue versioni dei canti popolari lirici greci o corsi. Su questa possibilità si avventa tutto il latino di cui aveva piena la testa, e il risultato è uno straordinario, potenzissimo intruglio nel quale traspare un alcunché di barbarico, di selvaggio, e d’ignoto alla tradizione italiana – penso soprattutto ai canti greci del Tommaseo – e tutto ciò si mescola in modo strano con il latino della vulgata che, evidentemente, Tommaseo aveva nell’orecchio. Se qualcuno di voi ha visto anche soltanto qualche passo dei canti lirici greci tradotti dal Tommaseo, libro che, tra parentesi, Pier Paolo Pasolini portava a messa – lo dice lui stesso in una sua poesia, che quand’era ragazzo se ne andava a messa con i canti lirici greci del Tommaseo – comprenderà l’effetto di questo ‘urto’ di cui parlo.

Lo stesso Carducci traduttore – e non penso soltanto alle sue versioni dal tedesco da Goethe e dai romantici tedeschi, ma da rifacimenti e adattamenti di testi medievali – mostra chiaramente che, per un verso, introduce materia che fa violenza alla buona ‘educazione’ classicista carducciana. Per entrare brevemente nei dettagli di questa traduzione: quando Carducci deve tradurre gli otto-novenari delle ballate tedesche, o spagnole da romanzero, tende ad un ottonario o ad un settinario italiano assolutamente regolari, direi di tradizione settecentesca. Si può verificare sul testo stesso questo straordinario ossoquio alla tradizione da cui proveniva il Carducci. Tuttavia, di tanto in tanto, gli balena il bisogno di fare rilevare l’estranieità di quello che traduce, e allora, per esempio, da un incipit trocaico passa ad un incipit giambico, o viceversa. Attraverso questa breccia passa tutto Pascoli, e tutte le sue traduzioni che sfruttano questa breccia. Pascoli è incomparabilmente più moderno di Carducci, in questo senso, proprio perché mette costantemente sotto gli occhi del lettore quest’estranieità. Si pensi alle versioni omeriche del Pascoli dove il poeta non solo rende evidenti tali differenze, ma se ne serve, se ne giova. Quelli che hanno la mia età, o sono di poco più giovani di me, sanno quali catastrofi abbia fatto questo tipo di gusto soprattutto nelle traduzioni dei classici greco-latini. Insomma, quest’emulsione era già instabile in età romantica e lo è stata particolarmente negli ultimi settant’anni, in cui le due componenti d’estranieità e somiglianza di quest’emulsione si sono separate. Con questo sia chiaro che non voglio minimamente raccogliere le tradizionali e mille volte ripetute obiezioni sulla possibilità o impossibilità della traduzione delle celebri tesi di Croce – oggi respinte da quasi tutti gli studiosi – e delle tesi linguistiche di Jakobson, che ugualmente negano la possibilità della traduzione.
In breve, l’ipotesi goethiana o benjaminiana di un terzo stadio ‘supremo’ di traduzione di poesia, che andasse al di là della parafrasi, ma anche al di là d’ogni appropriazione, che cos’è se non la stessa situazione, non della traduzione di poesia, ma della poesia? Se nel nostro secolo, la poesia è, come credo che sia, presa nella lotta che si conclude sempre con una sconfitta, la quale, tuttavia, può ritenersi gloriosa, per superare l’antitesi tra la soggettività, intesa come idioletto lirico, e la prosa critico-saggistica, bisogna o procedere in avanti, per via di rivoluzione, o all’indietro, per via di restituzione. Oggi ci vogliono far credere, e in parte hanno ragione, che quest’antitesi sia superata nell’atteggiamento del cosiddetto postmoderno. Il postmoderno, essendo omnivo, abolisce le differenze in una sorta di simultanea disponibilità di tutti i materiali linguistico-culturali del passato. Questo ‘tuttismo’ maschera, con la sua vivacità di superficie, la presenza e la forza latente, di là dell’apparente vivacità del linguaggio poetico, che è la forza della prosa, intesa come prosa del sapere astratto del dominio scientifico, tecnologico e tecnocratico. Insomma, nella nostra era, siamo un po’ come le persone di cui parla la celebre battuta cinese: ‘confuciani di giorno e taoisti la sera’, in pratica giustapponiamo la prosa di una, la prosa, appunto, del sapere e del dominio scientifico, tecnologico e tecnocratico con la poesia del cosiddetto ‘tempo libero’. Di giorno, l’ossequio delle regole, la disciplina, il cinismo, la razionalità...e la sera, invece, la possibilità di essere confucianamente nell’irratio totale.

In tal senso, la traduzione creativa, o poetica, se volete chiamarla così (ma forse è preferibile che la si definisca ‘creativa’), tende, in questi anni, ad essere semplicemente uno stato di ‘falsa coscienza’ e autoinganno. Non era così, e non è ancora così, nel caso della traduzione didascalica, o di ‘servizio’, che vuole semplicemente assolvere la funzione di agevolare la decifrazione di un dato testo. Non a caso, Brecht, che era molto più intelligente di quanto oggi non si voglia credere, negli anni più grigi del regime della Germania Est – regime che egli sosteneva e allo stesso tempo criticava – diceva che, per uno scrittore che vivesse in quello che si chiamava ‘socialismo reale’ fosse buona pratica procurarsi da vivere facendo il traduttore ‘di mestiere’, e non d’ispirazione. Questa è una riflessione che ho spesso ponderato, perché bisogna ammettere che, quando un poeta, o uno scrittore, nel nostro occidente non intenda fare il fornitore d’aromi spirituali, certamente questo lavoro apparentemente in ombra del traduttore è uno dei modi migliori di servire, al contempo, una società ‘possibile’, a venire, e la propria lingua. Ora, personalmente, so di averne fornito non poco di questo ‘aroma spirituale’, come l’ho appena chiamato, e quindi, di essermi contraddetto. Non pochi dei testi che ho io stesso tradotto trarrebbero vantaggio dall’essere considerati una sorta d’addestramento marziale alla mia affabulazione lirica privata. Al contrario, qualora si abbia a fare con la committenza dell’editore, o chi per lui, che ti dice ‘traduci questo’ (oppure sei tu stesso ad avere bisogno di quelli che Montale chiamava ‘gli scaldavivande’, ovvero della traduzione fatta per soldi), vale orientarsi verso una traduzione di servizio, dove il traduttore si fa ombra e, al limite, tende a scomparire. Questa contraddizione io l’ho vissuta sempre in prima persona, e il caso limite è stata la mia traduzione del Faust. Quando per molti anni ho lavorato alla traduzione del Faust, l’ho fatto per un doppio ordine di motivi: uno era, per dirla come Carducci, per ‘il lesso’ e l’altro perché ero straordinariamente impegnato in prima persona a combattere tutti i giorni con Volfango. Insomma, allo stesso tempo, facevo qualcosa che non avrei dovuto fare: oggi sono persuaso che non si debbano tradurre i classici in questo modo, che si debba ridurre al massimo il tasso d’ispirazione, d’appropriazione, di ‘genialità’ del traduttore.

La realtà della traduzione poetica è più ricca e contraddittoria di quella che vi sto presentando. Infatti, soprattutto per quanto riguarda le lingue più note, si verifica una sorta di disassociazione delle due componenti di cui parlavo. Le ragioni per cui, a volte il testo originale può essere omesso, come nel caso di certe traduzioni dal russo o dalle lingue arabe, o dei poeti arabo-siciliani, sono facili da capire, infatti, basterebbe un’indagine sommaria per calcolare quanti, in Italia, sarebbero in grado di leggere tali testi nella loro lingua originale. Un anno fa circa, è uscito da Mondadori un libro che offre un esempio calzante (e veramente mi vergogno ad avere collaborato a quest’impresa, che considero la cosa più barbarica che si
possiamo immaginare). Si tratta di una raccolta di poeti arabo-siciliani. Cedendo alle insistenze della curatrice, ho fatto il peggiore lavoro che abbia mai fatto: ho composto dei versi realmente orrendi, tradotti in piatti endecasillabi, desumendoli da un testo di cui non capivo niente. La persona mi aveva dato, sì, tutto l’occorrente: il testo arabo, che non mi serviva perché non conosco l’arabo, una translitterazione, due o tre traduzioni ottocentesche, tra le quali una di Michele Amari, e altre informazioni sparse. Insomma, tutto quanto bastava per capire che non ci capivo niente. Questo perché, per farlo, ci voleva ben altro: e non dico dal punto di vista metrico linguistico, ma dal punto di vista di un quadro d’insieme culturale della poesia di quell’area del mondo. In questo caso, però, non si sono curati di mettere a fronte la pagina in arabo antico. Queste sono le cose che rientrano nella cultura ‘bancaria’, direi. Per esempio, pensiamo alla traduzione dei classici: apro un libro, una bella edizione Einaudi da cinquantacinquemila lire, e leggo ‘Aurelio, che della vostra banda mi credete/ perché scrivo lascivo ed estenuato,/ viva il poeta intriso di religio,/ awolto nei pudori: c’è bisogno che anche i poemini suoi lo siano?’

