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FICTIONAL ARTWORKS

Literary Ékphrasis and
the Invention of Images

Edited by

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PREFACE

MICHELE COMETA

Fictional Artworks aims to introduce some considerations on the links between literary texts and visual media. It is a matter of carrying on a research about the transformations that the latter has produced on the former and, vice versa, about the contribution that literature has given – at both the poetological and thematological levels – to the constitution of the cultural and social paradigms that preside over the genesis of images. This investigation starts from the ever-increasing role that images have “for” literature, “in” literature and within the “literary system”, a process obviously descending from the resumption of the twentieth-century debate on the “wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste”, the reciprocal illumination of arts.

The articles here collected come from the investigations of a team focusing on the (artistic) creative process and on the cultural dynamics that underlay the balance/objection relations between literary texts and images.

In the following pages particular attention is paid to the description of images (ékphrasis), which ended up constituting an autonomous field of studies. Ékphrasis has found a fertile terrain in classical studies in Italy (Settis, 1999) and in art history, eventually developing within the field of literary theory (Cometa, 2004, 2005 and 2012; Segre, 2003; Mengaldo 2005) and aesthetics (Härle, 2005). Another important cornerstone of research is constituted by the Anglo-Saxon studies, above all American ones, on classical ékphrasis, with particular attention to the *incunabula* of descriptions, from Homer to Philostratus, to Callistratus and Lucian, a tradition that was grafted onto the dawning one of American “visual studies” interested in a

cultural study of *ékphrasis*, as in the case of W. J. T. Mitchell and J. Heffernan, who have dwelt on the political and gender implications of classical descriptions (Mitchell 1994; Heffernan, 1993). Also fundamental is, in this context, the work of Umberto Eco, whose *Les Sémaphores sous la pluie* (2002) is endowed with the enormous value of the horizon of reception, of that sort of “pact” that the one who describes has to establish with the spectator, that kind of interpretative “participation” that Eco places at the centre of his typology of hypotyposis. The “presence” of the spectator and that of the picture are, in fact, essential aspects of modern *ékphrasis*, as, obviously, its absence.

Attention towards particular technical features of *ékphrastic* theory is also relevant in this book. Several essays diffusely deal with the levels of reality that *ékphrasis* establishes (from the “mimetic” *ékphrasis*, based on an artistic object that really exists or has existed, to the “notional” one, that which “creates” its own object). *Fictional Artworks*’ essays investigate *ékphrastic* modalities in a wide range of cultural-artistic fields: from Psychoanalysis to the History of Science, from Visual Arts (sculpture, classic and modern painting, cinema and photography) to travel literature and comics. “Corporeal turn” is also one of the main themes of this volume (particularly in its ability to give rise to real *ékphrastic* performances) as well as creativity as a liminal zone between storytelling and pictorial image. The thread of this collection of essays is however the relationship between the unspeakable and the representable: a conceptual starting point in the attempt to investigate the “limits of representation” and the modalities through which literature – together with artistic practices – tries to overcome them.

The starting idea for this book was born on the occasion of the international conference *Beyond the Limits of Representation* (Palermo, September 2012), in which all the authors laid the groundwork about the modalities through which visual media influence narrative plots and forms, and viceversa.

BEINGS OF LANGUAGE, BEINGS OF DESIRE: FOR A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF RAYMOND ROUSSEL'S *LOCUS SOLUS*

DANIELA BARCELLA

De se taire parfois riche est l'occasion.
(R. Roussel, *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique*)

There are many anecdotes surrounding the extravagant and enigmatic Raymond Roussel, emphasizing the number of rules he followed and the almost obsessive care he took in his self-worship. It is said that he would only wear the same socks once, the same shirt twice, and the same ties seven times. I believe, however, that his most interesting habit was the following: when travelling, Raymond Roussel wished to catch no glimpses of the places he was reaching and would always draw the curtains when on board a vehicle. To those who would ask him the reason for this, he would answer: he did it so as not to lose his imagination. Indeed, Roussel devoted his whole literary work to the imagination as a creative faculty; and within this *oeuvre*, a crucial role is played by the work revealingly entitled *Locus Solus* (1914). Here, through the osmotic relation between imagination and language, both visual and verbal, the author created an extraordinary wonderland comprised of amazing imaginary devices, highly precise machines that may well be described as installations, and contemporary artworks based on the blending of natural and artificial, life and automatism. The first-person narrator and protagonist, along with a few close friends, wander through this vast solitary place, a genuine *musée en plein air*. They are accompanied by the master-inventor who – surrounded by his pupils – here leisurely carries out scientific research, as well as experiments through which he creates extraordinary devices. This man, Martial Cantarel (clearly Raymond Roussel's

double), is described as a champion of words with a warm and mellow voice. In this place everything becomes word, everything is created and lives through language. It is therefore a *locus solus* in the sense of a solitary and unique place, as well as a purely imaginary one, resting on an underlying impossibility: that of encountering reality (and hence of existing) in a different place from that of linguistic invention.

Michel Foucault – who wrote a book on Roussel describing him as “a secret room” because of his intimate approach to the latter’s work – regarded this *locus solus* as the space of non-sense bordering on madness.¹ The link between this literary work and madness cannot be viewed in purely pathographic terms. In this respect, the close interrelation between psychoanalysis and the literary and artistic work can provide some interesting interpretative keys for grasping the kind of impossibility that lies at the basis of the linguistic machines or “beings of language” (as Foucault himself termed them) in *Locus Solus*. That is to say, it can help to indirectly grasp the kind of impossibility that Roussel faced throughout his life, down to his death, which occurred in mysterious circumstances (probably as the result of a suicide attempt) in Palermo on a warm summer night in 1933.

Inflated Linguistic Machines

Roussel describes the ingenious machines that fill the vast *Locus Solus* park with the utmost attention to detail, illustrating their functioning and mechanisms, along with the history and meaning of all the various characters which they include – humans, animals and robots. The processes governing the movement of these mechanical organisms are complex, based on scientific discoveries, which Cantarel takes great pride in. The description provided is therefore a highly accurate one, so overflowing with details as to appear inflated, excessive and

1 Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*, ed. by Massimiliano Guareschi (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2001).

repetitive. Take one of the most fascinating devices described: a huge diamond that, upon closer inspection, the astonished visitors discover to be a huge container filled with glittering water.² At its centre, fully submerged and dressed in flesh-coloured tights, is a charming girl called Faustine who takes up sculpturesque poses and moves her long hair, plucking it like the strings of an instrument to produce harmonious sounds. Next to her a pinkish, hairless creature looking like a cat swims, while suspended from a thread. It is an insubstantial object: «the internal remains of a human face, with no traces of bone, flesh or skin left»³ – clearly a brain with muscles and nerves attached that nourish some tissues, supported by a carcass, in such a way as to reproduce its original human form. It is later revealed that this is what is left of Danton’s head, which Cantarel managed to acquire after various adventures. All around tiny individuals who look like Cartesian devils, in seven groups, move up and down with a regular but non-synchronised movement, creating what Roussel describes as “underground artworks”. After having presented all these characters, the master focuses on each one of them individually; he tells their story in detail and explains what the curious figures represent, illustrating in particular their sophisticated automatic mechanisms. The centrepiece of narrative, however, is constituted by the girl and the cat (both of whom are alive) along with the brain, which are what arouse the greatest curiosity. How can two living creatures remain immersed in water? Actually, Cantarel explains, this is a special water he has invented, called *aqua micans*: through some powerful oxygenation, it enables any living creature to live and breathe in it. Even more amazing is what happens to Danton’s brain: upon Cantarel’s signal, the cat – electrically charged – touches the cerebral matter through a metal cone; once electrically charged in turn, the brain starts producing some nervous impulses that move the muscles and nerves. The encephalon then starts speaking. And what does

2 Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*, followed by *Come ho scritto alcuni miei libri*, ed. by Paola Dècina Lombardi (Torino: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 52-95.

3 Roussel, pp. 53-54.

it say? “Under the mnemonic influence of old habits”, it starts repeating incoherent fragments of public speeches once delivered by the eloquent orator, and which now casually and automatically resurface through his cerebral memory.

Danton’s brain has thus been preserved and it is mechanically and fictitiously brought back to life through the memories of his speeches. All Cantarel’s mechanisms, in fact, seek to preserve, embalm or resurrect through mechanical reanimation or magical liquids (later on, Cantarel presents other substances he has invented, *vitalium* and *resurrectine*, capable of temporarily reanimating dead people). The whole park, then, is a second, artificial nature with which Cantarel surrounds himself in an attempt to bring what is dead back to life.

This attempt, however, is necessarily doomed to failure: as Foucault has emphasised, what machines engender is not resurrections but only mechanical and automatic repetitions, which is to say a proliferation of doubles (Cartesian devils, robots, the splitting of life) that in multiplying paradoxically make the place more and more *solus*, since it becomes steeped in failure, impossibility and death. Foucault also stresses how the configuration of these devices mirrors the narrative method adopted by Roussel, who creates these imaginary machines by using a repetitive and overflowing language: he describes them by fragmenting them into all their various mechanisms with an excessive listing of details, in order to tell us, later, how they were conceived, what they represent and the secret way they run, often through a cyclical narrative structure.⁴ Language too is thus intended to contribute to the process of preservation through the endless repetition of what is said and of its signs; through its superabundance, this reveals the underlying impossibility on which it rests.

4 Michel Foucault, *La superficie delle cose*, in *Raymond Roussel*, pp. 121-45. Actually, even before Foucault, Michel Carrouges had spoken of a *mise en abyme* between the object described and the narrative in relation to Roussel’s work; see Franca Franchi, ‘Ballons célibataires’, *Cahiers de littérature française*, 5 (2007), 81-90.

Just as Cantarel's resurrection machines are destined to fail, so the repetitive and inflated language describing them is never bound to make contact with the reality it describes. More precisely, the extremely detailed technical descriptions we are offered do not help the narrative unfold: they provide excess information, pure *dépense* that is perfectly unproductive and an end to itself, since the devices remain cut off from one another and utterly infeasible. Language rules supreme here, but in a self-referential manner, for in this purely imaginary reality words never make contact with things, and the verbal world, which appears to show itself, is constantly dispersed:

Everything is luminous in Roussel's descriptions. [...] Yet this inexhaustible wealth of what is visible has the (correlative and contrary) property of extending along an infinite line [...]. We never come to an end; the essential perhaps has not been seen yet or, rather, we do not know whether we have seen it, whether its turn has already come in this incessant proliferation.⁵

The theatrical adaptations of the work which Roussel attempted to make did not achieve the hoped result, probably confirming his fears. For this very reason, the author never showed much liking for the Surrealists, who were nonetheless interested in his work because of his taste for the concealed, the obsession with the invisible, and the reference to an external and mysterious reality. Roussel's language, however, is incapable of transcending itself: it refers to nothing except what is within itself. So behind the linguistic gloss there is no hidden meaning to be revealed, only the hard core of the impossibility to state everything, to capture and control nature, and to preserve life and memories. The *Locus Solus* – both as an imaginary place and as a literary work – expresses not so much mysteriousness (something dear to Breton and Aragon), as the sense of the absence of the work itself which Bataille described: if language does not transcend itself, the work can only exist as a work on the impossibility

5 Foucault, *La superficie delle cose*, pp. 133-34. All translations from French and Italian are mine.

of the work.⁶ No mystery then, only an explosive encounter – through linguistic excess – with the inner limits of language and the non-sense it encloses. The trip through the wonder-filled park, which the protagonists make under the guidance of Cantarel-Roussel, cannot be interpreted as an initiatory journey leading to a formative revelation, since what is engendered in the characters – as much as in the readers – is rather the constant amazement in the face of machines serving no purpose. They can only be found here, in the land of imagination.

The Empty Letter

Locus Solus represents the rule of pure *logos* over imaginary creatures. These spring from language and through language are controlled and set within a tight network of works in which nothing is left to chance, or pathos, or feelings. Everything is rational, functional, and controlled. Through the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis we can see *Locus Solus* as being governed by what is defined as the Other of the language that comes before us and, through its laws, creates a symbolic grid enclosing all subjects. The unconscious itself, according to Lacan's take on Freudian theory, is not irrational and chaotic, but structured like a language; as such, it adheres to the two fundamental laws of language: metaphor and metonymy.⁷ Metaphorical condensation enables the emergence of meaning, while metonymic sliding enables its constant subtraction; yet, metaphor and metonymy are still the determinations triggering the function of the signifier.⁸

6 George Bataille, *L'esperienza interiore* (Bari: Dedalo, 1978), also quoted in Marino Guareschi, *L'opera segreta*, in Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*, p. 24.

7 See especially Jaques Lacan, *Funzione e campo della parola e del linguaggio in psicoanalisi*, in Id., *Scritti*, ed. by Giacomo B. Contri (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), vol. I. pp. 230-316, and Jaques Lacan, 'L'istanza della lettera nell'inconscio o la ragione dopo Freud', in Jaques Lacan, *Scritti*, vol. I, pp. 501-02.

8 On psychoanalytic account of rhetoric and its implications for literary texts, see Massimo Recalcati, *Il miracolo della forma: Per un'estetica psicoanalitica* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), pp. 190-209.

According to Lacan, meaning is not produced – as Saussure would argue – by the articulation between signifier and signified, but by a concatenation of signifiers, which in their endless flow can only provisionally become interlocked, engendering a temporary *capitonnage* (pinning down) of meaning. Saussure’s notion of sign as the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified is therefore overturned, as it is the myth of the “full word” that engenders meaning, enabling the subject to find fulfilment. Reality is caught within the meshes of language, formed by an ongoing metonymic sliding that prevents any final affirmation of signification and that makes each subject a severed, split and divided one, doomed to utter an “empty word” which is invariably deficient and removed from meaning.

This conception of language is extremely useful in order to understand Roussel’s work. In this concept we certainly find an exaltation of the “language” *god*⁹ in which Roussel has always had an unwavering faith, although in the sense of a metonymic language based on the endless sliding of signifiers. Roussel himself reveals the linguistic method he adopted for *Locus Solus* and other books he wrote in a posthumously published text entitled *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. In this revealing text, the author exposes the mystery of his method, where by “mystery” we have to understand a purely “operative” mystery, not a secret concealed behind the writer’s words. Just from the beginning, the author states his intentions and describes the nature of his method:

I have always been meaning to explain the way in which I came to write certain of my books (*Impressions d’Afrique, Locus Solus, L’Etoile au Front* and *La Poussière de Soleils*). It involved a very special method. (...) I chose two almost identical words (reminiscent of metagrams). For example, *billard* [billiard table] and *pillard* [plundered]. To these I added similar words capable of two different meanings, thus obtaining

9 This definition (“il dio-linguaggio”) is provided by Giovanni Macchia in his article ‘L’ultima macchina di Roussel ovvero la luce, l’estasi e il sangue’, in *Atti relativi alla morte di Raymond Roussel*, ed. by Leonardo Sciascia (Palermo: Sellerio, 1979), pp. 55-81.

two almost identical phrases. (...) The two phrases found, it was a case of writing a story which could begin with the first and end with the latter.¹⁰

Roussel's texts, therefore, derived from essentially phonetic language games in which allophone words, differing by only one phoneme, give rise to ever new and unexpected meanings. First, then, come phonetic combinations, tiny differences in a signifier engendering words and sentences that would be repeated, with the *décalage* of their differences, through a circular return which represents a return to something that is both the same and different. Ultimately this method is related to rhyming, since «in both cases there is unforeseen creation due to phonic combinations»,¹¹ blending the homophony of language with the semantic splitting of words and sentences. This mechanism – Roussel explains – was later further developed: «The process evolved/moved and I was led to take an unspecified sentence, of which I drew from the images by dislocating it, a little as if it had been a question of extracting some from the drawings of rebus».¹² In this case, what is produced is a genuine breakdown of word into several words preserving some assonance with the former but referring to different images, in such a way as to create an equation of facts to be logically solved. Parallels emerge between sentences that are only apparently casual and automatic; a series of images then springs which are centred around word games, i.e. language with its shifting signifiers. This is the creative mechanism that lies at the basis of the imaginary world of *Locus Solus*.

Michel Leiris, a friend and admirer of Roussel's, has provided what is arguably the most complete overview of this method by dividing it into three phases: the fashioning of double entendres, the creation of a logical thread bringing together all unusual and dissimilar elements, and finally the formulation of these relations through an extremely rigorous text. According to Leiris, through this method Roussel created «a special world that takes the place of the ordinary one», which is to say *myths* – transpositions into

10 Roussel, *Come ho scritto alcuni miei libri*, p. 265.

11 Roussel, *Come ho scritto alcuni miei libri*, p. 276.

12 Roussel, *Come ho scritto alcuni miei libri*, p. 273.

dramatic action of what is essentially a linguistic phenomenon: «a method of inspiration, a way of stirring the imagination, something essentially active and not – as is all too often erroneously believed – a fixed rule for production, or indeed an aesthetic canon».¹³

At this stage, within this imaginary proliferation, we perceive something that puts up some resistance and escapes the linguistic grid. The perfectly constructed language that engenders machines/works of art always proves itself to be inadequate with respect to reality it is intended to represent. The imagery eludes complete symbolic control and manifests its imaginative power – in this case, the idea of imagery as stabilizing mirror identification, as conceived by Lacan himself. The images fashioned by Roussel are based on language and yet elude it, enclosed as they are within their land of pure imagination that denies any relation with reality. Words never establish contact with things. What we have is no longer an endless sliding of signifiers: the provisional *capitonnage* of meaning now gives way to an absence of meaning, to emptiness and non-sense. Ultimately, *Locus Solus* is nothing but a grand construction resting on an inner deficiency of language itself; so the extreme linguistic exercise which Roussel applies to an unproductive nothing reveals an elusive and unnameable element at the heart of the incompleteness and inadequacy of writing.

It is Lacan's teaching, in fact, that points us in this direction. Setting off from a stress on the signifying order, Lacan reached an awareness of the existence of asemantic signifiers (which he enunciated using the categories of “letters” and “marks” of the subject), and then – especially from *Seminar 7* onwards – the idea of the absence of signification and an emphasis on non-sense as an “extimate” element, i.e. one at the same internal and external to symbolic structures.¹⁴ In other words, the signifying mesh represented by the Other of language proves itself to be

13 Michel Leiris, *Roussel & Co.* (Paris: Fata Morgana-Fayard, 1998), pp. 216-17.

14 Jacques Lacan, *Il Seminario. Libro VII: L'etica della psicoanalisi, 1959-1960*, ed. by Giacomo Contri (Torino: Einaudi, 2003).

structurally deficient, for a hole in it is made by what belongs to the order of non-knowledge and escapes symbolisation. This is what Lacan succinctly enunciates when he claims that «there is no Other of the Other», i.e. that there is no external signifier that may lend structural legitimacy to language, which as such is deficient and limited. Literary works and artworks in general make this loss of meaning detectable:

This means that the statute governing artworks is not merely based on the laws of language, metaphor and metonymy, i.e. that it does not express homology exclusively through the idea of the unconscious structured as a language; but that it also introduces the traumatic dimension of the limit of language, of the encounter with reality as that which pierces the symbolic screen of language.¹⁵

What we have, therefore, is no longer an endless opening up of meaning through always provisional acts of *capitonnage*, but an encounter with the opaque *inertia* at the heart of language itself. It must be stressed that what makes words possible is the very encounter with a limit, and that what makes language possible is an absence in the background. There can be no literary work without a constitutive and essential deficiency. If language could perfectly state all things, it would be its “dumb and useless” double «and hence would not exist».¹⁶ Roussel was aware of this and he took it to the extreme consequences by rejecting concrete reality and replacing it with a perfectly imaginary one, in which things remain unreachable. The utmost transparency of linguistic method adopted and explained by Roussel becomes a form of opaqueness revealing no hidden world or symbolism, but only a “flat and discontinuous” universe in which each thing refers back to itself, as Alain Robbe-Grillet has argued. The writer has developed a particularly effective simile to sum up the character of Roussel’s work in the light of the explanations provided in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*: «One gets the impression of

15 Recalcati, pp. 97-98.

16 Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*, p. 186.

having found a closed drawer and then a key, and that this key opens the drawer impeccably... and the drawer is empty».¹⁷

Celibate Desire

Roussel's writing illustrates an important critical stage in early 20th-century art and literature: a crucial moment for reassessment of language's potentialities, that ultimately puts Roussel in a different place from his contemporaries. His extreme exercise on language may suggest a parallel with the work of a writer who devoted his whole life to the untiring fine-tuning of his style: James Joyce. Certainly, both novelists show the same obsession with language and style, in the context of a nagging pursuit of social acknowledgement as *litterati*. Like Joyce, Roussel sought to achieve literary glory and to make a big name for himself on the scene, a goal which – unlike Joyce – he never attained and which became the cause of the psychological *malaise* he was destined to suffer from for the rest of his life.¹⁸ As Lacan has emphasised, in the case of Joyce the imaginary is not presented as an alternative to the symbolic or real, as literary writing takes the form of an objective *sinthome*, which is to say the knotting together of three otherwise unconnected registers. In the case of Roussel, by contrast, the imaginary rules out the real and shuns the symbolical, becoming the only possible domain. Hence the distinction drawn by Colette Soler between Joyce as *faux illisible* and Roussel as *vrai illisible*: for even after having read *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, we struggle to discern the sense or signification of Roussel's texts.¹⁹ Likewise, Roussel's writing creates an imaginary world enveloping all things, a literary way

17 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Enigmes et transparence chez Raymond Roussel*, in *Pour un nouveau roman*, ed. by Alain Robbe-Grillet (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1963), p. 73.

18 Concerning Roussel's mental disorders and obsession with unattained glory, see in particular the work of the psychiatrist who treated him Pierre Janet, *De l'angoisse à l'extase* (Paris: Alcan, 1926).

19 Colette Soler, *Les paradoxes du symptôme en psychanalyse: Lacan sans paradoxe*, in *Lacan*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Paris: Bayard, 2007).

of writing that rules out both sentimental involvement, parody and estrangement of the sort we find in Kafka.

With *Locus Solus* Roussel created a self-sufficient universe that is unique, unitary, solitary: *solus*, pervaded by a constant tension towards a unity of meaning that is never attained. Language seeks the uniqueness of its reuniting with its object, but becomes scattered and drifts away through a maze of exploratory details that are always unsuited to this task. The same drive towards original unity may be found in Antonin Artaud, but with a crucial difference and a very different outcome. Artaud also loves playing with linguistic signifiers, with vowels and phonemes, in an attempt (which may be described as psychotic in psychoanalytical terms) to reach the original pre-linguistic unity, which is to say to deny the Other of language, to the point of creating an alternative language (glossolalia) which interrupts all communications and is presented as the original mother tongue (according to Lacan, what we have here is no longer *parole* but *apparole*, no longer *langue* but *lalangue*). In Roussel's case, by contrast, the tension towards unity is wholly internal to language itself and lies in the exasperation of language as it discovers itself to be inhabited by what is different from itself. In the search for a unity of meaning, a proliferation of multiplicity emerges; in repetition, the constant addition of differences, which rather than opening up endless meanings, dramatically bring up the limit of non-meaning.

What we have here is the kind of experience of the irreducible otherness of the Other of language to which psychoanalytical practice leads. Indeed, to use a pair of terms dear to Jacques Alain Miller, psychoanalysis as a "talking cure" turns "signifying amplification" – the flowing of the subject's words – into a "reduction" to the point of suspension of meaning, which is to be analytically understood as an encounter with the real of the subject's urges. Reduction is not at the origins of signifying amplification – as the "mystic" word would suggest – but is rather its product, since there is no "this side" (or "that side") in language. The resulting encounter is that with the foreign centre of the Other, which is nothing but absence, emptiness.²⁰ This

20 Recalcati, pp. 207-08.

emptiness, this subtraction of the original unity, which cannot be recovered, engenders a kind of desire similar to the endless yearning to be reunited with an object (what Lacan calls “the small object” *a*) which has always been lost and always will be. Desire and deficiency are inseparable. The object of desire – which paradoxically is both the object and cause of desire – cannot be recovered, and yet it inspires the subject as his irreducible singularity, which resists the grid of universality. The foreign element which emerges within language may thus be connected to the very aspect of desire that cannot be combined with the word “universal”; language lives through the tension of an impossible unity that can only apparently and indirectly be attained. This is what emerges from a careful analysis of Roussel’s writing, as Sjef Houppermans points out in a study devoted precisely to the relation between writing and desire in Roussel:

Writing is the use of a code which collects, grasps, changes and shifts: that way it constitutes something strictly concerning desire. Imagination and process are the two constitutive parts of a same “wanting-desiring machine”, so writing could be defined as “écriture du désir”.²¹

Roussel’s writing is thus a great desiring machine, as much as the imaginary machines it brings to life. The desire which stirs them, however, is destined to remain forever unfulfilled. As ends in themselves, these devices are bound to remain self-referential and celibate, since they cannot be conjoined with anything; through a kind of reverse *mise en abyme*, the detailed description of their parts is not conjoined with the rest of the text or with the machines described: it is also celibate. «Être célibataire, c’est manquer l’unité rêvée»,²² in the sense of unity with the other and with oneself. The subject is dislocated, split and divided, and the desiring machine implements this act of becoming a subject through a dispersion where no unity is possible. As Carrouges notes:

21 Sjef Houppermans, *Raymond Roussel: Écriture et désir* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1985), p. 14.

22 Houppermans, p. 322.

Le drame de la machine célibataire n'est pas celui de l'être qui vit totalement seul, mais celui de la créature qui s'approche infiniment près d'une créature de l'autre sexe sans parvenir à vraiment la rejoindre. Ce n'est pas la chasteté qui est en cause, tout au contraire, c'est le conflit de deux passions érotiques qui se juxtaposent et s'exaspèrent sans pouvoir parvenir au point de fusion.²³

Roussel's celibate machines are conflict, division, tragedy, and thus desire. According to Marcel Duchamp's definition, these machines bring together a mechanical whole and an anthropological whole; or, rather, they express the mechanical solitude of one or more human beings.²⁴

Duchamp actually claimed to have been influenced by Roussel's machines in the creation of his great celibate work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* – evidence for the complex and productive interconnection between visual arts and literature in the early 20th century. Also known as *The Large Glass*, this work was described by Duchamp himself as a “machine”. It represents an intensive setting for a movement of desire destined never to reach its object: a dividing line between the upper part (the bride) and the lower (the bachelors) marks the incompatibility and lack of unity between the two. The machine is celibate because it expresses the dramatic motion of drawing closer to an impossible goal. Both Duchamp, with his visual work, and Roussel with his beings of language, provide reflections upon the split within representational and narrative possibilities and within each subject. This is the split of desire as what is most intimate and yet most foreign for us.

Roussel's world – comprised of language and imagination – thus illustrates a kind of excess which is difficult to enclose, and which carries detachment from reality within it. Within this unbridgeable detachment, on the threshold of representation, there emerges what escapes all symbolic framing and constitutes a problem for words and images, and yet for this very reason animates and enlivens them.

23 Houppermans, p. 322.

24 Houppermans, p. 325.

THE WORD THAT YOU CAN SEE: VISUAL AND SCENIC STRATEGIES IN *LA RELIGIEUSE* BY DIDEROT

MICHELE BERTOLINI

La Religieuse can be included in Diderot's project of dialogue, comparison and reciprocal enlightenment of the arts of representation. Such a dialogue assigns a predominant role to the visual dimension, as it is closely linked to the imagination process at work in the production and fruition of the works of art. This does set the ground for the comparison of word and image, of tale and pictures, as, through the tormented story of Suzanne Simonin, Diderot's novel stages the feminine body in its pathetic, desiring, suffering, aesthetic and erotic dimension, and it becomes the description and institution of paintings and scenes, in close theoretical connection with the traced path of the *Salons*.

The complex genesis of the novel leads to an ambiguous and hybrid literary product: Diderot «alternatively refers to his novel as *mémoires, histoire, roman* and *conte*»,¹ presenting an aesthetically sparkling text thanks to the dark brightness of its “true lies”, as a baroque work of art.² Excluded by society, rejected by her parents because of her illegitimate birth, and confined to a microcosm, secluded from nature and society as well, invisible to any external eye, Suzanne's story follows the steps of an artificial and aborted³ new-birth into life, senses, and feelings, that recall

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- 1 Huguette Cohen, 'Jansenism in Diderot's *La Religieuse*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11 (1982), p. 75. The term *conte* supports the philosophical dimension of the work that can be taken as a laboratory of analysis for analytical observation of human behaviour in artificial conditions.
 - 2 See Jean Terrasse, *Le Temps et l'espace dans les romans de Diderot* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999), p. 31.
 - 3 On the image of the convent interpreted as a substitute of the uterus in which Suzanne is brought back by force for the guilt to be born, see Dominique Jullien, 'Locus hystericus. L'image du couvent dans *La Religieuse* de Diderot', *French Forum*, 15 (1990), 133-48.

Galatea's animation, although upside down, since she is forced into the denial of sensuality, the negation of sense language by the perversion produced by life in a convent.

A Novel for Painters. Suzanne's Gaze

The visualizing function of words in *La Religieuse* can be detected on a first level in the lexicon choices, strongly emphasized by the author's several adjustments during the long process of the preparation of the text. The written word's evocative capacity, if uttered in the first person, engenders representations in the listener's soul, and it is supported by a specific vocabulary constantly recalling the language of painting. The word "paints", "shows", evokes "pictures" and "scenes", "represents" and, working on imagination, gets to replace perceived reality with an image, sometimes hallucinatory, unreal, generated by its own enchanting and rhetorical power. In the second part of the novel, introducing the *tableau agréable* of the young nuns, altogether in the room of the convalescent Mother Superior of Saint-Eutrope, Suzanne refers to her interlocutor, the marquis of Croismare, to whom the whole content of the *mémoires* is dedicated, introducing him as a painting expert⁴ and therefore particularly sensitive to the visual force of the word, especially when it is developed into a story or a narration. As a matter of fact, since the very first page of the novel, while addressing her interlocutor in order to ask his intervention, Suzanne defines the story of her misadventures as a painting of passions: «I depict (*je peins*) some of my misfortunes,

4 See Denis Diderot, *The Nun*, trans. and ed. by Russel Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 120: «You know about painting, and I can assure you, Monsieur le Marquis, that it was quite a pleasant picture to behold». The three versions of the Vandeul collection, discovered by Dieckmann, offer the privilege of an autographed manuscript with original corrections by Diderot (probably dating back to the years around 1780, twenty years after the first drafting), and a third copy by another hand as well; this remark is an addition and correction by Diderot himself, who often reshapes the text emphasizing its visual dimension.

writing with neither skill nor artifice, but with the naivety of a young person of my age and with my own native honesty».⁵

The iconic dominant of the novel is moreover clearly stated, together with the aspiration to reach and touch one of the limits of representation and fruition by the reader through the *interesting* and the *pathetic*, by Diderot himself, when he writes the presentation letter of the novel to Meister, placing *La Religieuse* in the wake of the ékphrastic enterprise of the *Salons*, as the final epigraph reminds us:

C'est la contre-partie de Jacques le Fataliste. Il est rempli de tableaux pathétiques. Il est très intéressant, et tout l'intérêt est rassemblé sur le personnage qui parle. Je suis sûr qu'il affligera plus vos lecteurs que Jacques ne les a fait rire; d'où il pourroit arriver qu'il en désireront plutôt la fin. Il est intitulé *La Religieuse*; et je ne crois pas qu'on ait jamais écrit une plus effrayante satire des couvents. C'est un ouvrage à feuilleter sans cesse par les peintres; et si la vanité ne s'y oppoisoit, sa véritable épitaphe seroit: Son pittor anch'io.⁶

Such a programmatic claim, assigning a pedagogical role to the text, and one that is of creative stimulus for painting, is the mirroring overturning of what Diderot said in the *Salon* of 1765, concerning Greuze's "pathetic" and "moral" art, true champion of customs (*mœurs*) paintings, where the *philosophe* could at some point see the dream of a painting-novel:⁷ «Here we have your painter and mine; the first who has set out to give art some morals, and to organize events into series that could easily be turned into novels».⁸

5 Diderot, p. 3.

6 Diderot, 'Lettre à Meister du 27 septembre 1780', in *Correspondance*, ed. by George Roth and Jean Varloot (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1955-1970), XV (november 1776-july 1784), pp. 190-91. On *La Religieuse* as a novel that reveals, a novel for the "edification of painters", see Terrasse, p. 36.

7 See Rene Démoris, 'Ut poesis pictura? Quelques aspects du rapport roman-peinture au siècle des Lumières', in *Dilemmes du roman: Essays in honor of Georges May*, ed. by Catherine Lafarge (Stanford: Stanford French and Italian Studies, 1989), p. 277.

8 Denis Diderot, *The Salon of 1765 and Notes on Painting*, in *Diderot on Art, I*, ed. by John Goodman, introduction by Thomas Crow (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 96.

