Lorenza Gattamorta

LUZI, ELIOT AND DANTE:
LANGUAGE AND EXPERIENCE

Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Italian Literature at University of London

Department of Italian
University College London
2002
ABSTRACT

The aim of my thesis is to determine how far Mario Luzi was influenced by Dante, as mediated by various Italian poets and especially by T.S. Eliot. While the relationship between Montale, Eliot and Dante has for decades been part of Italian critical discourse, that between Luzi, Eliot and Dante has not yet been given the attention it deserves. This research, therefore, seeks to add a postscript to the history of Eliot's international achievements and, more generally, to make a contribution to the question of the relationship between Italian and Anglo-American dantismo.

In order to have a clearer understanding of the postwar period, and especially of that Dante whom Mario Luzi at this stage of his poetic output was beginning to consider his 'maestro operativo', this study examines the pre-war years and those immediately following, limiting the field of inquiry to the poetic world closest to Mario Luzi, that of 'the third generation' Florentine poets. After an Introduction describing the method used to trace the relationship between Dante and Hermeticism - and an attempt is made above all to identify which Dante is the object of the discussion - the first three chapters deal with the Platonic stilnovismo and dantismo of Bigongiari, Parronchi and Luzi.

Chapter 3 examines the stilnovismo and dantismo of the early Luzi (from La barca to Quaderno gotico), while Chapter 4 studies Dantinea 'figures' in Luzi's post-war poetry (from Primizie del deserto to Dal fondo delle campagne). Both chapters attempt to offer a new approach to Luzi's stilnovismo and dantismo by way of an intertextual, intratextual and 'interfigural' analysis. What lacks in this field of research is in fact an exegesis capable of systematically exploring the intentionality, history, and stylistic-rhetorical significance of the allusions and highlighting possible mediations on the part of other Italian and foreign poets. The second part of the thesis concentrate on Luzi's reception of Eliot from the thirties to the sixties within the context of the Italian critical debate of those same years. Key issues discussed include the intertextual relationship between Luzi, Eliot and Dante in the post-war period, theories and practice of impersonality and intersubjectivity in their writing.
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The aim of this study is to enter as far as it is possible into that mysterious and complex phenomenon that is the memory of poets, endeavouring to reveal (even though all we can do for the most part is simply to discuss them and draw up hypotheses) those threads of experience that precede and accompany the writing of a text, then to be transformed into something completely different. In particular, the traces of Dante that the reader finds in the poetry of Mario Luzi illustrate perfectly the complicated process of more or less conscious re-elaboration on the part of the poet in an attempt to express something of his own.

The study starts out from the presupposition that the inter-textual connection between the twentieth-century text and the ancient one cannot be reduced to an exclusive relationship between two texts, limiting research to a simple list of direct and definite sources. And anyway, Luzi, with his Platonic-Petrarchan starting point, does not seem to have decided a priori to echo Dantean language, which rather emerges from his memory because it is a vital part of the Italian lexicon, both literary and common, and above all because by deciding at a certain point to approach reality in its ongoing and problematic nature he finds that he has to rediscover – and modify in order to bring up to date – the meaning of terms already used by the medieval poet. It might be said that Luzi has relived the substance of the Dantean universe but also transformed it, through a different personal and epochal experience, and this without forgetting other literary experiences closer to him which in some way developed the medieval work still further and made it a subject of discussion.

This is why the attempt to define the nature of the relationship between Mario Luzi and Dante has made it all-important to assess the mediation exercised by other Italian and foreign poets. Pride of place has been given to T.S. Eliot. While indeed the relationship between Montale, Eliot and Dante has for long been at the centre of Italian and English criticism, that between Luzi, Eliot and Dante has not yet received the attention it deserves.
The main point is that after more than six hundred years what the two twentieth-century writers, starting from different traditions and languages, discovered in the language of Dante seems to consist in what Eliot admires as the ‘perfection of a common language’ and which Luzi sees as ‘lingua naturale’, a language that both the poets have defined as ‘language of experience’ and that other Italian writers have called ‘lingua delle cose’ (Pirandello), or ‘lingua che pone i suoi significati nei fatti e non nelle idee’ (Montale).

Central to this inquiry is, in particular, Dante’s revolutionary presence in the modern Italian Hermetic poetry as registered in different ways in the post-war years. The post-war period, which for the ‘third generation’ Florentine poets meant a turning-point in their relationship with Dante — a different kind of turning-point depending on the individual writer -, did not seem to imply so much a turning back from the dominant Platonic-Petrarchan line of the literary tradition of the time, as a dialectical confrontation with that tradition, with a tradition, that is, which was an indelible part of the Italian and European mind. However, 1945 was a turning-point in the creation of a new poetic language, and together with a change in society and politics the reception of Dante also changed.

To have a clearer understanding of the post-war period, and especially of that Dante whom Mario Luzi at this stage of his poetic output was beginning to consider his ‘maestro operativo’, this study begins by examining the immediate pre-war years, limiting the field of inquiry to the poetic world closest to Mario Luzi, that of Florentine Hermeticism.

After a methodological Introduction which attempts to describe the nature and to establish the limits of the relationship between Dante and the ‘third generation’ Florentine poets — trying above all to identify which Dante is the object of the discussion - the first part of the thesis deals with the Platonic stilnovismo and dantismo of Bigongiari, Parronchi and Luzi, in the hermetic period and in the postwar years. Given to the historical and cultural malaise of the thirties and forties, the three writers, each with his own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, arrived at the discursivity and dialogic nature of Dantean and Eliotian language only after having travelled the whole way down the road of Platonic, Petrarcan and stilnovistic abstraction and idealization. However, already in the Hermetic period, especially in the case of Luzi, conflicts and doubts appear which, even if they do
not yet presuppose Dante, do uncover the crisis concealed behind the absolute and idealistic premises of Hermeticism itself.

Chapters 3 and 4 study Luzi's *stilnovismo* and *dantismo* from *La barca* (1935) as far as *Dal fondo delle campagne* (1965). While stilnovistic reminiscences in Luzi have never been the object of any specific study, nor have they been catalogued, some of Luzi’s *dantismi* have already been identified and catalogued. What is therefore lacking in this field of research is not only a catalogue of stilnovistic echoes and a more comprehensive catalogue of Dantean ones, but above all an exegesis capable of systematically exploring the intentionality, history and stylistic and rhetorical significance of stilnovistic and Dantean allusions, highlighting the possible and frequent mediations of other Italian and foreign poets. What is needed, in other words, is a study that can move both diachronically and synchronically through Luzi’s *oeuvre* examining recurrent *topoi* or figures characteristic of stilnovistic and Dantean lyrics and precise words and phrases which could give the reader a more or less veiled glimpse of the original source, or more often the source which has played an intermediary role. Mediations and contaminations complicate the intertextual network by enriching it with other references.

Harold Bloom has shown how a creative motion in poetry and in all art occurs under the instigating, distorting, reactive pressure of the works of predecessors and of contemporaries. What he has called ‘anxiety of influence’ is usually inevitable and unconscious, but it is interesting to explore the ways in which and why it sometimes becomes intentional. This study aims to establish when echoes from Dante are introduced consciously, that is as allusions, and when they are introduced unconsciously, because part of what Contini called ‘memoria nazionale’ or, according to Segre’s general definition of cultural phenomena of this kind, because ‘materiali già registrati e assimilati dalla cultura’. This distinction, Barański

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observed, ‘is almost always ignored in the studies of Dante’s fortuna in the twentieth century’.

After investigating Luzi’s stilnovismo and dantismo according to these methodological premises, the second part of the thesis sets out to show how and up to what point T.S. Eliot inaugurated a new way of reading Dante and early Italian lyric poetry in Italy, and in particular within the context of Hermeticism. The rare echoes of Eliot in Luzi’s first collections confirm that the attraction of Eliot’s dantismo was still weak in the thirties, although it will be necessary to establish how and to what extent the influential Montale and Contini, together with Praz, Baldi and Berti, helped this English dantismo to create a cultural climate that Luzi also absorbed and in which Dante (and especially the Dante of the ‘common’ and ‘natural’ language) was to find his moment of greatest modernity. If, in fact, his dantismo does not seem to have been the main and most profound reason for Luzi’s need to re-read Dante (even after the Second World War, when Italian criticism, for example that of Anceschi and Paci, was dedicating more time to Eliot), it did definitely determine, as the poet himself observed, the poetic stimmung of the twentieth century and of the Italian cultural milieu closest to him, to the point of leaving many traces in Luzi’s poetry itself. Eliotian echoes and symbols appearing in Luzi’s poetry from Quaderno gotico (1946) and going as far as Nel magma (1963) will be subjected to an accurate textual analysis, in which it will be shown how T.S. Eliot played a part in the evolution of Luzi’s poetry towards dramatic verse and a progressive breakdown of the boundaries between poetry and prose, to the point of approaching Dante’s own way of describing places, hours, encounters, characters, dialogues and reflections.

Chapter 6 compares the issue of ‘impersonality’ in the work of Luzi and Eliot. Eliot’s theory of impersonality has already been the subject of numerous critical studies but Luzi’s will be discussed here for the first time, starting from the assumption that there is a positive encounter - more inter-discursive than intertextual - with Eliot’s theory. Although the language employed (Eliot’s more allegorical and Luzi’s more symbolic) leads to a different and original mode of expression in the two authors, both Eliot’s and Luzi’s ‘impersonal’ poetry can be

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seen as part of a reaction to the subjectivism of Romantic-Symbolist poetry and at the same time, paradoxically, as an attempt by both to affirm the properties of personality. We shall therefore see that the two poets’ diffidence towards the absolute and demiurgic personality, as the Romantics understood it, is not accompanied by a sceptical lack of confidence in the human: the objective, natural dynamics chosen by the two writers in the wake of Dante does not work against the subject but is its necessary completion.

London, 6 December 2001

The Italian version of this research is forthcoming with the title La memoria delle parole. Uno studio intertestuale su Luzi, Eliot e Dante (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the enlightened and generous assistance I received from my supervisors, Emmanuela Tandello and John Took. I wish to express my special gratitude to Andrea Battistini and Ezio Raimondi, for their valuable suggestions on the manuscript and for their advice since the beginning of the project. My best thanks are also due to Professors Zygmunt Barański and Diego Zancani, for their illuminating criticisms, and to the following Professors: Jozef Faliński, Vita Fortunati, Anna Laura and Giulio Lepschy, Luigi Scorrano, Stefano Verdino, Mario Luzi. For financial support, I wish to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board, the Accademia dei Lincei, the Centro Europeo Università and Ricerca of Bologna, and the University of Perugia. I alone am responsible for the views expressed in this work and for its shortcomings.
Abbreviations

1. Critical Works by Mario Luzi

UP Un'illusione platonica ed altri saggi, 2nd edn with an appendix of new essays (1941; Bologna: Boni Editor, 1972)
IL L' inferno e il limbo, 2nd enlarged edn (1949; Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964)
SM Studio su Mallarmé (Florence: Sansoni, 1952)
IS L'idea simbolista, 2nd edn (1959; Milan: Garzanti, 1976)
TQ Tutto in questione (Florence: Vallecchi, 1965)
VF Vicissitudine e forma (Milan: Rizzoli, 1974)
DN Discorso naturale (Milan: Garzanti, 1984)
NP Naturalenza del poeta (Milan: Garzanti, 1995)
CQPV Cantami qualcosa pari alla vita (Forli: Nuova Compagnia Editrice, 1996)
DLM Dante e Leopardi o della modernità, ed. by S. Verdino (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992)
CMS Colloquio. Un dialogo con Mario Specchio (Milan: Garzanti, 1999)
PS Prima semina. Articoli, saggi e studi (1933 -1946), ed. by M. Zulberti (Milan: Mursia, 1999)
VRD ‘Le vie del ritorno a Dante. Colloquio con Mario Luzi’, ed. by L. Gattamorta, Restine, n.s. 21.80 (1999), 9-20
ED ‘Eliot e Dante: un debito con il mondo’. Interview with Mario Luzi, ed. by L. Gattamorta, Grande Enciclopedia Epistemologica , n.s. 3 (2000), 37-61

2. Collections of Poems by M. Luzi

O L'opera poetica, ed. by S. Verdino (Milan: Mondadori, 1998)
LB La barca, 2nd enlarged edn (Florence: Parenti, 1942)
AN Avvento notturno (Florence: Vallecchi, 1940)
UB Un brindisi (Florence: Sansoni, 1946)
QG Quaderno gotico (Florence: Vallecchi, 1947)
PS Poesie sparse, in Il giusto della vita (Milan: Garzanti, 1960)
PD Primizie del deserto (Milan: Schwarz, 1952)
OV Onore del vero (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1957)
DFC Dal fondo delle campagne (Turin: Einaudi, 1965)
NM Nel magma, 3rd enlarged edn (Milan: Garzanti, 1966)
SFI Su fondamenti invisibili (Milan: Rizzoli, 1971)
AFC  Al fuoco della controversia (Milan: Garzanti, 1978)
BNF  Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti (Milan: Garzanti, 1985)
FICS  Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare (Milan: Garzanti, 1990)
VTCS Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini (Milan: Garzanti, 1994)
SSU  Sotto specie humana (Milan: Garzanti, 1999)
T  Teatro (Milan: Garzanti, 1993)

3. Works by T.S. Eliot

KE  Knowledge and Experience (1916) (London: Faber & Faber, 1964)
SW  The Sacred Wood (1920) (London: Methuen, 1966)
SE  Selected Essays, 3rd enlarged edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1951)
UPUC  The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), 2nd edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1964)
OPP  On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber & Faber, 1957)
TCTC  To Criticize the Critic (London: Faber & Faber, 1965)
SP  Selected Prose, ed. by F. Kermode (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1975)
CP  Collected Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1962)
PART ONE

DANTE AND THE END OF HERMETICISM

Passando attraverso lo straniamento dell'alterità si deve cercare il significato che può avere per noi, deve essere posta la questione del significato che storicamente continua e va oltre l'originaria situazione di comunicazione.

Hans Robert Jauss
1.

DANTE AND THE ‘THIRD-GENERATION’ FLORENTINE POETS

È un fatto che noi moderni ci sentiamo più solidali col temperamento, dico il temperamento linguistico, di Dante; ma è altrettanto un fatto che la sostanza della nostra tradizione è più prossima alla cultura petrarchesca

Contini (1951)

1.1. Methodological Issues

In dealing with the relationship between Dante and the ‘third generation’ Florentine poets during the Hermetic period proper and immediately after, it is necessary to pause not only over the much-debated historiographic category of Hermeticism, but also over the methodological issues that arise when we speak of the relationship between Dante and certain writers who are traditionally considered to be part of the Platonic-Petrarchan line in Italian literature. Before

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1 In his essay on Le generazioni nella poesia italiana del Novecento Macri groups the poets together according to their date of birth, setting the first creative phase of the third generation (represented by Penna, De Libero, Sinisgalli, Pavese, Bertolucci, Gatto, Caproni, Sereni, Luzi, Parronchi and Bigongiari) between 1906 and 1914. See O. Macri, ‘Le generazioni nella poesia italiana del Novecento’, Paragone/Letteratura, 42 (1953), pp. 49-50, then, with the title Risultanze del metodo delle generazioni, in O. Macri, Caratteri e figure della poesia italiana contemporanea (Florence: Vallecchi, 1956), pp. 83-84. Actually, of the Florentine triad made up of Luzi, Bigongiari and Parronchi, all three born in 1914, only Luzi and Parronchi were born in Florence, while Bigongiari was born in Navacchio (Pisa). Nor is Luzi entirely Florentine: his poetry has deep traces of Siena, where he spent his school years, and of Sanprugnano, the birthplace of his parents, where the poet spent every summer up to 1940. Of the other poets of the ‘third generation’ (many of whom were never Hermetic), Penna was born in Perugia in 1906, De Libero in Fondi (Latina) in 1906, Sinisgalli in Montemurro (Potenza) in 1908, Pavese in Santo Stefano Belbo (Cuneo) in 1908, Gatto in Salerno in 1909, Bertolucci in San Lazzaro (Parma) in 1911, Caproni in Livorno in 1912, Sereni in Luino (Lago maggiore) in 1913.
embarking, therefore, upon a systematic examination of Mario Luzi's poetic oeuvre, we must focus on the kind of Platonic stilnovismo characteristic of Bigongiari's and Parronchi's Hermetic period and on the veiled dantismo of the following years. A study of these two authors, who have never before been studied from this point of view, will enable us in the following chapters to locate Luzi's Platonism, stilnovismo and dantismo within the historical and cultural context closest to him, and above all to identify what is unique to him as well as what distinguishes him from, and unites him with, the other two members of the Florentine Hermetic triad.

Critical accounts of when Hermeticism began and ended do not differ significantly, but there are substantial differences between those critics who place more emphasis on the historical aspects and those who concentrate directly on the poetical works: so Valli, who sees it running from 1936 (the appearance of Flora's essay) to 1947 (the appearance of Croce's essay), finds himself in opposition to Ramat, who locates it between 1932, the year of Montale's Casa dei doganieri, and 1945, the year of Luzi's Quaderno gotico. The years proposed by Ramat differ only slightly from the most recent chronological proposal, that of Pautasso, who chooses as his point of departure 1930, the year of Quasimodo's Acque e terre, and as his point of arrival 1947, the year of Ungaretti's Dolore and of Sereni's Diario di Algeria. It is within this chronological framework that we find the main exponents of Florentine Hermeticism: Mario Luzi, whose first poetic works were La Barca (1935),

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2 Also in Pegorari's Vocabolario dantesco della lirica italiana del Novecento (Bari: Palomar, 2000), which stresses the importance, almost always ignored by previous criticism, of a study of the relationship between Florentine hermeticism and Dante, does not give any space to the dantismo of Bigongiari and Parronchi, while a section is dedicated to the dantismo of Luzi (the critical bibliography on this last issue will be discussed in the introduction to Chapter 3). In the Hermetic period, as will be seen in the course of this chapter, the poetry of Bigongiari and Parronchi has extremely rare Dantesque echoes, but in the post-war period, above all in the case of Bigongiari, there appear Dantesque echoes of various kinds.


Avvento notturno (1940), Un brindisi (1946) and Quaderno gotico (1945); Piero Bigongiari, whose Hermetic work began with La figlia di Babilonia (1934-1942), preceded by L’Arca (1933-1942 but unpublished until 1994); and Alessandro Parronchi, whose first books of poetry were I giorni sensibili (1937-1940), I Visi (1937-1942), Alone (1939-1942), Sonno delle stagioni (1943-1945), Addii (1943-1946), In ascolto (1946-1947) and Occhi sul presente (1948), subsequently collected in the volume Un’attesa (1949). In those same years Quasimodo published Erato e Apollion (1936) and Ed è subito sera (1942), and Gatto published Morto ai paesi (1937) and Poesie (1939-41). Sinisgalli published Campi Elisi in 1939, Sereni made his debut with Frontiera in 1941, while in 1936 Ungaretti’s Sentimento del tempo had appeared and in 1939 Montale’s Le occasioni.

The first to place the Hermetic issue in its historical perspective and to investigate its problematic aspects was Flora, who laid the foundations for future historical and cultural interpretations of Hermeticism, the initial notion of which, owing to the predominantly negative implications of the term itself, supplied future criticism, from Romano and Giannessi up to Petrucciani, with a key to a reading of Hermeticism that was to turn out to be partial and reductive. Flora’s judgement, based on the presumed deliberately ‘obscurity’ of Hermetic poetry and criticism, was followed by Croce’s equally negative judgement, with its profound reservation as to so-called ‘pure poetry’: Croce spoke of lack of poetic substance, pure sound, poverty of spirit and sentiments, and late-Romantic decadentism.

That the pure poetry described by Croce is a long way from the poetry of Decadents and Hermeticists is now an incontestable historical and critical fact. Hermeticism suggested a sense of ideological and expressive crisis similar to

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6. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, quotations will be taken from O.
7. F. Flora, La poesia ermetica (Bari: Laterza, 1936).
that, for instance, of the Baroque or of Symbolism, but a more fruitful crisis than
the initial negative judgement would for so long have had us believe.
Hermeticism was furthermore made up of a mainly heterogeneous group of
writers who, very different from one another in respect of their origins and
experience, followed in those post-war years different ideological and stylistic
paths.\footnote{Mengaldo has several times dealt with Hermetic ‘grammar’, especially in ‘Il linguaggio della poesia
ermetica’ (1989), republished in P.V. Mengaldo, La tradizione del Novecento. Terza serie (Turin: Einaudi,
1991), pp. 131-57, especially pp. 137-42; his latest reference to the subject is in P.V. Mengaldo, Il
general works see F. Chiappelli, Langage traditionnel et langage personnel dans la poésie italienne
contemporaine (Neuchâtel: Université de Neuchâtel, 1951), pp. 79-85; G. Devoto, M.L. Altieri Biagi, La
lingua italiana. Storia e problemi attuali (Turin: ERI, 1979), pp. 191-96 (the chapter on the Hermeticists is
by Altieri Biagi); G.L. Beccaria, C. Del Popolo, C. Marazzini, L’italiano letterario. Profilo storico (Turin:
UTET, 1989), pp. 180-82; V. Coletti, Storia dell’italiano letterario. Dalle origini al Novecento (Turin:
Einaudi, 1993), pp. 429-34. Among the studies dedicated to the language of Bigongiari, Parronchi and Luzi
see in particular: F. Audisio, ‘Alcune caratteristiche della lingua poetica di Bigongiari’, Paradigma, 3
(1980), 355-81; O. Macri, Studi sull’ermetismo. L’enigma della poesia di Bigongiari (Lecce: Milella,
1988); I. Bigazzi and G. Falaschi (eds.), Per Alessandro Parronchi, Atti della giornata di studio, Florence –
the most important studies on Hermeticism see: F. Flora, La poesia ermetica (1936); L. Anceschi, Lirici
nuovi. Antologia (Milan: Hoepli, 1942), 2nd enlarged edn (Milan: Mursia, 1964); M. Apollonio, Ermetismo
(Padua: CEDAM, 1945); B. Croce, ‘La poesia pura’ (1947); M. Petrucchini, La poetica dell’ermetismo
italiano (Turin: Loescher, 1955); R. Jacobbi, ‘Campo di M arte’ trent’anni dopo: 1938-1968 (Florence:
poetiche critiche novecentesche (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970); C. Fioravanti, La critica e gli ermetici
(Bologna: Cappelli, 1978); D. Valli, Storia degli ermetici; P. Bigongiari, Poesia italiana del Novecento, 2
vols (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1980), II (Da Ungaretti alla terza generazione); G. Manacorda, Storia della
letteratura italiana tra le due guerre 1919-1943 (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1980); F. Di Carlo, Letteratura e
ideologia dell’ermetismo (Foggia: Edizioni Bastogi, 1981); B. Stasi, Ermetismo (Milan: La Nuova Italia,
2000).}

One of the main centres of Hermeticism, but not the only one, was Florence’s
Caffè San Marco, where Luzi, Bigongiari and Parronchi, born all three in 1914,
often met with Renato Poggioli, Carlo Bo, Oreste Macri, Leone Traverso and
Romano Bilenchi. These poets, critics and translators, found ample debating
space in the literary reviews of the thirties and early forties, especially in *Circoli, Il Bargello, Letteratura, Corrente, Campo di Marte, Prospettive, Primato* and for a certain period (except for Bigongiari) in *Frontespizio*. This is how Mario Luzi, in a piece from 1962 entitled ‘Discretamente personale’, describes Florence in the thirties:

Firenze era allora la città letterariamente più viva d'Italia; due generazioni di scrittori e di critici, matura l’una che aveva la sua più alta autorità in Eugenio Montale, giovane e ancora in formazione l’altra che portava alla notorietà Elio Vittorini, Romano Bilenchi, Tommaso Landolfi, e già rivelava la sua fisionomia interessante Carlo Bo, Leone Traverso, Gianfranco Contini, Oreste Maerì, Vasco Pratolini, Piero Bigongiari, Alessandro Parronchi, Renato Poggioli. [...] C’era specialmente tra i più giovani una vera e propria comunanza di propositi e di fini umani ed estetici. [...] L’ambiente in cui mi aggiravo era saturo di cultura, ma io restavo pur sempre giovane di ventidue o venticinque anni in balia di desideri, di illusioni, di sconforto. Dovrei credo parare anche d’amore: e dell’amore in quel tempo sospeso, in quella città rocciosa e abissale che è la città di Cavalcanti e di Dante, dove il sentimento del tutto e il sentimento del nulla esasperati dalla tensione del desiderio si avvicendano di ora in ora, di strada in strada. Dovrei anche parare delle letture solo in parte ordinate; di Mallarmé, di Rimbaud, di Eluard scardinati dal loro sistema e ascoltati come voci perdute nel mare dell’esistenza. (IL, p. 238)

The poetry of the Florentine Hermeticists, never forgetful of the teaching of Rimbaud, the influence of the Orphic and metaphysical poetry of Holderlin, Novalis, and Rilke, in the line of the Platonic-Petrarchan tradition, undoubtedly goes back to Ungaretti’s poetic Mallarmé-Leopardian symbolism with its dialectic of absence-duration-memory. Recurring elements in Luzi, Bigongiari and Parronchi are the strategic inversions of certain words, a non-traditional use of prepositions which contributes to the creation of ambiguity and plurisemanticity in the message (the predominance of the polyvalent ‘di’ is a case in point); substantives without the support of articles (to show their indeterminacy and absoluteness); mainly paratactic syntax; recherché lexis with occasional and isolated dialectal forms; a baroque use of adjectives which gives details an allusive and often metaphysical feel. There are recurrent symbols and analogies (thought to be ways of understanding the real and its hidden essence), while the
word is conceived as a lyrical revelation of innerness and of the unconscious, in a never-ending search for fragments of truth concealed in the grey reality of the everyday. To all this is added, apart from a critical awareness closely connected to the creative act, the mute figure of absence, described in an essay by Carlo Bo, *L’assenza, la poesia* (1940), with the comma in the title evoking and at the same time annulling the tension between the two terms and pointing to their equivalence.

However, beside these undeniable constants which make up the grammar of Florentine Hermeticism, it is important to remember the exceptions and peculiarities which form part of any grammar and which are often the liveliest part of that grammar. The reference is, for example, to the lexical traces left by Montale in Parronchi’s early poetry and, but differently, in that of Bigongiari and Luzi. The classifications and constants, in short, however useful they may be, often make us forget that Ungaretti and Montale represented two distant if interacting moments within the Hermetic lexicon. The early poetry of Luzi, Bigongiari and Parronchi was certainly closer to the monolingualistic, Platonic and Symbolist tradition established in the Petrarch-Leopardi-Mallarmé-Ungaretti poetic line, with the influences of Onofri and Campana. At times, however, even if contrastively or dialectically, that same poetry was forced to come to terms with the poetic and linguistic *imagery* of Montale, who formed part of the realistic-objective line of Dante-Pascoli-Gozzano, and had given an original interpretation, as far back as the thirties, of the Eliotian poetics of the ‘objective correlative’ (on the reception of Eliot in the years of Hermeticism and the post-war years see Chapter 5 and 6).

The dominant Platonic-Petrarchan register is from time to time shot through by a contradictory and dialectical tone, which, especially in the case of Luzi, deserves greater critical attention. The relationship between Florentine Hermeticism and Dante introduces into this picture a new and complicating
factor which, together with a number of others (social, political and cultural), points to the crisis within Hermeticism itself.  

When we speak of dantismo the immediate problem, as Anna Dolfi notes, is to decide which Dante we are referring to: ‘Con quanti Dante abbiamo a che fare? Con quello petroso o con quello stilnovista, con quello del De vulgari o con quello del Convivio, con quello della Commedia o con quello delle tre cantiche o con quello degli oltre diecimila versi (e anche il rapporto numerico, nel risultato di ogni possibile proporzione/equazione, non è irrilevante)? Quale Dante sceglieremo, e soprattutto, quale registro sceglieremo?’ Obviously, when Bigongiari, on the occasion of the International Meeting on Dante nella letteratura del Novecento held in Rome in 1977, speaks of ‘L’ermetismo e Dante’, he is not referring to the plurilingual and pluri-stylistic Dante that Contini opposes to a monolingual Petrarch:  

Contrariamente a una diffusa quanto erronea ipotesi critica che l’ermetismo si sia svolto sotto il segno dominante del Petrarca, sino a farne persino da parte dei suoi detrattori un fenomeno di reviviscenza novecentesca del petrarchismo, è da dire che una delle componenti segrete, ma tra le più portanti, della cultura dell’ermetismo, è rappresentata proprio dalla poesia dantesca in tutta la  

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12 See M. Petrucciani, Due paragrafi per Dante e il Novecento, pp. 177-78: ‘Non interessa l’insegnamento del plurilinguismo e polistilismo: la scrittura ermetica, si sa, non esce volentieri dalla sua patinata, idealizzante andatura monolinguistica spesso compiaciuta di preziosismi lessicali e sintattici, ambigui analogismi, musicalità rarefatte. D’altra parte però questa scrittura, almeno nelle sue punte più critografiche, è unica, iniziatiche, non nasconde le sue ambizioni ontologiche: pone anzi la propria candidatura a logos – il termine è caro alla prosa della critica e della teoria letteraria di quegli anni – come (unica?) possibilità di decifrazione dell’inconoscibile, illuminazione folgorante nelle tenebre’. 
That Hermeticism resists pure lyricism and does not correspond to what Croce called *poesia pura* is now an accepted critical fact (perhaps it was only Quasimodo who really managed to inhabit those absolute and timeless realms), but the notion that Petrarch, star in the Italian and European literary firmament, should no longer be the dominant sign but take second place to Dante is altogether more difficult to find in the theoretical and poetic texts of those years. By the same token, however, - and especially when we consider the pre-eminently Petrarchan qualities of the Hermeticists and of their beloved French poets (Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Ronsard, Éluard and so on) - it is dangerous to assert that Dante was one of the main pillars of Hermeticism.\(^{13}\) It is

\[\text{su a ratio esplicata e implicata nella propria finale contraddizione - che finisce per essere un punto preciso dell'iterum mentis provocatore dell'hic et nunc architetico - e per cui il lavoro poetico si svolge su una materia resistente al puro lirismo.}\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) P. Bigongiari, 'L'ermetismo e Dante', in *Dante nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, p. 203; the essay was then included in P. Bigongiari, *Poesia italiana del Novecento*, II, 441-451 (henceforth quotations will be taken from the volume on *Dante nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*). In an interview in 1981, granted to Roberto Bertoldo for his graduation dissertation on *Ermetismo fiorentino come petrarchismo*, the writer confirms his judgement on the non-Petrarchism of Hermeticism but at the same time takes a softer line stressing the importance of the Petrarchian influence on Leopardi which, it might be added, is a filter for a new and modern Petrarchian interpretation: ‘L’idea di ermetismo come petrarchismo è da me totalmente rigettata, è una falsa idea critica dominante, ma anche un luogo comune sbagliato. Certo che Petrarca e la sua grande lezione, ha contato, veda in proposito il capitolo ‘Le poetiche critiche novecentesche “sub specie Petarchae”’ nel volume di Adelia Noferi, *Le poetiche critiche novecentesche* (Firenze, Le Monnier, 1970); ma devo anche dirle che, per quanto mi riguarda, è piutosto Leopardi che mi ha insegnato quella nozione di movimento intrinseca al fare poetico che, come tale, obbedisce alla legge della propria irreversibilità: il “verso dove” implica il senso del tragico’ (P. Bigongiari, *Nel mutismo dell’universo. Interviste sulla poesia 1965-1997*, ed. by A. Dolfi (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001), p. 105).

\(^{14}\) Luciano Anceschi was the first to deal with the problem of Hermetic Petrarchism and in an essay of 1943 he observed: ‘La curva della fortuna del Petrarca in questi anni sta risalendo forse verso una cima di perduta felicità […] Il Petrarca si è offerto come un mito attivo per un rinnovato ed efficace umanesimo delle lettere e come un motivo supremo per una rilettura contemporanea della tradizione’ (L. Anceschi, ‘Breve prova di lettura sui lettori’, in *Civiltà delle lettere* (Milan: EI, 1945), pp. 19-42). Between 1939 and 1943 fundamental critical writings were published on Petrarch: G. Contini, *Saggio di un commento alle correzioni del Petrarca volgare*, new edn (1941: Florence: Sansoni, 1943); C. Calcaterra, *Nella selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1942); G. De Robertis, ‘Valore del Petrarca’ (1941-43), in *Studi* (Florence: Le
not in any case entirely clear what Bigongiari means when he says that Hermetic monolinguismo is not based on Petrarchan monolinguismo (because there is no trace of plurilinguismo apart from one or two sporadic cases of dialectal forms or

lowering of register) but on a Dantean discorso and monolinguismo. The reaction of a philologist like Zygmunt Barański to the improper use that Bigongiari makes of Continian terms is therefore understandable (‘To confuse and redefine them is to deny the distinct status of each’) and may, in part, recall Cesare Segre’s reaction to the use, also ‘improper’, that Pier Paolo Pasolini made of Continian terms in an article published in Paragone in 1965, twelve years before Bigongiari’s essay. In that article Pasolini wrote ‘se mai c’è da contrapporre monolinguismo a monolinguismo. Ossia, per la critica marxista italiana, tutto sarebbe da ricominciare daccapo’.


P.P. Pasolini, ‘La volontà di Dante a essere poeta’, Paragone, 16.190 (1965), 57-71, then published in P.P. Pasolini, Empirismo eretico (1965-1968) (Milan: Garzanti, 1972); now in Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte (from which I shall quote henceforth), ed. by W. Siti and S. De Laude, with an essay by C. Segre, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, 1389-90. When the article published in Paragone was republished in Empirismo eretico Pasolini revised it and added some words to explain the difference between Dante’s monolinguismo and Petrarch’s: ‘la contrapposizione di plurilinguismo dantesco e monolinguismo petrarchesco era, almeno nella “compagnia picciola”, errata, o parzialmente errata. Se mai c’è da contrapporre monolinguismo a monolinguismo: un monolinguismo eletto e selettivo (Petrarca) e un monolinguismo tonale (Dante); un monolinguismo dovuto all’iterazione infinita del proprio atteggiamento interiore e del proprio rapporto con una realtà cristallizzata (Petrarca) e un monolinguismo dovuto a un’equidistanza perfettamente invariabile dal proprio atteggiamento interiore e dal proprio rapporto con la
Bigongiari’s and Pasolini’s questioning of Contini’s coordinates leave the reader with a basic perplexity as to the real meaning of the new concept of *monolinguismo* that they introduce. It would be better, therefore, to consider their opinions not primarily as critical contributions but as an occasion for the two critics to project onto the text their own creative concerns. But, above all, observes Barański, Bigongiari’s essay (and of course, it might be added, Pasolini’s) is the demonstration of an ‘obsession with Dante’ that runs throughout the whole twentieth century (see ‘The Power of Influence’, p. 370).

Therefore, instead of opposing the two *monolinguismi*, it would be better to maintain the original distinction in Italian literature drawn up by Contini between *monolinguismo* and *plurilinguismo*, underlining, however, the inevitable crossover that there is between the two poles. It is again Barański who brings up the problem when, after speaking of the ‘limits of plurilingualism’ in Cardarelli’s *dantismo*, he makes an important observation as to the methodological approach that all studies on twentieth-century *dantismo* should take:

> While the distinction between the plurilingual and the monolingual is a useful one, it should be applied with care. The contaminations and connections between the two began with Petrarch’s large debt to Dante, and have continued to the present: for instance, Montale’s borrowings from Petrarch and Pascoli’s Dantesque compositions. Only by adopting flexible attitudes will a clearer picture of the twentieth century’s *dantismo* begin to emerge. (‘The Power of Influence’, p. 371)

Savoca too, speaking of Montale’s Petrarchism, considers simplistic any attempt to characterize Montale’s poetry as Dantean and plurilingual with a monolingual and Petrarchan interlude represented by *Occasioni* and *Finisterre*, and, while admitting that that generally is how things stand, he wonders ‘se in un quadro globalmente plurilinguistico non si possa isolare un filone di lingua

realtà, per quanto varia questa sia (Dante); un monolinguismo come soliloquio eternamente omogeneo (Petrarca), a un monolinguismo che omologa incessantemente le più diverse finzioni di dialogo (Dante). Ossia per certa critica marxista italiana, che voleva distinguere poesia da poesia, tutto sarebbe da ricominciare da capo’.
squisitamente petrarchesca (e ciò senza introdurre il concetto un po’ vago di monostilismo)' ('Sul petrarchismo di Montale', pp. 56-57).

While Savoca wonders about the presence of Petrarchism in Montale's plurilinguismo, in the case of the Florentine Hermeticists we should on the contrary discuss the presence of Dante in the Hermetic monolinguismo starting from the fifties and sixties (but at this point we have left the so-called Hermetic period behind), when the ever-present language of Petrarch blends with an incipient dantismo, while learned-idealizing forms typical of Petrarchan introspection coexist or alternate with prosaic and dialogic forms inside a register which has by now become more varied and discursive (on Dantean, Montalian and Eliotian lines). Therefore, especially in the case of the Florentine Hermeticists, it is best to abstain, as Petrucciani observes, ‘dai comodi tranquillanti delle etichette monosegniche’.

The crossover between the two Continian poles complicates the study of twentieth-century dantismo, creating an intricate play of allusions which involves not only the two ancient poets but also the entire literary tradition that has been constructed on the two poets, so that what happens is that a writer of the early twentieth century reads not only the medieval Dante but also the closer Dante of Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Gozzano, Montale, Rebora and, in the same way, he reads not only fourteenth-century Petrarch but also, as in the case of the Florentine Hermeticists, the Petrarch of Leopardi, Ungaretti and the French Symbolists. The years of Italian Hermeticism were also to a certain extent influenced by Croce's Dante, by the Pre-Raphaelite Dante of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (mediated by d'Annunzio), and, through the mediation of Praz, Montale, Contini, Baldi and Berti, there was beginning to be talk of the critical and creative dantismo of Eliot and Pound, while Auerbach's Dante, still more or less

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18 What is significant is above all the poem-like movement of Bigongiari's Antimateria or the sermo merus of Horatian memory that Luzi uses as an epigraph to Nel magma as a preannouncement of more communicative forms and lowerings of tone that will be brought about through such a change of lexis, syntax and rhetoric as to contaminate the genre of the lyric with that of narrative and the theatre.
unknown, was to become an indispensable landmark in the sixties for critics and poets alike. Therefore, attention to possible mediations as well as contaminations and connections between the two poles seems to be one of the approaches that would best suit a complex phenomenon such as allusion and intertextuality. Obviously, the attributes of the Dantean and Petrarchan mind cannot be only those indicated, even if paradigmatically, by Contini. It is usually the writer’s text itself that tells us which Dante or which Petrarch the poet has, more or less consciously, chosen, reinterpreted or even discarded. According to Adelia Noferi, for instance, the Dante of the poets of the terza generazione

Anna Dolfi also finds it useless to try to force Bigongiari’s Dante inside Contini’s coordinates and, identifying herself with Bigongiari’s poetics which underlie the 1977 essay, she explains that the ‘monolinguismo ermetico’ that the

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18 M. Petruciani, ‘Due paragrafi per Dante e il Novecento’, p. 163.

20 More than once Luzi recalls his debt to the teaching of Auerbach (see, in particular, CMS, pp. 66-67). This debt was in all likelihood contracted late, when the Florentine poet’s return to Dante had already begun, as far back as the post-war years. Auerbach’s writings (among which ‘Dante, poeta del mondo terreno’ and ‘Figura’ appeared for the first time respectively in 1929 and 1938) were in fact published in Italy (in the collection Studi su Dante translated by Dante della Terza) only in 1963, and for example in France even later.

Tuscan author speaks of ‘la risultante, potremmo dire unificata, di una pluralità originaria, una sorta di “lingua allargata” che ha assorbito dalla base la propria ricchezza unificandola’. If Petrarch’s language ‘è un corpo fisico che si scorpora nei suoi valori emblematici’, what Bigongiari says that he has learnt from Dante is a language that ‘acquista un corpo fisico in quanto messo oppositivamente in rapporto col prelinguaggio e col silenzio caotico iniziale’. Bigongiari therefore focuses on Dante’s language as a means of exploring the origins of poetic language itself and the kind of continuity that exists between language and something preceding it, with something ‘prelinguistico’.

It is well-known that Saussure’s theory, which was circulating in Italy in the sixties and seventies, excludes the referent from the linguistic sign (understood as an indivisible fusion of signifiant and signifié), thus representing the dramatic separation of words and things, a dramatic separation that goes back to Plato’s Cratylus and which in the twentieth century, for instance with Blanchot, culminates in the destruction of the thing by the word. Bigongiari in his paper on ‘L’ermetismo e Dante’ in 1977 questions this theory of self-reference, and in speaking of the ‘prelinguistico’ with which language has to continually come into contact in order to have a ‘corpo fisico’, he anticipates the problem that Umberto Eco raises in the first pages of Kant e l’ornitorinco:

24 Although Bigongiari’s perspective is different, the use of the term ‘prelinguistico’ may have been influenced, even from a distance, by Contini’s important study of Pascoli, originally a conversation held at San Mauro in 1955, and which then appeared in Studi Pascoliani (Faenza: Lega, 1958). According to Contini, the innovative thrust of Pascoli’s language (‘radice e matrice di molta parte degli esperimenti europei’) consists not only in having attempted at least in part ‘il linguaggio pre-grammaticale’ but above all in having placed on the same plane ‘il linguaggio a-grammaticale o pre-grammaticale e il linguaggio grammaticale e il post-grammaticale’, arriving at an ‘equivoco e compromesso’ between non-semantic language and semanticity of language, so that elements of sound, like interjections and onomatopoeia, are not used in a pure and isolated way but are charged with a semantic value and, vice-versa, as Renato Serra was one of the first to point out, semantic elements are broadened for phono-symbolical or non-semantic purposes, with consequently a new relationship established between res and verba (see G. Contini, ‘Il linguaggio di Pascoli’, in Varianti e altra linguistica, 1, 219-45).
Non credo che la semiotica possa evitare un altro problema: che cosa è quel qualcosa che ci induce a produrre segni? Ogni filosofia del linguaggio si trova di fronte non solo a un terminus ad quem ma anche a un terminus a quo. Non solo deve chiedersi 'a che cosa ci riferiamo quando parliamo', e con quale attendibilità? (problema certo degno di nota), bensì anche: 'che cosa ci fa parlare?' [...]

La semiotica strutturale il problema non se lo è mai posto [...]. La filosofia analitica si è appagata del proprio concetto di verità [...], ma non ha problematizzato il nostro rapporto prelinguistico con le cose.25

It is not really a problem of the referent, which can even be excluded from the linguistic sign, in the same way as the rose 'said', in Mallarmé's words, is the 'absente de tout bouquet'. Rather, it is the problem of the origin of the word, and the possibility that the word, by 'imitating' the image (this is where Bigongiari's interest in the Informal movement in painting comes from), can accommodate, instead of separating out, the prelinguistic and the linguistic, the experience and the conventional sign.

According to Bigongiari's poetics, from initial chaos, from a metamorphic and a linguistic reality, the informal word emerges in the pre-linguistic phase by entering as a referent into the sign, which in turn begins, in the linguistic phase, its progression from signifiant to signifié. This signifié must not be crystallized but constantly referred back to the prior reality from which in every instant – past

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25 U. Eco, Kant e l'ornitorinco (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), p. 4. This observation, which comes from the first pages of Kant e l'ornitorinco, questions and goes beyond the conclusions that Eco reached in the seventies: 'il referente deve essere escluso come una presenza imbarazzante che comprometterebbe la purezza teorica della teoria stessa' (U. Eco, Trattato di Semiotica generale (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), p. 91). For further studies, see the useful study by Michael Caesar: 'The themes and problems of perception had never of course been far from Eco's mind even at the time of A Theory of Semiotics, but the emphasis was a 'culturalist' one, the focus being community. [...] While not reneging his culturalist past, he is prepared to put it into historical perspective, and to explore the area which joins rather than separates the natural object in itself and its cultural representation. [...] The outline which you draw on a sheet of paper to produce the figure of a horse, for example – and which is precisely the feature which the natural horse does not have – is no longer seen from that point of view which stresses the conventionality of the representation, but in relation to our perception of the natural horse, the way in which the drawn outline reproduces a visual
and present - it comes so that it never loses its relation with the original, prelinguistic state of things:

il viaggio dantesco, la spirale infernale che prosegue, in senso opposto, ma sempre con questo senso di vortice, vortice che solleva invece di deprimere, sulla montagna del Purgatorio, è alle origini del ‘viaggio’ orfico-paolino che ha presieduto alla costituzione strutturale del ‘verso dove’, che partito heideggerianamente come descensus ad inferos, ha proseguito in una orizzontalità progressivamente curva nella costituzione segreta della nostra poesia. ('L’ermetismo e Dante', p. 213)

In this endless approximation, whoever wishes to grasp the sense and fix it is destined to failure just as if he had tried to halt the ebb and flow of the tide. The indecipherable voice that comes from the magmatic nature of existence can take on a shape only to the extent that it refuses to allow itself to be imprisoned by


26 Bigongiari’s critical thinking had been nourished from the very beginning by French existentialist philosophy (from Berdiaev’s Cinq méditations sur l’existence, which was published in Paris in 1936 to Sartre’s L’être et le néant, which appeared in Paris in 1943) and through it absorbed the thought of Heidegger (whose Sein und Zeit was published in 1927 at Halle). In 1933, furthermore, Grassi’s book Dell’apparire e dell’essere. Seguito da linee della filosofia tedesca appeared in Florence and offered usable elements of Heideggerian thought. In general Italian writers and poets approached Heidegger directly in the fifties, when, according to Vattimo, European criticism of the German philosopher developed and the first Italian translations of his works came out (the first Italian translation of Sein und Zeit is from 1953). However Bigongiari had probably read Heidegger before, as can be deduced from an interview given to Maria Paola Fisaulli in 1985: ‘per le riflessioni che vanno dalla fenomenologia di Husserl all’esistenzialismo heideggeriano, attraverso il pensiero negativo, occorre retrodatare influssi e letture fino a ben addentro negli anni Trenta’ (P. Bigongiari, Nel mutismo dell’universo, p. 132). See also a 1987 interview where Bigongiari remembers the German philosopher among the foreign authors sought as ‘maestri’ in the Hermetic period: ‘io ho definito l’ermetismo un’avanguardia non codificata, che d’altronde cercava e valorizzava nella loro vera entità storica i suoi maestri, come i Campana e i Rebora, gli Ungaretti e i Montale […] ma anche tra gli scrittori di un’Europa libera che la censura fascista proibiva, come i Gide e i Proust e i surrealisti, e l’ebreo Freud e Heidegger; oltre che tra gli Hölderlin, i Goethe, i Rilke, i Leopardi e i Foscoli, tra i poeti mitteleuropei e russi e spagnoli che erano il nostro pane quotidiano, letti al di fuori degli schemi accademici, e la cui progressiva conoscenza veniva incontro alla nostra fame gnoseologica’ (Nel mutismo dell’universo, p. 177).
that shape: 'Io non posso trattenerti più oltre, forma che già splendi dell'informità ultima e primaria' ('Pietre del deserto', lines 13-14).

1.2. Beyond the Orphic and Cavalcantian Fatalism: Intertextual Relationships between Bigongiari and Dante

After this necessary introduction to the study of the relationship between Dante and the ‘third generation’ Florentine poets, this and the following section will dwell on the Platonic stilnovismo and dantismo of Bigongiari and Parronchi. I have considered these two sections useful to be able, in the next chapters, to set Luzi more easily in the historical and cultural environment nearest to him, and especially to obtain a better idea of where lay the originality and uniqueness that makes Luzi different from the other two poets who make up the ‘Florentine triad’.

In the 1999 collection of Bigongiari’s Poesie e pensieri inediti Adelia Noferi notes: ‘È ancora tutta da studiare e documentare la componente dantesca del linguaggio poetico bigongiariano (a tutti i livelli), ancora evidentissima nella sua ultima fase, con frequenti “citazioni” o allusioni (anche nelle poesie qui raccolte), studio che dovrebbe estendersi alla poesia duecentesca, soprattutto a quella cavalcantiana che mi sembra abbia avuto un forte impatto sulla sua poesia’. Taking up her invitation, my intention is to study the presence of Dante and of the stilnovistic poetry in one part of Piero Bigongiari’s poetical

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oeuvre, collected under the title Stato di cose and including La figlia di Babilonia (1942), Rogo (1952), Il corvo bianco (1955), Le mura di Pistoia (1958) and Torre di Arnolfo (1964).

In the introductory note to this last book, which might be called the ‘quinta mutazione’ of a state that actually, as the author points out, ‘non può dirsi tale e non è ipotizzabile che attraverso il suo mutare’, Bigongiari writes: ‘Il Bildungsroman che il lettore ha sotto gli occhi, un romanzo dove cause ed effetti colludono in una materia che è continuamente, e insieme, causale ed effettuale, comincia in quello stato di prefigurazione che La figlia di Babilonia attesta per svolgersi, attraverso una poesia ch’io non saprei meglio definire che gravitazionale, fino alla “verità” di Torre di Arnolfo’. According to Bigongiari, in fact, Stato di cose ‘non è un canzoniere, e se mai aspira all’apertura del romanzo’. If it were a canzoniere it would have to be an exemplary history of a soul and have some kind of completeness, whereas Bigongiari’s book is a ‘diario relativo’, a ‘biografia non trascesa ad esemplarità’, and above all it keeps up ‘una continua incognita che l’idea di canzoniere, nella sua totalità, esclude per definizione’. An analysis of the relationship between Bigongiari and Dante, starting from the first part of this ‘romanzo’, which means from the Hermetic period, gives us the opportunity to trace the development of poetry which was initially closer - partly because of the unhappy historical period in which it was


31 Id., ‘Nota’ to the first edition of Torre di Arnolfo, in Tutte le poesie, p. 369.

32 Id., ‘Nota’ to the first edition of Stato di cose, p. 366.

33 Id., ‘Nota’ to the first edition of Torre di Arnolfo, p. 371.
written (‘Fu l’epoca dei prigionieri in patria’\textsuperscript{34} - to the Orphic and Cavalcantian model than to the Dantean one. By way, then, of a comparative study conducted on both an ideological and philological-textual level it is possible to study the dialectics and doubts that entered a phase of the post-war period, and especially from the fifties on, which seemed immune from change.

It must be noted that in the 1977 essay on ‘L’ermetismo e Dante’, Bigongiari does not make any distinction between the hermetic period and the fresh accomplishment of the years following it: the attempt on the part of Hermetic monolinguismo to go beyond Quasimodi poetics of the word to a poetics of discourse seems in fact applying retrospectively to his earliest poetry the results of a development that began with the absolute and static experience of Hermeticism (as we see in the absence and athematic quality of the first book, \textit{La figlia di Babilonia}),\textsuperscript{35} moved towards the perennial mobility of informal matter, and ended up with \textit{Antimateria} (1964-1971) and the works following on it in a new poetic phase, where, as also the colour of Informal art, language does not correspond to a precise object according to fixed and pre-established associations but is in a perpetually fluid relation with reality. The underworld\textsuperscript{36} from which Bigongiari’s poetry starts off seems to imply not so much a Dantean journey through the three realms of the otherworld, nor yet a discourse that contains a ‘provocazione storica’, as an Orphic and Cavalcantian fate to which the absent woman has condemned the poet.\textsuperscript{37} In other words, Bigongiari’s verse does not yet seem to imply the ‘verso dove’, che partito heideggerianamente come

\textsuperscript{34} Id., \textit{Autoritratto poetico} (1959), in \textit{Tutte le poesie}, p. 383.

\textsuperscript{35} This first small volume of poems published by Bigongiari brings together lyrics written presumably starting from 1937-38; its \textit{incunabula} are from further back and come from an attempt at an epistolary novel datable between 1933-34 and 1939.

\textsuperscript{36} In Bigongiari and the Hermeticists in general there are frequent references to the pagan underworld: just to give a few examples, Bigongiari’s ‘la tua finestra brancolante a un Ade’ (‘Trama’), Luzi’s ‘Già colgono i neri fiori dell’Ade’ (1939), Sinisgalli’s \textit{Campi Elisi} (1937-39), Sereni’s ‘Versi a Proserpina’ (whose early poetic period Mengaldo and Isella consider Hermetic).

descensus ad inferos, ha proseguito in una orizzontalità progressivamente curva nella costituzione segreta della nostra poesia' (‘L’ermetismo e Dante’, p. 213). The ‘verso dove’, when it does exist, looks in the direction of the underworld and implies only the inexorable and tragic sense of death. This sense of the tragic implied in the Heideggerian ‘towards where’ is to be found in La figlia di Babilonia whose protagonists are an unattainable Eurydice and an Orpheus-self that have changed roles because it is no longer the Orpheus-self that attempts to bring Eurydice back to life but it is the woman who goes in the underworld and who turns round.

‘Ella andava verso la notte’, ‘Era triste, forse piangeva’ and ‘Si è voltata, sono perduto’ are the titles of the first, second and third sections of the collection. These three titles (whose incisiveness is fixed for ever in the isosyllabism of the three nine-syllable lines) which are the core of that Orphean night (through the experience of the night of Nerval, D’Annunzio, Mallarmé, and above all Campana) in which nothing is narrated because any relationship between the absent woman and the Orpheus-self is impossible a priori. Silvio Ramat describes it as ‘la notte profonda dell’inaccaduto, dell’inattuato che resta attuabile all’infinito’. As for the fact that Eurydice and Orpheus have

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38 The act of turning around to look is frequent also in another poet of the terza generazione, Vittorio Sereni. In this case, however, the Dantean model prevails over the Orphic one. See the poem ‘Inverno’ (1935), which opens the poet’s first collection (Frontiera), and in particular line 1 (‘ma se ti volgi e guardi’) and lines 8-10 (‘poi che ti volgi / e guardi / la svelata bellezza dell’inverno’). The lines quoted above from V. Sereni, Poesie (Milan: Mondadori, 1995) might allude to Purg. III. 106: ‘Io mi volsi ver lui, e guardai fiso’. According to Luigi Scorrano, ‘volgersi e guardare’ of line 1 of Sereni are there for all to see also in Dante’s line; but in Inverno Dante’s ‘fiso’ also finds correspondence in the expression ‘in fissità’ of line 12 (‘Armoniosi accenti sorgono / in fissità, nel gelo …’): ‘Ancora, per volgersi e guardare, con le implicazioni che questo comporta, si può rinviare al drammatico “si volge a l’acqua perigiosa e guata” di Inf. I. 24: significativo, il passo, rapportato al testo sereniano, per la presenza dell’acqua; oscuramente perigiosa anche quella, tra metafora e realtà, del lago di calma’ (L. Scorrano, ‘Dantismo “trasversale” di Sereni’, L’Alighieri, n.s. 40.14 (1999), 41-76, in particular pp. 42-43; now in Id., Il Dante ‘fascista’. Saggi, letture, note dantesche (Ravenna: Longo, 2001), pp. 127-67).

exchanged roles, this does not seem to imply yet that 'rovesciamento del mito di Orfeo e Euridice' to which Bigongiari refers in an interview of 1984:

Even if the roles have been inverted, it is difficult to see this poetry as 'proiettiva' (a poetry that looks ahead), since what Eurydice does is turn round, which implies a break in the journey and with it, a tragically, fatal perdition of the Orpheus-self. It might be said of the female figure of Bigongiari’s first book what the author himself observes of ‘Les yeux fertiles’ of Éluard whose amour fou is ‘nella patria di uno stilnovismo reincarnato, più che dalla salvezza della Beatrice dantesca, dalla perdizione orfica della fanciulla campaniana’.

Bigongiari, who translates Éluard in the Hermetic years, is certainly influenced by the French poet and his stilnovismo.

Bigongiari’s stilnovismo is also influenced by Montale’s when for example the lyric self becomes aware of the ‘vecchie mura / dove un croco s’inflamma’

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40 A reference to and at the same time a going beyond the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, dear to the Hermetic writers, is to be found in some scattered poems of Eugenio Montale. In ‘Ritmo’ (1917), for example, there is ‘e se il desiderio di volgerti mai / t’assalga, tu frenalo e pensa / che incontro a ciò che passò / tu vai ancora: camminai’ (lines 24-27). Quotation from E. Montale, Tutte le poesie, ed. by G. Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1984). ‘Ritmo’ was first published in Quaderno genovese edited by Laura Barile (Milan: Mondadori, 1983); a typewritten is preserved in the Archivio Contemporaneo ‘Alessandro Bonsanti’ of Florence, dated 1917.


42 As Bigongiari himself observes in an essay of 1949, ‘il dichiarato “stil novo” di Montale è la parte per cui Montale si è più affiancato all’esperienza che suol dirsi ermetica (do al termine un significato storico, definitorio, non peggiorativo) della poesia contemporanea’ (P. Bigongiari, ‘Altri dati per la storia di Montale’ (1949), in Poesia italiana del Novecento, II, 342).
or becomes aware of evocations and scents, is struck by sudden flashes and vivid colours, or sees shadows. The sign will, however, remain Platonically 'troppo oltre':

I ponti verdi sulla piena soffocano
il tuo richiamo
in un lume di secoli aberrante
dove i cupi giacinti e la tua mano
sprigionano un odore penetrante;

dove l'ombra rinfocola pe' muri,
ora fiamma ora cenere ora croco,
lo sguardo innamorato ancora un poco
di sè, forse il tuo pure
è un ricordo, il tuo segno è troppo oltre. ('Ardore e silenzio', lines 1-10)

The typology of the shadow appearing arouses expectation but Montale's 'più in là' is transmuted into a 'troppo oltre' or a 'Dismisura' (as the title of another poem in the same collection La figlia di Babilonia will state). It is an excessive distance that leads to denial a priori of every possibility of meeting. Every now and then a shadow 'appears' but not even memory can manage to hold it back: 'ombra cerula apparsa dove il cuore / già più non ti sostiene [...]’ ('Duello', lines 5-6). As a consequence there is nothing to narrate, nothing to remember, nor to await, if not one's own dying: 'Io lungamente attesi il mio morire’ ('Trama', line 13). This waiting for death probably goes back to Guido Cavalcanti ('[...] mai 

[^43]: The symbolism of the barrier-wall and the presage-crocus seem to be echoes of Montale. Compare Bigongiari's 'croco' and 'le vecchie mura' with the 'croco' and 'scalcinato muro' of a famous lyric in Ossi di seppia, 'Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato' (1923). The fact that the word 'croco' (found also in Pascoli, D'Annunzio and Palazzeschi) appears only once in all Montale's poetic work makes Bigongiari's allusion even more probable. The topos of the 'wall' is to be found in Montale, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Rebora and, in the same way as the typically Hermetic topos of glass and the mirror, is the emblem of the insurmountable separation of the occasion and the eternal.

[^44]: As Silvio Ramat has pointed out, although Bigongiari seems at times to follow the 'linea della letteratura del presagio, dell’annuncio, che ha appena avuto l’articolazione a noi nota nelle Occasioni di
non déi sperare altro che morte', *Rime* V. 14), whose tragedy of fate and of love in death certainly had a powerful effect on Bigongiari's poetic imagination.

One of Bigongiari's essays – an essay dedicated to the thirteenth-century poet - is a real mine of information on the relationship between the two writers. In this essay, written in a period that was no longer Hermetic but slightly later (already in 1946, however, Bigongiari had no hesitation in describing the stilnovist poet as one of 'i nostri poeti più alti e pieni di fascino'), Bigongiari speaks of Cavalcanti and at the same time seems to be revealing the profound spirit that runs through his first collection of poetry, *La figlia di Babilonia*. At the beginning of the essay the 'contrast' is described between the 'tragic' poetry of Cavalcanti and the 'comic' poetry of Dante that begins with the 'nove rime': “tragica” nell'uno ma impegnata contemplativamente, dunque già aprioristicamente sollevata dalle sorti della battaglia, “comica” nell’altro quanto alla risoluzione teologica, ma impegnata in un'azione, punto per punto, tragica, di esito incerto, cioè dentro la *melèe* fino ai capelli” (*Cavalcanti*, pp. 1-2).

The motif of fatalità is central to Bigongiari: the sword that tragically slays Cavalcanti is the same ‘onde Amore ancise Dido’, it is the ‘fatalità provenzale, tramandatasi nello Stil Novo, che Andrea Capellano aveva codificato nel suo *De Montale [...] l'assenza s'istituisce come concetto e principio anteriore alla vicenda del libro, essendone la forma primaria e radicale irraggiungibile' (S. Ramat, *L'Ermetismo*, p. 428).


In this essay on Cavalcanti, according to Adelia Noferi, Bigongiari 'non si pone in una posizione di puro spettatore, ma piuttosto di intimo collaboratore al lavoro poetico' (A. Noferi, 'Piero Bigongiari: la critica come segno di contraddizione', in *Le poetiche critiche novcentesche*, p. 161).
amore’ (p. 11), the same that Paolo and Francesca suffered. It needed Dante for this tragedy of fate to be replaced by the drama of human responsibility.

The titles that introduce the three sections of *La figlia di Babilonia*, especially the last (‘Si è voltata sono perduto’), are courtly and Cavalcantian, and recall the tragic ineluctability of Virgilian poetry. In Cavalcanti it is frequent the case that the act of seeing and that of mortal perdition coincide, and this coinciding is usually indicated by the verb *convenire* which implies a necessity from which it is not possible to escape. According to Bigongiari, it is this very immobilising *fatalità* that holds Cavalcanti ‘nei termini di una cultura prebeatriciana’. The fact that Bigongiari places the stilnovist poet in the context of a ‘cultura prebeatriciana’ means, furthermore, that he follows the interpretation of those who make Beatrice the object of the much-discussed ‘cui’ of *Inferno* X. 63:

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49 What Bigongiari observes on the law of necessity represented in Montale’s early poem is an excellent description of the poetics at the root of *La figlia di Babilonia*: ‘La poesia di Montale nasce da un contatto stretto con le cose di cui ha accertato la preliminare inconnoscibilità, la preliminare autonomia, la preliminare prosecuzione di un moto cosmico che obbedisce alla *dura lex* della necessità: come un’antica creatività del cosmo cui l’uomo sia ammesso soprattutto per sentirsi estraniato; e allora altro non resta che ricalcare, delle cose, il loro avvenuto inconnoscibile, fatale, con qualcosa, nell’esito umano, di inane, e più, di demonico, ripeterle in un “ritmo stento” che ne sia quasi l’eco traudita’ (P. Bigongiari, ‘I primi tre tempi della lirica montaliana ovvero “Il difficile discorso”’, in *Poesia italiana del Novecento*, II, 347). The theme of *fatalità* was after all widespread in Hermetic poetry and is common also in one of the fathers of Hermeticism, Giuseppe Ungaretti, who in 1922 observed: ‘per noi l’arte avrà sempre un fondamento di predestinazione e di naturalezza’ (G. Ungaretti, ‘Ragioni d’una poesia’, *Inventario*, 2.1 (1949), p. 7). It was to be above all immediately after the war that Bigongiari and Luzi would loosen the bond between Ungaretti’s ‘predestinazione e naturalezza’, and find a new relation between the poet and nature so that ‘la natura non sia abbandonata a se stessa, alla legge della necessità, ma appunto diventi il mondo delle forme, cioè il mondo percepito e inventato, il mondo liberato dall’uomo, o almeno in cui l’uomo è intervenuto tentando con dolore la sua aspirazione umana’ (P. Bigongiari, *Il senso della lirica italiana*, p. 280). The novelty of Bigongiari’s poetics was in fact to consist - underlines Macri after harshly describing *La figlia di Babilonia* as ‘un libro interamente aprioristico’ ‘arbitrario e fittizio’ - ‘nella necessità di un reale implicato nella libertà della decisione al viaggio e all’incontro’ (O. Macri, *Realtà del simbolo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1968), p. 196).

50 See some of Cavalcanti’s *Rime*: ‘Tu sai, quando venisti, ch’io ti dissi, / poi che l’avéi veduta, per forza convenia che tu morissi’ (IX. 40-42); ‘Davante agli occhi miei vegg’io lo core / e l’anima dolente che s’ancide, / che mor d’un colpo che li diele Amore / ed in quel punto che madonna vide. / Lo su’ gentile spirito che ride, / questi è colui che mi si fa sentire, / lo qual mi dice: “E’ ti convien morire”’ (XIX. 4-10).
‘forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno’. It is no coincidence that philological discussions of this Dantean line were particularly animated in the first half of the twentieth century.\(^{51}\) That it is Beatrice who is the reason for the discord between

\(^{51}\) For the various interpretations of this much-discussed passage, see E. Malato, Dante e Guido Cavalcanti. Il dissidio per la Vita Nuova e il ‘disdegno’ di Guido (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1997), especially pp. 75-109. Here let us only remember that earlier criticism did not find any great difficulty in reading this line and the entire episode, and in the second half of the nineteenth century everyone agreed that the ‘cui’ of line 63 referred to Virgil. Pio Rajna, according to which the ‘cui’ is not a relative object referring to ‘colui ch’attende là’ of the preceding line (= quem), but is rather an oblique case, demonstrative plus relative (= ad eum quem), depending on the verb ‘mena’, suggested an interpretation of the ‘cui’ in terms, not of ad eum quem, but of ad eam quem, referring to Beatrice, who was supposed to have been the object of Guido’s refusal. See, in accord with this interpretation, L. Filomusi Guelfi, Due chiose dantesche (Inf. X 61-63 e Purg. IV 1-2) (Turin: Bona, 1889), pp. 5-29; A. D’Ancona, Scritti danteschi (1889) (Florence: Sansoni, 1913), pp. 215-29; G. Mazzoni, ‘Rassegna degli studi danteschi’, La Biblioteca delle scuole italiane, 1 (1889), 187-88; M. Barbi, ‘Il canto di Farinata’, Studi danteschi, 8 (1924), 87-109, p. 99n.; Id., ‘Con Dante e i suoi interpreti’, Studi danteschi, 15 (1931), p. 37. Perhaps the fact that in 1924 Michele Barbi, from the pinnacle of his prestige, declared that he was ‘risolutamente con quelli che riferiscono il famoso disdegno di Guido a Beatrice’ has decided the fortune of this annotation: ‘condivisa già da Barbi e altri studiosi, come si è ricordato, difesa da Chimenz, questa tesi ha trovato un energico e autorevole sostenitore in Antonino Pagliaro, nell’immediato dopoguerra, e ha finito poi con l’impossi presso la critica dantesca contemporanea, benché con adesione non sempre pienamente convinta’ (E. Malato, Dante e Guido Cavalcanti, p. 84). See A. Pagliaro, ‘Il disdegno di Guido’, Letterature moderne, 1 (1950), 447-59, then in Saggi di critica semantica (Messina-Florence: D’Anna, 1953), pp. 357-80; now, revised, with the title ‘Farinata e Cavalcanti’, in Ulisse. Ricerche semantiche sulla ‘Divina Commedia’ (Messina-Florence: D’Anna, 1966), 1, 185-224. An authoritative scholar like Contini attempted to reach the following conclusion: ‘pare accertato che grammaticalmente l’oggetto del “disdegno” sia Beatrice (non Virgilio e non Dio); e che dunque Guido sia presentato come aw erso alla sublimazione di Beatrice, al suo trasferimento sul piano trascendente’ (see G. Contini (ed.), Poeti del Duecento (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1960), II, 489). But already in 1957, in the essay on ‘Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia’, the critic had written: ‘Sembra di poter dire [...] che, posto il verso “forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno”, gli interpreti moderni consentano ormai a riferire il pronome “cui” a Beatrice, non più a Virgilio o a Dio. Grammatica e intreccio non licenzierebbero altra soluzione’ (now in Varianti e altra linguistica, II, 348). Pagliaro’s thesis, supported by Michele Barbi, was also accepted by Mario Sansone (1955), Giorgio Padoan (1959), Fernando Figurelli (1961), Giorgio Petrocchi (1965), Arsenio Frugoni (1966), Mario Marti (1970), Francesco Mazzoni (1972), Ettore Paratore (1974), right up to the most recent commentators. Even Sapegno in the 1957 comment on Dante gave his support: ‘Questa interpretazione è la sola che restituisca un senso persuasivo a questo verso, che è tra i più discussi e difficili del poema’ (D. Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, ed. by N. Sapegno (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1957), p. 121).
Dante and Cavalcanti is more than once insisted upon by Bigongiari in the course of his essay:

E il fatto che Cavalcanti non abbia intravisto quell'"Amore, salute lucente", secondo le parole ungarettiane, proprio del Dante stilnovistico, fa sì che egli si mantenga rigorosamente conseguente quando si distacca da Dante e prosegue nella propria materia lirica quella propensione verso una catastrofe, dirò così, psicologicamente endogena.\(^5\) (‘Cavalcanti’, pp. 36-37)

To insist on the reason for the discord between the two thirteenth-century poets being due to the opposition of Cavalcanti’s woman and Dante’s Beatrice supplies, moreover, an important key to interpreting Bigongiari’s poetry, in which, especially in the collections that follow on the crisis of historical Hermeticism, the old conflict between Cavalcanti and Dante seems to be resolved in the abandonment of that Orphean underworld in which the woman is so fatally unattainable, and in a commitment to undertake a Dantean journey towards a new Beatrice, ‘Amore, salute lucente’. Not insignificantly, Bigongiari himself in ‘L’ermetismo e Dante’ defines the new Beatrice of the Hermetic poets (ex-Hermetic by now) as an ‘Euridice alla rovescia’:

The stilnovistic female figure of *La figlia di Babilonia*, however, not only has Cavalcantian features, such as the *fatalità* of death in love, but also Platonic and

\(^{52}\) P. Bigongiari, ‘Cavalcanti’, pp. 36-37.