A questo punto, mi rendo conto che è assolutamente inutile guardare sulla pagina di sinistra i versi di Catullo, che così sono tradotti, no? Qui il traduttore è nella pienezza del suo genio, e procede per endecasillabi, ma strizza l’occhio all’avanguardia con una dizione forte e con quell’ ‘intriso di religio’. A giudicare dalla collezione in cui lo pubblica, e nel prezzo che fa pagare, l’editore è nella pienezza del suo genio. E lo studente sarà invitato a non avvertire che si sta traducendo qualcosa di molto dubbio e che sarebbe meglio consigliato se acquistasse uno dei libretti interlineari che ai miei tempi stampava ‘Albright & Segati’, e che aiutarono gli anni del nostro Liceo. Tanto più che, dopo il passo che vi ho appena letto, basta girare pagina per incappare in questa soluzione: ‘A lungo lacrime mi rigarono le guance quando le mura della mia città caddero. Salii tra lance nemiche e navi nemiche; trasportata in questa terra selvaggia fui barattata con molto oro’ (dal Coro). Si tratta del tipico sublime-medio delle versioni novecentesche. E chissà che il traduttore non abbia voluto con ciò rendere le differenze tra i dialetti. Vi sono traduttori che, paragonando varie versioni, decifrono il testo senza conoscerne l’essenza linguistica originaria. Questi sono altri esempi di pura speculazione editoriale.

Nel caso della traduzione dei classici, vale citare quelle egregie edizioni che s’impegnano a fornire al lettore ampie note al testo, e che in tal modo lo informano sulla sua forma letteraria, come nel caso di alcune valide traduzioni didascaliche. Altre volte, l’editore, trovandosi nel cassetto qualche vecchia traduzione — o traduzioni raccolte qui e là nelle riviste — le fa mettere dentro, rimaneggiare da un traduttore assoldato a curare un adattamento, il quale è chiamato a far coabitare in un medesimo spazio traduzioni vecchie e nuove. Ma che cosa dire, allora, d’imprese assai più gravi, come avviene per lo Shakespeare in cinque volumi della Mondadori? Bisogna notare che in Italia queste cose nessuno le dice, perché non esiste ancora una critica seria della traduzione, come non esiste ancora una critica affidabile dell’editoria. Credo che vi rendiate perfettamente conto di cosa implichi una nuova traduzione integrale di Shakespeare; eravamo rimasti a quella traduzione della Sanzoni, anch’essa fatta da diversi autori, pubblicata in tre tomi moltissimi anni fa. Orbene, si tratta di un’opera assolutamente egregia, fatta da specialisti seriissimi, con un apparato d’informazioni sull’opera, di storia della fortuna del testo, di storia dello spettacolo, e via dicendo, che contiene traduzioni, le quali, dal punto di vista didascalico, mi sembrano di prim’ordine. Allo stesso tempo, l’editore, evidentemente per risparmiare, avendo forse nel cassetto delle vecchie
traduzioni, le ha prese e le ha incluse nell’opera, insomma, ce le ha ‘infilate dentro’; in altre parole, ha preso delle rielaborazioni di un degnissimo nome del teatro come Luigi Squarzina – il quale aveva forse adattato dei testi shakespeariani tradotti in modo approssimativo per ragioni teatrali – e le ha incluse nell’antologia, in modo che coabitassero sia con le traduzioni di Melchiorri o D’Agostino, due specialisti che conoscono alla perfezione le opere su cui stanno mettendo le mani, sia con delle vecchie traduzioni di Quasimodo e Montale; il punto è che è illogico mettere insieme traduzioni di Melchiorri e D’Agostino, Montale e Quasimodo, e poi inserirci quelle del primo ‘teatrante’ venuto. E vi potrei citare degli altri esempi ‘terrificanti’, come il dialogo tra Bruto e Cassio nel _Giulio Cesare_, con la celebre battuta finale del litigio tra i due, in cui Bruto annuncia bruscamente: ‘Porzia è morta!’; ebbene, l’anima di ‘scalzapolli’, l’anima popolare, che alberga anche nell’anima del più nobile teatrante, lo spinge a tradurre, ‘Porzia’ (fine di rigo, a capo) ‘è morta!’, perché venga introdotta una pausa patetica, che Shakespeare non ha introdotto, infatti; se avesse voluto farlo, l’avrebbe introdotta senza scomporsi.

Ora, a me parrebbe (anzi mi è sempre parso) che gli autori supremi debbano essere accompagnati da un consistente apparato informativo anche sui criteri adottati per la traduzione. Questa deve essere idealmente fatta da più persone con una convergenza di controlli di carattere storico-linguistico, e, in aggiunta, un sistema di note: tutte cose che non possono esser curate da una sola persona. Insomma, ho cercato inutilmente di portare avanti questo discorso, ma si continua pertinacemente per la vecchia strada. Ad esempio, è attualmente in corso la compilazione di un ‘tutto Goethe lirico’, condotta da un gruppo di vari traduttori: sono stato personalmente officiato per coordinarla, ma, ovviamente, ho risposto di no, perché, avendo già assunto delle colpe gravissime verso il _Faust_, non volevo assumermene anche delle altre verso le liriche goethiane. Niente di maie che vi siano più traduttori coinvolti, tuttavia, quasi mai questi traduttori si mettono d’accordo, preferendo continuare a lavorare ciascuno per conto proprio su un dato settore. Oltre a tale impresa, in vista di un convegno per il cinquantenario della morte di Antonio Machado, è di questi giorni una traduzione della _Soledades_ assegnata ad una decina di poeti italiani. Ne verrà fuori, credetemi, un bellissimo volume ‘bancario’, un regalo per Natale!

Prima di tagliare la fetta di tela del quadro, volevo accennare ad un’altra questione, ricorrendo ad alcuni esempi addizionali. L’atto del tradurre è frequentemente situato tra l’operazione interpretativo-critica e l’atto di lettura, vale a dire la lettura come momento precritico. Indubbiamente, il traduttore prende le sue decisioni a vari gradi d’autocoscienza – lo sostiene un pensatore come Sergio Levi, uno dei maggiori teorici della traduzione, per il quale la qualità specifica della traduzione è di essere una serie di atti di volontà, di decisioni. Quanto a me, ho qualche perplessità verso questa nozione, non solo perché è applicabile a qualsiasi operazione di tipo poetico o letterario, ma anche perché vi sono delle implicazioni molte serie a livello linguistico su cosa significhi ‘decisione’. Quali che siano i gradi d’autocoscienza dell’operazione che compie il traduttore, egli costituisce nella lingua d’arrivo, all’interno di un medesimo scritto, una struttura omologa a quella che ha veduto, o creduto, o voluto vedere nel testo di partenza.

Gli elementi fondamentali dei procedimenti, che chiamiamo ‘traduzioni poetiche’, sono la gerarchia tra quelle componenti del testo di partenza che il traduttore ritiene di potere individuare, e la gerarchia che ritiene di dover stabilire all’interno del testo d’arrivo, o con il testo d’arrivo. Mi riferisco alla nozione che Tynjanov chiamava della ‘dominante’, la quale, come argomento della nostra conversazione successiva, riguarderà, appunto, il processo dei ‘compensi’ nelle traduzioni di poesia. Il famoso formalista russo, in opere che hanno ormai mezzo secolo di vita, parla di livelli diversi esistenti in ogni testo poetico, e spiega come tra questi livelli vi sia una dominante. Alcuni studiosi d’italiano, ad esempio il Pagnini, hanno affermato, secondo me giustamente, una cosa che era già implicita nel discorso di Tynjanov, e cioè che la dominante non è sempre dello stesso tipo, ma muta a seconda del recettore, a seconda della lettura critica, e a seconda del contesto storico culturale. Detto altrimenti, possiamo avere sia una lettura di un’ode del Parini volta a privilegiare gli elementi
fonosimbolici, sia una lettura che ne faccia notare gli elementi lessicali, sia, infine, una lettura che ne sottolinei, piuttosto, i contenuti didascalici. Come avviene nelle corse ciclistiche, c’è sempre un elemento che ‘tira’ e, stando alla testa di questa gerarchia, la cambia, la rende mobile, tanto che, come dimostra la storia della critica, può accadere che, per un periodo di tempo abbastanza lungo, per un secolo addirittura, si legga Parini guardando soltanto ad una certa dimensione, subordinando le altre. Può invece sopraggiungere un’epoca, un gusto, e un tipo di rapporto con i destinatari che facciano prevalere altri elementi. Il traduttore, che è anche lettore e critico, individua, o crede di individuare nell’opera una certa gerarchia di livelli. Egli può anche credere di dovere attribuire tale gerarchia alle intenzioni dell’autore, oppure di doverla proiettare sul testo che vuole tradurre, e quindi decidere di stabilire un dato ordine, per cui certi elementi diventano automaticamente prevalenti su certi altri. Ma, una volta fatto questo, quando traduce o ha finalmente tradotto, si trova ad avere un testo il quale, a sua volta, ha una gerarchia interna di livelli sua propria.