The long redaction of *La religieuse* can be placed within a period of critical reformulation of Horace's paradigm *Ut pictura poesis* (see Diderot's negative formula *Ut poesis, pictura non erit*⁹), next to the transformation of the theory of painting and of the hierarchy of pictorial genres, through the critique of the allegorical language of historical paintings, the critique of the dependent relationship between a painting and the pre-existing literary text, and the consequent, tiring emancipation of genre bourgeois painting, the narrative potential of which, as in the paradigmatic case of Greuze, is thus discovered. Painting, however, within the eighteenth century theoretical context revolving around the crucial role of the pregnant instant, refers as *punctum temporis* to a narrative temporality, but it cannot directly show it. Diderot's writing instead (drama, critique and fiction), claims an ever more authoritative visual space and aims to incorporate, through the notion of *tableau* – transversal to the arts of representation – the visualizing and staging functions within its narrative mechanisms. Precisely the ambiguous notion of *tableau*, theoretical inter-media paradigm applied to Diderot's theory of painting, theatre poetics and novel practice, serves as the moment of interruption of the story's continuity, breaking the *diegesis* in order to condense into a single image the polarized conflicts expressed by the dialogue, the theatrical gesture or by the narration. As an expression of virtual narrative,¹⁰ the image sketched by the *tableau* seems to suspend the specific powers of writing, asking to the reader or listener an effort of representation, staging and visualisation of the described situation, pushing the text to its iconic roots beyond the writing medium itself and the expressive powers of the *récit*. At the time of the historical crisis of the noble genres of theatrical and pictorial representation, as well as of its mimetical foundations, the description and the narration of images acquire a central role, as Diderot's writing testifies.

9 See Denis Diderot, *The Salon of 1767*, in *Diderot on Art, II*, ed. and trans. by John Goodman, introduction by Thomas Crow (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 65.

10 See Jay Caplan, *Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of Beholder* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 89.

Diderot's claim moreover emphasizes a specific aspect of *La Religieuse* fabric: the almost exclusive, monologue concentration of the story on the main character speaking, reinforced by the identification between the narrator's perspective (posteriorly telling the story at some distance from the events) and the main character's perspective (who does actually live the events in the first person, in the present and from within). The oscillation between distance and identification, generating a plurality of perspectives in the story, together with their provisional superposition and identification, comes together with the theme of Suzanne's *gaze*, that is split into a double point of view, being the internal point of view in the presented *tableau*, at the centre of the performance of which she is the main character, and also being the external eye, looking at her assembled and staged *tableaux*, as a painter would do.

We are dealing with a somehow oneiric gaze, as Suzanne re-experiences the paintings she imagines and of which she is the main character; such a gaze is highly reversible and reciprocal, since at the same time it works as the active subject, looking at things and distancing them, and as a gaze that is perceived as detected by other people's views: the Mother Superior of Longchamp and then of Saint-Eutrope, the director, the lawyer Manouri, and also the anonymous crowd of the other nuns. The main character's need to hide her identity behind the protective authority of her interlocutor, even more remarkable in a first-person narration, works as an anti-theatrical strategy, that is able to let Suzanne's personal portrait progressively emerges through the perspective and comments of other characters in the story, or external to it, including the readers, ideally called to be testimonies to the story. Suzanne, as the homonym heroin of the Old Testament represented in paintings several times, can "be seen" by others, named and judged from the exterior, but she never "reveals herself" in the first person, she never consciously assumes a mode of self-exposition of her body or personality, as she is forced to the anonymity of the herd also by the conditions of the monastic life.¹¹

11 See Anne Coudreuse, 'Pour un nouveau lecteur: *La Religieuse* de Diderot et ses destinataires', *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, 27 (1999),

Moreover, the insertion of the *tableaux* in the narration is always mediated by the activation of the gaze of the main character or other's, as it is precisely the gaze on one's self or on the other characters that triggers the description. Mother Sainte Cristine's order to watch ourselves, in tighten relation with Suzanne, pushes the main character to observe and find herself in a state of disorder and alteration: «And so I looked at myself and realized that my dress was in disarray, that my wimple was almost back to front, and that my veil had fallen around my shoulders».¹²

Every evoked image requires the formulation both of a gaze and of a visual support in order to be as such, thus connecting the question about description within the wider definition of the dominant scopic regime.¹³ The night wandering of the Mother Superior of Saint-Eutrope is a gestural action that becomes *tableau* when invested by Suzanne's gaze, who sees her in the lugubrious nocturnal gloom of the church where Suzanne seeks comfort in her prays. Her visage and her hands are enlightened, contoured and framed by the light of a lamp, according to the apparatus of sublime and nocturnal vision, pictorial and theatrical in origin, that is well known to the author of the *Salons*, who is also the refined theorist of *chiaroscuro* in the *Essais sur la peinture*. In this case the representation has the character of a frightening apparition, presenting to the young nun the phantoms of her imagination stimulated by father Lemoine's story on the Mother Superior's demonic nature. Our context is then very close to the descriptive force of ancient *ékphrasis*, where the lacunose memory of father Lemoine is replaced by the liveliness of the terror effects produced on Suzanne's imagination,¹⁴ the revival

45-46: «Suzanne ne peut acquérir un nom, et une identité, que dans le cadre du couvent. (...) Elle semble être une non-personne, à qui seuls le discours et le désir d'autrui pourront conférer une existence réelle».

12 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 52.

13 Martin Jay, 'Scopic regimes of modernity', in *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Michele Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini: Letteratura e cultura visuale* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2012), pp. 35-41.

14 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 129: «Now that I come to compare what he said as I have just reported it to you with the terrible impact it had on me at the time, there is no comparison».

of which triggers an effect of hallucinatory presence, waiting for incarnation, thanks to the visual support of light and bodies.¹⁵

The assimilation of the narrator's perspective with the eye of someone, who observes and describes the several manifestations of convent life, provides a rich phenomenology of what is sacred, of the places and people, of gestures, habits, rituals of the convent, allowing the novel shifting towards an iconic predominance, expressed furthermore in the sequential structure of the narration, room by room, carefully separated and arranged one next to the other.

«The scene of the novel follows the laws of the art of painting. *La Religieuse* is a gallery, a *Salon*, in which appear several contrasting paintings».¹⁶ It is a gallery of mental and imaginary paintings activated by Suzanne's memory and gaze, nevertheless influenced by the memory of sacred paintings and by the experience of the *Salons*, starting from the awareness of the essentially visual, pictorial and spectacular framework of Christian "mythology", clearly shown by the work of Diderot *salonnier*. The monastic setting, as the historical background of Suzanne's sad story, designed by the multiplication of closed and circumscribed spaces, legitimates on a general base the visual primacy of the novel. The very scenographical pictorial nature of Christianity, and particularly of its baroque and Jesuit declination, justifies the abundant presence in the text of paintings, rituals, that become theatre and performance, bodies revealing themselves, and several visual apparatus as the frames of doors, cells, grating, and the torches lighting.¹⁷

15 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 131: «I realised that I had been terrified by a bizarre apparition that my own imagination had conjured up. For she was so positioned with respect to the lamp in the church that only her face and the tips of her fingers were lit up and the rest of her was in darkness, which made her look strange».

16 Béatrice Didier, 'Images du sacré chez Diderot', *Travaux de littérature*, VI (Paris: Adirel, 1993), 193-209 (p. 195).

17 Diderot, *The Salon of 1767*, p. 296: «Patriotism and fear of God have stimulated great tragedies and terrifying pictures». On visual apparatus in the baroque culture, see Michele Cometa, *Letteratura e dispositivi della visione nell'era prefotografica*, in *La finestra del testo. Letteratura e dispositivi della visione tra Settecento e Novecento*, ed. by Valeria Cammarata (Roma: Meltemi, 2008), pp. 30-40.

On a further level, the visual primacy is justified by its emotional and pathetic power, by its presence value and by the efficacy of the image in relation to the text, as a language of natural signs that establishes a direct contact between the observer and the observed subject. The pathetic language is a language of images and gestures, as Suzanne recalls when she emphasizes the value of Mother Moni's portrait, depicting her first mother superior, and jealously kept on her breast and kissed every morning.¹⁸

The passage from text to image, and to the depiction of the body and its martyrdom, is formulated in the novel through the crucial narrative event of Suzanne's destiny: Mother Moni's replacement with Mother Santa Cristina as Superior of the convent of Longchamp. After Mother Moni's death, who had a probable Jansenist penchant, and who was the author of fifteen meditations on death (*Les Derniers instants de la sœur de Moni*), Santa Cristina, who has Jesuit and Sulpician sympathies, takes the Holy Bible away from all nuns in the convent and, in replacement, gives them the cilice and the scourge for the mortification and torment of the body and the spirit. The novel revolves then around such a curious absence of the text (the Bible, Moni's meditations), around a void of writing, whose place is taken by a baroque and lugubrious carnival of scenes of torture and martyrdom, a succession of pathetic frames culminating in the simulation of Suzanne's condemnation to death. «The nun's body becomes essentially pictorial and theatrical»,¹⁹ opening «the literary representation to a "removed" level: the female body as a sensible, sexual, passionate, pathological and pathetic body (according to the double meaning of the Greek word *pathos*, at the same time disease and passion)».²⁰ Diderot's writing engages in the restitution of bodies through images, by activating the desire of bodies translated into the desire of images. Such an aim

18 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 48: «Whenever I want to pray but my soul feels cold, I take the portrait from around my neck, place it in front of me and look at it, and it inspires me».

19 Didier, p. 198.

20 Anne Deneys-Tunney, *Écritures du corps: De Descartes à Laclos* (Paris: PUF, 1992), p. 138.

does not reveal the intention to assimilate bodies to the realm of language,²¹ as the sexed bodies. Differently from what happens in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, here the bodies cannot “speak”, however they express themselves through the mute language of gesture or, else, in the spasm of a shout. *La Religieuse* can then be interpreted as a work on the progressive loss of sense and consistency in the religious and doctrinal thinking, replaced by the persistence of images, and by the liveliness of descriptions. The evocation of images takes the place of the voids and deletions of signs, to the point that in the last pages the retrospective narrative is transformed into a present tense diary, according to a sequence of details and textual notes crossed by empty spaces in the page.²² Suzanne’s amnesias concern mainly words, while the visual impression of gestures, bodies, physiognomies, conserves its revived trace and strength also after a while.

Once we have recognized the central position of the story as a spatial structure in *La Religieuse*, organizing the narration according to «a succession of scenes (that produce an extreme slowdown of temporality, and the condensation of time around the hysterical body of the woman) and ellipses (that produce the acceleration of time)»,²³ we should now more precisely define the specific nature of the space, images, and gazes generated by the narration, in their differences and affinities in relation to the space and gaze of painting and theatre.

The pathetic *tableaux* of *La Religieuse* present a dimension of temporality that is not icastic, but rather, slowed down, stretched, progressively frozen in the distance of a scene captured as a still frame or fading according to Suzanne’s perspective, who often suffers from fainting and incertitudes concerning her own memories. The strength of pathetic progression is not given by the single scene, often evaporating and extinguishing as dream-like vision, but rather by their sequence position, by their editing according to the disposition of accumulating frames of violence

21 See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

22 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 144.

23 Deney-Tunney, pp. 142-43.

and terror, until they produce such a charge of energy that is unbearable for the reader. The novel invites the reader to become spectator in order to overcome one of the limits of representation, especially in the description of the tortures inflicted on Suzanne at Longchamp, to the point that the main character herself has to interrupt in some passages the list of details of the persecutions, that would make the story cruel and ferocious, beyond any possible appropriateness.²⁴

La Religieuse can be read as an album of images in sequence, to glance through, the editing of which follows the order carefully chosen by Diderot according to a rigorous progressive sequence. This is why the first illustrators and engravers (for instance in the 1804 edition) had the idea to condense the story into a series of main scenes, accompanied by captions. Differently from the description of real paintings in the *Salons*, the order of which follows the dispositions of the *Livret*, the gallery of paintings presented in *La Religieuse*, offering a sequence of moving and changing scenographies, all meeting and packing around the permanence of the bodies – fulcrum and focal nucleus of each scene – is put together through the editing of *moving pictures*,²⁵ the final charge of which has to produce a dramatic and pathetic effect and the main character seems sometimes perfectly aware of it.²⁶

Epiphanies of the Secret: The Display of Intimacy

The strategy of the epiphany of the secret necessarily requires the activation of a sort of burglary gaze (*regard de l'effraction*), that is able to pass the borders of what is hidden, and is somehow the mirroring and upside-down version of what is achieved in the descriptive enterprise of the *Salons*. In the purely ékphrastic work of the *Salons*, in the physical lack of works, a public space –

24 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 71.

25 Caplan, p. 49.

26 David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 95.

Louvre's *Salon carré* – containing little worlds and private spaces inside is evoked. Diderot approaches images with the modesty of someone overcoming a temporal, aesthetic, ontological threshold between two separate worlds, to the point that the description is presented as the narration of a journey towards an isle of memory, asking for a modest as well as curious perspective, persistent as well as conscious of its limits. In the novel where several rhetorical *ékphrastic* strategy are introduced (enumeration, integration), although the description of real works of art is absent,²⁷ the intrusion in a place by definition hidden from any glance – the convent, as space of reclusion –, let the bodies of the nuns, both mystical and carnal, be visible to us, presenting them in the theatre of a performance of vision.

Moreover, the descriptive and narrative effort of the *Salons* can be taken as parallel and convergent with the entire creative activity of Diderot, writer, play writer, *philosophe*, that on the overall can be defined as an *ékphrastic* enterprise: to make visible what is temporarily hidden from the glance, starting from the absent paintings, that keep hiding themselves also when they are just in front of us, to the bodies in their most secret drives, to the sacredness of domestic fire and family, celebrated in *Le Fils naturel*, so that the *mise en scène* does not alter or corrupt the nature of the stolen intimacy or the gaze of the spectator. Within the limits of such a contradictory dialectics of intimacy and *grandeur*, display and secrecy, the evocative powers of the narration and of the story, reaching the irrepresentable of a representation, are put into play. Such an effort of monumentalization of intimacy, requiring its specific gaze, goes through a description and narration in which pity is the main mediator, i.e. the emotional solicitation of pain and compassion, that can be stimulated in order to set the story within precise boundaries. The hypothetical story of seduction and loss of the virginity lying under the colours of the painting *Jeune fille* by Greuze, as Suzanne's tale to the Mother Superior at the convent

27 We can find in *La Religieuse* some reference to music (Rameau) and dance (Marcel), providing a realistic background to the story; the absence of reference to real paintings is justified precisely by the descriptive effort to generate mental images.

of Arpajon, are developed from an intense feeling, an affective-corporeal motor full of hidden erotic implication, that is set free in front of the body of the nun and of the image of the young girl. The erotic attention for Suzanne, that drives the Mother Superior of Saint-Eutrope to madness, actually comes from sensitive tenderness, in which imagination is stimulated by pity, that is by a feeling of sympathy and compassion for the misadventures narrated by the young novice. The Mother Superior's words almost offer a paradigmatic insignia to the Eighteenth Century aesthetic of feeling and to the "pleasure of crying":

Never fear, I like crying: shedding tears is a delicious state for a sensitive soul to be in. You must like crying too. You will wipe away my tears, and I yours, and perhaps we'll find happiness in the midst of your account of your suffering. Who knows where our emotions might lead us?²⁸

This is the appropriate feeling for the required taste in the spectator in order to aesthetically enjoy a work of art, although in the pages of *La Religieuse* it largely overcomes its legitimate boundaries, as the convent of Saint-Eutrope is the place of physical and moral disorder, where there is «neither true distance, nor measure»,²⁹ but rather a condition of excessive empathic proximity. In the convent place the aesthetic education of senses seems in the end just impossible, since the inclination of nature has been diverted and perverted. The *fermentation*, through the heat of the feeling, of imagination approaches the figure of the Mother Superior of Saint-Eutrope, as well as Suzanne herself, to the definition of *Genius* proposed by the *Encyclopédie*: «In the man of *genius*, the imagination goes farther, it remembers with more striking feelings than when they are made. Because to these ideas are attached a thousand others which appropriately give rise to the feeling».³⁰

28 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 119. On the "pleasure of crying", see Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, *Il senso del limite: Il dolore, l'eccesso, l'osceno* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2009), pp. 48-93.

29 Diderot, *The Nun*, p. 93.

30 *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by Denis Diderot and others (Paris: Briasson, David L'Ainé, Le Breton, Durand, 1757), VII, p. 588.

More than frames, *La Religieuse* provides a rich collection of oneiric images, on the verge of coming to life or break up, moving images and inconsistent, going into ruins and building up again enlightened by the uncertain and shaky light of torches, of dusk and gloom. The writing finally focuses on the mental and imaging dimension, awakening the reader's imagination, soliciting its strength and virtual charge, opened to several possible actualizations.³¹

The Portrait of the Beloved Girl: Between Blason and Body of Passion

The description produces an effect of visualization, it stimulates the representation through imagination and pathetic participation, thanks to its rhetorical strength; at the same time, it is legitimated and enriched both by the pre-existing iconographic references, although implicit, and by visual paradigms, expressive stereotypes that are like a *revenant* in the pages of the *Salons* as well as of the handbooks of theatre aesthetics, defining an expressive grammar of gesture and mimic, a visual repertory of expression that pertains to the whole body and not only to the face. The famous description, both medical and aesthetic of the mad nun, escaping from her cell in the first pages of the novel, and by which Suzanne is obsessed, as if she was anticipating the menace of her possible destiny, presents once more the iconography of desperation, madness, and rage described in *Dorval et moi*³² and in the *Salons*, enriched from time to time by small gesture variations (the head thrown back, the half-open mouth, the dismayed look). Also in this case, Suzanne's gaze triggers the description, one of the apex

31 See Nathalie Ferrand, *Livres vus, livres lus: une traversée du roman illustré des Lumières* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009); Jean Sgard, 'La beauté convulsive de *La Religieuse*', in *L'Encyclopédie, Diderot, l'esthétique: Mélanges en hommage à Jacques Chouillet*, ed. by Sylvain Auroux, Dominique Bourel, Charles Porsel (Paris: PUF, 1991), pp. 209-15.

32 See Denis Diderot, 'Dorval et moi', in *Paradoxe sur le comédien précédé des Entretiens sur Le fils naturel* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 47 and pp. 60-61.

of the *pathetic* of desperation, as an emotional communication pushing the reader to recognize what is presented as performance within the reservoir of his/her own visual and cultural memory:

I have never seen a sight more hideous. She was unkempt and almost naked; she was weighed down by iron chains; her eyes were wild; she tore at her hair, beat her chest with her fists, ran about, screamed, called down the most awful curses on herself and on everyone else; she looked for a window to throw herself out of. (...) My mad nun was constantly on my mind.³³

Somewhere else, behind the description and its layering of different “perspectives”, registers and simultaneous (aesthetic, medical-scientific, juridical) analyses, sometimes in reciprocal conflict, it is also possible to detect a precise and exemplary iconography, as Fontenay suggested concerning the first description of the Mother Superior of Saint-Eutrope. He indeed recognized there the evocation of the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* by Bernini³⁴ (quoted by Diderot himself in the *Salon* of 1767³⁵), although mixed with another upcoming paradigm, the scientific analysis discovering the disorder of the feminine body as a display for the clinical eye of the doctor. The clinical observation of the effects of madness on the body, the juridical and social accusation against the damages caused by religious education, the aesthetic and pathetic description of the tragic beauty of the bodies tortured in the convent are three modes of gaze-telling, co-existing, sometimes inconsistently, in Suzanne’s descriptions,³⁶ as they establish their object as a performance for the external eye. The nuns are therefore some *monstra*, “monsters” to be studied and analysed on the physiological, social and aesthetic

33 Diderot, *The Nun*, pp. 8-9.

34 See Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Diderot ou le matérialisme enchanté* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), p. 180. See Diderot, *The Nun*, pp. 91-92.

35 See Diderot, *The Salon of 1767*, p. 296. The reference to *Saint Therese* by Bernini concerns the visual teaching that it is possible to get around the potential of a body possessed by a demon or in ecstasy.

36 See Marie-Claire Vallois, ‘Politique du paradoxe: Tableau de mœurs/Tableau familial dans *La Religieuse* de Diderot’, *Romanic Review*, 76 (1985), 164-66.

ground, and the *tableaux* are as much dramatic scenes as clinical tables, pathological cases.

Actually, Diderot often recalls, according to a strategy already presented in the *Salons*, a series of “possible” pictorial or theatrical iconographies, thus soliciting a performative response entailing the visual culture of the addressee as well as his/her perceptual experiences,³⁷ in the description of images that “act like frames”, to the point that they present themselves as a model for the artistic activity of a real painter. The above mentioned *tableau vivant* of the nuns gathered together in the room of the Mother Superior of Arpajon «looks very much like a Salon painting’s description»,³⁸ so that it could be taken, from the point of view of its style and descriptive method, as a sort of *notional ékphrasis*, i.e. a falsifying fiction generating a real painting, as far as the imagination of a painting strictly following the rules of art could really provide true inspiration to a talented painter.³⁹ Such a complex interplay of overturning imaginative fictions, enriched by the memory of painting and by the production of real images, is, furthermore, placed within a novel whose external frame is the real mystification in relation to the marquis of Croismare, supporting the whole novel.

The true “portrait” of Suzanne is assembled and accomplished by the Mother Superior of the convent of Sainte-Eutrope in Arpajon, at the peak of the pathetic and moving narration of all the misfortunes and tortures she had to suffer in the convent of Longchamp, according to an upside down ékphrastic strategy, that is also parallel to the sensual and erotic description of the *Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* by Greuze in the *Salon* of 1765, which entails the revival of a rhetorical technique such as *prosopopoeia*.⁴⁰ In the second case, the slightly ambiguous

37 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 41-7.

38 Georges May, *Diderot et La religieuse: Étude historique et littéraire* (Paris: PUF, 1954), p. 225.

39 See Diderot, *The Salons of 1767*, p. 67; see John Hollander, ‘The Poetics of Ékphrasis’, *Word & Image*, 4 (1988), pp. 209-19; Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 48-53.

40 Diderot, *The Salon of 1765*, pp. 97-100.

and sensual image of Greuze's painting trigger the story that has generated the image, pushing the *philosophe* to experience a hardly dissimulated form of erotic excitement, although it is prohibited by his status of aesthetic public; whereas, in the first case, the story of Suzanne solicits the Mother Superior to visualize the image of the torture to the young novice, through the enumeration of the body parts that have suffered martyrdom (arms, shoulders, hair, face, mouth, legs), with much more explicit erotic effects.

The adoration, full of sensuality, that the Mother Superior has for Suzanne's suffering and tortured body parts,⁴¹ is certainly one of the most violent, intense, and sarcastic moments of the *détournement* and of the "parody" that Diderot makes of Christian liturgy's practices and language. In *La Religieuse*, then, we can find a principle of structural overturning, through the progressive assimilation of Suzanne's body to the body of Christ, the body of *Passion par excellence*, scattered and shattered in the discrete succession of its parts, according to a spiritual exercise, here subverted, «which requires the believer to visualize every stage of Christ's bodily suffering».⁴² This is not only a stylistic exercise miming – according to Spitzer – the Biblical style in the form of a poetic blason, but rather it is a performative movement that revolves word into gestures, rhetorical invocation into mute action of desire. Suzanne's body, as the body of Angelica in Ariosto, is a described body, captured into the meshes of the narration, that can take it fragment by fragment, transformed by the eye, thanks to its isolating virtues, into fetishes. Following the rhetorical strategy of the classical *ékphrasis*, well attested in the pages of the *Salons* (see the enumeration of the parts of a painted beautiful body),⁴³ the admired description breaks the integrity of the body and of the image, opening its flank to the erotic infection, that not only breaks it further, but also reinforces and strengthens it through

41 Diderot, *The Nun*, pp. 109-11.

42 Leo Spitzer, 'The Style of Diderot', in *Linguistic and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics*, ed. by Leo Spitzer (New York: Russel & Russel, 1962), pp. 135-91 (p. 149).

43 Diderot, *The Salon of 1765*, pp. 12-13.

repetition. The exaltation of such an erotic liturgy goes through a detailed enumeration, otherwise condemned by Diderot as descriptive strategy of paintings, if it ends up into a “trituration” of the image.⁴⁴ It is instead potentially very fruitful in literature, as it is made clear by the famous eulogy of the descriptive and visual detail in Richardson’s novels, where the particular truths, the multitude of little things, prepare the soul to the strong impressions of big events, i.e. to the pathetic sublime,⁴⁵ thanks to a refine dosage of delays, caution, emotional suspension and overflowing explosions. The visual detail, upcoming element of the realist novel, has not only a reality function⁴⁶ – as it pushes the language towards the immediacy of daily objects – but it is also and most of all a stimulus for the activity of imagination in its tension towards totality, reactivating the phantoms of the ancient “enàrgheia” and “ékphrasis”.

44 Diderot, *The Salon of 1767*, p. 202: «The more details one provides, the more the image evoked in the reader’s mind differs from that on the canvas (...) The proliferation of detail in a description produces much the same effect as pulverization».

45 See Diderot, ‘Eloge de Richardson’, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jules Assézat (Paris: Garnier, 1875), vol. V, pp. 211-27.

46 See Michel Delon, *Le détail, le réel et le réalisme dans la perspective française*, in *Le Second Triomphe du roman du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. by Philip Stewart and Michel Delon (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009), p. 19.

THE IMPOSSIBLE PORTRAIT.
GEORGES PEREC AND HIS *CONDOTTIERE*

VALERIA CAMMARATA

The challenge between the representable and the unrepresentable, between the original and the fake, between the true and the false is certainly one of the most important questions of the arts throughout the centuries and in all countries. During the twentieth century this issue seems to have found a proper territory in between the realm of the word and that of the image, not only through reference or citation within the two distinct and defined systems, but in a deeper exchange of structures. Thus word and image, which already had a well-established artistic tradition in the aesthetics of the “sister arts”, as a mutual exchange, conflagrated in the disputed territory of twentieth-century representation, in which their relationship wavered between a meeting at infinity and a decisive antimony. Since both instances “take the word for”, “stand for” something else, and since that “something else” becomes an object that is hard to define (or even the unspeakable itself), the relationship between word and image and its possible products – i.e. *ékphrasis* – need to be connected in a unique structure, in which it is difficult to define where the text ends and the image starts, and in which, however, the differences are not merged. This is the new frontier of the “heterology of representation”, whose new means of expression is the *imagetext*.

Not only the conflagration between word and image but also the questioning of representability in literature and in art are the key features of the work of Georges Perec. He was certainly an experimenter of writing which he investigated in all its possible forms, in all its imaginable and unimaginable boundaries, and whose limitations he tried to overcome. Despite all the efforts,

which led him to produce – as Italo Calvino claims – some of the greatest literary masterpieces of the second half of the twentieth century, two major limitations stand insurmountable on Perec's scene: memory and identity.

Because of his difficult childhood and of the countered history as a rootless Jew, Perec attempts to build a stable individuality, an image of himself that is defined once and for all and that is mostly unchanging. Not a single image but a structure seems to be the only one fitting to his personality: the composite, dismantlable and reconstructable one of the puzzle.

The continuous use of the term "image" should not be considered a common rhetorical device because it is in the images of the other that Perec seeks his own portrait, so it is in another art that Perec searches the mirror of his writing.

This is why his life and his art were characterized by the invasion of foreign territory, the overstepping of the boundaries of the self. During the years in which he collaborated with *La Ligne générale*, Perec developed a precise reflection on art, particularly on figurative art. Especially in *Defense de Klee*, an essay written for *La Ligne générale* on August 19th, 1959, Perec makes clear what should be the task of a work of art: i.e. to build a connection between man and the world. As observed by David Bellos, in Perec's aesthetics «Style, manner, school, degree of abstraction – all these aspects mattered much less than a work's success in achieving the aim of art, which was to provoke in the beholder some reaction that reduced his alienation from the world, to build bridges between the self and the other».¹ In this perspective the pictorial work that can achieve this goal better than others is that of Paul Klee. Klee's paintings, according to Perec, are due to a realist style, a style that does not want simply to represent reality, but also to intensify it, to make it meaningful. In the painting of Klee, Perec sees the reflection of his own poetics.

However, this is not the only kind of relation between his work and that of figurative artists. Indeed, of all the possible relationships

1 David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Worlds* (London: Harvill Press, 1993), p. 243.

between visual arts (painting, photography, architecture, sculpture) and literature, Perec was a real collector. In collecting the rarities of life and art, Perec was helped by photography, architecture, painting and drawing, and by the relationships he entertained with some artists. These were very diverse occasions, for what concerns the client and the kind of collaboration, which, however, he never faced as an art critic: «I have never tried – Perec aims – to make a speech about a painter from the point of view of his own painting. In fact, I have tried to translate what I feel looking at the work of an artist, a painter, a photographer, in something I do from the point of view of my own work».²

Thus began the collaborations with the photographer Cuchi White and seven painters: Antonio Corpora, Dado, Paolo Boni, Jaques Poli e Peter Stampfli, Fabrizio Clerici, Pierre Getzler. All of these experiences, which allowed Perec to investigate the limits of pictorial representation, were traced, by the author himself, to the field of challenge between art and literature: graphic work functions as a challenge to the writer; the literary work functions as a challenge to the painter. A challenge in which, from time to time, a form of representation forces the other out of its territory to enter that of the “other”, without, however, getting lost altogether: the one works as a *contrainte* to the other. This is the way Perec’s writing works on painting, for example; this is the way visual art works on Perec’s writing. The one does not speak about the other, rather the one forces the other to translate its own speech.

This is the challenge to find a literary form of writing somehow corresponding to the form that is inside a drawing, an illustration, a photograph, a painting, etc. In fact, Cuchi White’s *trompe l’oeil* photographs, a meta-representative challenge in itself, pose Perec a problem to solve: to figure out a system of writing that functions as a *trompe l’oeil*, but according to its own way.³

2 Georges Perec, ‘Certains peintres...’, *Riga*, 4 (1993), 62-66 (p. 57), trans. mine.

3 On the *trompe l’oeil* genre in Georges Perec and Cuchi White see Valeria Cammarata, *Sfide della rappresentazione: I Trompe l’oeil di Georges Perec e Cuchi White*, in *Fototesti: Letteratura e cultura visuale*, ed. by Michele Cometa and Roberta Cogliatore (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015), pp. 9-47.

During his short life, Perec tried to take different directions and to try different chances: from his incomplete studies at the Sorbonne – which allowed him to hone his literary bent, but above all, to know critics such as Barthes, Levinas, Lukács – to his work at a biology lab – which allowed him to cultivate his passion for classification, combining and cataloging –, until his literary experiments within the OULIPO – which enabled him to establish a challenge between his literature and “other” arts such as math, chess, painting, photography, sculpture, to probe the limits of the word in itself. It is just on the field of this challenge that Perec seems to have found his figure, and his interest in the visual arts in all his accomplishments had affected him so much that the interest in contamination between the two forms of representation becomes more and more intense, as to continually invade his plans, and in various ways: as “simple” collaborations with different artists, or in more cryptic forms – such as that of *W or the Memory of Childhood*⁴ in which a key role in the reconstruction of a memory, albeit distorted, is made by the camera and the film – until more complex and ambiguous shapes – such as that of *La Vie mode d’emploi*,⁵ with its difficult and obsessive attempt of producing and reproducing the false images of a *Cabinet d’amateur*.⁶

4 Georges Perec, *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), trans. by David Bellos, *W or the Memory of Childhood* (London: Collins Harvill, 1988).

5 Georges Perec, *La Vie mode d’emploi* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), trans. by David Bellos, *Life: a User’s Manual* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987).

6 Georges Perec, *Un Cabinet d’amateur* (Paris: Balland, 1979).



Antonello da Messina, *Portrait d'homme (Le Condottiere)*, 1475 ca.

Continuous and more or less veiled references, descriptions, inventions, images seem, therefore, to characterize the poetry of Perec. But above all one image is significant not only to his poetics but to himself: that of *Le Condottière*, translated in english as *Portrait of a Man*.⁷

On 2012, thirty years after Perec's death, the last piece of his literary image was discovered. Actually, it was the first image of this complex puzzle, the first time Gaspard Winckler, Perec's recurrent alter-ego, appeared on the scene. It was the first "completed" novel that Perec submitted to Gallimard and Seuil press, between 1959 and 1960, and that both of them refused. After the delusion, and after having worked so much on this project, changing titles, reducing the lenght (from 350 to 157), he wrote to his friend Jaques Lederer: «I'll go back to it in ten years when it'll turn into a masterpiece, or else I'll wait in my grave until one of my faithful exegetes comes across it in an

⁷ Georges Perec, *Le Condottière* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), trans. by David Bellos, *Portrait of a Man* (London: MacLehose Press, 2014).

old trunk you once owned and brings it out».⁸ Perec has always struck his readers for his ability in reading the future, but this is a kind of foresighting!