Leopardian elements,\textsuperscript{54} such as idealization and abstraction of the woman in a hyperouranion remote from reality, and Leopardian motifs, such as frequent shadows, apparitions and presages that soon turn out to be illusions and leave in the poet a 'vuoto inorridito' reminiscent of the horror vacui of baroque memory, and an anguish of absence that is typically Platonic, Petrarchan and Leopardian.\textsuperscript{55} For instance, one of the last poems of La figlia di Babilonia, entitled ‘Alla sua donna’, like the Platonic-Petrarchan Leopardi lyric of the same name,\textsuperscript{56} is typically Platonic. Expressions that are Platonic in the broad sense ('o

\textsuperscript{54} Leopardi's stilnovismo, together with that of Cavalcanti, exercised a particular influence on Bigongiari, who dedicated his first studies to Leopardi, among which his graduation dissertation L'elaborazione della lirica leopardiana, supervised by Attilio Momigliano in 1936. In the margin of some pages of Attilio Momigliano's Storia della letteratura italiana (Messina-Milan: Principato, 1936) Bigongiari noted for the years between 1936 and 1937: ‘Lo stilnovismo di Leopardi è più umano: esso ha perso il fondamento religioso e filosofico, acquistandone uno temporale: trasparentissimo e abissale’ (these 'Postille a Mogliano' have been recently published in P. Bigongiari, Un pensiero che seguita a pensare, Preface by C. Ossola, edited by P.F. Iacuzzi (Turin: Aragno, 2001), pp. 22-23). The annotation cited above is in the left margin of page 20 of Momigliano’s volume, where we read: ‘La donna della poesia siciliana è un’immagine elegante, smorto arazzo di sale aristocratiche; la donna dello stil novo, pure più ideale, è una creatura piena di vita. Essa è viva di tutta l’idealità etica o religiosa del poeta, è la sua intimità estatica e spirituale fatta persona o meglio immagine di sogno’ (Un pensiero che seguita a pensare, pp. 359-60). The approach to Leopardi’s poetry and stilnovismo is no coincidence and is repeated in the graduation dissertation: ‘Ma l’insieme di questo riso e di fuoco che questo sguardo presuppone, seppure più quieto sia il loro impasto, noi l’abbiamo già incontrato nello sguardo di Beatrice: “Ché dentro alli occhi suoi ardea un riso”; ora, in Silvia, il fatto che gli occhi siano fuggitivi, schivi insieme e mobili, e quasi astratti, come è stato detto, ma anche, come vedremo, più propriamente fuggiaschi dietro al loro amaro destino, e appunto perciò guizzanti, nello spegnersi, di un più vivo lampo, mentre attenua il fuoco (dall’“ardea” dantesco, e anche petrarchesco, allo “splendea” leopardiano c’è il passaggio da un’azione in sé agli effetti di quell’azione), lo rende più occultamente patetico’ (Id., ‘L’elaborazione della lirica leopardiana’ (1937), in Leopardi (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1976), pp. 147-48).

\textsuperscript{55} See F. Di Carlo, Letteratura e ideologia dell’ermetismo, p. 174: ‘Il petrarchismo barocco e platonizzante proprio dell’ermetismo, trova in Bigongiari, oltre che in Luzi, il suo maggiore punto di emblematisation ideologico-letteraria, storico-critica e linguistico-stilistica’.

\textsuperscript{56} The Platonic-Petrarchan substratum in Leopardi’s ‘Alla sua donna’ is pointed out by Bigongiari himself, according to whom the lyric ‘platonica nel fondo, subì l’influenza petrarchesca’ and ‘il platonismo è dichiarato dal poeta stesso nell’annuncio bibliografico del Nuovo Ricoglitore’ (P. Bigongiari, ‘L’elaborazione della lirica leopardiana’, p. 127). Elsewhere, Bigongiari speaks of this lyric as a ‘fondo
celeste sembiante’, ‘eterno’) go side by side with premonitions of the Montale kind such as ‘lampi’ and ‘limoni’:

Le mura dove il nero travolge
delle tue notti illumi penetrò,
o celeste sembiante che non ho
perduto, tu ancor specchi e consumi.

In timbri tramortiti le tue dita
celebrano il vento se riaffiora,
una lacrime cola illividita,
tra due colori transita un’aurora.

Ogni gesto riapre forse al limite
più spento il proprio cielo, io per sempre
velo il ritorno innamorato al mio
lento confine perdendomivi: resto

una forma che grida a te, mia amante:
tra i vitrei lampi i muri si confondono
coi fiori come un volto desolato
scopre un’ombra in un gelo di vetrade

non più sua e voltandosi improvviso
l’orma assente d’un vuoto inorridito;
io mi desto non più forse equilibrio
al mio morire che oltre mi sospiinge.

dove il tuo braccio langue per vestigio.
Le serre che diamantano i limoni
d’una luce radente si consumano

platonico e petrarchesco’ (Id., Studi (Florence: Vallecchi, 1946), p. 51), a ‘fervore platonico a cui si
accompagna l’ispirazione’ (Id., Senso della lirica italiana (Florence: Sansoni, 1952), p. 73), and an analysis
of the sentiment of love attempted in ‘Zibaldone, il 16 settembre del ’23, cioè all’epoca di Alla sua donna,
[...] con l’aiuto di Petrarca Saffo e Platone’ (Senso della lirica italiana, p. 78). The writer, furthermore,
underlines two extremes that are present in Leopardi’s poetry: ‘come “Alla sua donna” è un estremo
platonico-petrarchesco, “Aspasia” è l’altro estremo, la punta realistica che polemicamente dilacerà il tessuto
omogeneo dei Canti’ (see Senso della lirica italiana, p. 179).
come la terra che forse ha sorriso.

Si deprime, nell'ora che lo folgora
il tempo sulle meridiane, prime
a suggerlo, l'ombra che dirime
l'eterno dal suo limite introvabile,

il segno del tuo viso inviolabile.

The Montalian echoes bring with them the suspicion of sudden miracles but actually the woman does not become, as Leopardi would have Dantesquely wished in his song, 'viatrice in questo arido suolo'.\(^5^7\) After the 'vitrei lampi', which, according to the frequent Hermetic metaphor of glass, indicate transparency but also resistance to the epiphanic apparition, the 'volto desolato' reveals a shadow not its own, and 'voltandosi improvviso' finds 'l'ombra assente d'un vuoto inorridito', a probable reference to a Montalian 'osso' of 1923, in which 'in un'aria di vetro, / arida', upon turning round the poetic I encounters with a sense of terror 'il nulla' and 'il vuoto':

Forse un mattino andando in un'aria di vetro,
ardita, rivolgendomi, vedrò compirsi il miracolo:
il nulla alle mie spalle, il vuoto dietro
di me, con un terrore da ubriaco. (lines 1-4)

On the other hand, as Ramat underlines referring in general to the stilnovismo of the Florentine Hermeticists, if Bigongiari, Parronchi, and Luzi are among their generation the 'più allenati alla scossa di un'alta tensione fisico-metafisica', every apparition or sign will then be referred to a norm of transience:

la figura è, particolarmente nei fiorentini, il tramite fra il particolare della labilità e la sua universalità come legge, tra una mera fisicità e il suo superamento. [...] Ma nello stilnovo di questo

\(^{57}\) An exception to the form of absence dominant in 'Alla sua donna' and in general in La figlia di Babilonia is the 'io mi desto' (line 19).
decennio non resistono angeliche energie: non è lecito il traghetto ad alcuna zona divina; e i riflessi di una indubitabile macerazione in questa impossibilità di attingere il troppo oltre si raccolgono proprio nei giovani fiorentini che di tal meta hanno provato sul registro della passione personale anche tutta una suggestione letteraria. (L'Ermetismo, pp. 51-52)

This is why 'se si può parlare di stilnovo fiorentino, nell'ambito ermetico, gli epigoni sopportano un po' il contrappasso della colpa di coloro che usarono rime d'amor dolci e leggiadre: ne proseguono la vena d'amore intrisa di sensibilità religiosa, ma sono costretti a trasferire nell'unico mondo reale, del transeunte, l'angelica degli antichi, negando a se stessi l'ipotesi miracolosa e recentemente romantica di una sublimazione oltre il margine terrestre per virtù della creatura femminile' (L'Ermetismo, p. 53).

If, however, we read the collections written since the beginning of the post-war period, in the prison of stasis we begin to discern the possibility of change. On the role of Rogo, the title of a book written between 1944 and 1952, the words of the author himself are significant:

Vi sono in quel libro poesie d'amore, poesie in cui attraverso parole d'amore mi lampeggiava nella fantasia la cieca possibilità che la verità fosse a fiore del caso, appunto per quel che di magmatico l'essere planetario aveva messo in luce, rompendo la feroce prigione della stasi. [...] Intervennero "gli altri" anche se a bocca murata; e ora vedo che quel libro fu un grande ragionamento, un tentativo di rendersi conto che l'uomo deve non tanto, come si suo dire, accettare la storia, ma sentirsi soggetto di storia, cioè arricchire la storia non nel senso di piegarla ai propri fini, bensì in quello di interpretarla, dandole un'anima. ('Autoritratto poetico', p. 388)

In 'La tempesta', a lyric written in the immediate post-war period (15 November 1945), Orphic and static circularity is replaced by a lively reality involving a search for a thread to follow 'per non morire restando se stessi' (line 21). The law of necessity and the 'risultati rispondenti / alle cause' seems to have been replaced by the freedom and responsibility to interpret the signs of the real, even if they are an 'inferno':
Forse è questa l’ora di non vedere
se tutto è chiaro, forse questa è l’ora
ch’è solo di sé paga, ed il tuo incanto
divaga nell’inverno della terra,
nell’inferno dei segni da capire.
Ma non farti vedere dimostrare
ancora le tue formule, è finita
l’orgia dei risultati rispondenti
alle cause. […] (lines 1-5)

The ‘inverno della terra’ and the ‘inferno dei segni da capire’, apart from the
Dantean ‘inferno’, could perhaps allude to the infernal ‘inverno’ of the incipit to
The Waste Land which, if on the one hand it sees April as nothing but a ‘dead
land’, on the other it hides and feeds ‘a little life’ (‘The Burial of the Dead’, lines
1-7). The image of the winter that conceals signs to be read returns in ‘I monti
blu’ (1951) where, while ‘l’inverno brucia’ (line 2), ‘i campi della morte
nascondevano non tuberi qua e là ma gridi e sguardi di meraviglia’ (lines 4-5)
with a probable reference to the ‘little life’ which the winter in Eliot feeds ‘with
dried tubers’ (‘The Burial of the Dead’, line 7). Another allusion to Eliot is to be
found in ‘A labbra serrate’ (15 April, 1944), where ‘la rosa in un vortice
repentino scopre la primavera in un deserto’ (line 14). The line probably mingles
various reminiscences which go from the ‘spring rain’ that stirs ‘dull roots’ at the
beginning of The Waste Land, to ‘the garden in the desert’ of the last lines of the

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58 The quotation is from the first complete translation of The Waste Land, by Mario Praz in Circoli, 2.4
(1932), 27-57, which was to be published in book form in 1949: T.S. Eliot, La terra desolata. Frammento di
un agone. Marcia trionfale, 2nd edn (1949; Florence: Fussi, 1958). In the forties the translation of The
Waste Land circulated thanks to the volume of Poesie translated by Luigi Berti (Modena: Guanda, 1941).
Although the first translations of Eliot (by Praz, Montale, Baldi, Berti) came out in the Hermetic period, not
until after the war (above all after the Nobel Prize in 1948) did Eliot begin to enjoy a certain fortune in Italy,
and his critical and poetic work, including his dantismo, begin to be considered with greater interest than
that shown, at least among the Florentine Hermeticists, between the two wars. On this subject see Chapter 5.
fifth section of *Ash-Wednesday*, right up to the mystic and heavenly rose of the *Four Quartets* which conclude with the image of a ‘knot of fire’ where ‘the fire and the rose are one’.

But it is above all from the early fifties onwards that we start finding next to persistent stilnovistic, Leopardian and Orphic themes traces of Dante and especially of the first canticle of the *Divine Comedy*. For example, in a text of 1953 included in *Il corvo bianco* (1952-1954) there appears not only the word ‘inferno’ (line 38) and the verb ‘diruccia’ (line 18), also found in Inf. XIV. 115 (‘Lor corso in questa valle si diruccia’), but also a definite allusion to Inf. XXXIV. 103-104 (‘Ov’è la ghiaccia? e questi com’è fitto / si sottosopra? […]’) in which we find the same verb (*figgere*) and the same noun (*ghiaccia*) that are found again in line 75 of Bigongiari’s poem (‘e le figge quaggiù dentro la ghiaccia’):

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abituati all’inferno dell’effimero:
ieri è già eterno se altro tempo cade
dal suo cielo e vi porta visi, cose
fuggiasche nella loro lenta traccia;
questa la loro libertà: seguire
lievi il declino, dirizzarsi dentro
la loro gravità che le raccoglie
e le figge quaggiù dentro la ghiaccia
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59 It is very likely that ‘primavera in un deserto’ alludes to ‘the garden in the desert’ in *Ash-Wednesday*, which the Florentine Hermeticists knew from the Sergio Baldi Italian translations in 1937 in *Frontespizio*, 15.3 (‘l’orto nel deserto’) and in that of Luigi Berti (‘il giardino nel deserto’).

60 The image of the rose, charged with symbolic values and Dantean reminiscences, recurs also in *Un brindisi*, which his friend Mario Luzi had published in 1946 with Sansoni (Florence). Remember, for example, the ‘rosa fissa nell’etere e indivisa’ of the homonymous poem ‘Un brindisi’ (line 75). As ‘Little Gidding’ was first published in 1942, inside the *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace) and then in 1943, and was translated into Italian in 1944 by Raffaele La Capria and Tommaso Giglio (Rome: Edizioni Ali), it is possible that Bigongiari had read and remembered the end. This cannot be said for Mario Luzi whose composition ‘Un brindisi’ was written in 1941.

61 The noun ‘ghiaccia’ is frequent in the last Cantos of Dante’s *Inferno* (apart from the already mentioned Inf. XXXIV. 103, see Inf. XXXII. 35; XXXIII. 117; XXXIV. 29).
senza un grido; ma è un cielo che si semina
e si rapprende qua dove la brina
non regge, dove migrano le nuvole,
sui campi in cui la neve già s'incrina. ('Inno primo', lines 38-49)

In this ‘inferno dell’effimero’ the sense of the tragic and of the fatalistic is implicit, but to it is opposed the idea of a journey that must not be interrupted. Hence the final lines of the lyric, the warning not to succumb to the Orphic and elegiac temptation to turn round: ‘non volgerti di qua, la strada è quella / dove io non sono, dove tu non sei, / dove parla più arguto il vento esiguo’.

A clear allusion to Dante is to be found later in ‘Notte di luglio’ (1952):

La nostra carrozza ci porterà ancora
verso sera al lento fuoco
delle nuvole sopra le Cascine,
ai lecci, cupo ricordo del tempo,
alle ombre dorate di là, cappe rance
che non muovono sulla terra. (lines 13-18)

In a world of ‘ombre dorate’ that is not terrestrial, the ‘cappe rance’ recall, even if the atmosphere is more purgatorial than infernal, Inf. XXIII. 100, where the hypocrites appear clothed in ‘cappe rance’, that is, resplendent on the outside.62

In the fourth poetic stage of Stato di cose, Le mura di Pistoia (1955-1958), the Dantesque elements just about lose their allusiveness and become clear references, as in the case of the ‘lago del cuore’ in line 18 of ‘Sul Lungarno di dicembre, tra un ponte e l’altro in costruzione’ (1956), reminiscent of the ‘lago del cor’ of Inferno I. 20, perhaps through the mediation of a Montalian ‘osso’ where the

62 As it is a quotation there is no doubt as to the source; it is, however, interesting to note that the adjective ‘rancia’ is found in another place in Dante, Purg. II. 8-9 (‘là dov’i’ era, de la bella Aurora, / per troppa etate divenivan rance’), in an ‘osso’ of Montale’s in which at the exit of a hellish ‘grotta’ is depicted a purgatorial ‘rancia marina che uno zefiro scompiglia’. See lines 3-30 of ‘Marezzo’, a lyric which appeared for the first time in Convegno in 1925, and Luzi’s ‘Annunciazione’ (1938) where there appears a ‘luce rancia’ (line 8).
same phrase ‘lago del cuore’ appears (‘Ed ora sono spariti i circoli d’ansia...’,
line 2). The ‘volo lento, folle’, which is the subject of the first line of ‘Rondini
di mare sull’Arno’ (1957), is a clear reminiscence of the ‘folle volo’ of Ulysses
(Inf. XXVI. 125). The ‘morta gora’ of ‘Settembre’ (1956), taken from Inf. VIII.
31 (‘Mentre noi corravam la morta gora’) is a straight quotation:

L’etere si fa vento azzurro
nella morta gora
a spruzzi tra i rovi incupiti e, nel dolce, i frutti. (lines 1-3)

The ‘vento azzurro’ that blows through ‘i rovi incupiti’ in the Bigongiari passage
introduces movement and possibility of change to show that Hell is no longer the
only world that exists as in the Orphic underworld but a tragic world to be
passed through, without stopping, as quickly as possible.

However, a measure of the distance separating Dante’s journey from the
twentieth-century one is the instability and uncertainty in which the lyric self of
‘Il fuoco di Sant’Ermete’ (1956) finds itself. As in the ‘delirio di immobilità’ of
Montale’s ‘Arsenio’ or in Prufrock’s Eliotian limbo, forever unable to ‘force the

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63 The Dantean phrase ‘lago del cor’ is to be found also in Montale’s Occasioni: ‘in questo lago /
d’indifferenza ch’è il tuo cuore [...]’ (‘Dora Markus’, lines 23-24). Both Ossi di seppia and Le occasioni
were certainly texts that Bigongiari had uppermost in his memory; he also dedicated various critical essays
to Montale.

64 There is a comparison between Leopardi’s shipwreck and that of Dante’s Ulysses in Bigongiari’s
essay on ‘L’“infinito” di Leopardi e l’“interminato” del Cusano’ (1975): ‘il mare dell’infinito non è
navigabile fino alla riconquista dell’edén, del paradiso perduto; esso è solamente “naufragabile”: che è la
posizione conoscitiva dell’Ulisse dantesco’ (P. Bigongiari, ‘L’“infinito” di Leopardi e l’“interminato” del
Cusano’, in Leopardi, p. 384). Another reference to the Canto of Ulysses is perhaps to be found in a poem
of Abbandonato dall’Angelo (Locarno: Dadò Editore, 1992) where, on page 35 and 57, Bigongiari writes
‘nella scia di se stessi che si chiude’. This wake seems to close up like the closing of the sea on the
shipwreck of Dante’s Ulysses (‘infin che’l mar fu sopra di noi richiuo’, Inf. XXVI. 142) or, as Adelia
Noferi prefers, ‘come “l’acqua che ritorna equale” (del II del Paradiso) nel cancellarsi della scia “dietro il
mio legno che cantando varca”, che indica il procedere oltre, il “varcare” della poesia verso l’invisibile e
moment to its crisis', Bigongiari's poetic self wavers between opposing elements incapable of distinguishing fire from shade, silence from the voice. The very adjective 'indeciso', which is twice suspended at the end of the line, helps to accentuate, also at a rhetorical level by means of the break created by the *enjambement*, the inability to choose between two existing opposites which are indispensable to each other:

Ha fame quel che nasce di morire,  
reciso all'orlo della fiamma è il buio  
del falò sotto il fortizillo rosso:  
io sono qui che domani sarò  
più tuo, cullato dal mio stesso insistere  
tra fuoco ed ombra, io sono qui indeciso  
se il fuoco l'ombra o l'ombra attizza il fuoco,  
io sono qui lungo il mare indeciso  
qual è il silenzio, quale la sua voce,  
io sono qui che domani sarò  
sulle aride zolle tra le stoppie  
a spigolare intorno alla tua casa  
giallina al sospiro degli equinozi  
la voce delle stelle [...]. (lines 11-24)

The 'io sono qui' that is a frequent formula in the poetic work of Bigongiari and which in this lyric is repeated four times, reminds the reader (and perhaps also the author) of the 'Here I am' with which T.S. Eliot begins 'Gerontion' ('Here I am, an old man in a dry month') and the fifth section of 'Little Gidding' ('So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years'). In all these cases the deictics 'qui' and 'here', together with the first-person pronouns, indicate an 'I' that is not extended and universalised but is seen in the particularity of its *hic et nunc*. The indecision of the poetic self (emphasised through the anaphora of the 'io sono qui') may also recall the inertia and sloth of Prufrock, while the

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65 Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Gerontion' were known in Italy in the already mentioned Luigi Berti translation, published by Guanda in 1941.
copresences of birth and death, flame and darkness, fire and shadow, recall the connection of opposites so frequent in *Four Quartets*.66

There are also allusions to Eliot’s poetry in *Torre di Arnolfo*, the fifth and last book of *Stato di cose*: ‘la terra smemorata’ (line 11) of ‘Il passare del giorno’ (1960) may recall the first lines of *The Waste Land* in which ‘memory and desire’ mingle; ‘dove il sole chirurgo non arriva alla fine’ (line 24) of ‘Alt’ (1961) is perhaps a vague memory of ‘the wounded surgeon plies the steel / that questions the distempered part’ in ‘East Coker’ (IV. 1-2); the title of a poem of 1962, ‘Entre-deux-guerres e dopo’, contains the same expression in French that is found at the beginning of the fifth section of ‘East Coker’ (‘So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years - / twenty years largely wasted, the years of l’entre deux guerres –’); ‘East Cliff’, the title of a section of ‘Carte Routière’ (1963), might be a transformation of the title of one of the *Four Quartets*, ‘East Coker’; ‘Tutto / s’intrattiene nel punto che già muta’ (lines 12-13) of ‘Scalo della vergine’ (1963) seems to be instead a variation of ‘at the still point of the turning world’ from the first of the *Four Quartets* (‘Burnt Norton’ II. 16).

In the book *Torre di Arnolfo* (1958-1963), with its sense of the immobility of what were the Orphic shades of Hermeticism and of the infernal ‘vita desolata’ (again of Eliotian memory), the real movement of Dante’s journey finally starts to take over, as we read in ‘Fine del maltempo’ (1958), a lyric-poem belonging to *Torre di Arnolfo*: ‘Tra cose ferme qualcosa si muove, / l’amore il dolore, la stessa desolazione dell’amore: furto nell’agonia. / Come in una spiaggia lontana / la vita desolata chiama dal basso delle cose […] Esiste anche il rovescio delle tempeste / e non è calma, è ardore’ (lines 1-7, 16-17). But a clearer echo of the *Comedy*, and in particular of the wood of the suicides of *Inferno* XIII, is ‘le

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66 The translation of ‘Little Gidding’ made in 1944 by La Capria and by Giglio was followed by other partial translations of the *Four Quartets*: by Emilio Cecchi, by Giglio and La Capria again, and by Margherita Guidacci until the complete translation by Rizzardi (*La Fiera letteraria*, 10 August 1952) and Donini (Milan: Garzanti, 1959).
fronde con tosco’ that are found, near the beginning of ‘La stilla della luce’ (1959):

Tranquilla luce sulle strade e i mari,

i rami fremono, le fronde con tosco;

poi l’ombra il tempo si avvicinano,

sbucano dalla chiaria: sono qui. (lines 1-2)

The second line echoes, also in its rhyme, Inf. XIII. 4 ‘Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco’, and Inf. XIII. 6: ‘non pomi v’eran ma stecchi con tósco’. A clear allusion to the wood of the suicides of Canto XIII of the Inferno can be found in Torre d’Arnolfo (1959) where ‘i morti consegnano a un morto che vive parole, sangue, lacrime’, a line that recalls the metamorphosized souls of the suicides with their issuing forth of ‘parole e sangue’ (Inf. XIII. 44).

The end of this journey, however, as opposed to Dante’s, is always suspended; it is a journey towards Dove si perdono le tracce, as the title of one of the last collections of the author says, or where ‘non vi è alcuna dimora’, to use the title of another collection that the poet had decided should come out posthumously. Mladen Machiedo sees Bigongiari’s ‘L’ermetismo e Dante’ as convincing (but ‘a condizione di accettare la sua lettera come un militante indizio generazionale’), and describes the distance between Bigongiari’s journey and Dante’s in the following way:

Dove il linguaggio fisicizzante ad esempio aiuta Dante a raggiungere la visione, Bigongiari sposta il mezzo verso lo scopo e ne trae logicamente altre conseguenze d’immisurabile portata: Dante giunge al vertice della sua visione come essere concluso, il poeta moderno resterà un essere in concluente;

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67 For the verbal presences of Inf. XIII in Mario Luzi’s Invocazione (1948) and other poems collected in Primizie del deserto (1952) and Onore del vero (1957), via the filter of Montale, see Chapter 4 and the Conclusion. At the time of Torre di Arnolfo the images drawn from the wood of the suicides of Canto XIII might have come back to Bigongiari through the experience of Montale and Luzi.


69 See the volume of poems that Bigongiari wanted to be published posthumously but which appeared in 1990: E non vi è alcuna dimora, ed. by P.F. Iacuzzi (n.p.: L’Albatro Edizioni, 1999).
Bigongiari does not resolve the contradictions. He does not draw conclusions, conclusions lending at most, according to another Dantean image to be found in Paradiso II. 10-12 and 123, to the ‘vitreo trasparire senza fondo’ of ‘Terra di nessuno’, a lyric in the collection La Legge e la leggenda (1986-1991).  

Bigongiari’s language swings between knowing and non saber because, as he himself observes, quoting a line from Dante’s Purg. IX. 18, the poet ‘si limita a vedere, quando la mente “alle sue vision quasi è divina”’. We might say, taking up an image familiar from Cavalcanti’s amor de lonh and from the Orphic shades of La figlia di Babilonia, that the twentieth-century poet had begun a Dantean journey in which the circularity of the Orphic Hell had changed into a spiral rising from the mountain of purgatory up to the heavenly light of his last books. After the crisis of historical Hermeticism, the tragedy of fatalità had left more and more space to the drama of responsibility in the face of a world that contained both law and liberty, guilt and innocence, justice and injustice. In this prevalently oxymoronic poetry, nature and history are opposites that do not cancel each other out, nor do they converge, but coexist in a dialectical and dramatic relationship.

1.3. Parronchi, Montale and Dante

As in Bigongiari so also in Parronchi, the Platonic-stilnovistic reaching out to the beloved in the Hermetic period turns out to be impossible; if anything, the tragic
fatalità of the Bigongiari gives way to the weary and romantic resignation of the Parronchi. For example, in the lyric ‘Distanza’ which forms part of the first collection I giorni sensibili, the woman, as ‘far off” (‘lontana’), is Platonically an ‘idol’ but it is vain to idolise her because she is already returning to her celestial origins:

Lontana, e tu ne puoi donna il chiarore
Accendere sul tuo pettine colmo
La pupilla serale ora impietrata
Nei rami, e dalla quiete naturale
Una stella precipita su queste
Rive, in cui, donna è vano idoleggiarti
Perché un tempo smarrita ora già segui
Per vie d’orme terrene il tuo celeste. (lines 1-8)

While in Bigongiari’s La figlia di Babilonia the lexis is refined and recherché, the adjectives remaining almost always on a precious and abstract level, verbs tending to depart from their usual meaning and morpho-syntactic structure, inversions and hyperbata serving to confer absoluteness, in the Parronchi of Giorni sensibili, while some norms of Hermetic grammar persist (such as emblematic nouns in the plural and a lexis that is prevalently learned and literary), the effect of estrangement is less frequent and the language, as Baldacci notes, is made up of a ‘tappeto di parole naturali’. In the few hendecasyllables quoted above, for example, even though they are from one of Parronchi’s more Hermetic poems (if only because of the title, Distanza), the ‘natural’ vocabulary consists of sera, ramo, stella, rivo, via; there are also nouns in the plural (suggestive, therefore, of a certain indeterminateness that is typically Hermetic) and various hyperbata, but the only expression charged with a metaphor of estrangement is ‘la pupilla serale ora impietrata’, where the pupil, part of the human body, is ‘naturalised’ with the adjective ‘serale’ and designates ‘l’impietrirsi come eventualità per la natura e non per la “donna”’ (Ramat,
L’ermetismo, p. 52). For the most part we have ‘liquide, musicali, tematiche parole petrarchesche, e in ogni modo anche il registro di una maggiore specificità resta lontano dal raro e dal tecnico’ (‘Parronchi poeta’, p. 19). Sometimes this lexis actually combines with words in common use to create studied effects of contrast: ‘La notte strofinandole turchine / ha rese le ghirlande’ (‘Finestra sull’occidente’, I visi, line 6), ‘[...] la chioma / illuminata germinò il colore / dell’ortensia [...]’ (‘Saluto’, I visi, lines 7-9), 73 ‘Che subentri alle voci alto silenzio, / rotto solo da strepiti di pioggia / e fuori, dalle imposte, e nella stanza / dal tic tac della sveglia che non tace’ (‘Autunno precoce’, Addii, lines 9-12). The Hermeticism of the early Parronchi is different therefore from the more literary and verbal style of Bigongiari and Luzi; it is more ‘intimistico, “parlato”’ and free from the ‘soggezioni raffinate e colte del petrarchismo e del platonismo di “scuola”’, 74 preferring to move among echoes of D’Annunzio, Pascoli and the neo-Romantics.

It is also interesting to note that together with Foscolo, Pascoli, D’Annunzio, Campana, Onofri and Leopardi, an author who is found in the early Parronchi is the Montale of Ossi di seppia. If, according to Mengaldo, in the initial stages of Hermeticism the importance of Ungaretti is usually accompanied by a ‘demotion’ of the early Montale, in Parronchi this seems not to have happened. If anything, as Fanfani observes, as opposed to what happens with other writers more influenced by Sentimento del tempo, it is the lesson learnt from the Ossi di seppia that has such a profound effect on his poetic formation, and not only from the point of view of metre and language: Montalian resonances, although relived in a personal mode, populate all the themes and motifs of Parronchi’s early poems. This does not mean a betrayal of the Petrarchan register and lexis mentioned above (it is not the petroso Montale that leaves his mark in early

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73 In the 1943 edition juxtaposition was also a question of the coupling of adjectives: ‘la chioma / sparpagliata trasale come ortensia / trasognata’.
74 F. Di Carlo, Letteratura e ideologia dell’ermetismo, p. 174.
Parronchi), but, if nothing else, it is a question of feeling more acutely ‘il proprio ingombro fisico’ and to allow the abstractness of Hermeticism to make a ‘scoperta sensuale del mondo’. Significantly in 1952, Parronchi, looking back, makes the following judgement:

Montale più che ‘petroso’, ‘arso’ mi apparve fin dalle prime letture ‘frondoso’, ricco d’acque e di linfe, vivo e riconoscibile in quell’insieme di miti dei quali cantava la dissoluzione e l’inesistenza. [...] Era, a suo modo, nella traboccante natura in rovina di Ossi di seppia, una scoperta sensuale del mondo, non altrimenti che nell’Alcyone, che avevo letto qualche anno prima [...]. Godevo di ritrovarmi vicina questa sensibilità di uomo smarrito, che sentiva il proprio ingombro fisico come io lo sentivo [...].

Elsewhere (1993), after recalling his first meeting with Montale in 1938 at the Giubbe rosse, Parronchi goes back to his early reading of the Ossi:

Quell’affondare nelle cose e riemergere vivo, non con un simbolo ma con una realtà diversa e impreveduta. La disperata profonda fede in un visibile che ci sovrasta e tuttavia non può sottrarsi da noi. E, finalmente, la poesia che ritorna fatto intimo, privato, assoluto, che non si mette in mostra (D’Annunzio), né cerca di commuoverci (Pascoli). Il pudore violento che la difende.

It may be that the lesson learnt from Montale’s Ossi to ‘affondare nelle cose e riemergere vivo, non con un simbolo ma con una realtà diversa e impreveduta’ was one of the ways in which Parronchi, from the start interested in the phenomenal and sensible world, decided to abandon Hermeticism and its learned

76 Id., ‘Memoria di Montale’, Hellas, 2-3 (1981), p. 33. Numerous Montalian stylemes in the poetry of Parronchi have been found by Fanfani, ‘Sul linguaggio poetico di Parronchi’, pp. 70-71. Here it is sufficient to recall that Parronchi himself gives various examples in which his lines have seemed to him to echo those of the Ossi: ‘Pubblicando oggi, 1981, la prima poesia, considerata allora non pubblicabile, Notturno, 1934, mi sono accorto - lo assicuro, solo oggi - che derivava da “Meriggiare”. E che il metro, assai strano, di un’altra poesia, pure inedita fino a quest’anno – ‘Dea’, 1936 –, da dove veniva se non da “Ripenso il tuo sorriso”? Una delle poesie degli Ossi calata per prima nella memoria, dove rimarrà impressa in eterno. Riprendendo il libro di Montale dopo la sua morte, mi sono accorto, solo ora, di avergli rubato un intero
abstractions in order to seek, after the turning point of the fifties, a more immediate contact with perceptible reality (those were the years when prose and colloquial forms were being increasingly turned to). And perhaps it was Montale who led him to study the Dantean ‘perspettiva’. The visual experience of the medieval poet became, in fact, for Parronchi the object of impassioned and erudite university lectures, published in 1959 under the title ‘La perspettiva dantesca’, and republished in 1964 as part of Studi su la ‘dolce’ prospettiva. Attention to the visual-figurative aspect of the Comedy led him also to write an essay on ‘Come gli artisti leggevano Dante’, and another where he offered an original interpretation of Botticelli’s drawings for the Comedy. As in Montale, what Parronchi admires in Dante’s poem is the visual experience constituting art itself, an experience that goes beyond pure empiricism to become at the same time a physical and spiritual vision, an experience in which the act of seeing implies the use of sense and soul, perception and reason (in this regard, although it came later, the mediation of Eliot who, in the fifties, after his 1948 Nobel


77 See A. Parronchi, ‘La perspettiva dantesca’, Studi danteschi, 36 (1959), 5-103; then, with a slightly different title, ‘La prospettiva dantesca’, in Studi su la ‘dolce’ prospettiva (from which, henceforth, quotations will be taken) (Milan: Martello Editore, 1964). A conference on ‘Dante e la prospettiva’ was given at the ‘libera cattedra’ on 3 March 1958. For more details see Id., Lettere a Vasco, ed. by A. Parronchi (n.p.: Edizioni Polistampa Firenze, 1996), pp. 302, 311, 313, 319. See, in particular, Studi su la ‘dolce’ prospettiva, p. 3: ‘Della parola “prospettiva”, cercando in vocabolari o in enciclopedie, troviamo più o meno questa definizione: “Scienza o arte di rappresentare su una superficie piana la forma, il contorno e il rilievo dei corpi in modo che sembrino veduti a una data distanza e in una data posizione”. È certo che invece nei primi secoli della lingua, per quanto in seguito registrato piuttosto saltuariamente, il significato del termine era quello stesso latino, cioè “Ottica, o scienza della visione”.

78 Id., ‘Come gli artisti leggevano Dante’, Studi danteschi, 43 (1966), 97-134; now in Id., Botticelli tra Dante e Petrarca (Florence: Nardini, 1985). The essay has been recently republished by the author, summarised and with a few changes (‘Le illustrazioni del Botticelli per la Commedia e il progetto di un ‘Panteon’ fiorentino’, in Botticelli e Dante, ed. by C. Gizzi (Milan: Electa, 1990), pp. 77-80).

Prize, was beginning to enjoy a certain amount of fame in Italy and among the Florentine ex-Hermeticists, was to be important):

Ora Dante deve aver meditato sul valore dell’esperienza, se ha fatto produrre a Beatrice nei II del Paradiso la nota dimostrazione dei tre specchi, da lei definita un “esperienza ... ch’esser suol fàm e ai rivi di vostr’artì” (Par. II. 96). E vedremo quanto la concezione ottica dantesca, pur restando interamente foggita sulla teoria prospettica medievale, si sforzi di sollevarsi dall’empiria per diventare, come esplicitamente è dichiarato in Conv. III. x. I, strumento di verità. Dante cioè avverte, nei confronti del visibile, la necessità di seguire un metodo che, anche dove rispecchia la posizione soggettiva e psicologica del suo tempo, la sottopone al controllo della ragione. Visione fisica, nel XIII e XIV secolo, mal si distingue da visione spirituale, se non per chi voglia esplicitamente dare alla chiarificazione del senso un valore di certificazione dell’esistente, e quindi di guida alla verità: che può essere ciò che Dante ha imparato dai teorici della perspectiva. Ma certo su lui non può non aver fatto presa anche l’intrinseca bellezza connessa con lo studio di questo fenomeno del vedere, in cui senso e anima sembrano toccarsi più che in qualsiasi altro.80

The theme of visual experience connected to that of perspective (and according to Parronchi, in his capacity as an art critic, is a matter not simply of space but also of light) was always there right from Parronchi’s first collections of poetry. If Dantesque perspective was to become the object of study only at the end of the fifties (and it would be interesting to review the presence of Dante, Montale and Eliot’s mediation of Dante81 in the lyrical works of those years from the specifically linguistic point of view), to understand Parronchi’s early poetry of light it would be necessary to refer above all to Montale, Ungaretti, Leopardi, and his training as an art critic. For example, the image of windows reflecting the light of the setting sun is found in both Montale and Parronchi,82 but, if in Ossi di

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80 Id., Studi su la ‘dolce’ prospettiva, p. 19.

81 According to Luigi Baldacci, apart from the comparisons with Montale, “sono altrettanto validi gli accostamenti a Cardarelli, Rebora, Betocchi, Sereni, e, in funzione di puntuali riscontri, all’Eliot dei Quartetti” (‘Parronchi poeta’, p. 30).

82 See L. Lenzini, ‘Appunti sparsi per un ritratto di Parronchi’, ‘Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università di Siena’, 14 (1993), 203-209. The critic indicates one of the features that best describe the poetry of Parronchi as ‘amore per il visibile, l’anelito verso la chiarezza’, then adds: ‘È un fatto
seppia what prevails is the dazzling light of lemons and the ‘Gloria del disteso mezzogiorno’ (‘quand’ombre non rendono gli alberi, / e più e più si mostrano d’attorno / per troppa luce, le parvenze, falbe’), Parronchi prefers a situation somewhere between night and dawn, or the night-time wood in which you have to go in order to perceive its hidden light. Montale’s ‘troppa luce, che intorbida’ he replaces, therefore, with penumbra so that the wood appears animated by the ‘color delle notti’ (‘Boschiva’, I visi, line 2), glimmering lights ‘dentro i mormoranti alberi’, ‘[...] il giorno è sempre un poco / prima dell’alba e sfilano in catene / dal buio della notte al bianco fioco / costellazioni inaridite, tremule / meteore [...]’ (‘Canto dei boscaioli’, I giorni sensibili, lines 17-21). From this point of view Parronchi seems closer to Leopardi’s ‘ombre meridiane incerte’ or Ungaretti’s ‘notturno meriggio’ than to Montale.

This chiaroscuro poetics of light, that has been looked at briefly here, cannot be appreciated without reference to Parronchi’s observations on light in his role as art critic. Right from his graduation thesis his first publications were on medieval art, followed by important studies mainly on the art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. If, then, the early Parronchi is also interested in the Duecento and Giotto, we have to wait until the late fifties for his attention to turn explicitly to Dante. First he went through a stilnovistic phase and his female figures were placed at a Platonic distance, through the mediation of Foscolo and Romanticism, with interesting and unexpected references to Montale’s Ossi di

\footnotesize{insieme di stile e d’immagini. Si rilegga – quanto al secondo livello – la prosa che apre I visi, e si vedrà che è tutta percorsa da segnali luminosi, dal variare della luce sugli aspetti del reale’ (p. 209).}

\footnotesize{83 In 1937, not yet graduated, Parronchi published an article on a Florentine painting of the mid-thirteenth century, a panel depicting the Virgin, Child and the Annunciation (A. Parronchi, ‘Una pala duecentesca nei pressi di Greve in Chianti’, Rivista d’Arte, 19 (1937), 31-36). Two years later he published an essay dedicated to the so-called Maestro of Santa Cecilia, an artist who, according to a critical tradition going back to Offner, Parronchi places in close relation with the young Giotto and with a Roman circle of the second half of the thirteenth century. This essay, which aroused great interest among the specialists, was then developed and modified in a study in 1994, entitled Cavallini ‘discepolo di Giotto’ (Florence: Polistampa, 1994). On the ‘Studi medievali di Alessandro Parronchi’ see the essay by P. Scarpellini in Per Alessandro Parronchi, pp. 105-16.}
*seppia.* This absolute ‘distance’ that separates the poet from the object of his desire is reminiscent of the Provençal *amor de lonh* but does not relive Cavalcanti’s tragedy of *fatalità* with the same intensity as Bigongiari does. If, in fact, Bigongiari’s expectation betrays its nature as *fictio* and if his first book is in the nature of a novel which (as in the case of Cavalcanti) concerns itself more or less exclusively with his own death (‘Io lungamente attesi il mio morire’, ‘Trama’, v. 13, *La figlia di Babilonia*), Parronchi’s waiting becomes the actual title of a collection of poems proposing an alternative, although a subterranean one, to the Hermetic poetics of absence.
2.
THE PLATONIC GRAMMAR OF EARLY LUZI

L'interesse che ho avuto per Platone è una cosa che io ho percepito fin dall'inizio. Ebbi poi la fortuna di vedere Le stanche di Raffaello in cui il platonismo è un ideale caratterizzato da una concretezza così presente che rende l'ideale affascinante. In fondo, quello che Raffaello descriveva era l'esperienza della realtà.

M. Luzi (1999)

2.1. The Aporias of a 'Socratic' Platonism

In the criticism and poetry of the early Luzi we can glimpse a subterranean, sometimes unconscious, alternative to the poetics of absence typical of Platonic-Petrarchan Hermeticism. However, also owing to the illusory 'giardino d'Armida' in which the culture of the inter-war years had come to rest, Luzi commits himself to a dialogic and discursive language only after having travelled in its entirety the road of abstraction and idealisation. This is the reason why, before analysing the dantismo of the post-war period, I intend to study the nature of the Platonism and stilnovismo of early Luzi, highlighting the contradictory and dialectic points that, even if they do not lead directly to Dante, in some way arouse a 'dubbio agitatore' and create a crisis in the inception of Hermeticism itself.

Dealing with the relationship between early Luzi and Plato will allow me not only to add a missing item to the critical bibliography on the Florentine writer, but also to describe a significant experience which led Luzi to increasingly distance himself from the Petrarchan 'limbo' in which many literary figures between the two wars had ended up, and to go beyond the illusione platonica of
separating the ideal model from sensible reality, poetic from common language, or, as one of the fathers of Hermeticism stated in 1924, time from eternity: ‘Platone ancora è risorto e ha profferito il suo monito: Il tempo è privazione d’eternità’. My inquiry will be limited to the thirties and early forties and I shall examine some of the author’s critical writings in which the categories of Platonic thought, now established as part of the Western mind, emerge, without any claim, however, to be resolved in a coherent philosophical system.

In Italy at the end of the nineteenth century it was above all the translations of Francesco Acri and Ruggero Bonghi that had created an interest in Plato, while the fundamental works for the presence of the ancient philosopher in the European panorama of the early twentieth century are, according to Attilio Zadro, Russell’s Principles of Mathematics (1903), Natorp’s Platos Ideenlehre (1902), Taylor’s idealistic Plato and Gentile’s Logica (1917), without forgetting Saussure’s Cours de linguistique générale (1916). In Italy, the names of Luigi Stefanini, Augusto Guzzo, Giuseppe Rensi, and Giorgio Pasquali are

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3 Some of Luzi’s critical essays from his Hermetic period are still scattered in reviews, but most of them are collected in UP, PS and in S. Ramat, L’ermetismo.
6 See L. Stefanini, Il problema del Bello e didattica dell’arte. Con traduzione e commento del Libro X della Repubblica di Platone (Turin: SEI, 1924); Id., Il problema religioso e didattico della religione: Con l’Eutifrone di Platone translated and commented (Turin: SEI, 1925); Id., Il problema estetico in Platone (Turin: SEI, 1926); Id., Il problema religioso in Platone e S. Bonaventura (Turin: SEI, 1926); Id., Idealismo cristiano (Padua: Cedam, 1930); Id., Immaginismo come problema filosofico (Padua: Cedam, 1936); Id., Inquietudine e tranquillità metapsicica (Padua: Cedam, 1937); Id., Problemi attuali dell’arte (Padua: Cedam, 1939).
7 See A. Guzzo, Agostino. Dal ‘Contra academicus’ al ‘De vera religione’ (Florence: 1925); Platone, Dialoghi, it trans. by F. Acri, with a comment by A. Guzzo (Florence: Vallecchi, 1925-31).
8 See G. Rensi, Motivi spirituali platonici (Milan: Gilardi and Noto, 1933); Id., Vite parallele di filosofi: Platone e Cicerone (Naples: Guida, 1934); Platone, L’apologia di Socrate, commented by G.
important, each of whom during the period of Florentine Hermeticism contributed to creating a cultural *humus* by which, more or less directly and consciously, the criticism of Bo, Macri, Betocchi, Gatto, Bigongiari and Luzi was stimulated and enriched.

Whenever we speak of Platonism the problem arises as to its precise nature and, given the uncertainties still surrounding its origin and interpretation, the search for these things would in any case be futile. Among its - recurrent and fairly uncontroversial - themes, however, are those of the duality of the ontological planes, the metaphysics of the Transcendent and Immutable, the primacy of an objective spirituality, intellectual intuition as a paradigm of perfect knowledge, the exaltation of pure thought, the possession of a-temporal truth. But the relation between idea and world is not always one of opposition: *eidos* means the essence of things as their archetype, existing in them and for them in a *hyperouranios* world, while at the same time suggesting *idea rerum* manifest in things themselves, which are thus made comprehensible. The numerous aporias in the thought of the ancient Greek philosopher have led scholars to trace two paths inside Platonism:

Nella dottrina di Platone si possono cogliere entrambi gli atteggiamenti: di accentuare il distacco, sicché il mondo sensibile divenga semplice occasione per salire a quello puramente intelligibile delle idee; ma si può considerare con ugual diritto l’altro aspetto, per cui il mondo intelligibile delle idee è quello che ci dà la vera comprensione del mondo sensibile. Il primo atteggiamento, ripreso poi dal neoplatonismo, è più consono al platonismo nel senso tradizionale; il secondo già prepara la via all’aristotelismo. Non si dimentichi, infatti, che questa parte la preoccupazione di Platone.

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9 See G. Pasquali, *Lettere di Platone* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1938). The Professor used the *Lettere di Platone* as the subject of his seminars with his students in Florence and Pisa (see *Prefazione*, Florence: Le Monnier, p. X). Giorgio Pasquali is remembered by Luzi as a ‘persona geniale e molto formativa’ (CMS, p. 83).
It is, furthermore, necessary to distinguish, as Zadro observes, 'tra il Platone, per
cosi dire, della teoria delle idee, ed il Platone dell'Uno e della storia', whom
philosophers and philologists have attempted to find in a tradition of oral
teaching which has survived parallel to the written one, to the point of giving
birth in the modern age to the kind of historicism we witness from Vico to
Gentile, through that of Goethe and Herder, Hegel and Droysen.¹¹

Luzi several times distanced himself from the idealistic Platonism of Croce
and Gentile (even though they were a strong dialectical presence in Hermetic
criticism) and he has often recalled his youthful love for ancient philosophy, the
pre-Socratics, Socrates and Plato, and including Plotinus.¹² He has declared his
debt to the Romantic philosophy of nature - that of Hegel, Fichte and Schelling -
and above all he has recognised the influence of philosopher-poets such as
Novalis, Hölderlin and Leopardi; after which he returns to Plato through the idea
of Destiny as δόμημα in Goethe (see CMS, pp. 61-64). In a recent interview he
also defined his Platonism as 'Socratic', a good description of his open
philosophical position, which, in line with the original Greek thought, was born
not to be crystallized in the form of doctrine but to retain the character of the
dialogue, of a continually unfolding confrontation.¹³ This fluid position, together

¹¹ A. Zadro, Platone nel Novecento (Bari: Laterza, 1987), p. 5. The Florentine Hermeticists often refer
to Vico and Goethe in their critical essays. See in particular O. Macri, Esempolri del sentimento poetico
contemporaneo (Florence: Vallecchi, 1941) but also Piero Bigongiari, who recalls how important the
reading of Vico was for the Hermeticists, who learnt from him how to free themselves from the always-
same repetitiveness of Orphean circularity in favour of a spiral concept of the poetic event ('L'orfismo in
crisi' 1995), in Nel mutismo dell'universo, p. 238).
¹² See CMS, p. 60; M. Luzi, Conversazione. Interviste 1953-1998, ed. by A. Murdocca (Fiesole:
Edizioni Cadmo, 1999), pp. 14, 100.
¹³ See VRD, p. 15: 'Direi che il mio è un platonismo socratico, cioè legato anche alla lezione di Socrate.
Poi alcuni dicono che la lezione di Socrate è platonizzata, ma per me è quella'.
with a fundamental sense of misgiving sets him apart from Carlo Bo as the spokesman for Hermetic culture, the Carlo Bo who in the thirties was resolutely devaluing historical time as ‘tempo minore’ and proclaiming the absolute primacy of ‘tempo maggiore’.14


Macri also sees literature as having a strong neo-Platonic imprint, and pursues, as he writes in an article of 1938, a ‘desiderio platonico di corpi smarriti, di decisioni terrestri risolte in nuove dimensioni’.16 Macri’s Florentine Platonism is, however, all the more substantial conceptually and terminologically by virtue of its deriving from the concreteness of the Southern Italian tradition from which he came: ‘Dunque un platonismo ma reale vissuto

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sofferto, come si è andato facendo e definendo nelle strade, nelle case, nei caffè di tutti i paesi e di tutti i climi'. It is a Platonism that does not scorn empirical and historical elements, deprecated and 'sterilised' by the Idealistic Platonism of Croce: 'Se Benedetto Croce avesse riportato meglio alla natura del senso vichiano la sua intuizione, avrebbe meglio esplicato quei valori empirici (di tempo spazio circostanza abitudine negazione grado ecc.) dei quali ha invece sterilizzato l'opera vichiana e, in parte, la sua'. The Neapolitan philosopher had in fact, from his very first book on aesthetics published in 1900, rigorously separated criticism and pure poetry, phenomenal reality and absolute perfection of all acts of the Spirit, introducing the concept of the autonomy of art. He had interpreted De Sanctis’ notion of ‘form’ as a Kantian aprioristic synthesis and noumenal expression rather than as indicating a preceding phenomenal reality or as an instrument, however conventional, of interpersonal relationships. This ‘cultura idealistico-crociana’, observes another of the Florentine Hermeticists in 1939, renders ‘disabitato il percorso dalla vita alla poesia’ and causes us to lose ‘il senso dell’oggetto’, of the steps, the space between ‘l’interno e l’esterno’,

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17 ‘La poetica della “parola” (Quasimodo)’, pp. 109-10. In an essay of 1937-1939, entitled ‘Della grazia sensibile’, Macri investigates whether the poetic genius of Betocchi ‘è fatto naturalmente per riuscire a quella risoluzione lirica che è l’istanza suprema della poetica cattolica da Dante a Claudel: la visione come identificazione rappresentativa o simbolo sensibile della Grazia – e nel termine rappresentazione si vorrebbe rendere l’aspetto immaginativo della visione, il contenuto sensibile che la distinguerebbe dalla mistica visione’ (Esemplari del sentimento poetico contemporaneo, p. 55). Notice the phrase ‘simbolo sensibile’ which is already a prelude to the title of a later collection of essays, Realtà del simbolo (Florence: Vallecchi, 1968).

18 Id., ‘Intorno ad alcune ragioni non formali della poesia’ (1939), in Esemplari del sentimento poetico contemporaneo, p. 22.

19 In a retrospective judgement, Macri remembered the attempt by the Florentine Hermeticists to go beyond the Crocean dualisms and distinctions: ‘A noi non interessava sapere ciò che non era il noumeno della poesia, ma vivere e possedere noi stessi mediante un Altro in un punto singolarissimo del tempo e dello spazio’ (Realtà del simbolo, pp. 545-46).
between spirit and reality: 'Noi aprimmo gli occhi su questi gradini, tristemente
delusi dalla grande sicurezza di quella cultura'.

Luzi seems to be closer to the direction indicated by Macri than to that of Bo
or Croce: as the 1937 article on Leopardi shows, the concept of *forma*, rather
than being a pure *a priori* intuition, is placed in relation with the 'vicissitude' of
the world, and, as is confirmed in an article of 1938, 'l'ambizione di un'ascesa
noumenica' gives way to the 'proposizione continua dell'evento comune e
singolare a un dubbio agitatore, mantenuto fedelmente nella sua ora inerme'.
This 'dubbio agitatore' makes the Platonism of the early Luzi intimately
problematic and his critical positions not always coherent. For example, in
*Malefizio*, published in *Frontespizio* in 1936, Luzi indicates a dualism between
spirit and matter in Dante's *Comedy*: 'Pensate con quanta angoscia Dante fissa i
due poli della Commedia: l'incorporeo punto luminoso di Dio e l'enorme
materialità di Lucifero'. Once again speaking in similarly Platonic terms, in an
article of 1938, Luzi clarifies the meaning of the term 'eloquenza' as an attitude
towards regulating contingent contents in the light of another content that is
'puramente spirituale e atematico', and a few months later in * Campo di Marte*,
once again dealing in dualistic oppositions, he observes that a life undertaken to
reduce circumstances 'to the use of consciousness' also implies committing
oneself to an inescapable opposition between eternal and historical ('l'eterno

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20 P. Bigongiari, 'Vestibolo', *Corrente*, 2.11 (1939), p. 3; then in * Il critico come scrittore. Prose e
aforismi* (1933-1942) (Porretta Terme: I Quaderni del Battello Ebbro, 1994), p. 27.
21 See M. Luzi, 'Vicissitudine e forma', * Il Frontespizio*, 9.9 (1937); then in UP, pp. 51-60.
22 Id., 'Nostre pagine', * Campo di Marte*, 1.2 (1938), p. 2; poi in PS, p. 159.
23 Id., 'Malefizio', * Il Frontespizio*, 8.2 (1936), p. 15; then in PS, p. 49. Going back to the same subject in
an interview in 1999, Luzi again opposes the spirituality of the *Paradiso* to the materialness of the *Inferno*,
but following a different Platonism he clarifies that by 'bruta materia' he means 'la negazione della vita e
del mutamento' whereas by 'spirito' he means 'animazione e amore': 'Dante mi pare sposti il dilemma tra
morte e vita: inerzia e cecità della greve materia contrapposte a spirito, animazione, amore. Lucifero non è
unangelo del male, né un *devil spirit* ma la negazione della vita e del mutamento nella bruta materia. La
vita invece nella sua pienezza è nella luce ed è restituito alla vita chi è accolto e accoglie a sua volta la luce'
(Id., *La luce (dal Paradiso di Dante)* (Forte dei Marmi: Galleria Pegaso Editore, 1994) p. 27).
contro il quotidiano’). Even the language of art itself is defined in Platonic tones: what is more, it is veiled with such an ascetic spiritualism that, in order to reveal to man his interiority, the subjects perceived are dangerously close to being abstracted from daily life: ‘Il linguaggio, meta violenta dello spirito dolorosamente determinato, crea e dispone le materie presentite secondo un impulso liberato da quel sentimento di esse che la vita quotidiana aveva sopportato; e rivela finalmente all’uomo interiore (all’uomo cristiano) la sua anima naturale’ (UP, p. 16). A few years before, however, in one of the first articles he wrote in 1933, entitled ‘Intellettualismo e poesia’, Luzi had defended himself from attack from a section of Italian literary culture which had taken sides with Noventa in La Riforma Letteraria. Criticising in his turn the ‘ultima tendenza dell’arte’ to pursue ‘una liricità incorporea tendente al vago o all’idillico’, Luzi had indicated as a model to admire the extraordinary coherence of the worlds of Dante, Leopardi and Shelley, observing that this coherence did not depend on an ability to look at things in the measure and colour defined by the subject, but was caused by ‘una potente ondata che si infiltrà nella essenza umana del poeta e la rigenera’. In the same essay Luzi also speaks of ‘caso’ as of that which happens independently of the self, which the self cannot handle but can raise to ‘un piano superiore’, giving it ‘un significato metafisico’ which in its

24 Id., ‘Momento dell’eloquenza’, Il Bargello, 10.29 (1938), p. 3; then in PS, p. 121.
27 M. Luzi, ‘Intellettualismo e poesia’, Il Ferruccio, 5 August 1933, p. 2; then in PS, p. 156.
realisation leads to ‘la sublimità’. In the art of Dante, Leopardi and Shelley there is created in short a mutual relationship among events external to the self (such as the ‘ondata che si infiltra’ and ‘caso’) and an urge to grasp ‘l’essenza umana’ in these events in order to arrive at the ‘piano superiore’.

Commenting on these pages of Luzi on ‘Intellettualismo e poesia’, Battistini and Raimondi introduce a concept of intellectualism in him that is quite other than that associated by Crocean Idealistic criticism with Hermetic writers:

È poi questo il retto significato di ‘intellettualismo’, da intendersi non nell’accezione negativa di astrazione formale e di oscurità volontaria, come l’intende Flora, ma di ‘costante centro coordinatore’ in grado di sollevare la parola a un significato metafisico che esprima il concetto di sublime moderno in tutti i valori di ascensi.

That Luzi’s intellectualism is not to be understood in the negative sense of abstraction and deliberate obscurity is confirmed by the fact that in the thirties...
Luzi himself criticised abstract intellectualism, with its lack of any relationship with common, social and sensible reality. For example, in the ‘Lettera da Firenze’ published in *L’Italia letteraria* in 1934, Luzi underlines the fundamental relationship between the Immanent and Transcendent that is perceived in real art, and observes that ‘sono sopra ogni altro i poeti che stabiliscono rapporti tra il sensibile e il soprasensibile’.

‘Gli uomini colti’ on the other hand, he states in ‘Il sangue bianco’ (1935), are a completely different category vis-à-vis real artists and poets: they aspire to being ‘uomini universali’ and buoyed up by their pride they believe that they can become that by ‘non accettando con veemenza le cose e soffrendole, ma sopraffacendole con un ordine intellettuale’. The lack of ‘facoltà partecipativa’ as well as ‘il terrore della disintegrazione di se stessi’ keeps them a long way from any ‘adesione sentimentale ed attiva agli eventi appassionati’; and in any case they are very careful not to sacrifice anything of their own: ‘da loro alle cose corre molta distanza’ (PS, p. 43). And a few months later in ‘L’intelligenza laica’, Luzi, showing how little time he had for Idealistic Platonism which isolates art in a kind of *hortus conclusus*, speaks out against the culture of the ‘epoca delle accademie’, where everything assumes an air of indifference with respect to any involvement or participation, and Art, Intelligence and Politics become pure values. Intelligence, in particular, has become a way of life and prerogative of a restricted ‘casta degli intellettuali’ for whom intelligence is nothing other than its own end.

This harsh judgement on the ‘casta degli intellettuali’, cut off from the events of society and always ready to censure everything that does not lend itself

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34 The idea of intellectuals as a caste is to be found also in the first editorial of *Riforma Letteraria* which came out a year later and was written by Noventa with a clearly anti-academic purpose (1.1, November...
to being measured according to predetermined patterns, may have been the result of the anti-intellectualism of the metaphysics of Bergson, whose thought shapes Luzi’s essays and ideological perspectives. It would not be difficult to find various points of contact with Luzi and the French philosopher, who, even if not directly, reaches down to the Florentine poet by way of Ungaretti, and then later through the cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin, a confessed disciple of Bergson. The French philosopher, who renewed the Platonic and Augustinian tradition from within by emphasizing the notion of time as duration, had this to say on the much-debated problem of intellectualism:

L’intelligence humaine, telle que nous la représentons, n’est point du tout celle que nous montrait Platon dans l’allégorie de la caverne. Elle n’a pas plus pour fonction de regarder passer des ombres vaines que de contempler, en se retournant derrière elle, l’astre éblouissant. Elle a autre chose à faire. Attelés, comme des bœufs de labour à une lourde tâche, nous sentons le jeu de nos muscles et de nos articulations, le poids de la charrue et la résistance du sol: agir et se savoir agir, entrer en contact avec la réalité et même la vivre, mais dans la mesure seulement où elle intéresse l’œuvre que s’accomplit et le sillon qui se creuse, voilà la fonction de l’intelligence humaine. Pourtant un fluide bienfaisant nous baigne, où nous puissions la force même de travailler et de vivre. De cet océan de vie, où nous sommes immergés, nous aspirons sans cesse quelque chose, et nous sentons que notre être, ou du moins l’intelligence qui le guide, s’y est formé par une espèce de solidification locale. La philosophie ne peut être qu’un effort pour se fondre à nouveau dans le tout. L’intelligence, se résorbant dans son principe, revivra à rebours sa propre genèse.

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1936): ‘La nostra giovinezza è finita […] Finito il nostro dilettantismo culturale, finita la fronda giovane contro le idee che non si sapevan raggiungere, finita la presunzione giovanile di appartenere a una casta’.


While Luzi speaks of an ‘adesione sentimentale ed attiva agli eventi appassionati’, Bergson of knowledge as an ‘agir et se savoir agir’, freeing oneself from all preoccupation with measure in order to ‘entrer en contact avec la réalité et même la vivre’; at the same time what remains fundamental is the Platonic urge to find the essence of things, the metaphysical meaning within and beyond things themselves.\(^{37}\)

On the other hand, the danger of intellectualism and isolation in respect to reality also involves the ‘personaggi letterari’ that Luzi, in ‘Malefizio’ (1936), defines as ‘i reietti e i confusi’, those that have given up being ‘buoni o cattivi per essere interessanti’.\(^{38}\) In ‘Teatro’ (1938) and ‘Il Sonno’ (1939), we find once again a critique of official culture, which, containing, as it does, a ‘sconfinata serie di sonnambuli’ (‘Il Sonno’, in PS, p. 165), is compared to a theatrical and rhetorical parade. It was no accident that this hostile attitude on the part of Luzi (and not only of Luzi) in the pages of *Campo di Marte* forced Vallecchi, under the pressure of censorship, to suspend publication of the review in 1939, in much the

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same way as happened in the following year with *Corrente di Vita Giovanile*, the Milanese review of Ernesto Treccani.

2.2. *A critical Confrontation with the Platonism of European Literature*

Luzi’s first explicit references to Platonic thought began in 1939. In an article that appeared in *Campo di Marte*, speaking of the Romantic Sparkenbroke with regard to the concept of ‘apparenza’ characteristic of the sensible reality, seen in opposition to the life of the spirit, the young poet refers to the *Phaedrus*. In a note in which the Platonic dialogue is given explicit mention, ‘apparenza’ is defined as an identification of object and memory which anticipates the flight of the soul from the naturalistic and accidental order of human reality towards ‘una causalità pura e aprioristica’.

Luzi specifies that modern cognitive apriorism, the main champions of which are Kant and Croce, is different from the ‘abitudine platonica che genera l’illusione’, but derives from it, and its consequences in terms of earthly vicissitudes are the same. The term ‘illusione’ that appears in this article and in the 1941 essay ‘Un’illusione platonica’, as also in the collection of poems of the same name and of the same year, contains a doubt as to the possibility of poetry being able to grasp, in keeping with the Platonic view of the world, the noumenal substance of things. Luzi seems to perceive that this view of the world, understood as a hymn to physical dissolution, can turn out to be a deception, betraying man in the very moment in which he decides to do without the real and contingent. The awareness of the direction taken by the Platonic tradition can be seen also in ‘Ciels séduits’ where, from a more general point of view, the author recalls how in Greek thought ‘la vita dello spirito aveva proceduto distinta dalla vita dei sensi’.

The chapter ‘Un’illusione platonica’ is an occasion for developing some elements of Platonic thought and its relationship with Italian and European

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literature. It was initially meant to be an introduction to Baldassar Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, and describes the ‘scoperta di Platone nell’*otium* e nella disponibilità originaria dell’anima sempre perfettamente presente a se stessa e alla sua natura, priva quindi di mortificazione e sottratta allo squilibrio e alla febbre della ricerca’ (UP, pp. 20-21). The Platonic language of the Renaissance writer is calm and unruffled, in a state of contemplative stillness, and sustained by nothing other than the virtue of self-possession. Its main feature is furthermore a ‘tranquillità aprioristica’ with regard to results, and a state of perfection that is ‘lirico e noumenico’ (UP, p. 21):

Questa confidenza e familiarità con la natura dell’anima eccede infatti da ogni nozione del tempo, delle determinazioni e quindi delle finzioni: al di là di ogni rapporto o relazione, essa si conosce e si sente immune da ogni riflesso e da ogni finalità logica avvenire, inabitata se non dalla legge eterna del suo essere, consustanziale alle altre leggi divine perfette del tempo e dello spazio. Essa non ha alcuno stimolo a uscire da quella quiete e da quell’*otium*: neppure quando persegue le sue immagini dialogiche, essa rompe la sua stasi, ma genera dalla sua forma altre forme accidentali. (UP, pp. 21-22)

This familiarity with the nature of the soul, subsisting in a state of pure consciousness, has had a great influence on Italian literature. Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, in particular, retains clear traces of that vast Platonic literature that was spread throughout Italy by Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo and Bembo, as well as minor figures like Equicola and Cattani da Diacceto. The Platonism of the *Cortegiano* was a Platonism that emerged from the very depths of humanism and at the same time constituted the main vehicle of Platonism in Europe and especially in France, where it left a trace on all poetry from Marot to the Pléiade.