Il rapporto, ovvero la funzione di traduzione, è essenzialmente questa: il traduttore, in quanto critico e lettore, deve assumere la decisione di stabilire un certo ordine e una certa gerarchia di livelli in relazione al testo di partenza, il che non significa che, una volta stabiliti questo ordine e questa gerarchia, il traduttore debba, o possa, mantenere lo stesso ordine e la stessa gerarchia nel testo d’arrivo. Come traduttore, posso legittimamente ritenere che gli elementi di tipo ideologico-sociale, presenti nel Giorno del Parini, debbano essere prevalenti su altri livelli, fra i quali, supponiamo, il livello fono-simbolico o metrico o lessicale o sintattico degli endecasillabi di quest’ode. Posso pervenire a queste decisioni, ritenendo, in quanto critico, che si debba dare maggiore attenzione all’elemento A piuttosto che al B al C, e così via, e tuttavia, qualora fossi uno straniero che dovesse tradurre Parini, non è affatto detto che questo sistema gerarchico, per quanto programmato, sia poi mantenuto nella traduzione.

Un esempio piuttosto ‘scandaloso’, che risale a qualche anno fa, riguarda due traduttori americani che hanno cooperato ad una traduzione di Catullo, la quale è stata realizzata in una stranissima lingua e con stranissimi nessi per cui, leggendo a voce alta il testo inglese, si ha quasi l’equivalente di una lettura ‘all’inglese’ del testo latino. È un effetto straordinariamente divertente. Oppure penso ad un traduttore francese che aveva realizzato delle versioni di poesia italiana, spagnola e russa (traducendo tra l’altro in modo egregio delle poesie di Ungaretti), il quale era riuscito ad ottenere l’effetto che, nel leggere la sua versione in francese delle poesie di Esenin, ciò che ti arrivava nell’orecchio era l’accento russo, non il francese. Una soluzione davvero curiosa! Ma questi esempi sono a livello del puro gioco; tuttavia, nel caso in cui si volesse tradurre il Parini, nulla vieta di privilegiare quel caratteristico impasto – quel legame, quel sapore particolare – che è la somma di una sequenza di endecasillabi pariniani, rispetto a quelli contenuti più visibili che a noi, giustamente, sembrano così importanti nella lettura del Giorno. Quanto più nella lettura e nell’interpretazione che precedono l’atto di traduzione, il traduttore decida di privilegiare una funzione del linguaggio che non sia, in termini jakobsoniani, una ‘funzione poetica’, preferendo a questa una funzione referenziale, tanto più è possibile una comparazione tra il testo di partenza e il testo d’arrivo, che ne diventerebbe una parafrasi. Difatti, qual è lo sport a cui si danno con tanto entusiasmo, e da sempre, quelli che si occupano della traduzione? La caccia all’errore. Ovvero, il trovare errori nelle traduzioni altrui. E come diventa possibile tale caccia all’errore? Essa è possibile solo quando si sia persuasi che pane è la stessa cosa che bread o brod. Ortega, invece, afferma che non vi sia mai una coincidenza possibile del significato di una stessa parola in due lingue diverse.

L’altro sport preferito dai traduttori è la gara a chi è più bravo a vincere le difficoltà; infatti, moltissime analisi, anche minuziose, di traduzioni esistenti, realizzate tramite la comparazione di più traduzioni, sono fatte appunto per verificare chi se la sia cavata meglio e come abbia combattuto, tanto che, alle volte, si ha come l’impressione di trovarsi davanti a delle prestazioni di tipo atletico, e un premio è, infine, assegnato a colui il quale ha fatto i ‘cento endecasillabi’ in minor tempo. Sebbene non si possa rinunciare del tutto all’uso di tale metodo sportivo, questa è ovviamente una concezione puerile, ovvero scolastica, della traduzione.
Ma passiamo, adesso, all’altra fetta del quadro con cui intendo proporre alla vostra attenzione la nozione dei ‘compensi’. Questa nozione procede dall’ipotesi che vi sia un tasso di densità assoluta o relativa delle figure di discorso, o figure retoriche, che costituiscono e strutturano il testo poetico. L’orizzonte al quale mi richiamo con questa nozione di ‘compensi’ (e soprattutto con l’idea dell’esistenza di un tasso di densità delle figure di discorso, o figure retoriche) è quello abbastanza remoto nel tempo – ma, a mio avviso, ancora oggi molto vivo come riferimento – formulato dal russo Tynjanov e dal ceco Mukařovský. Di Tynjanov assume la definizione di forma come unità linguistica dinamica, nella quale i fattori sono gerarchicamente distribuiti in presenza, di volta in volta, di una dominante, come ho dinanzi accennato; di Mukařovský, invece, assumo l’affermazione che la dominante e la sua forza dipendono dal genere letterario e dall’epoca. Tale forza della dominante, nel suo diminuire e accrescersi, introduce in una data società, una continua dislocazione dell’intero sistema che giustifica la funzione letteraria.

È noto che i tentativi di connotare come poetici i testi nei quali la densità delle figure di discorso, o figure retoriche, attinge ad un livello particolarmente elevato, si sono rivelati insufficienti. Infatti, secondo la celebre battuta di Francis Bacon, si produrrebbero più figure retoriche in un’ora di chiacchierata al mercato tra gli erbivendoli, o nel linguaggio dei pescatori, di quante non se ne trovino nell’opera di un illustre poeta. In questo senso, è evidentemente non erroneo, ma insufficiente pensare che la poesia si possa valutare secondo il grado di densità delle figure che il testo contiene. Infatti, il valore del grado di densità delle figure retoriche muta in relazione ad una grande varietà di dati e condizioni – laddove, molti di questi dati e molte di queste condizioni possono essere contestuali, extra-testuali o metatestuali. Infatti, quello che ha un peso determinante nei confronti della densità delle figure è la condizione, o l’orizzonte culturale-ideologico, entro il quale il testo si situa con vario grado d’intenzionalità, vuoi come poetica dell’autore del testo di partenza, vuoi di poetica del traduttore, vuoi infine come poetica, o sfondo culturale, dei destinatari stessi, vale a dire dei recettori del testo conclusivo.

Ma riflettiamolo: in un enunciato semplicissimo, estremamente fattuale e pressoché spoglio – sebbene, a dire il vero, nessun enunciato sia mai spoglio, privo di figure del discorso retorico – in un enunciato, dicevo, in cui il tasso delle figure retoriche sia minimo – come, ad esempio, in certi celebri testi brechtiani, che si presentano come degli enunciati ‘lisci come specchi’ (simili ad affermazioni o statements che sembrano non avere nulla di poetico), e all’interno dei quali non è possibile trovare qualcosa che li giustifichi come poetici – è chiaro che quello che li giustifica come poetici è ciò che sta al di fuori del testo. Nel caso di Brecht, la sua famosa frase ‘Elettricista, accendi tutte le luci’ possiede una grande forza ermeneutica, applicabile a molti poeti antichi e moderni. Bisogna chiedersi cosa intendesse Brecht con ‘Elettricista, accendi tutte le luci...’. Potremmo leggere il significato della battuta come ‘Più luce si dà, maggiore è la leggibilità’; e, tuttavia, ciò non conduce ad una comunicazione prosastica perché vi è una soglia al di là della quale l’eccesso di luce modifica la prosasticità dell’enunciato. ‘Accendere tutte le luci’ significa ‘trasfigurare’ la realtà; quindi, un enunciato che si pone come poetico, da quale elemento riceve la spinta che ne altera i caratteri meramente comunicativi o discorsivi? I poeti simbolisti parlavano di ‘margini bianchi’. Mallarmé, a sua volta, credeva nel silenzio, vale a dire in ciò che non è sulla pagina, in ciò che regge la ‘cimba’ alla barca della poesia.

Un enunciato semplicissimo e fattuale può ricevere una fortissima curvatura significante, come insegna la storia del frammento lirico, che può assumere significato perché il bianco della pagina è coperto degli invisibili segni di un extratesto storico-culturale amplissimo. Ad esempio, ci sono dei testi che rispondono ad una sequela di dati e di condizioni di carattere storico-ideologico e presentano altresì un grado elevato o, in certi casi, elevatissimo, di figure retoriche. Cosa intendo quando parlo di dati e di condizioni di carattere storico-ideologico? Si pensi al ‘genere’, o alla sottospecie di un genere, come la forma ‘sonetto’, che reca in sé, nella nostra cultura, una grande quantità di dati a carattere storico-
ideologico. Oltre a ciò, si può trovare un grado elevato di figure di significazione, costruzione, elocuzione e ritmo, riunite a livelli d’eccezionale saturazione, come ad esempio, nella poesia di Mallarmé. Ma si possono avere, al contrario, dei testi nei quali, nonostante il grado delle figure sia ridotto al minimo, presentandosi come enunciati prosastici, la loro situazione nello spazio culturale della letterarietà è decisa dal di fuori del testo, per dir così, vale a dire dalla nozione stessa che noi, come lettori, abbiamo di letterarietà o di poeticità.