The novel, carrying already some of the fundamental features of all the future Perec's poetry, is told twice, in a way we could define combinatorial and potential, since the two parts – an internal monologue first, and a confession after – can be read as two single stories, as two parts, two points of view of and on the same story, and they can also be read coversevely: the second part as the first and viceversa. This kind of structure will be one of the favorites in Perec's writing, and it will have the definitive realization in *W, or the Memory of Childhood*, the novel that has very much in common with *Portrait of a Man*, both because of the name and the characteristics of the protagonist – also recurrent in *Life: a User's Manual*, and in *Un cabinet d'amateur* – and because of its double structure.

It could be told the story of a double crime: one against Madera, art dealer and paymaster of Gaspard Winckler; the second against *Le Condottière* painted by Antonello da Messina. Both of them, indeed, stay annihilated between the first and the second page of the novel. Madera's heavy body is borrowed up and down the stairs leading to Winckler's studio, still bleeding after Gaspard has slaughtered him. The warlord, the *condottière*, il *Condottiero* stays «crucified on his easel».⁹ We immediately know that Gaspard has killed them, on purpose by means of a razor the first, accidentally by means of the failure of his paint brush the second. But why did he destroy them? All the novel is the explanation of the reason why he has “killed” them, and the reason is, somehow, the same: to get free from them, to get free from the obscure man who, while promising a wealthy life, has in fact imprisoned Gaspard exploiting his ability as a forger; and to get free from the hot blooded, self-confident man who, looking at him from the portrait, has slammed into his face the failure of

8 Georges Perec, *Letter to Jaques Lederer*, quoted in David Bellos, *Introduction*, in Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, pp. 6-15 (p. 12).

9 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 19.

his art: in front of the ineffable art of Antonello his twelve-years-long try to make a new, original copy of the *Condottière* finds an insurmountable limit. Still there is a way out, that to destroy that limit, to overcome it by «the first action of the demiurge emerging from chaos».¹⁰

Three main characters stay on the stage of *Portrait of a Man*: Gaspard Winckler, Antonello da Messina and the unknown warlord himself. Behind them stays, of course, Perec, the “character” into which all the others flow, that they somehow have built or depicted. And, probably, it is his own image, his own portrait that Perec is trying to depict through each of them, by writing of and on each of them.

Perec and Winckler

Gaspard the forger. Gaspard Theotokópoulos alias El Greco. Botticelli. Gaspard Chardin, Gaspard Cranach the Elder. Gaspard Holbein, Gaspard Memling, Gaspard Metsys, Gaspard Master of Flemalle. Gaspard Vivarini, Gaspard Anonymous French School, Gaspard Corot, Gaspard Van Gogh, Gaspard Raphael Sanzio, Gaspard de Toulouse-Lautrec, Gaspard de Puccio alias Pisanello ... Gaspard the forger. The smith-slave. Gaspard the forger. Why a forger? How a forger? Since when a forger? He hadn't always been a forger...¹¹

This list of false Gaspard, or of coincidences of Gaspard with the masters he has plagiarized is the better way in which Perec can represent the first act of the drama of which his *alter ego* will be the protagonist through all his works: namely of being able to produce only fakes, mere reflections of creativity, a whole gallery but «a gallery without any soul or guts ...».¹² Nor Gaspard or Georges, by the way, are simply forgers, infact Perec poses some questions on the way in which Gaspard is a forger, questions intended to discover this mystery way to be forger in a

10 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 40.

11 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, pp. 40-41.

12 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 40.

deductive way. Indeed, as we have already said, the whole novel is structured as a crime novel, in which it is not the crime in itself to be uncovered from the mystery, we know very well who is the victim, who is the killer, how did he act. What we do not immediately know is why he did it. But, above all, what remains fundamental to be discovered for Perec is what kind of forger Gaspard (and Georges himself) is.

In Perec's writings Gaspard Winckler is always a forger: as a painter, as a remembering orphan, as a puzzler. But each time – in *Portrait of a Man*, in *W or the Memory of Childhood*, in *Life: A User's Manual*, in *Un Cabinet d'Amateur* – he is a forger in a different way. *Portrait of a Man*, in particular is the story of a forger in crisis: the story of a young painter who suddenly becomes a successful forger, who is educated to be a forger, who enters into crisis when he comes face to face with the *Condottiero* by Antonello.

Winckler's story can be traced along this novel just answering the questions Winckler poses himself. So, why a forger? And since when? He did not become a forger because he needed money, nor because he had suffered extortion. He cannot properly say if he has never liked it. Probably the difficult answer stays in his young age, and in the easy life the whole forgery *equipe* he had encountered – Anatole Madera, the paymaster, Jérôme, the “forger-master”, Otto and Rufus, Madera's assistants – promised him. It appeared to be much more simple to make «desultory use of a fairly good “hand” to keep boredom at bay (...) copying, pastiching, copying, imitating, reproducing, tracing, dissecting»¹³ than to be a real painter. Slowly this easy and high paying job had become an attraction, the attraction for the *incognito*, an absurd will not to exist but under thousands masks, under thousands deads. As a forger he used to live in a false and non-sense world, in museums and laboratories, investigating the precise acts other painters did before him, better than he could do. Trying to reach an illusory likeness. He sudden became the greatest forger in the world, which meant he did not exist:

13 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, pp. 41-42.

Listen. I did not exist. Gaspard Winckler was a name without content. No police force was out to get me, nobody even knew who I was. I had no country, no friends, no aims. Once a year I did a genuine restoration job for the Art Museum in Geneva. I was supposed to be off sick for the rest of the time. Where my money came from nobody knew. I was allegedly on Rufus's payroll as the picture restorer at his art gallery, but everyone knew that the Koenig Gallery hardly ever needed to do restoration work on its holdings. I was the world's greatest forger because nobody knew I was a forger ... That's all. That's enough ... Enough to be dead.¹⁴

Moreover, if Gaspard is a forger is because of Jérôme, the first forger employed by Madera, who becomes his master. They first met when he was seventeen years old and he had just finished the school, in Switzerland. He was not Swiss (we do not know his actual nationality), but his parents had sent him there because of the Second World War,¹⁵ which was almost ended when the encounter with Jérôme occurs.

What kind of forger, then, he was? Till he encountered Antonello's *Condottiero*, he used to work like all other forgers work, like Van Meergeren, like Icilio, like Jérôme: after having chosen three or four works by whomever, he selected some pieces here and there, he mixed up, and he built a puzzle. This very image of the puzzle maker is, of course, particularly important in Perec's writing. It is, in some way, the embrional stage of what Gaspard Winckler will become in his masterwork, *Life: a User Manual*.

However Antonello was different. At the beginning he started, as usually, from some preconceptions, some issues he, like anyone, knew about the sicilian painter: «His stiffness, his almost obsessive precision, the sparseness of his settings, a

14 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 59.

15 The story of the young Gaspard, before he becomes a forger, in relation to his parents is particularly close to that of Perec. Significantly, the last memory the character has of them is set in a train station, when he choose not to follow them on their way to escape and to remain in Switzerland. It is very similar to the last time little Georges saw his mother, on the train to Switzerland, where she sent him to escape from nazis. She was eventually captured from nazis, and died in Auschwitz.

more Flemish than Italian distribution of mannerisms and, so to speak, an admirable command of the subject or, more exactly, a way of portraying command itself». ¹⁶ But the problem came when he arrived to the *Condottiere*, since it is different from all others Antonello's portraits: «the only portrait Antonello did that is so powerful». ¹⁷

The new challenge with Antonello, in fact, is a breaking point, for he tries to forge the heritage of the past in order to make something new. ¹⁸ But still this “new” is not something to be brought toward the future, rather to be brought back in the past again. Since this powerful portrait gives him no starting point for a puzzle. It is impossible to make a puzzle from the *Condottiero*, for that stiffness means sincerity, and he needs to understand that face to be able to paint it again. Again but in a different way, in a new way. This is the idea he had: to pretend to be a real painter. But the attempt is too hard, and he failed:

What was the illusion he had cherished? That he would be able to cap an untarnished career by carrying off what no forger before him had dared attempt: to create an authentic masterwork of the past, to recover in palpable and tangible form, after a dozen years' intense labour, something far above the technical tricks and devices of his trade such as mere mastery of *gesso duro* or monochrome painting – to recover the explosive triumph, the perpetual reconquista, the overwhelming dynamism that was the Renaissance. ¹⁹

The *Condottiere* is the breaking point of Winckler's forger profession because of the arrogance it instills in Winckler: to make the warlord anew. But something got wrong and this inspiration became a failure, the dream became a nightmare, the studio became a prison, the creative impulse of the painter turns

16 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 62.

17 *Ibidem*.

18 It is not secondary that this breaking point coincides with the encounter with Mila, the woman he will eventually fall in love with. As Perec himself says: «For the first time in his life he had a sudden urge, just like that, to stop playing the game. To be himself (...) Loving a woman, was that being himself? Did he love her?», Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 43.

19 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 30.

into killing gesture of no one but a forger: «I wasn't ready ... I wasn't good enough. Was looking for something that didn't match anything inside me, that didn't exist in me (...). But Antonello wasn't joking».²⁰

His kind of forgery questions the modern concept of art as made of both formal and material complex, which together give the work an authorial authenticity. No doubt, Winckler is able to accomplish the formal preparation and creation of a masterpiece ascribable to Antonello da Messina, another version of the well known portrait kept at the Louvre. He studied for almost twelve years Antonello's techniques of preparation of the canvas and of painting itself. He is a perfect master in the technique of *gesso duro*. The material features of the work are perfectly comparable to that of the renaissance master, but still the formal aspect is very far from the original. It is a failure, it is not false because of its material properties, but because of a pretended identity it cannot in any way pretend.²¹

It could still remain unclear what is at the basis of this failure, of this failed identity. What scared Winckler that morning in his studio, at the very end of his twelve-years-work on the *Condottiere*, what made him crazy as much as to kill his paymaster and to destroy his masterpiece. It was the final awareness that the image he was looking for, was not that of the unknown warlord portrayed by Antonello da Messina, but his own image. Moreover, the most scaring discover for him was the absence of that image, the disappearing of his face, the discover of an absence, of a hollow.

He was no one: a man without a past, without true memories giving him material to make art, without real experience of the real world. That real world that was fighting its hardest war, while he was passing his childhood in a safe, neutral, inexistent country, without parents, without religion, without a mother tongue, without "History": «A life with no roots and no connections. With no past beyond the abstract, mummified

20 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 63.

21 See Umberto Eco, 'Falsi e contraffazioni', in U. Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (Milano: Bompiani 1990).

past of the world, like a museum catalogue. A paltry universe. A camp. A ghetto. A prison».²²

An artist at the desperate research of his own image to be discovered through the images and the memories of other artists. An artist fated to constantly discover an absolute absence. An artist called Georges Perec.

Perec, Antonello and the Warlord

At the center of the novel stands the warlord, the *Condottiere*. After the first part – narrated in a stream of consciousness, devoted to Gaspard’s attempt to escape his studio/prison, and from Rufus and Otto, who certainly want to punish him for Madera’s death –, before the second part – narrated as a confession to his Yugoslav friend Streten, a sort of flashback of all his entire life – stay two little chapters introducing us straight to the warlord’s portraits, the one by Gaspard Winckler, and the one by Antonello da Messina, deeply involved one in each other.

The *Condottiere*, the warlord is first introduced through Winckler’s «clunky reproductions»,²³ within the microcosm of his studio, now become a prison. It is not actually described in particulars, but in few words Perec gives us the quintessence of Antonello’s portrait: «a face of triumph and control».²⁴ The real description is devoted, *per converso*, to its ill-matched reflections, condensed in the final failed “forgerpiece”, ironically described in all its material and less significative parts:

the living image of failure on the unfinished panel set on its special easel with its four corners protected by a triple sheath of cotton wool, rag cloth and metal angle-piece at the carefully contrived focal point of six small spotlights: it didn’t show unity restored, the mastery of the world or inalterable permanence, but instead, a mere frozen flash – as if catching sight of itself in a moment of clarity – portraying

22 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 96.

23 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 52.

24 *Ibidem*.

the fundamental anguish of blind force, the sourness of cruel might, and doubt.²⁵

Carrying on his irony, Perce traces in the Renaissance genius the cause of all the failures to come. It is like Antonello had expressed in *nuce* one of the fundamental question of twentieth century philosophy: the expression of all the «anguished contradictions of consciousness».²⁶ That face becomes the mis-matched mirror of a controversial world, which the warlord overcomes with his proud and straight gaze, and that the painter re-organizes in his «eternal and rational stability»²⁷ of a Renaissance structure. That model, that face, his gaze would not have been possible any more. After the *Condottiere* any look would have become cloudy, any will «flimsy and fleeting», no more strenght and completeness. After Antonello no painters would have included «the world and his own self in a single glance».²⁸ The perfect structure had turn into a fragile, caotic organization, the demiurge had turn into a demon, the truth into doubt. The only way for art to express all this was that of falsification, of *pastiche*, beyond any model, beyond any possible representation.

What, then, the *Condottiere* had become? The portrait depicted by Perce, as a new *Picture of Dorian Gray*, is a distortion of the original model, it is the mirror of all viciousness humanity has misrecognized in the self and has assigned to the realm of repretation. This is the apotheosis of notional ékphrasis:

Impassiveness had turned into panic, the relaxed firmness of the muscles had come out as lockjaw, the look of confidence had become arrogance and the firmness of the mouth now expressed revenge. Every detail was no longer an integral element of an irreducibly transcendent totality, but just a flimsy and fleeting trace of a man's will strained to breaking point, a will that was itself rendered untrue by its development, wearing ever thinner as the superficial impression of completeness gave

25 Perce, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 53.

26 Perce, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 54.

27 *Ibidem*.

28 Perce, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 55.

way to distorting elements which by virtue of their power and ambiguity undermined, point by point, the apparent harmony of the ensemble.²⁹

And what about the painter? As it had already happened to Balzac's Frenhofer in *The Unknown Masterpiece*,³⁰ who had experienced the limits of pictorial and had tried to overcome them by looking for a new paradigm. In his attempt Frenhofer had fallen in what Diderot considered the risk of his own madness: the vanity of showing his own expertise, as much as not to being able to stop his brush at the surface, ending up with slaughtering his figures.³¹ But, the most hard limit, both for Frenhofer and for Winckler, was the face, namely a torture for the modern painter «And more must they be embarrassed by the human face, that moving canvas which changes in form and colour with all the ever-varying feelings of that subtle breath that we call the soul».³² Like Frenhofer, Winckler has challenged these true limits of modern painting, of modern representation as a whole, and like him he has destroyed his masterpiece, since all his techniques – all the glues and plaster, the *gesso duro*, the brushes, the pencil sketches – did only show the futility of his project: «From the center of the painted panel shone forth sacrilegious self-satisfaction. In the now empty laboratory the failure had been entire».³³

The face of that warlord had really been a torture for Winckler, incapable of grasping that gaze, that sneer, that true expression. That face, and all the other faces and the heads he studied to compose his new impossible Renaissance puzzle, populated a whole horror gallery, described in a pure denotative way in one of the numerous lists of painters and works which enrich the novel. But, the true description of Antonello's *Condottiere* rises from the ashes of Winckler's *Condottiere* at the second turning point of

29 Percé, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 55.

30 Honoré de Balzac, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (Paris: 1831), trans. by Richard Howard, *The Unknown Masterpiece* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001)

31 Denis Diderot, *Diderot's Thoughts on Art and Style: With Some of His Shorter Essays*, trans. by B. L. C. Tollemache (Remington: 1893).

32 Diderot, p. 49.

33 Percé, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 55.

the narrative structure. Gaspard has just met Streten, and he has just began to tell what he did, the crimes he has committed, but before beginning the story of his entire life a new pause stops his discourse, and «the sense of presence» of that face finally appears through the words of Perec:

You were taken in by that oxlike mug, that admirably oafish face, that spectacularly thuggish snout. But what you had to recover was the strong and simple relationship (a peculiarly simplified relationship, moreover) that this personage – who was in the last analysis little more than a tarted-up barbarian – was able to afford to have with the world. Were you able to understand it? Were you able to understand why or how it occurred to this mere soldier of fortune to have his portrait painted by one of the greatest artists of his day? Could you grant that in place of unbuttoned gaudiness (with loosened doublet and aiguillettes fixed on any old how) he wore only an admirably neutral tunic with no decoration apart from a barely visible mother-of-pearl button? Could you understand the absence of a necklace, medals, or fur, the barely visible collar, the lack of pleats in the tunic, the exceptional strictness of the skull-cap? Did you grasp that the almost impossible sobriety and severity of dress had the direct consequence of leaving the face alone to define the *Condottiere*? Because that's what it was about. The eyes, the mouth, the tiny scar, the tensing of the muscles in the jaw were the exclusive means of giving consummate and utterly unambiguous expression to the social status, history, principles and methods of your character...³⁴

Merely a face, a face you need to know very well, as well as the world he belongs to, to be able to portrait it. There is no need to study particulars: you have to know that soldier, to have seen his eyes, his mouth, and to be that painter, belonging to the same world, or at least belonging to whatever world. But Gaspard is not a painter, he does not belong to any world. There is no Van Eyck behind him.

Gaspard Winckler got lost in searching the true *Condottiero*, but what he did not understand – he will eventually understand at the end of his story – is that the warlord does not exist. The only man who did really exist was Antonello. It was not the action or the challenge of the warlord what he saw on the canvas, but that

34 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, pp. 65-66.

of Antonello a man in search of order and coherence, of truth and freedom by means of his art.

Antonellus messaneus eum pinxit, and no other could paint him again. *Le Condottière* is not only the portrait of an unknown soldier, it is a window on Antonello's world, it is a mirror of Antonello himself. Thus, the forger who have realized the world gallery of all the times, falls down in front of Antonello and his *Condottiere*, he falls in front of the unrepresentable, for Gaspard's warlord could be nothing but himself, his own mirror, but since Gaspard Winckler is no one – he is a forger, one of a thousand masks – the warlord is no one. Gaspard Winckler doesn't exist, and the *Condottiere* is the image, the face of what doesn't exist:

A monumental ambition. A monumental mistake. A vast recycling scheme. Trying to gather the central elements of your life in that face. Harmonious conclusion. Necessary conclusion. The universe of potential broached at last, beyond masks, beyond play-acting. The ambition of seeing his face emerge slowly from the wood panel, with its strength, power, and certainty.³⁵

By the way, Gaspard Winkler is also Georges Perec, once again the reflection of someone who not having memory, not having memory images, does not exist. The mystery warlord is the image of oblivion. This is why Winckler fails, because he knows that he cannot, nor he wants, to remake Antonello's *Condottiere*, but another *Condottiere*: «a different one, but of the same quality».³⁶

To some extent *Portrait of a Man*, Perec's first novel, is the opposite of *Cabinet d'amateur*, Perec's last novel. Even though this last novel is about forgery, as much as the first is, it is the demonstration that each original art work is the copy of another art work. *Portrait of a Man* is rather the celebration of fake as an artistic expression of novelty and authenticity. This is why it is so difficult to succeed in forgery.

Once again self-portrait and autobiography coincide in Perec who writes the authentic portrait of a false "self".

35 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 66.

36 Perec, *Portrait of a Man*, p. 63.

THE DREAM-IMAGE IN GRADIVA'S GAIT FROM POMPEII TO MARRAKESH

CLIZIA CENTORRINO

Dreaming in Pompeii

Wilhelm Jensen, a Danish writer and poet renowned in Germany in the end of the 19th century, is best remembered in particular for his short tale *Gradiva: A Pompeian Fancy*. Before enrolling at the Faculty of Philosophy in Munich, the writer attended medical school for just one year. In Munich he began to frequent literary and artistic circles and graduated in Philosophy in 1860. The short tale *Karin von Schweden*, not *Gradiva*, would make him a renowned writer in his time.

Jensen lived in the German world in the latter part of nineteenth century, the same world where psychoanalysis has begun to spread.

Luigi Russo proposes that readers and scholars treat *Gradiva* from both an aesthetic and psychoanalytic point of view:

So it's reasonable to think that in this intellectual climate, marked by romantic medicine and fed by the problems of animal magnetism, [Freud] would have highlighted what he considered to be the pregnant psychoanalytic themes in Jensen's tale and omitted the other aesthetic elements. One must keep in mind these overlooked elements.¹

Freud's analysis, an interesting study about the interpretation of invented dreams, was a determining factor of the work's success. The protagonist of Jensen's tale, Norbert Hanold, is an archaeologist who makes a *grand tour* in Italy. Probably during a visit to Rome, he discovers a bas-relief of a walking woman in

1 Luigi Russo, *La nascita dell'estetica di Freud* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983), p. 134, all translations by the author.

the Vatican Museum. Norbert is struck by the sculpture, by «[the] grace which gave the impression of imparting life to the relief».² A particular detail of the low relief attracts his attention: it is the feet in the act of walking. The left foot has advanced, and the right, about to follow, touches the ground only lightly with the tips of the toes, while the sole and heel are raised almost vertically. It is precisely because of this peculiarity that he decides to call her *Gradiva* — that is, «the girl splendid in walking».³

Jensen's prose makes it quite evident that Norbert has immediately become obsessed with his *Gradiva*, «his observations caused him annoyance, for he found in the vertical position of the lingering foot beautiful, and regretted that it had been created by the imagination or arbitrary act of sculptor and did not correspond to reality».⁴

Hanold persuades himself that the profile of the woman has Greek origins. He tries to find *Gradiva*'s way of walking in other women, women of his time, but in vain. His monothematic dreams start, all of them are centred on *Gradiva*.

The first dream takes place in Pompeii on August 24th of the year 79 (AD), the day of the Vesuvius eruption:

The pebbles and the rain of ashes fell down on Norbert also, but, after the strange manner of dreams, they did not hurt him [...] As he stood thus at the edge of the Forum near the Jupiter temple, he suddenly saw *Gradiva* a short distance in front of him. Until then no thought of her presence there had moved him, but now suddenly it seemed natural to him, as she was, of course, a Pompeian girl, that she was living in her native city and, without his having any suspicion of it, was his contemporary (...) when Norbert Hanold awoke, he still heard the confused cries of the Pompeians who were seeking safety, and the dully resounding boom of the surf of the turbulent sea.⁵

2 Sigmund Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva: An Interpretation in the Light of Psychoanalysis of Gradiva*, trans. by Helen M. Downey (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1922), p. 14.

3 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 1.

4 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 19.

5 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 20.

Norbert continues his journey and arrives in Rome, where he is tormented by the presence of young bridal couples; in the guesthouse he dreams for the second time. He is in Pompeii again: Apollo lifts up Venus and he places her safely, maybe, upon a carriage. It is strange that Apollo and Venus speak in German, not in Greek, exactly like the young bridal couples who torture him. The scene changes:

Absolute silence took the place of the confused sound, and instead of smoke and fire-glow, bright, hot sunlight rested on the ruins of the buried city. This likewise changed gradually, became a bed on whose white linen golden beams circled up to his eyes, and Norbert Hanold awoke in the scintillating spring morning of Rome.⁶

Hanold decides to return to Naples as soon as possible. When he realises that the young bridal couples invade Naples, like as they did in Rome, he gets away. He takes off for Pompeii.

During a walk through the ruins of the ancient city, he catches sight of Gradiva, but «again [she appeared as] a noonday dream-picture that passed there before him and yet also [as] a reality».⁷ Norbert silently follows Gradiva's steps until she arrives at the house of Meleager, when she suddenly disappears. He falls asleep and Gradiva appears again. Hanold finds the courage to speak to Gradiva and decides to address her in Greek. But Gradiva does not understand and asks him to speak in German. This is the first of many meetings. Hanold takes an asphodel⁸ to his loved one and she shows her way of walking. He sees that below the raised gown she wears, not sandals, but light, sand-colored shoes of fine leather, modern shoes. Her name is now Zoe.

Hanold begins to ask himself questions; he starts to think that Zoe-Gradiva is a projection of his mind. He is disappointed and

6 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 33.

7 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 50.

8 The asphodel is the flower associated with death and Gradiva directly expresses this concept: «One must adapt himself to the inevitable and I have long accustomed myself to being dead; but now my time is for to-day; you have brought the grave-flower with you to conduct me back» (Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 70).

worried. He sets off for the city, after a meeting with a lizard-hunter. In town he finds a host (but also a forger) who sells him a metal brooch. Anecdotes say that this brooch supposedly belongs to a Pompeiian couple who died during the Vesuvius eruption in a firm, harrowing embrace. Hanold is at first very skeptical about this story, but now he is convinced that the object belongs to Zoe-Gradiva, so he buys it for an exorbitant amount.

When he returns to his room, he falls asleep and begins to dream in a new dream «remarkably nonsensi[cal]» fashion:

Somewhere in the sun Gradiva sat making a trap out of a blade of grass in order to catch a lizard, and she said, Please stay quite still-my colleague is right; the method is really good, and she has used it with the greatest success. Norbert Hanold became conscious in his dream that it was actually the most utter madness, and he cast about to free himself from it. He succeeded in this by the aid of an invisible bird, who seemingly uttered a short, merry call, and carried the lizard away in its beak; afterwards everything disappeared.⁹

The next day, at midday, Hanold joins Gradiva into the house of Meleager. With fear and trepidation he asks her if the brooch belongs to her. Now he is afraid that Gradiva is dead. This is an illogical thought mechanism, but he needs to be reassured. His confused state of mind is evident. The aspect of the modern Gradiva scares him because he is afraid that Gradiva remains a ghost. He needs to know that Gradiva is a woman of flesh and blood. He reasons that the only way to know it is to touch her. He finds a pretext: a fly lands on the cheek of Zoe/Gradiva. He discovers the reality, but Zoe, teased, thinks that he is crazy.

Hanold does not meet a Pompeiian ghost, but a childhood love. It all starts from the last name of Zoe, Bertgang, which has the same etymology of Gradiva: “the girl splendid in walking”. There is an evident physic similarity between the two:

A merry, comprehending, laughing expression lurked around his companion’s mouth, and, raising her dress slightly with her left hand,

9 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen’s Gradiva*, pp. 78-79.

Gradiva *rediviva* Zoë Bertgang, viewed by him with dreamily observing eyes, crossed with her calmly buoyant walk, through the sunlight, over the stepping-stones, to the other side of the street.¹⁰

To introduce the first dream, Jensen writes clearly «he had, one night, a dream which caused him great anguish of mind».¹¹ It is well known that Freud extensively analyzed “dreams of anguish” like that mentioned in this sentence in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Furthermore, Freud’s analysis proposes that «the third and the most remarkable and incomprehensible peculiarity of the memory in dreams, is shown in the selection of the reproduced material, for stress is laid not only on the most significant, but also on the most indifferent and superficial reminiscences».¹²

Indifferent and superficial details of Hanold dreams are: lizard, a young woman’s way of walking and her last name (in the dream she is called Gradiva).

It is hard to associate the detail “lizard” to Zoe Bertgang, until the woman recalls to the protagonist that she is the daughter of a zoologist. He shows an interest in *Lacerta faraglionensis*, subspecies of *Podarcis sicula*, which only lives in the *Faraglioni* of Capri. The lizard hunting (the manifest dream content), conducted by the Zoe’s father, is connected to *Gradiva hunting* of Hanold; in this way, the image of the bird who catches the reptile, unconsciously assumes an erotic meaning (sense). The Hanold oneiric life is the medium which makes him able to understand his unsatisfied needs and desires.

Gradiva's Film

After twelve years of cinematographic inactivity, Alain Robbe-Grillet decided to work on a new project, *C'est Gradiva qui vous appelle*, a movie loosely based on Jensen’s tale. He first

10 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 108.

11 Freud, *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, p. 19.

12 Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), p. 13.

presented *Gradiva* in 2006 to the “Horizons” section audience at the 63rd Venice Film Festival. Robbe-Grillet’s screenplay for the film *C’est Gradiva qui vous appelle* dates from 2002, and was published by Éditions de Minuit. After an open heart surgery, Robbe-Grillet was obliged to edit the movie in a hospital. Under these circumstances the director and his assistant editor finished the project in an assembly hall arranged in the clinic. According to the French director the movie is about:

A young art critic, John Locke, who loves painting and in particular painting as object: art object, erotic object, object *d’amour fou* (...) he decides to live in a small villa in the ruins of the Moroccan Atlas mountains, following the path of Delacroix, who is also his subject of study. Conducted by a man pretending to be blind, he falls into the clutches of a forger, Anatoli, who leads him to a clandestine cabaret to view some sado-masochist spectacles. Under the pretext of giving him drawings made by Delacroix in Morocco, Anatoli (...) accuses John of a sexual crime, which is actually committed by another man.¹³

The protagonist is named John Locke, but, according to Robbe-Grillet, this is not an allusion to the British philosopher. Robbe-Grillet denied this theory during an interview released to *The Guardian* in his response to the explicit question «Is his film’s hero, John Locke, named after the English Philosopher?». Robbe-Grillet answered:

No, he’s named after a character called John Locke in Antonioni’s *The Passenger*. Antonioni was one of the few geniuses of cinema. The story is about a man [played by Jack Nicholson] who steals the identity of a dead man, hoping that it will solve all his problems. Actually, it just makes matters worse, and he gets pursued by the dead man’s pursuers.¹⁴

However, Antonioni movie’s hero is in fact named David Locke, not John, as Robbe-Grillet purports. Nevertheless *The*

13 Caterina Taricano and Claudio Di Minno, ‘Il gioco del piacere, il piacere del gioco. Il cinema di Robbe-Grillet’, *Mondo Nuovo* 18-24 *ft/s*, 3 (2006), p. 12.

14 Stuart Jeffries, ‘French force’, *Guardian*, 15 September 2007, www.guardian.co.uk/film/2007/sep/15/2.

Passenger's plot and setting contain many latent similarities to Robbe-Grillet's filmic choices. In *Gradiva* we follow two stories: part of Jensen's tale and Delacroix's journey to Morocco in 1832. Over the course of this journey the painter completed hundred of drawings, which now are in Delacroix Museum in Paris. Delacroix's works reveal how much the North-African population and natural environment clearly impressed and fascinated him.

John Locke is in Morocco to study Delacroix and, in the first scene, we see him watching slides of Delacroix's drawings. (The slides also contain sketches of horses. In fact the abundance of horse sketchings in the painter's sketchbooks kept during the journey, which are contained in Delacroix Museum, underline the painter's fascination with this animal. One must understand the symbolic use of horses in Robbe-Grillet's film as a direct reference to Delacroix's journey to Morocco).¹⁵ The first element, which connects the film to the book, is the reference to the vertical position of the foot, which is framed for a long time by the camera. The woman is suddenly introduced into the movie: her appearance fascinates and hypnotizes the spectator. The foot, in a particularly high-arched position, is framed two times and then Gradiva appears in the movie.

As in Jensen's tale, the first meeting between John and the woman occurs in the house of Meleager (this time in a Moroccan version). Gradiva-Leïla roams the streets of Marrakesh in a transparent white dress. In the following scene Locke learns of an anecdote that the ghost of a woman named Leïla roams through the city streets. She was punished because she felt in love with an Occidental tourist (Eugène Delacroix) and was killed with a dagger. This element becomes very emblematic. In fact Delacroix brought back from his trip to Morocco a lot of objects; one of these is a large sabre or *nimcha*. This object further demonstrates the importance of the French artist's presence in the film.

The viewer learns that Gradiva's gracious gait is not perceptible to the human ear. It was Delacroix who named her Gradiva and

15 Guy Dumur, *Delacroix et le Maroc* (Paris: Herscher, 1988).

in his drawings he insisted on her foot position. Locke becomes obsessed with this woman, who comes to haunt his dreams.

The forger Anatoli invites John to his house, where he gives him a medication purported to alleviate his toothache, but which has hallucinatory effects. Having entered into a semiconscious state of mind, Locke sees [00:28:54] Leila spread out and chained in the vein of the Delacroix painting the *Death of Ophelia*—we see the same body position and melancholic, absent look.

Bloody “odalisques”, victims of torture, inhabit his dream. Locke is introduced to the *Club du Triangle d’or*, at the entrance of which he receives a dagger. In his room (room number 13) there are two doors. He opens the right-hand door and falls asleep on the bed, where he dreams about the forger’s servant, Claudine who is tortured with a dagger.

He awakens distraught and opens the other door: Gradiva-Leila is chained on the sofa, stabbed. He has his hands full of blood and is holding the dagger. A camera clicks and a flash goes off. He runs out of the room, anguished and scared; in the corridor he sees Belkis, disguised, who shouts and runs away. Indeed, Belkis, who is Locke’s ambiguous servant, appears in many of the scenes which are set outside of the villa. This fact forces us to generally reflect. The girl [Belkis] acts in the *tableaux vivants*, which take place in the forger’s and Madame Elvira’s house, but also tortures and whips others girls and works to satisfy paying guests’ desires. It may be that all scenes set in the house of Anatoli are part of his dreams.

The sequences where Gradiva-Leila appears are very interesting:

in the first [00:43:25] she runs with a splendid white horse; in the second [00:46:00] Gradiva sings by the moonlight in a place which reminds one of a Pompeiian atmosphere.