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42 Luzi’s words describe not only Platonic language but also the phenomenon of Petrarchism in Renaissance humanism and connected to various aspects of the Platonic tradition. As Jaqueline Risset has observed, ‘il petrarchismo nell’interpretazione dell’umanesimo rinascimentale, implica al tempo stesso omogenetità linguistica, ciceronianesimo, inteso come armonia codificata dal discorso, poesia in quanto *otium* e variazione infinita intorno a un centro immobile’ (J. Risset, *Dante scrittore* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984), p. 167).
According to Luzi, it is a musical Platonism, a prose characterized preeminently by its rhythmic properties, taking on the form of a ‘bianco spazio spirituale’ and a ‘perfetto candore ex abrupto’ (UP, p. 22).

Apart from Baldassar Castiglione, another important figure in the Platonic world of the Italian Cinquecento is Raffaello Sanzio, to whom Luzi dedicated some acute observations that have remained virtually unknown to scholars. In an article of 1934 published in Il Ferruccio, Luzi expressed admiration for the unity of the physical and metaphysical in the paintings of Raphael and defined this relation an ‘armonica consistenza della realtà’ giving the artist a value which is not only pictorial but also intellectual and moral. The greatness of the paintings of Raphael consists in having glorified life ‘nelle sue forme più semplici e comuni’, in having represented a beauty that is ‘molteplice, quindi non astratta’, a beauty that ‘ha una intima forza e non è un tipo’; what is more, the famous grace of his figures, often transported into an idyllic atmosphere, does not

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43 M. Luzi, ‘Guida all’interpretazione di Raffaello Sanzio’, Il Ferruccio, 17 and 24 February, 1934, p. 3; then in PS, p. 27. A result of the visits to the Vatican Museums in Rome where his father had sent him after his ‘maturità classica’, Luzi’s long essay on Raphael was an introduction to what would turn out to be a great interest in pictorial art, as shown in the collection edited by N. Micieli, Luzi critico d’arte (Florence: LoGisma, 1997). On the ‘dinamica fisica e spirituale’ of Raphael’s paintings and the ‘armonia’ of his compositions in which the position of the detail is subordinated to that of the whole, see Heinrich Wölfflin, whose interpretations spring from the depths of early twentieth-century European thought: L’arte classica, It. transl. by R. Paoli, 2nd edn (1941; Florence: Sansoni, 1953), pp. 81-144, 251-90 (Die klassische Kunst first appeared in 1899). For the movement from the Renaissance to the Baroque, which can be found in Raphael himself, see Wölfflin, Rinascimento e barocco, It. transl. by L. Filippi (Florence: Vallecchi, 1928), p. 46 (Renaissance und Barock first appeared in 1888): ‘Raffaello è tipico per questa evoluzione. I tratti monocromati, quieti e serrati del suo stile anteriore scompaiono, i colori vengono infranti e sviluppati in tutti i sensi – dappertutto appare vita, movimento’. According to the German critic, Raphael put into practice the law of necessity which was a characteristic of the Renaissance: ‘le variate proporzioni di tutto l’insieme e delle sue parti devono dimostrarsi determinate da un’unità che forma la base di tutte quante; nessuna deve apparire casuale, ma ognuna deve derivare dall’altra per una necessità, l’unica naturale, l’unica concepibile. In questi casi si suol parlare di un’espressione dell’organico. Ed a ragione: perché il segreto sta appunto in ciò, che l’arte opera come la natura, ripetendo nel singolo sempre la figura dell’intero’ (Rinascimento e barocco, pp. 97-98). The ideological perspective of early Luzi seems however to be different from the rigid attitude of Wölfflin.
preclude ‘l’importanza drammatica o comica che è propria di ogni individuo con ogni sua singola azione’ (PS, pp. 30-31). The adjective ‘comico’ is probably meant in the extended meaning that it has for Dante, whose Comedy is written in a comic style very close to the Biblical sermo humilis that the Middle Ages believed to include all styles, from the low to the illustrious. As the Comedy comprehends the whole range of human possibilities, from hell to paradise, so does Luzi see in the paintings of Raphael ‘l’importanza drammatica o comica’ of man, the capacity that he possesses to resolve diversity in unity, the plane of reality and the ideal plane. The ideal atmosphere that is a feature of the paintings of Raphael, in fact, takes place ‘in atteggiamento figurativo’ and establishes a mutual inherence between ‘figura “immanente”’ and ‘figura “trascendente”’ (PS, p. 33).

In a recent interview, a retrospective judgement by the author on the Hermetic period confirms the observations he made in the early essay of 1934:

L’interesse che ho avuto per Platone è una cosa che io ho percepito fin dall’inizio. Ebbi poi la fortuna di vedere Le stanze di Raffaello in cui il platonismo è un ideale caratterizzato da una concretezza così presente che rende l’ideale affascinante. In fondo, quello che Raffaello descriveva era l’esperienza della realtà. [...] Non ha più importanza sapere se è il reale che trascende alla sua

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44 On the antinomy between unity and variety, harmony and multiplicity, which the Platonism of the Renaissance cannot escape from when it is translated into artistic terms, see the fundamental studies by Ezio Raimondi collected in Rinascimento inquieta (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), especially ‘Dalla natura alla regola’ (pp. 5-17).

idea o è un'idea che scende nel reale, perché l'esito è un'unità raggiunta, un'unità raggiante.\footnote{46}
(VRD, p. 15)

This 'esperienza della realtà' depicted in the paintings of Raphael, and which in the post-war period Luzi was to seek in the language of Dante, was a confused aspiration of the Hermetic years, and rarely found in the Italian literary tradition. In an essay of 1937 (originally a letter written in 1935 to Valentine Alphan), Luzi wrote some 'Note sulla poesia italiana' and observed that most Italian lyric poetry (including Foscolo, Leopardi and the Stilnovists) follows the mirage of absolute creativity: 'la storia della poesia italiana non concede nulla di sé alla natura finché non sarà capace di ridurla ad una semplice fase del suo ordine. Ne sono esempio gli stilnovisti, un po' convenzionalmente: ma in Petrarca questo dominio, questa demiurgia è avvenuta assolutamente'.\footnote{47} In particular, Luzi describes Leopardi's absoluteness and his Platonic tendency to transpose the themes of his life into a climate that has no further contact with circumstances.\footnote{48} At the same time, as if to demonstrate the restlessness and fundamental complexity that run through his first critical essays, he underlines Leopardi's ability to cancel the dualism between 'lingua' and 'linguaggio', logical discourse and poetical discourse, until he finds his own personal language in the language itself, eliminating the split between vicissitude and form (UP, p. 59). And above all, he shows how Leopardi endeavours to remain faithful to the original purpose of his poetry: 'accogliere e restituire' (UP, p. 60).

\footnote{46} On the unity of the real and ideal, between what happens and the perception of the intellect in the art of Raphael, see Erich Heller: 'For something that happens becomes an event only when it is mentally and emotionally perceived and registered. Matarazzo, therefore, in all his naivety, and Raphael with all the transforming power of his art, are both sources for the historian of a culture, who is, as Burckhardt once put it in his unphilosophical manner, as much concerned with "represented history" as with what "literally happened", forgetting that nothing happens literally – unless we are determined to make our own perception the criterion of the perception of truth itself, and to say that what really happens is precisely what we would have noticed had we been on the spot' (H. Heller, The Disinherited Mind. Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought, new edn (1952; London: Bowes & Bowes, 1975), p. 72.

\footnote{47} M. Luzi, 'Note sulla poesia italiana', Il Frontespizio, 9.2 (1937), 141-44; then in UP, pp. 39-40.
In the sphere of French literature, on the other hand, what becomes the object of attack is above all the Platonism of Mallarmé who, while he had cast a profound spell and exercised a strong influence over Luzi’s early poetry, in 1938 was judged by him to be of a ‘platonismo rigidamente disciplinare e religioso’, which remains deaf to the ‘meraviglia di fronte all’essenza dotata di tante occasioni e quindi di tanta vastità’. As the Platonic prospect turns out to be ‘illusione’, in the same way does Mallarmé’s Platonism reveal itself to be a ‘miraggio’ and ‘utopia’. In 1942 (ten years before publishing the Studi su Mallarmé) the Florentine writer traced to the French poet ‘la nostra letteratura di frasi isolate e distinte, di frasi inattive’, observing that however much his dream of creating ‘un sistema di pure probabilità formali’ may have remained unrealised in history, he was the one who repeated ‘il miraggio di una cosmogonia attuata mediante il potere suggestivo delle relazioni verbali’.

For the Florentine Hermeticists the greatness of the French poet consisted in having faced the poetic problem from an integral point of view, to the point of making it coincide with the problem of being and knowledge. From Mallarmé’s point of view, however, the Platonic dualism of spirit and matter was taken to the extreme consequences: while before, as Albert Beguin observes, it was a question of accepting, without premeditation, the life of those regions in which affectivity grouped images, Mallarmé was now employing language signs in such a way that nothing could intervene from life in its raw state. If Rimbaud declared that he witnessed almost as a by-stander the flowering of his own thought (‘J’assiste à l’élosion de ma pensée’), Mallarmé invited his readers to leave the initiative to words (‘céder l’initiative aux mots’) which no longer acted

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48 Id., “Vicissitudine e forma”, Il Frontespizio, 9.9 (1937), 661-85; then in UP, p. 52.
51 See A. Beguin, L’âme romantique et le rêve (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1939), p. 381. Luzi recalls Beguin’s monograph as one of the studies that were ‘nutritivi’ for him in the immediate post-war years, together with a reading of Maritain, Dante, Sartre, the German existentialists Heidegger and Jaspers, as well as a re-reading of the French Symbolists and Mauriac (see CMS, p. 50).
as a means of communication and relations between men, but, endowed with
essentiality and purity, became an ‘instrument de pouvoir’ and were worth
more for their suggestiveness as sounds than for their sense or ability to refer to
real and external objects. The fact that Mallarmé insists on the non-referential
relation of the word to the external world as a condition for the purity of the
language presupposes a real absence in poetry and indicates that split in the pact
between word and world which, according to George Steiner, constitutes one of
the few real revolutions of the spirit in Western history and defines modernity
itself. The French poet’s vieux songe of poetic creation capable of dominating
chance and creating being out of nothing through the word, reveals itself in all its
illusoriness and, as Luzi points out, the conclusion of Igitur is the crowning
failure. If Mallarmé considers the gesture of Igitur, having to recognise the
unavoidable presence of chance even in the throw of a dice, a failure (‘un coup
de dés jamais ne abolira le hasard’ because ‘si c’était le nombre ce serait le
hasard’) that is the very point from which the poetry of the twentieth century
can start out again:

il fatto che Mallarmé abbia portato all’estremo quell’ambizione e ne abbia poi rappresentato il
naufragio nel ‘Coup de dés’ dà a noi il senso della necessità di un ricominciamento. Un

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revolutionary epistemology and linguistics of ‘real absence’ is ‘in a rigorous philosophic-semantic sense
(where both the philosophical and the semantic eventuality are in doubt) an ontological nihilism (such as
Heidegger will explore in his exposition of “Nothingness” or *Nichtigkeit*). Between the four arbitrary signs
which make up – where “make up” has its full fictive connotation – the verbal or graphic object rose,
between the syntactic rules of the particular language-game in which this object has relational legitimacy (it
relates to other verbal and graphic markers) and the putative flower, there is now a gap which is, strictly
considered, infinite. The truth of the word is the absence of the word” (p. 96). See also Maritain, according
to whom ‘with Mallarmé and Valéry, the option for the rejection of transcendence taught modern poetry the
experience of the void (and also, as concerns Mallarmé, a faint hope in magic)’ (J. Maritain, *Creative
ricominciamento da altro, non da fuori della storia, non da fuori del mondo, in opposizione ad esso, ma dall’interno di esso. Dalla parola di tutti noi dobbiamo ritrovare l’elemento fondamentale: cioè una poesia nella non poesia del mondo. Allora io cerco un’identità tra linguaggio e lingua, tra linguaggio che insegue un sogno di assolutezza, e invece la lingua, cercando nella lingua della comunità e della comunicazione, l’assolutezza, se c’è: una possibilità di individuare qualcosa di fondamentalmente creativo che è implicito nella lingua, come tale, quotidiana.55

It was no accident that it was to be the ‘rovescio’ of Mallarmé’s 

It was no accident that it was to be the ‘rovescio’ of Mallarmé’s *vieux songe* where the *illusione platonica* of separating sensible and intellectual reality, the language of the lyric self and the language of the tribe, the poetic word and the common word, would decline for Luzi. It would be on the very ‘rovescio’ of that dream that ‘la via “possibile a salir persona viva”’ would open: ‘una via purgatoriale come quella del verso dantesco’ in which consists the ‘cammino del nostro secolo’.56

Luzi’s accomplishment in the Hermetic period is not so much to have glimpsed the ‘reversal’ of Mallarmé’s dream, to have shown a Purgatorial path through the twentieth century, or to have used a ‘lingua della comunità’

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56 Id., ‘Con Mallarmé, a lungo’, in NP, pp. 243-44. Originally the essay was published in translation and edited by Jean-Yves Masson, with the title ‘Au fil du temps’ as an introduction to the volume *S. Mallarmé, Poésies* (Paris: Orphée La Difference, 1991). For the unusual juxtaposition of Mallarmé or rather his ‘rovescio’ to Dante, see also J. Risset, ‘Introduzione’ to *S. Mallarmé, Poesia e prosa*, ed. by C. Ortesta (Milan: Guanda, 1982), pp. IX-X: ‘Ma forse, perché i poeti italiani si interessassero di nuovo a Mallarmé (dopo Ungaretti) serviva proprio che fosse avvenuta l’esperienza opposta a quella di Pound: se infatti Pound ha rappresentato per la cultura italiana, rispetto alla tradizione petrarchista dominante, l’altro polo, quello della sperimentazione dantesca, forse un ritorno a Mallarmé – visto quasi sempre come una sorta di culmine paradigmatico della tradizione petrarchista – è stato reso possibile dall’escursione esorcizzante nei Cantos. Anche se in realtà Mallarmé più che un Petrarca, sarebbe da considerare un Dante rovesciato [...]. Tutto un versante dell’attività mallarmeano è decifrabile in rapporto con la tensione sperimentale dantesca, e in particolare con l’interesse dell’autore della *Commedia* per il problema del linguaggio poetico’.
immersed in the magma of history and nature, as to have judged the Platonic perspective an ‘illusione’, the Petrarchan one a ‘demiurgia’, and a ‘miraggio’ and ‘utopia’ that of Mallarmé. In other words, his merit consists in having singled out, in an expression of his friend and maestro Carlo Betocchi, the Idealistic ‘punto morto’ and to have felt, often in the impossibility of escaping from it, the Platonic, Mallarmean and Petrarchan dualism as a prison in which what is annulled a priori is instead ‘vita’, ‘occasione’ and ‘caso’. The intention has been in short to emphasise the strong neo-Platonic imprint in Luzi’s early critical works, but also highlighting their dialectical character, their doubts.

In this sense Luzi is much closer to the suffering and intensely experienced Platonism of Macri than that of Bo. The awareness of a poetry whose form, sometimes involuntarily obscure, is generated by continuous encounters ‘con la sintassi storica’, the awareness, therefore, of the concreteness of the poetic symbol and of the need on the part of the a priori continually to confront external reality, came to Macri from his study of Vico, who had taught him the fantastic character of history but also at the same time a historicity of fantasy.

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57 C. Betocchi, ‘Invito alla poesia’, *Il Frontespizio*, 10.4 (1938), 253-58. In the article Betocchi reflects on the incapacity of aesthetic criticism to overcome the Idealistic ‘punto morto’ and notes in reference to this problem that it ‘abdicò ad ogni interpretazione dantesca’.

58 O. Macri, ‘Tecnica della memoria poetica’ (1938), in *Esemplari del sentimento poetico contemporaneo*, p. 170. One year before, Ungaretti held a conference on Vico as an inaugural lecture at the University of St. Paul, where he stressed the intention of the Neapolitan thinker to unite the historical reality of Tacitus with the sublimity of Plato (see G. Ungaretti, ‘Posizione storica e grandezza di Giambattista Vico’, in *Invenzione della poesia moderna. Lezioni brasiliane di letteratura (1937-1942)*, ed. by P. Montefoschi (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1993), pp. 203-20). See also G. Ungaretti, ‘Le origini del romanticismo italiano’ (1941), in *Invenzioni della poesia moderna*, p. 237: ‘Per Giambattista Vico i fatti umani non sono promossi dalle idee né le idee dipendono dai fatti; ma lo spirito nel suo costantemente nuovo dibattito procede strettamente legato ai fatti i quali ad esso strettamente uniti, mutano costantemente. È disastroso, intollerabile per Vico, come lo era per Dante, separare le idee dai fatti, l’anima dal corpo’.

59 According to Andrea Battistini, in Vico’s assumption of rhetoric as a hermeneutic instrument at the service of anthropology we can also decipher, paradoxically, ‘il persistere di una fedeltà più volte dichiarata a Platone, giacché, per quanto il Gorgia e il Fedone accusino la psicagogia di mistificare la verità, si riconosce comunque che le immagini seducenti e l’apparenza sensibile sono pur sempre la remota e
This idea of a 'simbolo sensibile', or of a reality inside poetry, are aspirations comparable to those expressed by Luzi when he speaks of the unity to be found in the art of Raphael, between the real and ideal, between the Immanent and Transcendent. If Bo believed in a sense of form that was innate and anterior to any experience of phenomena, for Macri it was necessary to remember that this form is realised only after having drawn from those very phenomena, external to the soul, the dialectical nourishment by which the soul itself is fortified. If in the Hermetic years these criteria of Macri's, which definitely exercised a certain fascination over the young Luzi, seemed destined to remain submerged, in the post-war period they were to be saved thanks to their very dialectical nature, thanks to their having passed the limits of purity or apriorism.

Luzi's Platonism may be defined 'Socratic' precisely because it does not forget the aporias that characterised an ancient way of thought that was anything but systematic and definitive, a thought born not as a crystallised doctrine but as scepisis or continual research. It is not therefore too much to say that among the many directions that the thought of early Luzi could have taken there was also implicit the one taken after the war, starting from the essay L'inferno e il limbo (1945), where he speaks of the necessity for a natural language like Dante's.

The Platonic dialectic between light and shade, spirit and matter, remains in Luzi's works, and the excess of light that dazzles the reader in his last poetic collections sometimes risks swamping the colours, destroying their differences and creating a mystical spiritualism to the detriment of the flesh. On the whole, however, Luzi's work unfolds within a 'metafisica della terrestrità', with the purpose of fighting any rigid dualism in order to reach that 'esperienza del reale' and 'raggiante unità' between physical and metaphysical that in his youth the

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deformata imitazione dell'essenza, un vestibolo che accede alla verità, non un ostacolo' (A. Battistini, 'Introduzione' to G. Vico, Opere, ed. by A. Battistini, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), I, p. xx).

poet had admired in the Platonism of Raphael and which later he was to find again in the ‘luce intellettua, piena d’amore’ of Dante’s Paradiso.\(^{61}\)

If the unity of the various, the different and multiple in art is refused by the Idealistic Platonism of Croce, which accepts only things in their pure and abstract universality, the Raphael unity to which the twenty-year-old Luzi aspired glorifies life ‘nelle sue forme più semplici e comuni’, depicts a beauty which is ‘molteplice, quindi non astratta’, without excluding ‘l’importanza drammatica o comica che è propria di ogni individuo con ogni sua singola azione’ (PS, pp. 30-31). This is obviously not a static and final unity, but a dynamic unity created in a universe sensitive to its historical and natural imperfection. The serene peace celebrated in the Cortegiano, which for a certain time represented the illusione platonica of the Hermetic Luzi, gives way increasingly in the second half of the twentieth century to a unity which emerges from the frammenti of the world to arrive at the attempt to mix the poetic voce with the magma of life, seen as vicissitudine sospesa and fuoco della controversia. In this sense, although the rational Aristotelian structure of the Comedy was difficult to apply to the baroque ruins of the twentieth century, the Dantine metaphor was to reveal its modernity to the Florentine poet, because instead of dividing two worlds (sensible world and ideas), as allegory does, it suggests a Platonic concern for the universal idea without sacrificing detail, and thus represents, in Raimondi’s words, the ‘unitio nella varietà’.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{61}\) See M. Luzi, La luce (dal Paradiso di Dante).

STILNOVISMO AND DANTISMO IN THE EARLY LUZI

Ogni parola viva non si contrappone nello stesso modo al proprio oggetto: tra la parola e l’oggetto, tra la parola e il parlante c’è il mezzo elastico, spesso difficilmente penetrabile, delle altre parole, delle parole altrui sullo stesso oggetto, sullo stesso tema. E la parola può stilisticamente individualizzarsi e organizzarsi proprio in un processo di vivente interazione con questo specifico mezzo.

M. Bachtin

3.1. A Methodological Introduction to an Inter-textual and Inter-discursive Analysis

While the stilnovistic reminiscences in Luzi’s poetry are studied here for the first time, we owe a first catalogue of the dantismi in his work, with occasional sporadic references to the collections written in the Hermetic period, to Luigi Scorrano,¹ one of the most assiduous and careful scholars of twentieth-century dantismo. Scorrano’s entries, in their division of dantismi into four typological categories, also reflect, even if marginally, the methodological problems of cataloguing intertexts. They are developed further by Pegorari in his Vocabolario dantesco della lirica italiana del Novecento.² The Vocabolario, which orders the dantismi of various twentieth-century poets chronologically inside their respective works is, considering the amount of material examined, an ambitious work. However, the choice of considering the widest possible range of dantismi

² D.M. Pegorari, Vocabolario dantesco della lirica italiana del Novecento (for the part dedicated to Luzi see pp. 497-557).
ends up occasionally in forced interpretations. While some single lemmas make it possible to conjecture, with an inevitable margin of doubt, an inter-discursive link with the Dantean text (for instance 'ciocco', which will be discussed below), other lemmas seem to have been chosen following a criterion that can only be called subjective. In such cases, the reader will have difficulty, after checking the surrounding context, in finding a 'particolare rilievo conferito o da una certa aulicità o dal valore semantico rivestito nell'opera dantesca'.

For instance, the intertextual concord claimed to exist between 'altro' (Vita Nuova XXVII 5-12) and 'altri' ('Giovinetta, giovinetta', LB, line 13), between 'via' (Vita Nuova XXVI; XL) and 'vie' ('Giovinetta, giovinetta', LB, line 2), between 'viso' (Inf. IV, 11; IV 20; V 110; IX 74; XV 27; XVI 14; XVI 123; XVII 52; XVII 117; XVIII 47; XVIII 128; XX 21; XXIII 83; XXX 54; XXXI 11; XXXII 45; XXXII 53; XXXII 70; XXXII 112) and 'visi' ('Viaggio', UB, line 3), between 'desidero', 'desideroso' (Vita Nuova XXIII) and 'desiderio' (QG V 19-20), is not convincing. In these cases not even the contexts, which Pegorari quotes, help to show the connection between Luzi's text and Dante's: the original lemmas used by Dante seem to have been absorbed by the ordinary language to the point of having completely lost any connotation they might have had in the original thirteenth-century text. On the whole, however, the Vocabolario constitutes an important and flexible consultation tool and is the first step for those wishing to undertake a historical reconstruction of twentieth-century dantismi, and describe and discuss their rhetorical, stylistic and symbolic meanings.

Another study, which appeared during the final stages of the writing of this research, is Titone's work, which came out in 2001, when this doctoral thesis was almost completed and parts of some chapters already published or

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3 According to Pegorari this is the criterion that makes it 'non azzardato' to catalogue an ample range of individual lemmas ascribable to the broadest literary tradition (D.M. Pegorari, p. LXXX).

forthcoming in reviews. Titone’s book turned out to be complementary to my work on Luzi’s dantismo, as the methodological premises, interpretation and even choice of dantismi are significantly diverse. This shows the complexity of twentieth-century Dantean studies, the results of which often diverge or in any event can have different methodological approaches. Titone dedicates roughly eighty pages to Luzi’s poetic and critical work, and as she considers it almost in its entirety she is obliged to make a drastic selection of the dantismi. As opposed to the present research, there is no space dedicated to the historical context of Hermeticism and its initial Platonic stilnovismo, and above all the relationship between the twentieth-century text and the medieval one is presented without inquiring into the possible mediation on the part of other Italian and foreign poets (Eliot is never mentioned). However the writer deliberately chooses this approach and declares right from the introduction that she has not ‘ritenuto opportuno documentare altri sondaggi su fenomeni non italiani di dantismo novecentesco o su presunte, e variamente negate da Luzi e Pasolini, mediazioni nel processo di avvicinamento alla lezione di Dante Alighieri’.\textsuperscript{5} However, if on one hand it is true that Dante appears various times in Luzi’s text without any need for mediation on the part of the literary tradition (in this case it would be a forced interpretation to search for it), on the other the texts prove that the linguistic presence of Pascoli, D’Annunzio, Campana, Mallarmé, Machado, Ungaretti, Montale, Eliot and many other writers is often an aid to arriving at a better understanding of the complexity of and reasons for Dantean echoes, and the ways in which these form part of the context of twentieth-century verse. Verbal echoes are often in fact susceptible to a whole range of extraneous influences, the result of previous assimilation and use of the lemma or phrase in the national cultural tradition.

In the course of this thesis, especially in Chapter 4 and 5, there will also be an attempt – and here again this is a different path from that chosen by Titone – to

\textsuperscript{5} lvi, p. 5.
carry out an intratextual as well as intertextual analysis, an analysis that is both diachronic and synchronic at the same time. There will be a chronological survey of some of Luzi’s post-war collections, grouping the Dantean and Eliotian borrowings in thematic ‘figures’ so as to be able to describe the types, recurrences and variations with which some Dantean and Eliotian lines return to Luzi’s memory in different stages of his poetical career. Last of all, it must also be noted that Titone in her analysis does not mention either the two interviews focussing entirely on the relationship of Luzi with Dante, published in 1999 and 2000 respectively (VRD, ED), or studies on Luzi’s dantismo previously written and published by Ciccarelli (1996), Toppan (1997), Gattamorta (2000) and Pegorari (2000).^6

Investigating the stilnovistic and Dantean elements in Luzi’s early works (including the ‘novel’ Biografia a Ebe), one is immediately struck by a complex and subterranean network of allusions, albeit at times distant and antithetical. The literary tradition that Luzi drew upon in the Hermetic period was above all that initiated by Petrarch and continued by the Petrarchism and Platonism of the Cinquecento, culminating in Leopardi and the French Symbolists. So, even if the singling out of Dantean words by scholars is useful, the subject needs to be treated in a different way; the attempt should be to separate voluntary borrowings from those that are involuntary because part of the collective memory, so that the intention, history, ideological significance and stylistic-

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rhetorical value of the allusion can be studied, without neglecting the mediating function of other writers such as Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Campana, Montale, Ungaretti, and Mallarmé. My aim is therefore to arrive, as far as possible, at what Gian Biagio Conte calls a 'conoscenza quasi genetica', a knowledge which attempts to go beyond 'il movimento formativo del testo' (p. 5) to inquire if, during the secret and mysterious act which is the moment of composition, Luzi's memory was deliberately using Dante's text.7

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Much the same can be said for Luzi’s postwar dantismo, which, because more obvious, has received greater attention from the critics: what is lacking here too is not only a more comprehensive catalogue than the one already drawn up by Scorrano and Pegorari, but above all an exegesis which systematically explores the intentionality and the stylistic-rhetorical significance of allusions to Dante, highlighting the possible and frequent mediation on the part of other poets, whether Italian or foreign, a mediation that complicates the intertextual network by enriching it with other references.

It must be stressed in any case that the same encounter between the voice of Dante and that of Luzi is never the imitatio of a model. To use a distinction drawn by Gian Biagio Conte, Luzi’s allusion to Dante does not seem ‘integrativa’ so much as ‘riflessiva’. If the first use of allusion indicates a harmonisation of two voices that create ‘una unica parola arricchita da una risonanza interna: una designazione, cioè che comporta una connotazione orientata’, in the second case ‘lo scontro dialogico delle due voci entro la stessa parola impedisce che la sovrapponibilità diventi fusione e compenetrazione reciproca’ (Conte, p. 43). An interdiscursive and intertextual analysis of the collections chosen in this chapter and in the next one will therefore mean studying not only words or syntagms that evoke passages in Dante but also understanding how they are re-semanticised and re-contextualised in writing that is completely different from the original.

3.2. From La Barca to Quaderno Gotico: Stilnovistic Appearances and Dantean Infernos

Luzi’s first contact with Dante and stilnovistic poetry seems to have been encouraged by his cultural environment and by texts of the Duecento that had to

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8 G.B. Conte, Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario, pp. 43-44.
be read with particular attention in all schools, of every kind.

Together with the inevitable cultural mediation of imposing figures like Montale and Contini in Florence in the thirties, there was also the magisterial figure of Francesco Maggini, Luzi’s teacher at liceo and a scholar of Dante and early Italian lyric poetry. Dante was furthermore a ‘folk’ presence in Tuscany and familiar to young people, Luzi tells us, as a kind of ‘mito popolare’, by way for example of weekly magazines in which there were illustrations of the Divine Comedy: ‘un giorno, a nove anni, stavo giocando per la strada, in un giardino, in una specie di terreno vago, che c’era li tra le case a Castello, a un certo punto, sentii il bisogno di ritornare a casa e di mettermi a scrivere, e scrissi la mia prima, non so come

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9 See also O. Macri, ‘Le origini di Luzi’ (1961), in Realtà del simbolo, p. 150: ‘La nativa, estroflessa, confidente ingenuità del primissimo Luzi non temette di riattingere alle fonti idealistiche del Novecento, al tradizionale sincretismo umanistico e classicistico dei licei italiani (Virgilio, Lucrezio, Catullo, gli stilnovisti, Dante...) fino alle Rime nuove di Carducci, ai Canti di Castelvecchio, ai libri di Alcyone e Maia’. Macri returns to the subject in the same essay: ‘Nulla il giovanissimo poeta poteva opporre se non gli esempi accennati – classico-umanistici – della sua cultura scolastica, le grandi figure e luoghi comuni di Omero e Virgilio, Catullo e Properzio, Dante e Manzoni, Foscolo e Leopardi: al massimo, rifarsi al rinnovamento generale di Parini e Alfieri, all’umano inferno di Baudelaire e all’integrale ellenismo di Hölderlin; per il Novecento, all’Allegria di Ungaretti, forse a Rebora e a Betocchi’ (p. 160). It is useful to remember that primary school textbooks always included a portrait of Dante, accompanied by sub-titles celebrating The Divine Comedy or short epigraphs taken from passages from it. With the Gentile Reform of 1923 the study of the Comedy was extended to all kinds of ‘scuola superiore’, excluding the ‘istituti professionali’: all ‘dipломati’, in their last three years of education, read Dante’s poem in more or less its entirety, learning a good part of it by heart and were examined in the final exam on all three canticles (see S. Albertini, ‘Dante in camicia nera: uso e abuso del divino poeta nell’Italia fascista’, The Italianist, 16 (1996), 117-142; especially the section ‘Dante sui banchi di scuola’, pp. 118-22). For the historical framework of the presence of Dante in the mass media of the Fascist regime (official speeches, schools, radio) see also L. Scorrano, ‘Il Dante “fascista”’, in Il Dante ‘fascista’. Saggi, letture, note dantesche (Ravenna: Longo, 2001), pp. 88-125. In Scorrano’s essay there is no reference to the Florentine Hermeticists, whose Dante, when he is to be found, does not form part of that climate of rhetoric and theatricality so typical of the period.

chiamarla, poesia, testo, per Dante. [...] Questa cosa era una specie di omaggio a Dante, siccome allora c’erano quelle dispense che facevano per bambini; ero rimasto colpito, più che dal senso di quello che aveva fatto, proprio dall’avventura e scrissi questa cosa’ (CMS, p. 116).11 His first official encounter with the medieval poet took place, however, while he was at the liceo: ‘Il primo incontro ufficiale con l’opera di Dante avviene al liceo. Ho fatto il mio liceo con eccellenti maestri tra cui Francesco Maggini, eccezionale conoscitore del Due e del Trecento. Non potevo avere guida più autorevole e persuasiva alla lettura della Commedia e delle altre opere dantesche’ (‘Dante da mito a presenza’, in DLM, p. 49). In a recent interview he also recalled the edition of the Divine Comedy and of the Vita Nuova that he used in those years, the one edited by Casini-Barbi and published by Sansoni in Florence in 1922, based on the Italian Dante Society’s critical text established by Barbi on the occasion of the sixth centenary of the death of Dante (see ED, p. 219).12

The stilnovistic character of Luzi’s poetry has often been noted, as, for example, by Mario Apollonio, who in his Letteratura dei contemporanei of 1956 deemed Luzi, of all the new generation of poets, to have the richest literary memory, ‘quello che con più delicatezza ripercorre nel proprio l’altrui canto, il vero rappresentante di un’“ars nova” delicatamente consapevole di sé nei suoi stessi ricordi’.13 In the course of a more general treatment of the poetry of the time, Ramat frequently points to a ‘stilnovo fiorentino nell’ambito ermetico’ and finds a ‘carattere neostilnovistico’ in all Hermeticism (L’Ermetismo, p. 162). As

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11 Referring again to the very first poems on Dante written when he was a child, Luzi says ‘anche questi sono dei segni, dei precorrimenti, se non altro un po’ archetipici direi, di quello che sarà poi il lavoro e l’esperienza mentale, dell’anima’ (M. Luzi, Intervista, in G. Tabanelli, Per Mario Luzi (Spinea – Venice: Edizioni del Leone, 1994), pp. 26-27).

12 See D. Alighieri, Divina Commedia, comment by T. Casini, ed. by S.A. Barbi, 6th edn renewed and enlarged (Florence: Sansoni 1922); Id., Vita Nuova, ed. by T. Casini, 2nd edn reviewed and corrected (Florence: Sansoni, 1922). The two editions are based on the text D. Alighieri, Le opere di Dante, ed. by M. Barbi, E.G. Parodi, F. Pellegrini, E. Pistelli, P. Rajna, E. Rostagno, G. Vandelli, critical text of the Italian Dante Society (Florence: Bemporad, 1921). Quotations will be taken from these two editions.

further support for these observations, Luzi, in a conversation with Mario Specchio, recalls the “incantamento” del dolce stilnovo’ experienced by the young Florentine poets of the thirties:

Per alcuni di noi, specialmente i più giovani, scoprire la poesia, scoprire la giovinezza nello stesso tempo, averne e prendere piena coscienza, e scoprire la nostra convivenza e in fondo la nostra simbiosi mentale in Firenze, non poteva non far rigermogliare questo sogno o questo “incantamento” del dolce stilnovo. E pur senza compiacimento, perché nessuno fece propositi di ripristinare una consorseria poetica e neppure un’iniziazione precisa a dettami o altro, effettivamente qualcosa si risveglia di necessità quando si toccano certi motivi, certe emozioni di tipo lirico, di tipo anche biografico, come le storie d’amore che a quell’epoca non potevano non esserci, e forse non si può evitare questo in Firenze. Era un recupero intenso della tradizione lirica, del linguaggio lirico italiano […]. E su questo cammino è chiaro che la Vita nova e tutta la lirica dello stilnovo non potevano non essere importanti. (CMS, p. 15)¹⁴

To this we may add the words of Romano Bilenchi who, in an article dedicated to Mario Luzi’s seventieth birthday, in the Nazione, recalls the beginning of their friendship and their discussions of the books they were reading, among which was the Vita Nuova:

Quando lo conobbi avevo 24 anni, Mario 19; non ricordo chi ci presentò, ma non ho alcun dubbio che lo incontrai nei pressi di Piazza San Marco. Leggevamo in quei giorni uno scrittore che ci è sempre rimasto caro, François Mauriac. […] Questa coincidenza si ripeterà nel corso della nostra vita. Ci incontravamo e ci chiedevamo: che libro leggi? E tutti e due ora eravamo entusiasti di un romanziere straniero poco conosciuto, ora di un classico italiano. Una volta scoprimmo che rileggiamo negli stessi giorni la Vita nova di Dante e le impressioni che ne ricevevamo e che ci scambiavamo durante passeggiate domenicali erano uguali e stupende per tutti e due.¹⁵

In an interview of 1998, in the course of a retrospective survey of all his poetry, Luzi recognises a real ‘atmosfera dantesca’ that goes right back to Primizie del

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¹⁴ The very streets of Florence, where youthful love affairs were born, were for Luzi a memory of the Stilnovo, as we read in ‘Discretamente personale’ (1962), a first-hand account of experience in Florence of the thirties (IL, p. 238).

deserto and Onore del vero; he judges Dante ‘una presenza non incombente ma costante’ in his poetry, right from the first collection, *La barca*, in which, according to him, the Dante of the stilnovo is a closer and more sustained presence than the Dante of the Comedy.

There is a stilnovistic echo in the title of the first book of poems, which is the metaphor of the boat. The *topos* of the boat and navigation, signifying in stilnovistic terms poetic experience and the experience of friendship, is frequently found in the lyrics of the collection and can be found, for example, in the opening lines of *Alla vita* (1935):

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Amici ci aspetta una barca e dondola
nella luce ove il cielo s’inarca
e tocca il mare,
volano creature pazze ad amare
il viso d’Iddio caldo di speranza
in alto in basso cercando
affetto in ogni occulta distanza
e piangono: noi siamo in terra
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16 M. Luzi, *La barca. Canti* (Modena: Guanda, 1935); *La barca*, new edn (Florence: Parenti, 1942) (in *Quaderni di Letteratura*); then, with further modifications, in *Il giusto della vita* (Milan: Garzanti, 1960), now in O (from where quotations are taken, indicating when there are variations in respect to other preceding editions).


18 The ‘amici’ are present also in the early poems of Bigongiari’s, written in the same period as *La barca* and only recently published in the collection *L’Arca*, which is called by Ramat an ‘officina protoermetica’: ‘Cogli i labili fiori’ (1934), line 1 (‘O dolci amici, siete pure esistiti’); ‘Tra le fervide orse in isquilibrio’, lines 10-12 (‘Ma voi forse, amici, / nell’ombra d’una sera ascolterete / come il cielo si sgombra di rimorsi’). To ‘amicizia’ as a ‘motivo poetico iniziale’ of lyric poetry Contini was to return a few years later, in the ‘Introduction’ to Dante’s *Rime* published in 1939: ‘Questo spiega come la persona del nuovo trovatore, lungi dall’affermarsi, si dissolva nel coro dell’amicizia; e quest’amicizia, oltre a essere la possibilità generale di quella tale poesia, sia assunta addirittura in veste di motivo poetico iniziale. Al coro degli amici entro cui si perde il poeta, risponde dall’altra parte, come motivo poetico gemello, il fondo corale delle donne’ (G. Contini, ‘Introduzione’, in D. Alighieri, *Rime* (1939), p. XIV).
As Bonifazi points out, Luzi's boat 'è quasi una stilnovistica (o hoelderliniana) barca di amici, una barca della vita che si appresta a salpare: una specie di vita nova, dove c'è, altrettanto forte che il dantesco gusto delle apparizioni e degli emblemi, un senso timido, ma certo, della giovinezza e della vita'.

In Luzi's lines it is not difficult to discern an allusion to the magic 'vasel' of the sonnet that Dante addresses to his friends Guido Cavalcanti and Lapo Gianni. ‘Guido i’ vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io / fossimo presi per incantamento, / e messi in un vasel ch’ad ogni vento / per mare andasse al voler vostro e mio’ (Rime IX. 1-4).

If Dante's lines contain the theme of flight towards an enchanted world in which it is possible to 'ragionar sempre d’amore' (line 12), similarly in Luzi's 'trasognata imbarcazione', in which heaven and earth mingle, we take flight with friends towards an unreal world or at least a world distant enough from earthly torments to be able to offer a Platonic 'affetto in ogni occulta distanza' (line 7).

The following lines from 'Alla vita' speak, however, of a voyage 'dalle foci alle sorgenti', which recalls not only the journey of poetic experience together with a group of friends but also the voyage of knowledge and salvation that

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20 The Dante sonnet was to be quoted two years later by Luzi in the essay ‘Note sulla poesia italiana’, where 'il mirabile equilibrio che esiste tra la quantità affettiva e la quantità ritmica' was highlighted (UP, p. 42).
21 The quotation is taken from D. Alighieri, Rime, ed. by G. Contini.
23 Luzi’s boat may recall, although the basic poetics are different, the ‘barca di salvezza’ to be found in a famous Montalian lyric in Ossi di seppia, ‘Crisalide’ (1924). In that composition the boat was already a symbolic place of experience and existence with which to embark on a Purgatorial voyage after surviving a shipwreck (Allegria di naufragi was originally the title of Ungaretti’s Allegria: ‘Vanno a spire sul mare, ora si fondono / sull’orizzonte in foggia di golette. / Spicca una d’esse un volo senza rombo, / l’acque di piombo come alcione profugo / rade […] / spunta la barca di salvezza, è giunta: / vedila che sborda tra le secche’, lines 46-55). The boat as a means of salvation was also found in an Ungaretti lyric of 1927, ‘Sogno’
Dante embarks on in the *Divine Comedy* from the 'foci' of the Tiber to the 'sorgenti' of hope.\(^{24}\)

Amici dalla barca si vede il mondo
e in lui una verità che procede
intrepida, un sospiro profondo
dalle foci alle sorgenti. (*Alla vita*, lines 13-16)

It is likely that the poet had in mind here the second Canto of *Purgatorio*, in particular the 'vasello snelletto e leggero' (line 41) that the Angel ferryman rows to the bank to transport the souls from the mouth of the Tiber to the second realm of the Otherworld. According to Andrea Ciccarelli these lines show that the

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\(^{24}\) In the *Divine Comedy* the poem is occasionally represented as a ship that sails the sea: remember in particular *Par.* II. 1-5 where the 'legno' in which Dante has embarked, followed by the 'piccioletta barca' of the readers, is a metaphor for poetry as knowledge, or the proem to the second canticle: 'Per correr migliori acque alza le vele / omai la navicella del mio ingegno' (*Purg.* I. 1-2).
Hermetic Luzi is already assigning responsibility to poetry to explore the world and record the results of this exploration (see ‘Dal frammento all’unità’, p. 79). This same world of moral and cognitive exploration, however, is also observed from without (‘dalla barca si vede il mondo’), but contemplatively rather than with an active and personal involvement. Even the Platonic desire to absent oneself and be able to ‘un giorno librare / esilmente piegare sul seno divino’ alludes to a redemption that does not take place in the imminence of living but only in an indeterminate future which is actually to be found after death. Not by chance the port towards which the boat is heading seems to correspond to death, even though for Luzi death may sometimes coincide with life, in the same way as the ‘foce’ may become the beginning of a voyage towards the ‘sorgente’, according to that coincidence of opposites that was to become increasingly central to his poetical oeuvre. As well as Dante’s journey towards Beatrice and through her to God, Luzi also had before him the example of Campana, whose journey backwards had aimed at recovering an original state of innocence, the lost existential archetype of Mothers as the origin of life.

The metaphor of navigation often associated with that of the port, understood as ‘destino’, is to be found in many of the lyrics in La barca: for instance, in metonymic form in ‘Serenata di Piazza d’Azeglio’ (1934): ‘[...] uma vela umida di destino / chiede a noi unporto profondo’ (lines 7-24), where more than the ‘glorioso porto’ of Inf. XV. 56, according to Pegorari’s Vocabolario dantesco, it might recall the closer Ungarettian ‘porto sepolto’, to which Luzi seems to be alluding also in the ‘Canto notturno per le ragazze fiorentine’ (1935). In the

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25 From the post-war years, the mediation of Eliot, in particular in the Four Quartets, and later that of Theilard de Chardin, were to help to accentuate and develop that natural Platonic-Christian tension which opposes but also relates (to the point of making them coexist) opposing elements such as foce-sorgente, time-eternity, death-birth, particular-universal, and personal-impersonal. On the relationship between personal and impersonal in the critical and poetic work of Eliot and Luzi see Chapter 6.

26 On the nautical metaphor associated with that of the port see the numerous textual references collected by E.R. Curtius, Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1948), pp. 136-38.
latter stanza, the distance of a few lines that separates (syntactically and also
with a change of line) ‘porto’ and ‘sepoltò’ conceals the quotation and creates an
allusion to the well-known Ungaretti title:

‘e dormendo naviga senza dondolare
al suo porto [...] // Come acque di un fiume sepolto rampollano dalla notte / le
immagini addormentate / di voi, dei vostri occhi assenti’

(lines 9, 13). But to see how the metaphor of navigation so frequently used in

La barca

takes on Dantean and stilnovistic connotations it is necessary to read ‘La sera’

(1935):

Quando la luna
inumidisce il suo biondo velo
al soffio che rimena le oscillanti
barche al silenzio dei porti

[...]
Sul mare dai bui
antiri d’affaticate isole equorei
canti di donne, richiamando nomi
inestinguibili da’ freddi corpi sommersi
e velieri folli da’ cupidi viaggi

27 Ungaretti’s Il porto sepolto (1915-16) is the title of a section of L’Allegrìa and a poem included as well.
29 Most of the lyrics written in 1935 use the topos of navigation. See, for instance, ‘Alla primavera’, lines 1–5 (‘Dal fondo dei mari i vascelli si faranno un’erba / per la rondine acerba al valico dei continenti, / i naviganti nell’oceano vuoto di venti / specchiano la faccia indurita, / i brevi anni nel flusso dell’acqua infinita’); ‘Primavera degli orfani’, lines 1–19, where the metonymy ‘vele’ is used (‘Anima dei verdi dispiuvì / che il cielo sommuove con l’errore / del mare ove pencolan l’onde / e le vele senza colore [...] ove con le disperazioni antiche scorre / verso una foce oscura il tempo, il sangue’); ‘Fragilità’, line 13 where the rivers are rose-coloured, a typically Orphean hue (‘Le barche scendono lungo i fiumi rosa’, line 13); ‘L’immensità dell’attimo’, lines 14–16 (‘Le navi inclinano nel fianco a strane coste, / il suono d’ogni voce’); ‘Il mare’, lines 2–21 (‘spingeva i pesci e le navi guerriere e i quieti / [...] sopra impervi legni ricullano i primi / sonni e i corpi emunti dal vento / [...] Battendo i fianchi e la nota lenta del mare / [...] nella notte l’eroe si confonde / con avventurosi navigi e subacquei canti defunti / [...] chiama nomi, puri visi, pace eterna.’ / Le fanciulle con le brocche alle foci / curvano il cuore ai ceruli viaggi e ai lontani / remi degli amanti’).
where the ‘velieri folli’ united with the ‘canti di donne’ may have been associated in Luzi’s memory with some elements in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno* with its ‘folle volo’ of Ulysses, while the ‘dolci navigazioni’ and the ‘notturni amori’ might be a distant allusion to the Dantean ‘vasel’ that takes the stilnovist poets and their respective female companions on voyages of poetry and love.

Side by side with the stilnovistic ‘dolci navigazioni’ and the undoubtedly Platonic tendency to resolve everything in transcendence or in an ‘occulta distanza’, in Luzi’s first book we find, however, the collective voice, uniformly anxious, of women, maidens and mothers, what Macri called ‘le gotiche icone di *La barca*’. As Quiriconi points out, the introduction of other voices in the living texture of the poetry, together with the almost complete elimination of ‘I’ and ‘you’, indicates ‘una esplicita volontà di discorso fortemente differenziata rispetto alla tradizione novecentesca e, in particolare, alla lezione ermetica’. The attention paid to men and things has been noted also by Luigi Paglia, according to whom there is a ‘propensione di dialogo’ in the collection which, even if it often remains only interior, and therefore only latent, ‘è tuttavia divinatoria delle ragioni ed anche delle potenzialità degli “altri”’. The chorality of voices that pervades Luzi’s verses is accentuated by the fact that the pronoun ‘I’ only appears once in the whole collection, in the lyric ‘Parca villaggio’ (1951) which Luzi places at the opening of the third edition of *La barca*: ‘Io vecchia donna in questa vecchia casa / cucio il passato col presente, intesso / la tua infanzia con quella di tuo figlio’ (lines 9-11). In these lines, however, it is not the ‘I’ of the poet that is involved but a mythical and timeless figure that represents the entire village.

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33 Even indicators of the first-person singular are rare and recur only six times.
The second-person singular personal pronoun is also quite infrequent: the difficulty in identifying the female figure forces the poet to seek her not in a precise woman, in a ‘you’ like that of Clizia for Montale, but in a ‘donna-muliebrità, che ingloba, occultandola, l’unicità denegata ma insostituibile della Cosa materna’,34 from whom everything seems to have been born: ‘Nelle stanze la voce materna / senza origine, senza profondità s’alterna / col silenzio della terra, è bella / e tutto par nato da quella’ (‘Alla vita’, lines 24-27). Usually the female figure is designated by the terms ‘madri’, ‘ragazze’, ‘fanciulle’, seen as a unitary plural and not as a set of faces that can be separated out in their uniqueness and historicity. At the grammatical level a consequence of this prevailing recourse to the collective voice is that the discourse is normally managed by means of the first person plural and, to a lesser extent, by the second person plural. ‘You’, as said before not very frequent, is nearly always detached from the human world and usually refers to natural elements like the ‘acqua serale’ and the ‘tortora’ (‘Serenata di Piazza d’Azeglio’) or the river (‘Sull’Arno’). The only case in which ‘you’ refers to a living human addressee is that of a 1936 lyric that appeared for the first time in Parenti’s 1942 edition:

Giovinetta, giovinetta
per le scogliose vie di Firenze
disperse in un etereo continente
i venti si avvicendano e i tuoi passi
al colmo traboccano nell’assente;
gli adolescenti
nel silenzio delle strade
ricercano i tuoi passi dispersi,
l’ombra, gli sguardi lenti caduti dalle tue ciglia
sulle livide pietre dei crepuscoli:
risfiorando le porte e i davanzali
la tua forma mortale si ripete

in altri corpi in altre odorate carezze,
e sulla terra dovunque
la triste realtà d‘una fanciulla. (‘Giovinetta, giovinetta‘)

Apart from the ‘livide pietre’ on which the maiden’s gaze falls, which might recall the ‘livido color de la petraia’ of Purg. XIII. 9, the Dantine allusions are more thematic than lexical. We may note for instance the motif of the gaze by means of which Amore is normally generated (and generates) in stilnovist poetry, or the motif of the passo that precedes the appearance of the female figure. Those ‘passi’ are an anticipation, a positive instance that reinforces the expectation but which in the culminating moment are pulverised in Montalian fashion into nothing and ‘traboccano nell‘assente’ (line 5). The Reborian ‘imminenza di attesa’ persists, however, even after the delusion, and the ‘forma mortale si ripete / in altri corpi in altre odorate carezze’ (lines 12-13). If in La barca the stilnovistic expectation (Dantine rather than Cavalcantian) seems to prevail despite everything, in the following collection the motif of absence takes over completely as the only genuine possibility.

With Avvento notturno, published in 1940 and containing poems written between 1936 and 1939, immediately before the war, the female presences of the early Luzi disappear: ‘Qui il flusso della vita insegue se stesso in modo più angoscioso e batte contro gli emblemi della perennità divenuti più umbratili, più sibillini ritorcendosi in certe interrogazioni senza risposta’ (IL. p. 240). The

35 For the topos of the ‘passo’ of distant female figure, see in La barca lines like ‘[…] cerca tu in quali opache / profondità l’amore / abbia perduto i suoi passi’ (‘Serenata di Piazza d’Azeglio’, lines 17-19); ‘questa aliena presenza della vita / […] nel tuo passo echeggiato dalle volte’ (‘Toccata’, lines 6, 9); ‘Sulla sponda che frena il tuo pallore / cercando nel tuo passo profondo’ (‘All’Arno’, lines 1-2); ‘e il vento preme il cuore / col suo passo uguale ora e sempre’ (‘Fragilità’, lines 11-12); ‘i venti s’avvicendano e i tuoi passi / al colmo traboccano nell’assente; gli adolescenti / nel silenzio delle strade / ricercano i tuoi passi dispersi’ (‘Giovinetta, giovinetta’, lines 4-8).

36 In the three versions that have been preserved and which precede the definitive one, in place of ‘al colmo traboccano nell’assente’ there is the variant ‘al colmo traboccano nell’eternità’ (see O, p. 1337), to underline the option (absence) that has prevailed over the possibility of eternity.

37 M. Luzi, Avvento notturno (Florence: Vallecchi, 1940).
discourse of this poem becomes analogical and is forced into strophic and metrical forms such as hendecasyllabic quatrains and hexastichal strophes; the rare and unimportant traces of Dante pass unobserved in the predominant elegiac register typical of the Petrarch-Leopardi tradition, with reminiscences of the Italian lyricists (Foscolo, D'Annunzio, Quasimodo, Onofri, Campana, Ungaretti and Montale), within a European horizon in which the funereal and nocturnal Romanticism of Novalis and the French Symbolist tradition going as far as Rilke can be particularly felt. If we can still speak of stilnovismo, it is this time all on the side of Cavalcanti, and could be compared to the Platonic and Cavalcantian stilnovismo present in Bigongiari’s La figlia di Babilonia (1932-1942). The Orphic Hades that in Figlia di Babilonia leaves no possibility of escape and whose main feature is perfect stillness is also present in Luzi’s second book, the very title of which is emblematic in its declaration of Orphic ascendancy from Nerval, Rimbaud, Mallarmé as far as Campana. If Bigongiari’s female figure is a Eurydice who turns and transforms the poet Orpheus into stone, and does not yet seem to be that Beatrice or ‘Euridice alla rovescia’ of the post-war period, but if anything Cavalcanti’s absent woman and her mortal fatality, the female figure in Avvento notturno stands rigidly behind the freezing glass of time, in the Rilkian image of waiting at a window at night, while Luzi’s lyric self is represented in Cavalcantian anguish: ‘Ma dove attingerò la mia vita / ora che il tremebondo amore è morto?’ (‘Avorio’, lines 12-13). Glass as transparency that allows us to contemplate reality but which, in the long run, separates us from it, is a typically Hermetic topos and even when it is described by the word Miraglio (1938), a term of Provençal origin which is used by Dante in Purg.


39 It is the title of a poem in Avvento notturno, written in 1938. The obvious distance that separates the lemma used by Luzi from that used by Dante is passed over in silence by Titone, whose concentrates on finding a perfect semantic correspondence between two terms that have now only a lexical proximity: ‘il “miraglio” di Rachele non è solo Dio come oggetto di speculazione e di contemplazione ma anche la coscienza in cui l’anima si specchia e si conosce e, dunque, la speculazione e la contemplazione in sé. Come quello dantesco, il “miraglio” di Luzi è cifra di una tensione intima, umbratile e profonda, che, per
XXVII. 108, it has little in common with the ‘miraglio’ in which Dante’s Rachel is reflected, an image of the contemplative life, as opposed to Lia, the image of active life: ‘Per piacermi a lo specchio, qui m’adorno; / ma mia suora Rachel mai non si smaga / dal suo miraglio e siede tutto il giorno’ (Purg. XXVII. 103-108). In Dante, the ‘miraglio’ is an otherness that has become the object of contemplation whereas in Luzi’s lyric it is a completely interior reality, from which the self does not break out, either, perhaps, because it is committed to a species of Narcissistic self-contemplation, or because the female figure, who could give it a face, disappears among the Platonic ‘fanciulle finitme dell’ombra’: ‘Io vorrei essere dolce / nell’oscura me stesso, un viso attinto / all’ambiguo sorriso onde si celano / le fanciulle finitme dell’ombra’ (lines 13-16). ‘Rosse epifanie d’infanzia’ (line 5) also appear in the lyric, and could be a distant echo of the stilnovistic visions of the young Dante to whom Amore had appeared clothed in a ‘drappo sanguigno’, but immediately the vision with its sharp outlines and vivid colours (red) changes into a vague ‘sogno di bandiere’ (line 9) where the female figures appear with abstract and surreal ‘capigliature blu’ (line 9).

Except for the phrase ‘aria morta’ (‘Danzatrice verde’, line 3) which quite clearly recalls the ‘aura morta’ of Purg. I. 17, the Dantine pieces in the collection do not seem to be real allusions, expressly designated as such. Since we are dealing here not with expressions that can be readily associated with precise Dantine figures or motifs in a similar or even contrasting context, but

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quest’ultimo, non sa ancora esprimersi nell’“ovrare” e costringe l’esistenza in anguste, invisibili gabbie di silenzio’ (p. 148).

46 ‘Miraglio’ is an ancient and literary word that comes from the Provençal word ‘miralh’, in its turn derived from mirar (‘look’). From the examples quoted by Battaglia, only in Purg. XXVII. 105 is ‘miraglio’ to be found with the figurative meaning of ‘oggetto di contemplazione spirituale’, whereas the meaning of ‘mirror’ is to be found in Boiardo, Gioberti, Panzini, and with the figurative meaning of ‘esempio e modello’ in Bondie Dietaiuti, Guittone, Amico di Dante, Cino da Pistoia (see S. Battaglia, Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, X (1978), 519, under ‘miraglio’, sections 1, 2, 3).
only with single words ascribable to what Contini termed 'memoria nazionale'; it seems more appropriate here to speak of interdiscursivity rather than intertextuality. In 'Bacca' (1937), for instance, in lines 12-13 ('l'Arno turge // le efemeridi sperse degli scalmi') we note the use of 'turge', a verb that appears only twice in Dante (Par. X. 144: 'che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge'; Par. XXX. 72: 'tanto mi piace più quanto più turge'), and rarely in the poetry of the twentieth century (an exception is found in Montale's Ossi di seppia: 'Traboccherà la forza / che mi turgeva, incosciente mago', 'Quasi una fantasia', lines 10-11), while in the bynomial 'luce rancia' (that is, yellow-orange) that 'Annunziacione' speaks of (1938) there is the adjective 'rancia' which is to be found with the same meaning in Purg. II. 8-9, 'là dov'è' era, de la bella Aurora / per troppa etate divenivan rance’. This adjective is also used by some twentieth-century poets – by Montale, for instance, who in a poem in Ossi di seppia, speaking of an infernal 'grotta', almost a 'selva oscura', speaks of a Purgatorial ‘rancia / marina che uno zefiro scompiglia' ('Marezzo', lines 3-4). The adjective is also taken up by Bigongiari who, although the influence of previous poems by Luzi and Montale is not to be excluded, seems to be taking it straight from Dante. Not by chance, in a 1952 poem Bigongiari describes a world of 'ombre dorate' in which the 'cappe rance' ('Notte di luglio', line 17) recall - in a more properly purgatorial context, however - the heavy 'cappe rance' that cover the hypocrites of Inf. XXIII. 100.

And then there is the word 'ciocco', a hapax in Luzi's poetic works, found in 'Esitavano a Eleusi i bei cipressi' ('il tempo dorato dagli astri / desiste, là contesta con i ciocchi / la luce sfronda in rovi alti, salmastri', lines 14-16). The noun comes from Dante ('Poi come nel percuoter de' ciocchi arsi / surgono innumerabili faville / onde li stolti sogliono augurarsi // resurger parver quindi

42 C. Segre, 'Intertestuale-interdiscorso', p. 22.
43 With the meaning of 'turgere', see also the use of 'urge' in Montale, 'Elegia di Pico Farnese', in Le occasioni (Tutte le poesie, p. 182): 'Se urgi fino al midollo i diòsperi e nell'acqua'.
più di mille / luci, e salir, qual assai e qual poco / si come il sol che l’accende sortille’, Par. XVIII. 100-105), but it is quite probable that it had stuck in Luzi’s memory through the quite frequent use of the term in the spoken language and through its use in the Italian literary tradition, especially in Pascoli and Campana.

But what distinguishes the *stilnovismo* and *dantismo* of *La barca* from the weak *stilnovismo* and *dantismo* of *Avvento notturno* is above all the fact that the stilnovistic boats of the first collection are replaced by ‘barche nuziali’ or sophisticated ‘caravelle vagabonde di sé’, while the friends with whom the ‘dolci navigazioni’ were to be undertaken have disappeared: ‘Ma ormai dove sono / (oltre il Lete bisbigliano) gli amici?’ (‘Passi’, lines 9-10).

The Petrarchan solipsism in *Avvento notturno* is also to be found in *Biografia a Ebe* (1938-1939), where there is a close relationship between the linguistic and stylistic elements and the verse of the same period. For example, the motif of

44 In Pascoli’s *Myricae* (1891-1903), the word ‘ciocco’ recurs twice, ‘ciocchi’ once: ‘Racconta al fuoco (sfrigola bel bello / un ciocco d’olmo in tanto che ragiona)’ (‘In campagna, I. Il vecchio dei campi’, lines 9-10); ‘Son mesta come un colchico: dal ciocco / tanto mi germino di femminelle!’ (‘Le pene del poeta, IV. Le femminelle’, lines 2-3); ‘Dorme il vecchio avanti i ciocchi’ (‘Tristezze, VIII. Al fuoco’, line 1). But it is perhaps likely that Luzi had in his mind the word ‘ciocco’ from *Canti di Castelvecchio*, a Pascoli collection on which Luzi wrote an essay in 1962, with an actual reference to the lyric *Ciocco*: ‘Nel “Ciocco” la veglia che il Pascoli fa vivere dei suoi stessi movimenti rituali, del suo pari are e dei suoi silenzi è sentita in sé come rivelazione d’un mondo elementare, umile, armonico; ma è sentita anche come vicenda, come *epos* nella sua ciclicità, che bene esprimono i ritornelli e i moduli narrativi replicati popolarescamente […]’. L’*epos* della veglia si riflette sull’oggetto della conversazione: le formiche del ciocco snidate dal fuoco: la vicissitudine di quel microcosmo include per analogia quella del pari dolorosa dell’uomo che per il Pascoli non fu forse mai un vero macrocosmo’ (M. Luzi, *‘Canti di Castelvecchio*’, in IL, p. 190). The quotation is taken from G. Pascoli, *Poesie*, ed. by L. Baldacci (Milan: Garzanti, 1994).

45 See the sole occurrence of ‘ciocco’ in Campana’s *Canti Orfici*: ‘Gli piaceva udire tra i calmi conversari dell’inverno bolognese, frigido e nebuloso come il suo, / e lo schioccare dei ciocchi e i guizzi della fiamma / sull’ocra delle volte i passi frettolosi sotto gli archi prossimi’ (‘La Notte’, 24. 11-15). The quotation is from D. Campana, *Canti Orfici*, with a commentary by F. Ceragioli (Florence: Vallecchi, 1985) (the volume gives a faithful reproduction, with printing errors corrected, of the Marradi edition, Tipografia Ravagli, 1914).

the mirror, frequent in *Avvento notturno*, often appears here, the mirror being a metaphor for the kind of interior reality which, gazing only upon itself in a suffocating circularity, ends up by destroying itself: ‘Una giovinetta si era uccisa dinanzi allo specchio e quando fu rinvenuta ancora il suo sguardo si guardava nel fondo; era riversa su una poltrona ma ancora il suo sguardo si guardava nel fondo. Che cosa aveva voluto? [...] Avrebbe dovuto ascoltare con remissione e modestia l’energia pertinace del sangue che la portava al di là della sua disperazione’ (pp. 71-73).\(^{47}\)

Usually treated by the critics as a marginal work,\(^{48}\) *Biografia a Ebe* has been called a ‘biografia dell’ermetismo’ by Angelo Romanò, and Ramat has called it an ‘antiromanzo’ and a metaphysical poem (*L’ermetismo*, p. 136). The work is certainly unique, both because of the difficulty of classifying it in terms of genre, and because it is one of the few Italian attempts at Hermetic prose, very difficult to compare with other novels or lyrical prose of the early *Novecento*.\(^{49}\) We might accept Sergio Pautasso’s definition of it as ‘una specie di *Vita Nuova*’\(^{50}\) and it certainly does not lack stilnovistic elements, but they are more thematic than


\(^{49}\) In the same years as Hermeticism, other ‘narrative’ texts that would deserve to be compared with Luzi’s are Alfonso Gatto’s *La sposa bambina*, some parts of Alessandro Parronchi’s *I visi*, and Piero Bigongiari’s *La donna miriade*, an attempt at an epistolary novel datable between 1933-1934 and 1939, which was to be published for the first time by putting together the two separate parts, only halfway through the seventies, with the title *La donna miriade*. The novel mode responded to the latent necessity in nascent Hermeticism to insert the word into the movement of the world in order to overcome that stasis that had been a feature of poetry from *Il porto sepolto* onwards.

lexical, such as the theme of the apparition (‘Preferisco abbandonarmi al piacere
di ricercarti tale quale mi apparisti al primo momento e forse veramente non
eri’). The historical and biographical qualification in the title of the collection
is also that of Dante’s ‘libro della memoria’ (Vita Nuova I. 1), but the personal
experience reordered by Dante to recount not so much the subjective substance
as the ‘sentenzia’ (Vita Nuova I. 1) differs from the absolute centrality of the self
in Luzi’s pages, which are far from the autobiographical – and at the same time
impersonal-universal – libello of the medieval poet. The ‘I’ narrator is
immediately highlighted at the opening of the work (‘Io non devo più chiedermi
perché ciascuno non sorti il suo sorriso insieme alla sua morte’) and a few pages
later the overlapping of author and main character is made explicit in the
employment, certainly no coincidence, of the same name (‘il mio nome è
Mario’) and in the deliberate reference to Luzi’s first collection of poetry (‘Vi ho
mai detto che la Barca peut-être l’unico esempio di poesia giovanile dopo il

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51 Biografia a Ebe, p. 81.
52 According to Dante one is allowed to ‘parlare di sé medesimo’ only ‘quando sanza ragionare di sé
grande infamia o pericolo non si può cessare’ and ‘quando, per ragionare di sé, grandissima utilitade ne
segue altresì per via di dottrina’ (see D. Alighieri, Convivio, ed. by G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (Florence: Le
Monnier, 1934), I. ii. 2-3, 12-13, 14). On the problem of the autobiographical genre in Vita Nuova and more
generally in medieval literature, see M. Guglielminetti, Memoria e scrittura. L’autobiografia da Dante a
de la “Vita Nuova”’, in AA.VV., Jeux de mémoire (Paris-Montréal, 1985); C. Calenda, ‘Memoria e
autobiografia nella Vita Nuova’, Quaderni di Retorica e Poetica, 1 (1986), 47-53; M. Picone, ‘La Vita
Nuova fra autobiografia e tipologia’, in M. Picone (ed.), Dante e le forme dell’allegoresi (Ravenna: Longo,
1987), pp. 59-69; A. Battistini, Lo specchio di Dedalo. Autobiografia e biografia (Bologna: il Mulino,
1990). Going beyond Lejeune’s thesis as to the absence of medieval autobiographies, Guglielminetti and
Battistini have showed that what was lacking was only the modern form of the autobiographical genre,
whereas there were other literary techniques that medieval readers decoded as autobiographies. In this
connection Battistini considers it more fruitful to return to Leo Spitzer on the medieval “I” ‘che da una parte
poteva incorporare eventi tratti da altre biografie per l’identificazione in sede letteraria di individuo e
umanità, e dall’altra teneva netamente distinto l’“io” poetico, privo di copyright perché il destinatario era
Everyman, dall’“io” empirico o pragmatico, con la sua specificità’ (Lo specchio di Dedalo, p. 152). See L.
Spitzer, ‘Note on the Poetic and Empirical “I” in Medieval Authors’, Romanische Literatur-Studien, 1936-
1956 (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1959), 100-12.
In the *Vita Nuova* Dante’s name never appears and in the *Divine Comedy*, which could actually be called a poem of the self – and of a self exquisitely sensitive to its own high calling - Dante’s name only appears once (*Purg.*** XXX. 55), at the point of the pilgrim-poet’s encounter with Beatrice, when she, still veiled, beholds and calls him with the ‘suon del nome mio, / che di necessità qui si registra’ (*Purg.*** XXX. 62-63): ‘Dante, perché Virgilio sen vada, / non pianger anco, non pianger ancora; / ché pianger ti conven per altra spada’ (*Purg.*** XXX. 55-57).