A porsi queste domande, che stanno tra la filologia e l’ermeneutica ci si sente confortati come a mettere un po’ di caldo nel cuore, inducendo nella gioia dei discorsi ‘normali’ sulla traduzione, che evolvono intorno a dei punti più o meno accertabili. Ma supponiamo, invece, che non in un ‘dopo temporale’ in cui è stato scritto quel testo, ma in un’altra attitudine, ci si propone di costituire un oggetto verbale, che nel proprio sistema di significati, o se vogliamo, nell’idioletto del traduttore, e poi in quello del recettore, introduca uno spostamento, uno spasamento, ovvero un decentramento, come lo definisce Henri Meschonnic, il quale è violentemente contrario ad ogni dualismo reazionario che si limita a contrapporre un testo ad un altro testo, o un momento ad un altro momento. Cosa accade?

Abbiamo già detto che uno dei modi della traduzione è quello in cui la lingua d’arrivo accetta l’urto del diverso. Bene, certamente, nel momento in cui si pensa soprattutto a costituire l’oggetto ‘testo d’arrivo’ (ma per non irritare Meschonnic, e per rimanere coerente con le mie posizioni, non dovrei nemmeno definirlo ‘testo d’arrivo’, ma piuttosto chiamarlo ‘testo-traduzione’), tutto quello che abbiamo avuto prima, vale a dire i livelli e la gerarchia che queste componenti avevano nel testo di partenza, subiscono anch’esse un contraccolpo, anzi, direi, si disgregano. In questo caso, ciò che mi pare Dante chiami il ‘legame-mosaico’ si dissolve. Quando questi materiali a piè d’opera li ritroviamo, in quale modo, nel testo-traduzione, la gerarchia è cambiata. Procedendo per ora in questa direzione, insistendo a ‘lottare’ contro la nozione di ‘confronto’, contro questo delizioso ‘confessionale’ dei traduttori e dei loro discorsi sulla traduzione. Infatti, chi conosce i traduttori sa che si danno a discutere su questi dettagli, perché, in definitiva, la traduzione da/a un’altra lingua-cultura, non è altro che un caso della ‘traduzione’ che si pone all’interno di una medesima lingua, su e giù per la scala di Giacobbe della stessa tradizione letteraria: cosa che è, invece, necessaria, soprattutto quando si leggano autori lontani nel tempo, o comunque, in qualche modo, distanti.

Il petrarchismo del Cinquecento ci invia la nozione di autori che rifanno, reinventano, e che sostanzialmente ‘traducono’ Petrarca. In genere, si può dire questo per gli epigoni. Va aggiunto che l’epigonismo domestico noi non lo vediamo, siccome viviamo ancora nel mito della verità come esperienza dell’autentico, anzi siamo stati educati al culto dell’immediatezza, del genio, dell’autenticità, della spontaneità, della verità interiore, culto che prima non esisteva e che ha una data di nascita abbastanza precisa, risalente a circa duecento anni fa. Infatti, non è che la celebre formula dello ‘stil novo’ volesse davvero dire avere ‘il cuore in mano’! Al contrario! Infatti, per arrivare all’idea del ‘cuore in mano’, bisogna per lo meno pervenire a Leopardi.

Dunque, il traduttore dei versi rimbaudiani può eleggere una gerarchia di elementi, o di fattori, diversa da quella implicata nel testo di partenza; può volerne dissolve ritmicità e metricità, per giungere ad una diversa ritmicità e metricità, compiendo quella che in musica si chiamerebbe una ‘trascrizione’, ovvero il passaggio da uno strumento ad un altro strumento.
Quindi dove va a finire l’estraneeo, il diverso, quello che non si fa ridurre facilmente? S’insinua nel testo nuovo, s’incinta, per dir così, nel testo nuovo con un complesso di allusioni, che non viene solo dall’ideazione immaginativa/informativa, ma anche dall’impiego di elementi formali di carattere metrico-prosodico, che costituiscono la forma stessa della poesia.

Vorrei proporvi un esempio autobiografico: fin da quando ero molto giovane, una sequenza di quartine non rimate, di versi o pseudoversi irregolari, assumevano per me un’aura di poesia slava, polacca o russa. Taie era la mia impressione, che in una certa occasione, durante la guerra, sotto l’impressione estrema di quello che accadeva intorno al 1942-43 in Polonia, composi due false poesie tradotte dal polacco, in altre parole mi misi a fare delle traduzioni ‘immaginarie’, delle traduzioni che non avevano un testo di partenza, bensì solo il testo d’arrivo, ma che erano fatte come se fossero traduzioni vere. In questo genere di traduzioni, s’immagina un originale in una lingua che si conosce, ma che si può anche non conoscere. Pubblicai queste traduzioni immaginarie anonimamente, tuttavia gli emigranti polacchi di Londra, Buenos Aires e New York, avendo ricevuto il giornalino curato da Ignazio Silone in cui compariva uno di questi testi, e credendo che fosse realmente tradotto dal polacco, si affrettarono a chiedere a Silone chi fosse il traduttore. S’era tra il ’43-’44, e Parigi non era stata ancora liberata. A tale richiesta, Silone li informò che l’autore era, in effetti, un giovane rifugiato. E che fecero, allora, questi polacchi? Tradussero, a loro volta, in polacco quei miei versi e li pubblicarono sui loro giornali dell’immigrazione. Ogni volta che ci ripenso, trovo abbastanza divertente quest’aneddoto.

Può accadere che il traduttore avverte nel testo di partenza la presenza di un livello di coesione degli elementi, che nella sua traduzione gli risulta indebolita, non tanto nei confronti dell’originale, ma in sé. In questi casi, non è solo lecito, ma inevitabile che il traduttore guardi ad ogni singolo elemento del testo di partenza con l’ottica di chi, posto dinanzi al problema di definire una specifica qualità di color rosso esistente in natura, operando sul piano che Roman Jakobson chiama il piano della selezione, ricorra a definizioni quali ‘rosso scarlatto’, ‘rosso magenta’, ‘rosso fuoco’, ‘rosso Saturno’, e così via. Ciò accade soprattutto quando questa scelta di colore sia guidata non solo da una tavola di convenzioni lessicali, ma da numeri di serie, denominazioni di convenzioni merceologiche. Come, ad esempio, quando si deve chiedere ad un negoziante ‘Mi dia il rosso 473’, che vuol dire un certo preciso tipo di rosso. Quando non si tratti solo di una tavola di convenzioni lessicali, e quando questa scelta sia guidata da elementi e relazioni tra tipi lessicali di rosso di cui disponiamo – in altre parole quando questa selezione non sia fatta solo nel rispetto di convenzioni lessicali, che possono giungere, come si è detto, all’astrattezza del numero, ma sia invece circondata e data da un contesto d’elementi ritmici ed evocativi – e questa è l’operazione del poeta – allora, il poeta ‘in proprio’ procederà esattamente come il traduttore-poeta nei confronti della selezione tra toni diversi (si pensi al ‘rosso tortora’ montaliano, o al ‘rosso solferino’, che pure esiste).

Quest’ordine di cose è il medesimo che anima l’agire del traduttore. Tali scelte non sono, si faccia attenzione, di carattere merceologico, ma sono, piuttosto, tonali, timbriche. Vi è, per esempio, una poesia di Sereni nella quale egli dice poeticamente l’ossessione della ricerca di un colore prossimo al rosso, l’amaranto, attribuendo a questa tonalità una serie di significati: ecco che tale ‘rosso amaranto’ non è, in Sereni, un semplice elemento di selezione del colore. Il traduttore fa la stessa cosa: egli finge, talvolta, di tenerisi alla natura, all’oggetto, al testo di partenza, ma, in pratica, opera in vista del testo d’arrivo, e quindi, per restare nell’ambito del discorso cromatico, il traduttore mette in atto il suggerimento contenuto in una celebre frase di Picasso: ‘Quando non ho del rosso, metto del blu.’ In questo modo, finge, ma in perfetta buona fede, anche con se stesso, di adeguarsi. In realtà, quello che gli impedisce di tradurre una parola con un’altra è questa resistenza: ci si rifiuta di tradurre un termine straniero con uno che per quanto idoneo, non ci piace, non ci garba, magari per la sua sfumatura di tono o di colore. Come traduttore, infatti, ho un problema di toni da riprodurre, non per imitare l’originale, ma per pervenire ad una coerenza all’interno del mio discorso, qualcosa che abbia le stesse doti musicali dell’originale, ma riferite alla fonetica specifica
della mia lingua, come nel caso della ricerca di effetti allitterativi, onomatopeici, vocalici. Oppure, posso essere motivato dalla crisi della rima nella mia tradizione poetica, nel rifiuto di rimare per motivi culturali perché lo status della rima è decaduto, avvertito come vecchio, inautentico.

Il traduttore che si trovi ad avere, a piè d’opera, le membra dell’opera stessa in apparenza dissestate, ha la sola responsabilità di rendere il doppio legame di vicinanza/distanza con la sfera di poesia-cultura da cui sta attingendo e a cui si è posto dinanzi. Ogni atto di lettura, interpretazione critica o traduzione che sia, induce uno spaesamento dei rapporti gerarchici degli elementi costitutivi del testo e, quindi, opera uno spostamento del senso e del valore di questi rapporti. Tale dinamicità e plasticità del testo sembra obbedire alla legge degli organismi viventi che, anche nella tensione e nell’entropia, tende a riprodurre l’equilibrio e dall’equilibrio un’ulteriore possibilità di tensione, operando una variante dei compensi, o dei sistemi di compensi. Tutto ciò è ben noto agli studiosi di variantistica, che, come disciplina, ci parla dei compensi a maggiore, o a minore distanza. Vale ricordare le famose pagine di Contini sulle varianti nel Petrarca, o nel Leopardi, atte a mantenere certi equilibri nei rapporti tra gli elementi testuali.