There is a dialogue between Locke and Gradiva-Leila where she explains that she is the ghost of the woman seduced by Delacroix and punished for this love. In the next scene Belkis and John sleep side by side. The servant wakes up, and she says: «I have had a horrible nightmare!». But the answer is almost desecrating: «Don’t dream, it’s out of fashion!».

The next dream [01:00:03] takes place in the afternoon. Locke goes out to get some fresh air, whereupon Gradiva appears followed by two black horses, Belkis seated upon the second. She is chained and stabbed (exactly like Gradiva in the Club). A mysterious man leans her on the same place where Locke had met his “oneiric lover.” Perhaps it is a premonitory dream for the end of the movie—we aren’t able to determine the dream’s meaning before the end of the film.

Locke meets Claudine, who models on the beach for a photography service. When he arrives in a cafeteria John meets Hermione, an actress in the Anatoli’s *tableaux vivants*. The resemblance with Leïla is striking. The exchange between Locke and Hermione reveals this: «I’m a dreams’ comedienne [...] as the name reveals: I play in people’s dreams [...] the dream’s world is as real as wakeful life. Don’t you know that, Mr. Locke?».¹⁶

It seems that Hermione acts in John’s dreams, and otherwise as she says: «The dreams’ world is so similar to the other one. It is an exact double, a twin. There are characters, objects, words, fears, pleasures, tragedies. But everything is more violent».¹⁷

The French director’s point of view filters through the word of Hermione, a character who assumes different personalities. Is it perhaps true that dreams, exactly like cinema, can transpose desires into images? Can dream and reality coexist, or even merge? Only an objet or a person can keep one firmly fixed within the real world. This is the function of Belkis, Locke’s servant, who has genuine, passionate and unrestrained feelings for her master.

Robbe-Grillet’s movie wants to leave the spectator in constant doubt. Such unresolved questions remain: who writes the story and who truly lives the protagonist’s story? Is it perhaps

16 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *C’est Gradiva qui vous appelle* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), p. 118: «Je suis comédienne de rêves [...] comme le nom l’indique: je joue dans le rêves des gens [...] Le monde des rêves est aussi réel que celui de la vie éveillée. Ne le saviez-vous pas, Monsieur Locke?».

17 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *C’est Gradiva qui vous appelle*, p. 118, «Le monde des rêves ressemble d’ailleurs beaucoup à l’autre. C’est son double exact, son jumeau. Il y a des personnages, des objets, des paroles, des peurs, des plaisirs, des drames. Mais tout est infiniment plus violent».

Hermione the actress, who wants to pass her story onto posterity? Or is Locke, who has fallen in love with a ghost, a chimera? But in dreams there are limits. Not all is allowed; the so-called *onirographes*, the playwrights assigned to the draft of dreams' stories, supervise and enforce the moral law. We could name them "dreams' guardians". They are destined to the Freudian censorship and in the deformation of the oneiric content.

The dialogue continues and some clues suggest clear references to the Freudian dream theory. Hermione, in particular, becomes the messenger for Freudian thought by uttering the sentence «Every true dream is erotic» («Tous les vrais rêves sont érotiques»). So actors become passionate about their profession. However, according to Robbe-Grillet's conception of dreams, they have neither latent nor manifest content. Drifting through two universes, the oneiric and the real, they develop into fantasies and embody the protagonist's conscious fears.

Dreaming of the servant Belkis as a sacrificial victim, laid on an altar and stabbed, Locke reveals to himself the fear of losing the only real love. This love remains always disguised, which is conveyed in the detail of Belkis' different-coloured hairs.

To the question: «Do you think adapting movies from works of literature is always a losing bet?», Robbe-Grillet answers:

More precisely, I think it is possible to make movies from works of literature but it is important to consider the specificity of the each form respective materials: this is extremely important in art. It is not the same sculpture when we use the clay as when we directly engrave stone. Similarly, there is a relationship between the cinematographic story structures and a written story structures, but their materials are very different: in the novel we are in front of phrases and words, in the movie we are in front of images and sounds.¹⁸

The director's analysis clarifies some choices made to direct *Gradiva*, his last and favorite feature film. It is needless to say that the tale is well-suited to Robbe-Grillet's directorial method: a land profaned by modernity as background (in Jensen's tale by

18 Taricano and Di Minno, p. 36.

young bridal couples; in Robbe-Grillet's movie by bailing out delinquents), a platonic love inspired by the ghost of a woman, and a real love with two different endings. Robbe-Grillet's ending does not consist in love triumphing. Like Hanold's delirium, Locke's blows over, but the causes are different. Hanold reconnects with reality by touching his beloved's cheek while Locke understands he has lost the only chance to be happy when he realizes that possibility is gone.

Belkis approaches the record player and listens to Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (maybe it is not a coincidence that this opera was finished by the musician exactly in 1903, year of the *Gradiva's* publication). The music warns the spectator; it is a presage of death and tragedy. The servant does not use the dagger like Cio-cio-san, she uses a common revolver (gun) to accomplish her *harakiri*. Belkis has not any more hopes; she is afraid that Locke remains the victim of his crazy dream.

The part of Puccini's opera, which Belkis listens to in a *crecendo* of lyricism, is *Un bel di vedremo*.¹⁹ The content of the soprano's aria is renowned and is full of meanings: most notably evoking first *Madama Butterfly's* false hopes to be still loved, the desperation and the melancholia of this character.

Robbe-Grillet's directing style does not leave anything to chance. In fact in this moment of the opera, *Madama Butterfly* confides to her handmaid Suzuki her dreaming/imagining about the return of his husband Pinkerton. That dream materializes in the movie, when Belkis looks at the bed, the cradle of love and the refuge where she completely gave herself to her master John Locke, and she hopes in vain for his return. When she listens to the aria, it seems that Belkis shares *Butterfly's* pain; her illusion is the same. Until the end she hopes that her "bridegroom" comes back home, but the presence of *Gradiva-Leila-Hermione* becomes too much insistent.

Robbe-Grillet's *Gradiva* is only a chimera, a dream which remains a dream, a ghost of John's heart. Belkis is Jensen's Zoe,

19 Giacomo Puccini, *Madama Butterfly* (New York: G. Ricordi & Company, 1906), p. 39.

the woman which could bring back the protagonist to reality, saving him from his delirium, which in this case changes into crime and murder. Belkis obeys that voice, that death's call, which she has forbidden John to listen to. Thanks to her sacrifice John experiences a real emotion: the pain, not the joy, of meeting up again with a woman loved since childhood.

Jeffreis asks Robbe-Grillet two questions apropos of *Gradiva* that many spectators would undoubtedly like to pose for every one of his feature films. The first is: «Are we supposed to make sense of this story?», to which Robbe-Grillet answers:

Yes, but not by establishing a clear and unambiguous order of events. In that sense there is a continuity with my novels. My narratives are often composed in such a way that any attempt to reconstruct an external chronology results in a series of contradictions. More intelligent critics have called what I do *temporal irony*.²⁰

The second question is as follows: «But does it upset Robbe-Grillet that his film got such a poor reception in his homeland?». The director's answer is applicable to all of his *auteur* films: «It didn't surprise me. I make films to please myself and a few others. This is the cinema of auteurs, not of spectators. I make films of the same kind as Antonioni and your Peter Greenaway».²¹

Murder in a theatre. In a private auditorium, frequented in particular by European customers, a sex maniac stabbed a young actress last night. During these last years the beautiful Hermione Gradivetski was a special servant of an antique dealer renowned in our town. [...] Police has had suspicions about an art critic, also known as Eugenio Della Croce, a transparent pseudonym. This orientalist used to go to this exclusive club. He suffered from hallucinations, in any case he was considered inoffensive.²²

20 Jeffreis.

21 Jeffreis.

22 «Meurtre au théâtre. Dans une salle de spectacle privée, fréquentée surtout par une clientèle européenne, une jeune actrice a été poignardée la nuit dernière par un maniaque sexuel. La belle Hermione Gradivetski avait, ces dernières années, servi d'assistance particulière à un antiquaire en renom de notre cité. [...] Les soupçons de la police se sont d'abord portés sur un critique d'art,

Employing the names of Hermione and Eugenio della Croce (whose name immediately conjures up that of Eugene Delacroix), it seems that Robbe-Grillet whispers to our ears the solution of a big enigma.

It is a bas-relief that impels Hanold, the solitary academic, to feel natural emotions, human emotions which draw him closer to reality. The problem of discerning reality from fantasy arises when the dream changes into delusion, or rather into diurnal apparition. This passage happens exactly in the same way in the movie: Locke sees Gradiva for the first time during the night on a horse. Then, the next day, walking through the stalls, he glimpses her in the streets of Marrakesh.

With his detailed and descriptive prose, Jensen develops the protagonist's sense of instability. What does Hanold see? Does he see a ghost, a dream or a woman in flesh and blood? The doubt persists. By not employing fading, Robbe-Grillet creates a double universe where dream invades reality and vice versa, like the Deleuzian *vigilambule's* world; the spectator remains unable to clearly distinguish one from the other. Gradiva tells her story, Leïla's tragic end, but Leïla is also Hermione. This triple personality, then, coexists in a single time.

Gradiva-Zoe seconds Hanold's delirium, because she believes she is able to free him from it («no other course is open; by opposition, one would destroy that possibility»²³). Does Belkis choose the same approach? At the beginning she forbids John to listen to the voice, death's voice, but the film's protagonist is obstinate. He continues to investigate; he wants to understand what it is happening.

In conclusion, if it is true that «the motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfillment

connu sous le pseudonyme transparent d'Eugenio della Croce, qui fréquentait ce club très sélect. Sujet à des crises de délire hallucinatoire, cet orientaliste a cependant été reconnu inoffensif par la faculté», Robbe-Grillet, pp. 157-58, translation by the author.

23 Sigmund Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming: Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), vol. 9, p. 143.

of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality»,²⁴ then we ought to start from this assumption to analyse both *Gradiva* and every single oeuvre.

Freud states the close relationship between nocturne dreams and diurnal fantasies:

Our dreams at night are nothing else than fantasies like these, as we can demonstrate from the interpretation of dreams. [...] If the meaning of our dreams usually remains obscure to us in spite of this point, it is because of the circumstance that at night there also arise in us wishes of which we are ashamed; these we must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious.²⁵

In Jensen's tale the basis of Norbert Hanold's shame is love, a feeling that the protagonist consciously condemns, considering futile and childish. The delusions and dreams are caused by unsatisfied desire, that lack which Norbert only unconsciously can represent, transfiguring into actions and characters: «The psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self observation into many part-egos, and in consequence to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes».²⁶

In Robbe-Grillet's film the sadistic eroticism puts Locke on the wrong track, like Jensen's senseless dreams. It distances him from reality and from his sincere love for the servant Belkis. In fact the object of his erotic fantasies is a fictitious woman [Gradiva]. If Robbe-Grillet and Jensen are to be considered daydreamers in the Freudian sense, their artistic fantasies appear to be disturbing. These fantasies leave an impression, repel us, and awaken anguish and a sense of loss. In Robbe-Grillet there is not censorship. Eroticism, the predominant subject of the oneiric dimension, does not leave room for love.

24 Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, p. 144.

25 Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, p. 143.

26 Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, p. 145.

The poets Jensen and Robbe-Grillet live their respective individual dreams and in turn universalize them. If the tale pleasantly captivates the reader, the film violently seduces the viewer.

Freud concludes that if «our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tension in our minds... not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thence forward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame».²⁷ This is the uncensored world where the reader/spectator lives when he reads/watches *Gradiva*. Robbe-Grillet's erotic fantasies are made like *tableaux vivants* to overthrow the omnipresent and insurmountable obstacle between our shame, our modesty and the condemnable thoughts which populate our mind.

27 Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, p. 146.

MOVING THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION: INVENTION, SEQUEL AND CONTINUATION IN BUZZATI'S *MIRACLES*

ROBERTA COGLITORE

Dino Buzzati's *The Miracles of Morel Valley* is actually a "sequel" of a previous work of the author.¹ The beginning and the end of the last Buzzati's iconotext are brought backwards and forwards to prolong the phases of the artistic genesis and to substantiate in the double mediality its *raison d'être*.

The original core of the work is composed by thirty-four votive panels dedicated to the miraculous intervention of Saint Rita in Morel Valley, accompanied by short texts, displayed in a solo exhibition in 1970 and collected in its catalog entitled *Unpublished Miracles of a Saint*,² together with a short story entitled *Explanation*. In the following edition published by Garzanti in 1971, a second expanded and more complex version of the introductory story presents the narrative background that has generated, in an imaginery way, the pictorial creation using a fantastic guise and the first person narrative. The realization of yet another panel devoted to Saint Rita was exposed post-mortem in Limana in 1973, in a little chapel specially built at the request of the mayor in honor of the writer, who loved walking in the

1 Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). See the difference between "continuation", as a completion of the unfinished or suspended work by a different author (chapter XXVIII ff.), and "sequel", as a re-launching of the original project beyond the work of the author him- or her-self (chapter XXXVIII ff.).

2 At the series of thirty-four panels of *Unpublished Miracles of a Saint* (Venice: Del Naviglio, 1970) should be added five more panels (*The Colombré, The Mammon Cat, The Giant Robin, The Martians, Fall of the House of Usher*) and the introductory explanation at the volume entitled *The Miracles of Morel Valley* (Milano: Garzanti, 1971).

valleys around Belluno. It later became pilgrimage destination for curious and mountain enthusiasts as well as admirers of Buzzati, representing the pictorial “sequel” and the architectural “continuation” towards an expansion of artistic forms.

A literary practice invents, therefore, both the original images, the real ex-voto – that is three-dimensional objects offered “for grace received” –, and the votive paintings – that is two-dimensional pictures that Buzzati says he observed in the votive paintings made by the caretaker of the shrine of Valmorel and then disappeared along with the entire chapel at his second visit with his grandchildren after the war. In the literary fiction introduced by the frame story, Buzzati’s paintings are nothing but the reproduction of images *de visu* observed by the author in the shrine and of those copied from a sketch found in his father’s library. According to Genette it is a “sequel” pretending to be a “continuation”.

The iconotext comes from the imaginery disappearance of the images and of the sanctuary – once as a catalog, once as an illustrated book –, and then also a shrine after the will of the mayor of the city of Limana, for whom Buzzati paints a final table depicting Saint Rita and the misfortunes she has to face. It is a fake “continuation” of the work of other authors and by means of different media, but also a real, even if partial, “sequel” present in the statements of the author.

Two inverse trails that branch off in two opposite directions, those of writing and painting, but contributing together to invent a pseudo hypotext and a real hypertext, relaunching the production of the work beyond its initial design.

A notional ékphrasis invents the three-dimensional and then the two-dimensional works of art; the same way as the production of an additional painting, the last of Buzzati, gives credibility and makes real the invention of the *Miracles*. Literature invents the artistic background that generated the iconotext, and painting provides evidence to the reality of imagination.

Advanced Genetics

Because of the composition of the two arts *The Miracles of Morel Valley* could be considered as a metanarrative, where a frame story includes thirty-nine micro-tales illustrated by the same author,³ or they could be analyzed as a catalog of paintings accompanied by an extensive caption or even as a modern emblematics.⁴ From the point of view of the locations they have been appreciated as a tribute to the place of origin of the author, an anthropological rewriting, with images and words, of his own traditions.⁵ Considered in their subversive drive they are a “joke”, as the author liked to call them,⁶ or in an autobiographical reading an attempt to show, while concealing them, his innermost thoughts⁷

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- 3 On the importance of the paratext see Marie-Hélène Caspar, ‘A propos du paratexte buzzatien’, *Studi Buzzatiani*, 5 (2000), 27-46 (p. 27): «It is a text or more exactly a number of texts composed as micro-stories, but their unit, their consistency is not immediately manifest. And this is why the paratext becomes a necessity».
- 4 Zugni Tauro does not agree on the assimilation to the emblematic form. In order to strengthen the internal logic in the succession of panels and especially the strong link between the two elements of expressive images and captions he writes: «the marginal explanations of Buzzati are not for the image what the motto is for the emblem, rather they play a modern and original echo that cannot be dismantled», Anna Paola Zugni Tauro, ‘L’affabulazione fantastica ne «I miracoli di Val Morel»’, in *Il pianeta Buzzati*, ed. by Nella Giannetto (Milano: Mondadori, 1992), 341-73 (p. 342).
- 5 Patrizia Dalla Rosa, ‘Geografia e onomastica de “I Miracoli di Valmorel”’, in *Dove qualcosa sfugge: lingue e luoghi di Buzzati, Quaderni del centro Buzzati*, 3 (2004), 101-11; Zugni Tauro says that «the “Oedipal relationship” with San Pellegrino is the basis of his original tone, of his atmosphere, of his writing and painting, rather than the Italian twentieth-century “magical realism”, to which the work of Buzzati can be juxtaposed but not organically connected», Zugni Tauro, p. 344.
- 6 Emilio Pozzi, ‘Dino Buzzati a Radio Lugano: l’ultima intervista’, *Studi Buzzatiani*, 7 (2002), 101-11 (p. 108): «No, there was no intention to imitate the classic ex-voto: my intention was to make them all-new, telling a story in each one, a mostly fantastic and also, let’s face it, unlikely story. So... there is no need to take these ex-voto seriously, from the point of view of the chronicle!».
- 7 Marie-Hélène Caspar, ‘Les Miracles de Val Morel. Un bestiaire fantastique?’, *Chaiers Dino Buzzati*, 3 (1979), 139-72 (p. 172): «So when considering the *Miracles* as the anarchic reappearance of ghosts and obsessions of the unconscious ego, it is better understood the systematic use of the *brouillage*

or to avert his own death.⁸ In the view of an iconotext theory they could be an example of a compensatory poetics,⁹ or they could play as a pastiche of the ex-voto religious genre, denouncing in a new formula the metariflexive need of the two arts.

The ex-voto are offered to Saint Rita, evoking the well-known religious tradition of votive images, to show gratitude for solving small and big troubles of the inhabitants of Morel Valley. The intervention of the saint, a regular feature of votive paintings,¹⁰ occurs in two ways: Saint Rita in action along with the other main characters of the scene or shown in a frame that stands her out, for nature and moment, from the scene represented. In both cases, through the lines of the drawing and the kind of action, the different nature, ultramundane and miraculous, is still depicted next to the mundane and plagued one of the other characters.

One year after the exhibition *Unpublished Miracles of a Saint*, Buzzati publishes the book with the title *The Miracles of Morel Valley*, with thirty paintings and as many stories. Each table is accompanied by a page with a number, a title and a narrative part, micro-narrative or substantial caption, with different functions from time to time or multiple within the same verbal text. The verbal part can tell the episode to which assists the protagonist

technique in Buzzati. The obscurity of the text, its ambiguity, its hard decipherability are nothing but the camouflage of the innermost and haunting thoughts of the author». Caspar, p. 45: «It is therefore, in some way, a testament-book that contains numerous obsessions of Buzzati, his unconscious ghosts and a writing technique refined over time». See also Marie-Hélène Caspar, *Fantastique et mythe personnel dans l'oeuvre de Dino Buzzati* (La Garenne-Colombes: Erasme, 1990).

8 Lorenzo Viganò, *Postfazione: Dino Buzzati e il miracolo della vita*, in Dino Buzzati, *I Miracoli di Val Morel* (Milano: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 93-110.

9 To be understood not only in a synchronic but also in a diachronic way. As Crotti claims, painting in Buzzati recovered «that fantastic deviation and that clear imagination that characterizes the first narrative production. It is what happens in *The Miracles of Morel Valley*, one of the best works of the late Buzzati precisely because it seems to approach a dazzling and clear color component, a fairy and surreal tone, a sense of the fantastic that had been gradually running out in the narrative». Ilaria Crotti, *Dino Buzzati* (Milano: La Nuova Italia, 1977), p. 105.

10 Only in one of the thirty-nine panels, n. 6 entitled *A kidnapped girl*, Santa Rita is not represented.

of the scene, the background or the conclusion; it can describe the image represented or even integrate and reconstruct the legend that gravitates around the episode more or less known to the inhabitants of the valley of Belluno; it can even revive the emotions felt in front of the observation of the ex-voto, but also the doubts and uncertainties felt by the extradiegetic narrator for what is represented and the news stories of the valleys. It can also provide more than one of the functions now listed, mixing the discourse of faith with that of information, the folk with the erotic one.¹¹

In addition to the thirty-nine notes Buzzati adds a frame story, entitled *Explanation*, which reconstructs the background to the pictorial creation. The grandfather and the father of a certain Toni Della Santa were the keepers of the votive offerings in honor of Santa Rita, gathered in the sanctuary of Val Morel. The father of Dino Buzzati had kept a notebook full of notes in a «pure language, ungrammatical and intensely dialect»¹² on a long series of miracles performed by the saint until 1909, and witnessed by the ex-voto panels gathered in the sanctuary. In 1938, after the discovery of the notebook, Buzzati went searching for information on the sanctuary and a friend of his father, the architect Alberto Alpago-Novello, suggested that it was just a literary joke. The priest of Limana, on the contrary, indicates the site of an aedicule where pilgrims stop and pray attributing «extraordinary powers to an image of Saint Rita, from immemorial time placed in one of those tiny chapels, open to the winds and the rain».¹³

Then the meeting occurs with Toni Della Santa, who tells him that the notebook and the tables in the sanctuary are the result of his work, a work done to give testimony of the power of the Saint:

11 On the eroticism in Buzzati's images Radius comments: «Mostly a sexual education for adults, started from rough to reach the natural. It is certain that the eroticism of Buzzati coincided with the wave of eroticism and pornography that has fallen on the so-called quietly civil world. He didn't help to anticipate it: he followed it», in Enrico Radius, *Leggendo i suoi quadri*, in *Buzzati pittore*, ed. by Raffaele De Grada (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), pp. 18-104 (p. 98).

12 Buzzati, *I miracoli di Val Morel*, p. 7.

13 Buzzati, *I miracoli di Val Morel*, p. 9.

There came poor and gentlemen to ask the most amazing graces, to pay tribute to the great Saint Rita. Even abroad, he said, even from distant continents. They brought hearts, legs, heads, arms, portraits of silver (I had a box nearly full) and they explained him the story, commissioning him a proper *ex-voto* to be painted, the modest art that his grandfather and father transmitted him. He had written the notebook on his own initiative, once he had known that my father was interested in “important” things of the Valley around Belluno. And, if I wanted, he would have reported other miracles that occurred after 1909, when the written account stopped.¹⁴

When, a few years after the meeting with Della Santa, in 1946, Buzzati comes back in Valmorel with his grandchildren in search of the sanctuary he does not find anything:

The path leading to the “sanctuary” no longer existed. I looked for it at length. I asked information. Nobody knew anything. No one had ever heard of a shrine of Saint Rita. No one had ever known Toni Della Santa. It seemed to find myself in the shoes of Rip Van Winkle. Centuries had passed since then? Was I in the grip of a drug? In a spell? Yet I carried with me the notebook, now yellowed, and the notes taken eight years earlier.¹⁵

Once again the strategies of the fantastic confuse the planes of reality. How is it possible that Buzzati keeps the notebook with the drawings of the *ex-voto* copied by the hand of the author himself, if there is no trace of the sanctuary, and it seems to belong only to the realm of dreams? Where did Buzzati meet his benefactor and at what level of reality does he belong to?

In his *Explanation* Buzzati presents Toni Della Santa as a nice “old man” of fifty-seven:

He was a strange man, who apparently had got a screw loose, but expressing an extraordinary openness, humility and goodness; also a certain fantasy, which is rare in people of none or minimal culture [...]. I was surprised by the light coming from those eyes. Was a saint himself?

14 Buzzati, *I miracoli di Val Morel*, pp. 10-11.

15 Buzzati, *I miracoli di Val Morel*, pp. 11-12.

Was he – as I asked myself repeatedly – a sort of inspired pixie, kind of magician of our mountains?¹⁶

Character in-between the world of fantasy and reality, that appears and disappears, making fantastic the story and the discovery of the boards, Della Santa is a kind of alter ego of the author. Some years later Buzzati tries to repeat with his grandchildren what Della Santa had done according to the family tradition: making ex-voto to be dedicated to the Saint. Della Santa mixes reality and fiction as well as the main character and the narrator of the frame story, being a fictional character confused with the real-life of Buzzati himself. The two grandchildren, characters of the *Explanation*, are those for which Buzzati has already written *The Famous Invasion of Bears in Sicily*.¹⁷ They are readers willing to believe in fairy tales, as well as the places where the action is set mingle with the real ones of the valley around Belluno. Imagination and reality are perfectly mixed, as in the most classic fairy tales.

However, the *Miracles* have also had a second life. After the successful publication of the work, local authorities asked Buzzati himself to paint a panel dedicated to Saint Rita to be displayed in a shrine built on purpose:¹⁸

What is great is that, since it is life that imitates art, not vice versa, after my exhibition in Venice, a professor in Belluno suggested parish priest of Limana to build in a place similar to the one I described a chapel devoted to Santa Rita, where presumably the testimonies of who

16 Buzzati, *I miracoli di Val Morel*, p. 11.

17 Dino Buzzati, *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1945).

18 As evidenced by Nicoletta Comar “local notables” «prayed Buzzati to create a painting that would have been shown in a specifically designed aedicule. Thus the Capital of Val Morel was born, opened September 3, 1973 and still on-site, [...] in the capital is now a copy of the work, while the original is kept in the Municipality of Limana. Precisely because of this joint initiative, in order to make known the places that inspired the artist, “Buzzati Path” was created in 2002. It starts from the Sanctuary of Madonna Parè and reached the small village of Valmorel», Nicoletta Comar, ‘I miracoli di Valmorel: le scatole della realtà’, in *Dino Buzzati: Catalogo dell’opera pittorica* (Gorizia: Edizioni della Laguna, 2006), pp. 32-35.

knows how many miracles she performed would come. If they really do that, it will be for me, a writer and painter, the greatest satisfaction.¹⁹

The devotion expressed in the votive panels and the hope placed by the author in the *Explanation* found an architectural achievement in the sanctuary devoted to Saint Rita and in the last votive painting added to the corpus made of thirty-nine panels that Buzzati seems to anchor to the reality of religious practice in Veneto and Italy.

The last votive panel that Buzzati painted for the sanctuary sums up all the miracles that Saint Rita could have miraculously made in the everyday life of the Venetian lands: shipping and railway accidents, rescue from a burning house or an automobile robbery.²⁰ Nothing comparable to the imaginary votive paintings designed for the exhibition and then republished in the book. No transfiguration of the evils of man and of his ancestral fears but a portrait of Saint Rita in the foreground, with a halo and roses, and, at the four corners of the picture, some variants of her probable and real interventions. This representation, being ideally situated at the end of the sequence of votive panels, gives the whole work a religious tone, even a truthful one, allowing the beholder to read differently the irony of the earlier paintings as well.

The second sequel, therefore, is a pictorial sequel within the architectural continuation (characterized by a religious and tourist vocation) of a work initially introduced in a pictorial sequence, and that in his first sequel had taken an iconotextual form in the book.

True Descriptions All Too Fake

Thus, the *Explanation* had provided personal testimonies and the factual evidence of the pictorial genesis of the whole work;

19 Maria Teresa Ferrari (edited by), *Buzzati racconta: Storie disegnate e dipinte* (Milano: Electa, 2006), p. 85.

20 The devotion to Saint Rita was also common to his friend and painter Yves Klein. I would refer to my *Storie dipinte: Gli ex voto di Dino Buzzati* (Palermo: Edizioni di Passaggio, 2012).

the fortieth votive painting of Saint Rita had consecrated its truthful vocation even in an atmosphere of firm religious beliefs; now the notes alongside the reproductions of the panels in thirty-nine iconotexts forming the volume emphasize the necessity of the dual artistic experience of the author, in addition to the variety of relationships between the two arts.

Compared to the chance of reviving the work beyond the limits it has originally imposed on itself (namely the representation in painting of organic ex-voto, as we are told by the author in the frame story following the work) the notes represent another form of “sequel”, an “intermedial” one, since it revives the work through a different art, from painting to writing. Almost as if Buzzati’s *Doppelbegabung* could fully express itself only by giving a verbal sequel to its own visual work.

In this case it is actually a sequel produced by the same author and published according to the rhythm of the double-page of *The Miracles* book. However, the writing in this brief note is so varied to simulate different enunciators, not coincident with the painter of the next page.

Generally, the function of the notes is to provide evidence of the truthfulness of the scene represented, achieving this goal in different ways and writings. Buzzati’s notes are therefore literary hypertexts inasmuch they deform high-value or popular stories already existing, but even inasmuch they take non-fictional prose, including pseudo autobiographical or journalistic prose; they are extraliterary hypertexts inasmuch they resemble administrative or archive reports; they could be considered artistic metatexts inasmuch they comment the picture next to them, or extra-artistic metatexts inasmuch they take popular or materials pictures that are not part of the artistic tradition, such as comic books and photo story; and they are also iconotextual metatexts inasmuch they objectively and subjectively comment real episodes, the stories that come after them and the images representing or deforming other iconotexts by Buzzati.²¹

21 It works for the informative notes as well.

Another variation should be added to this already complex hypertextual and metatextual, the description. If we consider the description of the images a way of narrating events, a series of routes that the narrator can make through narration in his eyes or a chain of episodes in sequence, or even the story of the making of the artifact, then *ékphrasis* can be considered a hypertextual amplification as well, and in turn an opportunity to give a pictorial comment, and therefore a meta-artistic opportunity.

Within iconotects, the forms of description have the ability to move the limits of representation, from one art to the other, both in the case of the “mimetic” *ékphrasis* and of the “notional” one.²²

In the first case the sequel of the pictorial work traditionally extends in the field of art criticism, thus moving writing borders towards the territory of the critical language trying to restore an unreachable vividness, while the original painting reproduced by its side is falsified and de-materialized by the words that represent an extension of the image in the other half of the iconotext. In the second case the description not only quotes or alludes to most famous writings and images, rather it transforms them and invents new artistic or ordinary ones. In this way it obeys the attempt to make true something that has never existed at all or that has gone lost, and that in any way it tries to link to reality.²³

Thus, a complex paratextual strategy is drawn, which removes the original painting to be described while trying to prove its authenticity. It had already happened in the fictional background about the former organic *ex-voto* and the paintings of Della Santa, no more existing.

All *ékphrasis* pretend to be mimetic within each iconotext, for they provide minute details, emphases of missing details in the

22 Hollander defined the difference between mimetic *ékphrasis* and notional *ékphrasis*, the one concerning works of art never existed (Hollander, ‘The poetics of *ékphrasis*’, pp. 209-19).

23 Michele Cometa claims: «Every mimetic *ékphrasis* can be regarded as the “falsification” of an original, its de-essentialism, its de-materialization in a verbal form, and, conversely, every notional *ékphrasis* is a kind of “making true” a fake, a picture never existed (or lost) that literature simply makes “real” with its means», Michele Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2012), p. 53.

paintings by their side, or even stages of their creative genesis. They are in fact notional descriptions, providing documented evidences of the truthfulness of the picture beyond the picture itself, looking for proofs in the reality of the Venetian community and in the heritage of legends or facts that constitute the collective memory of its inhabitants.

CAN PAINTINGS TALK? AN ÉKPHRASTIC POLEMIC IN POST-STALIN RUSSIA

DUCCIO COLOMBO

Aleksandr Gerasimov, the president of the Soviet Academy of Fine Arts, purportedly refused to meet Pablo Picasso (this must have happened in 1956, when the latter was expected in Moscow for the opening of his exhibition; the trip could not take place because of the Hungarian crisis):¹

- I don't know such an artist, – deceitfully answered Gerasimov. (...)
- How can you say such a thing, Aleksandr Mikhailovich! A world famous artist, a partisan of peace.
- Then let the Peace Committee meet this peace fighter. What has the Academy of fine arts to do with that?²

Could Gerasimov's fictional incarnation, Mikhail Gerasimovich Kamyshev, have met (or rather refused to meet) Picasso's fictional friend, Jusep Torres Campalans? The question is not an easy one: it affects the diversely ambiguous fictional status of the characters involved.

The texts in which Campalans and Kamyshev appear are completely different; yet they share a tendency to blur the distinction between *notional* and *actual* ékphrasis, to challenge the current idea of what fiction is and what it is not. Campalans, as is well known, is the hero of Max Aub's playful, witty, somewhat experimental novel bearing the hero's name as its title; Kamyshev is one of the main characters in Ivan Shevtsov's *Tlia* (*The Louse* or, better, *The Aphid*) – an infamous novel-pamphlet denouncing

1 See Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (London and New York: Tauris, 1996), p. 297.
2 Ivan Shevtsov, *Tlia. Sokoly: Roman, ocherki* (Moskva: Golos, 2000), pp. 276-77.

the purported take-over of Soviet artistic institutions by a bunch of “rootless cosmopolitans” aiming to substitute Russian realist traditions with Western avant-garde, to finally undermine Russian patriotism – a violently reactionary text, complete with easily recognizable anti-semitic undertones.