Dante’s new conception of love in the *Vita Nuova* – a conception of love which presupposes the historical actuality of Beatrice as an exemplary love-presence and which carries profound implications on both the narrative and stylistic planes – takes on a thematic and structural role in *Biografia a Ebe* as well, especially in the second part entitled *Estasi*, which also etymologically (*ἐκστάσις*) indicates an emergence of self from self because of an external presence which has the effect of breaking down the interior hell of pure stasis. If sometimes it is not a question of a real confrontation but of the *fictio* of an interior conflict, even so we still take part in the dialogue with a ‘ragazza gentile’ (*Biografia a Ebe*, p. 64). These dialogue forms that alternate with narrative ones (seen as amplifications of the dialogue itself) are evidence that Luzi discovered dramaturgy at a very early stage, an interest to which he was to dedicate himself above all from the early sixties. We can say, therefore, that the theatre that Luzi was to discover in the *Divine Comedy*, enough to make him accept to write a dramatisation of *Purgatorio* as part of a project by the director Federico Tiezzi, was already to be found in embryo in this prose written at the end of the thirties, as he himself confirms: ‘Ma la parte che ognuno di noi si è riservata esige naturalmente la presenza dell’altro per essere sostenuta, la nostra solitudine è ordinata secondo questo fatale teatro’ (*Biografia a Ebe*, p. 47).

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53 *Biografia a Ebe*, pp. 11, 12, 33.
The need to escape from the stasis of Petrarchan solipsism however began to take clearer shape at the beginning of the forties, with the outbreak of the Second World War, when the tragic turn of events made it impossible to avoid the bare facts of reality and it became increasingly important to ‘nominare le cose e valutare la loro elementare presenza’.

In those terrible years, ‘le cose riprendevano il sopravvento sul loro simbolo, i fatti sulla loro nominazione, ma la mente non cessava di cercare un significato onnicomprensivo alle individuali e collettive catastrofi’ (‘Dante da mito a presenza’, in DLM, p. 52). After ‘un secolo d’accidia’, in the ‘giardino d’Armida’, a prison-like limbo in which poets had found themselves up to then, the composition ‘Un brindisi’ of 1941 introduced ‘un dubbio, un sospetto’ (‘Dante da mito a presenza’, p. 52). The title of the poem recalled the ‘salut de la démence et libation blême’ of Mallarmé’s ‘Toast funèbre’ and meant the last raising of the glass, a toast and hope for an unknown future. In Mallarmé’s lyric the euphoria of the gesture rested on the illusion that it was possible to reach the absolute by eliminating hasard and everything that was not controllable by pure and demiurgic poetic language. Luzi’s toast, aware of the failure of Mallarmé’s dream, is not without its bitter irony. It was no accident, he recalls, that the discovery of Dante’s universe in the forties coincided with ‘la scoperta del lato assolutamente egocentrico, anzi luciferino della cosmologia romantico-mallarmeana’ (CMS, p. 68), and it was just from this failure of Mallarmé’s dream that ‘il cammino della poesia del nostro secolo’ opened out ‘la via “possibile a salir persona viva”: una via purgatoriale come quella del verso dantesco’.

54 M. Luzi, Interview in F. Camon, Il mestiere di poeta (Milan: Lerici Editori, 1965), p. 188.
55 The quotation is from line 62 of the lyric ‘Un brindisi’.
The collection of poems entitled *Un brindisi* (1940-1944)\(^{58}\) begins what Pautasso has called the second part of Luzi's work. Bearing in mind that *Un brindisi* together with *Quaderno gotico* (1945) is still part of what is generally recognised as the Hermetic period, and Luzi’s *dantismo* had not yet attained that importance and consistency that it was to have after the war, it is interesting to see these last two collections as a moment of transition between the endless and unanswerable questions of *Avvento notturno* (‘l’Isotto-Chimera dell’ermetismo’)\(^{59}\) and the ‘primizie’ that were to be born in the bleak ‘deserto’\(^{60}\) left after the war.

Outside the terrible hell of the war, in the poem ‘Un brindisi’ we find the image of the ‘rosa fissa nell’etere e indivisa’ (line 75) which probably reminds the poet of the mystic rose of Dante’s *Paradiso*, also charged with symbolic meanings and fixed in its eternity (remember especially ‘la rosa in che il verbo divino’ of Par. XXIII. 73; ‘la rosa sempiterna’ of Par. XXX. 124; the ‘candida rosa’ of Par. XXXI. 1). But it is the atmosphere of the *Inferno* rather than of the *Paradiso* which prevails. In ‘Già goccia la grigia rosa il suo fuoco’ (1940)\(^{61}\) a river is described as almost paralysed in the eternal freezing cold of the ‘Cocito’ (line 8), the poem ‘Un brindisi’ (1941) is crossed by ‘colori di Dite’ (line 7) and by the ‘voce che sale d’Acheronte’ (line 99), in the lyric ‘Viaggio’ (1942) there is a world that is ‘di là dall’Acheronte’ (line 1) and a ‘livida fuliggine’ (line 4). These lines seem to be reliving in the hell of the twentieth century the ghastly and harsh atmosphere of the ‘Cocito’ in the hollow depths of Dante’s Hades (*Inf.*...
XIV. 119; XXXI. 123; XXXII. 23; XXXIII. 156; XXXIV. 52, 75), the ‘trista riviera d’Acheronte’ of the *Inferno* III (line 78), ‘la città c’ha nome Dite’ of *Inferno* VIII (line 68) and of the following Cantos; the livid colour is furthermore very frequent in the first canticle of the *Comedy* and might recall ‘la livida palude’ of *Inf.* III. 98, ‘la pietra livida di fori’ of *Inf.* XIX. 14, the ‘livido color de la petraia’ of *Purg.* XIII. 9. The very ‘gocciare’, present in ‘Già goccia la grigia rosa il suo fuoco’, is often used in the *Comedy*, not only to describe the tears of the Veglio di Greta (‘d’una fessura che lagrime goccia’, *Inf.* XIV. 113) but also to describe the weeping - hampered by the freezing cold - of the fratricides (*Inf.* XXXII. 46-48: ‘li occhi lor, ch’eran pria pur dentro molli, / gocciar su per le labbra, e ’l gelo strinse / le lacrime tra essi e riserrolli’) and the weeping of Dite (*Inf.* XXXIV. 53-54: ‘con sei occhi piangea, e per tre menti / gocciava ’l pianto e sanguinosa bava’).

An infernal atmosphere and lexis are also found in ‘Diurnurna’ (1942) where the oxymoron ‘fioca ira di corni’ (line 3) makes use of a frequent Dante adjective (compare the use of ‘fioco’ in *Inf.* I. 63; *Inf.* III. 27; *Inf.* III. 75; *Inf.* XIV. 3; *Inf.* XXXI. 13; *Inf.* XXXIV. 22; *Par.* XI. 133; *Par.* XXXIII. 121) perhaps mediated through the Ungarettian oxymoron ‘fioca febbre’ (‘L’isola’, line 24), but also through Montale’s *Ossi di Seppia* and *Occasioni*. In the lyric we also hear the herds weeping with ‘inferna voce’ (lines 7-8) and colours all take on the colour of blood ‘dietro un velo di lacrime’ (line 17). The adjective ‘inferna’ is rarely used in the poetry of other twentieth-century poets and appears as a *hapax*, also feminine, in *Purg.* I. 45 (‘che sempre nera fa la valle inferna?’). The ‘velo di lacrime’ could instead allude to the suffering of the souls in the last Cantos of the *Inferno* and in particular to *Inf.* XXXII. 47-48 (‘[…] e ’l gelo strinse / le lacrime tra essi e riserrolli’), *Inf.* XXXIII. 128 (‘le ’nvetriate lacrime dal volto’) and *Inf.* XXXIII. 112-13 (‘levatemi dal viso i duri veli, / si ch’io sfoghi ’l duol che ’l cor m’impregna’).

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In a poem of July 1944, entitled ‘Diana, risveglio’ (a title which possibly contains a reference to the ‘stella diana’ of Guido Guinizelli and in general to the bright star of stilnovismo) Luzi expresses a desire for rebirth after the destruction and desolation left by the war: ‘È tempo di levarsi su, di vivere / puramente. [...]’ (lines 5-6). The lines seem to be reminiscent, both at the level of content and lexis, of Virgil’s exhortation to Dante in Canto XXIV of the Inferno (line 52): ‘E però leva su: vinci l’ambascia’. The verb levare, however, is very common in the poetry of the Novecento and in Luzi’s allusion to Dante’s line we might see a hypothetical middle space between Saba’s ‘I Risvegli’ (‘dicono: Su, leviamoci, fratelli!’ , line 32), and, more probably, Valéry’s ‘Le Cimetière Marin’: ‘Le vent se lève. Il faut tenter de vivre!’ (line 139). As Luzi himself was to observe in 1976, the words of the French poet (particularly well-known to the Hermetic poets) were the cry from which the poetry of the Novecento, after the failure of Mallarmé’s dreams, was able to set off again in search of new possibilities, even precarious ones, multiple and contradictory, as long as they were ‘nella vita’ and ‘nell’umano’: ‘Le vent se lève. Il faut tenter de vivre! È il grido nel quale si conclude la storia dell’idea simbolista; è anche la risposta che scriveremmo qui, quando ci fosse la certezza che il verso di Valéry sia da interpretarsi integrato di tutti i sensi: vivere nella vita, parlare nella lingua sicché

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63 The ‘stella diana’ is the planet Venus, also named ‘Lucifer’. See Guido Guinizelli: ‘Vedut’ho la lucente stella diana, / ch’apare anzi che ’l giorno rend’albore’ (VII. 1-2); ‘più che stella diana splende e pare / e ciò ch’è lassù bello a lei somiglio’ (X. 3-4); Dino Frescobaldi: ‘luce il lume de la sua bellezza / come stella diana o margherita’ (VIII. 7-8). Among the Stilnovist poets who use the word ‘stella’ antonomastically for ‘stella diana’, remember for example Cavalcanti (‘da la qual par ch ’una Stella si mova / e dica: “La salute tua è apparita”’ , XXVI. 11-12), or Lapo (‘E li occhi suoi lucenti come stella’, XI. 14). The quotations are from M. Marti (ed.), Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969).

64 U. Saba, Poesie fiorentine (1905-1907), in Il Canzoniere 1921, ed. by G. Castellani (Milan: Fondazione Mondadori, 1981). Notice furthermore the presence of the word ‘risveglio’ both in the title of Luzi’s poem and in that of Saba’s.

65 See S. Quasimodo, ‘Colore di pioggia e di ferro’, line 4: ‘il vento s’è levato leggero ogni mattina’ (the lyric forms part of the collection La vita non è sogno, in Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia, ed. by G. Finzi, 7th edn (1971; Milan: Mondadori, 1987).
la sintesi alla quale l'arte non può rinunziare senza perire avvenga nella vita; e la sua chiave sia posta nell'umano, qualunque reame debba aprire e rivelare'.

A clue suggesting the breaking down of the limbo of obsessive selfhood is the use of the verb _apparire_, a word of Dantean and stilnovistic flavour. This verb is not found in _La barca_ and _Avvento notturno_ and appears for the first time, and eleven times at that, in _Biografia a Ebe_, and is used most frequently (also in respect to successive collections) in _Un brindisi_ where it is found seven times: ‘[...] apparivi dai portali / dietro i vetri di croco’ (‘Donna in Pisa’, lines 17-18); ‘[...] un’ombra apparirai’ (‘Alla madre’, line 2); ‘fra siepi ed ombre fluide, ovunque appare’ (‘Linfe’, line 13); ‘Poi all’improvviso il vuoto apparirà / dagli occhi che convergono nell’Orsa’ (‘Giardi’, line 11); ‘[...] sul tuo volto / tutto fugacemente, / per poco che lo sguardo erri distolto / dall’anima, appare e si consuma’ (‘Figura’, lines 3-6); ‘[...] poi apparivi / dal vano d’una porta contro il cielo’ (‘Nuance’, lines 7-8); ‘M’appare nel meriggio arborescente’ (‘Epistolium’, line 1). Many of these appearances relate to female figures described with the visionary lexis typical of the _stilnovisti_ and the Romantic neo-Gothic, often with the employment of stylemes that seem to show the influence of Montale’s _Ossi di seppia_ (for example ‘croco’, ‘poi all’improvviso il vuoto apparirà’,

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66 M. Luzi, ‘Introduzione’ (1959), in IS, pp. 23-24. The verb ‘levare’ is also found in _Avvento notturno_ (‘si leva il vento carico d’offerta’) and in _Quaderno gotico_ (‘ora noi ci leviamo’).

67 See pages 12, 14, 20, 28, 32, 39, 43, 49, 57, 79, 83.

68 In _Quaderno gotico_ the verb ‘apparire’ recurs three times, twice however with the meaning of ‘sembre’, once with the meaning of ‘manifestarsi nella propria evidenza’ (O, p. 142: ‘appare sulla soglia una figura’). The noun ‘apparizione’ is found once (O, p. 142: ‘e in una fissa apparizione, a un tratto’). In the following collection, _Primitie del deserto_, the verb ‘apparire’ is employed twice, the denominative ‘Apparita’ and the noun ‘apparizione’ are employed both once. On the use of the terms ‘Apparita’ and ‘apparizione’ in _Primitie del deserto_, in relation to dream-stilnovistic lexis, see Chapter 4.

69 The noun ‘croco’ is a typically Montale word that does not appear in many other writers of the _Novecento_, if not showing a clear derivation from the Montalian source itself, as in the case of the lines quoted from Luzi or those contained in Bigongiari’s _La figlia di Babilonia_ (‘vecchie mura / dove un croco s’infiamma’, ‘Fiaba’, lines 13-14). The fact that it is little used in the poetry of the early _Novecento_ and that it is a _hapax_ in Montale’s _oeuvre_ (it only appears in ‘Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato’ in _Ossi di seppia_) increases the likelihood of Luzi and Bigongiari’s allusivity.
‘meriggio’, the last being a word that also harks back to Mallarmé’s L’après-midi d’un faune, the Meriggio from D’Annunzio’s Alcyone, and Ungaretti’s ‘notturno meriggio’.


71 The cycle of fourteen poems composed in 1945, appeared for the first time in Inventario, 1.1 (1946) (a three-monthly review directed by Luigi Berti and printed in Florence by the publisher Parenti), then was published by Vallecchi in 1947.

72 See the ‘Nota dell’Autore’ at the end of Il giusto della vita (Milan: Garzanti, 1960), now in O, p. 1308.

73 See ‘Di gennaio, di notte’, lines 22-26: ‘viso di molto amata un tempo / che tra pagina e pagina del libro / sfogliato senza termine degli anni / hai la pace che dà l’essere fiochi / e spenti sotto la crudele patina’.
Divine Comedy, certainly helped to create that cultural climate which was beginning to spread in Florence through Montale, Contini, Praz, Berti and Baldi (see Chapter 5).

Luzi’s endless thematic variations and development may furthermore recall the International Gothic. One of the most repeated themes is that of the attesa, a word with a Hermetic flavour to it, but also stilnovistic, already present in Un brindisi. On the whole we may note that in respect to the noun-adjective ‘assente’ and the noun ‘assenza’, the verb ‘attendere’ and noun ‘attesa’ are more frequent in Luzi’s first four collections (reaching a maximum number in Quaderno gotico). On this reckoning but, above all, on the basis of a reading of the first Luzi collections in their totality (excluding Avvento notturno), we may agree with Silvio Ramat that ‘non sembra nemmeno lecito asserire che, nel caso di Luzi, si verifichi quel totale riassorbimento dei segni della non-storia (ovvero nella preistoria sottratta alla fluidità del divenire: o storia isolata nel proprio ambito autonomo) di un grande Segno assente, che si è registrato come una quasi-costante nel secondo Montale e come una frequenza coerentissima nel primo Bigongiari’; but more important still is the ‘qualità sospensiva propria dell’assenza luziana e, in una convergenza quasi concorrenziale, della stessa attesa’. The journey through Hell having come to an end (‘ah il viaggio nell’Ade era compiuto, / ero giunto, potevo abbandonarmi’, X. 19-20), the continual alternation of ‘assenza’ and ‘attesa’ takes place in an endless spiral which causes Luzi to say ‘la speranza sempre compiuta sempre rinasceva’ (XII. 6), a line which repeats a concept already expressed in ‘Continuità’ from Un

74 The verb ‘attendere’ recurs twice in Un brindisi (O, pp. 100, 128); the noun ‘attesa’ recurs once in Avvento notturno (O, p. 58), three times in Un brindisi (O, pp. 99, 107, 120) and five times in Quaderno gotico (O, pp. 140, 141, 142, 146, 151). The adjective ‘assente’ is to be found once in La barca (O, p. 19), once in Avvento notturno (O, p. 51) and twice in Un brindisi (O, pp. 93, 127); the noun ‘assente’ is found once in La barca (O, p. 41) and once in Quaderno gotico (O, p. 147); the noun ‘assenza’ is found once in Un brindisi (O, p. 126).

brindisi, 'Forse quanto è possibile è accaduto, / ma da te si rigenera l'attesa' (lines 1-2).

This dramatic alternation of 'attesa' and 'assenza' is accompanied by typically Cavalcantian sentiments such as amazement at a sudden apparition (expressed also through frequent exclamations), a sense of loss, 'sgomento', and 'paura', 'angoscia', about the possible deadly effect of love. In order to define this 'paura' which is part of the Luzian lyric self, the words Luzi employed himself two years prior to Quaderno gotico, in an essay 'Sulla poesia di Guido Cavalcanti', are significant: 'lo sconforto che ne deriva è tanto più drammatico quanto più chiamamente egli riesce a sentire che la propria natura spirituale non ha altra via per attuarsi che il possesso definitivo di quella immagine. La paura di cui Guido ci parla che altro significherebbe infatti se non che al di fuori di tale possesso l'anima, mancandole insieme all'oggetto destinato ogni ragione di forza e di vita, finirebbe nel perdimento più buio ed informe?' (IL, pp. 87-88).

The 1943 essay on Cavalcanti constitutes an interesting interpretation not only of the thirteenth-century poet but also of the canzoniere that Luzi wrote immediately after the war. In the essay Luzi stops for instance at the word 'mente', which is central to Cavalcanti's poetry, and increasingly frequent in Luzi's poetical oeuvre: 'un verso come "Tu m'ài si piena di dolor la mente",

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76 After Quaderno gotico (O, p. 146), the word 'mente' appears once in Poesie sparse (O, p. 163), never in Primizie del deserto, whereas many times, with an ever-increasing frequency, in the following works: four times in Onore del vero (O, pp. 241, 251, 252), five times in Dal fondo delle campagne (O, pp. 264, 265, 275, 299, 301), fourteen times in Nel magma (O, pp. 318, 321, 325, 330, 331, 334, 336, 337, 338, 343, 344, 345, 350), twenty times in Su fondamenti invisibili (O, pp. 365, 369, 371, 375, 376, 383, 388, 390, 392, 394, 395, 397, 399, 401), seventeen times in Al fuoco della controversia (O, pp. 409, 418, 422, 423, 424, 429, 437, 440, 455, 456, 463, 473, 487), twelve times in Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti (O, pp. 531, 540, 567, 582, 591, 641, 666, 673, 692, 701), twenty-two times in Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare (O, pp. 715, 717, 718, 723, 729, 744, 775, 777, 778, 782, 790, 792, 794, 800, 836, 843, 932, 935, 939, 941), twenty-four times in Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini (O, pp. 957, 958, 959, 960, 971, 986, 995, 996, 1003, 1011, 1014, 1025, 1048, 1051, 1057, 1060, 1062, 1082, 1092, 1093, 1101, 1107, 1111, 1127), once in Appendice, Semiserie ovvero versi per posta (O, p. 1204), and twelve times in SPU, pp. 64, 79, 80, 116, 123, 164, 173, 193, 203, 228).
per quanto si sappia che il termine dugentesco avesse un significato assai più vasto del nostro, per effetto poetico del linguaggio riesce a suggerirci il gelo, il vuoto e lo sperdimento che avevano reciso alle radici ogni sua possibilità di pensare e di percepire la varietà delle cose della terra’ (IL, pp. 88-89). In Luzi too the word ‘mente’ returns charged with multiple thirteenth-century meanings, above all Cavalcantian-Dantean meanings, but also Augustinian and neo-Platonic, so that different meanings are used every time, and not so much those connected with the intellect as those of the memory, imagination, fantasy, desire and will. In Quaderno gotico the word ‘mente’ appears for the first time and just once in Luzi’s work, with the meaning of ‘seat of the visual perception’, which becomes also memory or imagination, in which images stay alive: ‘Rare immagini deste nelle mente / pochi misteri infine elucidati / dall’amore, ridotti a verità, come te consentivano l’attesa’ (XIII. 1-4), perhaps with a reference to a line in Cavalcanti where, similarly, next to ‘n la mente’ appears the verb ‘destare’: ‘Pegli occhi fere un spirito sottile, / che fa ’n la mente spirito destare / dal qual si move spirito d’amare’ (Rime XXVIII. 1-3).

At this point, it may be worth mentioning a recent unpublished interview where Mario Luzi dwells on the ‘totale’ sense of the thirteenth-century word:

La parola ‘mente’ che io uso è quella dugentesca, nel senso cavalcantiano e dantesco. È una parola che mi piace moltissimo e trovo che sia un peccato che la straordinaria ampiezza del suo significato sia andata quasi perduta. Il suo senso, che era totale, è venuto pian piano restringendosi, diventando specifico. Ad esempio, quando Cavalcanti in un sonetto indirizzato a Dante scrive ‘Onde mi duol della gentil tua mente / e d’assai tue vertù che ti son tolte’, con ‘gentil tua mente’ non si riferisce certo all’eleganza ma all’umanità di Dante che a lui sembra involgara. Cavalcanti usa molto la parola ‘mente’ che intende anche come oggetto di ferite, di sgomento, di morte nascente. ‘Mente’ è una parola così bella, così nostra, così italiana, che ogni altro termine mi sembra una rinunzia. Ad esempio in Francia è un problema per i traduttori trovare un corrispettivo di questa parola perché non ce l’hanno. Usano esprit ma non è la stessa cosa.*

* See the sonnet XLI. 3-4: ‘molto mi dôl délia gentil tua mente / e d’assai tue vertù che ti son tolte’.

* The interview which Mario Luzi kindly granted me is based on the Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini and was given in Florence on 3 April 2000.
Another word, in itself common but used with a Cavalcantian meaning, is ‘figura’. The word has a particular semantic force in Cavalcanti and recurs often in Quaderno gotico, usually to indicate the appearance of the woman. As Marti notes in his comment on Cavalcanti’s Rime, ‘figura’ means both “‘sembiante’ vero e concreto’ and “‘obbiettivazione in figura’”, a sort of “‘trasfigurazione’, ove coincidono – fuse eppur distinte – due realtà, una fisica, e un’altra, per così dire, metafisica’ (Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo, p. 156). Luzi himself pauses over this word in the poetry of Cavalcanti, and underlines the meaning of ‘primo fatto concreto’, accolto nella sua ‘sorprendente potenza’:

La figura per Cavalcanti non è mai un segnacolo o un presagio, ma il primo fatto concreto che trae tanta pensosa levità e insieme quel suo indicibile peso appunto dall’essere il primo fatto, accolto in tutta la sua sorprendente potenza. […] La donna stessa, l’oggetto comune cioè della lirica secolare, non ha mai per Guido alcunché dell’immagine ereditaria, dell’opposto dialettico necessario e sottinteso, ma esiste prima di tutto come figura, come volto di eccezionale potenza. I movimenti interni che seguono questa rivelazione testimoniano che egli aderiva intensamente ad essa, non soccorso da alcuna maniera, con una semplicità inerme e viva; fisso nella figura, trascura i particolari e i decori, per esaltarne il valore accentuando in essa gli attributi essenziali d’umanità e giunge al punto di identificare i pregi estetici in quelli morali. (‘Sulla poesia di Guido Cavalcanti’, in IL, p. 85)

In the verses of Quaderno gotico the ‘figura’ of the woman is ‘non ancora conosciuta’ but ‘tanto a lungo sospirata’ (I. 2-3), she sometimes ‘sparisce’ leaving a ‘gelo / di morte ed una lucida paura’ (VI. 10-12), or she is depicted dejected and weeping like ‘un segno di morte’ (XIII. 16-18). The appearance of the female ‘figure’, once again according to Cavalcantian norms, is often luminous in character but this luminosity is about to fade away: ‘Così dopo una pura, / una primaverile lunga attesa / appare sulla soglia una figura / vivida che si spinge in una stanza’ (IX. 13-16). In this apparition the reappearance of Cavalcanti’s stilnovismo (typically the representation of the love affair in dramatically visual terms) is coloured by a Mallarmé-type adjective, ‘vivido’,
which is used only once in Luzi’s first four collections and indicates a real figure, shining and radiating life. We may guess that, because he graduated in French literature and because of the numerous references to Mallarmé that can be found in his first collections of poetry (above all in *Avvento notturno*), the adjective derives from ‘Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui’ in Mallarmé’s *Plusieurs sonnets*, which Luzi was to translate only in the eighties but which he had definitely read at the time of *Quaderno gotico*. In Luzi’s translation the first line of the lyric was to become ‘il vivido l’intatto / lo splendido oggi è qui’.  

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79 The quotation is from M. Luzi, *Francamente (versi dal francese)* (Florence: Nuove dizioni Vallecchi, 1980), pp. 24-25; then in Id., *La cordigliera delle Ande e altri versi tradotti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 28-29. The adjective ‘vivido’ was to be employed again other times starting from *Onore del Vero*, and was to return in the seventh section of *Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi*, preserved in the *Fondo manoscritti di autori contemporanei* di Pavia: ‘il punto vivido / che brilla e recede all’infinito / negli occhi quando s’incontrano / e l’amore condiviso in pieno sopprime l’ombra / e detto e non ancora dicibile / sfavillano nella mente reciproca / il punto vivido, il punto pullulante dell’origine perpetua’ (7. 1-7). In this poem of *Su fondamenti invisibili*, as if to underline a distance from Mallarmé, the adjective underwent a variatio, becoming ‘vivo’: ‘Il punto vivo, la primavera del mondo / che sfolgora e recede all’infinito / negli occhi dell’altro nell’ora che il pensiero condiviso / in pieno sopprime l’ombra / e detto e non ancora dicibile / sfavillano nella mente reciproca, / il punto vivo, il punto pullulante dell’origine continua –’ (*Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi*, 7. 1-8). Luzi spoke about Mallarmé’s poem *Le vierge*, centred on the figure of the swan, in a recent interview: ‘Altri, come Mallarmé nel sonetto *Il cigno*, credono che una realtà eterna, trascendente e immanente allo stesso tempo, si sia manifestata. Quel momento che Mallarmé descrive come radioso potrebbe essere l’unità. È un’estasi, in un certo senso, però incompleta, trovata nelle cose. Queste sono illuminazioni, sono momenti supremi, non sono condizioni di felicità irreversibili. E comunque, solo il fatto che questi momenti esistano già remunera la pena dell’uomo’ (VRD, pp. 16-17). On the reading of the French poet in the Hermetic period and in the years that preceded the appearance of his *Studi su Mallarmé* of 1952, see again VRD, pp. 13-14). Note that, although there are numerous references to Mallarmé in the collections of the Hermetic period, above all in *Avvento notturno*, Luzi for a long time considered the French poet untranslatable: his poetic language seemed to him ‘equidistante da ogni lingua’ (‘Con Mallarmé a lungo’, in NP, p. 245). The decision to translate Mallarmé goes back to the Eighties, a period in which Luzi wrote *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* (1978-1984). In this collection the problem that Mallarmé had posed of the absoluteness of poetic creation was a central issue, but, if on one hand we can find various linguistic references to the French poet, on the other Luzi takes on a diametrically opposite position in connection with this problem. It is a question, as Luzi himself affirms, of a comparison that is ‘non più ontologico ma linguistico’ (NP, p. 245).
As this ‘figura / vivida’ fades away in a room, so similarly in the fourteenth lyric of the *Quaderno gotico*, the ‘beltà’ that ‘brillava’ according to Leopardian stylemes (see ‘A Silvia’, line 3: ‘beltà splendea’) is a ‘spera’ that disappears ‘fuori dell’esistenza’: ‘né memoria, né immagine, né sognio. / Il volto dell’assente era una spera / specchiata dalla prima opaca stella / e neppure eri in lei, eri caduta / fuori dell’esistenza’ (lines 10-14). The word ‘spera’, of Tuscan origin and often found in thirteenth-century texts, indicates a luminous sphere deriving its light probably from the planet Venus or from a star that does not shine with its own light, and is therefore ‘opaca’. In these baroque refractions of mirrors the ‘volto assente’ of the woman disappears completely and cannot be seen even as a reflection in the opaque body in which it is mirrored, a probable reference to a line in D’Annunzio: ‘Tutto il resto si dileguava, rientrava nella inesistenza’ (*Il Trionfo della morte* III. VIII).

It is certainly difficult for Luzi to keep alive the expectation of this ‘figura’ without opting to stop with D’Annunzio at the idea of ‘inesistenza’ or with Montale at the idea of ‘nulla’. In Luzi the above-mentioned dialectic between absence and renewal of the ‘attesa’ seems, however, both to continue and to contradict the nihilistic conclusions to which from time to time he comes close. The continuation in Luzi of a stubborn tension sustained interminably by the continual thwarting of expectations is seen in the metaphor of the ‘fuoco che il suo ardore rigenera’, to be found in the first lyric of *Quaderno gotico*:

L’alta, la cupa fiamma ricade su di te,  
figura non ancora conosciuta,  
ah di già tanto a lungo sospirata  
dietro quel velo d’anni e di stagioni  
che un dio forse s’accinge a lacerare.

L’incolume delizia, la penosa ansietà  
D’esistere ci brucia e incenerisce  
Ugualmente ambedue. Ma quando tace  
La musica fra i nostri visi ignoti  
Si leva un vento carico d’offerte.
Pari a due stelle opache nella lenta vigilia
Cui un pianeta ravviva intimamente
Il luminoso spirito notturno
Ora noi ci leviamo acuminati,
febbrili d’un futuro senza fine.

Così spira ed aleggia nell’anima veemente
un desiderio prossimo a sgomento,
una speranza simile a paura,
ma lo sguardo si tende, entra nel sangue
più fertile il respiro della terra.

Assunto nella gelida misura delle statue,
tutto ciò che appariva ormai perfetto
si scioglie e si rianima, la luce
vibra, tremano i rivi fruttuosi
e ronzano augurali città.

L’immagine fedele non serba più colore
E io mi levo, mi libro e mi tormento
A far di me un Mario irraggiungibile
Da me stesso, nell’essere incessante
Un fuoco che il suo ardore rigenera.

The first line ‘L’alta, la cupa fiamma ricade su di te’ seems to be reminiscent of a line of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, ‘Fiamma dal ciel su le tue trecce piova’ (CXXXVI. 1), a theme that is repeated, with a variation that always leads back to its origins in *Rerum vulgaria fragmenta*, in the sixth lyric of *Quaderno gotico*:
‘[…] ecco, un fuoco vivo piove / fusó con l’ombra quieta e animata’ (lines 6-8). In these lines the oxymoronic oppositions like ‘l’ombra quieta e animata’ and the ‘fuoco’ (an element usually considered opposed to water) that ‘piove’, are also Petrarchan. The ‘desiderio prossimo a sgomento’ that ‘spira nell’anima veemente’ is Cavalcantian, as is the ‘speranza simile a paura’ (perhaps traceable

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also to Petrarch’s ‘tremando di paura or di speranza’, *Canzoniere* CCLVIII. 13). The motif of the ‘sguardo’\(^1\) that enters ‘nel sangue’\(^2\) offering itself as the first vehicle of love, is more generally stilnovistic. The motif of the woman who descends from her *hyperuranion* to walk and make the banks ‘tremare’ and the ‘augurali città’ ‘ronzare’ is also stilnovistic. It is enough to think of Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*, a ‘miracolo’ in a Florence that is still stylised but real. The image of the woman who makes the air that everyone breathes vibrate existed also in Cavalcanti’s dramatic and dialectical soul, and his lines are well known: ‘Chi è questa che vén, ch’ogn’om la mira, / che fa tremar di chizìrate l’âre / e mena seco Amor, si che parlar se / null’omo pote, ma ciascun sospira?’ (IV. 1-4). This ‘tremare’ of nature and of the human soul are furthermore a constant element in Cavalcanti’s psychology and Luzi’s, a sign of that physical and metaphysical dread that is a characteristic of the ‘attesa’.

\(^1\) For this *topos*, traditional in stilnovistic and Occitanian poetry, *any number of examples could be found*. Here are just a few: ‘Apparve luce, che rendè splendore, / che passao per li occhi e ‘l cor ferio’ (Guinizzelli, VIII. 9-10), ‘Voi, che per li occhi mi passaste ‘l core / e destaste la mente che dormia’ (Cavalcanti, XIII. 1-2), ‘Ma quando sento che si dolce sguardo / d’entro degli occhi mi passò lo core / e posevi uno spirito di gioia’ (Cavalcanti, XXIV. 9-11); ‘D’ent’al tuo cor si mosse un spirìtello, / escl per li occhi e venne a ferire, / quando guardai lo tuo viso amoroso’ (Lapo Gianni, IV, 6), ‘mi saettò per li occhi dentro al core’ (Lapo Gianni, XII. 4).

\(^2\) If the motif of Love that passes between the eyes of the lady and of the poet, setting up physiological reactions in their ‘spiriti’, is typically stilnovistic, the realistic term ‘sangue’ to indicate the physicality of the lover inside whom Love enters is more twentieth century. However, some passages can be recalled in the *Vita Nuova* where the appearance of Beatrice makes the wrists tremble, a synecdoche for the ‘veins’ through which the blood pulses (see also *Inf.* I. 90: ‘ch’ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi’): ‘lo spirito de la vita […] cominciò a tremare si fortemente, che apparía ne li menimi polsi orribilmente’ (*Vita Nuova* II. 3-4); ‘vegno a vedervi, crendo guerire: / e se io levo li occhi per guardare, / nel cor mi si comincia uno tremoto, / che fa de’ polsi l’anima partire’ (lines 11-14 of the sonnet ‘Spesse fiate’, in *Vita Nuova* XVI). See also Dante’s ‘Rime petrose’: in one, the ‘sembiante freddo’ of the woman causes the freezing of the ‘sangue’ and the thought of the cruelty of the loved one is transformed into tears that flow out of the eyes through which Love had entered (‘per mezzo della luce / là ond’entrò la dispietata luce’, *Rime* CII. 31-35); in another, after Love’s stroke with the fatal sword that killed Dido, ‘l sangue, ch’è per le vene disperso, fuggendo corre verso ‘l cor, che ‘l chiama’ (*Rime* CIII. 45).
To have moved diachronically through the first part of Luzi’s oeuvre, examining also from a synchronic point of view some recurring topoi of stilnovistic and Dantean lyrics as well as precise words and syntagms which have given us a more or less veiled glimpse of the original source, or more often the source which has played an intermediary role, has enabled us to detect certain constants of stilnovismo (especially that of Cavalcanti and Dante) in some Italian poetic texts written in the Hermetic period. It has not always been possible to identify precisely this or that source, and in the course of what amounts to an attempt to penetrate the complex and ultimately mysterious phenomenon which is the memory of a poet, we have framed various hypotheses as to the poet’s allusions. If the effect may sometimes have been that of isolating a phrase or term by surrounding it with possible literary references, the intention was not constrain the poet’s creativity within the boundaries of the closed world of other people’s words. And no word, in any case, belongs only to the writer who uses it, but rather to an infinite number of other persons, literate and otherwise, who have made use of words in the attempt to define, always in an inadequate and therefore shifting and transient way, the variety and complexity of an experience. The history of Luzi’s stilnovismo and dantismo, in the end, is only a way of recounting an experience that has also been that of other poets and of human beings in general, passing from the closure and ‘accidia’ of the Petrarchan ‘limbo’ to the ‘magma’ of Purgatory, through the ‘deserto’ of ‘colori di Dite’ left by the war, where the figure of the woman fleetingly appears and disappears, never possessed, in a continual intertwining of dream, nightmare and vision.
4.

LUZI’S DANTISMO AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR: AN INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Cotesta arte mira appunto a questo fine, di dar modo al lettore di integrare con il pensiero quel che il poeta non dice.

G. Pasquali

4.1. 1945: an Idea of Dante and Petrarch

Luzi’s dantismo, which in the Hermetic period was still in only a potential state, only after the war came to light as a dialogic relation between texts. I shall choose as a sample three collections written after the war when Dante, in Luzi’s words, re-acquired an ‘attualità operante, diventa maestro di stile, di composizione, un maestro vero’ (CMS, p. 66). All this, the poet points out again in an essay ‘Dante, da mito a presenza’, ‘non significa un passaggio al dantismo, ma solo il rimorso latente della rimozione di Dante (poi divenuto insistente nei decenni successivi)’ (‘Dante, da mito a presenza’, in DLM, p. 54).¹

However, before studying Dante’s verbal presence in Luzi’s first three collections written from 1947 to 1961, it is useful to pause over some critical reflections which introduce to the idea Luzi had in 1945 of Dante and Petrarch. These reflections on L’inferno e il limbo (metaphors for Dantinean and Petrarchan poetry respectively), which appeared in 1945 in the review Società and were later collected in the volume of the same name,² show that the close tie between the Florentine writer and Petrarch was put into doubt

¹ The bibliography on Luzi’s dantismo after the Second World War has already been mentioned in the first note of Chapter 3.
from within, with consequences for the whole Hermetic group. The effect was, as Adelia Noferi observes in a study on the Petrarchan myth in the literary culture of the twentieth century, to ‘penetrare nel cerchio dell’universo poetico petrarchesco, come una sorta di cuneo, con una forza dirompente, sbloccandone la immobilità in cui tutta una tradizione poetica l’aveva sigillata, per farvi penetrare il movimento e il divenire, per stabilire un rapporto dialettico fra noumeno e fenomeno, per riconnettere l’atemporalità alla storia, nel tentativo di ridare una voce alle cose: “lasciar parlare le cose”’.

In the essay, Luzi does not juxtapose, according to the usual critical parameters, an Infernal-Dantean model and a Purgatorial-Petrarchan one, but rather an Infernal-Dantean model and a Petrarchan-type Limbo. At the origin of this opposition between the two models of Italian literature there are not only differences of language and style but also anthropological differences. The essay opens significantly with the words of the Abbesses de Soulesme: ‘La sofferenza ha solo una bontà relativa e presa in prestito; è un mezzo e non un fine’. According to the author, this notion of suffering as a ‘means’ that was to be found in Dante, became almost incomprehensible after Petrarch: suffering leaves hope no room for redemption, it is no longer a means that can lead to happiness but a state that one can even be delighted to find oneself in.

The difference between Inferno and Limbo is based on the difference between hope and regret: hope is for possible happiness, regret is for a happiness irremediably lost in the uncertainty of memory. The Inferno therefore represents the place of eternal suffering where ‘la speranza è stata definitivamente delusa’, but its very existence necessarily presupposes the existence of that hope, thus representing a level of the being to which Paradise is juxtaposed: ‘la realtà dell’inferno è visibile solo dall’alto, dalla
certezza cioè che esso è soltanto una parte, la parte afflitta dell’eternità’ con la coscienza che il dolore ‘è una scena non è il tutto’ (IL, p. 19). The greatness of the first Canto of the *Comedy*, Eliot had also observed, consists in its presupposing the complete range of human possibility, normally limited to the negative meaning.⁵

Limbo, on the other hand, is the place where suffering has never been married to the hope that the absence of happiness will be filled, and has preferred to console itself with the ‘lusinga’ of its illusions (IL, p. 21), surrounding itself with harmonious music that mitigates its prison-like conditions.⁶ In this place all possibility of action remains just possibility, captive to a paralysing inertia and inaction. If in fact the *Inferno*, as the author explained recently, stands for the ‘drammatizzazione di una libertà male scelta, male applicata, male vissuta’, Limbo is ‘esemplarità della libertà non usata, non applicata, senza scelta, quindi senza condanna’.⁷

The terms used by Luzi to describe Limbo can be compared but only in part to those used in the Limbo of the *Comedy*. Also the Dantean Limbo, like Luzi’s, has the characteristic of not knowing ‘speranza’ but only ‘rimpianto’ (*Inf.* IV. 42: ‘sanza speme vivemo in disio’, with ‘disio’ meaning ‘nostalgia’), but if the Dantean Limbo stands for a condition that can be explained only by

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⁵ Compare T.S. Eliot, ‘Dante’ (1920), in *The Sacred Wood*, p. 169: ‘Dante’s is the most comprehensive, and the most ordered presentation of emotions that has ever been made. […] You cannot, that is, understand the *Inferno* without the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*’; Id., ‘Dante’ (1929), in *Selected Essays*, p. 50: ‘The third point is that the *Divine Comedy* is a complete scale of the depths and heights of human emotion; that the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are to be read as extensions of the ordinarily very limited human range. Every degree of the feeling of humanity, from lowest to highest, has, moreover, an intimate relation to the next above and below, and all fit together according to the logic of sensibility’.

⁶ Luzi’s description of Petrarchan poetry as Limbo may be compared to what Flora, in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* of 1940, calls ‘eliso dei suoni’. In this ‘eliso dei suoni’ which is the world of Petrarch, the word is seen as pure sound, free from any semantic load, and the very power of meaning of the word risks vanishing in a pure play of ‘figure sonore’ (see F. Flora, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. I (Milan: Mondadori, 1940), p. 250).

⁷ VRD, p. 13. In this sense, we might say that paradoxically the *Inferno* is the place that better indicates the dignity of man, in that it is free, free to hope for happiness, and, at a certain point, to not hope for it any longer.
inscrutable Divine justice, Luzi’s (significantly a metaphor for the Petrarchan universe, sick with sloth) is the consequence of an unused freedom.

The Inferno implies furthermore a “presë diretta” [...] con i drammi dell’esperienza e della coscienza,8 while Limbo stands for non-reality, or at least the place where the only non-refused reality is interiority: in this perfect and exclusive system (defined by the critical metaphor of the circle or sphere), everything converges towards the author whose aim it is to ‘sostituire se stesso [...] nella sua unica superstite presenza, alla storia fisica del mondo’ (IL, p. 22). Life actually gets thrust away and the spirit no longer recognises any other object than its own world, over which it has become a despot. The illusion is that ‘l’arte abolisce il problema’,9 eliminating, that is, all that part of reality that escapes the control and prevision of man (hasard, to use Mallarmé’s word).

Luzi’s essay, in its comparing and contrasting the main lines of Dante and Petrarch, anticipates, at least in part, Contini’s magisterial and ‘massiccia opposizione’10 in 1949 between the two fathers of the Italian language (although it must not be forgotten in any way that in general the juxtaposition is ancient and goes back to Boccaccio and Bembo, coming down to Foscolo and De Sanctis).11 In particular, at the centre of both essays is found the

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9 Id., ‘Padre mite e dispotico’, L’approdo letterario, 66 (1974); then in DN, p. 104.

10 As defined by Contini, ‘Preliminari sulla lingua del Petrarca’, in Varianti e altra linguistica, p. 171. The essay was published in Paris in 1949 by Tallone, then in ‘Paragone’, April, 1951 and, with the title ‘La lingua del Petrarca’, in the volume Il Trecento (Florence: Sansoni, 1953); it is now found in Varianti e altra linguistica, pp. 169-92.

11 The Introduction to Dante’s Rime, which Contini published in 1939, came out various years before Luzi’s essay but it had not yet focused on the significance of the opposition between Dante and Petrarch (G. Contini, ‘Introduzione’ to Dante’s Rime, pp. 319-34). The latter poet Contini only referred to once, limiting himself to defining his style ‘come tensione assoluta’ as opposed to Dante’s, seen as ‘prova “locale”’ (p. 320). Neither do Contini’s other essays written before 1945 yet present significant contrasts between Dante’s style and Petrarch’s, but only limited philological analyses of Petrarch’s corrections: ‘Saggio d’un commento alle correzioni del Petrarca volgare’ (1943), in Varianti e altra
profound dependence of the Italian literary tradition on Petrarch: 'La nostra letteratura,' observes Luzi, 'procede piuttosto da Petrarca che da Dante; in ogni modo si sviluppa sull’esempio del primo più assai che su quello del secondo […] Accettando Petrarca la nostra letteratura si trovò fin dai suoi inizi, a compiere delle capitali e definitive rinunzie' (IL, p. 22). Compare Contini: 'è un fatto che noi moderni ci sentiamo più solidali col temperamento, dico il temperamento linguistico, di Dante; ma è altrettanto un fatto che la sostanza della nostra tradizione è più prossima alla cultura petrarchesca' (p. 170).

The terms that Luzi attributes to Dante’s language are ‘gusto della narrazione’, ‘inesauribile ricchezza’, ‘infinita possibilità di modi poetici’, ‘metrica ricchissima di combinazioni ritmiche’ (IL, pp. 23-24), while Contini speaks of ‘plurilinguismo’ (understood as ‘poliglottia degli stili […] e dei generi letterari’), ‘pluralità di toni e pluralità di strati lessicali’, ‘interesse teoretico’ and ‘sperimentalità incessante’ (pp. 171-72). Petrarch’s language is called by Luzi ‘circolare e chiuso’, characterised by an ‘accento lirico costante’, ‘un unico registro’, a ‘musica uniforme e continua’, a ‘ritmo imperturbabile dalla varietà dei fenomeni’ (IL, pp. 22-23), while for Contini it is an ‘orto tanto concluso’, with the characteristics of ‘unilinguismo’, ‘unità di tono e di lessico’, ‘fioca potenza speculativa’, ‘nessun esperimento’, ‘introversione’, ‘costante evasività’, ‘dominante ritmica’ (pp. 173-91). Although making use of different languages and critical instruments (the former drawing on the powers of synthesis typical of poets, the latter basing himself on refined linguistic and philological analyses) the conclusions arrived at by Luzi and Contini in 1945 and 1949 respectively are not so very different: ‘Si consideri dunque quanta parte dell’esistenza è rimasta esclusa, dopo di lui [Petrarch], dal dominio della letteratura e della vita spirituale e si pensi quanto è costato Petrarca a chi doveva in ogni modo averlo fra i propri numi tutelari’ (IL, p. 25); compare Contini: ‘Se la lingua di Petrarca è la

*linguistica*, pp. 5-32; ‘Correzioni grammaticali petrarchesche’ (1942), in *Varianti e altra linguistica*, pp. 33-34.
nostra, ciò accade perché egli si è chiuso in un giro di inevitabili oggetti eterni sottratti alla mutabilità della storia’ (p. 177).

In the next two parts of this Chapter, we shall analyse the Dantean verbal trace present in Primizie del deserto, Onore del vero and Dal fondo delle campagne, without forgetting that the confrontation with Dante and that with Petrarch alternate in Luzi’s poetry.

4.2. Between Hell, Purgatory, and Limbo: Primizie del deserto and Onore del Vero

In the intertextual analysis that will follow, I do not intend to consider those Dantean words and phrases that have been assimilated into the common language or that form a general part of the literary tradition. I shall not be dealing with the ‘inevitable’ Dante, the Dante derived from material that forms part of a collective memory, but with the dantismo that implies an underlying text engaged, as it were, uniquely by Luzi. As the presence of single Dantean words in Italian poetry is quite common but difficult to demonstrate (as Gianfranco Contini writes, the presence of Dante is part of the ‘memoria collettiva’ or ‘memoria nazionale’), we may agree with Cesare Segre that ‘via via che le coincidenze verbali toccano più ampi segmenti di discorsi, o meglio ancora, che le coincidenze tematiche corrispondono a riprese verbalì’, we witness a unique and voluntary process of textual reminiscence. I shall use the term ‘figure’ to indicate these coincidences of theme and verbal echoes. As a consequence, the phrases will not only have to be atoms of language taken out of the text, but part of a whole network of elements and ‘interfigural’ relations that lead from Luzi’s text to Dante.

In the two collections chosen, *Primizie del deserto* (1947-1951) and *Onore del vero* (1951-1956),¹⁵ some of the figures found include different kinds of infernal and purgatorial landscape, the motif of the appearance of a woman, the impenetrable and living forest of Canto XIII, the wind of Canto V; others are the millstone, the weight to be carried, the purifying fire, the night that clears the mind, the crowds of souls. I do not consider instead figures taken from the third canticle, as it seems that these are developed above all in Luzi’s last collections, those that in the Meridiani volume the poet himself decided to group around the motif of light.¹⁶

It is already clear in the first collection written after the war that Luzi’s relationship with Dante is not only a relationship between texts. The literariness that is a characteristic of the Luzi’s writing at the moment in which it recalls the Dantean word speaks also in some way of the reality to which these poems refer. This reality is for Luzi the desert left by the experience of the war, a period in which the Dantean message turned out to be surprisingly modern, an unequalled message of the ‘rapporto tra parola e cosa’ (‘Dante, da mito a presenza’, in DLM, p. 54). At the same time historical reality reminds the poet of the biblical desert, a place of absence but also of decisive meetings with the divine, the desert of Leopardi’s broom, the ‘grande deserto’ of Sbarbaro, the waste land of Eliotian memory, and, as Mario Specchio observes in an interview with the writer, ‘la terra vergine inseminata, dalla cui frontiera ripartire con nel cuore il trepido spavento dantesco all’uscita della selva selvaggia e aspra e forte’ (CMS, p. 69).

An atmosphere that recalls Dante’s emergence from the dark wood opens the first lyric of *Primizie del deserto*, ‘Né il tempo’ (1947), where ‘la strada grigia dei defunti’ (line 3) may be a re-evocation of the journey just undertaken by the two pilgrims through the reign of the otherworld, while in the ‘campo abbandonato dove niente rimane da sperare’ (lines 14-15) we

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¹⁵ The passages quoted will be taken from O.

¹⁶ Luzi had in fact chosen the title *Frasì nella luce nascente* for the ‘Meridiani’ edition (O, p. 1619).
seem to hear an echo of the terrible inscription of the gate of Dante’s Hell (‘Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate’, Inf. III. 9). The characters have ‘inoltrati nel folto senza fine’ (line 18), where ‘folto’ is a Dantean lexeme (see Inf. XIII. 7 and Purg. XXVIII. 108). This ‘patria desolata’ (line 29), however, seems to hide promises, or, as the title of the collection states, ‘primizie’ that grow in the desert. It is a condition that is infernal and purgatorial at the same time: in a space of the ‘colore della pena sterminata’ (line 23) little by little ‘prende nome ciò che si è perduto, / sofferto e non inteso che per segni’ (lines 27-28), the relationship with the world is accepted and it is possible even to begin to name things. Events, thoughts, figures, take on sense, even though the poet does not reach any solution that might liberate or save him.

In the lyric ‘Né tregua’ (1947) we find again a landscape of desolation that plays no purely descriptive or background role, and which moves between the infernal and purgatorial. The ‘campo desolato’ (line 24) is saturated with fog and rain, in that difficult and changeable season between autumn and winter, and creates a state of painful suspension: ‘L’essere morti non ci dà riposo / né tregua, né dolcezza di stagione’ (lines 19-20). It is, however, a ‘campo desolato’ in which ‘si fa strada il pensiero della vita’ (line 25), in a sense of intrepid expectancy that is reminiscent of Dante coming ‘fuor de l’aura morta’ (Purg. I. 17).

This state of expectation at times makes it possible to see a gleam of light, which is the appearance of a woman. The woman whom Luzi addresses in the initial lyric of Primizie del deserto is called ‘L’Apparita’, a name that leaves intact the mystery that is concealed behind her form and which recalls the way in which Dante described his amazement in the moment of Beatrice’s

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appearance: ‘apparve’ (*Vita Nuova* II. 1; II. 3; III. 1), ‘apparia’ (*Vita Nuova* XI. 1), ‘m’apparve’ (*Purg.* XXX. 64), ‘pare’\(^{18}\) (*Vita Nuova* XXVI. 5).

The second lyric too, ‘S’avvia tra i muri, è preda della luce’ (1947), revolves round an ‘apparizione’ (line 2), a ‘vaga figura’ (line 7), ‘preda della luce’ (line 1), which recalls not only the passages just quoted with the appearance of Beatrice but also the dream-like language used in the *Vita Nuova* to describe the appearance of Amore: ‘m’apparve una meravigliosa visione’ (*Vita Nuova* III. 3), ‘visione apparita’ (*Vita Nuova* III. 8), ‘m’apparve’ (*Vita Nuova* III. 11), ‘apparve’ (*Vita Nuova* IX. 3). In particular the noun ‘miracolo’, next to the verb ‘appariva’ (line 9), although in another context, is also used by Dante when he says of Beatrice ‘e par che sia una cosa venuta / da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare’ (*Vita Nuova* XXVI. 6). This apparition becomes one of Luzi’s typical modes of representation, not only because the journey towards the truth on which the poet embarks takes place ‘al di là del fenomeno’, ‘nell’escatologia’,\(^{19}\) but especially because in this journey the apparition, as in Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, is the manifestation of a hidden sense inside things themselves.

But the purgatorial waiting described above may become, apart from a bemused confrontation with an apparition, also an invocation addressed to a ‘Thou’ with divine connotations. The lyric ‘Invocazione’ (1948) comes to mind, one of Luzi’s most suggestive lyrics and richest with allusions to Dante. ‘Invocazione’ is after ‘Un brindisi’ Luzi’s second attempt to escape from the short measure of the lyrical fragment in favour of the structure of the longer poem and opening out towards new discursive forms. Luzi thus passes from the melancholy and solipsistic elegy to the thematic and stylistic multiplicity of drama and adventure. From the very first lines of the lyric he refuses the kind of circular and liberating confession typical of Petrarch, in which suffering is recounted but also self-generating, and the poets decides,

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\(^{18}\) ‘Pare’, according to Contini’s comment, non vale già “sembra” e neppure soltanto “appare”, ma “appare evidentemente, è o si manifesta nella sua evidenza” (‘Esercizio sopra un sonetto di Dante’ (1947), in *Varianti e altra linguistica*, I, 163).

\(^{19}\) G. Bàrberi Squarotti, ‘L’ultimo trentennio’, p. 249.
with a sense of disorientation that recall Dante’s ‘via [...] smarrita’ at the entrance to the Infernal wood, to enter an ‘ombra’ (line 1) corresponding to the ‘selva oscura’ of the first Canto of the Inferno:

E m’inoltr’ sosspeso, entro nell’ombra,
dubito, mi smarrisco nei sentieri [...] (lines 1-2)

But more prominent still than the ‘selva oscura’ is the wood of Canto XIII of the Inferno, which is without doubt a central figure of the lyric and of Primizie del deserto in general. The accumulation of textual and iconic references to this Canto signals the source of the reference to the reader and also indicates one of the codes for deciphering and understanding the lyric. The impenetrable nature of the forest with its trunks, stumps, creepers and thorns all inextricably tangled up projects Luzi’s lyrical vision against the nightmarish backdrop of the wood of the suicides, a ghastly and deformed place in which everything is black, thorny and gnarled. Dante is dismayed to hear ‘lamenti in su li alberi strani’ (Inf. XIII. 15) which seem to come from invisible presences among the trees (‘Io sentia d’ogni parte trarre guai, / e non vedea persona che ’l facesse; / per ch’io tutto smarrito m’arrestai’, Inf. XIII. 22-24), then he hears ‘parole e sangue’, Inf. XIII. 44, in the same way Luzi, full of doubt and fear, enters the ‘foresta inestricabile’ (lines 20, 24) where ‘una lamentosa notte fruscia’ (line 19) and ‘gemiti rari e parole se sono / parole’ (line 40)\(^\text{20}\) can be heard.

Impressed in Luzi’s memory is also the image of the ‘sangue bruno’ (Inf. XIII. 34) that flows out of the trunk when Dante breaks off a twig. The poet transfers Dante’s image to the blood flowing in the wood, in the wounds and

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\(^{20}\) The figures of the ‘foresta inestricabile’ and the ‘notte lamentosa’ of Dantean memory return in the lyric ‘Villaggio’ (1949) where in the ‘densità nera d’un bosco’ (line 4) is heard a ‘condolersi d’anime e di spoglie’ (line 1) (perhaps it is no accident that ‘spoglie’ is found in Inf. XIII. 103). In the lyric ‘Nebbia’ (1949) instead, line 2 ‘Squittii, versi d’uccelli a stormi, strida...’ may feel the influence of the ‘brutte Arpie’ that populate the monstrous atmosphere of Canto XIII and at the same time recall Inf. V. 35 (‘quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento’) where Dante refers to the company of the Lustful, and a few lines later compares them to starlings in flight.
'scorze' (line 30) to be bound, and in the mysterious figure that is invited to bleed with the man, a figure that is, significantly, a humiliated figure and fixed in the symbol of the tree ('[...] ferisciti, sanguina anche tu, / soffri con noi, umiliati in un tronco', lines 31-32).

The image of blood gushing from human wounds can be found also in 'Gemma' (1951), one of the last lyrics of Primizie del deserto. In the expression '[...] dalle antiche / ferite spicca sangue [...]’ (lines 14-15) the juxtaposition of 'spiccia' and 'sangue' gives the phrase a Dantean feel and recalls Purg. IX. 102 ('come sangue che fuor di vena spiccia'). However, the Dantean atmosphere evoked is not that of Purgatory IX from which the dantismo is drawn, because especially prominent here is again the Canto XIII of the Inferno: the blood gushes from 'semi' (line 11), there are 'radici esauste', 'ceppaie' (line 12), a 'primavera scontrosa' (line 9) in which 'gli alberi consueti mettono fiori strani' (line 16). The use in the same line of the noun 'alberi' and the adjective 'strani' confirms that in this lyric too the Canto he recalls principally is Canto XIII: the two terms are amply attested in common language but inserted by Luzi in the same line they take on the force of an allusion (Inf. XIII. 15: ‘fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani’). However, if in the Dantean phrase the collocation creates a possible ambivalence ('strani', as Casini notes in the edition of the Divina Commedia used by Luzi, refers more probably to 'lamenti' than to 'alberi'), in Luzi's line there is no possibility of misunderstanding and the adjective 'strani' clearly refers to 'fiori'.

Returning to the lyric 'Invocazione', the presence of the adjective 'strane' (line 17) referring to 'radici, rami, foglie' could also recall the 'strani' of Inf. XIII. 15. The word 'radici' is found in Inf. XIII. 73, while the line 'tentane con le mani caute i pruni' alludes to Dante breaking off a twig with the same kind of fear and uncertainty from a thorn bush ('Allor porsi la mano un poco avante, / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno', Inf. XIII. 31-32), but also to Inf. XIII. 108, where the word 'prun' refers to the plant born from the soul of the suicide ('ciascuno al prun del l'ombra sua molesta').
Lines 46-49 are also rich with allusions to Canto XIII, and have the same harsh and realistic style as Dante’s lines:

pesta le muffe tristi, i secchi sterpi,
schiantane i nodi, lacerai grovigli,
ma ferisciti, sanguina anche tu,
piangi con noi, oscurati nel folto.

It is a language that has little of the fluidity and melody of the Italian lyrical tradition. While the onomatopoeic terms, the piling up of consonants and the harsh sounds convey a sense of the strangeness of the impenetrable forest, the idea of trunk and gnarled branches, together with the idea of crushing, lacerating and mutilating re-echo the sound and semantic figures of Inf. XIII.

4-7:

Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;
non rami schietti, ma nodosi e’nvolti;
non pomi v’eran, ma stecchi con tósco.
Non han si aspri sterpi né si folti,

Luzi’s ‘secchi sterpi’ recalls Inf. XIII. 37 (‘Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi’) and Inf. XIII. 7 (‘non han si aspri sterpi né si folti’). We may also note that again in Inf. XIII. 7, apart from the ‘sterpi’, we find the adjective ‘folti’, which Luzi might have remembered a few lines further on when he uses the noun ‘folto’ (line 48); in line 47 the noun ‘nodi’ recalls the image of the boughs ‘nodosi e’nvolti’ in Inf. XIII. 5, while ‘schiantane’ is the same verb, although used in an interrogative and not imperative form, as in Inf. XIII. 33: ‘e’l tronco suo gridò: “Perché mi schianti?”’.

A reference to the cry of suffering of the plant-soul just quoted (Inf. XIII. 33) and in general to Canto XIII of the Inferno, may be found also in line 12 of the lyric ‘Nell’imminenza dei quarant’anni’ (1954), included in Onore del vero: ‘L’albero di dolore scuote i rami’. We shall, however, note that, although the poet’s idea of associating plants and trees with the human person
clearly has its roots in Canto XIII of the *Inferno*, Montale’s *dantismo* of a few decades before probably acted as a filter.\textsuperscript{21} The two kinds of *dantismo* have, however, a different hermeneutic function, which shows how the memories of the two poets read and reemployed the ancient word in different ways. In the lyric ‘Tramontana’ (1922), for example, the plant with which Montale mythically identifies himself has nothing infernal about it; its boughs are laden with ‘potenziali’ flowers, which Pier delle Vigne could never have, and which in themselves would be enough to affirm a positive desire for life. Faced by the ‘male di vivere’ which is recognised and so memorably portrayed, Montale does not choose suicide as a solution, but neither does he choose the possibility of hope of purgatory. If anything he contemplates ‘divina indifferenza’,\textsuperscript{22} and opts for Arsenio’s ‘delirio d’immobilità’.\textsuperscript{23}

The transposition into a changed poetic context is clear in Luzi’s lyric too. However, as opposed to Montale, the frequent references to the wood of the suicides are set in a purgatory rather than in a modern limbo. If in Montale the flowers are ‘potenziali’, in Luzi’s poem ‘insospettato lo spazio fiorisce’ (line 41) even if the flowers which blossom are ‘fioriture di lacrime’ (line 36). It seems, therefore, to involve a journey holding out the hope that suffering is a ‘mezzo’ and not a definitive state like Hell, or even a ‘fine’ as in the Petrarchan limbo (see II., pp. 16-25). This hope of a link between evil

\textsuperscript{21} A clear allusion to Canto XIII is to be found in some of the poems of *Ossi di seppia* (1920-27), the most important being the oldest, ‘Meriggiaire pallido e assorto’ (1916), in which ‘sterpi: serpi’ repeats *Inf.* XIII. 37-39, while ‘pruno’ is drawn from *Inf.* XIII. 32. The theme is taken up explicitly in ‘Tramontana’ (1922), where the limbo-like paralysis of the beginning is swept away by the destructive storm that ‘tutto schianta’, raising in the air ‘un muglio / di scerpate esistenze’ (the verbs ‘schiantare’ and ‘scerpare’ clearly come from the cry of Pier delle Vigne: ‘[…] Perché mi schiante? // […] Perché mi scerpì?’, *Inf.* XIII. 33, 35). The conclusion of the lyric helps to reinforce the plant-man metaphor, with the poetic self depicted as a plant struggling against the ‘venti disfrenati’, pressing to itself ‘i bracci gonfi / di fiori non ancora nati’ and, threatened by the ‘spiriti che la convulsa terra / sorvolano a sciami’, desperately loves ‘le [sue] radici’. The plant metaphor returns, even if less explicitly, in ‘Arsenio’ (1927) and ‘Incontro’ (1926). In ‘Personae separatae’ (1942), which belongs to ‘La bufera e altro’ (1940-54), the image of the tormented ‘bosco umano’ is very eloquent.

\textsuperscript{22} E. Montale, ‘Spesso il male di vivere ho incontrato’, in *Ossi di seppia*, line 6.

\textsuperscript{23} Id., ‘Arsenio’, in *Ossi di seppia*, line 23.
and its redemption finds significant expression in the lines ‘dove la fumida palude e il giunco / strettamente congiunti il muro e l'ombra’ (lines 72-73).

The image of the rush evokes the end of the first Canto of *Purgatorio* when Virgil washes all trace of hell from Dante’s face and ritually girdles him with a rush that he has plucked from the ocean shore. We find this image again in Montale, in the plant metaphor in *Arsenio*, where, however, the Dantean allusion has undergone a *variatio*: the poet identifies himself with the rush and denies it that physical resurrection that in the Dante passage followed on Virgil’s plucking it. While the humble plant in Dante reappears ‘subitamente là onde l’avelse’, Arsenio’s human rush remains unplucked with its roots ‘non mai / svelte’ (lines 48-49), trembles with life and reaches out in a ‘vuoto risonante di lamenti / soffocati’ (lines 50-51).

It is even more likely, however, that the opposition between Luzi’s ‘la fumida palude’ and the ‘giunco’ harks back to Dante through the mediation of the ‘paludoso giuncheto’ from another Montale lyric, ‘L’Arno a Rovezzano’. Here again we find an antithesis, and the Dantean loans are more explicit: ‘Solo l’ansa esitante di qualche paludoso / giuncheto, qualche specchio / che riluce tra folte sterpaglie e boraccina / può svelare [...]’.

While in Montale infernal negativity prevails and there is no possibility of hope (the characteristic of the rivers that flow through the ‘paludoso giuncheto’ is a ‘nullità inesorabile’), in Luzi the antithesis is one of death and rebirth, ‘perdita e inizio’ (line 102), ‘cenere e seme’ (line 103), in an atmosphere in which, as in the first Canto of *Purgatorio*, there reigns ‘l’ansia di giungere alla cima’ (line 50), and ‘tra grigie fioriture un monte’ can be discerned (line 51), ‘i giorni rinascono dai giorni’ (line 101) and ‘la notte / s’è aperta verso la speranza’ (lines 118-119).