Citerò ora, a proposito, un brano di Vittorio Coletti, che mi sembra molto appropriato: ‘La poesia moderna, nel momento in cui ha abbandonato le tradizionali regolari misure e simmetrie, è subito ricorsa ad altre, più nascoste, ma non meno operanti, figure ritmiche di similarità fonica, e, quindi, semantica. Ecco, allora, alla crisi della rima venire in aiuto, in parte, l’accumulo di assonanze, consonanze, allitterazioni, quasi-rime, o rime rare.’ E aggiungiamo subito che la rima è solo uno degli elementi del metro, il quale, a sua volta, è solo un elemento del sistema testuale, e che, quindi, gli spostamenti di densità degli elementi interni sono funzione degli spostamenti esterni, vale a dire delle poetiche, delle attese dei lettori, dei destinatari, dei recettori.

Di fronte ad un elemento come la rima, soprattutto quando, come accade in certe forme metriche o prosodiche, essa è di singolare rilievo espressivo, la scelta sarà dettata dall’elezione di questa o di quell’area di consenso dei destinatari. La svalutazione della rima, in ambito italiano, non accoglierrebbe adeguatamente un poeta straniero che, per quanto grande, fosse riportato, nella lingua contemporanea, attraverso tale applicazione formale. Siamo, in questo caso, dinanzi ad un fenomeno epocale che, in Italia, ha un passato di oltre un secolo di avversione a questa forma lirica. La situazione potrebbe cambiare, ma nel frattempo, il traduttore sa di dovere fare convivere un’eventuale rima con il nostro attuale sistema di non-rima, che enfatizza la dicibilità, ovvero la recitazione del testo poetico, a scapito della ‘memorabilità’, conferita dalla versificazione in rima.

Questa tendenza, introdotta dall’avanguardia simbolista, crea il vuoto dell’aspettativa ritmica, disattendendo le forme canoniche, come accade nella poesia di Rilke. Il traduttore, ribadisco, può decidere di confermare, oppure tradire il tono della poesia che ha dinanzi a sé (nell’elegia, ad esempio, il tono meditativo, alleviandolo o incupendolo). La svalutazione della rima, nelle sue forme tradizionali, è, dunque, un fenomeno epocale, ragion per cui si può affermare che ormai abbia di sé la storia di almeno un secolo di crisi. Ma non dimentichiamo che corsi, ricorsi e fluttuazioni, nella ‘borsa’ delle forme liriche, sono molto intense.

Ad esempio, un autore può riuscire a far convivere perfettamente la rima e la non-rima: è il caso di Carducci. Ancora, Brecht, che ricordavo prima, il quale, tra l’altro, è autore di uno scritto teorico proprio su questo argomento, ha affermato che il contrasto tra la metricità regolare e la metricità irregolare – la metricità regolare comportando quasi sempre la rima, e quella irregolare escludendola – è posto tra due effetti ‘pratici’ del testo poetico, che operano, o che il poeta vorrebbe operassero, sul recettore. Ricapitolando, nel primo caso, con la rima abbiamo la memorabilità del testo rimato, che è accresciuta di molto, e nel secondo caso, con la non-rima si accresce la dizione, la dicibilità, la recitazione.

Personalmente, mi è accaduto di dover fare un piccolo studio su un testo brechtiano, che avevo tradotto vent’anni fa: si trattava di una di quelle poesie non rimate, e molto
irregolari nella lunghezza, metricità, costituzione di versi. Ebbene, mi sono posto una
questione che gli studiosi tedeschi si saranno posti mille volte: come mai, in queste poesie,
nelle quali Brecht aveva la massima libertà di schema metrico – avendo potuto ‘andare a
capo’ quando voleva – con una frequenza molto alta (immaginate nel corso di questa poesia
che esaminavo un frequenza di circa un terzo dei versi) egli si serve dell’enjambement? Per di
più, il testo non usa un tipo normale d’enjambement, come quello tra sostantivo e aggettivo, o
tra verbo e complemento, bensi mostra fortemente la tendenza (che si riflette in un’intera
parte della produzione brechtiana in versi) di mettere alla fine del verso un avverbio o una
preposizione (‘aber’, ‘das’, per esempio) – a sua volta spesso preceduto da un punto fermo di
interpupzione. E dunque, riflettendo su questi dettagli, mi domandavo le ragioni di questa
scelta: per quale motivo Brecht introduce una pausa di fine verso? Mi è sembrato di trovare la
risposta a questo mio interrogativo nell’attitudine tipica dell’uomo di teatro, che è appunto
quella di Brecht; infatti, siccome questi testi sono destinati alla dizione, alla recitazione di tipo
teatrale, il poeta opera al fine di creare la mimesi di quel genere di esitazione che molto
spesso si determina nel discorso parlato. Si tratta di un’esitazione che, per un attimo, valuta le
varie possibilità di uso di un verbo – ma anche di un sostantivo, di un aggettivo – piuttosto
che un altro.

Chiunque nella propria vita quotidiana ricorre a questo tipo di strategia retorica
nell’usare gli intercalari che gli sono più consueti. Questi intercalari non sono soltanto
elementi, per dirla alla Jakobson, di carattere fatico, che hanno come sola funzione quella di
intrattenere. Spesso lo sono, e svolgono il mero ruolo di mantenere il contatto. Ma molto
spesso questi mezzi retorici sono degli indici di un’esitazione, e riproducono una data realtà
dello discorso parlato. Allora, come uomo di teatro che ha orecchio per queste cose, quando
deve costruire delle poesie del genere, Brecht ricorre a questo sistema di indicatori, che fanno
parte di una metrica che, ovviamente, non è la metrica tradizionale. Nello stesso momento,
nello stesso mese e anno, quasi con la stessa mano con la quale scrive testi del genere, con
l’intento di renderli dicibili dal palcoscenico, e magari, perché no, dalla tribuna dell’oratore
politico, Brecht scrive dei testi rigorosamente tradizionali, che contengono formalmente delle
rime, che possono servire al musicista per trasformarli in marce sovversive della sua parte
polilitica.

Pensate che bella storia della poesia italiana della fine dello scorso secolo fino a quella
del presente secolo si potrebbe scrivere a partire dalla presenza, dall’assenza, o dalla latenza
della rima, proprio passando attraverso l’opera dei poeti-traduttori, per verificare se, e in che
misura, una data parte del sistema formale del traduttore-autore intervenga o prevalga su una
data parte del testo-cultura di partenza; come ho detto, tra il 1930 e il 1940, il rifiuto della
rima si diffuse enormemente: infatti, si guardava alla poesia orfica e metafisica del tardo
Cinquecento e primo Seicento, in Francia, in Inghilterra e in Spagna, quindi a John Donne,
alla scuola Lyonnese, a Maurice Scève, e altresì, in area spagnola, a Giovanni della Croce, la
cui poesia venne in gran moda nella Firenze ermetica degli anni Trenta fino all’inizio della
guerra. Nel ripudiare la rima, gli ermetici alzarono contemporaneamente il linguaggio della
prosa a un livello poetico, contrariamente a quanto si mise a fare successivamente Pasolini,
che, com’è noto, ‘carnevalizzava’, per dirla alla Bakhtin, i modi alti, e ambiva ad trascinare in
basso il linguaggio della poesia per collocarlo allo stesso livello della prosa, parodiandolo
anche tramite il ‘rifacimento’. Quindi sia per via ermetica sia per via dissacratoria, la rima
subisce un violento urto nelle mode letterarie novecentiste.

Sempre a proposito del rifiuto della rima, in una sua poesia di lotta contro il Nazismo,
Brecht ad un certo punto dice che ‘In questi versi, una rima mi parrebbe quasi un’insolenza’: in
altri parole, come accade a Sereni, egli avvertiva che l’uso della rima, in un certo contesto
di tipo storico, avrebbe avuto un carattere quasi di fatuità, overo d’insolenza. Da noi, la
negazione della rima avveniva per altra via, con gli elementi tipici di quello che è stato
chiamato il ‘dimesso sublime’. Per esempio, il parlato di Palazzeschi, ‘il dimesso’; e ‘il
sublime’, in questo caso, è l’ Ungaretti de L’Allegria, con Ungaretti quale eroe eponimo della
modernità. Ma allora, che cosa significava la scelta, compiuta da taluni traduttori, soprattutto

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negli anni Trenta e Quaranta, in Italia, di ricorrere all’uso della rima, in modo che inducesse un ordine gerarchico nel testo d’arrivo omologo a quello che si riteneva occupasse nel testo di partenza? E, quindi, la connotazione culturale indotta da tale ordine aveva o meno una sua rilevanza maggiore di quella che avevano, o che avrebbero potuto avere, le altre componenti stilistiche? Capire questi fenomeni epocali significa tracciare una mappa dell’area nella quale non solo vigeva la rima, ma vigeva una società-cultura che su di quella si fondava.