When it appeared in 1964 (just a few years after Aub’s novel), Shevtsov’s opus was met with horrified remarks from both Soviet progressive and Western criticism, and since then it is only quoted as an example of bad, overtly tendentious, malignant literature.³ Apart from a legitimate curiosity to know what the bad guys (no question, bad) were writing (a whole body of literature by Soviet conservatives and/or nationalists is practically unknown to scholars), the reason for a study of what is clearly a poor piece of writing lies in its peculiar use of *ékphrasis*: the whole novel can be read as a gallery – twenty paintings are described at length, the rest consisting mostly of what could be interpreted as a historical commentary (discussions between painters, reports of exhibition openings and of debates, newspaper articles...) and merely the skeleton of a love triangle to try to hold this material together in novelistic form. What is more, the polemical aim of the work concerns, more or less overtly, the actual possibility of *ékphrasis* – in other words, the ability of a painting to speak, the relationship between the image and the spoken word is at the core of the discussion.

The Aphid came out in 1964; in the foreword to the 2000 edition, the author claims it was written in the early fifties but its publication was hampered by censorship when contracts had already been signed with the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia* and the journal *Neva*, and it was left in a drawer «for twelve years» until the notorious Manège scandal of December 1962 (when Khrushchev, while attending the Moscow Artist’s Union anniversary exhibition, was enraged by the “modernist” works he saw there, and immediately launched a massive purge): «Then I took the manuscript out of my archive, I quickly wrote

3 See, for instance, Maia Kaganskaia, ‘Shutovskoi khorovod’, *Sintaksis*, 12 (1984); Igumen Innokentii (Pavlov), ‘Tragikomiia tserkovnoi sovremennosti’, *Kontinent*, 120 (2004).

down the epilogue, and after three days I took it to the director of the Soviet Russia publishing house...».⁴ According to this version, therefore, the novel would have been completed by 1950, or 1952 at the latest. This clashes with a number of clues disseminated in the text; to mention only the most self-evident: an article written by one of the leading *cosmopolitan* critics, Semen Vinogradov, but not actually signed by him (the plot in several chapters revolves around this article and his signature) is entitled *On Sincerity in Art*⁵ – and, if this were not enough to prove the allusion to Vladimir Pomerantsev’s famous *On Sincerity in Literature* (*Novii Mir*, December 1953), we are told that the text mentions, just like its real-life model, an opposition between “sermon” and “confession” (*propoved’* and *ispoved’*); in one dialogue one of the negative characters, Boris Iulin, speaks enthusiastically about the novel *Whose Bread Do We Eat?* (about a prospector), which appeared in *Novii mir*; it is impossible not to recognize Vladimir Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone*, about an inventor, which appeared, once again, in *Novii mir*, but only in late 1956. Pomerantsev’s and Dudintsev’s are two of the most representative works from the period of the Thaw; and the term *thaw* itself is mentioned twice in Shevtsov’s novel – notably, for the first time, in Vinogradov’s speech at a debate about an All-Union exhibition: «The thaw has finally come, and artists can now create following their hearts’ dictates».⁶ Ehrenburg’s novella, which was to become eponymous for the period, was published in 1954. The epilogue comes, in fact, after a sudden cut in the story line, but the events described in the last chapters preceding it might be placed around 1955-1956.⁷ The novel is simply not worth archival research aiming to determine the exact

4 Shevtsov, pp. 4-5.

5 Shevtsov, p. 178.

6 Shevtsov, p. 201.

7 In the eleventh chapter out of fourteen, actually, a character recalls «that American donkey who painted with his tail» – the story about a picture painted by a donkey and exhibited in Baltimore comes from a December 1962 issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta* – after the Manège affair; see *Tlia. Sokoly*, p. 201 and Gian Piero Piretto, *Il radioso avvenire: mitologie culturali sovietiche* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), p. 270.

timing of its composition; what matters is that its polemical pathos is addressed to the cultural-political situation of the Thaw. In Stalin's time, in fact, such a belligerent book could hardly have been imagined. The backdating of the novel, in the 2000 foreword, evidently serves two purposes: firstly, to testify to the power of what the author is finally not afraid to refer to as the "Zionist" or even "Jewish-masonic" mob who, in his words, had already deviously occupied strongholds in the Soviet power structure in the early fifties; secondly, to justify the ill-famed, official, anti-cosmopolitan (read, once again, anti-semitic) campaign of the late forties-early fifties as an act of self-defense. In the first chapters, clearly set in the late forties,⁸ we see Shevtsov's young artist heroes, Vladimir Mashkov, Okunev, Eremenko, Vartanian, struggling for the survival of the Russian realist tradition under the cosmopolitan yoke, until the old, patriarch-like Kamyshev, undeterred by the enemy's devious attempts, publishes in *Pravda* a flamboyant article 'On the Aesthetic⁹ Tendencies in Visual Arts', which gives these artists a breath of fresh air. The head of the enemy camp, the critic Ivanov-Petrenko, though, is not afraid: «We must admit our mistakes. And wait. No panic. (...) It's only another campaign. In a couple of years they will forget about it».¹⁰ In 1949, Aleksandr Gerasimov (who was then not just a famous, respected, elderly artist, but the president of both the Soviet Academy of Arts and the Organization Committee of the Soviet Artists' Union) published an article in *Pravda*, 'For a Militant Theory in the Visual Arts', coming at the height of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign and denouncing a group of critics, most of them of Jewish origins, who were almost all arrested shortly afterward (at least one of them, Nikolai Punin, never came back from the prison camp).¹¹

8 Chapter eight is dedicated to an exhibition, held at the Tret'iakov gallery, which has much in common with the 'Thematic exhibition of works by Soviet artists' which opened on december 21st 1949.

9 Read "aestheticizing" – Soviet official language of the period shows a tendency to confuse these terms.

10 Shevtsov, p. 170.

11 See Matthew Bown, '1945-1954', *Realismi socialisti: Grande pittura sovietica 1920-1970* (Ginevra-Milano: Skira, 2011), p. 84.

It should be clear by now that the novel enjoys a rather complex relationship with actual historical facts. The hints are countless, and their status somewhat puzzling. Are they merely traces of the author's inspiration, or are they there to be grasped by the reader? A number of them surely are, but not in every instance can the right answer be easily found. Consequently: what is the status of the *ékphrasis*? Are they to be considered "actual" or "notional" *ékphrasis* of existing paintings?

The word "pamphlet" seems to indicate that the writer had concrete targets in mind; and, for instance, Andrei Siniavskii's early review repeatedly points out that it is easy to recognize who those targets are.¹² In one of his essays, however, Shevtsov recalls that, at a meeting with Dmitrii Polianskii (one of the main sponsors of the nationalists, of the so-called *Russian Party* within the higher spheres of the Party Central Committee),¹³ the latter «started to ask questions about the prototypes of Barselonskii, of Pchelkin... I eluded an answer, saying that they are collective images».¹⁴ Could this possibly mean that there are concrete prototypes, but he did not wish to mention them? Pchelkin, as we shall see, could in fact be a somewhat composite character. There is no doubt about Barselonskii, nor about Kamyshev: the easiest to identify are not the main characters in the plot, but the most representative figures in both camps. Kamyshev is Gerasimov (if his patronymic Gerasimovich is not enough, a parallel reading of the pages where Kamyshev is introduced in the novel and of Shevtsov's essay on Gerasimov will get rid of any possible doubt), and Lev Mikhailovich Barselonskii is Il'ia Ehrenburg. Once again, no misunderstanding is conceivable. Barselonskii's last name is weird enough – it reads like "from Barcelona", not a common name for a Russian, even for a Russian Jew; it probably refers to Ehrenburg's involvement, both as an *Izvestia* correspondent and as a political activist in the Spanish civil war. Barselonskii's

12 Andrei Siniavskii, 'Pamflet ili paskvil?', *Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii* (Moskva: RGGU, 2003), pp. 52, 55.

13 See Nikolai Mitrokhin, "'Russkaia Partiiā': Fragmenty issledovaniia', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 48 (2001), p. 277.

14 Shevtsov, p. 575.

biography closely follows Ehrenburg's; he emigrated to Paris before the revolution (though, contrarily to the prototype, no mention is made of political motives), there became a well-known artist, he traveled through Europe and America, and came back to the Soviet Union in the early thirties, «after he had tried every pictorial “ism” from impressionism to constructivism». ¹⁵ He had problems adapting to Socialist Realism, but during the war he received definitive recognition from the Soviet people: he did not lock himself up in an ivory tower, but worked with passion and energy, drawing posters and caricatures (a clear nod to Ehrenburg's enormously popular journalistic activity during the war)... In the opening of the epilogue, we are told that three volumes of his memoirs have been published ¹⁶ – an unmistakable allusion to the very well-known *People, Years, Life*.

The pair are well chosen: just as Gerasimov was a natural leader of conservative artists (he was forced to resign from the presidency of the Academy after the XX-th congress), Ehrenburg was regarded as a leading propagandist of progressive views, not only in the field of literature, but in visual arts as well, using his unquestionably strong position within the establishment to protect nonconformists and to promote the diffusion of Western modern art (q.v. his role in the organization of the Picasso exhibition in Moscow in late 1956 and, a few months later, of an exhibition of reproductions of French impressionist masterpieces). ¹⁷ After the Manège affair he also came under attack from the Party cultural functionaries. ¹⁸

Other characters are less clearly identifiable. Nikolai Nikolaevich Pchelkin is maybe the clearest example. An aged painter who made himself a name with wholesome realistic pictures, he used to be regarded by the young heroes as a mentor of sorts, but he is driven by cowardice – and by the malign influence of his young Jewish wife ¹⁹ – into the enemy camp. As

15 Shevtsov, p. 128.

16 Shevtsov, p. 266.

17 Rubenstein, pp. 296-99.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 That Jews were training attractive young women to marry powerful people and thus extend their malicious influence, was a widespread myth within the

a result, his artistic talent begins to wane. Pchelkin, in the first chapters, is the leader and organizer of a *brigade* working on a collective painting (he promises his young friends that this easy job will gain them official prizes); both the *good* Okunev and Vartanian and the *bad* Iulin are part of this brigade, who will show the work at the Tret'iakov gallery (at the exhibition we might suppose to be the 1949 one). In 1950, Vasilii Efanov was granted a second-level Stalin prize for the collective work on the painting *Leading People of Moscow at the Kremlin*, together with his co-authors Stepan Dudnik, Viktor Cyplakov, Iurii Kugach and Konstantin Maksimov. This seems to indicate Efanov as the prototype for Pchelkin, while Iulin – a younger painter, and a Jew, making a career for himself thanks to the support of the *cosmopolitan* critics – should be Cyplakov (in a topical scene, we will find Iulin painting erotic pictures; in a note by the Culture section of the Central Committee the showing of openly erotic pictures at Cyplakov's personal exhibition is lamented).²⁰ In the novel, however, two other paintings by Pchelkin are mentioned. The first, exhibited in the same room as the brigade work, is titled *Gorkii on the Volga*, and is described at length when Mashkov visits Pchelkin in his atelier:

Gorkii was depicted in profile. He was standing on a high green river-bank with little birches, and looking thoughtfully into the distance, at the Volga. A dry, tall, angular figure in a white Russian shirt, dark trousers and heavy boots. His jacket hanging over one shoulder. His hair was long, thick, falling over his temples and his hair at the back of his head in a heavy mane.²¹

Russian nationalist camp; see Nikolai Mitrokhin, 'Etnonatsionalisticheskaia mifologiya v sovetskom partijno-gosudarstvennom apparate', *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 3 (2002). In a later novel Shevtsov even depicts an Israel-based 'Institute for fiancées'.

20 *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura: 1953-1957: Dokumenty* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2001), p. 259.

21 Shevtsov, pp. 54-55.



Viktor Cyplakov, *A. M. Gorkii on the Volga*, 1945.
Kiev National Museum of Russian Art (Particular)

There exists a painting which this description fits well – so well, in fact, that the writer could hardly have had anything else in mind; but it was by Cyplakov, not by Efanov.

Moreover, at the opening of the exhibition comment is passed on this painting in the “good guys” group in these words: «There is something of Iulin in it».²²

Iulin is represented at the same exhibition by a painting titled *The Komsomol team*; Mashkov had known it previously under the title *The working day is over*:

Young collective-farm girls were walking back from the fields with wooden rakes over their shoulders. They wore neat brightly-colored dresses, high heeled shoes, fine little watches on their wrists, on their faces, reddened by the rays of the sunset, there was not even the least trace of weariness. They walked along singing. The rays of the setting sun played on their colorful clothes, on a distant cloud, on the green shoots in the field, on the sticky foliage of a young birch-tree.

Vladimir frowned: the composition was too well-known, it reminded him of Shishkin’s *Noon*, of Makovskii, of Fedor Vasil’ev... But they showed life itself, and in this painting...²³

The ékphrasis seems, once again, to refer to an existing painting – Andrei Myl’nikov’s *In the Fields of Peace*.

22 Shevtsov, p. 152.

23 Shevtsov, p. 113.



Andrei Myl'nikov, *In the Fields of Peace*, 1950.
Saint Petersburg, National Russian Museum

Thus, Shevtsov links his polemics against “modernists” with another official campaign, the one (diametrically opposite) against the “varnishing of reality”, which was launched in 1952 (somewhere else in the novel, Ivanov-Petrenko writes an article *On the Natural Disappearance of Conflict in Life and Art*; Vinokurov’s *On Sincerity in Art* is planned, with diabolical dialectical ability, to come immediately after it, so as to shake Soviet ideology from the other side).

But the original title of Iulin’s picture cannot but remind us of another of Cyplakov’s works, *After a Working Day*, which he showed at the 1955 All-Union exhibition, and which was described in this way in a note by the Science and Culture section of the Central Committee: «The picture’s title was used by him merely as a pretext for depicting bathing women... collective-farm women are depicted in vulgar attitudes».²⁴ The same original picture, however, seems to serve as a prototype for another fictional one; at a debate following the All-Union exhibition (clearly the 1955 one), Vinokurov praises Pchelkin’s *Women Beach* (in another CC note, Cyplakov’s painting is indicated as *The Bathers*²⁵) in these terms: «In the long years of the bureaucrats’ rule in arts, we had forgotten how to feel and to understand the Beautiful. And today we are enchanted to

24 *Apparat TsK*, p. 378.

25 *Apparat TsK*, p. 346.

welcome one of the first examples of the Beautiful, the wonderful *Women Beach* by Nikolai Nikolaevich Pchelkin».²⁶

From yet another CC note we learn that, at a 1955 debate, the critic V. Kostin praised a painting, saying that «for the first time in many years it gives an essentially correct, chaste and highly artistic representation of the naked body».²⁷ He was not, however, speaking of Cyplakov's painting – his subject was, instead, Arkadii Plastov's *Spring*.²⁸

This whirlwind of multiple references is enough to show how useless it would be to search for a prototype for every object (for every painting as well as for every character)²⁹ depicted in the novel; for every painting described it would be possible to find something similar in the reality of Soviet art, more than a single painting in most cases. This is due to both the monotony of Soviet art and to the peculiar quality of ékphrasis. One example can shed light on the way Shevtsov worked with the material offered by reality. One of the last works by Aleksandr Gerasimov, *A Shot at the People*, depicts Fanny Kaplan's 1918 attack on Lenin. The novel's epilogue begins with Kamyshev in his atelier, looking at his last paintings. One of these, which he had proposed for an exhibition and been rejected (a sign of the times!), had a long period of gestation:

He made different versions. Some drafts lay on the shelves, each one of them interesting in itself. In one Kaplan is shooting at Lenin, in another Dzerzhinskii is interrogating Kaplan. He finally chose a third one: Dzerzhinskii at the wounded Lenin's bedside.³⁰

26 Shevtsov, p. 201.

27 *Apparat TsK*, p. 395.

28 Plastov could doubtlessly expect to also be put by Shevtsov in the enemy camp; when describing a painting by Barselonskii he probably had his *Partisans* in mind: see *Tlia. Sokoly*, p. 129.

29 The evolution, in the novel, of Mashkov's career – hampered by the artistic authorities, rescued by the people's reaction to his paintings – reminds us of the story of Aleksandr Laktionov as it was told by his hagiographers (Shevtsov included); see Oliver Johnson, 'A Premonition of Victory': *A Letter from the Front*, *The Russian Review*, 68 (2009), 408-28. The first name of Ivanov-Petrenko is Osip, the same as Osip Beskin, the "liberal" director of the journal *Iskusstvo* from 1932 to 1940. The search could go on.

30 Shevtsov, pp. 268-69.

Gerasimov, on the other hand, chose the first option, although Shevtsov recalls not liking the first version of the painting when he saw it, and that Gerasimov agreed to change the composition, making it «much better, more disciplined, more harmonious».³¹



Aleksandr Gerasimov, *A Shot at the People*, 1961. Moscow, Central V. I. Lenin Museum

Did Shevtsov describe his idea of what the painting should have been, and was Gerasimov not smart enough to carry it out? Or should we interpret this as a disguise, a way of underlining, in a rather naive way, the fictional quality of the text, a transparent screen beyond which the reader was supposed to recognize the prototype? There could be some truth in this. Yet another explanation is possible. A couple of pages after the first description we encounter a more detailed one:

Neat as he always was, the knight of the revolution, Felix Dzerzhinskii, sits in half-profile in front of Il'ich and talks about the preparation for this monstrous crime against humanity itself, the shooting of Fanny Kaplan, a blow to the heart of the revolution itself. He relates to Il'ich that according to the initial plan a professional killer, a hired criminal, should have shot him. But he could not raise his hand, he refused. The second one was a white guard. He was also not able to force himself

31 Shevtsov, p. 287.

to do it. Kaplan's hand did not tremble. It was a poisonous snake, a slippery and stinking one, an enemy of life, a sower of death.

Kamyshev looks at Lenin, Lenin at Dzerzhinskii or, maybe, at the artist himself. Il'ich's look is concentrated, profound, penetrating the thick layers of the years to come. It seems that Lenin foresees new gun-shots, at Kirov, Tel'man, at Patrice Lumumba, and all the bullets poisoned with cynicism, hypocrisy and hatred for mankind. And that he warns: be vigilant!³²

The interplay of looks here has something of a reinforced standard pattern, and could indeed have something to say about the power relations implied; but it is inevitably bound to recede into the background, given the fact that the painting, in this scene, is literally speaking. It addresses the viewer directly with the voice of the dead leader: it is a painting with a message, or more precisely a command, a painting that is supposed to have an effect, a painting literally, giving orders. However, there are other words spoken, the words spoken by Dzerzhinskii and addressed to Lenin, which the viewer is meant to hear (the only way to do this is to summon up previous knowledge; it is very likely that the function of the painting is precisely to mobilize, and through this previous knowledge to communicate its injunction). In the painting a story is being told, a story comprising the scene depicted in Gerasimov's real life version.

In the representational code inherent in Shevtsov's novel these lines are, simply, an actual *ékphrasis*, a valid description of Gerasimov's work; the painting implies a narrative – the whole of it – and, though any single scene depicted can be chosen at any given moment, this does not really alter the final meaning.

The paintings by the bad guys, accordingly, are not bad because they tell the wrong story, but because they tell no story. Although some are actually described in the novel, most of them are simply impossible to describe: they are mute. Such is, for instance, the effect of the Barselonskii room, at the first of the two exhibitions: a whole, well-lighted room where a place is found for «the watercolors and satirical drawings by Barselonskii, which Ivanov-

32 Shevtsov, p. 270.

Petrenko and Vinokurov had been advertising for a long time before the exhibition's opening. Almost the whole of the walls were covered in watercolor etudes, portraits, flowers and still lifes». ³³

Another example: in a flash-back, Mashkov remembers when he had been invited to his dacha by Iulin, who still had not revealed his true nature, and he recalls thinking at the time: «What should they go to the country for? You can paint still lifes here just as well». ³⁴

Several documents from the Party and State structures, during the fifties, show the same attitude. In September 1954 G. F. Aleksandrov, the Minister of Culture, wrote that

A serious flaw in the exhibitions of visual arts held in recent years has been that many sketch-like works were shown, devoid of great ideal content. Plot-based paintings in recent years have been moved to the background or are realized in a hurry in the form of unripe canvases painted by brigades. ³⁵

In opposition to the «sketch-like works, devoid of great ideal content», the desired paintings are defined as *plot based*³⁶ (*siuzhetnye*). What the Minister wanted was *narrative* paintings.

33 Shevtsov, p. 150.

34 Shevtsov, p. 113.

35 *Apparat TsK*, p. 301.

36 Although the Russian *siuzhet* derives from the same Latin root as the English “subject”, it has hardly anything to do with subject matter; in the 1940 Ushakov dictionary it is defined as «The sum of *actions* and *events* through which the basic content of a work of art is disclosed», and the meaning of «Content, theme of something» is just quoted as a secondary figural meaning (*Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka: v 4 t.*, Moskva: Gos. izd-vo inostr. i nats. slov., 1940, T. 4, col. 630). Both Ozhegov (*Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 14-e izd., stereotip., Moskva: Russkii yazyk, 1983 – first edition 1949 –, p. 699) and the Small Academic dictionaries (RAN, Institut lingvisticheskikh issledovaniï, *Slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 4-e izd., stereotipnoe, Moskva: Russkii iazyk, Poligrafresursy, 1999 – first edition 1957-1961 – t. 4, p. 328) are analogous; only in **recent works, such as the 1992 edition of Ozhegov revised by N. Iu. Shvedova** (*Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 4-e izd., dopolnennoe, Moskva: Azbukovnik, 1999 – first edition 1992 –, p. 786) or the 1998 dictionary directed by S. A. Kuznetsov does the meaning of «theme, object of depiction in a work of visual or musical art» appear (*Bol'shoi tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, Sankt-Peterburg: Norint, 2000, p. 1300). *Siuzhet* is the word opposed to *fabula* in Viktor Shklovskii's famous studies on narrative.

The Ministry of Culture itself, however, was often accused of protecting aesthetes, by the Science and Culture department of the Central Committee, whose language is very close to Shevtsov's (his heroes, by the way, repeatedly look for help in the official sphere; at the Ministry they are always turned away, while they find assistance at the CC;³⁷ his novel could thus be possibly read as a move in a game between a "liberal" Ministry and a "conservative" Party structure). Just before the opening of the 1955 exhibition, a CC department note signaled that the selection committee «preferred works of aesthetic quality and etudes»³⁸ while rejecting realist paintings; on the same piece of paper a handwritten postscript stated that the Ministry would undertake urgent steps to provide the exhibition with «thematic works, painted in a realist manner»³⁹ (we found an analogous plot in the novel: Petr Eremenko's diorama about the Battle of Stalingrad is rejected; Mashkov appeals to the CC and Eremenko is invited to bring his work to the Tret'iakov gallery the day before the opening. This, however, happens in the chapters concerning what seems to be the 1949 exhibition).⁴⁰ Yet the CC was not satisfied: a note comments on the exhibition lamenting the fact that too much space was occupied by the work of "aesthetes" and, not content with this, these artists «did not exhibit thematic pictures. They confined themselves to landscape, still-life, portraits of the members of their family and of some acquaintances».⁴¹ It is clear from the overall context that by "thematic" paintings, here, the same "plot-based" ones are intended.

As has often been pointed out, an obsession with the word, an imposition of a literary code in every field of expression is a basic characteristic of Stalinist culture and its connection with its highly ideological mindset. This state of affairs is formulated precisely by Leonid Heller and Antoine Baudin:

37 Shevtsov, p. 215.

38 *Apparat TsK*, p. 346.

39 *Apparat TsK*, p. 347.

40 Shevtsov, pp. 145-49.

41 *Apparat TsK*, p. 378.

The weight of the literary model, ubiquitous at theoretical (both ideological and aesthetic) level, causes first of all to deny the other arts their structural qualities, to subdue their evaluation criteria to obligatory discursive categories: “verbalization of the image” in the field of visual arts, primacy of screenplay and drama in those of cinema and theater – narrative, descriptive or explicative elements flood the pictorial, musical, or cinematic work. Its function as *basic code* – no doubt predetermined by the fact that it is derived from the Verb, and thus from the ideological Verb – explains the dominant position of literature in the Soviet system of the arts and the overall “literarization” of the latter.⁴²

This predominance of the verbal descends from the urge to use every kind of medium in order to convey to the beholder the same ideological message, basically verbal; however, it comes to achieve the status of an ideological bone of contention in itself. This becomes clear in a note dispatched to the CC by Aleksandr Gerasimov himself in his official position as President of the Academy of Arts:

The principle of Party spirit in art finds its most prominent embodiment in plot-based thematic works dedicated to the events in the life of the people and in their struggle for liberation. Taking for granted a great mastery of execution, the Party spirit brings to our art the strength of a powerful weapon in the struggle for the transformation of the world, in the cause of the education of the masses. This is why the enemies of the art of Socialist Realism in their yearning to knock this powerful ideological weapon out of the hands of the Soviet people often oppose the principle of the Communist-ideal contents of our art by discrediting plot-based thematic painting and its masters.⁴³

Whereas in the CC Department papers the adjective used for the requested paintings is *thematic*, Aleksandrov reunites the terms: “plot-based, thematic” works are being discredited. Content is what is needed, and content is narrative. The ability to paint is a necessary but secondary attribute: the “mastery of

42 Leonid Heller et Antoine Baudin, ‘Le réalisme socialiste comme organisation du champ culturel’, *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétiques*, XXXIV (1993), 3, p. 337.

43 *Apparat TsK*, p. 367.

execution” can be “taken for granted” (*pri vysokom masterstve vypolneniia*), it is merely the solution to a technical assignment. Every attempt to discuss this proposition is equated to a political diversion.

Aleksandrov’s (and Shevtsov’s) targets are not only the cautious attempts of young artists to exploit the liberal atmosphere of the thaw in order to carve out for themselves some free space in which it might be possible to experiment with modernist techniques; in the notes from the CC department, among the “formalists” there appear the names of such painters as Petr Konchalovskii, Martiros Sar’ian, Grigorii Shegal’, who had been active since the first decade of the century and had more or less succeeded in holding on to their status throughout the roller-coaster years of Stalin, and also Aleksandr Deineka, Arkadii Plastov, Sergei Gerasimov, who still had strong positions in the Soviet art establishment.

Recent studies have demonstrated the existence of an underground struggle going on over the years, behind the monolithic facade of the unanimously accepted theory of Socialist Realism; the fighting camps can be roughly identified with the various pro-communist artistic associations that were disbanded in 1932 by the CC resolution, which established a unified Union founded on the unique “method”. Former members of the AKhRR, the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (notably, Aleksandr Gerasimov), the faithful disciples of the nineteenth-century tradition of the *Peredvizhniki*, confronted the followers of modern figurative styles, which in the pre-1932 situation formed the OST, the Society of Easel Painters (Deineka) and the OMKh, the Society of Moscow Artists (Sergei Gerasimov, Konchalovskii). This “modernist” party never, of course, challenged the idea of Socialist Realism nor the insistence on a correct subject matter: the object of the dispute was not *what* to paint, but rather *how* to paint it. The official 1936-1938 campaign against “formalism” consolidated the positions of the first group, although in 1939-1940 “naturalism” and the lack of “painterly culture” (*zhivopisnaia kul’tura*) became one of the main targets of often officially sponsored criticism, and the balance was once

again altered;⁴⁴ in the years of greatest ideological pressure, from 1946 up until Stalin's death in 1953, the conservative party was again in power, and during the thaw its antagonists hoped to regain positions.⁴⁵ This struggle can be interpreted as a struggle between fine drawing and color (which could take the form of a debate on the French impressionists) and is implicit in Shevtsov's *good* artists being constantly mocked by *bad* critics with charges of "naturalism" and of painting "color photographs".

Ehrenburg had taken active part in this feud since the Thirties, supporting the modern party. His 1954 *Thaw*, a very cautious attempt, though hardly his masterpiece, to attack bureaucratic habits under an impeccable Socialist-realist vest, is now remembered mostly for the icastic perfection of its title as eponymous of a whole era.⁴⁶ When it appeared, however, a fiery polemic exploded around a secondary plot concerning the visual-art world, where a cynical careerist, Vladimir Pukhov, who has sacrificed his talent for success, is confronted by his old school friend Saburov, living in poverty and painting masterpieces, ignored by the outside world. This artist character – painter, musician or writer – is a typical feature in Socialist-realist novels, and the perfect solution for a writer wishing to include personalized comments regarding his own sphere of activity. The Soviet press reacted vehemently – did the writer actually mean that official art was a sham and that real talent in the USSR was being neglected?⁴⁷ The CC Science and Culture department lamented the bad influence of the novella on young artists.⁴⁸ When Shevtsov wrote his novel (presumably in the late fifties, as pointed out above), *Thaw* was hardly a commonly understood term for the epoch; quoting the term (as we have seen, in the *bad*

44 See Susan E. Reid, 'Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The *Industry of Socialism* Art Exhibition, 1935-41', *The Russian Review*, 60 (2001), 153-84.

45 See Susan E. Reid, 'In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited?', *Kritika* 6, 4 (2005), 684-90.

46 See Benedikt Sarnov, *Sluchai Erenburga* (Moskva: Tekst, 2004), p. 402.

47 Rubenstein, pp. 280-81.

48 *Apparat TsK*, p. 260.

guys' speech) was in all likelihood an allusion to the actual book, a way of identifying Ehrenburg as one of the polemical targets.

Ékphrasis is the battle-field where the polemics rage. In *The Thaw* there is hardly a single painting described; we are told only that Pukhov paints portraits of people in power, and Saburov landscapes and portraits of his crippled wife. The very idea that words are able to describe a painting is under discussion; such is the topical scene in which Pukhov visits Saburov and sees his work, an episode marking an abrupt change in Pukhov's self-awareness:

Looking at great paintings in picture galleries, Volodya had the sense of joy and lightness he experienced when gazing lovingly at a tree in leaf or at the beauty of a woman's face. In his opinion art had once existed but had long since vanished. No wonder that in a museum there was always something a little dead the cleanliness and the faint cold and the whispering of the visitors. He was profoundly shaken by Saburov's work: this, after all, was his contemporary, his schoolfellow. And what was so difficult to grasp, he had done that landscape in this slum room, sitting with his cripple, looking out of that small window. How simple it all was and how far beyond his understanding the full tones, the depths of the dove-grey and blue sky, the clayey heaviness of the soil! Saburov showed him his latest portrait of his wife and again Volodya was overwhelmed. Glasha asked him if it was like her; he didn't answer. He only saw the painting (*on videl tol'ko zhivopis'*) the ochre of the highlights in the hair, the olive-shadowed face, the green blouse. And gradually, just as in the landscape nature had revealed itself in its poverty and splendour the melting snow, the blackness of the naked brandies, and the light blueness of the sky the miracle of the northern spring so now he saw a woman in her ugliness and her beauty. A whole lifetime would not be too much to understand her timid, plain, unnoticeable smile.⁴⁹

The actual painting remains undescribed, or, rather, what is described is only its impression on the observer. The subject matter is irrelevant, and so is its similarity to the model: "He saw only the painting" (or, better, the painterliness – *zhivopis'*), the colors.

49 Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Thaw*, in *A Change of Season*, trans. by Manya Harari (New York: Knopf, 1962), p. 86.

In the work of Ehrenburg's "real" painter there is nothing to be described; just as there is nothing to be described, in Shevtsov's novel, in the work of Ehrenburg's incarnation. If there is anything at all, interpretation is anyway problematic, as in Barselonskii's *Bad Weather* (is the meteorological title an allusion to *The Thaw* and *The Storm*, another of Ehrenburg's novels?):

... some cheerless, indefinite landscape, it was impossible to understand in which climatic belt it was located... From a professional point of view, everything was painted roughly, badly outlined, with deliberate crudity: the people, the landscape and the horses, everything was conventional both from the point of view of the drawing and from that of the painting. In fact, there was no painterly quality at all: everything was daubed in three colors, just as if the artist never knew about halftones and nuances.⁵⁰

One last example: Iulin proudly shows his old (and nearly lost) friends a book of reproductions of contemporary French painters. In a painting titled *The Catastrophe* it is not hard to recognize Picasso's *Guernica*, described from the point of view of Shevtsov's heroes: «Scraps of metal, blood, some railing, the head of a donkey, a crashed wheel, a human hand and something else that was absolutely impossible to understand, mixed up in monstrous chaos».⁵¹ This is a poor painting because it cannot be understood, and it cannot be understood because it cannot be described in words.

In the strategies of both parties, therefore, traditional topoi of *ékphrasis* are played out: on the one hand, the muteness of the picture, the inability of words to express its true quality; on the other, the deployment of the painting's narrative potential. In Shevtsov's case, however, there is one difference from the classical pattern. This pattern is described by James Heffernan as follows:

50 Shevtsov, pp. 196-97.

51 Shevtsov, p. 90.

The “pregnant moment” of an action is the point of arrested which most clearly implies what came before the moment and what is to follow it. But as the example from Homer [Achilles’ shield] shows, ekphrastic literature typically delivers from the pregnant moment of graphic art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that graphic art tells only by implication.