So the invocation in the lyric of a celestial figure to share the sufferings of man becomes a central moment: on the one hand the poet begs the figure to descend and remain ‘[...] prigioniera / nella sfera angosciosa di Parmenide / immota sotto gli occhi della moira’ (lines 80-82), while on the other he begs it to break this circle, to give voice to the suffering that holds man in thrall.
Luzi feels suffocated by the Petrarchan or Parmenidean limbo, ‘il recinto di febbre dove il nascere / è spento e del perire non è traccia!’ (lines 83-84), and yearns for ‘a un nuovo contatto con il divino’ (CMS, p. 126), a new coincidence of opposites that will show, in faithful accord with the world and its laws, the possibility of a continuity between the immutable being of Parmenides and Heraclitean becoming (CMS, p. 71). The poet, if he was once tempted by the Platonic illusion of escaping from the world, now senses that without lacerating contact with the world itself it is impossible to bridge the gap between being and existing, and realises that the only help that can come to him is from the reality outside the circle, from a figure at the same time divine and human to whom he addresses the invocation: ‘Vieni, interpreta l’anima sconfitta / tra questo essere e questo non esistere, / vieni, libera il nostro grido, spazia, / ma ferisciti, sanguina anche tu’ (lines 107-110).

A metaphor of movement and transformation that enters the stasis of Parmenidean Being or the Petrarchan limbo is the wind, a central image in Luzi’s poetry and especially in Onore del vero. Without wishing to detract in any way from the literal sense and reading this figure according to the other meanings proposed by the medieval Dantean exegetical method, the wind as an allegory may be seen as the inexorable force that drives existence and makes possible the event – the event constitutive of reality itself in its continual mutations (‘passava il vento / e il trascorrere in se medesimo / dell’universale evento’, O, p. 778) - while according to the anagogical sense it is the infernal ‘bufera eterna’ (O, p. 223) or the purgatorial ‘vento di quaresima’ (O, p. 198) which, even though interpretable in an eschatological sense, are found in life itself. But the words that best explain all the senses in which the figure of the wind should be read come from Valéry. They were for Luzi the cry with which twentieth-century poetry, after the failure of Mallarmé’s dream, was to be launched in search of new prospects, even precarious ones, multiple and contradictory, as long as they were ‘nella vita’ and ‘nell’umano’ (see Is, pp. 23-24).
Returning to the textual comparison, it must be noted how in one of the last lyrics in *Primizie del deserto*, ‘Nella casa di N. Compagna d’infanzia’ (1950), line 7 ‘l’incalza, la rapisce nella briga’ is particularly allusive to the wind in Cantos V and XIII of the *Inferno*: ‘briga’ is a noun that is found in Par. VIII. 67-69 (‘E la bella Trinacria, che caliga / tra Pachino e Peloro, sopra’l golfo / che riceve da Euro maggior briga’), but above all in Inf. V. 48-49 (‘così vidi venir, traendo guai, // ombre portate da la detta briga’). In the first passage from Dante just quoted, the term ‘briga’ meant ‘travaglio’, in this second one it means, in a more limited and concrete sense, ‘tempesta’ and is therefore ‘la bufera infernal, che mai non resta’ mentioned earlier in the Canto (Inf. V. 31). Luzi seems to be reusing this last meaning and therefore implicitly to be referring to Inf. V. 31. The passage from Inf. V. 31-33 (‘la bufera infernal, che mai non resta, / mena li spirti con la sua rapina; / voltando e percotendo li molesta’) seems to have aroused other memories in line 7: ‘incalza’ and ‘rapisce’ might refer to the Dantean ‘mena’ and ‘rapina’. The wind, apart from being set in a context similar to that of the ‘bufera infernal’ of Inferno V, is also a wind that ‘lacera a brano a brano i nastri’ (line 4), thus recalling Dante’s brutal expression in Inf. VII. 114 (‘troncandosi co’ denti a brano a brano’) and in Inf. XIII. 128, where the very periphrasis is found joined to a compound of the verb ‘lacerare’ and therefore in a similar phrase: ‘e quel dilacerarò a brano a brano’. However, the fact that it is a ‘vento di quaresima’ gives this poem on the whole a purgatorial rather than an infernal meaning.

It is most of all in the Onore del vero collection that the figure of Dante’s wind becomes dominant. In the lyric ‘Uccelli’ the wind is a harsh voice that warns (‘il vento è un’aspra voce che ammonisce’, line 1) and recalls the impetuousness of the voice-wind in Inf. XIII. 91-92 (‘Allor soffio il tronco forte, e poi / si converti quel vento in cotal voce’). In ‘Il vivo, e il morto’ ‘la corrente leggera e turbinosa / che ti spinse ci porta via di nuovo’ (lines 10-11)

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24 Luzi may have remembered the word ‘rapina’ from Inf. V. 32 also in line 12 of ‘Villaggio’ (1949): ‘trascorre una rapina rossa e livida’.
alludes to another Canto dear to Luzi, Canto V of the *Inferno*, and in particular to lines 31-33 already referred to above (‘La bufera infernal, che mai non resta, / mena li spirti con la sua rapina: / voltando e percotendo li molesta’), line 75 (‘e paion sì al vento esser leggieri’), and line 79 (‘Si tosto come il vento a noi li piega’). In a network of reminiscences, Luzi’s ‘corrente’ echoes Dante’s ‘bufera infernal’, the two adjectives ‘leggera e turbinosa’ recall respectively the ‘leggeri’ of *Inf*. V. 75 and the ‘voltando e percotendo’ of *Inf*. V. 33, while ‘spinse e porta via’ of line 11 is reminiscent of the ‘mena’ of *Inf*. V. 32 and of the ‘piega’ of *Inf*. V. 79. That Luzi’s ‘vento’ alludes to the wind of *Inf*. V. 79 is even more evident in the lyric ‘In un punto’:

\[
\text{In un punto del vento,} \\
\text{in un punto della bufera eterna (lines 16-17)}
\]

where ‘bufera eterna’ corresponds to the ‘bufera infernal che mai non resta’ of *Inf*. V. 31 and makes the allusiveness of the whole passage to Canto V of the *Inferno* clear. As Crivelli has noted, in the lines just quoted a shift is created from the physical to the metaphysical, an observation that confirms the anagogic sense already pointed out.

If the wind is a metaphor for the transitory and mutable, the image of the millstone, the weight to be carried, the fire, the night that clears (‘lava’) the mind, are also metaphors of movement but in the specific sense of purification and expiation.

In ‘Pur che’ (1948), one of the first lyrics of *Primizie del deserto*, Luzi, in a manner that already preludes to the dialogic approach of *Nel magma*, addresses a soul with the words ‘ombra che sei tritata a questa mola’ (line 2). The term ‘mola’ is used by Dante in the specific sense of ‘millstone’ and in the more generic sense of ‘wheel’. In this line Luzi seems to have in his mind *Par*. XXI. 81 where ‘mola’ means ‘millstone’ (‘girando sé come veloce

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mola'). Note also that ‘tritata’ is a verb used by Dante in Par. XIII. 34 ('Quando l’una paglia è trita'): in the case of Luzi’s poem it is the shadow that in the process of expiation is ground by the millstone, in the case of Dante it is grains of wheat.

Once again the greatest number of examples can be found in Onore del vero. Taking the figure of the weight to be carried, we note that in the lyric ‘Nel mese di giugno’ (1955), lines 6-7 (‘che il corpo inciampa nel suo peso / ma si rialza sulla sua fatica’) bring to mind the soul of Oderisi da Gubbio who is bent under a great weight (‘si torse sotto il peso che li ’mpaccia’, Purg. XI. 75), where ‘impaccia’ might recall ‘inciampa’ in sound and theme. Like the figure of the weight fire is also a metaphor of transformation and purification, of that desire for change that appears in Luzi’s post-war period. In ‘Incontro’, expiation assumes paradoxically infernal connotations, and takes place ‘nella fiamma della morte perpetua’ (line 15). In ‘Las animas’ (1954), on the other hand, the figure of fire is a clear metaphor for purification:

Un fuoco così mite basta appena,  
se basta, a rischiarare finché duri  
questa vita di sottobosco. Un altro  
solo un altro potrebbe fare il resto

26 Whereas in a lyric in Su fondamenti invisibili, ‘Il gorgo di salute e malattia’, 7, line 42, Luzi seems to have remembered the second meaning. Line 42 ‘ben poco t’assomiglia la mola del mondo’ recalls Par. XII. 3 (‘a rotar cominciò la santa mola’) with ‘mola’ used with the meaning of ‘wheel’ and metaphorically indicating the circle of the Blessed moving in a ring.

27 What distinguishes Luzi’s journey from Dante’s is the fact that the poet does not have that vision of the whole that Dante had: he himself becomes an ‘ombra vana’ and with the other souls undertakes a journey which has only uncertain prospects of salvation and which at times seems more infernal than purgatorial: ‘[… Vana sono divenuta, / ombra che muta luogo nella fiamma / della morte perpetua. E tu chi sei, / una persona vera o uno spirito’ (lines 13-16). The adjective ‘vana’ referring to ‘ombra’ alludes to the similar phrase in Purg. II. 79 (‘Oi ombre vane, fuor che ne l’aspetto!’) and may also be a thematic-lexical reminiscence of Inf. VI. 34-36 (‘noi passavam su per l’ombre che adona / la greve pioggia, e ponevam le piante / sopra lor vanità che par persona’), while the opposition of ‘persona vera’ and ‘spirito’ re-echoes the just-quoted Inf. VI. 36 and Inf. I. 66 (‘qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!’).
Among the Dantine passages that return to the memory the purgatorial fire is particularly significant: the ‘foco che li affina’ of Purg. XXVI. 148, and the curtain of flames through which Dante and Virgil have to pass before reaching the earthly Paradise (Purg. XXVII. 10-11), that fire which, a few lines further on, Virgil calls ‘temporal foco’ as opposed to the eternal fire of Hell (Purg. XXVII. 127-28).

After the millstone, the weight and the fire, another metaphor of purification is the night, which appears in ‘La notte lava la mente’ (1956). However, there is a variatio in the lyric in respect to the Dantine model: while in Dante’s Purgatorio the night, as Sordello explains in Canto VII, is the period in which the process of expiation of the souls is suspended, Luzi entrusts the night with a purifying function of the mind. The purification of the mind recalls the episode in ante-Purgatory in which Virgil washes away

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28 See the passages in Purgatorio in which appears the element of fire commented by J. Le Goff, La naissance du Purgatoire (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1981; Engl. transl. by A. Goldhamer (London: Scolar Press, 1984), pp. 344-45. Fire frequently has a purifying function in Christian symbology, even if with this function it is usually coupled with water (see Matthew 3. 11-12; Luke 3. 16).

29 It is interesting to note that also in a recent poem by Luzi collected in Il Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini (1994), the night has a purifying and cathartic function. In the lyric, which is entitled ‘Dopo la prova’, the night clears and purifies of any impurity until the poet is reduced to a ‘salma spolpata’. If the night seems to be, as Gramigna notes, an experience of ‘prosciugamento del soggetto’ (the night is ‘dilavata di me’), it does not however coincide with the ‘nothing’ that cancels everything, it is ‘l’essente’ (line 15) which leaves intact the eager awaiting for repossessing ‘la rivestita carne’ (line 26). The last two lines are a clear reminiscence of Dante: ‘quando, / quando, Dante, / la rivestita carne alleludiva?’ (‘Di quel flusso di vita’, VTCS, lines 24-26) where ‘la rivestita carne’ is a quotation from Purg. XXX. 15, and the variant ‘carne’, preferred by Luzi, is found in the 1921 edition of Dante’s Comedy, only to be replaced by Petrocchi with ‘voce’ in the Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata (‘la revestita voce alleluviando’). The allusion is also to Par. XIV. 43-45: ‘Come la carne gloriosa e santa / fia rivestita, la nostra persona / più grata fia per esser tutta quanta’. Before being collected in Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini, Luzi’s poem was first published with the title ‘Dopo la prova’ in G. Gramigna, ‘Planetari piranha. Attorno a una poesia inedita di Mario Luzi’, Corriere della sera, 19 July 1992, then published in Paradiso, 4 (1993), p. 3, with the Spanish translation by Martha L. Canfield.
the soot from Hell from Dante’s face with dew (Canto I), Matelda’s immersion of Dante in the waters of Lethe (Canto XXXI), and his second immersions in the waters of the Eunoè (Canto XXXIII). When it is reactivated in Luzi’s text, however, of the three sources mentioned it is Canto XXXI, in which the river Lethe washes and frees the mind from the memory of sin, which prevails.

The first line (‘La notte lava la mente’), according to Ramat, seems to be a dream that anticipates the vision of the two triplets. His interpretation is that Luzi’s night is a place of dreams like those that Dante dreams in *Purgatorio* at the beginning of Cantos IX and XIX and in the course of XXVII. He supposes that in Luzi’s otherworld that emerges from the lyric there is an unexpressed dream, ‘catartico, preludio necessario alla visione “lavata” che scorre lungo le due terzine’[^30] but does not deny the possibility that the two triplets may themselves be a dream:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Poco dopo si è qui come sai bene,} \\
\text{fila d’anime lungo la cornice,} \\
\text{chi pronto al balzo, chi quasi in catene.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Qualcuno sulla pagina del mare} \\
\text{Traccia un segno di vita, figge un punto.} \\
\text{Raramente qualche gabbiano appare.}
\end{align*}
\]

Seeing the sense of certainty of what is being described (the firmness of ‘come sai bene’, line 2, is significant), considering that a vision is less subjective than a dream (notice the objectivity of the impersonal form ‘si è qui’, line 2), it would seem that the first hypothesis, according to which the two triplets do not represent a dream but rather a vision that takes place in the otherworld, is the most likely; Luzi’s ‘I-us’ not only describes a purgatorial otherworld but seems to be speaking from it.

There is another central figure of Luzi’s post-war poetry in this lyric: the line of souls (‘fila d’anime’). The descent into the depths of the self in Luzi’s early period makes the poet feel part of a vaster universe which is the world, and to wish, as in the exemplary Dantine journey, that his destiny may be part of that of other men. The poet’s words on this point are significant: ‘L’esperienza basilare della guerra, della messa in discussione delle sorti umane, ha fatto rinascere questo senso di prova, di prova universale. Dopo la guerra ritorna per me l’interesse per Dante, questo non significa ripudiare Petrarca, però quest’attenzione all’esperienza collettiva dell’umanità mette in primo piano tutta l’esperienza dantesca’ (CMS, p. 65).

As regards this suffering humanity with which Luzi feels that he shares a common destiny, we may recall the ‘[...] condolersi d’anime e di spoglie’ (line 1) of ‘Villaggio’ (1949) set in the ‘densità nera d’un bosco’ (line 4), recalling the atmosphere of despair and ‘guai’ of the dark and deformed wood of the suicides. But it is above all the collection Onore del vero that is populated with crowds of Dantine souls. In the lyric ‘Uccelli’ ‘una schiera’ ‘ripiglia il triste volo’ (line 4), with ‘schiera’ recalling a frequent word in various places of the Divine Comedy among which, in particular, the two passages in which it is related to bird-souls (Inf. V. 40-41 and Purg. XXIV. 64-65).

In the lyric ‘Incontro’ we assist at a file-past of a ‘tratta d’anime e di spoglie’ (line 38). Seeing that the leaves of line 34 are a metaphorical representation of the ‘tratta d’anime e di spoglie’ of line 38, it is likely that the ‘schiera’ of leaves of lines 34-35 (‘[...] turbina / qualche foglia, s’aggiunge alla sua schiera’) recalls Dante’s ‘schiera’ of souls. The expression ‘in questa tratta d’anime e di spoglie’ of line 38 evokes the crowds of ante-Hell, alluding in particular to Inf. III. 55-56: ‘e dietro le venia si lunga tratta / di gente [...]’. The word ‘tratta’ in its meaning of ‘fila’, ‘schiera’ appears only in Inf. III. 55, while it is found with the meaning of ‘distanza’ in Purg. XV. 20 and Purg. XXXI. 31. Luzi seems to have remembered the first meaning and the fact that it is a Dantine hapax charges Luzi’s word with an
even greater allusiveness. In this case the Dantean reminiscence is made explicit by the two complements ‘di anime e di spoglie’ (line 38), which correspond to ‘di gente’ (Inf. III. 56).

The collective ‘gente’ takes us to the lyric ‘Il pescatore’:

Viene gente per acqua. Gente muta
rasenta le murate delle navi alla fonda,
si riscuotono all’urto dell’attracco. (lines 1-3)

where the union of the noun ‘gente’ with the verb ‘venire’ reflects, again at the beginning of the line, Inf. XV. 118: ‘Gente vien con la quale esser non deggio’, while the verb ‘venire’, accompanied by the same complement of motion rendered as in Latin by the preposition per, is found also in Inf. VIII. 15-16: ‘com’io vidi una nave piccioletta // venir per l’acqua verso noi in quella’ (see Toppan, p. 155).

Another image of a ‘schiera’ of souls appears in the lyric ‘Sulla riva’ where ‘la brigata dispersa si raccoglie’ (line 6) is a re-elaboration of Inf. XXIX. 130 (‘e tra’ne la brigata in che disperse’), even though the context is completely different: in the first case, it is the brigade that is ‘dispersa’, in the second it is ‘Caccia d’Ascian’ that ‘disperse’ all his substance in the brigade.

Proceeding with descriptions of groups of people, it may be noted that in the lyric ‘Epifania’ lines 23-24 (‘Ci mettemmo in cammino a passo rapido // per via ci unimmo a gente strana’) seem to correspond at a thematic level to Purg. XXIII. 16-17 (‘Si come i peregrin pensosi fanno, / giungendo per cammin gente non nota’). In line 24 in Luzi and line 17 in Dante respectively, the expression ‘per via’ (with per introducing the complement of motion) is analogous with ‘per cammin’, ‘ci unimmo’ recreates ‘giungendo’ (which in the Dante passage means ‘reach’, ‘join with’), while ‘gente strana’ (with the meaning of ‘unknown’) is a phrase that is similar to ‘gente non nota’.

In ‘Casa per casa’, on the other hand, the souls ready (‘pronte’) to undertake the journey (‘il distacco dalla mia pianta d’anime // pronte al viaggio o riluttanti, ferme’, lines 9-10) hark back to Inf. III. 74 (‘le fa di
trapassar parer si pronte’) or Inf. III. 124 (‘e pronti sono a trapassar lo rio’),
even if in Luzi the determination of some souls is opposed to the immobility
and reluctance of others.

A similar attitude, at times of determination, at other times of indecision,
reappears in ‘La notte lava la mente’ (1956), the concluding title of the
volume entitled Il giusto della vita, which brings together all Luzi’s poetical
work from La barca to Onore del vero. In it appears ‘una fila d’anime lungo
la cornice, / chi pronto al balzo, chi quasi in catene’ (lines 3-4) where, apart
from the Dantean term ‘cornice’ (compare, for the context, Purg. XI. 26-29:
‘quell’ombre orando, andavan sotto il pondo, / simile a quel che tal volta si
sogna, // disparmente angosciate tutte a tondo / e lasse su per la prima
cornice’), there is the figure of a ‘gabbiano’ which refers through the ‘astore
celestiale’ of Montale’s ‘Proda di Versilia’31 to ‘li astor celestiali’ of Purg.
VIII. 104. If the epiphany of Montale’s ‘astore celestiale’ is rare (‘sempre /
più raro, astore celestiale, un cutter / bianco-alato li posa nella rena’, lines 8-
10), so is the epiphany of the ‘gabbiano’ (‘raramente qualche gabbiano
appare’), and while the ‘astore celestiale [...] posa nella rena’, the ‘gabbiano’
appears in the ‘pagina del mare’, a metaphor that suggests, according to
Ramat’s exegesis, ‘il peso di una scrittura sulle cose, del visibile come libro
che Qualcuno popola o infiora di segni non sempre percettibili’.32 The sea
cannot therefore be considered a pictorial fact, but as writing and experience,
the writing of the world that in its indecipherability allows itself sometimes to
be read by the ‘schiera’ of souls.

However, what remains central to the poem is the sense of suspension and
ambiguity that accompanies the drama of choice: the ascesis of Luzi’s souls

32 S. Ramat, ‘Purgatorio e inesistenza in due testi poetici medio-novecenteschi’, p. 155. Apart from
with Dante via the filter of Montale, the quotations from Luzi above could perhaps be compared to
some lines from ‘Pari a sé’ (1925) by Ungaretti: ‘Va la nave, sola / Nella quiete della sera. / Qualche
luce appare / Di lontano, dalle case. / Nell’estrema notte / Va in fumo a fondo il mare’ (G. Ungaretti,
Sentimento del tempo (1919-1935), in Vita d’un uomo. Tutte le poesie, 15th edn (Milan: Mondadori,
1996), p. 133). In a similar situation of darkness (‘notte’) covering the sea (‘mare’), Luzi’s ‘qualche
gabbiano appare’ is reminiscent of Ungaretti’s ‘qualche luce appare’.
is slow and takes place in long stages, but sometimes seems to return upon itself, repeating itself in its motifs and situations, not finding any final release from suffering and continuing to see side by side with the person who is ‘pronto al balzo’ the person who is still ‘quasi in catene’. In this ‘quasi’ is the fundamental difference between Dante’s and Luzi’s limbo: the Dantean souls that ‘sanza speme’ live ‘in disio’ (Inf. IV. 42) become in Luzi’s poem ‘i quasi in catene’, the ‘quasi’ indicating that limbo is neither inscrutable divine justice nor an absolute ‘male di vivere’, but an option. Over and against this option, which in other poems is called reluctance, is opposed the possibility of the ‘balzo’ into hell or into the ‘mare dell’essere’.

All this can become an interesting key to a reading of Luzi and shows how, apart from the single elements, phrases or stylistic cadences, we must keep open the wider problem which is the dialogue between the two texts in their entirety and in their cognitive function. The relationship between the two texts has not become a relationship of mutual exclusion but a dialogue between the diversity of cultural contexts and the perception of reality which remains for each alike a point of departure. What has happened is what Bachtin wrote in one of his rare references to poetry: ‘Anche la parola poetica in senso stretto deve farsi strada verso il proprio oggetto attraverso la parola altrui che lo avvolge’.

The primary object of the poetry examined has been the desert of modern multiplicity and fragmentation, the desolation and deformation of reality often described against the nightmarish backcloth of the wood of the suicides, in the still suspension of limbo, in the movement of a wind which is metamorphosis and metanoia, in the purgatorial waiting and expiation. We may conclude by saying that Luzi’s poetry explores the human predicament in terms of two different and contradictory paths, where freedom is to be found in a continual balance between the paralysing inaction of Limbo and the hazardous leap into the hell or purgatory of the real.

4.3. *The Comedy Universe of* Dal Fondo delle campagne

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The collection *Dal fondo delle campagne* (1956-1961) marks the beginning of that period in which is registered ‘il passaggio o lo scarto da universo lirico a universo poematico o commediiale’.\(^{34}\) This new book, published by Einaudi in 1965, represents a moment of transition from *Onore del vero* to *Nel magma*. The word seeks to find different linguistic modes to indicate the real, and the poetic line opens out to include dialogue and narrative; with this more ample use of dialogical and narrative techniques we move beyond the world of *Il giusto della vita* and enter that of *Nell'opera del mondo*, the title of the volume that begins with *Dal fondo delle campagne* and ends with *Al fuoco della controversia* (1977). The criterion behind the grouping of the lyrics is ‘la “questione” tra morte e vita’:\(^{35}\) and not by chance one section is entitled ‘Questione di vita e di morte’ (another ‘Morte cristiana’, another ‘Quanta vita’), and it is significant that a variation on the common saying ‘questione di vita o di morte’, with the disjunctive-dualistic conjunction ‘o’ replaced by the copulative-relational ‘e’, has been chosen.\(^{36}\) It is a theme that in those years Luzi, if only because of the death of his mother in 1959, felt particularly strongly, with the awareness of finding himself ‘a una discriminante dei tempi, a un salto della civiltà prodigo di lacerazioni’ (O, p. 262). However, he never pauses to describe the moment of transition and its ritual manifestations. Even when in a lyric of 1942 he had imagined the death of his mother before her actual death, he had seen her appear with her usual appearance and at the same time new (‘Forse, infinato il mistero, nel chiarore / del mio ricordo un’ombra apparirai, / un nonnulla vestito di dolore. / Tu, non diversa, tu come non mai’, ‘Alla madre’, lines 1-4).\(^{37}\) After her real death

\(^{34}\) S. Ramat, ‘Purgatorio e inesistenza di due testi poetici medionovecenteschi’, p. 150.


\(^{36}\) See J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Engl. transl. by F. Hopman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1924), p. 7: ‘in history, as in nature, birth and death are equally balanced’. Compare also the lines that open and close ‘East Coker’: ‘In my beginning is my end’, ‘In my end is my beginning’.

\(^{37}\) Perhaps these lines of Luzi’s re-appear, but transformed, in a sonnet written by Parronchi to his mother in October, 1943: ‘Nella luce in cui sempre apparirai / oggi, mamma, mi appari, alla venuta /
he represents her, in *Dal fondo delle campagne*, as weeping and smiling, more alive and real than before: ‘Mia madre, mia eterna margarita / che piangi e mi sorridi / viva ora più di prima [...]’ (*Siesta*, lines 24-26). In these lines the borrowing from *Par.* II. 34 is evident, although the twentieth-century context has changed: in the Dante passage ‘l’eterna margherita’ is the precious and incorruptible gem of the heaven of the Moon which welcomes Dante to her breast with all her bodily nature (thus violating the physical law of the impenetrability of bodies), in Luzi’s line it is a way of invoking the mother by calling her by her name and surrounding her with a dazzling light with the paradisiacal formula and Latin-type archaism of ‘gemma’ for ‘perla’.

At the opening of *Dal fondo delle campagne*, in the first section of ‘Le petit montagnard’, Luzi recovers the symbolic value, already noted in *Primizie del deserto* and *Onore del vero*, of the Purgatorial ascent labouring under the weight of expiation: a woman ‘lenta s’avvia’ in a state ‘tra la fatica e la quiete’ and ‘sale quanto è erta la pendice’ up the mountain (lines 1, 3, 4). The river has the grey and flat colour of ‘una petraia’ as in the second cornice described in Canto XIII of *Purgatorio*: the fact that ‘petraia’ is a Dantean *hapax* makes line 12 (‘se fiume è una petraia [...]’) - even though Dante is speaking, not of a cornice, but of a river – alluding to *Purg.* XIII. 9 (‘col livido color de la petraia’) and there is probably the mediation of Montale’s ‘torrente’, ‘vivo di pietre e di calcine’ (*Incontro*, *Ossi di seppia*, lines 10-11). We also find an echo of Dante’s ‘livido color de la petraia’ in ‘Il duro filamento’ where the adjective ‘livida’ takes on the status of an allusion to Dante placed as it is next to ‘pietre’: ‘[…] la città / livida nelle sue pietre […]’ (lines 19-20).

Infernal and purgatorial shades alternate in ‘Il soldato’. On the one hand, ‘lo sbandato’, like one of the Dantine damned, rejoins his ‘pattuglia’, the

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38 The figure of the ascent also returns in ‘A mezza costa’: ‘Dapprima si sale lentamente’ (line 1).
via' seems to have been lost ('scompare', 'appare', 'si perde'), the 'bosco' becoming 'da verde quasi nero' recalls the 'selva oscura', and 'lo stare all'erta dei guardiani' puts fear into the pilgrim Luzi. On the other hand, the environment takes on the appearance of 'giro su giro lungo la montagna aggrondata', the 'lunga marcia' is characterised by a suffering that draws everybody together, 'chi più chi meno', and above all there seems to be some hope of getting out of the infernal wood. Firm in his belief that suffering is a 'prova atroce', but after all a test, a means and not an end, the author concludes: 'Ma fui certo che il bosco / non è senza via d'uscita. / Di più non era opera mia soltanto' (lines 42-44).

The figure of the purifying fire, already analysed in the post-war collections, re-appears however in 'Fumo':

[...] Ma se voi dovete
perire e sopravvivere
per mediazione del fuoco,
non è questa caligine
di frasche macerate
ed arse che può pascervi, è una vampa
di trasparenza accesa in altre vite.
Lotto, fo che la mia pena non ne sia indegna. (lines 28-35)

where the 'vampa / di trasparenza' recalls the flames that purify the two companies of the lustful, from which emerge the cleansed souls of Purg. XXVI. 148 ('Poi s'ascose nel foco che li affina'), while 'caligine' (line 31) is a term that appears also in Purg. XI. 30 ('purgando la caligine del mondo') with, however, the allegorical meaning of sin. The union of the noun 'fumo' with the verb 'aduggia' confers a Dantean tone on the first lines of the lyric. It is useful to compare lines 1, 5-7 ('Il fumo [...] / [...] aduggia i pochi palmi / di terra da lavoro / strappati alla montagna') with Inf. XV. 2 ('e 'l fumo del ruscel di sopra aduggia'), but also with Purg. XX. 44 where only the verb 'aduggia' appears ('che la terra cristiana tutta aduggia'). The meaning of 'aduggiare' is basically positive in Inf. XV. 2, with the vapour coming off the
stream forming an airy curtain ‘proteggendo’ the bank from the falling flames, but negative in *Purg. XX. 44* where the spirit declares that it is the head of that evil line, his progeny the successive representative of which do harm (‘nuoce’) to all Christianity. From the context we see that Luzi is restating and reinforcing the negative meaning of ‘fare ombra nuocendo’.

Another typical figure from Dante’s *Purgatorio* and common in Luzi’s poetic works, above all starting from *Primizie del deserto*, is that of crowds of souls called in ‘Apì ‘anime in pena’ (line 29), ‘apì’ (line 30) that ‘vagano, / tengono viva la boscaglia’ (lines 31-32), a ‘popolo’ (line 33).\(^{39}\) Instead in ‘Prima notte di primavera’ the motif suggests generations of men who ‘premono, fanno tutte ressa [...]’ (line 10), with probable reference to the company of the negligent who died a violent death and who crowd around Dante and Virgil in *Purg. V. 43* (‘Questa gente che preme a noi è molta’). For the image of the bridge crowded with ‘generazioni’ we may propose a reminiscence of Dante through the mediation of Eliot: ‘A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many’ (*The Waste Land* I. 62-63). Instead, the coupling of the verbs ‘geme’ and ‘cigola’ in lines 10-11 (‘[...] E geme / e cigola da pila a pila il ponte’) is the same in *Inf. XIII. 41-42* (‘[...]da l’altro geme / e cigola per vento che va via’), even if the situation is different; the Dante lines refer to a glowing ember that drips moisture and hisses as the water changes to steam.

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\(^{39}\) The comparison of Purgatory with a beehive was to be repeated when Luzi had to transcribe the second canticle into a theatrical work and entrust the following words to a voice off introducing the ascent on the Mount of Purgatory: ‘Non dorme, non riposa, / è un’arnia insonnie, / fervoroso bugno senza pausa / la ripida montagna. / Vi lavorano le sue apì un miele / amaro, vi distillano / un dolce assenzio / di martirio e di purificazione / convenute da ogni punto / del tempo, da ogni plica / dell’interminato spazio’ (lines 1-11). See M. Luzi, *Il Purgatorio. La notte lava la mente* (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1990); then in T, p. 438. Note that the oxymorons ‘miele amaro’ and ‘dolce assenzio’ (absinthe is a herb with extremely bitter leaves and flowers) express the ‘agro e dolce senso della penitenza’ that characterises the purgatorial ‘fabbrica incessante / di dolore e di letizia’ (p. 439). The rhetorical figure of the oxymoron, central to the poetic work of Luzi, lends itself better than any other to representing with a concrete image the dialectical relationship between the opposites of time and eternity, movement and stasis, which characterise that changing and often contradictory reality through which the expiating souls, before entering Paradise, have to pass in order to be purified.
The various human groups in *Dal fondo delle campagne* are joined in ‘La colonna’ by ‘uomini sotto balle ed incerati’ (line 19) who recall the multitudes of souls of Dante’s *Purgatorio*. In connection with this we may also recall the ‘morti per forza’ of ‘Caccia’ (line 17), the ‘persone nel viaggio’ in ‘Corriera’, the ‘compagni’ in ‘Traghetto’, the ‘carovana’ in ‘La valle’, the ‘compagni d’altri tempi’ in ‘Quanta vita’, the ‘gente’ in ‘Qualche luogo’, and the ‘anime / all’uscita del labirinto’ who go into the ‘bosco inquieto’ of ‘La fortezza’. In particular, the ‘morti per forza’ in ‘Caccia’ are clearly a quotation from *Purg.* V. 52 (‘Noi fummo tutti già per forza morti’), while the travellers anxious (‘smaniosi’) to arrive in ‘Corriera’ are a thematic harking back to *Inf.* III. 74 (‘le fa di trapassar parer si pronte’), although Luzi, as has been noted in some lyrics from *Onore del vero*, contrasts the souls ready and keen to arrive with those who are uncertain and undecided: ‘sediamo qui, persone nel viaggio, / smaniosi alcuni dell’arrivo, alcuni / volti tutti all’indietro, chi sospeso’ (lines 17-19). In the lyric ‘Il traghetto’ the crowd of people is seen on the bank waiting for their turn to be ferried across the river. The image of the ferry, which is an autobiographical memory of people who have emigrated from the Maremma mountains towards more happy lands (‘Il traghetto era presente sull’Ombrone e sulla Fiora: quando uno se ne andava dal paese metteva le cose più impegnative su questi barconi. Mi dava la suggestione di un’immagine di avventura e quasi di esilio’), takes its place in a continuum of meaning which has not only a historical and literal sense but also an analogical one. According to this level of interpretation, the souls are waiting to be ferried across to the ultra-terrestrial realm that has been set apart for them, a motif (‘Straducole più basse dell’argine / portano gente qui all’attracco [...]’, ‘Il Traghetto’, lines 1-2) that is reminiscent of the ‘gente’ crowding on the bank in *Inf.* III. 71 (‘vidi gente a la riva d’un gran fiume’). The eschatological meaning of the lyric furthermore suggests a comparison between the ‘traghetto’ and Charon’s ship (*Inf.* III. 82-84, ‘Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave / un vecchio bianco per antico pelo, / gridando [...]’ or the

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vessel of the 'celestial nocchiero', the ferryman of Purgatory (\textit{Purg.} II. 40-43, ‘[...] e quei sen venne a riva / con un vasello snelletto e leggiero, [...] Da poppa stava il celestial nocchiero’):

\begin{verbatim}
[...] Sono gente insonnolita,  
muta, lasciano i borghi di montagna.  
E più d’uno col suo bagaglio al piede  
guarda gli uomini del traghetto, osserva  
chi dei due scioglie il canapo, chi è l’altro  
che punta il Palo sulla proda e sfila  
la barca dal riparo, prende il fiume.  
Aspettano ciascuno il proprio turno.  
Vanno, trovano sull'opposta riva  
ad attenderli i già vecchi del posto,  
i già stanziati nei mestieri, certi  
nelle case. Sono ospiti un giorno,  
proseguono per luoghi più lontani. (lines 10-22)
\end{verbatim}

The crowd waiting to be ferried across in line 17 seems to be a thematic re-elaboration of \textit{Inf.} III. 124, ‘e pronti sono a trapassar lo rio’. Line 18 on the other hand recalls \textit{Inf.} III. 118-120, ‘Così sen vanno su per l’onda bruna / e avanti che sien di là discese, / anche di qua nuova schiera s’auna’. If in every Dantean Canto there usually emerge from the groups of souls one or two characters who converse with Dante and Virgil, the people, ‘insonnolita’ in Luzi’s lines remain fundamentally ‘muta’ and seen from afar. It is not until the collection \textit{Nel magma} that some of the faces in the otherwise anonymous human groups come into focus and become real characters, talking among themselves or with the poet. In this poem, however, the lyric ‘I’ that is following the ‘carovana’ and whose destiny is as uncertain as that of all the others emerges from the crowd. As opposed to the character-author of the \textit{Comedy}, the poetic ‘I’ of Luzi is only a character, and like the others he does not know how the journey will end:

\begin{verbatim}
M’accordo a quella carovana. Poco  
o quasi nulla, quanto dura il tempo
\end{verbatim}
The poem ends with a morning that unfolds ‘tra un tempo che si sfalda e uno che nasce’, thus making explicit the collection’s central theme, which turns on the relationship between life and death, beginning and end, time and eternity.

The theme of the relationship between these two opposite poles is a ground bass of the collection and is further developed in ‘Il duro filamento’ where Luzi speaks in Dantean terms of a ‘vivente comunione / di tempo e eternità’ (lines. 37-38), a possible antidote to the Petrarchan ‘duro filamento d’elegia’ (lines 39). Not surprisingly, one of the features of Dante’s poetry highlighted by Luzi on the occasion of the seventh centenary of Dante’s birth is that it cannot be reduced to the historical age to which the medieval poet after all belonged and of which he is one of the most central voices, but what it does is ‘connettere il frangente con l’eterno’: Dante sets his story where time no longer exists and ‘le fa respirare un tempo tellurico e universale’ (VF, p. 46), a time that is connected to the ‘terra’ (tellus) and which at the same time contains in itself a link with eternity. In order not to create that blurred effect which standing too close to something brings about, making the background disappear, Dante starts from temporal circumstances and at the same time does not let himself be imprisoned by them.41 Whereas in Petrarch’s Canzoniere, according to Luzi, a ‘metafisica del tempo’ is delineated, in which the poet seeks a ‘vittoria’ over time itself by leading his work ‘preliminarmente al sicuro, nell’intemporale’,42 thus detaching the details ‘dalla miccia delle occasioni brucianti’.43 Furthermore, considering memory as the present of the past, Petrarch takes the Augustinian premises to

41 In connection with this, Steiner has observed that ‘all good art and literature begin in immanence. But they do not stop there’: in other words ‘it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between man and “the other”’ (p. 227).


their extreme consequences, ending up, however, by eliminating the present itself: the world of corruptible phenomena becomes a world of essences, made incorruptible by memory and, through the unifying power of memory, the multiplicity of phenomena is abolished in an innerness that refracts as if it were a room full of mirrors (‘Solo d’un lauro tal selva verdeggia’). In reality, as opposed to the Dantean memory which is historical and cognitive at the same time, having, that is, an exegetic responsibility for finding a relationship between present and past by becoming an action of the *hic et nunc*, the Petrarchan memory implies oblivion of the present which ‘non è né qui né ora ma piuttosto dovunque e sempre che può significare anche in nessun luogo e mai se non nello spazio e nella durata tutte particolari dell’arte’ (DN, p. 104). Laura herself who is within the vicissitudes of time can save herself ‘solo nella presunta eternità della forma, in cui anche ciò che è caduco può permanere’.  

In this sense ‘la vivente comunione / di tempo e eternità’, which probably also alludes to Eliot’s problem of grasping ‘the point of intersection of the timeless / with time [...]’ (‘The Dry Salvages’ V. 18-19), turns out to be an antidote to Petrarchan memory, which is isolated in the closed and circular time of form, in the melancholy time of elegy. And it would be superfluous to underline how this communion between ‘vivi e morti’ in the poem (‘la parola all’unisono’, line 36) is the key to that poetics in which nostalgia for the past has its place, but is transitory (‘non ti soffermare troppo a lungo’):

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[...] Solo
la parola all’unisono di vivi
e morti, la vivente comunione
di tempo e eternità vale a recidere
il duro filamento d’elegia.
È arduo. Tutto l’altro è troppo ottuso.
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44 Id., ‘Conversazioni. Mario Luzi con Roberto Mussapi’, *Panta*, 15 (1997), p. 312. On this occasion the author points out that in Dante there is no attempt to halt events by isolating them from movement: there is a continual experience that can lead to salvation but not even Beatrice can assure him final salvation that will exonerate him from continuing responsibility in the present.
What characterises historical time for Luzi is the fact that the opposition between desire and regret, as was already to be found in *Quaderno gotico*, does not exist: ‘Desiderio o rimpianto? Desiderio / e rimpianto, una sola febbre amara’ (III. 7-8). In that lyric too the disjunctive conjunction ‘or’ had been replaced by the copulative ‘e’, because regret is not absolute and can coexist, even if dramatically as with a single ‘febbre amara’, with desire and hope. This is probably the reason for Luzi’s special feeling for the second canticle of the *Comedy*. *The Purgatorio* is the only realm in which time is experienced under the twofold aspect of nostalgia (time as remembrance of the world) and of yearning (time as anticipation of eternity).


46 According to Alfredo Luzi, in these two lines of Luzi’s we are aware of ‘un vago ricordo, nell’oscillare delle sensazioni, di certi motivi stilnovistici nella canzone, della *Vita Nova*, “Tutti li miei penser”’ (A. Luzi, *La vicissitudine sospesa*, p. 105).

47 The distance that separates Dante’s desire or hope and Petrarch’s regret can be explained by distinguishing the ‘desiderio “piramidale”’ of Dante from the ‘desiderio “labirintico”’ of Petrarch. The first consists in bringing all desires to a head (‘Però che vedere si può che l’uno desiderabile sta dinanzi a l’altro a li occhi de la nostra anima per modo quasi piramidale, che il minimo li cuopre prima di tutti ed è quasi punta de l’ultimo desiderabile, che è Dio, quasi base di tutti’, *Conv.* IV. xii. 17) and admits the possibility of attaining to the object of desire. The second expresses a long search for a way out that cannot be found (‘un lungo error in cieco labirinto’, as we can read in the *Canzoniere*). See A. Noferi, ‘Dante: la parola dell’Altro e l’altro dalla parola’, in *Il gioco delle tracce* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979), p. 21.

48 In the theatrical reworking of the second canticle of Dante’s poem, performed in 1990 at the Fabbricone in Prato as part of a project by the director Federico Tiezzi, the author singles out time as ‘il fermento primo’ that moves the many souls in *Purgatorio*, the ‘filo che unisce pena, pazienza e attesa’. See Luzi, ‘Notizia’, in *T*, p. 492. It is also significant that at the beginning of the play a group of souls that have just come on stage ask: ‘Esiste il tempo?’ and that a voice offstage replies gravely: ‘Sì, ed esiste il travaglio’ (T, p. 419). This is then repeated throughout the whole scene as a *leit-motif*, in an almost liturgical way. On the relationship between liturgy and history in the second canticle of the *Comedy*, see E. Raimondi, ‘Rito e storia nel 1 canto del “Purgatorio”’, in *I sentieri del lettore*, I, 73-104.
A recurrent Canto in the collections of poems of the post-war period and also in *Dal fondo delle campagne* is the fifth of the *Inferno*. In the lyric ‘Caccia’, for instance, the word ‘rapina’ (line 21), in itself widely ascribable to the literary tradition as well as the common language, owing to its being connected syntactically with ‘vento’ (‘[..] il vento / di vita e tutt’uno di rapina’, lines 20-21) sends us to *Inf.* V. 32 where the wind of the infernal gale ‘mena li spiri con la sua rapina’ (compare this Dantean line also to line 21 of ‘La valle’ where the trees, creepers and leaves are ‘prossimi alla rapina che li aspetta’). The figure of flight with ‘ali ferme’ or ‘tese’ also seems to have been suggested by the fifth Canto of the *Inferno*. In particular in ‘Spari’, lines 15-16 (‘mentre il volo ad ali ferme del nibbio / si tiene alto’) could allude to *Inf.* V. 83 (‘con l’ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido’). But if in this case the Dantean binomial pair of the ‘ali alzate e ferme’ is preserved and is thus easily recognisable, in other lyrics it is synthesised as ‘ali tese’. In this connection compare the Dantean line quoted above with line 2 of ‘La colonna’ (‘Si divincola e ronza ad ali tese’) and line 2 of ‘Di notte, un paese’ (‘che se ne stacca ad ali tese e stride’). In line 4 of ‘Quanta vita’, where the birds ‘[..] tracciano una scia di piume e strida [..]’, we hear an echo of *Inf.* V. 35: ‘quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento’. Lines 12-16 are also reminiscent of Dante:

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incrocio in queste vite di banche
senza un cenno d’intesa
compagni d’altri tempi
trascinati da un vento oscuro tra le porte vigilate
e li vedo ansiosi, simili a uccelli ritardatari
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where Luzi alludes to *Inf.* V. 79 (‘Si tosto come il vento a noi li piega’) and above all to the birds that are dragged along by the wings in the ‘freddo tempo’ in the same way as the souls are swept along by the wind of the infernal gale (*Inf.* V. 40-43: ‘E come li stornei ne portan l’ali / nel freddo tempo a schiera larga e piena, / cosi quel fiato li spiriti mali: // di qua, di là, di giù, di su li mena’).
Among the rarer allusions to the *Paradiso* (which will become increasingly frequent towards the end of the poet's career) we may recall, apart from the already quoted 'eterna margarita', line 33 of 'La colonna' ('anima e corpo questa plenitudine'), which may have recovered the Dantean *hapax* 'plenitudine', found only, and then only as a variant, in *Par.* XXXI. 20 ('di tanta plenitudine volante'). Of the two variants that are found in the manuscripts, 'plenitudine' is, in respect to 'moltitudine' chosen by Petrocchi, a *lectio facilior* and is the variant preferred in the edition of the *Comedy* edited by Casini-Barbi and used by Luzi.

We may at this point conclude by observing that in general the Dantean Cantos that are found most often in *Dal fondo delle campagne* are those of the *Purgatorio* (especially ante-Purgatory with its characters moving slowly; *Purg.* II with the 'celestial nocchiero' who reaches the bank with 'un vasello snelletto e leggero'; *Purg.* V with the image of 'questa gente che preme a noi è molta'; but also *Purg.* XI, XIII, XX, XXVI, the latter with a figure of the 'foco che li affina'). Although the purgatorial atmosphere is prevalent, allusions to the *Inferno* are also frequent, more than might have been expected on a first reading (in particular *Inf.* I with the image of the 'selva oscura'; *Inf.* III with the ferryman Charon and the 'gente qui all’attracco', who then become 'gente a la riva d’un gran fiume' and those that 'pronti sono a trapassar lo rio'; *Inf.* V with the 'bufera eterna' that 'mena li spiriti con la sua rapina' and the flight of birds driven along by the cold wind, among 'le strida, il compianto, il lamento').
PART TWO

ELIOT AND THE END OF HERMETICISM

The history of European literature will not show that any has been independent of the others; rather that there has been a constant give and take, and that each has in turn, from time to time, been revitalized by stimulation from outside. A general autarky in culture simply will not work: the hope of perpetuating the culture of any country lies in communication with others.

5.

ELIOT, HERMETICISM AND BEYOND: A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL INQUIRY

In tanta disperazione, quanta ne ha conosciuta l'Europa tra le due guerre, in tanto scetticismo corrosivo, quanto ne aveva lasciato il crollo delle filosofie idealistiche e positive, è sorprendente corne questo intruso guardi con occhio fermo i frantumi sparsi di una cultura che fu lucente e piena e intraveda la possibilità di servirsene per un'opera dello stesso carattere integrale di quelle che poggiavano su fondamenta sicure e compatte.

Luzi, *La grandezza di Eliot* (1965)

5.1. From Another Perspective

After investigating in the first four chapters the stilnovistic and Dantean reminiscences in the work of the 'third-generation' Florentines, over a period of time that goes from the thirties to the sixties, with special emphasis on the inter-discursive and intertextual relations between Luzi and Dante, I would now like to go back and read those years again, but from another perspective. The object is to verify how and up to what point Eliot helped to revive fresh interest in Dante in the Italy of the thirties and the post-war period, once again leaving a special space for Luzi and the cultural environment surrounding him. Chapter 5 will begin by looking into the slow reception of English *stilnovismo* and *dantismo* (Rossetti-Pound-Eliot) in early twentieth-century Italy, to then focus on the *new* Dante introduced by Eliot into the Florence of the thirties and forties (the analysis will, however, exclude the influence of Eliot in Great Britain and the United States). After investigating the way in which Eliot's *dantismo* was received in the years between the wars, attention will turn to the critical debate following on the appearance of his essays, poetry and theatre in the post-war years. This critical and historical analysis will be followed in Chapter 6 by an
analysis of a linguistic nature: first of all Eliotian verbal echoes and symbols will be sought in some of Mario Luzi's collections of poetry (from *Quaderno gotico* to *Dal fondo delle campagne*); secondly the possible influence of Eliot's dramatic verse will be sought in the poetry of *Nel magma* with which Luzi definitively left behind him the Platonic-Petrarchan lyricism of his Hermetic beginnings in favour of dialogic forms in which the influence of drama and the theatre was strong. Chapter 7 will contain a comparative analysis of some similarities and differences in the poetics of Luzi, Eliot and Dante.

5.2. The Italian Reception of English Stilnovismo and Dantismo in the Years Between the Two Wars

In the nineteenth century, an important role was played in the English reappraisal of the *Stil Nuovo* and Dante by Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian patriot who was a native of Vasto, and exiled to London for his part in the Carbonari riots of Naples.\(^1\) The debate over Rossetti's allegorical interpretations involved various critics, among whom Aroux,\(^2\) Perez,\(^3\) Pascoli,\(^4\) and Valli,\(^5\) who was Rossetti's

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\(^1\) For Gabriele Rossetti's translations of and annotations to the *Comedy* see: *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, with analytical comment by Gabriele Rossetti, I and II (Londra: Murray, 1826-1827). Rossetti intended to comment the entire poem in six volumes, but the work was never finished: the *Inferno* came out in two volumes in London, in 1826 and 1827 respectively; the *Purgatorio* was partially translated and commented, and remained unpublished until the commented edition by Pompeo Giannantonio, *Commento analitico al 'Purgatorio' di Dante Alighieri* (Florence: Olschki, 1967); the *Paradiso* was never started. Among the other Dante studies of Rossetti there are: *Amor platonico del Medio Evo derivato da' misteri antichi* (the work was not very well known: only 50 copies were distributed in England, 20 copies in Italy, 2 in Germany), 5 vols (London: Dalla Tipografia di Riccardo e Giovanni E. Taylor, 1840); *La Beatrice di Dante. Ragionamenti critici* (London: Privitera, 1842), new edn *La Beatrice di Dante. Ragionamenti critici*, ed. by M.L. Giartosio De Courten with a Preface by B. Giuliani (Imola: Galeati, 1935); 'L'ombra di Dante', in *Il veggenti in solitudine* (Paris: Dai Torchi di François, 1846), pp. 291-309; *Disamina del sistema allegorico della Divina Commedia*, ed. by L. Anelli (Vasto: Società Editrice Anelli & Manzitti, 1890).

\(^2\) E. Aroux, *Dante hérétique, révolutionnaire et socialiste. Révélations d'un catholic sur le Moyen âge* (Paris: Renouard, 1854). The work of Aroux is a plagiarism, even if with changes, of *La Beatrice di Dante*, which was rashly entrusted by Gabriele Rossetti to Aroux for publication in French. For references of
greatest champion in Italy. The allegorical interpretation of the Vita Nuova had been proposed for the first time by G.M. Filelfo in the fifteenth century and Rossetti developed his critical premises by inserting them into a wider political, philosophical and theological symbolism, in which the poetics of the Stil Nuovo was not what Contini in 1938 was to call a poetics of the ‘oggettivazione dei sentimenti’, which is ‘press’a poco l’inverso dell’allegorismo’, in the dualistic sense of ‘divorzio dei significati’.\(^{5}\) For Rossetti, head of the modern allegorical school or of what Pompeo Giannantonio calls ‘esoterismo dantesco’,\(^{7}\) the Stil Nuovo offered the reader a poetry rich in mysterious symbols and terms with many layers of meaning.\(^{8}\)

All allegorical interpretations came up against the negative judgement of Croce who from his Neapolitan observation post would comment on all the most important cultural events and who, in the course of a review of an essay by

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\(^{3}\) F. Perez, La Beatrice svelata (Palermo: Lao, 1865); 2nd edn (Molfetta, 1936).

\(^{4}\) Pascoli’s works on the subject are La Mirabile Visione, Minerva oscura and Sotto il velame, which are now collected in G. Pascoli, Scritti danteschi, ed. by A. Vicinelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1952).

\(^{5}\) L. Valli, Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei ‘Fedeli d’amore’ (Rome: Optima, 1928-1930).


\(^{8}\) Although critics usually place Pascoli among those that read Dante with an allegorical interpretation, we must distinguish the Dantean hermeneutics of Pascoli from Gabriele Rossetti and his school. Pascoli in general does not refer so much to Gabriele Rossetti as to Witte (see La mirabile visione (Messina: Muglia, 1902, p. 47) and openly contradicts Perez (‘si contradice a Perez, che si giova di questo passo per dimostrare che tutto è allegoria e simbolo nella Vita Nuova’, La mirabile visione, p. 59, n.1). See also La mirabile visione, p. 20: ‘Ma quest’angelo e questa maraviglia celeste aveva un genitore terreno, e aveva alcuno, quando il padre morì, a lei “tanto distretto di sanguinitade… che nullo più presso l’era”; e si aggirava visibilmente per le vie di Fiorenza con sue amiche visibili, e si trovava talora non molto discosto da quella monna Vanna, chiamata Primavera, (VN. 22, 32, 24) con la quale Dante avrebbe voluto che fosse nel vascello incantato’.
Vincent,9 wrote of Rossetti: 'I suoi libri di critica, come il Commento analitico alla Divina Commedia (1826-27), Sullo spirito antipapale che produsse la riforma (1832), Il mistero dell’amor platonico (1840), La Beatrice di Dante (1842), sono conosciuti per la teoria criptografica che sostengono circa le opere di Dante e dei suoi contemporanei dello stil nuovo, la quale di recente è stata ripresa in Italia da cervelli, come il suo, vaghi di misteriosità'.

The nineteenth-century English Gothic Revival reached its peak with Rossetti’s son, Dante Gabriele, whose poetic programme within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was imbued with sensual and decadent symbolism and mystical suggestions, destined to have an enormous influence on European Decadentism emerging at that time. Dante Gabriele Rossetti made the thirteenth-century Italian lyric known not only through his translations of the Vita Nuova and The Early Italian Poets (a volume published in 1861 and then republished in an enlarged edition in 1874 with the title Dante and his Circle), but also through his sonnets of the House of Life (the first volume of which came out in 1870, while the entire collection was published in 1881), and his paintings depicting scenes from the Vita Nuova.10 These works contributed to the new fortunes of the Stil Nuovo in England and indirectly also in Italy, where for example at the beginning of the twentieth century the translation of the Vita Nuova11 was

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10 Dante Gabriele Rossetti’s illustrations to the Vita Nuova could be seen in Italy in the early twentieth century in Dante, La Vita Nuova, with an introduction by A. Agresti (Turin-Rome: Casa Editrice Nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1902): Dante Alighieri (p. 33), Il saluto di Beatrice (p. 36), Beatrice nega il saluto a Dante (p. 55), Gli angeli portano al cielo l’anima di Beatrice (p. 101), Il sogno di Dante (p. 103), Beatrice (p. 119), Beata Beatrix (p. 126), Dante sorpreso a disegnare un angelo (p. 140), La donna della finestra (p. 146), Dantis Amor (p. 163), Il saluto di Beatrice nell’Eden (p. 164). These illustrations, together with others not connected with Dante, were also published three years later by E. Rossetti Angeli, Dante Gabriele Rossetti con 107 illustrazioni (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1906).
praised by Agresti as ‘la più perfetta traduzione inglese dell’opera giovanile del nostro massimo poeta’; while the translation of The Early Italian Poets was in Galletti’s words the work of a ‘filologo e di poeta’ in which in order to give the feel of the language of the thirteenth-century poets, whether they were Sicilians or Guitianians, of the school of Guinizzelli or of Cavalcanti, Rossetti had renewed certain ancient English poetic forms to make them capable of translating ‘la psicologia sottile e i sentimenti delicati e complessi dei poeti del dolce Stil nuovo’. The aspect of Dante Gabriele Rossetti’s poetry that Galletti highlighted was the imaginative and abstract language, ‘pullulante di personificazioni allegoriche come quello di Dante o del Cavalcanti’, a language characterised by a ‘simbolismo platonico’ and animated ‘da “spiriti” e da “virtù” come nella lirica dello stil nuovo’ (p. 56).

In the sphere of Italian Decadentism, it is D’Annunzio who comes closest to the aestheticism of Rossetti, a poet with whom he shared a certain sensuality and refined hedonism and, more particularly, the kind of beauty to be found in names. In the second section of ‘Due Beatrici’, after a sequence of female names D’Annunzio, significantly, of all the Pre-Raphaelites refers to Rossetti:

O Viviana May de Penuële
Gelida virgo prerafaelita,
Another reference to the Pre-Raphaelites is in the novel *Il piacere* (1899), in which the figure of a woman is described as 'una lirista lesbiaca [...] quale avrebbe potuto immaginarlì un prerafaelita [...]'.

However, it was only with the Anglo-American *dantismo* of Pound and Eliot that there was to be a reassessment of the *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia* more fitting to the tastes and expectations of the twentieth century. Pound had in any case already been in contact with Dante through the works of Dante Gabriele Rossetti whom he considered, as he said in the introduction to his 1912 translation of Guido Cavalcanti, 'father' and 'mother', even though he was later to move away from him and recognise the limits of the Pre-Raphaelite approach. Among the

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studies or translations of early Italian lyrics that Pound had been involved in, the
most important were *The Spirit of Romance* and *Provença* published in 1910,
*Canzoni* published in 1911 and rich in Provençal themes, and an edition of
*Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* of 1912. Pound had conceived this
latter bilingual edition when he was reading the proofs of his essays on Romance
poetry on Lake Garda in 1910. His intention was to offer his English readership a
more accurate image of Dante’s ‘primo amico’ than that which was to be found
in Rossetti’s very widely read anthologies: ‘eighteen years ago [...] I saw that
Rossetti had made a remarkable translation of the *Vita Nuova*, in some places
improving (or at least enriching) the original; that he was indubitably the man
“sent”, or “chosen”, for that particular job, and that there was something in
Guido that escaped him or that was, at any rate, absent from his translations’.21
Towards the end of the twenties, probably at the request of Eliot himself, Pound
began work on a second bilingual edition of Cavalcanti’s poetry. The book was
never published because the English editor who was supposed to publish it went
bankrupt in 1929. However, Cavalcanti’s Italian texts were published in 1932 at
Pound’s own expense in Italy, in a limited edition, while most of the prose
commentary came out in *The Dial* and in a collection of Pound’s essays entitled
*Make It New*.23 The knowledge that Italian poets had of the American writer in

Femininity in Dante’s *Vita Nova* and Pound’s *Apparuit*, *Agenda*, 34.3-4 (1996-97), 166-70; P. Russell,
17 E. Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: Dent, 1910); It. transl. by S. Baldi: *Lo spirito romanzo*
(Florence: Vallecchi, 1959).
18 Id., *Provença* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1910).
19 Id., *Canzoni* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911).
20 Id., *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (London: Swift, 1912). The translations that Pound
prepared between 1910 and 1912 were based on the Italian edition edited by Francesco Zanzotto (*Guido
Cavalcanti*, in *Parnaso Italiano* (Venice: Antonelli, 1846), II, col. 240-276), of which Pound had found by
chance a small volume in a Venetian bookshop.
23 Id., *Make It New* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934); 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press,
the period between the two wars is recalled by Montale in 1953: 'Egli non era un ignoto quando, nel '24, venne da noi: alcune liriche di *Personae*, un breve poema (il *Mauberley*), gli assegnavano già un posto di prim'ordine nella nuova poesia americana. Capo dell'imagismo e poi del vorticismo aveva esercitato un influsso anche su poeti a cui molto egli doveva: Yeats, Eliot'.

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Even more than Pound, however, there was another element of novelty that had come from the English world into Italian and above all into Florentine dantismo: the Dante essays and poetry of T.S. Eliot, who in his turn had been influenced by Rossetti ('Rossetti's Blessed Damozel, first by my rapture and next by my revolt, held up my appreciation of Beatrice by many years'), the Harvard Dantists (according to Hugh Kenner, the double influence of the Harvard Dante and that of Rossetti, which he first discovered in London through Pound, was to have far-reaching consequences for Eliot), and above all the Romance studies of his friend and mentor Ezra Pound. The meeting between Eliot and Pound took place in London in 1914. As Mario Praz recalls, before reading The Spirit of Romance and meeting Pound personally in London, Eliot

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Pound and Olivia Rossetti Agresti: Their Correspondence, in Ezra Pound and Europe, 93-104; E. Livomi, Avanguardia e tradizione: Ezra Pound e Giuseppe Ungaretti (Florence: Lettere, 1998); for the presence of Pound in Genoese reviews of the Hermetic years, see S. Verdino, Storia delle riviste genovesi da Morasso a Pound (1892-1945) (Genoa: La Quercia Edizioni, 1993), pp. 95, 129-38, 151-53.

25 The first essay on Dante appeared as a review of H.D. Sidgwick's Dante, with the title 'Dante as a "Spiritual Leader"', Athenaeum, 2 April 1920; then in SW, translated in Italy by L. Anceschi, Il Bosco Sacro (Milan: Muggiari Tipografo Editore, 1946); the second essay is Dante (London: Faber & Faber, 1929); the third essay is 'Dante and Donne', which, together with the other two, was collected by the Modena publisher Guanda in 1942, in Luigi Berti's translation; the fourth essay is 'What Dante Means to Me', originally a speech delivered in London at the Italian Institute of Culture in 1950, then in TCTC. Numerous references to Dante and stilnovistic poetry are to be found also in the Clark Lectures given at Trinity College (Cambridge) in 1926 and in The Turnbull Lectures given at The Johns Hopkins University in 1933, which remained however unpublished until 1993, when Ronald Schuchard collected them in a volume edited by himself: T.S. Eliot, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry (London: Faber & Faber, 1993).


27 H. Kenner, 'Dante tra Pound e Eliot', Il Verri, 18 (1964), p. 39. See also F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, 2nd revised edn (1935; New York-London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 10: 'It needed only to be added that from Longfellow through Charles Eliot Norton, Santayana, and Charles Grandgent there was an unbroken line of Dante scholarship at Harvard. It may be that in the end Eliot gained a more challenging insight into the technical excellences of The Divine Comedy through conversations with Ezra Pound, but at all events, in the preface to his own introduction to Dante he lists as his principal aids all the names which I have just mentioned'.

28 On Eliot's reception in Italy see Laura Caretti, T.S. Eliot in Italia. Saggio e bibliografia (1923-1965) (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1968), in particular the ample bibliography, and the important volume edited by
had read here and there among the early Italian poets, especially Guinizzelli, Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia, but it was Pound who aroused his interest in them and made them come alive. Significantly, Eliot, taking up the definition employed by Guinizzelli for Arnaut Daniel in Purg. XXVI. 117, in 1922 dedicated The Waste Land to his American friend (‘For Ezra Pound / il miglior fabbro’) who, in drastically reducing the length of the poem, assisted Eliot in its reconstitution.

In particular Eliot’s 1929 essay on Dante, translated into Italian by Luigi Berti in 1942, inaugurated a new way of reading early Italian lyric poetry and the Vita Nuova. This had been judged disparagingly in 1921 by Benedetto Croce as a ‘libretto di devozione’. The influential Neapolitan thinker did attempt to give some parts their due but basically he was just stressing the unbridgeable gap between it and the poetry of the Comedy, urging his readers to do away with ‘le esagerazioni e le false ammirazioni, che una voga letteraria del secolo decimonono, stilnovistica, preraffaellita, smaniosa di mistici rapimenti e di sublimità’ (p. 40) had accustomed them to.

In clear opposition to Croce’s essays, Eliot in his 1929 essay wrote that ‘the Vita Nuova has a special importance, because it does more than any of the others to help us to a fuller understanding of the Divine Comedy’ (SE, p. 271) and added that it ‘is neither a “confession” nor an “indiscretion” in the modern sense, nor is it a piece of Pre-Raphaelite tapestry’ (p. 273). But above all he highlighted ‘a mixture of biography and allegory’ (p. 272), a mixture that was difficult to


understand for the modern mind and which consisted in the fusion of an experience that was ‘actual’, ‘intellectual’ and ‘imaginative’ (p. 273). In short, Eliot was stating that the origin of Dante’s *Vita Nuova* consisted in actual personal and biographical events but transformed into universal experiences and ‘not of importance because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person who kept press-cutting bureaux busy, but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value’ (pp. 272-73).

These last observations by Eliot are quoted by Gianfranco Contini in his ‘Introduction’ to Dante’s *Rime* (ready for the press in 1938 and published in 1939) and confirmed the attention Eliot’s *Dante* received before the Italian translation of 1942. According to Dionisotti, Contini’s introduction had the merit of making a Dante that was ‘diverso e in parte nuovo’ re-emerge ‘nei tempi grossi’ (which follow the decline of the Risorgimento myth of Dante replaced by the Roman and Imperial one). In that edition of the *Rime* edited by Contini and published by Giulio Einaudi (well-known for having gathered around him a tightly-knit group of young members of the political opposition), Dionisotti had furthermore recognised ‘un punto d’incontro fra la più esperta filologia universitaria e la corrente ermetica che era in quel momento stesso all’avanguardia della letteratura militante in Italia’ (p. 242).

Montale must have read Eliot’s essay on Dante before it was translated in 1942. As early as 1926 he had asked Orlo Williams for Eliot’s address in London, and in 1928 he published Praz’s English translation of ‘Arsenio’ (1927) in the *Criterion*, whose director was Eliot himself, while in the years to come

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he was to translate three poems by Eliot.\textsuperscript{35} It seems on the other hand that Luzi, whose interest in the thirties was mainly in French, German and Spanish Symbolist poetry, discovered the Dante essay indirectly, probably through Montale himself and Contini's introduction to Dante's \textit{Rime}, reading it in its entirety only in 1942 in Luigi Berti's translation.\textsuperscript{36}

However Eliot's poems were already being talked about in Florence in the late twenties.\textsuperscript{37} Mario Praz,\textsuperscript{38} whose friendship Montale recalled in the years spent in

\textit{Novecento}, ed. by M.A. Grignani and R. Luperini (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998), pp. 165-88, especially pp. 178-88 in which five hitherto-unpublished letters that Mario Praz sent to Montale between late 1927 and early 1928 are published, with various references to 'Arsenio' and its publication in Eliot's \textit{Criterion} after many editorial delays.


\textsuperscript{36} See ED, pp. 217-18.

\textsuperscript{37} The first article on Eliot written in Italy was by the English scholar Carlo Linati, published on 13 January 1926 in the \textit{Corriere della sera}: 'E poiché si tratta di poesia nuovissima, squisitamente elaborata, e l'Eliot per essere il direttore del grave "The Criterion" gode di grande autorità e aspettazione fra i giovani, parliamone un po'. The Italian critic singled out his apparent 'futurismo' as one of the essential elements of Eliot's sensibility, that is, being 'profondamente nutrita di ordine e di classico rigore', so much so as to bring it close to the artistic experiences of Joyce and Pound. With his pioneering and militant spirit, Linati also immediately recognises in Eliot's poetry 'la poesia dell’umanità del dopoguerra' even though, while having no difficulty in admiring the 'accezza e la lucidità' of the critical essays, he hesitates before the incomprehensibility of this new poetry and openly admits to a Crocean doubt: 'sta a vedere se è vera poesia'.