Vorrei proporvi questa volta un esempio da una mia versione del Faust, ‘La notte di Valpurga’; c’è un coro che recita delle strofette di quattro versi ciascuna, rimati AABB, la cui traduzione letterale: ‘Tace il vento,/ vola la Stella,/ la luna torbida si cela volentieri./ Nel sibilo il coro magico strizza/ molte migliaia di faville.’ Quello stesso coro riprende e recita una seconda quarta con tonalità popolaresche e ubriache. In questo caso, delle rime rozze, da boccale di vino o di birra, non andavano male, e dunque, il contenuto così viene reso: ‘Si va sulla scopa, si va sul bastone/ sulla forca e sul caprone/ Chioggi non si leverà./ E perso per l’eternità.’ Quest’eccesso di cadenza, che è monotonamente per il nostro orecchio, veniva in parte evitato, volgendo i quattro novenari in un doppio senario, un ottonario, due novenari tronchi, e così via. Il primo, che inizia con ‘Tace il vento...’, è un caso tipico di compensi, ovvero di aumento della densità fonica per supplire alla perdita delle rime AABB dell’originale tedesco. Vi troviamo una coppia di rime assonanzata (‘stella/mille’), ripresa da due rime interne
(‘mille/faville’, ‘zitto/fitte’), e, in funzione allitterante, due sdrucchiole consecutive e una bisdruciola; si rileva, inoltre, un chiasmo, una divisione simmetrica dei primi due versicoli e un iperbato: è difficile trovare una maggiore densità di figure. Ripeto, questo è un compenso alla caduta o alla rimozione delle rime. Ne viene un’ulteriore osservazione: nella totalità dei casi esaminati da Mengaldo, e in quelli che mi è capitato personalmente di esaminare, se si opera su autori-traduttori relativamente vicini, vale a dire del nostro secolo, allora si arriva a delle conclusioni tautologiche; vale a dire, che la traduzione di X fatta da Y, se Y è bravo, conferma gli elementi stilistici di Y, la sua tendenza personale. Vale a dire che Montale, quando traduce, se fa delle traduzioni, è perché fa delle poesie di Montale; la stessa cosa accade a Luzi, Caproni e a Sereni. Per cui non si arriva mai a vedere che cosa succeda realmente se si procedesse in una direzione diversa. Vi sono casi solo rari in cui il poeta si avventura su una strada a lui sconosciuta; quando lo fa, si verificano degli eventi straordinari.

In un piccolo studio da me condotto sulle prime traduzioni, fatte da Montale, ho constatato che il giovane poeta, non ancora se stesso, s’addestrò in queste traduzioni, comprendendo infine che non sono congeniali al suo futuro sviluppo lirico, semplicemente le abbandonò. Tra questi versi non suoi, tra questi versi tradotti, tutto ad un tratto, però, proprio a causa della libertà conferita da questo ‘disinteresse’ del Montale-traduttore nel poeta tradotto, il lettore individuerà la genialità del verso montaliano, che darà al critico gli elementi per capire le ragioni per le quali il Montale-traduttore si sia, da quel momento in poi orientato in una direzione che va da tutt’altra parte, verso la Dickinson o Eliot.

In modo inverso, un caso straordinario è quello di Sereni, il quale, ad un certo momento, si mette a tradurre un poeta da lui moralmente e politicamente lontano, come René Char, e nella traduzione dei suoi scritti si ‘permette’ una maschera di se stesso, o una verità di se stesso che non si sarebbe altrimenti concesso, vale a dire che si permette i grandi accenti eroico-tragici del poeta francese. Naturalmente, nella traduzione contemporanea il rapporto non è tanto un rapporto della lingua della poesia di partenza con il linguaggio-cultura della lingua di arrivo, quanto piuttosto il rapporto della cultura di partenza con il dizionario privato, ovvero con il sistema di mezzi espressivi del singolo poeta-traduttore, come se il singolo poeta-traduttore fosse il signore e padrone di una parte del dizionario; anzi, per costoro non esiste più un dizionario ufficiale che hanno in comune con i loro concittadini, e connazionali. Essi hanno come ‘ritagliato’ questa loro lingua personale all’interno di quella nazionale in cui operano. Il risultato è che, quando ci troviamo dinanzi ad una traduzione di Montale dalla Dickinson, in effetti, ci troviamo di fronte a qualcosa che riguarda innanzitutto il sistema poetico montaliano, e non più il sistema poetico italiano.

Ritornando a Mengaldo, e dedicandogli l’inizio di questo nuovo stralcio del mio quadro sulla traduzione poetica, vorrei brevemente parlare della sua pubblicazione del 1978, I poeti italiani del Novecento, in cui antologizzava trentaquattro autori che avessero pubblicato la
loro prima opera in un periodo non anteriore alla fine degli anni Dieci, prendendo, quindi, in esame un sessantennario di poesia. Il numero dei poeti ivi inclusi, che possono essere considerati autori d'importanti traduzioni di poesia, non è molto alto, essendo questi, circa una quindicina. Vi troviamo Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale, Attilio Bertolucci, Salvatore Quasimodo, Sergio Solmi, Giaime Pintor, Mario Luzi, Giorgio Caproni, Vittorio Sereni, Giorgio Relli, Nelo Risi, Luciano Erba, Giovanni Giudici, Giovanni Raboni, e il sottoscrittore. Se si vuole aggiungere a questi anche gli autori di traduzioni d'elevata qualità letteraria, che non sono propriamente dei poeti, il loro numero aumenterebbe perché l'area della letterarietà costitutiva della traduzione (essendo essa eminentemente letteraria nel senso istituzionale della parola), eccede quella della qualità poetica. Un valido esempio è quello dei Vociani, i quali sono stati eccellenti traduttori, sebbene quasi mai di poesia. Si pensi a Rebora, che ha tradotto in modo eccelso Gogol e Tolsoj, a Jahier che ha tradotto Clauerd, a Sbarbaro che ha tradotto Euripide, Flaubert e molti altri autori. Per alcuni di questi, soprattutto per Jahier, che ha trascorso la seconda parte della sua vita esclusivamente facendo il traduttore, anche per questioni economiche, si tratti di traduzioni di consumo, che servivano a far bollire la pentola quotidiana.

Agli inizi degli anni Venti, invece, abbiamo dei critici, che, diventando precursori di un fenomeno che sarà più forte nei nostri anni, si fanno competenti traduttori, come nel caso di Emilio Cecchi. Tuttavia, per avere un quadro della traduzione poetica in Italia prima della seconda Guerra Mondiale, bisogna tenere presente che esiste una produzione molto ampia di traduzioni di opere di poesia, in prosa e in versi, che non può essere messa sullo stesso piano delle traduzioni portate a termine da autori come quelli che ho elencato, in quanto si tratta di traduzioni che vengono fatte secondo la prosecuzione di forme letterarie e di linguaggi formali che si erano sviluppati in un periodo precedente, soprattutto in ventennio che va tra il 1890 e il 1910, quindi molto segnate dall'eredità carducciana e pascoliana. Sono quelle che si riconoscono qualche volta perfino da lontano e che, ironicamente, potremmo chiamare 'traduzioni di professori'; tra queste ce n'è una di un autore eminentissimo, Benedetto Croce, che ha tradotto da Goethe con esiti francamente un po' disperanti. Si pensi, inoltre, al pascoliano Valgimigli, che traduce dai classici latini. Su questa linea si mettono anche Diego Valeri, eccellente traduttore di poesia tedesca e di poesia francese. Un altro poeta-traduttore, che non rientra nell'elenco con cui avevo cominciato questo mio discorso, è il dannunziano Vincenzo Errante, autore di ragguardevoli traduzioni. Ma quando ho dovuto occuparmi di Errante per la traduzione del Faust, mi sono trovato dinanzi ad un testo francamente inaccettabile, non perché fosse sciatto, al contrario perché era eccessivamente ornato ed elativo, subendo in modo eccessivo l'influenza di D'Annunzio. Sarebbe interessante che qualcuno studiasse, magari per una tesi di laurea, il 'poetese' e il 'traduzionese' di questo periodo, che dà come risultato certe grosse imprese editoriali dove si traduce da tutte le lingue del mondo e dove si fanno dei grossi volumi della lirica universale; Orfeo sarebbe un libro ideale, ai fini statistici, dei modi e delle soluzioni traduttologiche dalle diverse prospettive internazionali.