In fact, since the picture of a moment in a story usually presupposes the viewer’s knowledge of the story as a whole, ékphrasis commonly tells this story for the benefit of those who don’t know it, moving well beyond what the picture alone implies.⁵²

In *The Aphid*, as the example of Kamyshev’s painting of Lenin clearly shows, the reader is expected to know the story from the beginning, while the painting can (or cannot) be recognized from the actual description. Heffernan’s definition, in fact, can only apply to actual ékphrasis; in notional ékphrasis – most surely in this case – what the reader gets is only the story, and he is left to picture for himself what the resulting painting might look like⁵³ (another classical feature: ékphrasis tells more of the depicted scene than of the painting itself) or to recognize an existing one.

In Socialist realism, verbal representation is primary. Works of visual art must be based on a verbal program: ékphrasis is not accessory to the painting, it is its indispensable presupposition. When the verbal representation is at hand, pictures are simply not necessary.

52 James Heffernan, ‘Ékphrasis and Representation’, *New Literary History*, XXII (1991), 2, 301-02.

53 This is, however, a task that does not leave much to the imagination: Socialist Realism, from this point of view, is probably nearer to the pre-modern situation as described by John Hollander in his definition of notional ékphrasis: his model texts, from Homer and Hesiod to Dante, «conjure up an image, describing some things about it and ignoring a multitude of others which, particularly before 1400, we might assume were supplied by any reader who knew what images – there being so few conventional options – looked like (that is, a style could be said to be assumed by the basic terms of the descriptive language). And while we might want to suggest that a student in class imagine the reliefs in Dante as looking rather like a Pisano – rather than Signorelli’s “illustrations” of them (...) – it is still clear that, at best, we can only adduce partial or conventional paradigms in actual works of art for notional ékphrasis». (*The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, p. 209).

This is why research into the possible prototypes of the paintings described by Shevtsov is unlikely to arrive at indisputable conclusions: discussing the ontological status of his ékphrasis is simply meaningless. Anyone with a good knowledge of Soviet art could offer many more hypotheses than we have here.

Most of the protagonist's paintings are hard enough to identify, not because there is nothing similar in real life, but rather because – given the notorious monotony of Soviet art – there is too much. Let us take, for instance, his *Russian Spring*:

On a hillside huts with faded straw on their roofs, barns, fences with pots on their stakes. Behind the village narrow multicolored strips: fields bordered by the blue distance of woods. In the foreground a skinny horse harnessed to a wooden plow stands and, sadly dropping its head, bites from under its legs the young green grass shooting up under last year's grass. Rooks and crows fly in turn over the freshly plowed field with a cry. A Russian peasant in a shirt with no belt and bast shoes stands by the plow, holding out his rough hands at Lenin. Vladimir Il'ich, simple, well-known, so near that it is almost painful, stands and caresses with his hand a fair-haired, barefooted boy who had brought his father his meal and is carefully listening to the "sower and protector" of Russian land. And it seems that Lenin already sees spring in the distance with thousands of tractors going out into the endless reaches of Russia to rebuild the peasants' life.⁵⁴

"Lenin among peasants" is the subject of many paintings, several of which possess elements that bring to mind this description, but none of them seem to correspond perfectly; no existing painting can, in any case, incorporate all the information from the text – the cry of birds and the tractors that Lenin *seems to imagine*.

54 Shevtsov, p. 232.



Vasiliy Basov, *Lenin between the peasants of the village of Shushenskoe*, early fifties



Evdokiia Usikova, *Lenin with villagers*, 1959

There exists, in fact, a painting that comes very close to Shevtsov's ékphrasis, but it was only painted in 1982, eighteen years after the novel had been published: word is primary.



Engel's Kozlov, *On Life and Land*, 1982

Had Engels Kozlov's *On Life and Land* borne the title *Russian Spring*, and been signed "Vladimir Mashkov", it would have had, paradoxically, the same status as the "Campalans" paintings that were exhibited repeatedly.

This reconstruction seems to suggest an easy conclusion: that narrative, "speaking" paintings, with their embedded propaganda content, are, as such, an instrument of totalitarian thinking, while real progressive art is *mute*. In Shevtsov's intentions this was no doubt the case; and his party's defense of the 'plot-based' painting is an explicit defense of Stalinism, and even more so – of anti-semitism as a key component of Stalinism, in opposition to the liberal hopes of the *thaw* period. Yet it would be hazardous to create a generalized law out of this case.

Andrei Siniavskii's review (one of the last pieces he published in *Novii mir* before his arrest) concentrates on revealing the absurdness in Shevtsov's representation of the Soviet art-world; where in real life is this oppression of traditional realists? For a judgment on «the level of his [Shevtsov's] aesthetic ideas», "one detail" is enough:

The vulgar scoundrel Boris Iulin's recreation room is decorated with «color reproductions of naked women: Rembrandt's *Danae*, Giorgione's *Venus*, Rubens' *Susanna*, Briullov's *Bathsheba* and, of course, Renoir's young lady sitting with her back to the viewer and gently turning her head». After enumerating these creations from the genius of the world, Shevtsov explains to the reader that they helped Boris Iulin to seduce young girls.

It could be of some use to observe incidentally that the author is generally inclined to perceive the work on the nude in, let's say, an overly utilitarian way.⁵⁵

Silly as it may seem, Shevtsov's treatment of the classics of nude painting is not totally deprived of logic if appreciated within its own system. Didactic art is in fact often equated to pornography; a very suitable example can be found in Kenneth Clarke's expertise for the Longford committee on pornography:

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography. In a picture like Correggio's *Danaë* the sexual feelings have been transformed, and although we undoubtedly enjoy it all the more because of its sensuality, we are still in the realm of contemplation.⁵⁶

Communist propaganda art and pornography have one thing in common; they do not invite the observer to passively contemplate the formal qualities of the work ("painterliness"), they want him/her to identify the subject with its real life prototype and to react to it. In Shevtsov's logic, a picture of a wounded Lenin is able (must be able) to fill the viewer with horror at such a monstrous crime, which will give momentum to the struggle against the enemies of the people. In accordance with this pattern, a *Venus*, be it Giorgione's or Correggio's, is first of all a naked young woman that might well provoke a reaction just the same.

55 Siniavskii, "«Pamflet ili paskvil'»", pp. 58-59.

56 Denis O'Callaghan, *Pornography: The Longford Report* (London: Coronet, 1972), pp. 99-100.

Can we be so confident that this attitude is simply outdated, coarse and wrong? In the novel, Iulin has his “color reproductions” hanging in a backroom of his atelier, a room he uses both to paint naked models and to seduce them. Feminist criticism has denounced the «sexual myth of the artist/model relationship» where «the artist’s female model is also his mistress and the intensity of the artistic process is mirrored only by the intensity of their sexual relationship».⁵⁷ The work of Pierre Bourdieu has revealed the social relationships implied by the logic of disinterested contemplation of works of art – the same logic with which the depiction of a naked body is traditionally deprived of its sexual connotations by the appreciation of its formal qualities.

None of this is being stated in order to vindicate Shevtsov, who simply cannot be vindicated; but it can vindicate the interest in his work as a totally alien view of art, a different point of view from which a different light can be cast on our own received ideas.

57 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 50.

HOMO PICTOR:
ÉKPHRASIS AS A FRONTIER OF THE IMAGE
IN THOMAS BERNHARD'S *FROST*

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Strauch, the surgeon from the hospital of Schwartzach, a small Austrian town on the border with Switzerland, just a few kilometres from Lake Constance, secretly entrusts a young student – the narrator, whose name we will never know – to go to Weng, a village in Upper Austria, to observe the behaviour of his brother, Strauch the painter. *Frost*, Thomas Bernhard's first novel, published in 1963, presents the observations made by the young student during his twenty-seven-day mission in Weng, a place «so ugly that it's characterful; far prettier landscapes have no character».¹

«Watch the way my brother, holds his stick, I want a precise description of it».² These are the only words of Strauch the surgeon reported by the narrator, before setting out on his voyage and before the long ramblings of Strauch the painter prevail over his ability to observe an undefined illness. This phrase works as a clue and is directed at the reader at least as much as it is at the young student of medicine. Indeed, it is not rare for Bernhard to place “clues” of this sort in early pages.³

1 Thomas Bernhard, *Frost* (Frankfurt a. M: Insel, 1963), trans. by Michael Hofmann, *Frost* (New York: Vintage International, 2008) digital edition, p. 12.

2 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 14.

3 In one of his essays devoted to *Korrektur*, Emilio Garroni writes: «A clue that the theme [of Altensam, the town where the main characters in the novel were born] is central can be traced right from the first page of the novel, where it appears in the reference of the title to a manuscript left by Roithamer, who committed suicide, which the narrator friend is consulting, alongside other texts and drawings»: With regard to Altensam and everything which is connected to Altensam, with particular reference to the cone (Emilio Garroni, *Un esempio di interpretazione testuale: Thomas Bernhard's Korrektur*, in *L'arte e l'altro dall'arte: Saggi di estetica e di critica*, ed. by Emilio Garroni (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003), pp. 128-63 (p. 138).

In this way, we have summarised the basic plot of Bernhard's novel as well as the three elements at the centre of our brief analysis: the painter's stick, the landscape of Weng and the role of the young student as witness.

This analysis has two main aims: (1) to consider a special mode of notional *ékphrasis*, which for the sake of brevity we will call here "iconoclastic *ékphrasis*"; (2) to verify how painting representation methods can be used as a model for the structure of the novel.⁴

Strauch is a painter who abandoned painting some years earlier but, despite this renunciation, "cannot but continue to be a painter". All his actions – the long walks, his use of the stick – may be considered as an extension of his painting activity where the possibility itself of producing images is denied, due to an inauspicious form of Platonism on one hand and due to the "flatness" of the landscape on the other. For Strauch, recourse to verbal description is the inevitable and extreme consequence of the painting process, and it is in this sense that the *ékphrastic* process played out in *Frost* is seen to be paradoxical and iconoclastic: he constructs verbal images to state the impossibility and the failure of the pictorial image. We can read in this way not just the moments in which Strauch describes what he sees or imagines, but the whole movements he makes in the landscape of Weng, and it is in this sense that his irremediably being a *homo pictor* offers a narrative structure to the entire novel. In the Preface to the Italian edition of *Frost*, Pier Aldo Rovatti writes:

Re-reading *Frost*, I often had the desire to draw, perhaps with a small and schematic drawing, the map of the place, as you do when you enter a new house in order to have an idea of the location and the size of the rooms, the corridors and the balconies. (...) I would like to be able to draw this map, which I can see precisely in my head, but I think, then, that every reader of *Frost* certainly creates his own one, and that each one is probably different from the others.⁵

4 On the various different possible forms of homology between text and image, see Michele Cometa, 'Letteratura e arti figurative: Un catalogo', *Contemporanea*, 3 (2005), 15-29 (p. 24).

5 Pier Aldo Rovatti, *Contagio*, preface to Thomas Bernhard's *Gelo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), p. IX.

It is precisely this possibility of mapping the movements of Strauch which articulate the narrative scheme of *Frost*.

We can add a third aim which deserves a full, accurate, historic-literary study which, to which – for reasons of space and non-relevance – we can only refer here. Not only does *Frost* represent one of the best Austrian examples of anti-*Heimatroman*⁶ but, through the use of these three functional elements – and, of course, not only through these⁷ – Bernhard clearly overturns *Biedermeier* literature not without formative purposes, with Adalbert Stifter being an exemplary representative. In *Old Masters*, it is not a coincidence that Bernhard gives Reger, the main character observed by a narrator, a ferocious invective against Stifter: «If ever there was such a concept as tasteless, dull and sentimental and pointless literature, then it applies exactly to what Stifter has written. Stifter's writing is no art, and what he has to say is dishonest in the most revolting fashion»⁸ and continues in this way for a few pages before moving onto the

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- 6 Jonathan J. Long, *Bernhard: Frost*, in *Landmarks in the German Novel* (2), ed. by Peter Hutchinson and Michael Minden (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 7-24 (p. 9): «The status of *Frost* as a landmark novel, then, needs to be understood against a cultural backdrop dominated by a generally provincial orientation and by modes of dissemination that privileged small-scale ephemera. Beyond this, it also needs to be seen as a response to a cultural genre whose roots lie in the late nineteenth century, but which continued to play a major role in the immediate post-war years: the *Heimatroman*. The Austrian *Heimatroman* or rural novel, as exemplified in the work of the nineteenth-century writers Ludwig Anzengruber (1839-89) and Peter Rosegger (1843-1918), celebrated rural and agricultural life, community, rootedness, and tradition, and books by *Heimatdichter* sold by the million in 1950's Austria; [...] If Hans Lebert's 1960 novel *Die Wolfshaut* is generally identified as the first anti-*Heimatroman*, then the second is Bernhard's *Frost*». Also see Joseph A. Federico, 'Heimat, death and the other in Thomas Bernhard's *Frost* and *Verstörung*', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 29 (1996), H. 3-4, 223-42.
- 7 For a thorough comparison – to which we will return – between *Nachsommer*, Stifter's famous *Bildungsroman* and *Frost*, see Timothy B. Malchow, 'Thomas Bernhard's *Frost* and Adalbert Stifter: Literature, Legacy, and National Identity in the Early Austrian Second Republic', *German Studies Review*, 28.1 (2005), 65-84.
- 8 Thomas Bernhard, *Alte Meister: Komödie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985), trans. by Ewald Osers, *Old Masters* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010), 1989¹, digital edition.

better known yet no less cruel pages against Heidegger («Just as Stifter has totally and in the most shameless manner kitschified great literature, so Heidegger, the Black Forest philosopher Heidegger, has kitschified philosophy»⁹). Within Reger's bitter words, however, we find a further useful clue for reading *Frost*:

Stifter's descriptions of nature are always extolled. Never has nature been so misconstrued as in Stifter's descriptions, nor indeed is it as boring as he makes us believe on his patient pages [...]. Stifter makes nature monotonous and his characters insensitive and insipid, he knows nothing and he invents nothing, and he describes, because he is solely a describer and nothing else, he describes with boundless naïveté. He has the quality of poor painters.¹⁰

Stifter, indeed, was also a painter of landscapes (*Der Königssee mit dem Watzmann*, oil on canvas, 1837, Vienna Österreichische Galerie), urban views (*Blick in die Beatrixgasse*, oil on cloth, 1839, Vienna Schubert-Geburtshaus) and ruins (*Ruine Wittinghausen*, oil on canvas, 1833-35, Vienna Schubert-Geburtshaus), and for sure Reger's invective against his writing could also be extended to his paintings. As Timothy Malchow has emphasised, *Frost* can be read as an inverted Austrian *Bildungsroman*¹¹ and this inversion, we may add, is systematic and involves all the levels of construction of the novel. In particular in *Frost*, Bernhard defines

9 Bernhard, *Old Masters*.

10 Bernhard, *Old Masters*.

11 Timothy B. Malchow, *Thomas Bernhard's "Frost" and Adalbert Stifter*, p. 66: «*Frost* can be read as an inverted Austrian *Bildungsroman*. Its unnamed, first-person narrator is an impressionable young medical student who is sent to study his supervisor's deranged brother, the former painter Strauch, in the Alpine village of Weng and to report back secretly on his condition. The narrator's interactions with Strauch so transform him that he finally loses his very sense of identity. Several scholars have previously noted *Frost*'s intertextual allusions to the *Bildungsroman* genre and to Stifter's *Der Nachsommer* specifically. Bernhard's appropriation of *Der Nachsommer* enabled him to participate in emerging narratives of Austrian national identity that relied upon Stifter's work as an iconic artefact. In *Frost*, Strauch's unresolved, unspecified traumas and his concomitant tendency to see butchery as an irrepressible feature of the Alpine landscape prevent him from forming a meaningful identity».

a statute of description which will run through all his work and which, perhaps, finds its best exemplification in *Old Masters*.

Every two days for about thirty years, Reger goes to the *Bordone Room* of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna to look at Tintoretto's *White-bearded man* looking for a "clear error" which makes looking at it bearable («the complete and perfect are basically abhorrent to us»)¹² Michele Cometa shows how the descriptions of paintings in *Old Masters* reveal the relationship between *ékphrasis* and narration: «The paintings in this novel are basically a "non-place", they exist precisely because words (and music) seems to never reach them; they act, they "look at" their viewers, (...) but they communicate nothing».¹³ If in *Old Masters* paintings are words, in *Frost* they are words that absorb the visual dimension and become paintings.¹⁴ Cometa continues: «Bernhard is careful not to describe, but it is precisely for this reason that he reveals 'his' paintings in their un-describability, as an unresolved residue within the narration, referring to them and illustrating them».¹⁵ And he concludes:

In the novel we witness the systematic demolition of all the claims of positive integration between the arts and between the arts and life (...) and we know (...) that no ontological claim can be satisfied by painting, either in terms of mimesis, however platonically abhorred, or in terms of re-creation.¹⁶

12 Bernhard, *Old Masters*.

13 Michele Cometa, *Parole che dipingono: Letteratura e cultura visuale tra Settecento e Novecento* (Roma: Meltemi, 2004), p. 153. The contribution proposed here owes much to the pages which Cometa dedicates to *Old Masters*, in the last chapter, with the significant title *La visione estinta*, of *Parole che dipingono*, re-proposed, then, in *La scrittura delle immagini*. We refer to this for a rich and accurate analysis of the *ékphrastic* methods adopted by Bernhard in *Old Masters*.

14 Rovatti again emphasises: «Strauch sees the words: this claim, which seems to be ridiculous, will become a key motif in Bernhard's subsequent novels, and will be his famous words written in italics, italics as visualisation of things» (Rovatti, pp. X-XI).

15 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 156. On the relationship between painting and narrative structure in *Old Masters*, also see Ingeborg Hoesterey, 'Visual Art as Narrative Structure. Thomas Bernhard's *Alte Meister*', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 21 (1988), 117-22.

16 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 166.

And yet, this itinerary for the dissolution of the image already starts in Bernhard's first novel: word and image appear to be irremediably divided and the rambling which follows the loss of the image cannot be but destined for failure. To borrow the words of Gottfried Boehm, Bernhard seems to summarise the lesson of modernity «which consists of the growing distance which separates word and image».¹⁷

If Regen seems to accurately avoid the masterpieces housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum to prefer forgotten works, the only pictorial reference in *Frost* is, indeed, to one of the masterpieces of the Viennese museum, «a river landscape by Breughel the Elder», almost certainly *The hunters in the snow* (oil on wood, 117x162 cm, 1565).¹⁸ This is a work whose reception is not without interesting contradictions: on one hand, it is an image used (perhaps too much) for serene Christmas cards,¹⁹ on the other hand, explored by Tarkovskij's camera in *Solaris* (USSR, 1972, colour, sound, 165min), referred to in the construction of the shots of *The mirror* (USSR, 1975, b/w colour, sound, 108min), again by Tarkovskij, shot by Lars von Trier in the prologue of *Melancholia* (Denmark, Germany, France, Sweden, Italy, 2011, colour, 130min) to the notes of Wagner's overture *Tristan and Isolde*. Or again by William Carlos Williams who, in the last of

17 Gottfried Boehm, 'Bildsechreibung. Über die Grenzen von Bild und Sprache', in *Beschreibungskunst – Kunstbeschreibung. Die Ékphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (München: Fink, 1995), pp. 23-40; Italian trans. by Maria Giuseppina Di Monte and Michele Di Monte, *La descrizione dell'immagine: Sui confini fra immagine e linguaggio*, in *La svolta iconica*, ed. by Maria Giuseppina Di Monte and Michele Di Monte (Roma: Meltemi, 2009), pp. 187-212 (p. 191).

18 Actually, Bernhard, as we will see, does not offer a detailed description of the painting and the Kunsthistorisches Museum houses, as well as *The hunters in the snow* and many other works by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, another two paintings in the series of five *Months: The gloomy day* or *February* (oil on wood, 118x163 cm, 1565) and *The return of the herd* or *November* (oil on wood, 117x159 cm, 1565), both river landscapes. *The hunters*, as well as being the only snowy landscape of the three, seems to be the one which best corresponds to the human condition described by the narrator.

19 See Martin Kemp, 'Looking at the face of the Earth', *Nature*, 456 (2008), p. 876.

his collections *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* of 1962, has to dedicate a poem to *The Hunters*.²⁰

Forgive the long quotation, but this page of *Frost*, appearing right in the middle of the novel, manages to bring together many of the matters discussed here:

Watching him now, I thought a little puff of wind would be enough to knock him over. When he stopped, he marked the ground with his stick, Indian signs, he told me, that are incomprehensible to me. Some of these signs remind me of animals, a cow for instance, a pig; others are shaped like temples, or the courses of rivers. Circles. Other geometrical forms. Even up where I was, I could hear him muttering to himself. Like an old general talking to himself, and then turning to the army that will always be there in his imagination. And he looked, too, like someone bending over a staff map, with everything on it down to the least detail depending on him. He was talking in foreign languages as well. Asian words and scraps were flying through the air. The whole scene, with him the focus of it, reminded me of a painting I saw years ago once in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; I can even remember the room it's hanging in: a river landscape by Brueghel the Elder, where people are trying to find distraction from death, in which they are successful, but only, as the picture seems to be saying, at the price of infinite torments in Hell. The black of the tree stump, which shaded into the black of the painter's jacket, and the black of his pants and his stick, was finally picked up the black of the mountain peaks.²¹

The nature which Strauch and the student are passing through is deeply historical, but in the sense by which, according to

20 «The over-all picture is winter/ icy mountains /in the background the return/ from the hunt it is toward evening/ from the left/ sturdy hunters lead in/ their pack the inn-sign/ hanging from a/ broken hinge is a stag a crucifix/ between his antlers the cold/ inn yard is/ deserted but for a huge bonfire/ the flares wind-driven tended by/ women who cluster/ about it to the right beyond/ the hill is a pattern of skaters/ Brueghel the painter/ concerned with it all has chosen/ a winter-struck bush for his/ foreground to/ complete the picture» (William Carlos Williams, 'The Hunters in the Snow', in *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems: Collected Poems 1950-1962*, ed. by William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1962). On Williams' *ékphrasis*, see James Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetry of Ékphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. 165 ff.

21 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 130.

Benjamin, in German tragic drama, when «the hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world»,²² history dissolves within natural phenomena.²³ The traces of war and its horrors seem to be inscribed in the landscape, precisely as ruins which escape the linearity of history but never stop reminding. Not only because the corpses of the soldiers are still to be found beneath the snow and the pine needles but, above all, because «Nothing, not one thing, was mute. Everything continually expressed its pain. The mountains, you see, are great witnesses to great pain».²⁴ History is rooted in the landscape and the landscape resists all forms of progress. When, for example, one of the recurrent characters, an engineer who supervises the construction of a power station, focuses our attention on the time of modern civilisation, on the progress of machines and energy and on the idea of the future, he appears to be extraneous – especially to the eyes of the painter – to the crystallised time of the inn in Weng where the painter and the student are staying.

In this landscape, Strauch could disappear at any time. He himself is a creature in ruins. His obsession for illness, the constant aspiration for suicide, reveal not so much the desire to get away from life – which he has already renounced by his exile to Weng – but the desire to become a corpse, to reduce his very history to a natural phenomenon of decay. The student “sees”, in this landscape, Strauch’s end, which he will learn of, as we read in the final words of the novel, from the pages of a newspaper: «The unemployed man G. Strauch from V. has not been seen in Weng or environs since last Thursday. In view of the heavy snowfalls currently being experienced there, the search for the missing person, in which members of the police also took part,

22 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), p. 66.

23 Steven D. Dowden cleverly observes: «Bernhardian nature must be understood as a metaphorical transposition of history» (Steven D. Dowden, *Understanding Thomas Bernhard*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991, Chapter 2 *Frost and Gargoyles*, pp. 11-29, p. 19). To use Benjamin’s terms, we could say that nature may be understood as an *allegorical* transposition of history.

24 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 149.

has had to be called off».²⁵ The landscape of *Frost* is extremely topographic²⁶ and, at the same time, borderless, without “orientation”, and thereby denies the very possibility of the visual representation of memory. «Bernhard’s narrative seems to call up the founding myth of mnemotechnique, in which death sets off the work of memory. What is to be remembered in and for the present is disfigured».²⁷ Just as if the relationship between signs and meanings was irrevocably broken down.

Strauch uses his stick to draw (indecipherable) signs in the snow. At times, the stick seems to be a “substitute” for a brush, at times a real “prosthesis” in the sense given by Jaspers.²⁸ «Without my stick, I most probably wouldn’t be alive!»,²⁹ Strauch says. The stick is above all the instrument of hypotyposis: it designs signs of maps,³⁰ it indicates the path or the direction³¹ or the landscape to be observed. Here we are using the term hypotyposis in its broadest sense, summarised well in 1830 by Fontanier: «L’hypotypose peint les choses d’une manière si vive et si énergique, qu’elle les met en quelque sorte sous les yeux, et fait d’un récit ou d’une description, une image, un tableau, ou même une scène vivante».³² As an instrument of hypotyposis, for

25 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 279.

26 In a study focusing on the topographic dimension of *Frost*, Katya Krylova writes: «The Alpine topography in *Frost*, far from constituting a *Heimat*, is one characterized above all by a sense of *Unheimlichkeit*» (Katya Krylova, ‘Eine den Menschen zerzausende Landschaft, Psychotopography and the Alpine Landscape in Thomas Bernhard’s *Frost*’, *Austrian Studies*, 18 (2011), 74-88 (p. 76).

27 Bianca Theisen, ‘The Art of Erasing Art: Thomas Bernhard’, *MLN*, 3 (2006), German Issue, 551-62 (p. 559).

28 Cfr. Karl Jaspers, *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (Berlin-Heidelberg-New York: Springer, 1959).

29 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 275.

30 Bernhard, *Frost*, p. 99.

31 Bernhard, *Frost*, pp. 15-16: «If you walk the way I’m pointing with my stick, you’ll come to a valley where you can walk back and forth for hours, without the least anxiety’, he said. ‘You don’t have to be afraid of being found out. Nothing can happen to you: everything has died. (...) It’s like walking centuries before human settlement».

32 Pierre Fontanier, *Des Figures du discours autres que les tropes* (Paris: Maire-Nyon, 1827); repr. *Les figures du discours*, ed. by Gérard Genette (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), p. 390.

Strauch, the stick is an identifying element and, in a certain way, an iconographic element. With his stick, Strauch spatialises the image, renders it factual, makes it a “thing”. But the signs which Strauch reveals with his stick are already inscribed in nature. The extreme attention in tracing the signs in the snow leads him to «Asian words and scraps were flying through the air». But it is not so much a case of an Asian language, but the *language of nature*: «His powers of invention extend as far as “astonishing verbal constructions verging on the profound,” which he finds in the forests and fields, in the meadows and the deep snow».³³

The scene with Strauch absorbed drawing with his stick reminds the student of Brueghel’s *The hunters in the snow*. A Christmas card, as we said. A card in which, in a small-sized reproduction, we lose the minute details of Bruegel the cartographer. To the left of the hunters and their dogs, there is an inn with a deer sign. The sign contains the emblem of Saint Eustachius – protector of gamekeepers –, who converted to Christianity after finding a crucifix transfixed in the body of a deer. With respect to Dürer’s splendid engraving of Saint Eustachius from 1501, Brueghel would appear to expand the perspective, keeping the iconographic traits. In front of the inn, men at a fire are singeing the pig they have just finished slaughtering, as shown by the wooden vat. In the background, on the icy river, other men seem to be playing on the ice.

Bernhard’s *ékphrasis* seems to be suspended between the mimetic dimension and the notional dimension:³⁴ the direct evocation of the painting overlaps immediately with an interpretation of the human condition represented and then passes fluidly, through the “black of the tree stump” to the portrait of the painter observed by the student. Here in this section, again, Bernhard “dismantles” the painting to reveal the limits – and the impossibility – of pictorial representation. Citing the work of Brueghel, Bernhard gives us a

33 *Frost*, p. 64.

34 Cometa, *Letteratura e arti figurative*, p. 20: «In the case of literary *ékphrasis*, the distinction between *mimetic ékphrasis*, that is, that which starts from an artistic product which actually exists or existed and *notional ékphrasis*, which ‘creates’ its subject for the first time, is also decisive».

false centre using two strategies. Indeed, he does not report the title of the painting and the description offered could also refer to other paintings by Brueghel housed at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, at least to the other two in the *Months* cycle. But, above all, the description of the scene portrayed in the painting is “distributed” within other parts of the novel, including elements present in the other two paintings of the Dutch master, as if, in the memory, the three paintings merged. We refer, in particular, to two other moments in *Frost*. In the first, after a deliberate fire has devastated a farm and emergency slaughters of animals, Strauch himself says he is like a *homo pictor*:

‘You see’, he said, ‘this tree comes on and says the line I told it to say, an incomprehensible line of poetry, a line that will turn the world on its head, a so-called line against God, you understand me! This tree walks on from the left, the cloud comes on from the right, the cloud with its softer voice. I view myself as the creator of this afternoon drama, this tragedy! This comedy! Now listen, the music has come in right on cue. The music plays on the difference between my words and all others. [...] Do you see *my theatre*? Do you see the theatre of apprehension? The theatre of God’s un-self-sufficiency? What God?’³⁵

Towards the end of the novel, the scene of the slaughter returns in a sub-chapter entitled *The Animal Rustling Scum* in which Strauch has discovered in the wood traces of blood from a clandestine slaughter. And he again claims his painting activity on the landscape:

I want to call the scene ‘slaughter,’ in the moment I beheld it, everything seemed to soak into the picture. I could clearly see the butchers’ fleeing footprints. One could see also the tracks of the livestock they had stolen. One could see the darkness of the planets, and the low proletarianism of murder. I saw the word ‘innocent’ on the ground, in the snow, this low code, you must know, and the word ‘meanness’ clearly in the sky.³⁶

35 *Frost*, pp. 169-70.

36 *Frost*, p. 246.

The word here “literally” takes the place of the image and imposes itself as the ultimate consequence of the visual construction of the scene. The image reveals the vulgarity and the obscenity of the massacre. At times almost the comicality. Strauch is divided between word and image as he is divided between tragic and comic.

In this sense, it appears to be appropriate to speak of an “iconoclastic *ékphrasis*”: a description of an image or a visual work which aims to demonstrate the impossibility for the image itself to contain the sense of what is represented. The consequence of this process is that words also become “things” and things to be seen: inscriptions in nature, natural histories which are ever-increasingly hard to decipher.

Both the paradoxical statute of *ékphrasis* and the construction of Strauch as *homo pictor* who cannot paint push us, in conclusion, to ascertain how articulate and complex the structural and thematic homologies between text and image are in *Frost*, to the point of sometimes rendering themes and structure inextricable. The ontological critique of the nature of the image is combined with Stifter’s critique of the description of “beautiful nature”, and translates as a narration which is broken constantly before the fragmentariness and alongside the immensity of the natural phenomena. When, for example, Strauch imagines a park in which «Plants and music would follow in lovely mathematical alternation», he also reveals the impossibility of crossing it, of passing from one meadow “island” to the next: «‘In each case, there is a breadth and depth of water that prevents one from hopping from one island to another. In my imagining. On the piece of grass which one has reached, how is a mystery, on which one has woken up, and where one is compelled to stay,’ one would finally perish of hunger and thirst. ‘One’s longing to be able to walk through the whole park is finally deadly’».³⁷

In the same way, Strauch’s topographies design the structure of the narration of the novel. In this sense, the thematic homologies between

37 *Frost*, p. 76.

the images dreamed, indicated, constructed verbally, evoked, traced with the stick and the text also become structural homologies.

«European culture – wrote Boehm – has progressively increased the collection of images and with this the kingdom of presence too», gradually doing away with the space of the absent. «In the beautiful and new world of simulation – Boehm continues – we are actually working so that one day we can completely eliminate this space».³⁸ The renunciation of images by Strauch the painter is an act of revenge aiming to preserve and legitimise a space of absence. The resulting paradox is that the descriptions, rather than bringing text and image closer, actually serve to mark out the limits of representation in both.

38 Gottfried Boehm, *Repräsentation-Präsentation-Präsenz: Auf den Spuren des homo pictor*, in *Homo Pictor: Colloquium Rauricum*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm (München-Leipzig: De Gruyter Saur, 2001), Bd. 7, pp. 3-13; Italian translation by Maria Giuseppina Di Monte and Michele Di Monte, *Rappresentazione-presentazione-presenza: Sulle tracce dell'homo pictor*, in *La svolta iconica* (Roma: Meltemi, 2009), pp. 89-103 (p. 94).

BETWEEN ONTOPHANY AND *POIESIS*: HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL'S *DANCING STATUES*

MARIAELISA DIMINO

On May 1908 Hugo von Hofmannsthal took the first and only trip to Greece of his life, together with the French painter Aristide Maillol and his friend earl Harry Kessler, with whom he had been planning their journey since December of the previous year. Though the poet's stay in Greece had not been that pleasant,¹ his experience was later to become subject material for the three chapters of his *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. It took almost ten years for him to write the text,² testifying its particular complexity: not being a simple travel report, it attempts mapping an alien space, which extends beyond the limits of perception.