\textsuperscript{38} Among Mario Praz's translations of the thirties there were 'Ciò che disse il tuono', \textit{La Fiera Letteraria}, 21 February 1926, p. 5 (concerning 'The Love Song of J.A. Prufrock', 'Gerontion' and \textit{The Waste Land}, Praz suggests the term 'metaphysical' poems, seeing in them an affinity with the impassioned eloquence of some Elizabethan soliloquys); 'Marcia trionfale', \textit{Nuova Antologia}, 67.1441 (1932), p. 428;


Song for Simeon' in *Circoli*, together with that of ‘La figlia che piange’, while the translation of ‘Animula’ was to appear many years later, in 1947, in *L’immagine*. In the 1933 issue of *Circoli* Montale introduced his two translations with an interesting critical introduction in which he spoke of the ‘risoluzioni stilnovistiche e dantesche’ of *Ash-Wednesday* (published in London in 1930) and the ‘maniera epica, obiettiva’ adopted by Eliot from as far back as the *Ariel Poems*. In this critical-biographical ‘Nota’ Eliot’s work was indicated as a turning-point in American poetry:

T.S. Eliot segna una data nella nuova poesia americana, [...] per lui la moda è passata alla concentrazione, allo scorcio, non senza influssi della lirica francese che va da Rimbaud-Laforgue ad Apollinaire. Debitore al Pound di qualche soluzione ritmica e forse del suo primo orientamento d’artista, Eliot è riuscito poi personale, e forse più profondo, in un’espressione che costituisce, per usare una formula nota, il ‘correlativo obiettivo’ del suo mondo interiore. Il cosiddetto ‘classicismo’ di Eliot è tutto qui; e nulla contiene di archeologico e di nuovo.  

In 1933-1934, furthermore, Montale met Irma Brandeis, who had come to Florence to study the language of Dante and whose *The Ladder of Vision* was to come out in 1960 (Montale himself explicitly proposed this study as a proper point of arrival in respect of the kind of research represented by Eliot’s Dante

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essays). It was also the period in which Montale was writing that group of poems which in 1938 he was to hand over to Contini and which was to launch Contini’s critical article on ‘Eugenio Montale’.\(^{44}\) It is interesting to note that the stilnovistic Clizia (Irma Brandeis’s transformation into a visiting angel) was still completely absent in that group of texts, and that it was in 1937-1939 that the polarisation on the female figure of Clizia was to take place by means of which Montale’s poetry would take on those features which were to last for a decade. According to Scarpati, it was a polarisation that took place encouraged by the cultural environment and by a different way of looking at Dante: ‘il personaggio di Clizia, dal ’37 al ’47, rappresenta dunque la massima rivisitazione, critica prima che poetica, di quel repertorio gotico (Quaderno gotico intitolerà Luzi nel 1945 il suo album stilnovistico) della nostra letteratura cui era stato tributato il più largo culto, accanto a Petrarca, fuori d’Italia’.\(^{45}\) Concerning the development of the poetic material of Montale’s second book in the two years that precede the first edition (Turin: Einaudi, 1939) the critics have suggested a direct influence of Contini’s studies,\(^{46}\) observing for example that the name Clizia itself could have been taken from Contini’s commentary to a sonnet of Dante to Giovanni Quirini,\(^{47}\) while a passage contained in the Introduzione to Dante’s Rime may


\(^{46}\) See especially the ‘Introduction’ to Dante’s Rime already cited and which Montale, through his friendship with Contini, may have read in 1938 when the introduction was ready for publication, and the essay, again in 1938, ‘Dagli “Ossi” alle “Occasioni”’, quoted above.

\(^{47}\) See Contini’s commentary to D. Alighieri, ‘Nulla mi parve mai più crude cosa, Rime dubbie’, in D. Alighieri, Rime (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), p. 267: ‘Clizia, figlia dell’Oceano ed amante del Sole, che, avendo per la sua gelosia provocato la morte di Leucotoe, fu dal Sole trasformata in eliotropio o girasole, come narrano quelle Metamorfosi che tante materiale mitico suggerirono a Dante […] (un lettore intelligente, l’Eliot, scrive che Dante “deve più a Ovidio che a Virgilio”)’. See the comparison by Bigongiari, in an article of 1953-1956, of Clizia to the ancient daughter of the Ocean quoted from Dante: ‘Una angelica, ma non evangelica, Clizia “guarda ancora / in alto”: una Clizia che, come l’antica figlia dell’Oceano ed amante del Sole, “l non mutato amor mutata serba”: e qui cito Dante, il Dante, seppur sospetto, del carteggio poetico col veneziano Giovanni Quirini, non il Montale che ha ripreso, nella Primavera hitleriana, da
have influenced the choice of the title *Le occasioni*.

According to an essay by Piero Bigongiari written in 1949, it is Montale’s ‘stil novo’ itself that puts alongside the so-called Hermetic experience:

È il dichiarato ‘stil novo’ di Montale, è la parte per cui Montale si è più affiancato all’esperienza che suol dirsi ermetica (do al termine un significato storico, definitorio, non peggiorativo) della poesia contemporanea: è la poesia dove la psicologia tenta di muoversi sul fondo lustro e ingannevole, specchiato, della memoria, è la parte che per la ricostruzione dell’uomo i poeti contemporanei hanno sottratto alla perpetua significabilità orfica: essi hanno cercato un significato, il significato, nella polivalenza della memoria pura, cioè dalla memoria escono una memoria per imboccare il cammino della storia. Ora a questo senso di canzoniere ha contribuito in Montale anche lo stilnovismo anglosassone da Pound a Eliot, che ha portato ‘la Selvaggia o la Mandetta o la Delia dei Motetti’ a personaggio messo al centro di un moto spezzato, a protagonista di una storia che diviene, cioè non più fatto di natura, ma di volontà, anche se insufficiente, umana.


Luzi himself recalls Montale's *stilnovismo* in the Hermetic period (but not in relation to Contini or Eliot's poetry): ‘Questo stilnovismo, in fondo, filtra anche nelle poesie di Montale di quel periodo: anche lui sente a un certo punto la suggestione dell’ambiente che si va costruendo, in cui la dominante è la poesia, il linguaggio della poesia, che non è inquinato, o è meno inquinato dalla volgarità dei tempi e dei modi pubblici che vivevamo’ (CMS, pp. 15-16). As to the relationship between Contini and Montale, he even suggests that it was Montale who influenced Contini and not *vice versa*, while as for Irma Brandeis he says that he did not meet her personally in the years in which she was in Florence and that he only heard about her afterwards (ED, p. 220).

If Montale's first translations of Eliot appeared between 1929 and 1933, it was in 1937 that the first two translations of *Ash-Wednesday* appeared, one by Sergio Baldi in *Frontespizio* (in March), and the other by Luigi Berti in *Letteratura* (in April) respectively.\(^{50}\)

\(^{50}\) T.S. Eliot, ‘Ash-Wednesday’, *Commerce*, 15 (1928), It. transl. by S. Baldi, ‘Mercoledì delle ceneri’, *Frontespizio*, 15.3 (1937), 185-92 (with an introductory note on pp. 183-84, where the translator-critic discerns an ‘atmosfera purgatoriale’ in the poem). Until a study by Caretti (‘Testi montaliani inediti’, *Il Ponte*, 33.4-5 (1977), 488-89) it had been thought that the first Italian translation was that of Sergio Baldi. There had actually been an anticipation, albeit ‘clandestine’ and partial, by Montale who had translated the first two stanzas of Part 1 of *Ash-Wednesday*. The manuscript of the translation had remained unpublished right up to Caretti's transcription in his article. A facsimile of the manuscript had appeared in the Florentine edition of *Finisterre* (Florence: Barbera, 1945) in which an editorial note gave a general warning that it was the ‘inizio di una traduzione da T.S. Eliot (1928 circa)’. According to Caretti, as Part 1 of *Ash-Wednesday* was published by Eliot in *Commerce*, 15 (1928), with the same title that is found at the head of the Montale version (*Perch’io non spero...*), the translation must have been only a little later than the date that Eliot was published.

\(^{51}\) T.S. Eliot, ‘Il canto d'amore di J. Alfred Prufrock, Mercoledì delle ceneri’, It. transl. by L. Berti, *Letteratura*, 1.2 (1937), 87-96. Berti's translation ‘Ritratto d’una signora’ had also come out in 1935, in *Caratteri*, 1.4 (1935); while in 1941 the important translation of *Poesie* was published by the Modena publisher Guanda. As for Luigi Berti's Eliot criticism, the most important was: ‘Nota’ to the translations of Eliot, *Letteratura*, 1.2 (1937), p. 102 (where the wealth of stilnovistic and Dantean references in *Ash-Wednesday* is highlighted); ‘Simbolismo e rapporti tra cultura e poesia nella lirica di T.S. Eliot’, *Circoli*, 6.4 (1937), 313-24, and *Circoli*, 5-6 (1937), 483-95 (where, among the various intertextual relations with other poets singled out, precise comparisons with Dante and the Stilnovists are found in the purgatorial poetry of
In his essay on Eliot and Dante, which came out a few months after Baldi and Berti’s translations, Praz recognised just how near the English poem was to the Dante of the *Vita Nuova* and the last Cantos of *Purgatorio*. The spread of these comments on and translations of Eliot’s work certainly introduced new stimuli into the Italian cultural *milieu* of the Thirties. Despite the cultural autarchy imposed by the Fascist regime, despite the attempt by the then-dominant neo-Idealism (of Gentile and Croce) to set up barriers against undue influence from abroad, the openness of the Florentine Hermeticists towards Europe in the early twentieth century and towards contemporary European literature is well-known. Anceschi synthesised it in 1953 as the literature of Valéry, Apollinaire and the Surrealists, of Pound, T.S. Eliot and the Imagists, of Lorca, Machado with the other Spaniards of whom Bo and Macri spoke in those years, or George and Rilke down to Pasternak and Esenin. Among the various writers of a free Europe censured by the Fascists Bigongiari recalled not only Gide, Proust, the Surrealists, Freud and Heidegger, Hölderlin, Goethe, Rilke, Leopardi and Foscolo but also Trakl, Eliot and Pound with whom poetry worked ‘come nutrimento esaltante e insieme dubbio quotidiano contro le affermazioni devianti e le parole d’ordine delle ideologie dominanti’.53

In general, however, not many were ready to immediately grasp the innovativeness of Eliot and it was only after the war that a wider reception of

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53 P. Bigongiari, *Nel mutismo dell’universo*, pp. 177-78.
Eliot got under way. In the Florentine Hermeticists in particular, the impersonality of poetry understood as the transformation of the most personal and private emotions and ideas into an impersonal and universal poetry, the narrative and prose rhythm that does not disdain common language or dramatic verse, were initially elements that were too remote from the introspection and solipsism of the selective Petrarchan and Symbolist tradition that were the poetic models of those years. On the whole, the idea of an *autonomia dell’arte* prevailed, while, even though favoured by the translations of the decade going from 1932 to 1942, there were no significant openings towards Europe (and in particular to English metaphysical poetry). For example, although Baldi’s translation of *Ash-Wednesday* came out in *Frontespizio*, a review for which many Hermetic writers wrote, ‘un livello eliotiano’ Ramat notes, ‘era comunque impensabile, fra le mète che si potevano toccare nell’ambito della rivista fiorentina: sorta nella fase ottimistica del nostro cattolicesimo postconcordatario, essa risultava del tutto priva di quella tensione specifica dell’area anglosassone (di cui Baldi presentava un’altra grande figura, stavolta ottocentesca: Gerard Manley Hopkins) e della relativa espressione poetica’.

According to Carlo Bo, Eliot was known only to a few Italian writers and intellectuals, among whom were Montale and Ugo Guanda, the editor who in 1942 published Eliot’s Dante essays in the Luigi Berti translation:

> Era un tipo molto singolare, molto intelligente, un vero editore, un editore povero perché non aveva mezzi, ma al quale la cultura italiana deve diversi settori, diversi interessi, prima di tutto quello religioso e politico [...] ed è stato il primo, con i suggerimenti e con le suggestioni di Attilio Bertolucci, che viveva anche lui a Parma, a introdurre poeti come Lorca, come Eliot in maniera più considerevole di quanto non fosse stato fatto fino ad allora; perché Eliot era uno scrittore noto a pochi tra cui Montale, e difatti Montale ha sempre riconosciuto questo suo debole.

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Luzi too, who in 1935 had published *La barca* with Guanda, spent a few years in Parma, the years when Bertolucci was also there. So it is not difficult to imagine the two poets speaking of Eliot, of the translations of his poems, and more generally of foreign contemporary poetry. In a recent interview with Luzi it was clear that he remembered the period well in which the first translations of Eliot came out, especially those of *Ash-Wednesday* and *The Waste Land*, even though he pointed out the substantial distance that he felt at least initially from those poems, too allegorical and distant from the Symbolist and post-Symbolist tradition still dominant in those years:

Nel periodo ermetico di Eliot si parlava poco, si parlava di simbolismo, della poesia tedesca, di Rilke. Aveva insomma più risonanza la poesia di ispirazione romantica, simbolista e post-simbolista. Tutti noi ci siamo messi a lavorare su Eliot obbedendo ad una necessità comune del tempo. Lo conoscemmo innanzitutto attraverso la traduzione del *Mercoledì delle Ceneri* fatta da Sergio Baldi su *Frontespizio* (mi sembra fosse l’anno 1937). Fece impressione, fu una cosa che si notò. In *Mercoledì delle Ceneri* c’è un lato che mi pare sia più allegorico che simbolico, certamente suggestivo ma un po’ estraneo al nostro tessuto espressivo di ricerca. Delle liriche conoscevo una traduzione di Luigi Berti. Questa versione presenta vari errori, da un punto di vista filologico è un disastro, aveva però una suggestione che proveniva da questo traduttore, uomo di mare, piuttosto rude, capace di sentire e accentuare certi aspetti del testo, soprattutto quelli narrativi. [...] L’impatto con *La terra desolata*, che lessi sempre nel periodo anteriore al 1945, fu sicuramente forte ed esercitò su di me una impressione suggestiva che derivava soprattutto da quelli elementi che venivano fatti interloquire l’uno con l’altro per esprimere a fondo lo smarrimento intellettivo dell’uomo d’inizio Novecento. [...] Eliot, insomma, cominciò ad essere una presenza, non paragonabile comunque a quella degli spagnoli che furono tradotti in quell’epoca (Machado y Ruiz, Lorca, Jiménez, Salinas). Nel periodo ermetico Eliot non era ancora diventato un effettivo termine di confronto né un invito ad allargare e ad incrementare il linguaggio. Dopo la guerra invece il poeta anglosassone diventò un po’ alla moda e furono ‘gli altri’, gli antagonisti dell’ermetismo, a rivendicarlo come emblema contro tutta la tradizione simbolista, post-simbolista e anche surrealista.

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The rare references to Eliot in Luzi’s first collections of poems confirm that the attraction of Eliot’s *dantismo* was still weak in the thirties, although it cannot be excluded that the more recent and certainly more influential Montale and Contini helped this English *dantismo* to create a cultural climate which Luzi also absorbed and in which Dante (and especially the Dante of ‘common’ and ‘natural’ language) was to find his moment of greatest modernity.

### 5.2. The Italian Critical Debate on Eliot and his Dante in the Post-War Years

Italian Eliotism, which was born in Milan in 1926 with Linati’s article in the *Corriere della sera* and then grew in Florence through certain exceptional encounters like those between Praz and Montale and the translations and criticism of Berti and Baldi, became in the years immediately before the last war and more visibly in the post-war years a cultural event that was no longer circumscribed but had a far-reaching and profound effect on the process of revision and transformation which Italian writers, especially the Florentine Hermeticists, were beginning to go through in the forties: ‘Oggi è l’esperienza che deve risollevarsi a fantasia - observed Bigongiari in 1946 - o l’uomo rimarrà schiacciato da una vana e lampeggiante molteplicità. L’esempio di T.S. Eliot è bene un esempio significativo’.

A year later, in his first essay on Eliot, Oreste Macri indicated how important it was for contemporary culture to convert to poetry and for poetry to be nourished by metaphysics and religiosity ‘in un disperato anelito verso la fondazione di una persona integrale’ (not just single and private persons) who would save the wealth of tradition within the free horizons of the new human civilisation.

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tradition, and early Eliot had shown this with particular lucidity, had come down to the *Novecento* altered, and it involved, not only an alteration, but a separating out of aesthetics and ethics: 'la tradizione è stata accolta in chiave estetica, mentre la parte etica (economia, politica, metafisica, religione) è naufragata nel non essere del passato insondabile, e la cultura ha smarrito la sostanza del suo ufficio nel mondo, lasciando a nuove persone della storia la facoltà di ricostruire l’organica continuità nell’umano dolore dei principii, quale fu descritto dal Vico nel passaggio dalla ferinità alla barbarie'. Intò purely aesthetic, autonomous form, dissociated from realities extrinsic to it, Eliot was introducing a gnoseological need that would be expressed through perception by uniting thought to the senses.

According to Mario Luzi, the poetic mind of the early *Novecento* was modelled on the Idealistic presupposition more than the contradictions inherent in it would encourage us to believe and, although the disaster of the *Coup de dés* as far as Ungaretti’s failure was evidence of the wreck of Idealistic dreams, it was still, however, the same match that the European poet complained had been lost. For Luzi ‘era il contraccolpo di quel disinganno a intonare la voce dalla *Terra desolata* di Eliot agli *Ossi di seppia* di Montale and not even John Perse or Paul Claudel could modify the negative sense of this picture.

As for the reception of English *dantismo* in Italy, for Luzi the progressive transformation of Dante ‘da mito a maestro operativo’ that took place after the Second World War was part of the fluctuations of the Italian and European mind. In this sense the return to Dante depended ultimately neither on Pound nor on Eliot, ‘ma l’averlo essi, sia pure in modi contrapposti assunto come termine ebbe certamente un peso, un significato, un colore che rimasero nella stimmung

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60 O. Macri, ‘Eliot e il classicismo’, p. 1622.
62 Ibid.
poetica di questo secolo'. If English dantismo was not the deepest reason for Luzi's need to reread Dante, it did definitely determine, as the poet himself observed, the poetic stimmung of the twentieth century and of the Italian cultural milieu closest to him, to the point of leaving traces in Luzi's poetry itself, as will be seen later. Furthermore, Florence, the city in which the poet spent a large part of his life and with which he always kept close ties, was between the first and second half of the century one of the most culturally lively European cities and the first to realise that deep down the European mind was changing, and was beginning to be aware of that change. In this European framework poets like Eliot, Lorca, Esenin, Faulkner, Éluard, as Bigongiari observed in the December of 1944, had been the first to realise that this 'rivoluzione' was in progress: 'il libro è sempre aperto sulla pagina quotidiana, essi non aspettano consumatori, ma attori in tutti gli uomini, per ciò hanno reso anonima la loro fatica (ma non, s'intende, la pagina)'.

Right from the beginning Italian criticism had seen Eliot as a poet-critic and had sought in his theoretical works (for example 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism', appeared in 1933) a foundation for, and clarification of, artistic invention. The first essay that came out on Eliot in Italy, the article by Linati mentioned above, showed from the very title ('Poeta oscuro, critico perfetto') the overestimation of the critical rather than of the creative aspect. Praz, who just a few weeks after Linati's article published 'Ciò che disse il tuono' in La fiera letteraria, had also right from the beginning insisted on the 'dotto' character of Eliot's production, in that it was the 'prodotto di ragione e di cultura'. Vittorini as well, in 1941, speaking of Eliot in Americana, therefore in a narrative context, insisted on the 'intellettuale' value of Eliot's writing. Despite the fact that these

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65 E. Vittorini, Americana (Milan: Bompiani, 1941). In Il Politecnico, the review that he himself directed, Vittorini often left space for translations of Eliot or articles on him. See for instance the issue of 9 February 1946, which contains the anonymous article, 'Notizia su Eliot', a translation by R. La Capria, 'Poesia per conoscere il mondo: Little Gidding' accompanied by a short introduction by Vittorini. Vittorini
were times in which the notion of ‘intellettuale’ was looked upon with suspicion. Vittorini stressed the positive nature of this search for a form through which Eliot had avoided the possible dangers of sentimentality in poetry, and had successfully intellectualised and hardened the nostalgic substance of language into ever more immediate associations. The aura of great prestige that in the forties and fifties surrounded Eliot’s work on the nature of poetry was to be reflected in Montale’s observation immediately after Eliot’s death that in the English writer ‘il critico non vale forse il poeta ma ne è inseparabile’.

These comments are just some of the many that could be cited and, limiting the field of inquiry to the environment closest to Mario Luzi, mention must at least be made of Oreste Macri, who in an essay of 1965 wrote of the need for an organic exchange between criticism and poetry, in his opinion magisterially carried out by Italian and European Hermeticism, and in particular by Rimbaud, Vallejo, Blok, the early Eliot, Machado and Rebora. The Hermeticists, in fact, saw poetry as being born from criticism and at the same time being a reason for it, thus freeing it from ideological schemes defined a priori and making it a mode of self-clarification through the texts of others. In this sense Hermetic criticism has been defined by Ramat as criticism that is subjective, un’occasione autoscopica’ (see L’ermetismo, pp. 36, 116-17).

There is another significant essay by Macri on this subject: ‘La “mente” di De Robertis. (Il critico come scrittore)’. The title of the essay is expressive both in its use of the word ‘mente’ - which might refer to the mind in the broad stilnovistic sense as used by De Robertis, but perhaps also to what Macri called

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here lays stress on the ‘conoscitivo’ warmth of Eliot’s poem (‘poesia per conoscere il mondo’) and points out its special ‘difficoltà’ (‘Non vi offriamo stavaolta una lettura chiara. E nemmeno polemicamente significativa. Ma è bene che il Politecnico abbia anche pagine lente e difficili che esigono sforzo e poi, a sforzo compiuto, non esaltino: che riposino, che non diano compenso fuori della meditazione in cui si consumano’).


67 O. Macri, ‘Sulla critica italiana’, in Realtà del simbolo, pp. 616-19. ‘Realtà del simbolo’ is full of references to Eliot’s works, especially to Four Quartets. See especially the essay contained there ‘Esegesi
‘neoaristotelismo eliotiano’ - and in the critic-writer association, an identification of which in those years Eliot was the main example. And indeed poetry was for De Robertis an intellectual and cognitive operation in line with Eliot’s poetics, according to which writing poetry and knowing make up one single act.

Recently another Florentine Hermeticist, Piero Bigongiari, has returned to this issue, and replying to the questions of an interviewer, he confirms his conception of poetry as a thinking critical act and, vice versa, he explains his conception of the critical act as the thought of the creative act:

Evidentemente può anche esistere l’uno senza l’altro: come può esistere il critico senza poesia, così può esistere anche il poeta senza il critico. Devo dirle però che la poesia che conta, a cominciare da Foscolo, da Leopardi, e a proseguire poi nei nostri anni con Eliot, con Ungaretti o con Montale, e poi con alcuni di noi più giovani, è una poesia che viene in qualche modo ‘dimagrata’ del suo troppo, diciamo, che ne raccoglie i frutti. Ciòè per me, quello che conta è il pensiero della stessa actio poetica.68

In short, the simultaneity of the critical and of the creative aspects of the literary act has always aroused a special interest in Italian writers, starting from Foscolo and Leopardi, but the line could go back even further to Dante himself and to what one critic close to Hermeticism defined as the ‘perpetuo sopraggiungere della riflessione tecnica accanto alla poesia’, the ‘associazione di concreto poetare e d’intelligenza stilistica’ characteristic of Dante. That simultaneous nature of the creative act and exegesis was also proclaimed in Anceschi’s important book, Autonomia ed eteronomia dell’arte, published in Florence in 1936.

Luciano Anceschi, of the philosophical school of Banfi and assiduous pre-war contributor to the important reviews Letteratura and Corrente, through his critical essays and the translation of The Sacred Wood, made Italian Eliotism into an experience which had to be reckoned with in a moment of change like the

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68 P. Bigongiari, “‘In my beginning is my end’” (1994), in Nel mutismo dell’universo, p. 219.
post-war years, when the concept of tradition was requiring a new formulation and the figure of the artist was beginning to be set up against the idea of the pure poet and the autonomy of art.  

While in Italy the Crocean postulate of art as lyrical intuition and the Gentilian exaltation of pure subjectivity were asserting themselves, the poetry of Eliot was attempting to objectivise the word and keep the subject who says ‘I’ at a suitable distance, thus contributing to the search for new paths rather than following those indicated by Idealistic culture and turning out to be an effective corrective to the *pure* word of Mallarmé and Valéry. In this perspective it was inevitable that Eliot, together with other ‘impure’ artists like him, should have become a point of reference even if with a different use. And perhaps, Anceschi recalled *a posteriori* in 1989, immediately after the Second World War when the young generations were inviting literature to rebuild the world in ruins, the stimulating function exercised by Eliot and Pound was underestimated by criticism, which gave excessive importance - even though they were important - to the ‘American’ Pavese and Vittorini:

 What in the post-war years brought Anceschi close to the Hermeticists was

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70 Anceschi had written his graduation dissertation on this subject, *Autonomia ed eternomia dell’arte* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936; 2nd revised edn, Florence: Vallecchi, 1959), in which his aim was to enter into the quick of the literary discussions of the time by going back to the origins of the concept of *poesia pura* and showing that the concepts of the autonomy and heteronomy of art are aesthetic concepts tied to particular historical and cultural moments and not two abstract and absolute conceptions of art as Idealism had wished them to be.  
the inclination to see a continuity in Eliot’s work. In an article on Eliot of 1948, for instance, Anceschi again spanned the ‘coerente parabola’ of Eliot’s poetry from *Prufrock* to *Four Quartets* and saw in this last work the apex of his poetic development. But what in the Hermeticists was an exemplary and universal path, for Anceschi was an intellectual experience within the historical dimension in crisis of contemporary culture. In this connection, in an essay dated ‘marzo, 1945’ and introducing the Italian translation of *Il bosco sacro*, Anceschi declared that what was interesting to see in Eliot was above all the man who had come out of the horror of another war, ‘lo scrittore della crisi’ and then, later, he added that Eliot was really a lofty example of what is expected of a poet: ‘un essere in cui i liberi moti dell’immaginazione affiorano come da una cultura della persona portata fino in fondo, esaurita: un essere che ha fatto tutti i suoi conti col mondo’ (p. 21). An anti-Platonic and anti-Romantic poetics like Eliot’s would be able to exercise a positive influence on Italian culture, and help ‘a liberarci dalla pigrizia e dalla durezza dei casalinghi platonismi di elementare idealismo dogmatico’ (ibid., p. 39). In this function of liberation from Italian lyricism, Romanticism and Platonism, a central role was played by Eliot’s classicism which, pursued with great difficulty, implied the memory of a Golden Age including the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals and Dante.

The return to Dante on the part of the Italian *Novecento*, heir to a long Petrarchan and Platonic tradition, was in no way a foregone conclusion. In another essay on Eliot of 1947, Anceschi recalled that Dante’s fortunes in Continental Europe was ‘una presenza di rango regale’ but had no influence on

74 L. Anceschi, ‘Primo tempo estetico di Eliot’, p. 16.
75 See *ibid.*, pp. 13-42.
the new ways of writing poetry (Dante ‘è un poco il re in esilio delle nostre umane lettere’), whereas in far-off English lands Dante was an active presence and moved like a living poet among the new poets, ‘quasi a discorrere con loro, a rispondere all’urgenza di certe loro ansiose domande’. Eliot had played an important role in bringing Dante back into the workshop of the creative moment and raising him up again at the centre of a new conception of poetry, to the point of making him become ‘il Dante della crisi del nostro tempo’.

Among the more profound reasons for Eliot’s admiration of Dante (ideas already in embryo in the Dante essay of 1920 and then more amply developed in the definitive essay of 1929) there were, according to Anceschi, the impersonal conception of poetry, the wish to resolve the relationship between poetry and philosophy, and the desire to reconcile the idea of the integrity of poetry with that of the poet as spiritual guide. Eliot’s studies furthermore supplied the cue for placing Dante and Lucretius side by side, in virtue of the capacity that the poetry of both ancient authors had to make movements of thought sensible and visible, so that an idea or a thought might become not simply conceived but perceived.

Anceschi also shed light on the special relationship that Eliot established with Europe (which he preferred to America) and in an article of 1949, he clarified Eliot’s attitude to the European literary tradition by explaining the significance of his choosing Dante and Virgil, the two universal classics. Eliot, as no other writer, managed to express the tragic misery of Europe and at the same time, again like no other, ‘ha indicato che in essa sta ancora “il cervello del mondo”, la rara perla della sfera’. In another article that appeared in the same year, Anceschi returned on the same subject and saw this European feeling as deriving

76 See also Id., ‘Lettura “parallela” di T.S. Eliot’, Paesaggio, 1.2 (1946), 90-94.
78 Chapter 6 is entirely dedicated to this topic.
79 See L. Anceschi, ‘T.S. Eliot e la poesia filosofica’.
80 Ibid., p. 219.
from a clear ‘identificazione tra Europa e Civiltà’. With that realism which was such an important part of him, Eliot never concealed the dangers and evils of this civilisation, but never forgot its values either.  

In the sphere of Italian post-war criticism close to Hermeticism, another stimulating reflection on these Eliotian themes and especially on the theme of tradition, scrutinised by Anceschi in the context of a phenomenological ‘continua vitalità del presente’, comes from Enzo Paci. This critic, who together with Anceschi was a favourite pupil of Antonio Banfi, wrote two important essays on Eliot. In one, which appeared in 1947, he wrote, ‘so bene che a nessun poeta del mio tempo debbo tanto come a Eliot’; in the other ‘Sul senso della poesia di T.S. Eliot’, which appeared in 1966, he reproposed in diary form the same phenomenological exploration already conducted in the essays on Rilke, Mann, and Proust, following the example of Heidegger’s readings of the poetry of Hölderlin. According to Paci the novelty of Eliot’s language consists in the ironic and dramatic discovery of the profound unity that exists between metaphysics and the most degraded and decadent social normality, in the capacity to join words to things, and in the endeavour to illuminate the ruins of reality by seeking order in them, a link with the whole. An example of the desire to unite the fragments that make up being was, according to the critic, Eliot’s theatrical works, the place in which myth – seen as a striving towards unity and Kairós – takes objective form and is represented. This kind of reading was obviously very close to what Italian Hermeticism was seeking: right from its beginnings the Hermeticists had been full of questioning as to the significance of totality in poetry and the possibility of reaching it through non-poetic reality and contingent history.

Another person close to Florentine Hermeticism was Luigi Berti, who was

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84 Husserl’s phenomenology however was to arrive into the English-speaking world (and French) later.
mentioned in the first section of this Chapter in connection with his various
translations and criticism started in the second half of the thirties. Evidence of
the impassioned if not always scientific contribution made by Berti to the history
of the spread of the Eliot word is the review Inventario, which the critic founded
in 1946, taking as his model the exemplary ‘international’ review that was the
Criterion, and to which Eliot was invited as a special contributor: ‘I redattori di
Inventario che continuano a condividere l’ideale allora servito dal Criterion e
che Eliot, in guise eguali e diverse ancora difende ed onora, sentono che ad una
riaffermazione di quell’ideale non potevano trovare voce più persuasiva, o
lezione più magistrale’. The review was born with the aim of collecting not
only Italian contributions but also from the main European literatures and
cultures, without excluding America, which was entrusted to Renato Poggioli.
From the very first number the review had an international editorial committee,
comprising of T.S. Eliot, Harry Levin, Henry Peyre, Vladimir Nabokov, Herbert
Steiner, Pedro Salinas, and Manfred Kridl.

But it was above all Berti’s translations of Eliot’s Poesie, reprinted five times
by Guanda in the Fenice series edited by Attilio Bertolucci, that were to become
an extraordinary vehicle for spreading knowledge of Eliot’s art in Italy, as also
the above-mentioned translations of the essays on Dante which played a far

This could be evidence of Eliot’s intellectual independence.

55 See Inventario, 2.1 (1949), pp. 1-2. The review published at various times translations (by Berti even
if they were not signed by him) of Eliot’s essays both on literary subjects and more general cultural issues:
‘Note per una definizione della cultura’, Inventario, 1.1 (1946), 7-18, translation of the essay Notes towards
a Definition of Culture which originally appeared in The New English Weekly in four successive issues of
January and February, 1943; ‘L’uomo di lettere e l’avvenire dell’Europa’, Inventario, 1.3-4 (1946-47), 13-
18, translation of the essay ‘The Responsibility of the Man of Letters in the Cultural Restoration of Europe’,
Norseman, 2.4 (1944), successively reprinted with the title ‘The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe’,
Horizon, 10.60 (1944); ‘Storia del Criterion’, Inventario, 2.1 (1949), 2-6, translation of the second half of
the essay The Unity of European Culture, published first in English and German in Berlin in 1946 and
reprinted in 1948 in the Appendix to the volume Notes Towards the Definition of Culture; ‘Milton’,
Inventario, 2.3 (1949), 53-68, translation of the essay originally published in 1947; ‘I propositi del dramma
poetico’, Inventario, 3.2 (1950), translation of the essay originally published in Adam, 17.200 (1949), 10-16.

56 The volume contains the essay Dante, which appeared in London in 1929 and, in the Appendice, the
from insignificant role in the renewal of Italian Dante scholarship, both Crocean
which felt the need for renewal from within, and scholarship that was intent on
disputing more or less directly with Croceanism. Eliot’s reading of Dante
ushered in a new interest in Dante as a maestro of making poetry, and the
medieval author, who in Italy had been relegated to the rhetoric of myth or to the
philological discussions of learned specialists, after the war gradually
commended himself once again to contemporary taste and especially as an active
presence among poets and writers. Even Sereni (he too, like Anceschi and Paci, a
disciple of Banfi) noted in 1950 the innovatory effect of Eliot’s Dante studies,
and underlined their unorthodoxy in respect to the Italian critical tradition:

Il culto della poesia di Dante, sonnecchiante allo stato di vasto sottinteso negli interessi odierni, non
manca da qualche tempo in qua di dare vigorosi indizi di risveglio. Lo studio dell’opera poetica e
critica di T.S. Eliot, l’attenzione suscitata dalla sua teoria del “correlativo oggettivo”, esemplata
appunto su Dante in forme non propriamente ortodosse rispetto alla tradizione critica, la sua
rivalutazione di aspetti e di strumenti, quali l’uso dell’allegoria, solitamente confinati tra gli
elementi “caduchi” del poema, hanno irrobustito l’opinione che fa della Commedia – della sua
struttura, della sua finalità, delle sue allusioni – un blocco compatto profondamente radicato in
un’epoca, in una situazione storica.87

In the same article Sereni referred to an article by Egidio Guidubaldi which had
appeared a week before in La Fiera Letteraria88 and which was centred on the
disagreement between Croce and Eliot:

1920 essay Dante published in The Sacred Wood and the Seventh of the Clark Lectures, delivered by Eliot
at Cambridge in 1926.


In the following years the critic conducted an in-depth analysis on the nineteenth-century rediscovery of
Dante by Foscolo and Tommaseo, and then by De Sanctis and Croce, to arrive finally at Contini. The
investigation was to give special relevance to Eliot, who was remembered not only in the title (Dante
Europeo) but also in the dedication, the date of which, 6 January 1965, was only two days after the poet and
critic’s death.
Eliot and Croce inhabited two opposing aesthetic worlds which clashed on problems such as the unitary character of the Comedy, the role of allegory and the intellective possibilities of the creative moment: in years pervaded by Crocean distinctions Eliot accepted the Comedy in its unity and globality and reassessed not only the Inferno but also the Purgatorio and Paradiso, the last Canto of which he judged the very highest peak that poetry had ever attained; he gave a positive judgement to allegories which he saw as ‘clear visual images’ (SE, p. 242) rather than cryptographic expressions drawing attention away from the poem; and finally he underlined Dante’s ability to treat philosophy, not as a theory, but as something perceptible, in this way opposing Croce’s anti-intellectualism.

Another author who, although he cannot be called Hermeticist, established close connections with the group of Florentine Hermeticists, to such an extent that Luzi recognised in him ‘il compagno più fiero’, his ‘solo umile maestro’, is Carlo Betocchi. Born in Turin, but constantly on the move because of his work, Betocchi had Florence as a continual point of reference and in 1932, on the eve of the Hermetic experience, he made his debut with Realità vince il sogno. In this first book, published in the ‘Quaderni di Frontespizio’, the visual influence of Rimbaud and Campana is evident, but even more so, from the very

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89 V. Sereni, ‘Si può leggere Dante come un poeta “puro”?’, p. 28.
91 Id., ‘Abiura io? Chi può dirlo’ (1981), line 23, in Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), (now in O, p. 524). The relationship between Luzi and Betocchi has not yet been investigated thoroughly by critics and would deserve a study of its own (see, however, some pages by O. Macri, ‘“Epifania” luziana di un “maestro”’, Michelangelo, 17.71-72 (1989), 3-6, and Verdi’s
title itself, is the influence of Dante’s poetry of reality and objectivity of visions, quite remote from the modern subjectivity of dreams.

In 1937, in an article published in *Frontespizio*, Betocchi brought together the names of Eliot and Dante. The Eliot’s essays that are found in his library are heavily annotated, especially the essay on Dante translated by Berti, followed by *L’idea di una società cristiana* (which was published in the Edizioni di Comunità of 1948) and by *Sulla poesia e sui poeti* (published by Bompiani). Betocchi read this last essay in 1960, the year in which he wrote most of the texts of the ‘Diarietto invecchiando’ in *L’estate di San Martino* (1943-61). In 1959 he re-read *Four Quartets* in the Garzanti edition, edited by Donini.