La data di nascita della traduzione italiana moderna corrisponde, dunque, al periodo de La voce, ovvero al periodo del 'richiamo all'ordine'. Intendiamoci, non erano mancate, anni prima, delle manifestazioni d'insofferenza per questo linguaggio passatista a cui prima ho accennato. Infatti, nel '14, Ardengo Soffici stroncava a buon ragione una traduzione in endecasillabi di Mallarmé (si noti che lo stesso Soffici si fa traduttore di pagine in prosa di Mallarmé, che pubblica sulla Cerba). Insomma, in questo periodo, la traduzione diventa una specie di terreno di scontro e di equivoco tra vecchio e nuovo; nel 1916, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, che aveva trascorso una parte della propria giovinezza girando diverse città d'Italia in serate di declamazione di poesia in francese, soprattutto della poesia dei grandi simbolisti, quando diventò il capopopollo del Futurismo, iniziò a scagliarsi contro alcuni di questi poeti, e

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111 For an analysis of this literary period, see Eugenio Garin, Intellettuali italiani del XX secolo, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996.
in particolare contro Mallarmé, che trovava, a suo dire, insopportabile, sebbene egli avesse segretamente tradotto in prosa poetica tutte le sue poesie allora edite. Infatti, nel 1916, Marinetti aveva pubblicato un piccolo libricino di queste traduzioni, del quale quasi nessuno si accorse, essendo in netta contraddizione con quello che andava allora predicando. È mia opinione personale che una parte di questa traduzione deve avergliela fatta il suo segretario Decio Cinti, il quale poi (così almeno risulta ad una verifica sui testi) è vissuto facendo per trett’anni traduzioni in prosa di tutti i maggiori francesi dell’Ottocento, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, e così via (non so se con o senza testo a fronte): traduzioni, queste, che all’epoca si ritenevano molto utili.


Nel 1932, Ungaretti pubblica la traduzione di un celeberrimo sonetto di Gongora, che due anni più tardi include in un volume di traduzioni comprendente, oltre a Gongora, delle versioni da Blake ed Esenin, quest’ultimo tradotto, presumibilmente, di ‘seconda mano’, in quanto non credo che Ungaretti conoscesse il russo. La data di questa traduzione è il 1932, dunque di poco precedente alla pubblicazione del secondo libro di poesie di Ungaretti, Il sentimento del tempo, del 1933. In questo momento, per Ungaretti, Gongora rappresenta una metafora di Mallarmé, ed è un esempio di quegli elementi, in parte barocchi, ma anche nostri contemporanei, che la Terracini elenca in questo modo: importanza della forma, autonomia della parola, discorso non trasparente, poesia indipendente dal reale e dal normale. Si noti come la soggettività di Ungaretti, molto segnata dai tardo-simbolisti e dalle prime avanguardie francesi, intercetti in Mallarmé le origini dell’esperienza linguistica moderna, e cerchi un suo antenato in questo poeta del secolo d’oro spagnolo, il quale compone il sonetto in questione intorno al 1785-1786. Nel secondo dopoguerra, Solmi, critico straordinario di questi fenomeni, sosterrà, con ragioni che mi paiono molto persuasive, che è pericoloso insistere a ricercare nell’ermetismo di Gongora motivi e concordanze che lo apparentino alle moderne esperienze decadentistiche, e particolarmente, alle ricerche della poesia pura, facendo dello spagnolo una sorta di precursore di Mallarmé, un post-romantico del Seicento. Per dirlo in modo sintetico: quello che attira Ungaretti verso la poesia di Gongora è chiaramente l’unione di astrazione spiritualistica e di ossessione naturalistica (a proposito di Gongora, Ungaretti noterà ‘l’adesione all’esistere carnale del tempo e delle cose’).

Questo congiungimento di astrazione spiritualistica e ossessione naturalistica è l’elemento che Lukács considera equivalente al fenomeno tipico delle poetiche decadentistiche tardo-simbolisti. Entrambi i componenti si ritrovano nelle versioni che Ungaretti offre non solo di Gongora, ma anche di altri poeti. Ho predicato per tre sere consecutive contro il confronto con il testo d’origine, e tuttavia ora è interessante rilevare come in Ungaretti prevalgono altri elementi, come la volontà di distrazione (notevole, ad esempio, sia l’omissione delle divisioni strofiche del sonetto, eliminate anche dal sonetto originale, sia delle maiuscole nobilitanti all’inizio di ogni verso, e sia la trasformazione del
sonetto di Gongora in un sonetto elisabettiano, che coincide con la sua traduzione da Shakespeare). Faccio, comunque, notare che il sonetto shakespeariano è di quattordici versi, e non di quindici, come fa qui Ungaretti, avendo bisogno di un verso in più.

Torniamo a parlare di Solmi, per il quale esiste una predestinazione di unione tra il traduttore e il lirico, una tendenza spiccata, dice Mengaldo, ad una poesia ‘di secondo grado’, una poesia nobilmente meditativa, in cui ‘i gusti del traduttore non disdicono la fisionomia mentalistica e saggistica di questo poeta, intrisa di elegia. Perché continuiamo a fare riferimento a Solmi, che, tutto sommato, è una figura di secondo piano della nostra letteratura? Indicherò l’esistenza di due linee, nella traduzione del quindicennio che precede la guerra, la prima delle quali è quella dei traduttori come, appunto, Solmi, Valeri, Vigolo, Montale, per i quali è molto forte il sentimento della dignità di un modello letterario, che coincide con quello della tradizione. Di conseguenza, essi considerano la lingua poetica del Nocevento come l’ultima incarnazione di questa grande tradizione. Quando si parla di tradizione, tuttavia, si fa riferimento anche a qualcosa che è extra-letterario, di tipo socio-storico, socio-politico. In altre parole, essi non vivono la frattura determinata dalla crisi del genere poesia in quanto tale, mentre c’è un’altra linea di traduttori – tra cui troviamo Ungaretti, Quasimodo e certamente anche il giovane Luzi – per i quali la percezione della frattura nella tradizione è individuata come modernità, come avevano intuito le avanguardie storiche. Per costoro, l’atteggiamento nei confronti del passato, l’utilizzo della tradizione è carico del pathos del passato della distanza. Sono quei traduttori per i quali la traduzione è raffigurata nel belissimo verso del Petrarca ‘Quanta aria dai bel viso mi diparte’. In questo caso, il ‘bel viso’ è l’oggetto stesso della traduzione: ‘aria’, che è anche ‘aria secolare’. In questo consiste la ‘malinconia del moderno’, la nostalgia e il sentimento del passato che vuole mantenere la distanza.

La linea, che ricordavo prima, che fa capo a Solmi, Vigolo, Montale, e anche in parte a Sereni, patisce in misura minore questo senso della distanza, in quanto si sente inserita, in qualche modo, in una continuità. La tendenza della malinconia del tempo, invece, può andare d’accordo con posizioni politiche radicali, sia di estrema destra, sia di estrema sinistra (Ungaretti era di destra, e Quasimodo di sinistra). Questi poeti-traduttori, inoltre, assumono atteggiamenti di recupero formale del passato. Quasimodo traduce i greci che, nella sua ottica, non hanno più nulla a che fare con la storia, anzi, sono, per definizione, quelli che egli tratta in un modo quasi astratto come se la loro storia non fosse mai esistita. Ciò nondimeno, abbiamo una terza categoria di traduttori, quelli che annullerebbero sia il pathos, sia il dolore della storia. Si tratta del traduttore tipico degli ultimi trent’anni, che traduce qualcosa nella sua utilizzabilità di superficie, astoricamente, magari delegando alla prefazione l’offerta d’incenso nei confronti della Storia. Tale genere di traduttore contemporaneo traduce volentieri i classici, ma affida la loro dimensione storica all’introduzione, dove, in termini d’informazione storica o di interpretazione critica, viene spiegato al lettore, ad esempio, chi sia Pindaro e in cosa consista la poesia dell’Edda. In realtà, invece, si attua un globale rifiuto di quella dimensione storica che questo genere di traduttore sembrerebbe volere documentare. E ci si trova dinanzi ad una sorta di supermarket dove possiamo passare con il carrello di qui e di là e raccogliere questo o quell’autore, in quel sistema di citazioni che si definisce il postmoderno, quella dimensione in cui stiamo vivendo non da oggi. Il postmoderno è un fenomeno molto serio, non una moda, quindi non va considerato come un segno fuggevole dei tempi. È di Jameson la riflessione che spiega come il postmoderno non sia una tendenza come le altre, ma la fine di ogni tendenza, ovvero la distruzione di un secolo di avanguardie e neo-avanguardie, situazione da ritenersi quale forma più rispondente all’attuale fase dello sviluppo capitalistico internazionale. Come Jameson, credo fermamente che si stia verificando la disposizione, su un unico piano senza profondità storica, di tutta l’eredità possibile nei confronti della quale si procede per citazione, come fanno tanti pittoresi e tanti architetti contemporanei che, essenzialmente, citano. Siamo, dunque, in un’era, per così dire ‘citazionista’.
Un simile fenomeno si verifica, ovviamente, anche in poesia. Ciò non costituisce affatto un dato negativo, tuttavia, nel caso del traduttore-poeta, tali modalità ‘citazionistiche’ inducono e legittimano, comunque, un atteggiamento del tutto diverso da quello dalla prima tipologia di traduttori, come Montale o Solmi, delle cui metodologie si è precedentemente discusso, i quali, in qualche modo, si sentivano legati alla tradizione, cittadini di un’Italia, di un Mediterraneo, di una traduzione umanistica; e parimenti stimolano e avvallano un atteggiamento diverso anche da quello della seconda categoria di traduttori, a cui appartengono di Ungaretti e Quasimodo, maggiormente consapevoli della frattura occorsa nella storia, e, dunque, sensibili al pathos della distanza.