As in other texts of the same period,³ in his *Augenblicke in Griechenland* Hofmannsthal expresses his distrust of a linguistic

1 As explained by earl Kessler in a letter to his sister, Hofmannsthal decided to come back from Greece before his companions: «Hofmannsthal in Greece was a failure: *il ne se retrouvait pas*. He was almost always out of sorts, out of temper, or out of feeling with the surroundings. After ten days of much sufferings, he left us, to our mutual contentment (...) he said he could not stand the barrenness of the country (...)», Hofmannsthal/Kessler, *Briefwechsel 1898-1929*, ed. by Hilde Burger (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1968), p. 512. In particular, it is probable that Hofmannsthal was distressed by the *ménage à trois*: Kessler had in fact autonomously decided to invite the painter Maillol to join to the trip. Compare, Bärbel Götz, *Erinnerung schöner Tage: die Reise-Essays Hugo von Hofmannsthals* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992), pp. 69-74.

2 Hofmannsthal wrote the first part immediately after leaving Greece, and was published under the title of *Ritt nach Phokis: Das kloster des Heiligen Lukas* in June 1908 on the Berliner review *Morgen*; the second part, planned in 1909, was completed just in 1912 and then published in 1917 together with the third and last part of the text in the volume of *Prosaischen Schriften*.

3 See for example *Chandos-Brief* and other texts written in 1907, such as *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, *Furcht*, *Die Wege und die Begegnungen*, *Der Tisch mit den Büchern* and *Der Dichter und diese Zeit*.

dimension which seems no longer able to convey the creative power of imagination, whereas he gives the task of visualizing the invisible – of figuratively presentifying the essence of the things – to his “imaginal” writing which, unfolding with antinomic motion, pushes itself to the limits of nonverbal languages.

Paraphrasing the title of the text, it could be said that Hofmannsthal’s *Augen-Blicke in Griechenland* strives to establish a poetics of gaze, culminating in the ékphrastic moment. Hofmannsthal’s encounter with the “ancient Other” of Greece can only take place in an «inner space of writing»,⁴ in a climax of figuration reaching its highest point in the last chapter of the text, with the ékphrasis of the *Korai*-statues on display at the little museum of the Athenian Acropolis.⁵

Still, the ékphrastic moment, for which the whole text prepares us, ends up with freeing itself from the very representation from which it came, and exceeds itself by becoming metaphor of an empathic reception which, at the same time, coincides with the poietic act: while at a first sight this passage could seem a typical instance of actual ékphrasis, in the end it proves to be the ékphrasis of the poet’s vision of a mystical dance.

In the first part of the text the poet tries to draw the topography of the Greek natural landscape. It is clear from the beginning that the encounter with the ancient “other” will be only possible in the form of an encounter with a «forgotten cultural knowledge»,⁶ memory as a poietic act can emerge simply from a movement which, starting from worldly perception, turns back to the subject’s inner domain and addresses an unconscious, removed element, which can surface only in a visionary form.

In the second part, *Der Wanderer*, the emphasis shifts from physical landscape elements to the human figure. A number of

4 Compare Gabriele Brandstetter, *Tanz-Lektüren: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), p. 116. All translations are mine.

5 The statues are the Caryatids of the Erechtheion of the Athenian Acropolis. It must be noticed however, that starting from the simple data of Hofmannsthal’s text, it is not possible to identify specific characteristics which allow to distinguish these particular statues from any other *Kore*-statue.

6 Brandstetter, p. 98.

ghosts, of “faces” from the past, arises before the traveller and his companion on their way to Athens. During their dialogue, they seem to share in each other’s memories. The conjured images of their friends seem to stare at the two travellers, in a dimension in which the visual element becomes pivotal. It is by means of mutual gazes that the ghosts are given life.

The importance of the faculty of sight and its intimate relationship with the poietic act emerge from another ghostly apparition as well: though never overtly mentioned, the two travellers conjure a figure, which can be identified as Rimbaud, the *voyant* poet, who, close to death, resolutely heads towards his fate. Hofmannsthal emphasises Rimbaud’s rejection of his own poetry, thus testifying to an ambiguous relationship with the verbal dimension.

After the appearance of the ghosts, the two travellers meet a man of flesh and blood, namely the bookbinder from Lauffen am Salzach. To some extent he can be compared to the figure of the visionary poet, inasmuch as he also resolutely undertakes a voyage, which will lead him to illness and death. As Gabriele Brandstetter points out, after having tried to decipher the signs of an ancient “other” in the natural landscape, the traveller now attempts to decipher the story of the subject “other” by reading the physiognomy and the pathognomy of a “bodyscape”.⁷ His attempt, however, fails, since he seems unable to read the signs of perception.

The landscape topography and the face physiognomy finally overlap, while the verbal dimension seems unable to express the unspeakable sense of community that the traveller experiences in his “moved heart”.

However, it is only in the third part of the text, *Die Statuen*, that the subject, at the sight of the *Kore*-statues in the Athenian museum, is finally able to overcome the threshold separating the self and the world and to experience the epiphany of sense on a visual level.

7 *Ibidem.*

The arrival on the Acropolis disappoints the traveller, who feels puzzled when confronted with the irreparable sense of “pastness” in the ruins of the ancient civilization.

Not even the vision of Plato is able to revive those dead ruins, and his attempt to read Sophocle’s *Philoctetes* proves a failure as well: words are useless and everything seems strange.

Meaningfully, it is only by the crossing of a threshold – the threshold of the museum room where the statues are displayed – that the traveller is finally able to experience the imaginary encounter with the antiquity.

As Brandstetter underlines,⁸ in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* the encounter with the ancient “other” of Greece is mediated by the *Pathosformel* of emotional turmoil and deploys the *topoi* of the “divine” vision. This latter in Hofmannsthal’s text features fundamental elements of the ékphrastic discourse: first of all the inherent ambivalence of ékphrasis, which implies a problematic relation with the “other”; then the narrative’s penchant towards temporalizing the spatial nature of images, above all by means of *prosopepeia*; the complex relation between the ékphrastic fragment and the text as a whole; and, finally, the issue of the very nature of ékphrastic images.⁹

According to Mitchell, our fascination with the ékphrastic discourse derives from the fact that it must pass through three stages: that of the “ékphrastic indifference”, *i.e.* the «commonsense perception that ékphrasis is impossible»,¹⁰ that of the “ékphrastic hope”, «when the impossibility of ékphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor»,¹¹ and that of the “ékphrastic fear”, «the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that (...) the figurative, imaginary desire of ékphrasis might

8 Brandstetter, p. 101.

9 These issues have been discussed in William J. T. Mitchell’s text *Ékphrasis and the Other*, originally published on the review *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 91 (1992), 695-719, and then included in the volume *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 151-82; as well as in James Heffernan’s book, *Museum of Words: The Poetry of Ékphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993).

10 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 152.

11 *Ibidem*.

be realized literally and actually».¹² Starting from the sceptical point of view of the “ékphrastic indifference”, the specific aim of the ékphrastic discourse is, therefore, the overcoming of the inherent otherness of the image-text relationship. Such otherness, according to the scholar, appears by no means to be the result of the simple phenomenological difference between a speaking/seeing self and a mute/seen object, but it «takes on the full range of possible social relations inscribed within the field of verbal and visual representation».¹³

Hofmannsthal’s ékphrastic passage represents the relationship of otherness between the male speaking/seeing self and the female statues, a kind of relationship that Mitchell defines, among other things, as an inherent feature of the classical ékphrastic genre.¹⁴ Hofmannsthal’s statues however do not seem to share the traditional passivity of the female instance. Indeed, on the one hand they are glanced at, but, on the other hand, they glance back at the observer:

In that moment something happened to me: a nameless fear; it did not come from outside, but from somewhere in the immeasurable distance of an inner abyss; it was like a lightning: a much stronger light than there really was, instantly filled the room, square as it was, with its whitewashed walls and the statues that stood there: the eyes of the statues suddenly were turned towards me and a completely unspeakable smile appeared on their faces. To me, the actual meaning of this moment was this: I understood this smile, because I knew: I do not see it for the first time. In some way, in some world, I have already stood before this, I have already nursed some kind of communion with this, and since then everything in me was waiting for such a terror, and so, dreadfully, I had to touch myself in order to become once again he who I was.¹⁵

Mitchell’s stage of ékphrastic fear seems to be represented here: a nameless fear (aphasia, denial of speech) arises from

12 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 154.

13 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 162.

14 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 168.

15 Hofmannsthal, *Augenblicke in Griechenland* (Zürich: Im Verlag der Arche, 1949), p. 57.

the sensation that the statues may be endowed with gaze, or, in other words, that they may appropriate the subject's identity, thus turning him into a passive object.

It is only by means of another antinomic opposition that the ékphrastic discourse can take a turn: the binary relation between space and time is deconstructed in favour of their synthesis in the complex unit of "movement". The tension thus created involves the seeing subject as well as the seen object, and sets both of them "in motion":

I say «since then» and «then», but nothing of the contingency of time could have an echo in the entrancement wherein I had lost myself; it had no duration and the substance it was filled with, was beyond time as well. It was like being interwoven with it, some common flowing together towards somewhere, a steadily rhythmic movement, stronger and other than music, towards a goal; an inner tension, a setting in motion; it was like a trip; (...) somewhere a ceremony was taking place, a battle, a glorious sacrifice: such was the meaning of this turmoil in the air, of the expanding and shrinking of space, – this was the unspeakable exaltation within me, this overflowing sociability, alternating with this limp death-blown despair: then I am the priest who will perform this ceremony – as well as the victim, which will be sacrificed.¹⁶

Once again the poet/observer is in a middle position, since he is at once both priest and victim of a «glorious sacrifice»: the hint to sacrifice seems here to establish a connection between a symbolic dimension and a bodily dimension as the very foundation of the poetic act.¹⁷

16 Hofmannsthal, *Augenblicke in Griechenland*.

17 In his *Rede über Poesie*, Hofmannsthal had already made clear that he regarded the symbolic dimension as the very foundation of all poetry: «Weißt du, was ein Symbol ist? ... Willst du versuchen dir vorzustellen, wie das Opfer entstanden ist? (...) Mich dünkt, ich sehe den ersten, der opferte. (...) Daß das Tier für ihn sterben konnte, wurde ein großes Mysterium, eine große geheimnisvolle Wahrheit. Das Tier starb hinfort den symbolischen Opfertod. Aber alles ruhte darauf, daß auch er in dem Tier gestorben war, einen Augenblick lang. Daß sich sein Da sein, für die Dauer eines Atemzugs, in dem fremden Dasein aufgelöst hatte. – Das ist die Wurzel aller Poesie (...)», Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Rede über Poesie*, in *Ausgewählte Werke in zwei Bänden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1966), p. 137.

In the “ékphrastic indifference” stage that follows, the statues once again reveal their objectual materiality, thus appearing as strange figures:

Everything pushes to a resolution, ends up with the overcoming of a threshold, with a landing, a ‘here’ – with my being here, amongst them: still, here is the whole present in their fluttering clothes, in their knowing smile: and all this already dies down in their petrifying faces, it dies down and is gone; nothing remains, apart from a death-blown despair.

There are statues around me, five, only now I am aware of their number, strange they stay before me, grave and stony, with their slanting eyes.¹⁸

Once ékphrastic indifference and fear are overcome, the new stage of the ékphrastic hope begins:

(...) from where else rose in me this foreboding of a departure, this rhythmic expanding of the atmosphere (...) – which threatens me or which I can dominate? There is, I answered to myself, infallible like a dreamer, there is the secret of endlessness in these clothes. Not just these ruffled clothes, which come down from the shoulders to the knee – no – the whole surface is clothes and weaving veil, a manifest secret. Is not the blowing curtain over there a weaving part of mine as well? Did not I feel invisible limbs, that like in a dream I move? Did not I feel myself leaving up the veil with unearthly hands, while entering the temple of eternal life?¹⁹

As Brandstetter underlines, «the veil opposes the “dialectics of inside and outside” to the *topos* of the body and of the space as a whole (...) it appears as the border between body and space, but at the same time it is synonym of a “manifest secret”, of an interpenetration of inside and outside».²⁰ In this context the *Körperbild*²¹ plays a fundamental role as a symbolic

18 Hofmannsthal, *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, p. 57.

19 Hofmannsthal, *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, pp. 59-60.

20 Brandstetter, p. 285.

21 The idea of *Körperbild* (body image) was introduced by Gabriele Brandstetter as a precious interpretive device of the relationship between the visual and the verbal. As the scholar writes, «by means of the “body image” formula it is possible to link the issue of the physical presence and that of the moving body

construction connecting word and image: it becomes a medium of representation of unspeakable images inherent to a liminal area of consciousness, thus referring on a symbolic level to a pre-logical and archaic stage of consciousness, in which the distinction subject-object is not yet present.

It is only abolishing this difference that the epiphany of the ancient becomes possible. The veil, which should represent a demarcation line of inner and outer space, visible and invisible, male and female, present time and antiquity, textual and visual, here turns into the sign of the moving body in dance: the dancing *Körperbild* becomes therefore the *imagetext*²² in which otherness is overcome. Dance indeed represents the complex term, implying both the modes of time and space in an interdependent relationship,²³ just as it is in the case of literature:²⁴ by means of a synecdochic substitution the imagetext of the dancing *Körperbild* becomes the metaphor of Hofmannsthal's imaginal writing – a form of writing which unfolds the imaginative power

representation as a changing sign, which is first of all located in the symbolic field of the non-verbal and non-discursive, with the research on literary texts and on writing: inasmuch as we have a semiotic system trying to conjure up the bodily presentness in the *delay* of representation. The images of the body – as a typologically oriented reading grid – make it possible to mediate between enactment and discursivity». Brandstetter, p. 26.

22 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 154.

23 Gallese has explained the relationship between space and time from a neuroscientific point of view: «the mimetic mechanisms are probably decisive in allowing the existence of a presumably very ancient form of artistic expression, maybe the most ancient: dance. Dance puts together, by means of movement and rhythm, the two aspects which define our worldly horizons: space and time. The rhythmic articulation and the topology of action “artistically” unfold in a dimension, which frees the medium of expression, the body as a whole, from its usual and daily utilitarianism». Vittorio Gallese, ‘Il corpo teatrale: Mimetismo, neuroni specchio, simulazione incarnata’, *Culture Teatrali*, 16 (2008), 13-38.

24 See William J. T. Mitchell, ‘Spatial Form in Literature. Toward a General Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (Spring 1980), 565: «Instead of Lessing’s strict opposition between literature and the visual arts as pure expressions of temporality and spatiality, we should regard literature and language as the meeting grounds of those two modalities, the arena in which rhythm, shape, and articulability convert babbling into song and speech, doodling into writing and drawing».

of antinomy,²⁵ and in which the performative act of *Zeigen* (showing), typical of ékphrastic discourse, triggers the reader's productive act, his/her *Vorstellung* (imagination).

Moreover, as Brandstetter specifies, «the quotation of Goethe's "manifest secret" seems to go back to an artistic-religious frame of reference».²⁶ Indeed, with a sort of inversion, Hofmannsthal reveals the visionariness of the description: the epiphany does not come from outside, it is by no means the result of the sight of the statues, but emerges from the depths of the subject's self just as a *déjà-vu* or a dream: «I did not even know whether I had thought this or if it had happened. There is a sleep in wakefulness, a sleep of just a few breaths, which holds a greater power of transformation and is more similar to death, than the long deep sleep of the night».²⁷ Thus, Hofmannsthal's ékphrastic passage not only foregrounds the issue of a link between visible and invisible, *i.e.* between the sensory experience of sight and the emergence of endogenous images. Indeed, *Augenblicke in Griechenland* also participates in the contemporary debate on the physiological and psychological nature of visual perception²⁸ and is linked to the issue of its repositioning in the context of an interpretive act with symbolic character. Hofmannsthal's text seems to represent some sort of reversal of the seeing process, which results in «erasing seen images by means of inner images».²⁹ These latter seem to share the liminal and pre-logical nature of hypnagogic vision, but go far beyond, since it is returned to writing – and to visibility – through processes of introjection and symbolic interpretation of the visual element.

25 See Grazia Pulvirenti, *La farfalla accecata* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2008), pp. 19 ff.

26 Brandstetter, p. 285.

27 Hofmannsthal, *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, p. 60.

28 It is known from some notes of 1891 that Hofmannsthal was familiar both to Schopenhauer's essay *Versuch über das Geistersehen* and to Nietzsche's *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, which had been in turn influenced by Tylor's animistic-anthropological theories as well as by Helmholtz' theories on the physiology of vision. See Hubert Treiber, 'Zur *Logik des Traumes* bei Nietzsche', *Nietzsche-Studien*, 23 (1994), 1-41 and Pulvirenti, p. 149.

29 Pulvirenti, p. 151.

Thus Hofmannsthal's writing becomes a «writing of the invisible», inasmuch as it expresses the «basic paradox of every process of image creation: making visible in an image something which did not originate from some sensory perception coming from the outer world».³⁰

The emphasis on the motif of the chiasmus of the visible, which implies the idea of a «steadily reversibility between subjective and objective dimension»,³¹ suggests the overcoming of sensory perception, so that the «represented thing enters a new level of aesthetic presence in which the image materiality is nullified in favour of an essence which reveals itself in its very appearance».³²

The basically notional quality of Hoffmannsthal's ékphrastic discourse, and maybe, according to Mitchell, of ékphrasis *tout court* is thus made clear: as the scholar underlines, «the textual other must remain completely alien; it can never be present, but must be conjured up as a potent absence or a fictive, figural present».³³

Under this perspective, writing finally moves away from a merely verbal and descriptive level and acquires the polysemic qualities as well as the expressive power of a dynamic image: it evolves into a painting of imagination and, by means of symbolic thought, allows to swerve to the “other” dimension.

30 Pulvirenti, p. 152.

31 Pulvirenti, p. 25.

32 Pulvirenti, p. 26.

33 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 157.

THE OPTICAL WONDERS OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MICROSCOPIST: GEOMETRIC CRYSTALS AND GOTHIC *RÊVERIES*

FLORIANA GIALLOMBARDO

The Microscope, Scientific Discourse and the Challenge of the Visible

If the concept of “notional *ékphrasis*” is closely connected to the game of falsification, where the dizziness of transmedial translation undermines questions about the existence of the referent in literary descriptions¹ – this clearly imaginary feature seems to be incompatible with scientific prose, whose semantic organization seeks univocal denotation, avoiding the connotative ambiguity of literary language. Despite the programmatic statements of stylistic sobriety in scientific communication, which date back to the Royal Society, epistemology and literary criticism have highlighted its rhetorical strategies and mythopoetic resonances, especially, but not only, in the popularization of science.

These rhetorical aspects clearly emerge when scientific observation crosses the threshold of the invisible: accessing the microscopic and telescopic worlds, scientists described these new horizons of visual experience by an unprecedented effort of literary imagination. In the nascent scientific prose of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, such descriptions were a crucial episode, where experimental observation asserted its epistemological legitimacy through its own modes of representation, both verbal and visual. The new field of vision produced by microscopic observation gave rise to the peculiar

1 On the definition of notional *ékphrasis* by John Hollander complementary to mimetic *ékphrasis* see Michele Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2012), p. 48.

phenomena of “visual desperation” (as James Elkins calls it),² where scientific prose is forced to muster all its analogical and imaginative resources. The description is then resolved into a series of rhetorical strategies based on “hermeneutic integration”: verbal representation faces the challenge of translating visual experience from the unknown (microscopic morphology) to the known (visual culture and perceptual experience of the observer and his audience).³

However, while stretching the analogical tension of the verbal description, the aim of scientific descriptions is ultimately to adhere as faithfully as possible to the visual experience. The imaginative development of these themes belongs more correctly to the context of literary writing, which seized these new optical devices and turned them into an inexhaustible resource of topics and themes, which lasted until the nineteenth-century. In some scientific writings, however, the “naturalistic description”, despite the stylistic sobriety of the dominant model, can turn into an authentic “notional *ékphrasis*”: in these cases, microscopic observation was described as an “optical wonder”, enabling audiences to access the visual experience of microscopy through descriptions that can be seen as imaginative works of art. The case at issue, however, belongs to the field of scientific popularization, and is part of the “daring syncretism” between rhetoric and science that characterizes the teaching of the scientists of the Society of Jesus, which was investigated by Andrea Battistini – who placed an approach to scientific literature within the broader context of the history of ideas, starting with an analysis of scientific popularization for the well-educated reader.⁴

The literary account examined in this work concerns the development of the optical wanders, namely “vedute

2 James Elkins, ‘On Visual Desperation and the Bodies of Protozoa’, *Representations*, 40 (1992), Special Issue: *Seeing Science*, 33-56.

3 See Cometa, *La Scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 119, 122-123, 129.

4 Andrea Battistini devotes a chapter of his *Galileo e i gesuiti: Miti letterari e retorica della scienza* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), pp. 349-66, to the circulation in the literary sphere of the work of one of the popularizers of science, Francesco Lana Terzi, whose *Prodromo all'arte maestra* (1670) had revived the dream of human flight, a century before the Montgolfier brothers.

d'incantesimo”, unfolding under the gaze of a Sicilian botanist and microscopist, Filippo Arena, who took part in the complex eighteenth-century debate on embryonic development, between the vitalists and the mechanists. The text, though not seen as in the top ranks of the history of science – his stylistic eccentricity is one of the grounds for exclusion – enables us, however, to take a plunge into the visual culture of the time, whose aesthetic background reappears as scientific discourse that seeks legitimacy as physico-theology. Finally, it provides access to visual imagery of long standing which, due to optical devices linked to a persistent culture of the spectacle, developed rigorous and relentless theoretical speculation about the reality of appearances.⁵

The Rhetorical Register in Naturalistic Description

From the essential survey of Italian scientific prose conducted by Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, it is possible to infer some of the “formal and thematic characteristics” of seventeenth and eighteenth-century naturalistic descriptions, which are largely focused on the literary representation of microscopic observation.

This author, through an accurate analysis of the terminological and stylistic characteristics used by Italian microscopists and scientific communicators (Vallisneri, Magalotti, Spallanzani), sketches the outlines of what, referring to W. J. T. Mitchell, can be defined as a strategy of verbal appropriation of the visual.⁶ The predominant type of naturalistic description had its origin in the *Accademia dei Lincei*, whose scientific literature had become a stylistic model during the eighteenth-century.⁷ Among the predominant linguistic features, Altieri Biagi identifies the

5 See Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Aberrations. Essai sur la légende des formes: Les perspectives depraves- I* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

6 See Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 151-81.

7 Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, *Lingua della scienza fra Sei e Settecento*, in *Letteratura e scienza nella storia della cultura italiana*, ed. by Vittore Branca and others (Palermo: Manfredi, 1978), pp. 103-62. The work was then collected in Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, *L'avventura della mente: Studi sulla lingua scientifica* (Napoli: Morano, 1990), pp. 169-218.

tendency towards analogy and comparison, which obviates the difficulties in naming the elusive microscopic morphologies referring them back to precise analogies with the natural and human world, through circumlocutions and figurative language. She also points out the setting of a sequence of descriptive moments, modeled after Francesco Redi's *Esperienze sopra la generazione degli insetti*: habitat, behavior, external forms and internal structure.⁸ Moreover, the rhetorical rules for the literary representation of observation were a topic for scientists' meta-linguistic reflection: "description" was one of three levels of style in which Lazzaro Spallanzani classified scientific prose. Characterized by «simplicity, sharpness and non-sublimity», it was provided, however, with «a certain nobility, expressive strength and propriety», and held an intermediate position between the essentiality of "definition" and the strong stylistic effort of "natural history", modeled on civil history.⁹ The definition of a specific rhetorical level for naturalistic description was part of a broader reflection developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries – from Galileo to the Royal Society to Muratori – on the relationship between literary and scientific language, where, in the wake of reforms in literary language, scientists sought to establish the specificity of scientific discourse.¹⁰ The new scientific language, in fact, having greater complexity and the need for more exactitude than literary language, emphasized its difference from rhetoric and, in particular, from the poets' right to lie. However, scientific essays of microscopic and telescopic observations of the time, reveal the remarkable rhetorical effort

8 As Altieri Biagi pointed out the remaining typological features in naturalistic description, are the emphasis on the beginning of the description, indicated by an unusual word order (in Italian, the inversion of subject-verb); the use of diminutives, which connote in a domestic and emotional sense a science whose deep reflections are now applied to everyday objects; synonymic oscillation that often involves associating a common word to the more specialized scientific term. See Altieri Biagi, *Lingua della scienza fra Sei e Settecento*, pp. 129-31.

9 Lazzaro Spallanzani, as quoted in Altieri Biagi, *Lingua della scienza fra Sei e Settecento*, p. 160 (translation by author).

10 Biagi, *Lingua della scienza fra Sei e Settecento*, pp. 103-62.

used in the descriptions of the lowest rungs of the so-called *Chain of Being*, showing a precise awareness of the philosophical changes induced by the discoveries of “new worlds”.

The minimal immensities revealed by the microscope induced scientists, despite the frugal style of reports, to unreservedly express an attitude of wonder, an excitement of the imagination – in a poetic dismay found across various levels of communication: scientific texts (Vallisneri, Spallanzani, Bonnet); explanatory scientific texts for the educated and curious (Baker, Fontenelle, Algarotti) and their literary counterparts (Swift, Sterne).¹¹ An image made its way through the lens of the telescope and the microscope revealing two opposed infinite worlds that irreversibly put in question the status of man, stimulating the literary imagination in its fantastic, utopian and satiric developments.¹²

11 See *La finestra del testo*, ed. by Valeria Cammarata (Roma: Meltemi, 2008).

12 In the same context in which Altieri Biagi developed his linguistic analysis of seventeenth-century scientific texts, Ezio Raimondi reconstructed the different approaches through which literary criticism interpreted the relationship between the “two cultures” (this contribution is collected in *Letteratura e scienza nella storia della cultura italiana*, ed. by Vittore Branca, pp. 9-47). Raimondi recognized English literary critics as formulating new interpretative criterion for the reconstruction of the mental habits of an era which Marjorie Hope Nicolson took into account in her acute analysis of seventeenth and eighteenth-century English literature, tracing the «constellations of images» that migrate through different provinces of thought, following the direction outlined by Lovejoy (Raimondi, 1978, p. 20). The visual experience conveyed by optical devices had, in fact, an exceptional power to transform the way the world was seen; its transfer from science to literature generated new poetic themes, language forms and literary fashions. In the context of contemporary literary theory, the relationship between the verbal and the visual has become part of Comparative Literature, which has undertaken a close dialogue with those disciplines devoted to the study of images, following the *iconic turn* that took place in the humanities. Identifying the very foundation of culture in the intermedial game between word and image, the literary text can be analyzed as an archive through which one can reconstruct the “scopic regime” of an era, tracing profound cultural changes in the ever changing interrelation between “device”, “image” and “gaze” (see generally Cometa, *Letteratura e dispositivi della visione nell'era prefotografica*, in *La finestra del testo*, ed. by Valeria Cammarata; and Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*). This kind of approach is effectively applicable to the study of scientific culture, in which both the role of the imagination in the creative phase of discovery, and the representation of perception through optical devices, constitute historiographical problems

The Visual Culture of Microscopy

Among those historians concerned with scientific visual culture, Martin Kemp was the most attentive in highlighting how essays of the great seventeenth-century Dutch and British microscopists were influenced by visual associations and representational problems that were central to the art of their generation. Thus, in Robert Hooke there is an immediate comparison between a seed of thyme seen under a microscope and «a very pretty Object (...) namely, a Dish of Lemmons plac'd in a very little room» – with implicit reference to the Dutch still life – and with «delicate, strong and most convenient Cabinets» duly decorated, where nature has «her Jewels and Masterpieces». Here we find a clear reference to those collections known as “treasure houses” – also cited by Constantijn Huygens – in which nature’s and man’s creation were collected to demonstrate the same careful labour of the Great Architect.¹³

These topics develop what Altieri Biagi had already pointed out concerning the analogical attitude in the language of microscopists, aimed at putting into words new observations through circumlocutions, concrete analogies and figurative language. In addition, they provide clues about the ways in which writing – also scientific writing, while focusing on a referential register – appropriates the visual. When describing the unknown, authors use “forms of integration” that address the habitual cultural and perceptual experiences of its target audience, in “a co-operative dimension of interpretation”.¹⁴

of long standing. Regarding the latter issue, studies that investigate the verbal aspect of representation – calling into question the rhetorical mode of language – show their inevitable reciprocity with those concerned with visual representation in the sciences. For bibliographical guidance on the subject, see generally James Elkins, ‘Art History and Images That Are Not Art’, *The Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), 553-71, though mostly focused on English speaking studies.

13 As quoted in Martin Kemp, ‘Taking it on Trust: Form and Meaning in Naturalistic Representation’, *Archives of natural history*, 17 (1990), 127-88 (pp. 131-32).

14 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*.

The widening of the visual horizon by these unusual and bewildering “naturalia”, therefore, is linked to a repertoire of familiar images, and the game of metaphorical reference, by proposing comparisons with “artificialia”, implicitly refers to the cultural experience of *Wunderkammern*, in which works of nature are placed in direct continuity (if not in open competition) with works of art.¹⁵ This is a typical strategy in the rhetoric of wonder present in almost all accounts of seventeenth, eighteenth-century microscopists (in works such as Hooke’s *Micrographia*, 1665, and in *Microscope Made Easy* by Henry Baker, 1744) whether the authors are amenable to a mechanistic view of the universe, or not. But this also became a crucial issue within the physico-theological tradition: the infinite expansion of visibility allowed by visual devices gave an opportunity to demonstrate the harmony of creation since even in the most inaccessible regions of the Chain of Being; this harmony was read through the filter of collective imagery that consisted also of artistic and aesthetic preferences.¹⁶

Paradoxical Ékphrasis: The Optical Wonders of an Eighteenth Century Microscopist

The systematic confusion between art and nature, typical of the literary descriptions of microscopic observations, leads us

15 See Martin Kemp, *Seen and Unseen: Art, Science, and Intuition from Leonardo to the Hubble Telescope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. VI; see also (on the visual culture of *Wunderkammern*) Horst Bredekamp, *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglauben: Die Geschichte der Kunstkammer und die Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1996); Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *Storia di sei Idee: L’Arte, il Bello, la Forma la Creatività, l’Imitazione, l’Esperienza estetica*, ed. by Krystyna Jaworska (Palermo: Aesthetica, 2002), for a history of aesthetic thought about art and nature.

16 See generally Bernard Lightman, ‘The Visual Theology of Victorian Popularizers of Science: From Reverent Eye to Chemical Retina’, *Isis*, 91 (2000), 651-80; Cometa, *Letteratura e dispositivi della visione nell’era prefotografica*, pp. 31-40 (on the visual rhetoric of natural theology, as a long-term phenomenon in scientific culture).

into the uncertain territory between the “art of nature” and the “nature of art”, where the merging of the boundaries between the two spheres had sparked Baroque aesthetic speculation, which continued as a *basso continuo* into the aesthetics of the Picturesque.¹⁷ An example of this kind of paradoxical ékphrasis in scientific writing is contained in a Botanical text: *La natura e coltura de' fiori fisicamente esposta* (1767).¹⁸ The author, the Jesuit Filippo Arena, is not a leading figure in the history of science, but his work – as part of an up-to-the minute team of experimenters working in Jesuit colleges between 1730 and 1760 – bears witness to the high level of Sicilian scientific culture that animated cultural dialectic both inside and outside the Society of Jesus. Arena is a knowledgeable scientist, aware of the scientific literature of his time, an experimenter and a technologist, whose interests – originally related to optics and astronomy – turned to the epistemologically more neutral field of botany due to the changed cultural climate of 1759.¹⁹ His work, known to art historians for his valuable engravings of flower specimens, drawn

17 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Aberrations: Essai sur la Légende des Forme*; also see Roberta Coglitore, *Pietre figurate: Forme del fantastico e mondo minerale* (Pisa: ETS, 2004).

18 Filippo Arena, *La natura e coltura de' fiori fisicamente esposta in due trattati con nuove ragioni, osservazioni e esperienze: A vantaggio de' Fioristi, de' Fisici, de' Botanici, ed Agricoltori* (Palermo: Angelo Felicella, 1767). The work is divided into three volumes, the third of which consists of illustrations. For a description of the complex events of its publishing see Giuseppe Lo Iacono, *Le varie edizioni del volume «La natura e coltura dei fiori» di Filippo Arena*, in *Filippo Arena e la cultura scientifica del Settecento in Sicilia*, ed. by Oscar Alberghina, Ignazio Nigrelli and others (Palermo: I.L.A. Palma, 1991), pp. 95-106.