According to the author himself, Betocchi was interested above all in the Eliot who had brought into the twentieth century the grave tones of *Ecclesiastes*. This Biblical tone, together with the rhythms characteristic of an Eliot poem, appears in ‘Il giardino di Susanna’, included in *Un passo un altro passo* (1950-1966). Traces of Eliot are also present in ‘Con troppa dolcezza cantarono i miei poeti’, the second part of the triptych ‘L’età maggiore’. Although it is contained in the collection *Poesie del sabato*, which appeared in 1980, the passage can be dated to 1965 and is therefore from the same year as ‘Il giardino di Susanna’, as is clear here too from the ‘long’ lines and the overtly Biblical tone. In the penultimate version it still read:

```italian
Il correlativo oggettivo, questa suprema eleganza
della poesia del secolo, riscoperto da Eliot,
la mia natura biblica, un di danzante come David,
ma sempre in cammino, non l’ha potuta adottare.
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The first two lines, which did not survive as far as the final version, show how...
far Betocchi is from Eliot's emblematic objectivism and presumably his Italian pendant Montale. In the progressive development of Betocchi's poetry, that sea of objectivity which is reality, dominant in the author's first period, has absorbed deeper and deeper the subject itself. On the other hand, already in the poet's first book Realtà vince il sogno, the line 'Io un'alba guardai il cielo e vidi' is objective and subjective at the same time. The fact that the pronoun 'io' is placed in a prominent position at the beginning of the line and that it is immediately followed, without any mediation of the verb, by 'un'alba' (a complement of time that is also the object of the vision), shows that we are dealing with a state that involves a close relationship between the consciousness of the self and reality in its solid objectivity.

What rather interests Betocchi about Eliot is his having learned from subjective poetry to give expression to the humility of the human condition: 'Vorrei invece aver somigliato ad Eliot, che nella sua creazione di poesia, rifacendosi a Dante, ha restituito alla pietà il trono che le spetta. E ora capisco perché, un poeta come Eliot, non a Rimbaud abbia guardato, ma a Laforgue: quasi mutando dalla poesia soggettiva l'umiltà della condizione umana direttamente espressa'.

Among Italian authors that felt the presence of Eliot and who in some way built a cultural environment around Luzi there was also Attilio Bertolucci, often visited by the Florentine poet in the years between 1938 and 1941 when he was teaching in Parma. What Bertolucci learned from Eliot was above all how to mix the lyrical and prose registers, a kind of language capable of meditating on time and history, and ironically depicting (with an irony learned from Corbière and Laforgue) the most normal scenes of everyday life. There are numerous

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1994), I, 45.

94 In the Fronespizio years Betocchi denounced 'il pericolo del canto' as 'gratuita e facile consolazione'. See C. Betocchi, 'Premesse e limiti di un ritorno al canto', in Fronespizio, ed. by L. Fallacara (San Giovanni Valdarno – Rome, 1961), p. 390.

95 Id., 'Appendice' (1965) to Poesie del sabato (1980), in Tutte le poesie, p. 500.
references to Eliot in the essays\textsuperscript{96} and Bertolucci’s translation of ‘Journey of the Magi’ in his anthology of \textit{Poesia straniera del Novecento}\textsuperscript{97} is splendid. In this anthology, which was published in 1958, what Bertolucci admires in Pound’s work is the ‘archeologia ispirata, ardente’, never mind if often arbitrary, because what is important is that it should work as poetry: ‘Poeti giapponesi e provenzali, e stilnovisti italiani e metafisici inglesi non sono per lui dati freddi di cultura, ma esemplari ossessivi, un po’ come le sculture antiche per il Mantegna’.\textsuperscript{98} However, Bertolucci did not find Pound’s work completely convincing, and indeed he considered Eliot the greater of the two. There remain various traces of Eliot in Bertolucci’s poetic work, as line 3 of ‘La neve’(1947), ‘L’inverno è la stagione più cara’, which recalls, with the meaning overturned, the opening line of \textit{The Waste Land}, ‘April is the cruellest month’;\textsuperscript{99} ‘il vuoto di questi anni buttati via’ in ‘Verso Casarola’ (1957) line 38, which echoes a well-known passage in ‘East Coker’ V. 2, ‘[...] Twenty years largely wasted, the years of \textit{l’entre deux guerres}...’; a poem dedicated to \textit{Eliot a dodici anni (da una fotografia)} (1966); the water that does not spring from rocks in ‘Entrando nel tunnel’(1967), ‘Avrebbe mai […] // la mia seta trovato acqua scaturente da rocce?’ (lines 15, 17), reminiscence of ‘Here is no water but only rock’ in \textit{The Waste Land} V. 331; or the passage from Chapter XXVII of ‘Camera da letto’,


\textsuperscript{98} A. Bertolucci (ed.), \textit{Poesia straniera del Novecento}, p. 825.

‘C’è un’ora per il sole e un’ora per l’acqua, / un’ora per l’immobilità e un’ora per il moto’ (‘Le sorelle’, lines 48-49), allusion to Ecclesiastes by way of a passage taken from ‘East Coker’ I. 43-47, ‘The time of the seasons and the costellations / The time of milking and the time of harvest / The time of the coupling of man and woman / And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling. / Eating and drinking. Dung and death’.

At this point, it must be acknowledged that in the thirties, forties and the post-war years, Eliot was the cause of a progressive break with the dominant Platonic-Petrarchan tradition. From the sixties onwards he became increasingly ‘out of date’ with writers. In the Postmodern age, which denies tradition any authority, fragments reality and allows the most absolute irrationalism to reign, Eliot has progressively become a father that must be repudiated. All this in reality turns out to be confirmation of the prophetic substance of Eliot’s work, according to which the classic unitary structure of Dante’s poetry, the English Metaphysicals, and in part his own poetry, has been destroyed for good.

Evidence of the awareness of the decline of Eliot in Italian and also American poetry is found in an essay by Mario Praz, who in 1965, after a passionate thirty-year long study of Eliot, felt the need to re-dimension Eliot’s critical work, expressing a preference for Auden and Pound, for the French Surrealists, for the German Expressionists and even for the Russian Futurists. As with Praz, Anceschi’s enthusiasm too ended by dying down. In ‘Orizzonte della poesia’ (an essay of 1962 that developed the Discorso generale with which the review Il Verri had been inaugurated), Anceschi again referred to postulates based on Eliotian theories (the poetics of the object, the simultaneity between real things and ‘the time’ of poetry, the reducing of the poetic self to a minimum), but while he was delineating the main figures in the new twentieth-century lyric poetry tradition – Valéry, Eliot, Benn, Pound – he was insisting in particular on the latter.100

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In 1964, Antonio Porta, one of the novissimi introduced by Anceschi, published in the second issue of ‘Malebolge’ *Correlativo oggettivo*, an essay that was Eliotian right from the very title. On this occasion the writer discussed if and how it would be possible to follow Eliot’s suggestion to choose images and formal techniques ‘before’ and not ‘during the poem’, namely, following a rationalistic notion of poetic creation. In other words, Porta saw the risk of communicating a message decided upon *a priori* and therefore concluded: ‘Io credo che la poesia nuova si debba fare mettendo da parte Eliot’.

It was not easy, however, after the undoubted renewal that Eliot had been responsible for in Italian poetry of the forties and fifties, to put him and his dantismo completely aside. Again among the Novissimi, Sanguineti recognised that for certain passages of the Comedy ‘sono molte volte miglior commento taluni tratti dei *Cantos* o di *The Waste Land*, che non tante pagine di psicologistiche variazioni marginali’. Dante again, his experimentation with language, the idea of the Inferno as Laborintus, were used by the neo-Avantgarde of the sixties as an efficient tool to fight the abstractions of the ‘lyrical’ tradition. Laborintus was also compared by Sanguineti himself to a Terra desolata, even though turned upside-down, because if in Eliot’s work, especially in the last section, a metaphysical-religious direction may be hypothesized, in Sanguineti’s there emerges only a negative horizon, with a ‘degraded and degrading’ message:

Poiché il punto di riferimento era piuttosto Eliot che Pound, almeno immediatamente, potrei dire che il Laborintus, da questo punto di vista, è una specie di Terra desolata alla rovescia: nel caso di Eliot il piano delle citazioni è caratteristico, ed egli stesso, all’interno della Terra desolata, dichiara che si tratta di frammenti usati come puntelli per sostenere le rovine (‘These fragments I have

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101 A critique of Eliot’s rationalism and the excessively schematic division between the moment of *surrender* and that of *recovery* can also be found in the interview ED (see also Chapter 7).


shored against my ruins’). Nel caso di Laborintus, si manifesta un orizzonte di rovine irredimibili, invece, immediatamente. Ciò il mondo della cultura, della tradizione culturale, diventa una mera galleria di mummie esibibili\textsuperscript{104}.

In Sanguineti’s poetry there appear various Eliotian reminiscences and quotations, drawn not only from The Waste Land but also from the Four Quartets. In the ‘mistilinguismo’ of A-ronne and Laborintus II, for instance, there are numerous quotations from East Coker, even though they are ‘un catalogo di gesti spenti, di risonanze mute, appaiate dall’assenza di valore e di incidenza semantica’.\textsuperscript{105} What is re-evoked of the English poem is above all the opening (‘In my beginning is my end’), which is dismembered and given a free re-rendering in A-ronne (‘a: ah: hamm: anfang: / in principio: nel mio / principio: / am, anfang: in my beginning’), and the incipit of the fifth part, which is also cut up and reduced to shreds, in their turn mingled with short Dantean motifs drawn from the first Canto of the Inferno:

\[
\text{e nel mezzo: e in una selva:} \\
\text{oscura: selvaggia selva: e aspra: ed una lupa: ma: not} \\
\text{only} \\
\text{in the middle of the way: una lupa: in the middle: con} \\
\text{paura:} \\
\text{ma questa bestia uccide: uccide: but all the way in a} \\
\text{dark wood:} \\
\text{in a bramble: nel mezzo: the years of l’entre deux} \\
\text{guerres: una lupa:} \\
\text{nel mezzo}\textsuperscript{106};
\]


\textsuperscript{106} See \textit{East Coker} II 39-40: ‘In the middle, not only in the middle of the way / But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble’; \textit{East Coker} V 1-2: ‘So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years - / Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l’entre deux guerres –’.
LUZI AND ELIOT: INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONS

Come mai qui? Mi chiede lui
Calcando le parole più del giusto
M. Luzi, Bureau, lines 12-13

And heard another voice cry:
‘What! are you here?’
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding II. 45

Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?
Dante, Inf. XV. 30

6.1. From Quaderno Gotico to Dal fondo delle campagne: Eliotian Echoes and Symbols in Luzi’s Poetry

In the years after the war, starting from the lyrics included in Primizie del deserto (1947-1951), Luzi’s poetry also changed, not only through the influence of Montale’s Occasioni (1939), but mainly thanks to the renewed relationship with Dante and, even if to a lesser degree, with Eliot (a relationship which was sometimes direct, sometimes via the filter of Montale and, more generally, of the cultural climate described above, and at times brought about by a common

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1 Replying to a question about Eliot and Montale’s influence on Luzi’s post-war collections of poetry, the Florentine poet admitted to having learnt a great deal from Eliot but stressed the distance that separated him from Montale: ‘In fondo quello delle Occasioni è un linguaggio cifrato e allusivo a priori che a me non conviene. Che la mia rappresentazione del reale, poi, sia magari enigmatica e che abbia una valenza simbolica, questo è vero; ma il processo è il contrario, prima ha parlato la cosa, la natura, il mio interlocutore: hanno parlato prima che il mio a priori gli abbia tagliato la parola’ (Mario Luzi, ‘La poesia nel conflitto’ (1989), Interview ed. by P. Di Stefano, in Conversazione. Interviste 1953-1998, ed. by A. Murdocca, pp. 58-59). Even if Luzi has not based his poetics on Montale’s Occasioni, it would be worth dedicating a textual study to the linguistic influence of Montale’s collection on Luzi.
interest in Dante).\(^2\) In the post-war years Luzi, freed from the prison that was the ‘giardino di Armida’ of Hermeticism, in the desolate reality left by the Second World War, glimpsed ‘primizie nel deserto’ and felt ‘la necessità di nominare le cose e valutare la loro elementare presenza’.\(^3\) Again in the post-war years he found in Dante a surprising capacity to connect things, ideas and words, and was struck by Eliot’s reminiscence in the *Four Quartets* of Dante’s sense of time\(^4\) and by the *sermo humilis* (and sublime) of the theatre of Eliot\(^5\) (see ED, pp. 222-23). Not only in the poetry but also in the critical reflections of those years


\(^3\) F. Camon (ed), *Il mestiere di poeta*, p. 188.


\(^5\) *Assassinio nella Cattedrale* was translated by Castelli in 1947 and the complete volume of *Teatro* was translated by Rosati and Castelli in 1958. Luzi declares that he read the translations of the *Four Quartets* as they came out in the reviews, and *Murder in the Cathedral* before it was collected in volume form in 1958 (see ED, pp. 221-22).
various points of contact between the two twentieth-century authors can be discerned.

Perhaps Luzi had an involuntary and contaminated memory, and it really was in all probability a question of memory, because he had been reading Eliot’s poems and critical essays right from the Hermetic period, and despite a substantial distance felt in respect to a tradition that did not belong to him, he must have been encouraged to reflect on this. And then after 1945, in the void left by the collapse of theoretical systems, there appeared in Luzi’s work a kind of realism that seemed to be closer to Eliot’s objective poetry than nineteenth-century naturalism and verismo, or the Neorealism emerging in those years. Luzi’s poetry in fact set up basing itself on experience as its goal, going beyond this being anchored to experience on a level which Ramat has called the real ‘notizia’ of neo-Realism.6

Thanks also to the mediation of Eliot, whose presence in Italy was particularly important in the fifties, Luzi re-read Dante in a fresh light, not so much in order to begin by sharing the poetics of the objective correlative, as happened in the case of Montale, nor only because both Eliot and Luzi at a certain point tried out a mingling of styles very much like what Contini called Dantean plurilinguismo and pluristilismo,7 but above all because both, and Eliot was the first, tried to go beyond the crystallised fixity of the Platonic, Mallarmean and Petrarchan tradition which proclaimed the primacy of mental reality over that which was external and natural:

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6 See S. Ramat, L’Ermetismo, p. 296. On the issue of the meaning of ‘realtà’ so much discussed in the fifties, we may remember the words of Luzi himself: ‘non nella realtà secondo la nozione che implica di esso il realismo, ma nella natura percepita con purezza, nella sua voce profonda e continua che informa il linguaggio degli uomini risiede la possibilità di conciliare il dissenso tra il soggettivo e l’oggettivo, tra l’assoluto ideale e il concreto storico; e di superare la grande eresia Romantica, il che è dopo tutto il fine implicito di ieri e di oggi’ (TQ, p. 27).

7 The problem of Luzi and Eliot’s belonging to the Dantean strain of plurilinguismo would need to be dealt with apart, as would also the relationship between Luzi and Contini.
Tuttavia, sebbene la correzione e l’aggiustamento di visuale imposto dal prevalere dell’esperienza sulla prefigurazione - ma senza mai cedere i diritti di una sorta di prescienza che la poesia si è sempre fatta riconoscere - sebbene, dicevo, quella correzione dolorosa fosse in corso a cominciare dagli inizi del conflitto, e non soltanto in me, solo nel 1945 mi misi a riflettere di proposito sull’argomento. E sulla neonata rivista ‘Società’ pubblicai un saggio intitolato ‘L’inferno e il limbo’. Fu allora che Dante e la Commedia vennero, come testimoni fino ad allora accantonati, a sommuovere il discorso. Cercavo in quelle pagine di dire di che grande rinuncia, di che strenuo malinconico esilio dalla violenza e dall’inferno della storia era frutto la sublimité del modello, e più che modello popolarità, che aveva determinato la nostra tradizione lirica e la nostra lingua. Non era certo una conversione: una cultura che mi aveva formato sia pure in modo controverso non potevo certo rimuoverla. Si trattava invece di un acquisto di coscienza anche comparativamente diretto a considerare i rapporti che la poesia di altri paesi aveva con il proprio tempo su tradizioni differenti, meno dispotiche di quanto fosse la nostra per noi. In particolare era tenuta d’occhio quella anglosassone. (‘Dante, da mito a presenza’, in DLM, pp. 52-53)

With the end of the demiurgic illusion of being able to create a perfect spiritual universe distinct from the world, the reproposal during the post-war years of the relationship between poet and reality inspired Luzi’s critical works ‘L’inferno e il limbo’ (1945) (but also ‘Sul concetto di natura’ of 1947 and ‘Naturalezza del poeta’ of 1951), in which the writer used two metaphors, limbo and hell, to distinguish respectively the Petrarchan creative act characterised by a continuous poetic and speculative egocentrism, a hortus conclusus in respect to the fragmentary nature of reality, from the Dantean one, which had instead the features of a less formal and more fluid Italian, of an Italian more responsive to the inexhaustible processes of creation and nature. In 1959, furthermore, Luzi published an anthology entitled L’idea simbolista in which he traced the development of the modern lyric in a European framework along the path of Orphean Romanticism and its nineteenth and twentieth-century continuators. He also included Eliot in the anthology but presented him as already standing outside this trend, because, although ‘educato al simbolismo’, he had ‘approdato a una dottrina personale del linguaggio che risolve in modo del tutto oggettivo la
sopravveniente esigenza simbolica' (IS, p. 314). As an example of Eliot’s poetry Luzi chose *Ash-Wednesday*, in Baldi’s translation.\(^8\)

How much *Ash-Wednesday* influenced the Florentine poet can be shown by means of a textual analysis of verbal echoes of Eliot in Luzi’s post-war poetry. In *Quaderno gotico* for example ‘a capo delle scale’ (II. 11) probably conceals an allusion to the formula repeated in various ways in the third section of *Ash-Wednesday* ‘At the first turning of the second stair’ (III. 1), ‘At the second turning of the second stair’ (III. 7), ‘At the first turning of the third stair’ (III. 12), while the title of the following collection, *Primizie del deserto*, might recall ‘the garden in the desert’ of *Ash-Wednesday* (V. 34). The collection *Primizie del deserto*, as the poet himself states in an interview, represents ‘un po’ il rifiorire stralunato e spaesato della vita, dei suoi desideri e delle sue illusioni nella cenere del deserto; nelle ceneri delle rovine della guerra. E quindi la prima manifestazione della vita è il dolore, il dolore quando è stato tragedia e lutto non aveva neanche voce, dopo riprende la voce di afflizione. [...] Allora c’è questa voce che in qualche modo centra il discorso sulla desolata continuità dell’esistenza a cui tarda a ritornare il senso della speranza. Questa è la situazione di *Primizie del deserto*.\(^9\) If, on the one hand, there seems to be

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\(^8\) Note that *Ash-Wednesday*, the lyric that is most intimately connected to Eliot’s conversion, is one of the compositions that, perhaps owing to its profound although dramatic religiosity, attracted the attention of the Florentine Hermeticists most. The first Italian translation was published by Baldi in *Frontespizio* in 1937, and in April of the same year Berti’s translation appeared in *Letteratura*. It is significant that Luzi chose Baldi’s translation, which he probably preferred both for reasons of form (in the interview mentioned above, Luzi considered Berti’s translations a ‘disastro’ from the philological point of view, although able ‘di sentire e accentuare certi aspetti del testo, soprattutto quelli narrativi’) and because of the greater attention paid by Baldi to the religious questions present in Eliot’s work. On the scarce philological rigour of Berti’s translations see Carlo Izzo’s severe judgement expressed in a critical review entitled ‘Eliot tradito’ which appeared in *Matino del Popolo*, 1 June 1948. Note also that in the second edition (1960) Luzi no longer chose Sergio Baldi’s translation but that of Roberto Sanesi, which appeared in R. Sanesi, *Poeti inglesi del ’900* (Milan: Bompiani, 1960) and which was to reappear later in T.S. Eliot, *Poesie*, It. transl. by R. Sanesi (Milan: Bompiani, 1961).

nothing for it but to resign oneself to the conditions of the desert in the knowledge that 'niente rimane da sperare' ('Né il tempo', line 15), an allusion to the Eliot formula obsessively repeated in *Ash-Wednesday* 'I do not hope' (I. 1, 2, 3; I. 9, 30) or, with *variatio*, 'I cannot hope' (I. 23), on the other hand, sterility bears signs of fertility, like the 'fiori di quaresima' (line 26), which might recall, even if only distantly, the penitential atmosphere of Eliot's poem.

In the first lyric in *Primizie del deserto*, 'Né il tempo' (1947), lines like 'È questa la nostra regione senza limiti' (line 10), 'Qui è il dominio che dobbiamo saccheggiare / l'abbondanza da metere [...]’ (lines 19-20) seem to be echoes, also at a syntactic level, of the last lines of the second section of *Ash Wednesday*: ‘[…] This is the land which ye / Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity / Matters. *This is the land.* We have our inheritance’. The use of the demonstrative to open the line suggests the concrete preciseness of the discovery and the importance of the recognition, as well as signalling a decision to face the desert and inviting the reader himself to immerse himself in *medias res*. This use of the demonstrative (and a similar observation could be made for the use of exclamatory forms)\(^{10}\) was to extend to other poems in *Primizie del deserto* and *Onore del vero* until it became a stylistic feature of Luzi’s first post-war collections: 'Ma è questa la terra che dobbiamo coltivare' ('Né tregua', line 17) 'È questa la foresta inestricabile' ('Invocazione', line 24) 'È questo il tempo propizio, se vieni' ('Invocazione', line 46); 'in questo cieco transito dal tempo / al tempo, in questo aspro viaggio / da quel che sono a quello che sarò' ('Canto',

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\(^{10}\) The use of exclamatory forms is also quite frequent in the post-war collections and was already to be found in Eliot, to be exact in 'Marina', the last of the *Ariel Poems*, which appeared in 1930 (see also 'Pur che...'; 'Est', 'Marina', 'Notizie a Giuseppina dopo tanti anni', 'Villaggio', 'Nebbia', 'Gemma' in *Primizie del deserto*; 'Amanti', 'Come deve', 'Richiesta d'asilo d'un pellegrino a Viterbo', 'A Niki Z. e alla sua patria', in *Onore del vero*). It was not considered useful here to spend any more time on the affinity of Eliot’s *Marina* and Luzi’s poem of the same name as the theme has been dealt with exhaustively in specific studies (already quoted) by Panaro and Casella. On the use of the exclamative-vocative see Alfredo Luzi, p. 137; G. Zagarrio, *Luzi* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), p. 95; B. Nugnes, pp. 137-38. The tone of astonished affirmation or at times interrogation becomes, as Mengaldo observes, 'un’immagine ritmica del “transito”' (P.V. Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, pp. 651-52).
lines 11-12) and so on. These last lines taken from ‘Canto’ are a significant example of how the memory of Dante’s bitter journey through Hell (with its ‘rime aspre e chicce’) towards Paradise (‘all’eterno dal tempo’) intermingles with the memory of other lines of Ash-Wednesday: ‘In this brief transit where the dreams cross / The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying’ (VI. 5-6).

However, although Ash-Wednesday is at a formal and spiritual level among the poems by Eliot to have had the greatest influence on Luzi’s post-war poetry, precise textual references to The Waste Land and its symbolic figures would need just as much attention and are even more numerous:

L’impatto con La terra desolata, che lessi sempre nel periodo anteriore al 1945, fu sicuramente forte ed esercitò su di me una impressione suggestiva che derivava soprattutto da quegli elementi che venivano fatti interloquire l’uno con l’altro per esprimere a fondo lo smarrimento intellettuale dell’uomo d’inizio Novecento. La Terra desolata metteva di fronte allo shock della modernità, al dramma iniziato con Rimbaud, Leopardi. E mi è sembrata una lettura importante per il nostro secolo. In particolare mi colpiva il tentativo di riorganizzare un pensiero che non aveva più alcuna organicità, ricorrendo a un procedimento che dalla logica che era in frantumi passava al soccorso dell’antropologia che ci può dire nel profondo. La Terra desolata infatti rispecchia ed esprime le crisi di disorientamento dell’uomo novecentesco e fornisce suggestioni attive e fervide per la rinascita: lo fa a livello visibile, occulto e simbolico. (ED, p. 218)

The symbol of the desert, for example, is one of the most frequent symbols in Primizie del deserto and enshrines a complex mix of literary reminiscences, from Tasso’s desert to Sbarbaro’s, from Montale’s orto to Gerontion’s dry season, from the desert of the first Cantos of Dante’s Inferno to Eliot’s Terra desolata. Eliot’s desert and Luzi’s have many affinities but also differences, which have been well described by Piero Bigongiari:

il ‘deserto’ luziano è, in confronto alla ‘waste land’ eliotiana, una ‘tabula rasa’ per ricominciare ad

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11 It is worth noting that the ‘piaggia diserta’ of Inf. I. 29 and the ‘diserta piaggia’ of Inf. II. 62 indicate the slope, between the wood and the sunlit hill, where the three wild animals appear to Dante, whereas for Luzi the image of the desert is enriched with numerous literary experiences from Italian and European literature and indicates the reality of the world that had emerged from the hell of the Second World War.
apparecchiarla delle ignote primizie, piuttosto che una terra desolata dalla sua stessa carica vitale; e l'uomo luziano non risulta vuoto, seppur in partenza conservi l'abitudine all'inerzia di chi ha perso la rotta, proprio perché riempito di questa sua estrema, tempestante soggettività. E infine, proprio per quanto è oggettiva, intimamente oggettiva, la terra di Eliot è deserta, intimamente priva di speranza. Per Luzi invece, chi ben guardi, è più prossima la disperanza rilkiana ("Io ti credevo molto più lontana"), se non esistesse quel ritaglio del destino, una sorta di aprioristica condanna all'impossibilità della chiusura del cerchio che ha fatto pensare a Kafka.\footnote{P. Bigongiari, in Poesia italiana del Novecento, p. 263.}

Through an intertextual analysis a first suggestion from Eliot’s poem can be found in a 1938 lyric, included in Avvento notturno and entitled ‘Europa’, where ‘[…] un’orda incede / lungamente nel vento e nella luna / per le fratte […]’ (lines 13-15) like the ‘[…] hordes swarming / Over endless plains […]’ of The Waste Land V. 368-369 (notice however the significant semantic shift from ‘swarming’ to ‘incende lungamente’).\footnote{In the same poem there seems to be a reference also to ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’: the imperatives directed to himself, ‘osa tu il bianco / dell’inane graffito lungo i muri’, ‘osa il silenzio / delle attese patite’, might refer to the questions that the ‘I’ of Prufrock puts to himself in a circular repetitive movement from which he cannot pull free: ‘And indeed there will be time / To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”’ (lines 37-38). In Luzi, however, the interrogative becomes imperative and the inert apathy of the questions that do not wish or are not able to find an answer is transformed into a firm exhortation to ‘osare’.

There are also frequent echoes of the opening of The Waste Land:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring

\footnote{‘Da “Monologo”’ was originally a poem in nine parts but only sections IV and V were published in the Poesie sparse. For the part of the poem quoted and not preserved in the final version, see O, p. 1427.}
Dull roots with spring rain
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers ('The Burial of the Dead', lines 1-4)

which in Luigi Berti's translation, the one that probably remained most impressed in Luzi’s memory, became ‘Aprile è il più crudele dei mesi, genera / lilla [sic] dalla terra addormentata, confonde / ricordo e desiderio, risveglia / oscure radici con la pioggia di primavera’.\(^{15}\)

In Quaderno gotico and Poesie sparse, there have remained more or less vague traces of this opening, such as the use of the archetype of spring in the sense not only of being life regenerating but also as a cause of disruption and upheaval: ‘correva, ove tendesse, vento astrale, / deserto tra le prime fredde foglie, / portava una germinazione oscura / negli alberi, turbava pietre e stelle’ ('Da “Monologo”’ I. 20-23); ‘Di gennaio, di notte / quando lungo le sue vene lo spazio / trepida per un vento inesauribile, ravviva / negli alberi speranze ancora vane / e li sveglia a una vita ancora incerta, / troppo remota oltre le cime ed oltre / le radici’ ('Di gennaio, di notte', lines 1-7). There are more evident traces in Primizie del deserto ('[...] quando un impeto strano opprime i vetri e rade / l’erba e un nuovo inizio turba le radici’, ‘Est’, line 8) and in Onore del vero ('Chi esce vede segni inaspettati [...] Il freddo di Pasqua è crudele con i fiori, / fa regredire i deboli, i malati / e più d’uno dimessa la speranza / rabbirvidisce dentro sciarpe e baveri. [...]’, ‘Lungo il fiume’, lines 1-5). It would be interesting to conjecture that the expression ‘turba le radici’ translates, even while transposing it into another context, Eliot's ‘stirring / Dull roots’, where ‘stirring’ does not mean only ‘risvegliare’, as Berti translates it, but also, with a more disturbing meaning, ‘agitare’, ‘mettere in tumulto’ and ‘turbare’. ‘Stir’ and

\(^{15}\) The first lines of The Waste Land are those that more than any others entered into the collective imagination of Italian post-war poets. In the Hermetic sphere, Bigongiari has numerous allusions to this opening: to those indicated in Chapter 1 must be added the expression ‘il mese più tenero’ which is found in a lyric from 1984 and which deliberately replaces the superlative adjective ‘più crudele’ with its antiname
‘turbare’ as used by Eliot and Luzi respectively lend themselves well to replacing the traditional archetype of spring seen as happy regeneration with a more ambiguous and dramatic image, that of spring which disturbs and disrupts the balance of stasis and death. This dramatic sense of movement entering the quiet of stasis is found in another poem in *Primizie del deserto*, ‘Gemma’ (1951), where, apart from the Dantean reminiscences found in the syntagm already examined in Chapter 4, ‘dalle antiche / ferite spiccia sangue’, a ‘primavera scontrosa’ is depicted whose rain restores life to ‘le radici esauste’ with an allusion once again to the opening of Eliot’s poem mentioned above:

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Nei mesi alterni, nella primavera scontrosa
un vento cupo chiama alla fatica
per la notte piovigginosa i semi
e le radici esauste e le ceppaie. È il tempo
che soffia nelle ceneri, ravviva
le faville sopite, dalle antiche
ferite spiccia sangue. Tutt’intorno
gli alberi consueti mettono fiori strani. (lines 9-16)
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There are also allusions to the first lines of *The Waste Land* in ‘Aprile-Amore’ (1951) where Luzi speaks of April as a ‘Tempo che soffre e fa soffrire, tempo che in un turbine chiaro porta fiori / misti a crudeli apparizioni, […]’ (lines 8-10), in a lyric written in the following year where we read ‘La primavera quando arriva / che il corpo ancora stranito / regge al colpo, ma trema / e si risente nelle sue radici’ (‘In un punto’, OV, lines 1-4), and in a passage in *Su fondamenti invisibili* which describes ‘il punto / tra memoria e desiderio’ (‘Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi’, line 77-78), almost a quotation of ‘mixing / memory and desire’ (lines 2-3).

Apart from the desert and spring, another figure from *The Waste Land* and in particular from the last section ‘What the Thunder Said’ is the thunder announcing the coming of rain and a sign of a possible rebirth of the land. The
figure reintroduces the theme of aridity accompanied however by a desire for water and fertility: ‘brontolio di tuono’ (‘Da “Monologo”’, II. 41, in *Quaderno gotico*), ‘desolata pioggia’ (‘Da “Monologo”’, VIII. 14); ‘Dopo il tuono e la pioggia, in un versante’ (*Quaderno gotico*, XIII. 1);¹⁶ ‘[…] sotto aride pendici inconsolata / per vie cupe ove niente vive più, / niente se non la speranza del tuono’ (‘S’avvia tra i muri, è preda della luce’, PD, lines 10-12). What Luzi calls ‘speranza del tuono’ is situated in a desolate landscape which recalls that of Eliot (‘After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places / The shouting and the crying / Prison and palace and reverberation / of thunder of spring over distant mountains / He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying / With a little patience’, lines 323-28; ‘Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road / The road winding above among the mountains’, lines 331-34; ‘There is not even silence in the mountains / But dry sterile thunder without rain’, lines 342-43), in which at a certain point arrives the liberating sound of the thunder (‘then a damp gust / Bringing rain’, lines 393-94; ‘then spoke the thunder’, line 399). In general, however, Luzi’s thunder has a naturalistic and symbolic force (in this connection see also ‘Tuona. A tratti pioviggina. Cresce l’erba’, ‘Lungo il fiume’, OV, line 36) rather than a mythical and allegorical one as in Eliot.

While *Ash-Wednesday* and *The Waste Land* had already been read by Luzi before the war, *Four Quartets* was read after the war and left traces both in terms of form and contents in Luzi’s poetry:

Con la traduzione dei *Quattro Quartetti* la presenza di Eliot acquista rilevanza. Qualche segno c’era già in *Mercoledì delle ceneri*, nella *Terra desolata* e nei *Cori da ‘La Rocca’*, ma ciò che fu veramente interessante per me furono i *Quattro Quartetti*. So che molti critici in Inghilterra li giudicarono una cena, una deviazione: Eliot cominciava ad essere un fattore positivo, con una nuova teologia. Naturalmente non a tutti piacquero ma tutti dovettero prenderli in considerazione come un

¹⁶ This is the only text that was replaced in the first edition of *Quaderno Gotico* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1947) and which however appears in the manuscript of the original sequence of fourteen poems that appeared in *Inventario*, 1.1 (1946).
What seems to have left a profound impression on Luzi’s poetry is above all the way in which Eliot deals in *Four Quartets* with the theme of time, seen as a purgatorial suspension between past, present and eternity, going as far as being a typically Dantean simultaneity of present, past and eternity, as the poet himself admits:

1 *Quartetti* furono importanti per il modo in cui vi trovavo trattato il problema del tempo. Se pensiamo alla regia che ha regolato tutta la concezione del tempo che da Petrarca in poi ha pervaso la mente e l’evoluzione della nostra storia letteraria, emerge una concezione del tempo come perdita, come discendenza, come corruzione di una compiutezza iniziale. Ancora io non sapevo nulla di Teilhard de Chardin e l’incontro con i *Quattro Quartetti* fu gradito perché vi trovai ciò che in fondo avevo in potenza: essi rispondevano a una mia esigenza di vedere il tempo non solo come rovina, come corruzione, e quindi come perdita, ma anche come *agonia*, come combattimento tra il passato che perisce e qualcosa che si aspetta. È un tempo agonistico che mi pare si possa trovare nei *Quartetti*, un tempo agonico e purgatoriale che a me ha fatto bene. È anche il tempo dantesco perché in Dante c’è sia il tempo della perdita che quello dell’acquisto, il tempo del *Purgatorio* e del *Paradiso*: nell’Antipurgatorio il tempo è ancora legato a un ricordo, ma è anche attesa della purgazione, nel *Purgatorio* il tempo è presente sia come reminiscenza che come attesa di beatitudine, nel Paradiso il tempo non esiste più. (ED, p. 221)

The temporal dimension that is a feature of Luzi’s post-war poetry is above all the purgatorial dimension of a ‘vicissitudine sospesa’ (*Notizie a Giuseppina dopo tanti anni*, PD, line 8), and in its being ‘sospeso’ (*Invocazione*, PD, line 1), in its ‘Tempo sospeso ad alcunché tra oscuro / e manifesto’ (*Il pescatore*, OV, lines 113-14), Luzi’s poetic self probably recalls not only Tiresias in *The Waste Land* ‘throbbing between two lives’ (III. 218) and the ‘time of tension between’ of *Ash-Wednesday* (VI. 20), the ‘wavering between the profit and the loss / in this brief transit where the dreams cross / The dream crossed twilight between birth and dying’ of *Ash-Wednesday* VI. 4-6, but also the ‘time is
withdrawn' of *The Dry Salvages* III. 30. Another example of suspended time can be found in the Eliot lines 'One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, [...]’ (*Ash-Wednesday* IV. 14) and 'In the uncertain hour before the morning' ('Little Gidding' II. 25), which seem to merge in an original way with line 5 of 'Nel mese di giugno' (OV), ‘all’ora incerta tra vigilia e sonno’.\(^{18}\)

Bàrberi Squarotti, referring in particular to *Onore del vero*, has singled out the stylistic and rhythmical signs of this ‘tempo sospeso’ that is such an important characteristic of Luzi’s poetry: ‘si tratta anzi tutto di una struttura del verso (in prevalenza l’endecasillabo) costruita intorno al ritmo teso della parola proparossitona, per lo più situata in clausola, oppure in posizione forte al centro del verso: ne nasce un andamento del discorso perpetuamente inconcluso, nel senso di un continuo ritmo, attraverso l’evocatività dei moduli ritmici, a un “al di là”, a una soluzione noumenica a cui i dati fenomenici raccolti nel verso non possono offrire più che uno stimolo indicandone la problematica esistenza, in un’atmosfera di inquieta attesa, di turbata speranza’.\(^{19}\)

The moment suspended ‘between’ or ‘tra’ is also the moment in which the poetic self becomes aware of its being in a precise *hic et nunc*. In this connection the formula ‘Io sono qui’ found in ‘Villaggio’, a lyric in *Primizie del deserto* (‘Io sono qui lo stesso tempo che fu altrove / e in altro tempo, non importa / quanto lontano, né quanto diverso’, lines 18-20) seems to have not only a contextual but also a syntactic correspondence with the formula ‘I am here’ found in ‘East Coker’ I. 50-51 (‘[…] I am here / or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning’) or, in a slightly varied form, in ‘Gerontion’ (‘Here I am, an old man in a dry month / Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain’, lines 1-2).\(^{20}\) These last lines, and even

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\(^{18}\) See also ‘Per mare’ in *Su fondamenti invisibili* where there is an allusion to a ‘[…] tempo appeso a un filo / d’un riacquisto d’infanzia, / tra sonno e veglia, tra innocenza e colpa’ (lines 5-7).


\(^{20}\) Luzi’s syntagm ‘io sono qui’ (a frequent formula, as was observed in the first chapter, in Bigongiari too) returns in ‘A Giuseppina dopo tanti anni’, line 6 (‘Mi trovo qui a questa età che sai’), in ‘Anno’, line 11 (‘Io, come sia, son qui venuto, avanzo’), in ‘Villaggio’, line 18 (‘Io sono qui lo stesso che fu altrove’), in
more the Shakespearean quotation taken from *Measure for Measure* and used as an epigraph to the same poem (‘Thou hast nor youth nor age / But as it were an after dinner sleep / Dreaming of both’, in Luigi Berti’s translation: ‘Tu non sei né giovane né vecchio. È come se tu dormissi dopo pranzo sognando di queste due età’), lend themselves to a precise textual comparison with lines 6-7 of ‘Notizie a Giuseppina dopo tanti anni’: ‘Mi trovo qui a questa età che sai, / né giovane né vecchio, attendo, guardo’. Apart from the theme of suspended time, we may note also the Eliot-like use of the deictic ‘here’ which is often found in *Primizie del deserto*.21

This time suspended between present, past and future also becomes, both in Eliot and Luzi, a relationship between the opposites present and eternal, life and death, metamorphosis and stasis, so that becoming contains being, the end the beginning, in a sort of ‘geometrica compiutezza chiastica’.22 This conception of time can be seen as going back in general to the Christian-Platonic tradition, and above all to Dante, whose time, as Luzi himself has observed, is ‘un presente che risponde direttamente nell’eternità’.23 For instance the coexistence of opposites

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21 We may remember for instance the following lines: ‘Qui sediamo irreali tra gioventù e vecchiaia’ (‘Visitando con E. il suo paese’, line 12); ‘È qui, è in queste opere miti / e chiare che trascorre e brucia / quel che non ho e che pure dovrò perdere / Tempo passato e prossimo si libra...’ (‘Anno’, lines 7-10).

22 The expression is used by Bigongiari speaking of Eliot in an interview with Eanna Ceallachain in 1994 (P. Bigongiari, ‘In my beginning is my end’, in *Nel mutismo dell’universo*, p. 215).

23 M. Luzi, ‘Dante, scienza e innocenza’, p. 79. On the simultaneity and relationship between different polarities, such as time and eternity, locality and universality, individuality and collectivity, freedom and destiny, transcendence and immanence in Dante’s work, see John Took, *Dante’s Phenomenology of Being*, Glasgow, University of Glasgow Press, 2000, pp. 35-101. The hermeneutic approach of this book, which invites the modern reader to read the ancient poet starting from his own circumstances as himself a historically located being, so that every kind of world-interpretation presupposes an act of self-interpretation, turns out to be particularly useful also for studies on the dantismo of Eliot and Luzi. The medieval text is in fact read bearing in mind the methods and results reached by phenomenology, which presents many points of contact with the thought of the two twentieth-century poets. On the relationship between time and eternity see especially pp. 46-47: ‘For Dante, man is both in and beyond time. He is in time both in the simple sense of being bound like everything else by the seasonality of things, and in the more complex sense of knowing, willing and becoming successionally, in a manner, that is to say,
in Eliot is recalled by the following lines from Luzi: ‘Nei giorni incerti ai crocevia del tempo / nelle ore dopo la passione quando / anche il dolore ha fine e l’anima si tiene appena / che non frani nel suo vuoto / e si chiede stupita più che ansiosa / s’è quella l’agonia ch’è in ogni inizio / o il termine, il termine di tutto,’

(‘Di gennaio, di notte’ (1956), in Appendice al Quaderno gotico, lines 8-15, especially 13-15); ‘fummo la fissità nel movimento, / identità soggiunta a identità, / tempo nel tempo vivendo’ (‘Invocazione’, PD, lines 77-79); ‘Ed i giorni rinascono dai giorni / l’uno dall’altro, perdita ed inizio / cenere e seme, identità nel cielo’ (‘Invocazione’, lines 102-104); ‘[,] si duole in te la nascita / incessante del tutto ingenerato, / il moto nella quiete, il divenire / in quel che è, che resta sempre uguale’ (‘Brughiera’, PD, lines 2-5); ‘[,] Solo / la parola all’unisono di vivi / e morti, la vivente comunione / di tempo e eternità vale a recidere / il duro filamento d’elegia. / È arduo. Tutto l’altro è troppo ottuso’ (‘Il duro filamento’, DFC, lines 35-40). Various passages from Four Quartets immediately come to mind: ‘Time past and time future / what might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present’ (‘Burnt Norton’ I. 46-48); ‘At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless / Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is / But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity / Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, / Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance, and there is only dance’ (‘Burnt Norton’ II. 16-21); ‘Or say that the end precedes the beginning, / And the end and the beginning were always there / Before the beginning and after the end. / And all is always now’ (‘Burnt Norton V. 10-13); ‘In my beginning is my end

characterized by the before and after of each successive inflection of the mind and will and of each successive attempt at self-rationalization. He is beyond time in the sense that he is called by virtue of the kind of creature he is to a species of being-as-existence apt to transcend the cognitive and affective structures of temporal selfhood. But for man here and now – which is what Dante is concerned about in the Commedia – to be in and beyond time means simultaneously to be in and beyond time, with the result that in every conscious moment of his-being-in-the-world as a free existent he is invited to resolve the restiveness of the one in the stillness of the other’.
and ‘In my end is my beginning’ (‘East Cocker’ I. 1; V. 38); ‘At the moment which is not of action or inaction’ (‘The Dry Salvages’ III. 32); ‘When time stops and time is never ending’ (‘The Dry Salvages’ I. 47); ‘the point of intersection of the timeless / with time [...]’ (‘The Dry Salvages’ V. 18-19).

Sickness itself can change into its opposite and become health: ‘Il tempo, / il tempo medica le piaghe, / ché all’uomo, dici, è forza porre fine / alle lacrime, è forza cominciare / ogni giorno – questo è più acuto strazio – e la vita può darsi nella cenere / e questa piaga atroce può volgere in salute’ (‘Villaggio’, lines 24-30); ‘Il medico si curva sulla piaga, ride se noi diciamo morte, insiste / che tutto deve convertirsi in vita / o in ciò che le somigli e che proceda, / esprimi o risa o lagrime o fastidio, / piccole scorrerie vili o viaggi’ (‘Brughiera’, lines 18-23). Above all ‘il medico che si curva sulla piaga’ in ‘Brughiera’, who ‘insiste / che tutto deve convertirsi in vita’, might allude at the level of content to the ‘arte risanatrice’ of the ‘chirurgo ferito’ in ‘East Coker’: ‘The wounded surgeon plies the steel / That questions the distempered part; / beneath the bleeding hands we feel / the sharp compassion of the healer’s art / resolving the enigma of the fever chart’ (IV. 1-4).

Even death may contain its opposite, which is birth, as transpires in ‘Epifania’, a lyric of 1955 included in Onore del vero, the first two references of which are by admission of the poet himself to Eliot’s ‘Journey of the Magi’ and ‘Les Rois Mages’ di Frénaud. Line 12, ‘ch’è un fremito di morte e di speranza’, seems to allude to the dramatic relationship that exists between birth and death described in lines 37-39 of Eliot’s poem, ‘I had seen birth and death, / But had thought they were different; this Birth was / Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death’. Both poems are full of evangelical references, but, while Eliot underlines the difficulty of the journey and the dramatic paradox of ‘another...’

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death', in Luzi birth seems more imminent: 'Non più tardi di ieri, ancora oggi' (line 38).

6.2. The Theatre-Poetry of Eliot and Dante in Nel magma

After dealing with the theme of time, which connects closely, even if taking into account the various differences, Luzi, Eliot and Dante, one final issue remains to be clarified, that is the dramatic poetry, either Dantean or Eliotian, which characterises Nel magma. This collection of poems, published in 1963 by Vanni Scheiwiller in Verona and written between 1961 and 1963, attempts to grasp the movement of the world before it crystallises into form, endeavouring to take it by surprise while it is still in a 'magmatic' moment of its formation, without prejudicial constraints. The unity of the voice breaks up into a plurality of voices, and it may be said that its implicit theatricality brings this book closest to Dante's Comedy and Eliot's dramatic verse. The author himself has stressed how the collection was 'il momento di maggiore e più decisiva conversione, diremo così, alla scena e anche all'idea della scena, proprio perché recava in sé questa potenziale confusione e contaminazione del soggettivo e dell'oggettivo' (CMS, p. 210).

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25 The paradox of 'another death' in Journey of the Magi is similar to that of Nicodemus as recounted by St John (3, 4): 'Nessuno può vedere il regno di Dio se non nasce di nuovo'. See T.S. Eliot, La sorella velata. Poesie scelte, commentary ed. by L. Gattamorta (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000), p. 109.

26 See Id., 'Moderni? Contemporanei?', in DN, p. 16.

27 Francis Fergusson has highlighted the dramaturgical element implicit in the Comedy. For the American critic the 'moto spirital' of which Virgil speaks in Purg. XVIII. 32 is what causes the development of form which Dante speaks of in the Letter to Cangrande, and is what makes every Canto of the Comedy a dramatic event. Fergusson states that 'the "interpretation" is to be reached, not by looking up the answers at the back of the book, but by following "the development of the form". This developing form may be called dramatic, for it closely reflects, or imitates, the movements of the Pilgrim's growing and groping spirit. And each canto, for all the variety of its details, presents the beginning, middle, and end of one such moto spirital' (F. Fergusson, Dante's Drama of the Mind. A Modern Reading of the Purgatorio (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) pp. 42-43).
‘Presso il Bisenzio’ is definitely one of the most obvious and at the same time most complex examples of the way in which the theatricality of Dante and Eliot works in Luzi’s poetry in the early Sixties. The first lines create a hellish atmosphere:28 in line 1 ‘la nebbia ghiacciata affumica la gora della concia’, in line 24 appears the ‘terra fradicia dell’argine’ (note in particular that ‘gora’ is a Dantean *hapax*, found only in *Inf.* VIII. 31, ‘Mentre noi correvamo la morta gora’). The motif might be a distant echo of the ‘the smokes arose’ of ‘Little Gidding’ II. 32. Whereas lines 2-4, ‘[...] Ne escono quattro / non so se mai visti prima, / pigri nell’andatura, pigri anche nel fermarsi fronte a fronte’, perhaps allude to the slow and uncertain gait of some of the souls in ante-Purgatory (*Purg.* II. 120-121: ‘gridando: “[...] Che è ciò, spirti lenti? / qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?”; *Purg.* III. 58-60: ‘da man sinistra m’appari una gente / d’anime, che movieno i piè ver noi, / e non parea, si venian lente’), and to ‘Little Gidding’ II. 33, 40-41: ‘I met one walking, loitering and hurried / [...] Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled / Both one and many’.

A hostile tone, hellish, is the tone of the conversation with the souls who appear to the poet. One of them approaches the poet and accuses him: ‘[...] Tu? Non sei dei nostri. / Non ti sei bruciato come noi al fuoco della lotta / quando divampava e ardevano nel rogo bene e male’ (lines 6-8). Luzi’s behaviour, which involves him in looking fixedly at his interlocutor and not replying (‘Lo fisso senza dar risposta nei suoi occhi vizzi, deboli’, line 9) recalls *Inf.* X. 34 (‘io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto’) and *Inf.* X. 112 (‘e s’ì’ fui, dianzi, a la risposta muto’). The poet’s attempt to offer explanations (‘[...] È difficile spiegarti. Ma sappi che il cammino / per me era più lungo che per voi e passava da altre parti’, lines 26-28), is a distant echo of Virgil’s admonition in *Inf.* I. 91 (‘A te convien tenere altro viaggio’), Charon’s words in *Inf.* III. 88-93 (‘E tu che se’ costi, anima viva, / partiti da costesti che son morti / [...] Per altra via, per altri porti / verrai a piaggia, non qui, per passare: / più lieve legno convien che ti porti’), or

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28 Instead Quiriconi suggests the prevalence of ‘un’atmosfera limbica’ in these opening lines (see G. Quiriconi, p. 236).
perhaps the final part of Canto IV, when Dante becomes aware that he must leave the ‘queta’ to face ‘l’aura che trema’ (‘per altra via mi mena il savio duca, / fuor de la queta, ne l’aura che trema’, Inf. IV. 149-150). The last reference in particular seems only a vague memory in a completely changed context: Dante faces the ‘aura che trema’ of Hell and crosses all three realms of the Otherworld, Luzi stands accused of not having taken part in the ‘rogo’ of the war which blazed with both good and evil, and tries to defend himself without however being able to explain the ‘cammino’ he has undertaken. And in any case, as we have already seen in Chapter 4, the distance between the twentieth-century and medieval poet can be measured above all by the fact that Luzi is part of the eschatological condition that he describes: he does not reach the end of the road either as traveller or visitor but is involved in it like the souls that he meets.

Lines 38-46 allude to Canto XV of the Inferno. The youth who ‘si fa da un lato’ and ‘s’attarda’ to wait (line 39) is a clear reference to Brunetto Latini who, wishing to dally with the poet, turns back and lets all the company go on (‘E quelli: “O figliuol mio, non ti dispiaccia / se Brunetto Latino un poco teco / ritorna in dietro e lascia andar la traccia”’, Inf. XV. 31-33); Luzi’s ‘senza ch’io mi fermi’ (line 41) could be based, in a completely different context, on the scene in which Brunetto, walking side by side with Dante, begs him not to stop because those of the damned that stop even for an instant are condemned to remain lying for one hundred years without being able to shield themselves from the flames (‘O figliuol’, disse, “qual di questa greggia / s’arresta punto, giace poi cent’anni / senz’arrostarsi quando ’l foco il feggia. / Pero va oltre; i’ ti verrò a’ panni’, Inf. XV. 37-40); the ‘ciglio erboso’ (line 39) of the road where the character walks on the edge of the path which the Poet, afraid of the flames, does not dare to leave to come down to Brunetto Latini’s level.

Allusions to Dante and the theatrical-dialogical nature of the Comedy are found also in the lyric ‘Nel caffè’. In lines 7-9 we read: “Perché non parlare un po’ tra noi” / mi dice uno forato nella gola / premendosi una garza sull’incavo’, where ‘forato nella gola’ is a quotation from Dante taken from Inf. XXVIII. 64
('Un altro, che forata avea la gola') and Purg. V. 98 ('arriva' io, forato nella gola'). The story of bloodshed narrated by Bonconte da Montefeltro in Canto V of Purgatorio is thus re-elaborated and transferred by Luzi to a story of sickness in which the violence is in the human condition, subjected to pain and portrayed by the 'piaghe visibili della carne' of the 'forato della gola' (CMS, p. 124).

Another dialogue, which follows the pattern of encounters in Dante, is found in 'Bureau':

Intanto rialza sulla sua fatica il viso
e col viso uno sguardo di malato o d'ebete svuotato e bianco.
Ravvisarlo no, ma a una fitta improvvisa so che non è estraneo
al mio passato e mentre lui mi fissa
Lo vo cercando non tra le amicizie,
tra i rancori sordi e inespicabili dell'età più candida.

'Come mai qui?' mi chiede lui
calcando le parole più del giusto,
a meno non sia io già troppo amaro e ispido.
Forse non è che un vuoto intercalare d'uomo spremuto d'ogni linfa e affranto
E mi basta a ravvivare
La ruggine impalpabile che fu tra noi in altro tempo poco dopo l'infanzia. (lines 6-17)

The allusion is clearly to Canto XXIII of Purgatorio, from which I quote various passages as to highlight more easily the network of references:

Ne li occhi era ciascuna oscura e cava,
palida ne la faccia, e tanto scema
che da l'ossa la pelle s'informava.
[...]
Parean l'occhiaie anella sanza gemme (Purg. XXIII. 22-24, 31)

Già era in ammirar che sì li affama,
per la cagione ancor non manifesta
di lor magrezza e di lor trista squama,
ed ecco del profondo de la testa
volse a me li occhi un’ombra e guardò fiso;
poi gridò forte: ‘Qual grazia m’è questa?’
Mai non l’avrei riconosciuto al viso;
ma ne la voce sua mi fu palese
ciò che l’aspetto in sé avea conquiso.
Questa favilla tutta mi raccese
mia conoscenza a la cangiata labbia,
e ravvisai la faccia di Forese. (*Purg.* XXIII. 37-48)

The man whom the poet sees straining to look up and showing ‘[...] uno sguardo
di malato o d’ebete svuotato e bianco’ (line 7), the man ‘spremuto d’ogni linfa e
affranto’ (line 15) seems to evoke the horribly wasted company of souls
portrayed in *Purg.* XXIII. 22-24, 31, 37-39, but may be linked also to the ‘munta
[...] sembianza’ of *Purg.* XXIV. 17-18; the ‘mi fissa’ of line 9 and the
‘ravvisarlo’ of line 8 correspond, with some variations, to the ‘guardò fiso’ of
*Purg.* XXIII. 41 and the ‘ravvisai’ of *Purg.* XXIII. 48. In both passages there is
recognition of features which have changed but are not completely alien: while
Dante, however, recognises his friend Forese by his ‘voce’ and grieves for him,
Luzi searches for that pale countenance ‘non tra le amicizie’ but ‘tra i rancori
sordi e inesplicabili dell’età più candida’ (lines 10-11). And so suddenly Luzi
sees again ‘[...] il dove e il quando / e in un preciso angolo il suo aspetto già
allora di tarma’ (lines 36-37).

Line 12 ‘‘Come mai qui?’ Mi chiede lui’ is an obvious echo of Dante’s
reaction when he comes up against Brunetto Latini in *Inf.* XV. 30 (‘rispuosi
‘Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?’), where it is to be noted how the Dante pattern has
been changed: ‘si capovolgono le parti, fra chi interroga e chi è interrogato, su
una motivazione, tuttavia analoga di stupore per la dissonanza del luogo dal
personaggio interrogato’. The ‘calcando le parole’ that follows the Luzi line
quoted above can instead be compared to the ‘gridò forte’ of *Purg.* XXIII. 42,
thus confirming the general reference of the lyric to the meeting with Forese.  

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What must also be noted is that Luzi’s ‘Come mai qui?’ could be a re-reading of Inf. XV. 30 through the mediation and stimulus of T.S. Eliot, who in ‘Little Gidding’ II. 45 writes (placing the stress on ‘you’ instead of ‘qui’ as in Dante and Luzi): ‘And heard another voice cry: “What! Are you here?”’. Although Luzi was by no means always dependent on T.S. Eliot as a mediator in respect of Dante, Eliot certainly did contribute to the evolution of Luzi’s poetry in the direction of ‘una sorta di prosa pausata’ and eventually of a ‘libretto d’una “poesia-saggio”’, dissolvendo i confini tra poesia e prosa e dilatando al massimo le [...] strutture formali. As a consequence of Eliot’s appropriation of Dante poetic procedure, the sermo merus of Horatian memory that is such a strong element of Nel magma, and which is quoted in the epigraph to the collection (‘...nisi quod pede certe / differt sermoni, sermo merus...’), comes close to Dante’s way of describing places, hours, encounters, characters, dialogues and reflections.

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31 G. Contini, Letteratura dell’Italia unita, p. 117.
7.
LUZI, ELIOT AND DANTE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POETICS

The artist expresses his personality indirectly through concentrating upon a task which is a task in the same sense as the making of an efficient engine or the turning of a jug or a table-leg.

T. S. Eliot (1924)

La personalità del poeta non esiste allo stato autonomo, ma si attua, si determina in re.

M. Luzi (1951)

Nulla agisce se non per fare esistere il suo sé latente

Dante

7.1. Introduction

Although some textual affinities have been noticed between the poetry of Luzi and T.S. Eliot, the critical essays of the two writers have never been compared. In particular the problem of impersonality has only been mentioned by critics, and never discussed in any depth. The first critic to consider a possible affinity was Barbara Nugnes, who in her 1980 essay on the Italian post-war period compared two passages of 1919 and 1954 taken, respectively, from Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (‘The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’) and Luzi’s ‘Naturalezza del poeta’ (‘Solo a patto che egli (il poeta) rinunzi ad isolarsi e astrarsi negli attributi peculiari e tipici, e perciò stesso accidentali della sua personalità, gli sarà dato di percepire e esprimere alcunché del ritmo perpetuo dell’esistenza, d’inseririvisi e di attingervi’). Nugnes commented:
Si giustifica così un'altro delle caratteristiche della poesia luziana di questi anni: quella scarsità di riferimenti privati, quell'annullamento dell'io empirico che tanto oscuri e insoliti apparvero alla critica nostrana. Si tratta, per Luzi come per Eliot, di sfondare l'esperienza da tutto ciò che è contingente (fosse pure la propria storia o fisionomia individuale) per arrivare all'essenziale: l'uomo a nudo, il puro sentimento dell'esistenza.

Later, in 1989, Stefano Verdino refuted this very judgement and observed:

Non credo, come afferma la Nugnes, alla somiglianza tra la poetica eliotiana della impersonalità e quella luziana della naturalezza del poeta. In realtà l' impersonalità di Eliot è 'fuga dall'esperienza' come egli afferma testualmente, cioè progetto di una poesia di rigorosa struttura concettuale, poema della storia umana, quasi una sua voce epica, mentre per Luzi si tratta proprio all'opposto della massima valorizzazione e trasfigurazione dell'evento; inoltre Luzi non abolisce la propria soggettività come Eliot, la distinzione tra scriba e io vivente non è di tipo esclusivo, ma piuttosto agonistico.

The overlap that Nugnes sees between Eliot’s theory of impersonality and Luzi’s poetics of naturalness as the essential expression of man excludes from the comparison all of Eliot’s work after the conversion, especially the Four Quartets, whose ‘mancanza di problematicità’, according to the critic, should be opposed to Luzi’s ‘impatto difficile, sanguinoso con l’esperienza’, in whose poetry ‘il tema dei rapporti tra il mutevole e l’eterno rimarrà pressoché costante’ (p. 152). However, as it has already been observed in Chapter 5, according to Luzi himself it was actually the ‘agonistic’ relationship between the mutable and the eternal (but also between other oppositions such as light and shade, life and death, personal and impersonal) that gave shape to the Four Quartets: ‘I Quartetti [...] rispondevano a una mia esigenza di vedere il tempo non solo

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2 S. Verdino, “Consumed by either fire or fire” / “Se il fuoco oltre la fiamma dura ancora”: Eliot e Luzi’, p. 80.
3 Barbara Nugnes observes: ‘L’Eliot che nel 1927 si dichiarava “anglo-cattolico in religione, monarchico in politica, classicista in letteratura” aveva chiuso i conti col mondo. Ma se la prospettiva ultramondana bastava a quietare ogni conflitto, Luzi sul dramma di questo mondo ci si sofferma dramaticamente e non arriva mai ad obliarlo’ (p. 152).
come rovina, come corruzione, e quindi come perdita, ma anche come _agonia_, come combattimento tra il passato che perisce e qualcosa che si aspetta. È un tempo agonista che mi pare si possa trovare nei _Quartetti_, un tempo agonico e purgatoriale che a me ha fatto bene. È anche il tempo dantesco perché in Dante c'è sia il tempo della perdita che quello dell'acquisto' (ED, p. 221). If, on the other hand, Verdino's judgement that Luzi does not annul his subjectivity is fully acceptable,⁴ the theory of impersonality formulated by Eliot, which contradicts itself more than once, is much more problematic, as is also the ambiguous definition of the progress of the artist as a 'continual self-sacrifice' and 'continual extinction of personality'.

This Chapter will attempt to show why and how the 'impersonality' of Luzi and Eliot's poetry cannot be achieved without an initial _personal_ experience. Furthermore, if Eliot's theory of impersonality has been the subject of numerous studies by English and American critics, Luzi's is being discussed here for the first time, and this on the basis of a positive encounter - more interdiscursive than intertextual - with Eliot's theory. Given that the term 'impersonality' possesses various meanings depending on who it is used by and the contexts in which it is employed, it is intention to pause briefly over the meaning that it takes on in the European panorama of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and then investigate the meanings it has in some of Eliot and Luzi's essays, with some examples taken from their poetic works. I shall then see how the poetics of impersonality is linked to the relationship that both authors establish with tradition and in particular with Dante. To conclude, there will be a consideration of the role played by personality in the poetic activity of Dante, Eliot and Luzi, with an examination of the two moments that precede the actual

⁴ See what Luzi has to say in an essay entitled 'E non vergognarsi': ‘Il poeta, secondo me, è alla pari come individuo con tutto l’altro che vive, pensa o soffre, per quanto abbia in più la possibilità di cavare un senso dalla vicenda del mondo. È insomma un personaggio, tra tanti, della commedia, anche se lui ha l’uso e il privilegio, forse, della parola. [...] Insomma mi pare che sia implicito in uno scrittore moderno, anz proprio di oggi, alle prese con questa cultura e con questo mondo, un rifiuto della separatezza dell’io’ (DN, pp. 159-60).
poetic act, which Eliot, in a letter to Stephen Spender, calls the moments of ‘surrender’ and ‘recovery’.

7.2. The Poetics of Impersonality in the European Context between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Impersonality as a reaction to Romantic self-centredness is characteristic of many avant-gardes movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and it has a determining role in the work of Eliot and Luzi too. The two poets paradoxically approach the poetics of impersonality from Romanticism itself, where the subjectivity of the artist is usually powerfully presented. In the framework of English Romanticism Keats’ letter on the Unpoetical, according to which the poet has no identity and continually goes beyond the confines of his private self, ‘filling some other Body’, is of fundamental importance. In ‘Naturaleza del poeta’ (1951) Luzi, recalling this very passage, observes that the writer arrives ‘a non avere più una personalità distinta e a fondersi col processo indifferenziato dell’esistenza’, then adds: ‘in questa luce noi possiamo rileggere le parole della famosa lettera di Keats dove egli parla dell’impoeticità del poeta, della sua mancanza di individualità e della sua continua mimesi’ (IL, p. 41). In French literature, on the other hand, the point of reference is the extreme romanticism of Baudelaire, with its emphasis on poetry’s main resource being the non-poetic world. In this connection, Eliot recalls in ‘What Dante Means to Me’ (1950): ‘From him [Baudelaire], as from Laforgue, I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry; and that the source of new poetry might be found in what had been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic’ (TCTC, p. 126). Another important point of reference was left by the genius of Arthur Rimbaud, who taught the poet to identify with

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the other than himself and, in a letter of 1871, wrote: ‘Je est un autre’.\textsuperscript{6} This deliberately lapidary expression has various implications, as Maritain points out, and means that ‘in poetic intuition objective reality and subjectivity, the world and the whole of the soul, coexist inseparably’,\textsuperscript{7} but at the same time it conceals something tragic in its anti-syntactic form: the ‘I’ is no longer itself (‘I is another’) and ‘Rimbaud’s decomposition,’ - notes George Steiner – ‘introduces into the broken vessel of the ego not only the “other”, the counter-persona of Gnostic and Manichean dualism, but a limitles plurality’, so that ‘these other selves are not some neutral or parallel otherness, but parodistic, nihilistic anti-matter, radically subversive of order and creation’.\textsuperscript{8}

However, what is decisive is above all the failure of Mallarmé’s \textit{vieux songe}. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the pure work imagined by Mallarmé implies ‘la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots’,\textsuperscript{9} a renunciation of time and a break with the fragmentary self in favour of self-immersion in the Hegelian Pure Idea, in a perfect spiritual universe: ‘C’est t’apprendre que je suis maintenant impersonnel, et non plus Stéphane que tu as connu, - mais une aptitude qu’a l’Univers Spirituel à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi’\textsuperscript{10} This declaration of self-annulment in favour of an imaginary ‘Univers Spirituel’ are Eliot and Luzi’s point of departure towards a completely different idea of impersonality.

As Luzi has observed, the French poet was a ‘common’ source for Eliot, Valéry, Rilke, Ungaretti and Luzi himself, almost as if his work ‘si trovasse al punto d’origine di alcuni tra i più importanti corsi e diramazioni del pensiero e dello spirito contemporaneo’ (SM, p. 27). The final result, however, was a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{6} A. Rimbaud, ‘Lettre du Voyant’ (letter of 15 May 1871 to Paul Demeny), first published in \textit{La Nouvelle Revue Française}, October 1912.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} J. Maritain, \textit{Creative Intuition}, p. 124.
  \item \textsuperscript{8} G. Steiner, \textit{Real Presences}, p. 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} S. Mallarmé to Henry Cazalis, 14 May 1867, quoted in SM, p. 74.
\end{itemize}
failure, and the Florentine writer, after having lived out at first hand Mallarmé's illusion in its totality, in his *Studio su Mallarmé* (1952) observed that 'attraverso l'eliminazione di tutti gli ostacoli che si frappongono alla vittoria dell'io, si perviene all'abolizione dell'io medesimo' (SM, p. 75). 'Igitur, ou la folie de Elbehnon' (written by Mallarmé in 1869 and published posthumously in 1925) is a genial description of this failure; in this poem we partecipate in the drama of an ancient line of magicians who for generations have followed the mirage of abolishing Chance and creating the Absolute, but they have never had the courage to carry out the necessary action to make the event happen, that is, to swallow a phial containing Nothing. When Igitur finally drinks the mysterious phial he realises, as he approaches the absolute and, with it, death, that hasard has not been abolished; if anything it is present in the act itself of the person who attempts to kill it. This tragic defeat means, apart from suicide, the failure of the proud juxtaposition between the self and the world, thus implying for many poets of the early twentieth century a radical rethinking of subjectivity: the self, which hitherto believed itself to be monolithic and refuse to have anything to do with the contradictory and shifting multiplicity of existence, is forced, if it does not wish to go the same way as Igitur, to question itself about the 'oggetti' and 'occasioni'\(^\text{11}\) that surround it and to seek the lost link between these and the self itself.

In late nineteenth-century Europe, among those who set up objective art as the supreme instrument of knowledge and reaction to Symbolism and Romanticism, we must remember especially Flaubert whose work aimed at severe objectivity to the exclusion of any subjective intrusion: ‘Je crois que le grand Art est scientifique et impersonnel. Il faut, par un effort d’esprit, se transporter dans les

\(^{11}\) If the term 'object' is particularly dear to Eliot, who will go on to formulate the theory of the 'objective correlative', note that the term 'occasioni' is used by Luzi as early as 1938 (and so before *Le occasioni* came out in 1939) in an article published in *Campo di Marte*: ‘Allor che la nostra fede nelle singole conclusioni ci ha abbandonato e nulla ci appare certamente esistente nell’intelletto se non la cognizione della sua provvisiorietà, [...] sussistono ancora violente le occasioni' (M. Luzi, 'Nostre pagine', *Campo di Marte*, 2 (1938), p. 2).
personnages, et non les attirer à soi'.

We might also mention the brothers Goncourt, with their 'real novel' Germinie Lacerteux (1865), Zola who supplied in the essay Le roman expérimental (1880) a theory for naturalistic poetics, and Maupassant, whose short novels documented the moral and cultural misery of the French petit-bourgeois. Eliot, however, admires Flaubert above all and interprets his reticence as a way of safeguarding the poet from sentimental effusiveness but at the same time of preserving intact his true identity: 'Browning and Shelley and Byron, for all their effervescence, give us less of themselves than do Turgenev or Flaubert.'

Again in France, the voices of Remy de Gourmont and Benda are heard nourishing their art on ideas of impersonality and appreciating art for its objectivity. In the essay 'Imperfect Critics' Eliot takes a quotation from an article (1875) by Othenin d’Haussonville from Benda’s Belphégor and calls it 'admirable': 'Il y a une beauté littéraire, impersonnelle en quelque sorte, parfaitement distincte de l’auteur lui-même et de son organisation, beauté qui a sa raison d’être et ses lois, dont la critique est tenue de rendre compte' (quoted in SW, p. 42).

In the English-speaking world it is instead Henry James who speaks out in favour of impersonal and detached art, opting for a suppression of self, of the vigour of temperament and tenderness of heart:

art requires, above all things, a suppression of one’s self, a subordination of one’s self to an idea. [...] You must forget yourself in your ideas. Your personal qualities - the vigour of your temperament, the manly independence of your nature, the tenderness of your heart - these facts are impertinent. You must be possessed, and you must strive to possess your possession. If in your striving you break into divine eloquence, then you are a poet. If the idea which possesses you is the idea of your country's greatness, then you are a national poet; and not otherwise.'

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14 H. James, 'Mr. Walt Whitman' (1865), in Selected Literary Criticism, ed. by M. Shapira (London:
Two writers who are especially important for Eliot are Joseph Conrad, to whom he several times expressed his debt, and Yeats. The former, in the ‘Preface’ to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ (1897), compares the artist to the thinker and scientist in their common search for the truth:

Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential - their one illuminating and convincing quality - the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal.¹⁵

The latter thinks that the poet ‘never speaks directly’; ‘he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete’. At the same time, however, the poet ‘writes always of his personal life’ and the poem is born from an experience of a precise subject, which is completed rather than removed.¹⁶ It is not surprising that Eliot, in a 1940 essay on Yeats, observes that impersonal poetry springs from an intense and personal experience to express a general truth (see OPP, p. 255).

Finally, a further impulse for Eliot and Luzi comes from the writings of James Joyce and Ezra Pound. In an epic, Stephen Dedalus observes, the protagonist of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), the narrative is no longer purely personal:

The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea [...]. The personality of the artist [...] refines itself out of existence,

Heinemann, 1963), pp. 4-5.
impersonalizes itself. [...] The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisibile, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.\(^{17}\)

Luzi has several times declared that he has read the works of Joyce carefully, learning from their capacity to sound out and to uncover the humanity that he had not found in the philosophers. Eliot learnt from Joyce above all a particular kind of impersonality, which is the ‘mythical method’, an expression which he himself coined for the first time in the 1923 review ‘Ulysses, Order, and Myth’:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. [...] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr Yeats. (SP, p. 177)

Pound, on the other hand, in ‘Vorticism’ (1914) rejects the mask-characters in Personae and in some of his translations, and opts for the impersonal writings ‘The Return’ and ‘Heather’:

In the ‘search for oneself’, in the search for ‘sincere self-expression’, one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says ‘I am’ this, that, or the other, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing. I began this search for the real in a book called Personae, casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem. I continued in a long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks. Secondly, I made poems like ‘The Return’, which is an objective reality and has a complicated sort of significance [...]. Thirdly, I have written ‘Heather’, which represents a state of consciousness, or ‘implies’, or ‘implicates’ it. These two latter sorts of poems are impersonal.\(^{18}\)

In late nineteenth-century Italy the authors who practised an impersonal art were Capuana, De Roberto and Verga. The latter, in the dedication to Salvatore Farina, at the beginning of the novella ‘L’amante di Gramigna’ (1880), writes


that ‘il romanzo avrà l'impronta dell'avvenimento reale, e l'opera d'arte sembrerà _esserì fatta da sé_, aver maturato ed essere sorta spontanea come un fatto naturale, senza serbare alcun punto di contatto col suo autore’. The distance is obvious, but it may be interesting to juxtapose, if only to highlight the contrast, Verga’s introduction just quoted and a passage from ‘Naturalezza del poeta’ (1951) in which Luzi speaks of ‘un’opera che appaia come una pura determinazione del tempo e della lingua, [...] che possa sembrare fatta da chiunque altro e anzi, per meglio dire, neppure fatta, ma esistente in natura’ (IL, p. 41). The juxtaposition of the two texts can be justified only if we emphasise that behind the seeming disappearance of the author is concealed an intention to eliminate the Symbolist-Romantic self. The deep meaning, however, is definitely different, and Luzi speaks of impersonality, not so much as an instrument of identification with the social environment, as the ‘intersoggettività’ and ‘naturalezza’ of poetic language. Among the poets who have been the greatest influence on Luzi from this point of view we may recall Leopardi, from whom the Florentine writer learned the naturalness of the ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ voice of poetry, Pascoli, whose humble self-identification with the ‘impersonal’ in nature he was struck by, and, not least important, Betocchi, who, according to a poem which Luzi himself called ‘quasi una spersonalizzazione’, was able to see himself even in a stone.


31 In 1951 Luzi claimed that Leopardi was able to deal with the one great task of poetry ‘nella cui voce è contenuta la segreta voce della natura che vive, diviene e soffre’, then he recognised that the Leopardi line ‘O speranze, speranze; ameni inganni / della mia prima età!’ is both subjective and objective, because while referring to a personal situation it is ‘la natura stessa a pronunciarlo’ (IL, p. 45).

31 In an essay on Pascoli, Luzi defines his poetry ‘impersonale ed atemporale’, stressing its distance in respect to the impersonality and atemporality wished by Mallarmé: ‘Dalla parte dell’umiltà, della condizione della creatura e non da quella del creatore o del sacerdote del Verbo, aspira tuttavia anche lui a officiare il rito dell’eterno impersonale poema dell’universo’ (VF, pp. 131-32).

7.3. *The Paradox of Impersonality in Eliot*

Given, then, that the term ‘impersonality’ has different meanings depending on the writer who uses it and the contexts in which it is found, I shall now endeavour to see what meaning it assumes in the work of Eliot and Luzi.

In Eliot’s critical work the theory of impersonality has been the subject of much debate among scholars. For some it implies something quite other than eliminating subjectivity through an austere ‘discipline’ and ‘dessiccation of the heart’ (Maritain, p. 121), while others refute it *in toto* as confusing the issue of what Eliot really meant. For others again, Eliot has reduced the poet to an automaton or he has confused scientific values with artistic ones. The term ‘impersonal’ is certainly frequent and central in Eliot’s critical work, and to understand its ambiguity we must pause over two different meanings which, according to the context, the writer attributes to the antonym ‘personality’,

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distinguishing between a lower level of human personality and a higher one, the authentic self.  

A negative meaning of 'personality' is found in the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), when Eliot observes that a continuous 'surrender' to something of greater value is necessary in the poet, and that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (SE, p. 17). In this statement the term 'personality' is understood in the original etymological sense of 'mask' and therefore implies an assuming of roles and poses, and using ready-made phrases, which prevent direct confrontation with the incessant flow of experience. In Eliot's poetry there are numerous examples of this inauthentic personality: for example, in *The Waste Land* the hurrying crowd crossing London Bridge in an unreal atmosphere, a crowd made up of dead persons staring in front of them and whose spiritual solitude recalls not only the 'lunga tratta / di gente' imprisoned in Dante's vestibule of Inferno, but also the story of the death of Ugolino. Another perfect image of inauthentic personality are the hollow men in the poem of the same name, shadows that move in a hell-on-earth, stuffed men whose souls are no longer used and which have become withered, while their outer 'dried selves' are stuffed and propped up. Lastly, we may recall some parts of the *Four Quartets*, in particular the faces that are seen on the London Underground, 'Distracted from distraction by

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27 See *The Waste Land* I. 62-63: 'A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many'. These lines are a precise quotation from J.A. Carlyle's 1900 translation of Dante's *Inferno*, published in the Temple Classics series, Canto III, lines 55-56 (in Italian: '[...] si lunga tratta / di gente, ch'i' non avrei creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta').

28 See *The Waste Land* V. 411-415: '[...] I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison / Only at nightfall [...]'. See also the note to line 411: to Bradley's theory of finite centres Eliot couples the Dantean image of Count Ugolino locked up without hope of escape in the double prison of Hell and the Tower (the image is the objective correlative of man who lives in the prison of his soul and is incapable of a proper relationship with the outside world).
distraction / Filled with fancies and empty of meaning’ (‘Burnt Norton’ III. 12-13). A personality therefore seen as an alienating encrustation of social roles and deliberate disguises: for example, the poetic ‘I’ of ‘Portrait of a Lady’ which makes an attempt at self-expression by taking on the shapes of animals, dances like a circus bear, squawks like a parrot and chatters like a monkey, or the man depicted in *The Cocktail Party* (1950) who has been reduced to ‘a living object, but no longer a person’ (CP, p. 134) (the word ‘person’ being used in a positive sense and opposed to the negative meaning of an inauthentic personality).

Obviously the fact that they are more easily manageable means that these fictitious personalities and disguises are created, not in the interests of single persons, but of society and those who hold power: ‘the ordinary processes of society [...] consist largely in the acquisition of impersonal ideals which obscure what we really are and feel’ (SE, p. 277) (note that the term ‘impersonal’, usually used by Eliot as a negation of the inauthentic personality, here means a negation of the real self).

But what role has this ‘something we really are and feel’ when Eliot compares the poet to a catalyst in whom a chemical reaction takes place, and calls him ‘a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways’ (SE, p. 20)? In other words, in this process of depersonalisation, if art approaches science, what function remains for the individual talent of the poet, for his emotions, his authentic personality?

What Eliot calls personal emotions are only brute or purely instinctive sensations that are not to be eliminated as they are precious material but transformed:²⁹ ‘the more perfect the artist’, we read again in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, ‘the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and

²⁹ Compare Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 27-30. Eliot studied Maritain in depth and in the preface to *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939) he declared that he was directly indebted to the works of the French philosopher: ‘I am deeply indebted to the works of Jaques Maritain, especially in his *Humanisme intégral*’ (p. 6).
transmute the passions which are its material' (SE, p. 41). Indeed, a real artist, writes Eliot in 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' (1924), 'expresses his personality indirectly through concentrating upon a task which is a task in the same sense as the making of an efficient engine or the turning of a jug or a table-leg' (SE, p. 114).

According to this accurate definition of the authentic personality, in impersonal poetry the personality of the poet is not eliminated but comes to fulfilment by 'concentrating' and identifying itself in the object that it has before it: it is in a relationship that the personality expresses and completes itself while the perceived object may change into a work of art. In this way Eliot once and for all overcomes the Romantic opposition between the self and the world and goes beyond the Mallarmean illusion of the subject's carrying out an act of creation against natural creation: the poet, for Eliot, does not write just to express himself, something that might make him believe that he is creating something out of nothing or solely from his own self. If the impulse to write actually comes from the self, it is, however, triggered by external reality and by previous literary experiences: the outcome of the poetic act does not belong only to the individuality of the artist but to a relationship with the real from which emerges a profound part of the self that men have in common. This is why, Eliot says in 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism' (1933), the function of impersonal poetry is not to eliminate the self but to make us 'a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world' (UPUC, p. 155).

At this point we should ask ourselves what influence the religious conversion had on the poetics of impersonality. If indeed before Eliot's conversion the reader of The Waste Land notes a multiplicity of voices and a mingling of quotations that conceal and fragment the poet's self and what he says, and if in Prufrock and other early 'modernist' poems the narrators are invented characters speaking with the voice of the poet but not on his behalf, then after the
conversion the ‘I’ speaking in the poetry is a persona of the poet himself.\textsuperscript{30} The theory of impersonality goes through an evolution: if before there was a need to react to Romantic and Symbolist self-centredness, and if the polyvocalism of \textit{The Waste Land} almost overwhelmed the poet’s self, then later, also owing to historical changes that had in the meantime taken place, the author’s self reappears and, paradoxically, there is an increase in his impersonality, this time clearly understood as a reference of the particular ‘I’ to a universal reality. In the essay ‘Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca’ (published in 1927, the year of his conversion) Eliot himself places the adjectives ‘impersonal’ and ‘universal’ together, stating that like Dante, ‘Shakespeare, too, was occupied with the struggle - which alone constitutes life for a poet - to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal’ (SE, p. 137). Furthermore, in the 1929 essay on Dante, Eliot judges the experiences of the medieval poet as of a certain importance because they are endowed with a ‘philosophical and impersonal value’ (SE, p. 273). Lastly, we read in a 1940 essay on Yeats that impersonality ‘is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol’ (OPP, p. 255). In the passages quoted above the paradox of Eliot’s impersonality emerges clearly: the adjectives ‘universal’, ‘impersonal’, ‘philosophical’, ‘general’, are not presented in an antithetical manner but as the completion of their respective opposites ‘private agonies’, ‘personal experience’ and ‘particularity of his experience’.

It is, however, just as necessary to underline that the conversion does not imply so much a radical change of direction as a development (Eliot’s words are ‘expansion’ and ‘development’)\textsuperscript{31} of elements that, although in a contradictory