È di Quasimodo l’intuizione geniale della poetica della parola ‘verticale’, sottratta alla continuità della dimensione storica. E come traduttore, ha puntato a quei testi che, non solo sono remoti nel tempo, in quanto all’origine della lirica mediterranea e greca, ma che sono perlopiù anche inverificabili: infatti, chi ha messo il naso nei frammenti di Saffo sa perfettamente che con loro puoi fare quello che vuoi, come con i frammenti dei presocratici. Vorrei, inoltre, porre alla vostra attenzione le critiche mosse a Quasimodo dai cosiddetti ‘professori’, i quali arrogantemente ritenevano che egli non avesse capito nulla e che avesse sbagliato tutto nelle sue traduzioni; ebbene, in quel caso, gli sciocchi erano loro, i professori. Quello che importava a Quasimodo, infatti, era, ‘il vento del nord rosso di fulmini’, che era una sua invenzione di pura verticalità, assolutezza, la quale garantiva a quei versi classici una copertura aurea tutta ungarettiana.

Nel caso di scrittori autorevoli a confronto, non vale neppure la presenza del testo originale, ma il chiedersi che collocazione possa avere questa traduzione, in senso estetico. Quello ‘sbagliare’ certi dettagli e certe sfumature di un dato esimio traduttore (che, se te ne accorgi, gli telefoni e glielo dici perché li corregga) non decreta affatto la cattiva qualità della traduzione. Questo cedere all’errore non tocca la qualità estetica della traduzione autoriale che, se presente, è ‘un sogno di secondo grado’ su un episodio pregevole di una data cultura, si chiami Baudelaire, Milton o Shakespeare.

Non mi soffermerò, in questa sede, su un altro genere di traduzioni, quelle ‘a quattro mani’, effettuate dai poeta e dai comparativista specialista in lingue straniere. Ritornando alla resa dei classici, cui accennavo con l’esempio di Orfeo, si potrebbe redigere una storia della traduzione comprendente tutte le versioni di traduzioni di un dato poeta effettuate nell’arco di cento anni per verificare come il testo classico pervenga a noi attraverso queste varianti nel tempo. Prendiamo ad esempio la storia della traduzione di Baudelaire, che non eccede i cento anni. In tal caso, la traduzione si offrirà come strumento per capire il testo originale nella sua relazione al presente storico, e non se ne prenderà in analisi che questa qualità specifica. Per ribadire un esempio già dato: se è Montale a tradurre un testo della Dickinson, ne risulterà che a me la poesia della Dickinson non interesserà quasi più. Mi interesserà soltanto il risultato a cui Montale è pervenuto. Infatti, ha perfettamente ragione, in questo caso, Montale ad eliminare l’originale (solo i cialtroni, sosteneva Goethe, sono modesti). Nel caso della mia traduzione di Goethe, ho inutilmente pregato Einaudi di non pubblicare i testi a fronte, forse per farmi anch’io bello all’ombra di quello che aveva fatto Montale con la Dickinson, ma non c’è stato verso di convincerlo. Gli editori vogliono il testo a fronte! Quanto al traduttore, egli considera che quelle poche pagine, che ritiene ora assolutamente sue, non abbiano più bisogno di confronto – se valgono, allora stanno in piedi e camminano da sole!

La vera traduzione poetica è fatta da quelli che poeti sono, o si presumono tali. Essa trascende la traduzione letteraria prosastica, la quale, tuttavia, occupa una parte enorme del mercato editoriale e il cui scopo generale è quello di mettere in contatto il pubblico dei lettori con delle poetiche antiche o straniere ancora ignore. Per esempio, in Italia, negli anni ’44, ’45, ’46 Mondadori pubblicò, nella collana ‘Medusa’, una di queste vaghe antologie dal titolo Poesie, contenente una trentina di testi lirici inglesi, alcuni dei quali mediocri, appartenenti a quel ventennio, tradotti in modo da trasformare lo stile di ciascun autore in qualcosa che stava tra Quasimodo e Ungaretti. In queste traduzioni si palesava, per così dire, un ungarettismo e un quasimodesimo generalizzati. Non parliamo, qui, della conoscenza della lingua dalla quale
si traduce, ma di un atteggiamento nei confronti del testo con il risultato che tutti quei poeti inglesi antologizzati finirono con il sembrare dei discepoli di Quasimodo e Ungaretti. Inoltre, un testo che oggi appare intraducibile può diventare traducibile domani, e ciò dipende dai mutamenti e dalle situazioni che si determinano nella lingua-cultura d’arrivo, la quale può, infine, pervenire allo stadio adeguato per potere tradurre quello che prima non riusciva a tradurre. E, su questo tema, si rimanda alla Critica del gusto, di Galvano della Volpe, un testo eccezionalmente ricco, che contiene osservazioni di enorme interesse e acume sulla traduzione, in relazione al tempo in cui fu pubblicato.

Parlavo prima dei poeti-traduttori antologizzati da Mengaldo, ma a questi andrebbero aggiunti i nomi di quegli autori di ‘rifacimenti’ – quindi non autori di vere e proprie traduzioni, ma di interpretazioni – come Pier Paolo Pasolini, il quale è autore di straordinari rifacimenti, come i ‘Falsi provenzali’, già presenti sia nelle sue poesie giovanili in friulano, sia Nell’usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica. Infatti, questi rifacimenti pasoliniani sia da Rimbaud, sia dai poeti provenzali, che sono delle realizzazioni di grandissima eleganza e bravura, dicono di più sui poeti provenzali e su Rimbaud di quanto non dicano tante ‘vere e proprie’ traduzioni. Un altro straordinario ‘rifacitore’ è Giacomo Noventa, che si era posto il problema della traduzione in un suo splendido saggio del 1934, il primo che ha pubblicato su Solaria, a proposito di certe versioni di Heine in dialetto veneto, fatte da un tale di cui non ricordo bene il nome. Noventa, che scrive in veneto, ha ‘rifatto’ ripetutamente da Goethe, Heine, Machado, Lermontov: tuttavia, come nei grandi maestri dell’arte pittorica, basta un tocco, e questi ‘rifacimenti’ diventano senza possibilità di dubbio, poesie di Noventa; in questo caso, è interessante il confronto non tanto per fare la solita gara d’atletica, ma per vedere dove egli abbia modificato violentemente i testi ispiratori. I rifacimenti di Noventa sono, infatti, speciali e si pregiano di tecniche ammirevoli, che vi consiglio di esaminare, come la sua versione-rifacimento di una poesia di Machado, oppure la poesia ottenuta prendendo un brano del prologo del Faust di Goethe. Ma il miglior rifacimento, in senso postmoderno, è quello di Giovanni Giudici, poiché egli sa che il livello di partecipazione culturale non può essere più quello di un secolo fa, e ricorre a quella Russia da ridere, alla Russia da operetta che è assolutamente all’avanguardia.

In queste mie quattro lezioni mi sono astretto, non per modestia (non sono modesto), a non parlare di me, ma mi viene troppo bene per non farlo: venti anni fa mi capitò, come può capitare a tutti, di leggere una versione in inglese da uno sconosciuto poeta cinese dell’ottavo secolo, uno dei duemila o tremila poeti di una delle tante dinastie cinesi. Mi piacque e mi limitai semplicemente a tradurre in italiano la poesia cinese, desumendola da questa precedente traduzione. Ad un certo punto, mi accorsi che, per dare un senso personale a quei quattro versi, bisognava che ce ne aggiungessi uno che non era nel testo originale, e che avrei inventato io. Questo verso aggiunto cambiò completamente il significato dei quattro versi precedenti, vale a dire trasferì l’immagine da un universo confuciano ad un universo influenzato sia dal cristianesimo, sia dall’esistenzialismo. Anche la mia versione è un esempio di rifacimento, ma un esempio limite, poiché aggiunge addirittura un verso che non c’era nel testo di partenza. Si tratta di una classica poesia antica cinese, avente come tema il viaggio del Mandarino inviato in missione dall’Imperatore in qualche parte remota dell’Impero. Il testo nella mia traduzione recita: ‘Solo nella notte non riesco a prendere sonno./ Penso al mio Paese mille miglia lontano./ Quanti pensieri turbano il cuore del viaggiatore./ Questi capelli saranno domani invecchiati di un anno.’ I versi della poesia originale propongono le malinconiche riflessioni sul tempo e sulla vita del funzionario cinese da una lontana e sperduta locanda, mentre il verso che ho aggiunto ‘Conosco l’ordine di viaggio: non posso avere paura’ conferisce al tutto una nota eroica. ‘L’ordine di viaggio’, o ‘foglio di via’, è un mandato che è stato conferito, e che, pur nel travaglio e nel dolore della solitudine, non permette di avere paura. Sebbene anche il mio verso possa essere letto dai nostri contemporanei in termini puramente esistenziali, per me rappresentava un atto di fiducia di tipo sostanzialmente religioso quale non avrebbe potuto esserci in un poeta cinese.
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Oxford, OX1 4TS. Tel.: 0044 (0) 1865 295030
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