\textsuperscript{31} In the preface to the second edition of \textit{The Sacred Wood} (1928), referring to the years that followed the first edition (1920) and which coincide with the period of creative silence that culminated in the conversion, Eliot wrote: ‘I discovered that what happened in my own mind, in eight years, was not so much
way, were there in embryo as early as the first writings. Right from the time of the thesis on Bradley, Eliot had affirmed the existence of an authentic personality ('human personality at its highest') as something 'already present at the moment of conception' and destined to change 'into something new and unforeseen' (KE, p. 61).

In the first essay on Dante in 1920 Eliot was already admiring the medieval poet's allegory not as an abstraction but as a 'scaffold' for the entire range of human feelings 'from the most sensuous to the most intellectual and the most spiritual' (SW, p. 169). In 1924, in the essay 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists', Eliot speaks of a personality that is not eliminated but expressed indirectly, through concentrating on the poetic task. If therefore, right from the beginning, the impersonality of art means for Eliot a self-identification in the alterity of the external world in order to transform the more subjective and private elements into poetry, after the conversion it becomes more clear that the purpose of this transmutation of the most personal and biographical experiences is not to annul the self but to bring it closer to other men, to discern similarity rather than dissimilarity.

Therefore, if we wish to speak of the connection between the conversion and Eliot's theory of impersonality we should first stop at what some critics have called a 'literary conversion', which precedes the religious one and slowly comes into focus, not without conflict and contradiction. One of the reasons that led Eliot to this sort of literary conversion was, as I intend to demonstrate below, the relationship with Dante which had begun as far back as his years at Harvard, which was to be fundamental to his decision to abandon Idealistic-Romantic illusions and to the formulation of the theory of impersonality.

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*a change or reversal of opinions, as an expansion or development of interests* (SW, p. VII).
7.4. Impersonality and Inter-Subjectivity of Natural Language in Luzi’s Works

As Eliot had made a distinction between the mask-personality of the stuffed men and an authentic personality that expressed itself indirectly, identifying itself in its task, so also Luzi attributes two meanings to the term ‘personality’, on the one hand speaking in negative terms of ‘attore’, ‘individuo tipizzato’, ‘voce privata’, ‘personalità tipica’ (IL, p. 41), ‘personalità’ which gives the lie to ‘l’indiviso e l’universale che sono nell’uomo’, and on the other, observing that the ‘personalità non esiste allo stato autonomo, ma si attua, si determina in re’ (IL, p. 42), and speaks of a ‘personalità profonda, subconscia’ (VF, p. 133) which is not ‘attore’ but ‘interprete’ and ‘testimone’ (IL, p. 42).

There are numerous passages in which one or the other meaning appears. For example, Luzi refers to an inauthentic ‘personality’ when he states that only on condition that the poet ‘rinunzi a isolarsi e ad astrarsi negli attributi peculiari e tipici e perciò stesso accidentali della sua personalità, gli sarà dato di percepire e di esprimere adeguatamente alcunché del ritmo perpetuo dell’esistenza, d’inserirvisi e di attingervi’ (IL, p. 40). On the other hand, there is a positive meaning in a passage in ‘Pascoli e la Psiche’: ‘paradossalmente non c’è nulla di più legato alla personalità profonda, subconscia, che certe concezioni e disegni che mirano a evadere o ad astrarre dal soggettivo’ (VF, p. 133), ‘personalità profonda, subconscia’ which recalls ‘the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being’ which Eliot had written of in an essay of 1933 (UPUC, p. 155). And in a recent interview, commenting the passage from

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32 In his essay ‘Sulla poesia di Guido Cavalcanti’ (1943), Luzi opposes the ‘voce privata’ to that of Cavalcanti who ‘incide nell’essere intero dell’uomo fino a restituircene una nozione disperata e pure composta’ (IL, p. 89).
'Pascoli e la Psiche' and this Eliot passage, Luzi offers further clarification: 'La personalità più profonda evade anch'essa dal soggettivo: quando io scopro me stesso, nei miei fondamenti, nelle mie pulsioni e desideri profondi, non isolo me stesso ma mi riconosco parte del tutto. In questo senso la personalità più profonda può coincidere con il soggettivo particolare che non è più unicamente il mio ma è lo stato di emozione, di pulsione, di desiderio che giace al fondo dell'umanità' (ED, p. 227). This is where the special voice of the poet 'si incrocia o si scontra con questa voce della profondità umana appena intraudita, ma subiacente e presente'.

But among the numerous passages that could be mentioned there is one other that is particularly significant, a passage in which we read of an 'apporto personale' which, although invisible, is still part of the work: art 'progredisce incommensurabilmente quanto più il suo linguaggio si identifica con la lingua, quanto più il suo procedimento tecnico-espressivo si annulla nei movimenti e nei costrutti della lingua naturale fino ad apparirne una pura e naturale incidenza, mentre l'apporto personale sembra scomparso' (IL, p. 44) where the verbs 'apparire' and 'sembrare' indicate that 'l'apporto personale' does not prevail and almost disappears, but it is still there. Luzi adds that this 'è il cammino percorso da Dante dalla Vita nova e dalle Canzoni a quel miracoloso primo verso della Commedia: “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura”’ (IL, p. 44). One thing is certain: that Dante’s line lacks that subtle ambiguity found in Luzi’s observation: the ‘I’ of the Comedy, agens and auctor, actor and witness, unites with the ‘noi’ of humanity and does not conceal itself nor ‘si annulla’ mystically as does that of Luzi.

The Dantean ‘I’ is historical and at the same time exemplary, its subjectivity is not monodic and closed, but can be shared by the whole of humanity. For this reason the expression ‘mi ritrovai per una selva oscura’ is the image of a personal experience and of a universal possibility. As John Took has pointed out,
the problematics of collective being are not separable from those of individual being: if, on the one hand, in Dante 'there is nothing on the plane of collective being, however intractable, that is not ultimately reducible to the problematics of selfhood as lived out by the individual as engaged in the struggle for ontological emergence', on the other hand, for Dante 'man is summoned out of the individual into the collective, out of the exclusivity of being-in-self into the inclusivity of being-with-another, this, within the economy of human experience as a whole, constituting a reply to the destructiveness of individuality as a dominant means of self-interpretation'.

Luzi's poetic 'I' is instead ambiguous because the historical self almost risks mystic annulment in favour of the universal self ('almost' because the interrogatives, the double negatives, the disjunctive coordinations always leave the possibility open of a historical and individual reality): 'Annullarsi, seguire per esempio il mare / che esplode e ritorna mare poco più in basso? Non serve, constata nella sua vana onniscienza' (O, p. 450); 'o niente, annullati l'uno e l'altra; / lei e io, equiparati a zero / da una celestiale algebra...', (O, p. 528); 'Io? io, lei, altri da lei e da me - / tutti quelli che hanno parlato / o lo hanno desiderato - quelli / io sono / quelli uno per uno / e nessuno di essi in nessun luogo / né tempo / e dovunque in ogni momento' (O, p. 691); 'Chiusa la storia, cancellata la persona, / perso o vinto l'agone?' (O, p. 577).

Having brought together the meanings of 'personality' in the critical work and highlighted the importance of subjectivity in Luzi's poetical work, we can now

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36. Ibid., p. 69. See also p. 73: 'For Dante, man is both individually and collectively. He is individually in the sense (a) that each man constitutes a unique product of the divine fiat, and (b) that each man stands alone in living out, and in shouldering responsibility for, his own discrete act of specifically human being-as-existence. He is collectively in the sense (a) of being by nature a civic creature, and (b) of being encouraged in the way of self-surpassing in and through the significant encounter. But for man here and now — which is what Dante is concerned about in the *Commedia* — to be individually and collectively means simultaneously to be individually and collectively, with the result that, in every conscious moment of his being-in-the-world as a free existent, he is called on to resolve the exclusivity of the one in the inclusivity of the other'.
understand why 'impersonality', involving as it does the negation of personality, means the negation of the typical or 'tipizzata' personality: in the essay 'Uno sguardo al presente della poesia' (1954) Luzi speaks to young poets who have thrown the notion of 'personality' into crisis and says that 'impersonality' signifies an 'estrema comunanza e affabilità degli accenti', a 'familiarità interna', the capacity of poets to 'parlare da pari a pari con gli uomini e intenderli ed esserne intesi nei comuni bisogni' (TQ, p. 20). In an essay written as far back as 1942 he used the term ' impersonale' in a way that was not antithetical to the real self of the poet: 'esiste l' impersonale della natura in cui pure il suo io sussiste distinto dal peso umano che abita la sua voce' (IL, p. 77). More recently, however, speaking at Camaldoli in 1989 on 'Le parole agoniche della poesia', referring to the poet as 'luogo simbolico di questo processo che travalica l' individualità', Luzi introduces two new terms, 'super personale' and 'trascendentale' (NP, p. 302).

The points in common with Eliot are remarkable. If the poetry of Eliot represents the personality in its negative sense, the mask-personality of the 'hollow men', with 'headpiece filled with straw', still living but undone by death, imprisoned inside their selves, Luzi's poetry speaks of 'volto effimero, larva breve' (O, p. 194), 'Vana [...] ombra' (O, p. 215), 'Maschere di maschere' (O, p. 367), 'manichino svuotato di memoria' (O, p. 387), 'manichino terreo' (O, p. 403), 'maschera di sale' (O, p. 430), or separates the two poles of humanity with a disjunctive conjunction: 'E tu chi sei, / una persona vera o uno spirito?' (O, p. 215); 'l' uomo dall' incarnato di bambino / o il manichino terreo un po' sventolato dai suoi cenci' (O, p. 403), 'l' uomo o la maschera di sale' (O, p. 430). But the two authors reveal a surprising affinity above all in the similar meaning that they give to 'impersonality' in the sense of universal experience on the part of the more profound personality: it has been noted that in Eliot's critical essays we find a non-dualistic coupling of expressions like 'the most sensuous' / 'the most intellectual and the most spiritual' (SW, p. 169); 'personal and private' / 'universal and impersonal' (SE, p. 137); 'experiences [...] of some importance' /
'philosophical and impersonal value' (SE, p. 273); 'particularity of his experience' / 'general truth', 'general symbol' (OPP, p. 255). Similarly, Luzi also does not oppose but unites expressions like 'apporto personale' / 'lingua naturale' (IL, p. 44); 'personale' / 'impersonale', 'soggettivo' / 'oggettivo', 'situazione personale' / 'profondo dell'umanità' (IL, p. 45); 'l'impersonale della natura' / 'il suo io sussiste', (IL, p. 77), and to indicate impersonality uses synonyms which underline a common humanity, and therefore one that can be shared rather than annulled: 'l'indiviso e l'universale che sono nell'uomo' (IL, p. 42), 'peso umano' (IL, p. 77), 'estrema comunanza e affabilità degli accenti', 'familiarità interna', 'comuni bisogni' (TQ, p. 20), 'luogo simbolico' (NP, p. 302).

If there are numerous points in common, some distinctions must nevertheless be made. The fundamental difference consists in the fact that the Italian poet was never to formulate a theory like that of the objective correlative (on the other hand contradicted by Eliot in his poetry), and refused to give up writing in an explicit first-person or confessional mode:

il linguaggio confidenziale o confessionale di cui talvolta mi servo non ha nulla a che vedere con il soggettivismo ed è invece espressione di un io simbolico. Non voglio rinunziare a questo 'io' perché tutto comincia di lì. Da un'autoriflessione, da un'autoanalisi è nato molto e molto può nascere ancora, tuttavia il tono, la gravità procedurale del testo ci dicono che questo 'io' non è 'il signor tal dei tali' ma un personaggio del mondo, come 'tu', 'lei', 'noi'. (ED, p. 226)

And this passage confirms an earlier observation of Luzi to the effect that 'la poesia unisce, in fondo, il lettore “simbolico” con l'autore “simbolico”, poiché ognuno è qualcosa che riflette una infinità di altre persone e ogni oggetto è simbolico perché è lì in nome di infiniti altri oggetti che non ci sono' (CQPV, p. 78). So, perhaps the most exact term to describe Luzi’s poetry is not so much ‘impersonality’ (although, as has been stressed before, the term is found in the critical essays and the problem subsists throughout his poetry) as ‘intersubjectivity’: ‘È proprio perché si tratta di intersoggettività,’ he observes,
che io uso tanti pronomi nella mia poesia (per me l'uomo ha tanti pronomi, li ha tutti quanti). La lingua poetica diventa così espressione di un tutto universo che prescinde dall'individualità, dalla soggettività’ (ED, p. 226).

It is no accident that the pronouns ‘lui’ and ‘lei’ are the most common in Luzi’s poetry (especially beginning from *Nel magma* and, together with the frequent impersonal forms ‘si è qui’, ‘si deve’, ‘si compie’ (for instance: ‘[…] si è qui come sai bene, / fila d’anime lungo la cornice’, O, p. 252; ‘Si è qui, come si deve, in una parte, / in un punto del tempo, in una stanza, / nella luce, nel divenire eterno, O, p. 182; ‘[…] Non fu vano; è questa l’opera / che si compie ciascuno e tutti insieme / i vivi i morti, penetrare il mondo / opaco […]’, O, p. 237; ‘e noi si è qui o per destino o casualmente insieme / tu ed io […]’, O, p. 361), help to overcome ‘la prigione di sé ch’è il vero inferno’ (O, p. 290), to become ‘la parola all’unisono di vivi / e morti, la vivente comunione / di tempo e eternità […]’ (O, p. 288), ‘gorgo di reciprocità’ (O, pp. 376-77), ‘pensiero condiviso’, ‘mente reciproca’ (O, p. 390), ‘oscura similarità’ (O, p. 539), culminating in the following lines from ‘Lungo il fiume’ (in *Onore del vero*):

È più chiaro che mai, la sofferenza
penetra nella sofferenza altrui
oppure è vana
- solo vorrei non come fiume freddo,
come fuoco che comunica... (O, p. 229)

Alterity thus becomes more interior even than the self itself and reveals to the self the nature of the world:

Non avrei conosciuto la mia sete
se non fosse per lei che portata dal gorgo
di reciprocità l’impara e me l’apprende.
Non l’avrei conosciuta. E poco,
poco saprei della natura del mondo. (O, pp. 376-77)
To add one last poetic example of this intersubjectivity, that is, this total self-identification with the other and sharing with the world, we may note some verses of *Al fuoco della controversia* in which the 'scriba' identifies himself (to the point of total absorption) with the memory of a woman who, in a veiled allusion, seems to become 'quella materia ond'io son fatto scriba' of *Paradiso* X. 27 (the italics are mine):

\[
\begin{align*}
Tutto \text{ questo che forse nemmeno lei ricorda}, \\
l'oscuro, il momentaneo, \\
l'obliterato della sua esistenza - \\
questo mi perdo a pensare, questi grumi \\
di vita dissipati dal mondo \\
eppure impressi a fuoco in una sua memoria latente \\
da cui non \text{ mi distinguo in nulla } \text{ io scriba} \\
altro da \text{ quella non essendo, da quella e dalla sua sofferenza. (O, p. 449)}
\end{align*}
\]

The first-person pronouns 'io' and 'mi' which alternate with the third-person pronoun 'lei', with the possessive adjective 'sua' and the demonstratives 'questo', 'questi', 'quella', serve to overcome the Romantic antinomy between nature and self, thus pointing to a new accord between subjective and objective in the awareness that 'lo stato del poeta trova la sua espressione esatta e vera in quanto risveglia e smuove dalla sua inerzia uno stato pertinente all'uomo come tale' (IL, p. 45). Pronouns never exist only in the first person singular, and nothing exists whose being does not presuppose a dynamics of relationships, or a theatre of actors and spectators in dialogue together, while the demonstratives indicate an approach to concrete reality from which the self often isolates itself. In other words the plurality of voices becomes the law of poetry. As Ezio Raimondi has observed, Luzi in the course of his dialogue with his own 'I', which becomes 'noi', speaks also to other men, common men, to those who form part "'del grigio epos quotidiano'", where the authentic is not to be found in fleeing from the common, but in digging inside the common to find what is the
truth not of the humanist but of the human, of the bare human creature.\textsuperscript{37} This is why in Luzi there are frequently nouns that indicate a typically Dantesque choral quality: 'stuolo' (O, p. 209), 'schiera' (O, p. 209, 216), 'uccelli migratori a stormi' (O, p. 211), 'tratta d'anime e di spoglie' (O, p. 216), 'gente' (O, p. 231, 278-79), 'pianta d'anime' (O, p. 251), 'fila d'anime' (O, p. 252).\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps in direct reference to Eliot's poetry of the objective correlative, Luzi, after an extensive reading of the twentieth-century post-Romantic and post-Symbolist scene, asks the decisive question: 'dobbiamo dunque credere alla poesia oggettiva come ad un momento ulteriore e più profondo nei confronti della poesia soggettiva?' He then answers his own question: 'questa distinzione non ha più ragione di essere', because 'nella naturalezza del poeta [...] le proprietà e gli attributi soggettivi non sono più separati da quelli oggettivi' (IL, p. 45).

The meaning of the term 'naturalezza' is central to Mario Luzi's works and serves to clarify the term 'impersonality', the meaning of which is quite other than generally supposed.\textsuperscript{39} It is opposed to art as absolute creation, but it does not refer to art as imitation of nature, according to ancient aesthetic canons, nor to 'natural' language in the sense of 'nativo'\textsuperscript{40} (although it does not exclude this meaning: Luzi has said various times that he has never used dialect because his


\textsuperscript{38} On the crowd of souls, prominent in Dante and found in Luzi's first two collections of poetry written after the war, see Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{39} See S. Battaglia, Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, XI, 240-41, under 'naturalezza'; but also pp. 231-40, under 'naturale'.

\textsuperscript{40} Among the various meanings of the adjective 'naturale' Battaglia gives 'nativo' (p. 234). An interesting study on the different meanings of 'native speaker' has recently been written by Giulio Lepschy and Helena Sanson, 'Native Speaker', in P. Shaw and J. Took (eds), Reflexivity. Critical Themes in the Italian Cultural Tradition, pp. 119-29. On the relationship between 'Language and Being' in Dante, with reference to Dante's concept of natural and artificial language, see J. Took, Dante's Phenomenology of Being, pp. 180-205.
dialect or native language is the spoken Italian of Tuscany, learnt in Siena and Florence, an Italian which is at once popular and literary).

‘Naturalezza’ refers rather to a complex and unfinished product, the result of an encounter between a free human action and nature. The incompleteness of the work of art derives from the fact that the artist immerses himself in the constant flux of natural creation without rendering it formulaic. Fixing this relationship in a completed form, eternal and immutable, would make the language of the work not ‘natural’ but artificial, demiurgic (Luzi has also called ‘naturalezza’ ‘l’opposto di affettazione teoretica’, ED, p. 229). The fact that language is ‘natural’ does not mean however that it stands over and against history. Nature and history, as nature and art, for Luzi are not in opposition and this non-opposition is a product of his encounter with Dante.41

‘Naturalezza’, then, implies going beyond the dualism between the particular and universal, opposites which for Eliot too were unseparable: ‘personal and private’ / ‘universal and impersonal’ (SE, p. 137), ‘particularity of his experience’ / ‘general truth’ (OPP, p. 255), ‘experiences [...] of some importance’ / ‘philosophical and impersonal value’ (SE, pp. 272-73). In this connection Luzi recently observed: ‘Il “particolare” puo essere certamente goduto ed è tanto più goduto se rimanda ad un generale, se c’è un rapporto fra il frammento e il tutto’ (CQPV, p. 26). Lastly, as observed by Luzi above, ‘naturalezza’ implies a unity between ‘attributi soggettivi’ and ‘quelli oggettivi’: if ontological priority is given to the object in which the mind, in order to find its identity, has to identify itself to the point of almost disappearing, poetic knowledge turns out in the end to be a synergy, a relationship, not so much an

41 Not by chance it was precisely in a speech on the medieval poet (‘Dante, scienza e innocenza’), delivered in Ravenna in 1965, that Luzi underlined the inseparability of history and art and affirmed that ‘se c’è una speranza d’eternità per la poesia questa va calcolata sull’umano e sulle sue forme incidenti’ (VF, p. 78). But as far back as the Hermetic period, in an article in 1939, Luzi had insisted on the fact that ‘l’eterno ha bisogno delle nostre figure e di queste vicende fisiche ch’esso ha trascelte per la sua storia’ (‘Il sonno’, Campo di Marte, 4-5-6 (1939), p. 3).
'adaequatio intellectus ad rem' as an 'adaequatio rei et intellectus'.\textsuperscript{42} We now understand why there is no real opposition between two terms which would seem to contradict each other, authentic ('profonda') personality and 'impersonalità': for Luzi, Leopardi’s line 'O speranze, speranze; ameni inganni / della mia prima età' is a line that is both personal and impersonal, both subjective and objective, because 'il riferimento a una situazione personale non toglie che sia il profondo dell'umanità e, per così dire, la natura stessa a pronunciarlo' (IL, p. 45).

7.5. Luzi, Eliot and Dante: the Relationship between Impersonality and Tradition

For Eliot and Luzi the notion of impersonality implies profound identification not only with the datum which is the external world and nature, but also with the datum which is tradition: a poet cannot consider himself a self without time and space, nor can he separate himself from the social context that surrounds him, or from that which came before him. Certainly, a citizen of the United States moving to Europe is helped in gaining awareness of the value of European tradition for the very reason, observes Luzi, that Eliot 'proveniva da un paese dove la tradizione nel senso nostro non era potuta nemmeno formarsi' (ED, p. 232).

For the twentieth century, in which the past is considered a burden to throw off, Eliot’s essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is at the same time provocative and modern. Indeed what strikes the reader today is the sense of responsibility of the writer towards a language that he has been entrusted with. The poet who in his profession has to continually employ an instrument that has been given him and which belongs to everyone, that is language, cannot at a certain point fail to recognise that to free himself from the past would mean

\textsuperscript{41} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I-II. q.16. a.1.
above all to eliminate language itself, the heritage of a people. Harry Antrim, commenting Eliot’s essay, observes: ‘Languages vary, but language is universal, for it is what makes the continuity of tradition both real and possible. Moreover, for the poet who fully grasps this fact, language is no longer merely his own, limited by his particular time and place, but contains the wealth of all the people who have preceded him and who have had feelings, experiences, emotions similar to his own’. 43

Eliot’s interest in tradition is a matter, however, not of archaeological concern but rests instead on a sense that the present, the primary object of poetry, is ‘the past’s awareness of itself’ (SE, p. 16). The present is the place where the authentic personality can bring about the historical possibility of renewal, the place where the individual talent of the poet can modify and integrate, even if only a little, the past which it needs to conquer its own unique, personal position: as Eliot himself observes in ‘The Function of Criticism’ (1923), ‘there is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position’ (SE, p. 24).44 At the same time, we read in ‘The Social Function of Poetry’ (1945), the past has no reason to exist and no possibility of doing so if not required to exist by the present: ‘it is [...] through the living authors that the dead remain alive’ (OPP, p. 21-22).45

Mario Luzi, in his essay of 1973 entitled ‘La creazione poetica’, also highlights the relationship between tradition and ‘impersonality’ in poetry, observing that ‘il poeta è prima di ogni altra cosa uno che avverte come non sua


45 In Eliot’s critical, poetic and theatrical work the need to connect the past (and future) with the present is a central concern: ‘I can guess,’ says Agatha to Harry in The Family Reunion, ‘about the past and what you mean about the future / But a present is missing, needed to connect them’ (CP, p. 102).
la parola che usa' (VF, p. 36), a word that he finds inserted in the general process of life and the language that has been transmitted to him: ‘Che memorie, che immagini abbiamo ereditate, / che età non mai vissute [...]’, he writes in ‘Marina’, a poem rich with allusions to Eliot (O, p. 188). At the same time however Luzi, like Eliot, considers tradition an act of freedom of the living poet (‘la tradizione esiste solo a condizione che esista un presente che la rende legittima; che la esige’, DN, p. 161), and not as existing for archival or conservative reasons, but for a more lively and creative present: ‘se non si sente di appartenere a una continuità anche linguistica, non si può innovare’ (ED, p. 231).

The poetry of reality to which Luzi aspires in the fifties needs therefore to identify itself not only with nature and the human, but also with the language that it has received from tradition. Therefore, throwing himself into the midst of the debate on the objectivity and realism of writing which in those years was particularly heated, he writes in the essay ‘Dove va la poesia’ (1958) that ‘l’espressione oggettiva’ consists ‘nell’agitarsi e nell’annullarsi del linguaggio individuale in seno alla lingua che contiene, come elementari tesori, i modi del naturale sentire e metaforizzare della gente e i loro sviluppi e la loro tradizione inventiva che i grandi scrittori hanno idealizzato’. Immediately after, he recalls that the language used by the writer already exists and does not have to be invented, changed, substituted by dialects or purified in the name of an ideal ‘Tuscan’ model that has itself undergone considerable transformation:

In una nazione civile codesta lingua esiste; e non è né letteraria né popolare; è il frutto di un continuo intercambio; è l’espressione della natura di un popolo e della civiltà che su codesta natura si è costituita e continuamente si costituisce. Il fatto che codesta lingua abbia il suo epicentro, le sue più inesaurite radici in Toscana non significa che sia soltanto toscana se tutti vi hanno contribuito e operato innesti dal basso e dall’alto e codesti innesti sono stati ricevuti e sono rientrati nel circolo. (IL, pp. 53-54)
Given, then, that for Luzi and Eliot there exists a close relationship between tradition and impersonality in poetry, seen as the expression of human nature and a civilisation, we must now turn to Dante, an author of tradition whom both poets admired and in whom can be identified the origin of the kind of impersonal poetry discussed so far.

Eliot's work was born at the height of the crisis of the Romantic tradition, built on a fundamentally idealistic epistemology, on an insurmountable dualism between subject and object, between thought and experience, intellect and sensibility. Although in his early writings the dialogue with Idealism was still alive, and the relationship between thought and experience was sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, it was this very crisis inside Idealistic and subjectivistic aesthetics that seemed to drive Eliot to seek support and encouragement in the object, and it is not insignificant that the model to which he always turned was Dante.

In his now-classic study of Eliot, Matthiessen claims that as far back as his Harvard days Eliot had been under the sway of Dante scholars of the calibre of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Eliot Norton, George Santayana and Charles Grandgent. But it is especially in the reading of Grandgent's *Dante* that we may find the germ of the theory of impersonality as described in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. In connection with this, Grandgent, in a polemic with modern and especially Romantic self-centredness, wrote in his study on *Dante* (1916), to which Eliot declared himself in debt on more than one occasion: 'If the exhibition of the ego was foreign to medieval taste, the observation of self was scarcely less so. Introspection was confined, in the main, to religious experience, where it is legitimate and necessary'.

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Supporting the theory of a decisive relationship between Eliot’s theory of impersonality and Dante is also the fact that in 1939 Gianfranco Contini, in his Introduction to Dante’s *Rime*, actually referred to Eliot’s theory to explain that ‘l’esperienza dello stilnovista è spersonalizzata’ and ‘si trasferisce in un ordine universale’ (p. xiv), almost as if Eliot with his critical and poetic works was with greater clarity drawing out something implicit in the poetry of Dante and *stilnovismo*. Eliot himself, in fact, in his essay on ‘Dante’ of 1929, had highlighted the impersonal aspects of the poetry of the *Duecento*:

> it is difficult to conceive of an age (of many ages) when human beings cared somewhat about the salvation of the ‘soul’, but not about each other as ‘personalities’. Now Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance; not of importance because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person who kept press-cutting bureaux busy, but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value. (SE, pp. 272-73)

If Eliot arrives at Dante by way of Idealism and Symbolism, Luzi comes to him by way of Plato, Mallarmé and Petrarch, dominant figures in Italian and European literature. Even if what Erich Heller defines as ‘The Discovery and Colonisation of Inwardness’⁴⁸ was thanks to Petrarch, Luzi accuses the latter of having radically changed the idea that man has of reality to the point of creating a new reality, an entirely inner one. One consequence of this, which no longer surprises modern man, is that language dissolves the problem of meaning by creating signs that no longer refer to anything, but can only recall one another in a closed circle or in a ‘limbo’ of innerness from which it is difficult to escape. It is in fact a language that expresses only what it itself has produced: a closed world *a priori* in which any external event is infinitely unlikely.

So after having lived through the defeat of Mallarmé’s *vieux songe* and experienced at first hand the merits and limitations of Petrarchan poetry, Luzi chooses the way shown by Dante to learn the ‘linguaggio dell’esperienza’, of the

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‘vissuto’ (VRD, p. 18), of ‘naturalezza’, that is, a language whose main object is the world and not the self-centredness of the poet: ‘Nel dopoguerra,’ recounts the writer, ‘io desideravo recuperare questo tipo di linguaggio, ed è proprio in questo che Dante contò molto. È questo l’influsso, il dantismo non diretto, non di frasi: il nullificare l’attributo soggettivo nella cosa, nel fatto, nell’esperienza, l’enunciazione di umanità e di atteggiamenti che prescindono dall’emozione soggettiva’ (ED, p. 226). All this did not mean refuting en bloc the Italian tradition which had developed under the guiding star of Petrarch, but creating a radical change of direction inside it which would be important not only for a small and specified group of contemporary writers but also for the whole development of the twentieth century.

7.6. Luzi, Eliot and Dante: the Role of Personality at the Different Stages of the Creative Act

The precise ways in which the ‘personalities’ of Eliot and Luzi interpret things perceived and return the experience in an impersonal form can be studied together with the moments of the creative act described by Dante in Purg. XXIV. 51-52: “‘I’ mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch’e’ ditta dentro vo significando’”. From this definition of the Stil Nuovo emerges in keeping with the long established iconography of love discourse a subjectivity which stems from an objective, even personified, alterity.

This similar need to surrender oneself to the objectivity of external reality is expressed by Eliot in a letter of 1935 to Stephen Spender. In it he comments on his friend’s book (The Destructive Element) and suggests the three moments that should be at the origin of a real critical act; at the same time, as Frank Kermode notes (see SP, p. 13), he gives us the opportunity to contemplate an aspect not only of his critical but also poetical genius:
You don’t really criticise any author to whom you have never surrendered yourself [...]. Even just the bewildering minute counts; you have to give yourself up, and then recover yourself, and the third moment is having something to say, before you have wholly forgotten both surrender and recovery. Of course the self recovered is never the same as the self before it was given. 49

What is called in the letter ‘surrender’ is an abandonment which implies ‘a passive attending upon the event’ (SE, p. 21): passivity, however, in the etymological sense of the word, a suffering and acceptance of things, relations and creations, which the artist did not invent and has not the power to change. This means that man knows himself only through a knowledge of the external world, or, as Maritain would say, he ‘remains empty to himself if he does not fill himself with the universe’ (p. 114). 50 The moment of surrender is followed by a second stage in which the intellect takes up what the eye and the ear have perceived and endeavours to grasp a meaning in what the senses have presented him with. Finally, in a third stage, the seen, perceived object, which the poet has attempted to give a sense to, is replaced by the word. This is the real moment of poetic creation: the object and the personal emotions, which were also there in the beginning and were necessary, disappear and are translated and communicated in a form that can be understood by all, impersonal or universal.

On his part Luzi, in the essay ‘Dante, scienza e innocenza’ (1965), stresses that in the creative act identification with the object of thought, sense, judgement or sentiment ‘che non lascia intervallo tra il poeta e la cosa’ (VF, p. 78) is indispensable. He adds that he learnt this ‘forma di immedesimazione con l’oggetto’ from Dante. The fact that this self-identification precedes critical awareness, or what Luzi calls ‘scienza’, does not mean a naive identification devoid of critical and stylistic intelligence. Luzi in fact speaks of an ‘impensabile


50 For Maritain at the root of the creative act there must be first an ‘obscure knowing, by the poet, of his own subjectivity’ and then a ‘knowledge through affective union’ of the outer world (Creative Intuition, pp. 114-15).
associazione di scienza, consapevolezza e innocenza' (VF, p. 78) in Dante's poetry, and in using the word ‘innocenza’ he does not refer to innocence of the moral kind so much as innocence of an ontological nature, which is a consequence of the fact that the main source from which poetic language springs is not a doctrine, nor a rhetorical or cultural system, but reality itself.

The three writers, therefore, make the sacrifice of not letting the a priori of consciousness get the upper hand but of creating a work whose ideation comes in the first instance from outside, from an objective presence to which to surrender and with which to identify in order to receive its message. Dante has to abandon himself to what Contini calls ‘un principio trascendente’, and he is denied any spontaneity and subjectivity of inspiration. This objective presence is personified by Amore in the Vita Nuova and by Virgil and Beatrice in the Comedy, while for Eliot it is reality itself and the past civilisations of The Waste Land, the mysterious ‘Lady’ of Ash-Wednesday or ‘The Stranger’ in The Rock, and for Luzi it is the ‘voce’ of the universe that emerges in the form of ‘voce di salmista o, chi sa, di amante’ (O, p. 375). It is also interesting to note that the expression ‘voce di salmista’ taken from Luzi’s collection Su Fondamenti invisibili could refer to Dante’s ‘umile salmista’ (David) of Purg. X. 65, perhaps with the intention of coupling the modern psalmist with the Biblical one, but also perhaps with Dante himself, who actually begins to speak with David’s voice in the Comedy (Inf. I. 65).

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51 On Dante’s creative innocence see Maritain, Creative Intuition, pp. 370-80.

52 This is why the creative innocence that Luzi admires so much in Dante is not in contradiction with the infinite poetic modes opened up by the Comedy, in which we find ‘una consapevolezza illimitata del gioco, del ludus espressivo - dalla mimesi, alla parodia, al grottesco’ (VF, p. 83). As noted by Ezio Raimondi, the metaphor itself in Dante was ‘momento della realtà’: it did not distance itself from the real but reinforced it. See E. Raimondi, ‘Un’ontologia della metamorfosi’ (1986), in I sentieri del lettore, I, 29. See another observation by Raimondi in ‘Che c’è in quel vorticare della vita dentro i suoi recinti?’, p. 29: ‘Per Luzi l’inesistenza è movimento verso l’esistenza, è il “concludersi” come un interrogativo che apre sempre nuove possibilità. Di qui l’idea che la metamorfosi, la metafora, facciano parte del reale come fanno parte dell’uomo. La metafora è ciò che ci porta nel cuore, nell’incandescenza del reale’.
This is the line that Angelo Jacomuzzi refers to in Luzi to remark that a ‘voce’ guides the poet and it is of “‘amore’ che ‘ditta’ come forza operante, entità e non solo stato psicologico e ne viene fuori una voce che si qualifica come voce di salmista o di amante, e che infine, nell’immedesimazione totale con la condizione umana, si traduce nella figura dello scriba’.\(^{53}\) Going back to a preceding poem, *Onore del vero* (1952-1956), we may also note, again following Jacomuzzi, that love (what Luzi calls ‘conoscenza per ardore’) is ‘conoscenza per immedesimazione, “gorgo di reciprocità”, che in effetti si presenta come la vera forza attiva, la causa efficiente di tutto il discorso’ (pp. 689-90).

At this point it might seem that all three poets are the victims of an all-powerful objectivity: in Dante’s case, Amore enters an organ and ‘ditta dentro’, Eliot has to ‘surrender’, Luzi has to almost disappear in order to identify himself with nature. This first moment, however, although distant from Romantic subjectivism, is not without its drama, a personal drama.

Dante’s freedom is curbed by the voice that imposes its will saying ‘Ego dominus sum’, but at the same time is urged to answer, and the task of the word to manifest itself coincides with a decision and an action.\(^{54}\) Eliot also has a choice and a responsibility, as it is the poet that has to accept or otherwise the sacrifice of surrendering. For Eliot, just to accept reality, to wish to look at it and observe it more closely, is a terrible act of courage, ‘the awful daring of a moment’s surrender’ (*The Waste Land* V. 403). And it is an act that requires courage because usually ‘human kind / cannot bear very much reality’ (*Burnt Norton* I. 44-45). An example of the personal drama that this moment implies is Prufrock, an inauthentic personality who fails to force ‘the moment to its crisis’ (with ‘crisis’ in its Greek meaning of ‘decision’): the only possible conclusion is a chronic suspension in the hope of still having time ‘for a hundred indecisions, /


\(^{54}\) For Dante freedom is not just freedom to choose, to settle without constraint on this or that course of action or existential possibility, but also ‘freedom for or freedom in respect of, freedom as bereft of the for or in respect of’ (*Dante’s Phenomenology of Being*, p. 74).
and for a hundred visions and revisions’ (‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, lines 32-33).

Luzi himself lives out the drama of a freedom that clashes with a pre-existing imperious objectivity, the drama of an ‘inebriante infuso / di libertà e necessità’ (O, p. 639). The fact that the ‘libertà’ is welded tight with ‘necessità’ and that Luzi calls this ‘libertà obbligata’ depends on the initial choice of plunging into the ‘ritmo perpetuo dell’esistenza’ (IL, p. 40) which curbs and provokes at the same time. As said before, the moment of self-identification is anyhow described by Luzi not as a passive moment but as a moment that is ‘creativo’, which has not yet been transformed into the moment that is ‘più specificamente artistico’, into the so-called ‘operative’ moment (VF, p. 38): it is a dimension that is ‘elementare’, which does not identify itself with ‘uno stato potenziale’ but rather with ‘un fondamentale movente che è già, anzi è il primo e più radicale principio di azione’ (VF, p. 36). Poetry therefore becomes ‘un atto decisivo’ and before manifesting itself in words there is always what in Ipazia is described as an ‘attimo intermedio di prescienza in cui è ancora possibile alla mente di negare l’accaduto’ (T, p. 47).

But at this point, after this surrender to reality in its objectivity, the second moment of the creative act comes into play, which asks not only Dante but also Eliot and Luzi to ‘annotare’ and interpret that reality which Contini, speaking of Dante, called ‘non realistica, ma rivelatrice ad alta frequenza’. The second stage of the poetic experience asks Dante to ‘annotare’ what Love inspires, Eliot to ‘recuperare’ what the eye has accepted to observe, Luzi to descend into the ‘corpo oscuro della metamorfosi’ which is the depths of appearance but also innerness and the human memory. This stage, in which intellect and sensibility act together, is the initially chaotic moment in which the intelligence, according

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to the well-known medieval etymon, reads what the senses have confusedly perceived and searches for the meaning.

This stage is initially chaotic, especially in Eliot and Luzi, as obviously an almost insuperable barrier separates the two twentieth-century poets from the world of Dante. If the medieval poet is aided by the philosophical and religious system of his times to read inside and beyond the broad range of human emotions, Eliot and Luzi have instead to deal with the legacy that modernity has handed down to them. To approach the meaning in order to ‘recovery’ the experience requires the cooperation of two factors which modernity has split asunder: the intelligence and sensibility, thought and the senses. This dissociation is not only a problem of the critic, nor does it regard the poet exclusively. According to Eliot’s acute description in ‘East Coker’, it has become for all men ‘cold the sense and lost the motive of action’, while for Luzi ‘resta muto l’avvenimento’ (O, p. 510) and man is often represented without memory:

Confonde,
non decifra la scrittura,
non riconosce l’evento,
ha tutto parificato in uno sconciocafugliamento
del tempo e del vivente
il custode smemorato
del documento, l’uomo. (O, p. 453)

There is furthermore the risk of a false reading and interpretation of the ‘document’ when the memory casts doubt on the actual evidence of what has happened. In this connection a passage taken from the theatrical work Rosales is revealing:

[...] La memoria
muta le cose, la mente
revoca in dubbio l’accaduto.
Tutto si confonde in un dolore unico. (T, p. 140)
Historically, according to Eliot, this dissociation between the intelligence and the senses took place in the eighteenth century. In literature, observes Eliot in ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921), ‘in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden’ (SP, p. 64). As for philosophy, in the Clark Lectures held in 1926 in Cambridge, Eliot speaks of a real revolution brought about by Descartes. The French philosopher ‘clearly stated that what we know is not the world of objects, but our own ideas of these objects. The revolution was immense. Instead of ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world, you have suddenly a new world coming into existence, inside your own mind and therefore by the usual implication inside your own head’.  

Despite all these difficulties, however, both Eliot and Luzi strive for a real experience of the world, seek to arrive at a poetic knowledge that will not stop at the existing fact but will become knowledge of the innerness of the thing itself. The appearances to which the gaze initially surrenders are in fact necessary as they are the shell which has to be penetrated in order to arrive at what is beneath; but they are, as a poetic image from ‘Little Gidding’ insists, only the shell:

And what you thought you came for  
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled  
If at all. Either you had no purpose  
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured  
And is altered in fulfilment [...]. (‘Little Gidding’ I. 31-36)

The object of knowledge need not therefore necessarily have connotations of beauty. The essential thing, observes Eliot, ‘is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory’ (UPUC,

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p. 83). What the poet must do is deal with the reality of all, and read ‘beneath’, in the depths, and also beyond, remembering that poetry, as Eliot had learnt from Baudelaire, emerges ‘out of the unexplored resources of the unpoetical’ (TCTC, p. 126). For Luzi too it is necessary to read within and beyond ‘la trasparenza della vita’ (O, p. 427). This emerges clearly from the poetical works and in particular from _Al fuoco della controversia_: we need to perforate the ‘guscio di opacità’ (O, p. 411), the ‘scucita pellicola’ (O, p. 423), the ‘buccia necrotica’ (O, p. 424), to penetrate, in the same way as St John of the Cross (a writer dear to Eliot too) into the ‘risucchio’, the ‘abisso’ (O, p. 431), or in what in _Su fondamentii invisibili_ is called the ‘corpo oscuro della metamorfosi’ (O, p. 370), the ‘tunnel’ (O, p. 383), the ‘gorgo’ (O, p. 392).

Luzi however does not distinguish, as does Eliot, the moment of ‘recovery’ from the really operative moment that is the act of writing. Leaving open the possibility that Eliot also experienced that ‘la cosa si chiarisce mentre la si scrive’, Luzi affirms that ‘Eliot sul “recupero” ha dato a volte l’impressione di aver già classificato e ordinato gli eventi’ and says:

_Nel corso della mia carriera poetica ho sentito sempre di più l’atto della scrittura come evento, non come commemorazione o celebrazione del già avvenuto, ma come accensione di un eventuale nuovo accesso delle cose all’esistenza. Questo non succede sempre però, c’è una progressione nel mio lavoro. Rimane vero che quando si trova, si decide, si usa una parola è perché quello che abbiamo percepito o stiamo percependo (siamo in atto ancora), non vada disolto, possa perdurare almeno per noi che siamo scrittori e primi lettori di noi stessi (ED, p. 231)._ 

So, right from the moment of the ‘recovery’ of a meaning inside experience we may note that, although they both start from a similar relation between personality and world, Eliot and Luzi respond to the crisis of Romanticism and Symbolism in different stylistic and linguistic ways. In attempting to give a

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plastic objectivisation of what is actually immaterial (emotions, ideas), in the attempt to give concrete form to what does not possess a concrete form, Eliot’s theory of the correlative differs from Luzi’s problematic symbolism at the moment in which the two poets, in the wake of Dante’s allegorical and figural language, try to express what they have seen in a way that is ‘impersonal’ and ‘natural’.

Eliot’s re-reading of Dante’s allegorical method consists in being able to express an idea or an emotion in ‘clear visual images’ (SE, p. 242). Allegory is a means of detachment from the emotions with the purpose of visualising and objectivising them, and thus creating impersonality. According to Eliot the impersonality and universality of Dante’s poetry is also a consequence of the fact that the allegorical method was common to all European poetry and still today allows the foreign reader to enjoy Dante: as opposed to words which change from one language to another, images have no need to be translated, ‘speech varies, but our eyes are all the same’ (SE, p. 243).

There is, however, a problem as regards the contents of Dantean allegory. Eliot makes an important distinction between the Symbolist-Romantic concept of the image as described by Hulme and Dantian allegory. For Hulme, not the first critic to theorise on the relationship between word and image but one of the most important champions of the principle that words must be visually concrete, the content of an image is unintelligible, it can be neither translated nor paraphrased. Eliot instead affirms that the reader can initially be unaware of the content of a Dantian image but adds that ‘clear visual images are given much more intensity by having a meaning’ (SE, p. 242). For instance, images like the Eagle in Paradiso XVIII composed of the souls of the Just are not mere rhetorical devices ‘but serious and practical means of making the spiritual visible’ (SE, p. 267). The image has an immediately-perceivable appearance and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{59}}\text{ Eliot had learnt from Pound that in allegory the poet ‘apprende a distaccarsi, non ancora da intere disposizioni dell’animo, ma da semplici qualità e passioni, e a visualizzarle’ (E. Pound, Lo spirito romanzo, \textit{It. tr. by S. Bardi (Florence: Vallecchi, 1959), p. 85).} \]
at the same time a concealed meaning. In this sense allegory requires the use of the intellect and the senses, both necessary to perceive the image and grasp its meaning, which makes the image more powerful. This is the reason why Eliot admires the ability in Dante’s use of allegory to deal with philosophy not as a theory or as a reflection ‘but in terms of something perceived’.  

As for the relationship between Eliot and Dante, Eliot’s objective correlative has many features in common with the allegorical method described here. Unfortunately, however, Eliot spoke only once of the objective correlative, in the 1919 essay on ‘Hamlet and his problems’, and the formula is in some ways rather ambiguous: ‘The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked’ (SW, p. 100). When Eliot speaks of a given emotion that must find a form, an object to re-evoke it, this is at odds with his repeated statements in his critical writings. The ambiguity consists in speaking of poetry as just a mixture of feelings and emotions, without mentioning the role of the intellect, which Eliot usually associates with the problem of sensibility. What does emerge clearly, however, both in Eliot and Dante is the fact that the two poets do not privilege objects in themselves but relations between objects. As Dante chooses the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf to indicate incontinence, violence and fraud, so does Eliot express an emotion by choosing an object that re-evokes it (the rose-garden in *Four Quartets* recalls for example childhood). It is therefore obvious that Eliot’s intention is not to use the objective correlative to present the reader with a photographic image of what the poet initially saw: the aim is not to give a naturalistic representation but to use an image that can recall

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60 SW, pp. 170-71. It must be emphasised that when Eliot speaks of ‘vision’ he does not consider Dante a mystic. If the mystic experiences divine things and his contemplation ends in silence, Dante’s poetry experiences above all the things of this world and his experience, Eliot observes, end up by being an expression able to, or at least trying to, render the whole range of human emotions.
an experience to the reader similar to that of the poet. In other words, the aim of art is not to reproduce the visible but to make it visible.

In short, Dantean allegory and Eliot’s objective correlative are two ways, after the eyes of the individual talent have surrendered themselves to looking at the world and recovering its meaning, of detaching oneself once again from one’s personality to communicate universally, with a visual language, a relation sought for between oneself and the world. This is why impersonality ‘is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol’.61

It is, however, ‘cosa molto diversa se il poeta cerca il particolare in funzione dell’universale, o se nel particolare scorge l’universale. Dalla prima maniera risulta l’allegoria, dove il particolare non è che l’emblema, l’esempio dell’universale; ma la seconda è propriamente la natura della poesia: essa esprime un particolare, senza pensare all’universale o senza alludervi’.62 From this well-known definition by Goethe the ancient debate over symbol and allegory took on a new impulse in the nineteenth century and a negative connotation of allegory emerged, going through Symbolism and arriving at Luzi. That ‘tratto logistico di fondo dell’argomentazione’ which constitutes the intellectual and structural component of allegory turns out to be unsuitable for Luzi’s poetic vision. Above all from the post-War period with Primizie del deserto and Onore del vero the first thing that Luzi’s poetry does not wish to ignore are the most elementary things exactly as they present themselves phenomenologically. The result is inevitably a refusal of the deductive processes of allegory in the sense of an overlapping of a predetermined meaning on an object that has become devoid of potentiality for polysemousness and rendered univocal in its signification.

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In wishing to give a plastic objectivisation to what is in fact immaterial (emotions, ideas), in the attempt to give a concrete form to what has no concrete form, Eliot's theory of the correlative is, according to Mario Luzi, 'efficace ma in senso profondo immatura': effective because it manages to set a realistic limit to Symbolist subjective transfiguration, but at the same time immature because it gives ideas and emotions more importance than events: 'Per me,' observes Luzi, 'quello che la poesia dà come accadente o accaduto (ad esempio: 'La nebbia non c'è più') è più importante dell'idea. L'idea è generata da questo evento in corso o già compiuto, da queste emozioni, figure e invenzioni della poesia: non è l'idea che genera un evento, ma è l'evento che genera un'idea. Questo spiega perché il simbolo è integro e intrinseco alla condizione poetica e non è una proposizione astratta' (ED, pp. 227-28).

Luzi is not interested in things as objective correlatives of emotions and ideas that come before and are found elsewhere, but as symbols of something that is within and beyond the things themselves. Luzi feels intuitively an intrinsic symbolic charge in writing poetry that drives the writer to save phenomena, but he refutes the allegorical process with which 'lo scrittore deve trasportarsi in un territorio altro e più difficilmente avviene una riscoperta reciproca fra lettore, studioso e poeta' (ED, p. 228). Words, therefore, must free themselves of the yoke of metaphor (in the sense of allegory) and, we read in Ipazia, when reality changes into 'altro', in reality 'non è altro, è la sua profondità / medesima' (T, p. 54).

Both in the case of Luzi and Eliot, however, whether it is a question of allegory, objective correlative or symbol, the initial experience that triggers an idea or an emotion is indispensable material for poetry and the subjective component, which for a time has the task of 'listening to things' ('ascoltare le cose') in their metamorphic objectivity, almost disappearing, has then the responsibility for interpreting the 'other' or the 'profondità' in which reality is transformed. Among the baroque ruins of the twentieth century organic and certain Dantean interpretations will often be no more than an expression of hope.
7.7. Conclusion

To conclude, we may observe that, although the language employed (Eliot’s more allegorical and Luzi’s more symbolic) lead to different and original expression in the two authors, both Eliot and Luzi’s ‘impersonal’ poetry can be included in the common reaction to the subjectivism of Romantic-Symbolist poetry and at the same time in the common attempt to affirm the more profound personality. In the two poets, therefore, diffidence in respect of the absolute and demiurgic personality as the Romantics understood it is not linked to a sceptical lack of confidence in the human. The objective, natural dynamics chosen by the two writers in the wake of Dante does not work against the subject but is its necessary completion. The impersonality of the voice in no way implies a cold and detached art, rather, a tacit appeal to an external presence which provokes the subject and comes before the poetic language. Neither does the impersonality of the two authors imply an abstract universality that cancels all details, rather, a reciprocity, a mutual relationship between personal and impersonal, between present and eternal, between sensibility and spirituality.

Because of this precise coincidence of opposites that has been insisted upon in the course of this Chapter, Nugnes’s judgement, according to which ‘l’io poetico, la persona di Luzi, come il Gerontion o il Tiresias di Eliot “throbbing between two lives” si pone al di fuori delle coordinate spaziali o temporali’ does not seem convincing. Rather, as Mengaldo observes, Luzi passes under Eliot’s patronage ‘in parallelo al quale egli approfondisce la metafisica, tra cristiana e platonica, dell’identità e reciproca reversibilità, o meglio perpetua oscillazione, di divenire ed essere, mutamento e identità, tempo ed eternità’.

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In this sense, Luzi himself recognises, after going through various modes and techniques, that Eliot’s poetic process is in the end close to that of Luzi: ‘Il processo è simile: la poesia non tende a diventare scientifica ma ontologica, a dire cioè com’è la realtà che nessuna altra scienza dell’epoca poteva rendere visibile’ (ED, p. 227). And in the essay ‘Naturalezza del poeta’ (1951), after criticising the theory of the objective correlative, Luzi admits that ‘componendo i suoi migliori poemi o analizzando i caratteri della poesia dantesca’ Eliot has shown ‘di saper riconoscere una concreta che non consiste soltanto negli oggetti’ (IL, p. 45). Both Luzi’s symbols and Eliot’s allegories offer in the end a conceptual and linguistic means of approaching that alterity (visible and not) which is the world. In this Dante showed himself to be the ‘maestro operativo’ of poetic writing, not only because he is the originator of that line of experimentalism and plurilinguismo indicated by Gianfranco Contini, but also because his teaching insists upon the need for a relationship between subjectivity and alterity, between the poetic self and the world, between mutability and the eternal, recognising language’s pre-eminent gnoseological function in relation to the real.
CONCLUSION: MARIO LUZI'S *DANTISMO 'A MEZZO'*

In endeavouring to draw some conclusions as to the kind of relationship existing between Luzi and Dante, it will be useful to consider three basic themes found throughout the entire volume: first of all, the dialectic relationship between Dante and Petrarch that emerges in Luzi’s poetic works, with reference to the two critical metaphors of *inferno* and *limbo* explained in Luzi’s 1945 essay, secondly, the most significant figures and Cantos of the *Comedy* present in the author’s poetic works, and thirdly, the mediatory role exercised by other poets, in particular Montale and Eliot, in recovering Dante’s word.

1. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the essay ‘L’inferno e il limbo’ offers an original idea of Dante’s and Petrarch’s poetry, and anticipates, at least in part, Contini’s magisterial opposition in 1949 between the two fathers of the Italian language. In the end, however, the value of these two essays does not consist so much in their establishing the superiority of one poet over the other, as in fixing the meaning and results of certain choices of language which are opposed but which also co-exist and are connected (Petrarch’s poetry itself conceals various traces of Dante).¹

Taking this as a starting point, the investigation of this thesis has not shown a radical overturning of the Petrarcan course in the uniquely Dantean sense, nor a dualistic division between the Petrarcan and Dantean elements inside Luzi’s poetry. The basic thesis has certainly been to see what sort of part was played by the teaching of Dante and Eliot in helping to go beyond Hermeticism, without however suggesting a total rejection of Petrarch, but rather a dialogue with what was and remains an ineliminable presence in Italian lyric poetry, especially Florentine.

For instance, in the collection *Un brindisi* (1940-1944), certain situations are reminiscent of Dante’s Inferno, others of Petrarch’s Limbo (the latter to be understood according to the theoretical definition that Luzi gave in 1945 in his critical essay on Dante and Petrarch): among the infernal landscapes can be found the river almost paralysed in the eternal ice of the ‘Cocito’ (‘Già goccia la grigia rosa il suo fuoco’, line 8), the ‘colori di Dite’ and the ‘voce che sale d’Acheronte’ (‘Un brindisi’, lines 7 and 99), the world that is ‘di là dall’Acheronte’ and the ‘livida fuliggine’ (‘Viaggio’, lines 1 and 4); among the Limbo-like situations there are instead ‘le rose d’Armida’ (‘Un brindisi’, line 23), symbol of an idyllic but not real garden, and the bitter consideration ‘Continuo a non sapere a lusingarmi’ (‘Prima estate’, line 15).

Limbo returns in certain lines of ‘La notte lava la mente’, even though the lyric, placed at the end of *Onore del vero*, is enveloped in a prevailing Purgatorial atmosphere, as is shown by the fact that Luzi in 1990 chose it as the *incipit* to his theatrical transcription of *Purgatory* for the Magazzini. There are various echoes of the second Canticle of the *Comedy*: the cathartic washing of the memory-‘mente’ which re-evokes the purifying immersion of Dante in the waters of Lethe (*Purg. XXXI*); the ‘fila d’anime lungo la cornice’ (line 3), an allusion to the crowds of souls moving from one framework to another; the vision described in the two triplets that may be connected with the visions and dreams which often took place at night in the *Purgatory* too. An echo instead of the sense of suspension and ambiguity that is a characteristic of the Petrarchan Limbo is the fact that in the vision there does not appear only who is ‘pronto al balzo’ but also who is still ‘quasi in catene’. The critics have never given much attention to this ‘quasi in catene’, which is one of the most suggestive moments in the lyric, especially for a more profound understanding of Luzi’s *dantismo*: if the chains represent a situation of Infernal imprisonment, the ‘quasi’ indicates that it is not a question of Purgatory or Inferno but of Limbo, according to the meaning that Luzi gives in his critical essay, a Limbo, that is, that does not depend as does Dante’s on a mysterious Divine justice, but on a choice frozen for ever and never taking place (see also ‘La corriera’, DFC, lines 17-19: ‘Sediamo qui,
The alternation of Purgatory and Limbo returns in the collection *Dal fondo delle campagne* (1956-1961), where the Purgatorial arrays of souls who have with great difficulty come out of the Limbo ‘labirinto’ are tempted to return, closing themselves up again inside the walls of interiority: ‘Vita se dura non più che il lento / districarsi l’una dall’altra d’anime / all’uscita del labirinto. Accade quel che accade di primavera o estate / quando il bosco è inquieto, / quando da un momento all’altro / l’oscurarsi del cielo sui giganti / ne spegne l’allegria e a uno a uno / si ritraggono pur restando insieme / dentro la prigionia di sé ch’è il vero inferno’ (‘La Fortezza’, DFC, lines 19-28).

In the lyrical ‘Invocazione’ there is instead an alternation between the Infernal and Purgatorial dimension: going through a terrifying ‘foresta inestricabile’, an echo of the Wood of the Suicides in *Inferno* XIII, the poet turns to a mysterious figure and asks him to share and redeem human suffering. What is therefore central to the lyric is the hope that there is a connection between evil and its redemption, between ‘la fumida palude e il giunco’ (‘Invocazione’, PD, line 72). Also in ‘Gli uomini o la loro maschera’, ‘nella brulicante commedia’ of life where an infernal ‘desolata lacca’ gives no glimpse of a way out, at a certain point the hope appears that suffering is not death but a ‘semina’: ‘[...] non è / questo il tralucere / improvviso dell’inferno, / non è la morte, questa, è la semina, / solo così rigermogliano / e sono riconquistati al movimento, / al fuoco, all’eterna metamorfosi’ (‘Gli uomini o la loro maschera’, PBF, lines 19-25).

These examples, and many others that have been quoted in the course of the book, show that there is not only a Purgatorial and Paradisiacal Luzi, as is usually taken for granted by critics. If on the whole it is true that the Purgatorial dimension prevails from the end of the war onwards, and that the Paradisiacal dimension is a characteristic of Luzi’s last poetic collections (in particular *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare, Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* and *Sotto specie umana*), Luzi’s *dantismo* is, however, much more problematic and the oxymoronic co-presence between the opposites
Infemo and Limbo, Inferno and Purgatory, Inferno and Paradise remains as a thread through his complete poetic oeuvre, also leaving room for stilnovistic elements (it is no novelty to state that both Dante and Petrarch used stilnovistic poetry differently and went beyond it).

Certain stilnovistic motifs present in Luzi’s first collections are ‘dolci navigazioni’ and ‘notturni amori’ (‘La sera’, LB, line 20), which are distant allusions to the Dantean enchanted ‘vasel’ that bears the stilnovist poets and their respective ladies on a voyage of poetry and love; the veiled reference of ‘Diana, risveglio’ (UB) to Guido Guinizzelli’s ‘stella diana’ and, in general, to the bright ‘stella’ of stilnovistic poetry; the use of the word ‘mente’ which appears for the first time in Quaderno gotico and which becomes widely used in Luzi’s poetic works with the extended meaning that it had in lyrics of the Duecento.

But it is above all the female figure that is clothed in stilnovistic stylemes, even though she evolves in Luzi’s work and progressively works away from the initial stylizations: ‘gotiche icone’ are represented in La barca, while in Avvento notturno there appear icy maidens who cause dismay and death of a Cavalcantian nature (‘Ma dove attingerò la mia vita / ora che il tremebondo amore è morto?’, ‘Avorio’, lines 12-13), or ‘rosse epifanie d’infanzia’ (‘Miraglio’, line 5) to compare with the visions of the youthful Dante to whom Love appeared clothed in a ‘drappo sanguigno’; in Biografia a Ebe the dialogues with a ‘ragazza gentile’ show a very early discovery of dramaturgy (‘Ma la parte che ognuno di noi si è riservata esige naturalmente la presenza dell’altro per essere sostenuta, la nostra solitudine è ordinata secondo questo fatale teatro’), while the collection Quaderno gotico becomes a kind of stilnovistic book of memory in which to find ‘il viso di molto amata un tempo’ (‘Di gennaio, di notte’, line 22), or where there is a

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3 The Dantean image of the ‘drappo sanguigno’ will return in the sixties in Parronchi: ‘Un drappo rosso esce alla svolta. In cielo / sfumano lingue di fuoco...’ (‘“Transfert”’, in Pietà dell’atmosfera, lines 23-24).
4 M. Luzi, Biografia a Ebe, p. 64.
5 Ibid., p. 47.
description of how the woman came out of her Platonic hyperuranion to walk in the streets, make the brooks ‘tremare’ and make the ‘augurali città’ hum. The stilnovistic motif of the female apparition returns in Primizie del deserto: in particular ‘L’Apparita’ of ‘Né il tempo’ (line 5) and the ‘apparizione’ of ‘S’avvia tra i muri, è preda della luce’ (line 2) re-evoke the appearances of Beatrice and the dream-like lexis used in the Vita Nuova to describe the appearance of Love. From Onore del vero onwards the stilnovistic traits of the female figure become increasingly rare and the woman is seen walking tiredly with her flock of sheep (‘Le petit montagnard’, lines 1-7), wiping floors, spreading wax (‘Augurio’, DFC, lines 1-4); she is gnawed by ‘gelosia senile’ (as happens in a suggestive lyric in Nel magma entitled ‘In due’: “‘Anche questo è amore, quando avrai imparato a ravvisarlo / in questa specie dimessa, / in questo aspetto avvilito” mi rispondono, e un poco ne ho paura / e un po’ vergogna, quelle mani ossute e tese da cui scende qualche lacrima tra dito e dito spicciando’, lines 31-35), or she becomes a spouse to whom the poetic ‘I’ says: ‘Tu che avevi in te il mio bene / cui ero andato incontro, ma poco / camminando da solo / e inciampando nella mia ombra // tu che me lo porti in dono / e non vuoi né congedo a occhi bassi dal passato / né abiura, né pentimento / e sorridi profonda / in me più di me stesso e risplendi, // non ti fermare sulla soglia: / nulla di degno posso darti in cambio, / entra, prendi possesso della casa, / nei muri, nelle fondamenta’ (‘Il pensiero fluttuante della felicità’, 5, lines 277-89). Whereas in Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini, there appear, under the same name, two faces of femininity, antithetical and complementary: on one hand another, modern, Beatrice is depicted, by the name of Giovanna, Simone’s spouse, whose ‘sorriso’ and the ‘lucenti spere’ of whose eyes the poet highlights, on the other, another Giovanna is placed on the stage, la ‘povera donna di Donato’ (O, p. 1014), ‘agghiacciata da terori’ (O, p. 1009), torn by memories and wracked by perils that she feels ‘nei nervi, nella carne’ (O, p. 101).

2. The main characteristic of Luzi’s dantismo is not only the alternation of stilnovistic, Infernal, Limbo-like, Purgatorial and Paradisiacal atmospheres,
but also precise lexical echoes that take on consistence and presuppose a voluntary memory in that the verbal coincidences form part of wider segments of discourse and come to correspond with thematic coincidences. In order to verify the hypothesis of a dantismo, it has often been necessary to take the whole lyric into consideration or also the relationship with other lyrics that are more or less close to it chronologically. Attention to the context has been of fundamental importance even if often it is a changed context, transposing for instance a reference to Hell to a Purgatorial or Limbo-like atmosphere. Here it will be useful not so much to repeat the exegesis of certain passages, which has already been dealt with in the single chapters, but to propose a synthetic picture of the most significant dantismi present in Luzi’s entire work. This picture, which groups the allusions to the Divine Comedy according to the Canto to which they belong, makes it possible to arrive at a typology of the Dantean images that remained most impressed on the poet’s memory and to describe how all three Canticles, including the Inferno, are widely present in Luzi’s work.

INFERNO

The entrance to the dark wood in Inf. I

Inf. I 1-2, ‘mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, / ché la diritta via era smarrita’ (cf. ‘Invocazione’, PD, line 2: ‘e m’inoltro sospeso, entro nell’ombra, / dubito, mi smarrisco nei sentieri’).

Crowds of souls waiting to be ferried across in Inf. III


‘La bufera eterna’ and the ‘schiera’ of bird-souls in Inf. V

Inf. VII. 16, ‘così scendemmo ne la quarta lacca’; Inf. XII. 11, ‘e ’n su la punta de la rotta lacca’; Purg. VII. 71: ‘che ne condusse in fianco de
la lacca" (cf. 'Gli uomini o la loro maschera', PBF, line 13: 'in quella neutra desolata lacca, tutti'; Inf. VII. 125, 'Quest’inno si gorgogliano nel pelo della broda le risaie del Vietnam'; ("La lito"), FICS, line 26: 'nella morta strozza'); Inf. VIII. 53, 'di vederlo attuffare in questa broda' (cf. 'Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi', SFI, line 226: 'Gorgogliano da sotto il pelo della broda le risaie del Vietnam'; ('La lito"), FICS, line 26: 'nella morta strozza'); Inf. VIII. 31, 'Mentre noi correvan la morta gora' (cf. 'Città lombarda', AN, line 4 , 'delle tue mura accende e le tue gore'; 'Presso il Bisenzio', NM, lines 1-2: 'La nebbia ghiacciata affumica la gora della concia, / e il viottolo che segue la proda. Ne escono quattro'; 'Colme le valli', PBF, lines 13-14: 'prima persa nella gora / di un infernale esgorgo'); Inf. VIII. 15-16, 'com’io vidi una nave piccioletta / venir per l’acqua verso noi in quella' ('Il pescatore', OV, lines 1-27: 'Viene gente per acqua. Gente muta / […] seguo con gli occhi ansiosi il pescatore').

Encounter between Dante and Farinata in Inf. X

Inf. X. 34, 'l’ avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto'; Inf. X. 112: 'e s’i’ fui, dianzi, a la risposta muto' (cf. 'Presso il Bisenzio', NM, line 9: 'Lo fisso senza dar risposta nei suoi occhi vizzi, deboli').

The wood of the suicides in Inf. XIII

Inf. XIII. 4-7, 'Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco; / non rami schietti, ma nodosi e ‘nvolti; / non pomi v’eran, ma stecchi con tòsco // non han si aspri sterpi né si folti'; Inf. XIII. 15, 'fanno lamento in su li alberi strani'; Inf. XIII. 22-24, 'lo sentia d’ogni parte trarre guai, / e non vedea persona che ’l facesse; / per ch’io tutto smarrito m’arrestai'; Inf. XIII. 31-37, 'Allor porsi la mano un poco avante, / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno; / e ’l tronco suo gridò: "Perché mi schiante?" // Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno, / ricominciò a dir: "Perché mi scerpi? / non hai tu spirito di pietà alcuno? // Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi' ; Inf. XIII. 73, 'Per le nove radici d’esto legno'; Inf. XIII. 108, 'ciascuno al prun de l’ombra sua molesta' (cf. 'Invocazione', lines 17-33, 40-41, 47-50: 'Strane dove l’effimero ci porta / si mettono radici, rami, foglie / dove una lamentosa notte fruscia. / È la nostra foresta inestricabile, / ascoltane le foglie vive, i brividi / e la remota vibrazione, il timbro / d’arpa di cui percuotano le corde. / È questa la foresta inestricabile / dove cadono i semi, dove allignano, / genti che cercano il sole, viluppi / ciechi prima di attingere la luce, / prima di giungere al vento repressi. / Vieni tu portatrice di colori, / tentane con le mani caute i pruni, / estirpa i rovi, medica le sotorce, / ma ferisciti, sanguina anche tu, / soffri con noi, umiliati in un tronco // […] gemiti rari e parole se sono / parole quelle che nessuno ascolta / […] / pesta le muffs tristi, i secchi sterpi, / schiantane i nodi, lacerà i grovigli, / ma ferisciti, sanguina anche tu, /
piangi con noi, oscurati nel folto'; 'Villaggio', PD, lines 1, 4: 'Che condolersi d'anime e di spoglie / [...] / l'aria, la densità nera d'un bosco'; 'Gemma', PD, line 16: 'gli alberi consueti mettono fiori strani'; Nell'imminenza dei quarant'anni, OV, line 12: 'L'albero di dolore scuote i rami'); Inf. XIII. 128, 'e quel dilaceraro a brano a brano' (cf. 'Nella casa di N. compagna d'infanzia', PD, line 4, 'fuori lacera a brano a brano i nastri'); Inf. XIII. 41-42, '[...] dall'altro gema / e cigola per vento che va via' (cf. 'Prima notte di primavera', DFC, lines 10-11: 'premono, fanno tutte ressa, e gema / e cigola da pila a pila il ponte').

Encounter with Brunetto Latini in Inf. XV

‘Cotti dentro da la crosta’ in Inf. XXII

‘correan genti’ di Inf. XXIV
Inf. XXIV. 92, ‘correan genti nude e spaventate’ (cf. ‘Qualche luogo’, DFC, lines 8-9: ‘corre / gente, rintrona qualche sparo [...]’
‘Il folle volo’ in *Inf.* XXVI


‘Il capo […] pesol con mano a guisa di lanterna’ in *Inf.* XXVIII

*Inf.* XXVIII. 121-122, ‘e ‘il capo tronco tenea per le chiome, / pésol con mano a guisa di lanterna’ (cf. ‘Appeso come una lanterna, i più’, PBF, lines 1-4, ‘Appeso como una lanterna, i più: / altri scolpito dall’interno - / così / portano il viso’).

‘La brigata in che disperse’ in *Inf.* XXIX

‘e tra’ne la brigata in che disperse’ (*Inf.* XXIX. 130) ‘La brigata dispersa si raccoglie, / si conta dopo queste mareggiate’ (*Sulla riva*, lines 6-7).

The frozen lake in *Inf.* XXXII e XXXIII, XXXIV


**Purgatory**


‘Gente che preme’, ‘per forza morti’, ‘forato nella gola’ in Purg. V


‘Peregrin d’amore / punge’, in Purg. VIII

Purg. VIII. 4-5, ‘e che lo novo peregrin d’amore / punge […]’ (cf. ‘Da “Monologo”’, PS, II 1: ‘Di te punto d’amore o della terra?’).

‘sangue… spiccia’ in Purg. IX


Il ‘livido color de la petraia’ in Purg. XIII

'se fiume è una petraia'; 'Il duro filamento', DFC, line 20: 'la città livida nelle sue pietre').

'A guisa di fanciulla [...] // l'anima semplicetta' in Purg. XVI

_Purg._ XVI. 86-89 'prima che sia, a guisa di fanciulla / che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia, // l'anima semplicetta che sa nulla, / salvo che, mossa da lieto fattore' (cf. 'Il gorgo di salute e malattia', SFI, lines 325-327: 'la parte bambina dell’anima, la parte cucciola / come offesa da un tradimento, e si oscura / sentendosi cercata').

'Spera del sol' in Purg. XVII

_Purg._ XVII. 5-6, 'a diradar cominciansi, la spera / del sol debilmente entra per essi' (cf. 'Il pensiero fluttuante della felicità', SFI, line 180: 'dalla spera di sole che la cela').

'Uscir di bando' in Purg. XXI

_Purg._ XXI. 102, ‘più che non deggio al mio uscir di bando’ (cf. ‘Il soldato’, DFC, line 41: ‘per vivere da uomini e uscir fuori dal bando’).

'In qual vico' in Purg. XXII

_Purg._ XXII. 99 ‘dimmi se son dannati, ed in qual vico’ (cf. ‘Appeso come una lanterna, i più’, PBF, line 8: ‘Siamo dove? in che vicolo dell’inferno?’).

Encounter with Forese in Purg. XXIII

XXIII. 22-117 (‘cf. ‘Nella hall’, NM, line 10: ‘Né lui vede un amico d’altri tempi’).

‘miraglio’ in Purg. XXVII

Purg. XXVII. 105, ‘dal suo miraglio, e siede tutto giorno’ (cf. the title ‘Miraglio’, AV)

‘La revestita carne alleluiando’ in Purg. XXX

Purg. XXX. 15, ‘la revestita carne alleluiando’ Purg. XXX 15, together with Par. XIV. 43-45 ‘Come la carne gloriosa e santa / fia revestita, la nostra persona / più grata fia per esser tutta quanta’ (cf. ‘Di quel flusso di vita’, VTCS, lines 24-26: ‘quando / quando, Dante, / la rivestita carne alleluiando?’)

PARADISO

‘L’eterna margarita’ in Par. II

Par. II. 34, ‘Per entro sé l’eterna margarita’ (cf. ‘Siesta’, DFC, line 24: ‘mia madre, mia eterna margherita’).

‘d’amor turge’ in Par. X

Par. X. 144, ‘che l’ben disposto spirto, d’amor turge’ (cf. ‘Bacca’, AN, lines 11-12: ‘il tempo dell’uova, alto in un velo / australe l’Amo turge’).

‘folgorò nel mio sguardo’ in Par. III

Par. III. 128, ‘ma quella folgorò ne lo mio sguardo’ (cf. ‘Ménage’, NM, line 6: ‘’Non in questa vita, in un’altra’ folgorà il suo sguardo gioioso’).

‘Lascerai ogni cosa diletta’ in Par. XVII

Par. XVII. 55-56, ‘Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta / più caramente; […]’
(‘Se pure osi’, OV, line 17: ‘[…] la misura / delle cose che devo amare e perdere’).

‘Trita’ in Par. XIII and ‘mola’ in Par. XXI

Par. XIII. 34, ‘Quando l’una paglia è trita’ (cf. ‘Pur che…’, PD, line 2: ‘ombra che sei, tritata a questa mola’); Par. XXI. 81 ‘girando sé come veloce mola’ (cf. ‘Pur che…’, PD, line 2: ‘ombra che sei, tritata a questa mola’, where ‘mola’ means ‘millstone’). In Par. XII. 3 the term ‘mola’ is used by Dante also in the more generic sense of ‘wheel’, metaphorically indicating the circle of the Blessed moving in a ring, ‘a
rotar cominciò la santa mola' (cf. 'Il gorgo di salute e malattia', 7, line 42 'ben poco t'assomiglia la mola del mondo').

'La lista radial' in Par. XV
Par. XV. 23, 'ma per la lista radial trascorse' (cf. 'Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi', SFI, lines 254: 'non del braccio radiale della croce').

'intra Tevero e Arno' in Par. XIX
Par. XIX. 106, 'nel crudo sasso intra Tevero e Arno' (cf. 'La lite'), FICS, line 73: 'tra Indo e Arno')

'Rosa' in the last Cantos of Paradise
Par. XXX. 124, 'nel giallo della rosa sempiterna'; Par. XXXI. 1, 'in forma dunque di candida rosa' (cf. 'Un brindisi', UB, line 75: 'rosa fissa nell'etere e indivisa').

'Spera' in many Cantos of Paradise
the noun 'spera' is found in Par. II. 64, III. 51; III. 111; IV. 38; V. 128; IX. 110; XXII. 62; XXIII. 108; XXIV. 30; XXV. 14; XXII. 134; XXIII. 21; XXIV. 11; XXIV. 113; and also in Inf. VII. 96; XXXIV. 116; Purg. XV. 2; XV. 52; XVII. 5 ('Dentro la lingua avita', VTCS, line 22: 'l'altro cielo della spera'; 'S'intorbida la luminosa spera', VTCS, line 1: 'S'intorbida la luminosa spera'; 'In acqua e in aria', VTCS, line 16: 'incandescente spera'; 'Arte, cosa m'illumina il tuo sguardo?'; VTCS, line 20: 'quelle lucenti spere?'; 'Pittura, mi mancavi. Infine, eccolo', VTCS, line 14: 'a entrare nella spera'); see also Purg. XVII. 5-6: 'a diradar cominciansi, la spera / del sol debilmente entra per essi' (cf. 'Il pensiero fluctuante della felicità', SFI, line 180: 'dalla spera del sole che la cela').

'Come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista' in Par. XXX
Par. XXX. 33, 'come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista' (cf. 'Scarlo lo scriba?', AFC, line 2: 'vinto come all'ultimo suo ciascuno artista').

'Plenitudine' in Par. XXXI
Par. XXXI. 20, 'di tanta plenitudine volante' (cf. 'La colonna', DFC, line 33: 'anima e corpo questa plenitudine').

'o superinfusa / gratia' in Par. XV

3. A third aspect of Luzi’s dantismo, which has been dealt with carefully in the thesis, is the fact that allusions to Dante do not involve only the ancient poet but the entire literary tradition that is in some way based on the thirteenth century poet: so Luzi approaches the medieval poet through complex mediations, like those of Pascoli, D’Annunzio, Montale, Rebora, the French Symbolists, as far as the English (and American) Dante Gabriele Rossetti, Pound and Eliot.

It is not only a question of the cultural climate surrounding Luzi, first the school and university environment and then the literary circles, but also of mediations that leave clear traces in his language. For instance, in Chapter 3, it was noted that in the lines ‘È tempo di levarsi su, di vivere / puramente. [...]’ (‘Diana, risveglio’, UB, lines 5-6) the allusion to Inf. XXIV. 52 (‘E però leva sù: vinci l’ambascia’) may have been mediated by Saba’s ‘I Risvegli’ (‘dicono: Su, leviamoci, fratelli!’, line 32), whose title has the word ‘risveglio’ as does the title of Luzi’s poem, and by line 139 of Valéry’s ‘Le Cimetière Marin’: ‘Le vent se lève. Il faut tenter de vivre!’.

Montalian mediations are also numerous. For instance, in ‘Invocazione’ (1948) the image of the plant-man comes from Canto XIII of Inferno but it is likely that Montale’s dantismo of a few decades before acted as a filter. On one hand, the allusions are obviously to Dante’s Canto: the gesture ‘tentane con le mani caute i pruni’ re-evokes very probably Inf. XIII. 32 (‘Allor porsi la mano un poco avante / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno’); the lines ‘pesta le muffe tristi, i secchi sterpi, / schiantane i nodi, lacera i grovigli’ (lines 46-49) can be easily linked to Inf. XIII. 37 (‘Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi’), to Inf. XIII. 7 (‘non han si aspri sterpi né si folti’), to the image of the boughs ‘nodosi e ‘nvolti’ in Inf. XIII. 5, and to the verb schiantare that appears in Inf. XIII. 33 (‘e ’l tronco suo gridò: “Perché mi schiante?”’). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that these same passages taken from
Inferno XIII had been a few years previously taken up by Montale in poems that Luzi certainly knew, such as ‘Meriggiare pallido e assorto’ (1916), where the rhyme ‘sterpi: serpi’ repeats Inf. XIII. 37-39, while ‘pruno’ is taken from Inf. XIII. 32, or ‘Tramontana’ (1922), where the destructive storm ‘tutto schianta’ (see Inf. XIII. 33) raises ‘un muglio / di scerpate esistenze’. Montale had used the metaphor of the plant-man also in ‘Arsenio’ (1927), in ‘Incontro’ (1926), and in ‘Personae separatae’ (1942), where the image of the too-afflicted ‘bosco umano’ was central.

It was then hypothesized that ‘la fumida palude e il giunco’ present in ‘Invocazione’ recalled the purification rites of the rush that took place at the end of Canto I of Purgatorio, through the mediation of the human rush in ‘Arsenio’, which however, as opposed to the humble Dantean plant that reappeared ‘subitamente là onde l’avelse’, brought with it its roots ‘non mai / svelte’ (lines 48-49). But the mediation of the ‘paludoso giuncheto’ of another Montalian lyric, ‘L’Arno a Rovezzano’, is more likely.

Another significant mediation appears in ‘La notte lava la mente’ (1956), where the figure of a ‘gabbiano’ seems to recall ‘li astor celestiiali’ of Purg. VIII. 104 through the more similar ‘astore celestiale’ of Montale’s ‘Proda di Versilia’ (line 9). If the epiphany of the Montalian ‘astore celestiale’ montaliano (‘sempre / più raro, astore celestiale, un cutter / bianco-alato li posa nella rena’, lines 8-10) is rare, rare is also the epiphany of the ‘gabbiano’ (‘raramente qualche gabbiano appare’) and, while the ‘astore celestiale [...] posa nella rena’, the ‘gabbiano’ appears in the ‘pagina del mare’.

Special attention has been dedicated so far to the various symbols and echoes left by Eliot in Luzi’s post-war poetry, from Quaderno gotico to Nel Magma. The most common passages from Eliot’s poetic production are the opening lines of The Waste Land, the closing lines of Ash-Wednesday, and various motifs from Four Quartets. Apart from precise linguistic echoes and similar stylemes, the two twentieth century poets are united by a common passion for Dante, a progressive change in writing that goes from poem-like to dramaturgical, frequent use of exclamation and interrogative modes, and a
procedure of creating paradoxes based on antithetical realities (ice-fire, space-time, light-dark, time-eternity, individuality-alterity, awareness-oblivion, personal-impersonal, particular-universal, movement-fixity, flesh-spirit). On the whole, the cases in which Luzi directly recalls Eliot or Dante are more numerous that those in which there is a perfect triangulation between the three, with the English poet in the middle.

In a lyric in *Nel magma* the question "Come mai qui?" mi chiede lui / calcando le parole più del giusto' (‘Bureau’, lines 12-13) is a clear echo of *Inf. XV*. 30, ‘Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?’, and also of Eliot, ‘And heard another voice cry: “What are you here?”’ (‘Little Gidding’ II. 45), even though this does not necessarily mean that Luzi’s memory needed the English poet to remind him of the Dantean line. Some examples could however be cited in which the three voices interweave convincingly, as in ‘Prima notte di primavera’ (DFC) where the ‘generazioni su generazioni d’uomini’ (lines 5-6) that ‘premono, fanno tutte ressa, / e gome e cigola da pila a pila il ponte’ (lines 10-11) seem to be alluding to the array of the Negligent who died of violent deaths and who crowd around Dante and Virgil in large numbers in *Purg. V*. 43 (‘Questa gente che preme a noi è molta’), probably through the mediation of Eliot and his description in *The Waste Land* of the crowd on London Bridge: ‘A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many’ (*The Waste Land* I. 62-63).

Lines 2-4 of ‘Presso il Bisenzio’ instead (‘[...] Ne escono quattro / non so se visti o non mai visti prima, / pigri nell’andatura, pigri anche nel fermarsi fronte a fronte’) might recall the ‘spiriti lenti’ of *Purg. II*. 12, the ‘gente d’anime, che moviene i piè ver’ noi / e non parevan, si venian lente’ of *Purg. III*. 58-60, and an encounter narrated in *Four Quartets*: ‘I met one walking, loitering and hurried / [...] Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled / Both one and many’ (‘Little Gidding’ II. 33, 40-41).

The three authors also have the dimension of the journey in common: the lines ‘in questo cieco transito dal tempo / al tempo, in questo aspro viaggio / da quel che sono a quello che sarò’ (‘Canto’, lines 11-12) show significantly how the memory of the ‘aspro’ Dantean journey through Hell towards
Paradise (‘all’eterno dal tempo’) mingles with the memory of some lines of Ash-Wednesday: ‘In this brief transit where the dreams cross / The dream crossed twilight between birth and dying’ (VI. 5-6). In any event, the crucial moment of this journey is decided in the present. As Dante is the poet of the *hic et nunc*, able to ‘connettere ‘il frangente con l’eterno’⁶, so both Eliot and Luzi underline with the pointer ‘here’ and ‘qui’ the place where light must be shed:

[...] The critical moment
That is always now, and here. Even now, in sordid particulars
The eternal design may appear

*Murder in the Cathedral*, Part Two

È qui dove vivendo si produce ombra, mistero
Per noi, per altri che ha da coglierne e a sua volta
Ne getta il seme alle sue spalle, è qui
Non altrove che deve farsi luce

*Versi d’ottobre*, OV, lines 1-4
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