19 See Pietro Nastasi, *Filippo Arena: Fisico e Matematico*, in *Filippo Arena e la cultura scientifica del Settecento in Sicilia*, pp. 107-45 (p. 127). In the general rethinking of the contributions of the Society of Jesus to scientific culture – specifically in the spread of Newtonian philosophy – Filippo Arena, within Sicily, has been the subject of particular historiographical attention, which found expression in the conference of Piazza Armerina in 1991: see *Filippo Arena e la cultura scientifica del Settecento in Sicilia*, ed. by Oscar Alberghina and others; and *La cultura scientifica e i gesuiti nel settecento in Sicilia*, ed. by Ignazio Nigrelli (Palermo: I.L.A. Palma 1992). The first survey of the scientific production of the Jesuits in the eighteenth-century Sicily was by Aldo Brigaglia and Pietro Nastasi (Brigaglia-Nastasi, 1986).

by the author himself,²⁰ is apparently a floricultural manual, but it actually provides an account of the original experimental experiences conducted by Arena when studying the process of generation, a crucial scientific issue at that time.²¹

What is interesting for our purposes here is that the literary description of microscopic observation is implemented through an *ékphrasis* of fictional works of art, placed in the theoretically most meaningful pages of the text. The observation of common regularities in the microscopic structures of the organic and inorganic world – a *topos* of natural geometry – is expressed with a soaring rhetoric, transforming the complex structures into a journey through an enchanted Lilliputian vision, where the reader's extradiegetic look is repeatedly led to dwell on fictional works of art and fantastic architectural landscapes, meticulously described according to specific stylistic rules. Under the attentive gaze of the microscopist, the graceful crystallizations of common salt, show a surface:

nobly framed by quadrilateral frames, parallel to the sides of the cube, some of these frames are loosely curled, and rippled, while others are fluent and smooth – one thinks of Rococo cartouches – but all so

20 There are sixty-five chalcographic engravings of botanical subjects, *in folio*, partly drawn from *Phytanthoza Iconographia* by J. W. Weinmann. The illustrations show a particular attention to the graphic representation of surfaces, colors and size of the subjects depicted. The engravings, by the hand of Arena himself, are realized with the help of his confrere Mario Cammareri – also active at the Collegio Massimo of Palermo, with similar research and experimental interests.

21 Ignazio Nigrelli states in this regard that Arena's unconventional position on such a delicate matter as sexuality, although only of plants, placed him in an awkward position, due to its innovative theories that could not be appreciated by the conservative leadership of the Society of Jesus. For Nigrelli then one should connect this point with the vicissitudes of Arena and his book. *La natura e coltura de' fiori* was allowed to be published after much delay, in April 1767, shortly before the expulsion of the Company of Jesus from Naples and Sicily; it was immediately circulated by the publisher, Angelo Felicella, through two reprints under a false name (attributing it to Ignazio Arena, brother or nephew of the author). On the other hand, after the expulsion, one loses track of Filippo Arena, who, during his twenty-year stay in the Papal States, published only once, a book on physics, and then ceased to publish. See Nigrelli, 1991, pp. 168-69.

fine, so well arranged, that no art can imitate them. The frames then adorn, and enclose in the middle a beautiful picture, such as a painting or bas-relief, which not rarely represents from life what fantasy dictates to us as more appropriate, now a pleasant landscape, now a colonnaded atrium, now a gallery of statues, now other pleasant representations.²²

Even more amazing are the beautiful perspectives recognized in alum crystals, where the landscape is expressed with such naturalness that it seems a wondrous vision.²³ The microscopic landscape is transformed into a fictional urban scene, similar to an idealized city whose post-baroque urban structure is ordered according to an orthogonal grid. The movement of the eye has a topographical view, over a landscape whose features follow one after the other in an accumulation of precise descriptions:

Here at each point there is something worth seeing, here a delightful garden, there a pleasant orchard, all planted with excellent design, with order and symmetry of parts, and distinction of straight avenues, which, running the entire length and width of the garden, cross each other at right angles. Elsewhere you may see thick woods, or rugged forests, of stones, and rocks inlaid with shiny crystal: but elsewhere you may encounter vast cities, and oh what a beautiful view! What a noble design of roads, all directed from end to end of the city, cutting at right angles, all equally distant between themselves, and exactly parallel; furthermore adorned with long rows of magnificent palaces, for the most part with uniformly designed railings, with superb temples, towers, and very tall domes, squares, columns, spires, and anything that can adorn a noble city.²⁴

22 «Nobilmente scorniciata di cornici quadrilatera, ai lati del cubo parallele; altre delle quali cornici son vagamente riccie, ed increspate, ed altre correnti, e lisce ma tutte così fine, così ben disposte, che arte non v'ha, la qual possa imitarle. Le cornici poi fregiano, e chiudono in mezzo un bel quadro, come di pittura, o di basso rilievo, rappresentante non rare volte al vivo quel, che ci detta di più acconcio la fantasia, ora un ameno paesaggio, ora un atrio colonnato, ora una galleria di statue, ora altre vaghe rappresentanze», Arena, vol. I, pp. 380-81 (translation by author).

23 See Arena, vol. I., pp. 381-82.

24 «Quivi in ogni punto di luogo v'è da vedere, ove un orto delizioso, ove un ameno giardino, tutto piantato ad eccellente disegno con ordine, e simetria di parti, e con distinzione di viali rettilissimi, i quali correndo per tutta la lunghezza, e larghezza del giardino, ad angoli retti s'incrociano. Altrove si

Here we have a paradoxical description that overlaps the hypotyposis and ékphrasis of fictional works of art, making them indistinguishable: it is the description itself that establishes the artistic features of the object. The observer, recognizing artistic qualities in the work of nature, to the extent of describing it as a work of art, pushes the use of analogy to a further level: in this case, we are not dealing only with the use of figurative language to facilitate the recognition of microscopic forms; Arena rather takes his cue by natural morphologies to describe invented works of art, unreal but extremely detailed, with a burst of imagination that reminds us of notional ékphrasis. The literary references of such ékphrastic devices are, of course, eccentric when compared to the scientific prose of the eighteenth-century, and demonstrate links to those models of Baroque rhetoric taught in the typical training of Jesuit colleges. Arena prefers the scientific prose of Daniello Bartoli, a Jesuit scientist of the seventeenth-century, rather than the Enlightenment authors, which he knew. In fact, some lexical occurrences in the landscape descriptions in question can be traced directly back to Bartoli.²⁵

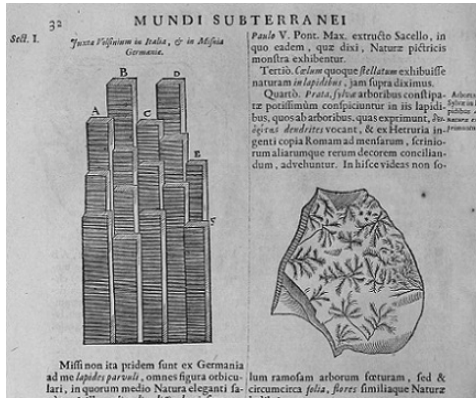
The theoretical positions of Arena, however, are those of an eighteenth-century scientist who thinks that it should be “natural causes”, and not “arcane virtues” to form repeated patterns in the various orders of nature.²⁶ On the other hand, these patterns were considered the *loci classici* of natural geometry, which had

veggono delle folte boscaglie, o delle aspre foreste, di sassi, e rupi di lucente cristallo intarsiate: altrove però s'incontrano delle vaste città, ed oh che bel vedere! Che nobil disegno di strade, tutte dirette da un capo all'altro della città, la qual tagliano ad angoli retti, tutte egualmente fra se distanti, ed esattamente parallele; ornate poi di lunghe filiere di palaggi magnifici, per la maggior parte a disegno uniforme nella sua ringhiera, di tempj superbi, di torri, e cupole altissime, piazze, colonne, aguglie, e di tutt'altro, che può far grandiosa, e adorna una Capitale». Arena, vol. I, p. 382 (translation by author).

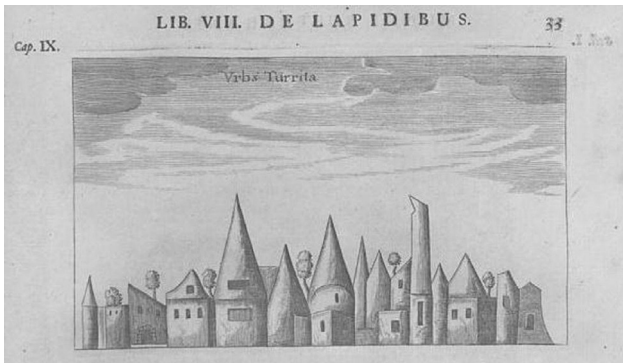
25 Arena, v. I, pp. 384-85. The experiences recorded by Bartoli on the coagulation of ice, especially the passages on Arctic landscapes (where nature or chance pretend to produce urban landscape in ice) provide lexical suggestions that Arena employs in his descriptions of crystalline landscapes. See Daniello Bartoli, *Del ghiaccio e della coagulatione, trattati del Padre Daniello Bartoli della Compagnia di Giesu* (Bologna: Giovanni Recaldini, 1682) pp. 70-71, 99-100.

26 Arena, pp. 389-90.

sparked speculation about the causes – mechanical or mystical – of these phenomena.²⁷ These aspects were widely found in that eclectic baroque literature, which employed conceits to describe natural works of art: for example in *Mundus Subterraneus* by Athanasius Kircher (1665) where the mineral wonders of crystallization, typical of *Wunderkammern*, were attributed to the *vis imaginativa* of *natura pictrix*.

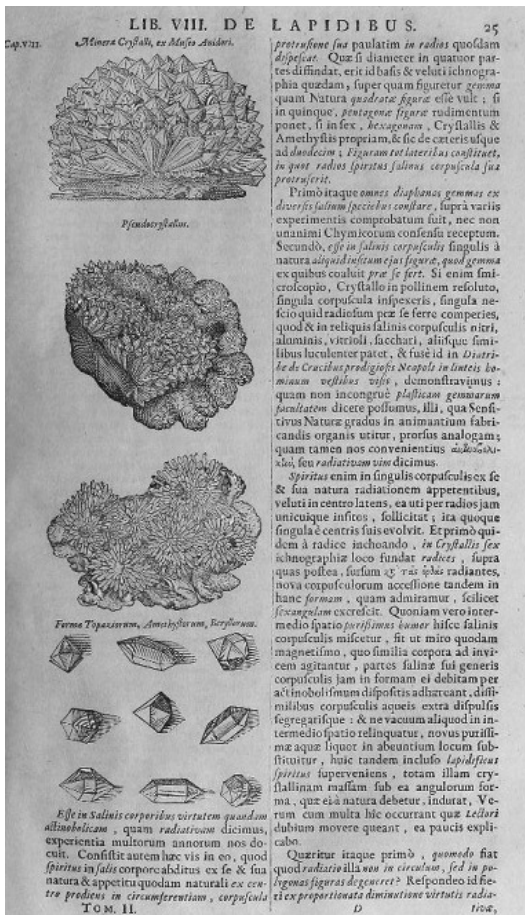


A. Kircher, Crystal morphologies, *Mundus Subterraneus*, vol. II, J. Janssonius van Waesberge, Amsterdam 1678



A. Kircher, Stone with urban landscape, *Mundus Subterraneus*, vol. II, J. Janssonius van Waesberge, Amsterdam 1678

27 See generally Martin Kemp, *Seen and Unseen*, chap. VI.



Crystal morphologies, A. Kircher, *Mundus Subterraneus*, vol. II, J. Janssonius van Waesberge, Amsterdam 1678

This paradoxical descriptive method, typical of *lapidaria*, implied a lack of distinction between works of art and works of nature, defined by Michele Cometa as the «nemesi of ékphrasis».²⁸

28 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 21-24. Not coincidentally, the blurring of boundaries between the two spheres was revived in the twentieth-century avant-garde (in the “fantastic aberrations” of Baltrušaitis’, the “material imagination” of Bachelard, and Caillois’ “mineral ékphrasis”)

However, we must make a distinction between the use Arena makes of analogy as a rhetorical device, which leads to notional *ékphrasis* modeled on those literary precedents, and the heuristic role that he reserves for it within the scientific method. Regarding the wondrous occurrences of natural geometry, Arena takes his distance both from those mystical hermetic theories that attribute their existence to direct divine intervention, and, in the scientific field, from the mechanistic theory of spontaneous generation, for which this kind of phenomena had been a strong argument. Rather, following Maupertuis, he found in Newtonian theory the explanatory laws governing such recurring patterns: having determined a visible analogy between vegetable shapes and the branching configurations assumed by some inorganic structures (such as crystals, the coagulation of ice, and metallic vegetation such as *Diana's tree*), the transversality of electrical forces was invoked to justify these phenomena. Arena's goal was to demonstrate, among other things, a theory of generation where the continuity between the organic and inorganic realm was mediated by the regulatory intervention of these forces.²⁹ In this sense, as a device intended to unify the multiplicity of phenomena in one economic hypothesis, analogies came to form part of the tools of the scientific method, and as such it was, in fact, used by Newtonian experimenters.³⁰

where the status itself of the work of art has been put in doubt. See also Roberta Coglitore, *Pietre figurate*.

29 See Arena, pp. 388-90, where Arena describes his experiences on branching shapes produced by organic compounds, hypothesizing their affinity to the structuration processes of the nervous and venous systems. Please note that Roberto Graditi documents the presence, at the Museum Salnitrianum in Palermo, of some *studi flebotomici* – anatomical preparations where skeletons of a man, a woman and a fetus, are surrounded by a petrified venous network. These artifacts, now lost, are similar to those found in the San Severo collection in Naples, the work of the same surgeon Gaspare Salerno, and still visible. See Roberto Graditi, *Il museo ritrovato: il Salnitriano e le origini della museologia a Palermo* (Palermo: Regione Siciliana, 2003), p. 50, n. 72.

30 Concerning the use of analogy in Maupertuis, disputed by his contemporaries, see Giovanni Solinas, *Il microscopio e le metafisiche: Epigenesi e preesistenza da Cartesio a Kant* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967), pp. 70-80. As for the eighteenth-century debate on the use of analogy in science see also Altieri Biagi, *Lingua della scienza fra Sei e Settecento*, pp. 120-24. On the use of analogy in Arena,

In the passage in question, however, Arena imaginatively extends the analogy between natural orders transforming it into a long and detailed comparison between the natural and artificial world, projecting the appearance of works of art onto the regular structures of the microscopic world. Historiographical judgments about Arena,³¹ referring to these rhetorical modes, criticize him on both stylistic and epistemological grounds: the scientific error, for his critics, would be to use analogies conjecturally (arguing his thesis only by simple steps of the imagination), resulting in a verbose prose style and one prone to *rêveries*. Such stylistic modalities are inevitably viewed with suspicion by the scientific community, in which forms of writing are forms of thinking.³²

One might then wonder about the use of this apparently dysfunctional rhetoric in this scientific argument. Ruth Webb pointed out the double-register created by the insertion of *ékphrasis* in literary texts, which generates a tension between distancing and identification.³³ In the same way one can look at the text of Arena as a complex set with multiple levels of reading,

cf. Filippo Arena, *Physicae Quaestiones novis experimentis et observationibus resolutae* (Roma: 1777), as cited in Nastasi, *Filippo Arena: Fisico e Matematico*, pp. 127-28.

31 Arena's botanical work has recently received credit as a precursor of modern biology for some of its positions, taking sides in the contemporary debate on the sexuality of plants and providing original reports on hybridism and pollination by insects. His work, however, fallen into oblivion after the expulsion of the Jesuits from Sicily in 1767, was rediscovered by scientists in 1897, when the German botanist Solms-Laubach published a critical review in the *Botanische Zeitung*, helping to bring to light Arena's contribution to European botany. See Emilia Poli Marchese, *Filippo Arena Botanico*, in *Filippo Arena e la cultura scientifica del Settecento in Sicilia*, ed. by Oscar Alberghina and Ignazio Nigrelli, pp. 45-86.

32 We draw these conclusions from the detailed survey conducted by Emilia Poli Marchese on the presence of Arena's work in botanical literature, aimed at taking stock of both the advances and errors of the scientist. Such an analysis is intertwined, of course, with the controversial historical judgments on the political and cultural roles of the Jesuit order as a whole. We note that the different opinions expressed, more or less indulgently, on the work of the Jesuit, have in common a double level of criticism, both on epistemological and stylistic aspects. See Poli Marchese, pp. 56-57.

33 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 149.

addressed to multiple audiences,³⁴ in which the examples of scientific updating had to pass through the ideological priorities of the Society of Jesus.³⁵

It should be noted, then, that Arena inserts his imaginative notional *ékphrasis* just at that point of the argument where the issue of generation could be placed ambiguously between the mechanistic and vitalistic option. The regular structurings of the microscopic world, which in Hooke's *Micrographia* were ascribed to the purely mechanical causation of spontaneous generation, are connected, in fact, with a theory of generation that cannot be reduced either to a purely mechanistic base or to direct divine intervention. In introducing this innovative position into the basically backward-looking context of the Society of Jesus, Arena simultaneously turns his reasoning into a physical theological argument: the notional *ékphrasis* that describes the infinitesimal parts of creation as a harmonious and noble city is, therefore, used to legitimize the role of "laws of attraction" that, reproducing on a microscopic scale the hierarchical order of the world, finally guaranteed, in their regularity, the existence of a divine plan. This is not secondary, then, to an understanding of what kind of figurative imagery substantiates the *ékphrasis*. Its repertoire of aesthetic references leads us back to the visual culture of Arena and his audience, which is possible to reconstruct from the optical devices themselves.

34 Arena addressed his work to a diversified public: florists, botanics, physicists, farmers and artists; to the latter he dedicated the illustrations. His erudite explanation of curious phenomena, instead, was specifically addressed to arouse the curiosity of the serious amateur, a growing number of which were taking an interest in experimental science during the eighteenth-century. But the work is also addressed to the devout to whom Arena claims to provide spiritual delight. See Filippo Arena, *La natura e coltura de' fiori fisicamente esposta in due trattati con nuove ragioni, osservazioni e esperienze*, vol. I, pp. 1-12.

35 The ambiguous positions adopted by the Society of Jesus concerning the reconciliation of science and faith appeared in the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1754, which, while cautiously open to experimental science, nevertheless censored the Copernican theory, and in every respect reaffirmed the primacy of theology. Pietro Nastasi explained fully the dramatic consequences of these positions by tracking the dissembling rhetorical expedients used by Arena, especially in his works on Physics.

A Spectacle of Crystalline Architecture and a Gothic Rêverie

An experimental attitude goes through all Arena's text, in which visual verification through the microscope plays a crucial role. We know that the device was built by the author himself,³⁶ who added his skill as a technologist to his taste for optical spectacle, a characteristic of curious science. In this regard, it is significant that Arena explicitly reports having performed public demonstrations, where he showed to the hundreds of people, who attended the microscopic curiosities described in the text, leaving viewers as if enchanted by the wonder of it all.³⁷ Such demonstrations took place in the Museum Salnitrianum (the museum of the Jesuits in Palermo), which, therefore, did not abandon its taste for turning technical knowledge into spectacle, based on Kircher's influential model, though shifting the focus of interest onto educational and experimental issues.³⁸

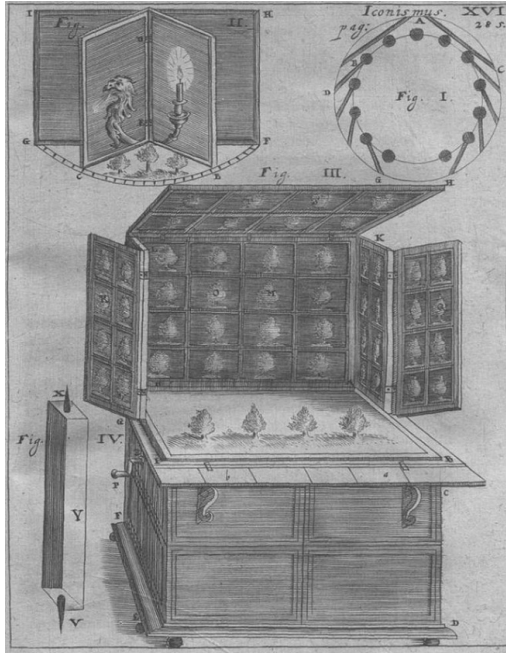
Following the path suggested by the emerging culture of optical spectacle, the framework of reference for the optical wonders of Arena is not found in the scientific reports of contemporary microscopists, but in the optical illusionism of catoptric theatres.³⁹

36 See Arena, *La natura e coltura de' fiori*, vol. I, p. 85.

37 See Arena, *La natura e coltura de' fiori*, vol. I, pp. 382-83.

38 About the history of the two collections, see Roberto Graditi, *Il museo ritrovato; Athanasius Kircher: Il museo del mondo*, ed. by Eugenio Lo Sardo (Roma: De Luca, 2001). Note that Graditi treats in detail the scientific role of Museum Salnitrianum in Palermo, but never mentions the presence of Arena as experimenter. For experimental activities involving Arena and other Jesuit scientists at the museum of Palermo, see Aldo Brigaglia and Pietro Nastasi, *Tentativi di rinnovamento nell'insegnamento delle scienze nei collegi gesuitici siciliani nella prima metà del XVIII secolo: M. Spedalieri, M. Cammareri, F. Plata, G. Barca, P. Marino, F. Arena*, in *La Sicilia nel Settecento* (Messina: Università degli Studi di Messina, 1986), pp. 162-64 (broadly focused on Jesuit science in Sicily, in comparison with national and European models).

39 Concerning microscopes and catoptric theatres in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century see generally Barbara M. Stafford, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2001), pp. 205-14, pp. 256-66. A notable example that documents the presence of such optical wonders in Sicily is the inventory of the rich collection of Marco Gezio, high prelate of Palermo in the seventeenth-century, published in Vincenzo Abbate, *Wunderkammer siciliana: Alle origini del museo perduto* (Napoli: Electa, 2001), pp. 35-36, p. 300.



Catoptrictheatre, Gaspar Schott, *Magiae universalis naturae et artis*,
pars I, J. G. Schönwetter, Würzburg 1658

These instruments of visual amusement, widespread in seventeenth and eighteenth-century collections – including the Museum Kircherianum, which owned some complex prototypes – showed architectural-catoptric perspectives to those who peered into them. These, in fact, showed in sequence the same miniature landscapes described in Arena’s paradoxical ékphrasis, which in this case were painted and illusively amplified thanks to the magic of reflection. The description given by Gaspar Schott *Magiae universalis naturae et artis* (1658) is broadly comparable to Arena’s text, even in the rhetoric of accumulation: catoptric chests pleased the eye showing *ad vivum* wonderful perspectives of long colonnades, extensive libraries, gardens, rows of trees, works of art gleaming with gold and precious stones, adorned with statues and paintings, amazing for the disposition, harmony

and the symmetry of their parts.⁴⁰ The insistence, both in Schott and in Arena, on the characteristic *concinnitas* of these urban landscapes, resplendent with precious materials and crystal, is relevant. There is a vast literature on the mystical-theological culture of the Society of Jesus regarding harmonic proportions in architecture, diffused through Villalpando's treatise. Such culture, towards the end of the seventeenth-century, in some Jesuit churches in Sicily, found its expression in various peculiar stone artifacts: altar frontals with architectural views of ideal cities inlaid in jasper, marble and coloured stones.⁴¹

40 The following is a passage from Schott describing the landscapes depicted in catoptric chests: «Jam enim sylvas pineas atque cupressinas longo elegantique arborum ordine diductas; jam urbes in suas concinnè plateas distributas, dominibusque elegantissimis exornatas; paulo post nundinas copiosissimas, omnique mercium pretiosarum, vasorum paesertim aureorum & argenteorum, margaritarum, aliorumque oculorum irritamentorum copia instructissimas, mox Bibliothecam infinitis libris affabre compactis, & artificiose dispositis refertam, aliaque similia multa ostendunt, non omnia quidem simul, sed successive alia post alia, adeo ad vivum, ut apparitionum fallacia vel ipsis Catoptricae peritis subinde illudat, imperitis vero imponat penitus; qui Catoptrico illo phantasmate decepti, non raro manus extendunt, ad contrectandas rerum species, non sine adstantium risu»: Gaspar Schott, *Magiae universalis naturae et artis, pars I* (Würzburg: Johann Gottfried Schönwetter, 1658), pp. 295-96. The prototype stored at the Museum Kircherianum displays moreover: «Et haec eo artificio facta, ut in quacunque scenicam projectionem disponi possit, ita ut quis eandem instrospectat, ornatissima conclavia, infinitos columnarum architectonico artificio dispositarum ordines, varia ambulatorum diverticula auro, argento, omnique cimeliorum genere fulgentia se videre existimet. Abscedente hac scena videbis hortos omni florum, plantarum, arborumque specie mirè exornatos, mox mensas omni cupediarum genere refertissimas, thesauros deinde inexhaustos, avarorum maximum tormentum» (p. 296).

41 For a historical and iconographical analysis of such altar panels in Sicily see Maria Clara Ruggieri Tricoli, *Il teatro e l'altare: Paliotti "d'architettura" in Sicilia* (Palermo: Grifo, 1992); see also, for the mystical implications in Jesuit architectural treatises, Rene Taylor, *Hermeticism and Mystical Architecture in the Society of Jesus*, in *Baroque Art: the Jesuit Contribution*, ed. by Rudolf Wittkower and Irma B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), pp. 63-97; for the mystical implication of the major architectural undertakings of Jesuits in Palermo and its ornamentation see Maria Clara Ruggieri Tricoli, *Costruire Gerusalemme: Il complesso gesuitico della Casa Professa di Palermo dalla storia al museo* (Milano: Lybra Immagine, 2001).

But these urban landscapes, like the ones painted in Schott's catoptric chests, were designed explicitly according to the rules of classical aesthetics, using traditional orders of classical architecture.⁴² Driven by analogical associations, Arena's ékphrasis ends, however, with an unexpected stylistic reflection that pushes it further, towards a later aesthetic taste:

Several times I came across perspectives of cities so similar to reality, they could be seen as a living painting since they lacked nothing; sometimes they even had regular or irregular walls or fortifications, as I reported above. The architecture generally recalls the Gothic, or old French, which is that of our Cathedral of Palermo, and that of Milan & c., and of these two noble temples, I saw the images within the alum, which in wealth, and magnificence of friezes exceeded them.⁴³

In the brief space of this last passage, Arena's ékphrasis concludes by stating the nobility of the Gothic style, on the threshold of his important reevaluation, which in Sicily would take place in the 1780's.⁴⁴ But, above all, in ambiguous territory

42 Gaspar Schott, quoting Della Porta about catoptrical chests, wrote: «Unde ex reciproco speculorum jaculata, tot videbuntur columna, stylobata, & ornamenta, recto Architecturae ordine servato, ut nil jucundius, nil certe admirabilius oculis occurset nostris. Perspectiva sit Dorica & Corinthica, ornata auro, argento, margaritis, gemmis, idolis, picturis, & similibus, ut magnificentior videatur. Ichnographia eiusmodi erit» (Schott, *Magiae universalis naturae et artis*, p. 295).

43 «Più volte mi sono imbattuto in prospettive di Città tanto simili al vero, che nulla lor mancava, per esserne una viva pittura, e qualche volta neppure desideravasi il recinto delle muraglie, e delle fortificazioni o regolari, o irregolari, come sopra ho riferito. L'Architettura corre per ordinario alla Gotica, o Franzese antica, qual è quella del nostro Duomo di Palermo, e quel di Milano &c., e di questi due nobilissimi tempj, ne ho io vedute nell'alume le immagini, che in ricchezza, e magnificenza di fregi li superavano» Arena, *La natura e coltura de' fiori fisicamente esposta in due trattati con nuove ragioni, osservazioni e esperienze*, p. 382 (translation by author).

44 If the celebration of Palermo cathedral was present in some works of local pride, more generally the appreciation of specific Gothic buildings, although understood as exceptions in the context of an overall rejection of that style, was present in some of the most common architectural treatises on classical taste. In Sicily, in general, the interest in Gothic style was introduced through contact with European travelers, present from the late 1760's, while autonomous reworkings of this theme – in architectural designs and treatises – took place in

between the culture of spectacle and science, it bears witness to the unexpected archeological trace of a well-known aesthetic metaphor: that of Gothic architecture as crystallization.⁴⁵

There is no trace of this idea in the set of illustrations accompanying *La natura e coltura dei fiori*, where the only architectural subject reminds us, at most, of eighteenth-century models of Garden art. However, crystalline landscapes, used in Arena's argument to demonstrate the constancy of the forces of attraction in the transition from the mineral to vegetable realm – reusing but modifying a theme dear to hermetic analogical tradition – lend themselves to speculation that reaches romantic imagery and beyond. Later, Friedrich Schlegel would speak of a “crystal cathedral” and “crystal vegetation”, when writing about Cologne Cathedral, emphasizing the aspect of transmutation with such a metaphor.⁴⁶ Viollet-Le-Duc would recall the “system of

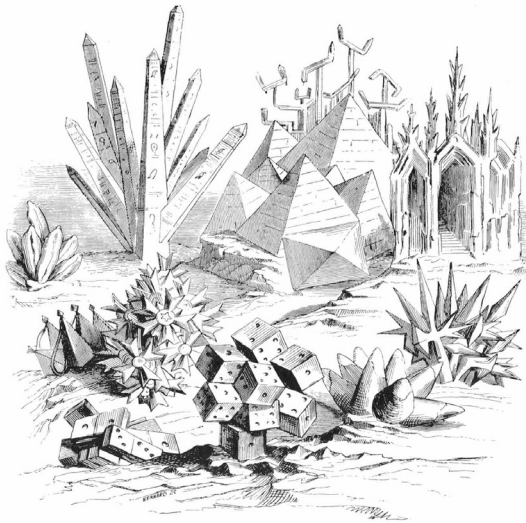
the last two decades of the 18th century. In the specific case of Arena, however, it is plausible to think of an earlier contact with this theme: as a botanist and a landscape gardener, he should have been familiar with European treatises on garden art, notorious precursors of the *gothic revival* in the first part of the century. For value judgments about Gothic style in European literature, see generally Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). For the role of European travelers in the spread of Gothic fashion in Sicily see Michele Cometa, *Il romanzo dell'architettura: La Sicilia e il Grand Tour nell'età di Goethe* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1999); Stefano Piazza, *Nei tempi di Schinkel. Le radici del revival medievale in Sicilia*, in *The time of Schinkel and the Age of Neoclassicism between Palermo and Berlin*, ed. by Maria Giuffrè et alii (Villa San Giovanni: Biblioteca Del Cenide, 2006). For re-elaborations of the *gothic revival* in Sicily see Maria Giuffrè, *La Sicilia verso i neostili e le ville dei principi di Belmonte a Palermo*, in *Dal tardobarocco ai neostili: il quadro europeo e le esperienze siciliane*, ed. by Giuseppe Pagnano (Messina: Sicania, 2000). On those architectural treatises widespread in Sicily between the seventeenth and eighteenth-century, compare Maria Giuffrè, *Barocco in Sicilia* (San Giovanni Lupatoto: Arsenale, 2006), pp. 231-38; Francesco Emanuele Gaetani, *Dell'architettura ed architetti* (1795-1802), ed. by Diana Malignaggi (Palermo: Giada, 1986).

45 Concerning imagery and metaphors related to Gothic style, the essay by Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Le roman de l'architecture gothique*, is essential reading. It especially highlights the image of gothic cathedrals as «vegetal architecture» (always, however, as «petrified forests», the reciprocal image of «mineral vegetation»): Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Aberrations*, pp. 151-91.

46 See Friedrich von Schlegel, *Grundzüge der gotischer Baukunst*, as cited in Baltrušaitis, *Aberrations*, p. 152.

crystallization” to define the stylistic unity of the French Gothic style, linking this metaphor to the structural logic of its construction.⁴⁷ This imagery even appears in the expressionist *Glasarchitektur*, in which Rosemarie Bletter traced genetic links with the mystic-esoteric literature on crystal architecture, focusing this time on metaphors linked with translucency and transformation.⁴⁸

At this point in the history of the phenomenology of metaphor, the traces of visual wonder aroused by optical devices would seem lost. However, in a celebrated catalogue of the fantastic obsessions of the nineteenth-century, we find again, grouped in a picture, the *phantasmagoria* of Gothic architecture as crystallization and the spectacle of microscopic worlds: it is an illustration of *Un autre monde* by Grandville.



Un après-midi au jardin des plantes: Cristallisations, pétrifications, stalactites.
Grandville, *Un autre monde*, H. Fournier, Paris 1844

47 See Viollet-le-Duc, 1875, *ad v.* Style (vol. 8); Viollet-le-Duc, 1875, *ad v.* Unité (vol. 9).

48 See R. Haag Bletter, ‘The Interpretation of the Glass Dream: Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 40 (1981).

The text, proceeding according to the absurd logic of the association of ideas, ironically retraces experiences of romantic *rêverie*, highlighting the bad faith of this experience through the alienating atmosphere of its illustrations. Such illustrations reflected, in the themes and figurative solutions, the typical interest of nineteenth-century culture for optical amusements, which were, by then, quite widespread: broadly speaking, the same visual technologies that, in the past, had permitted science to become a spectacle in the Jesuit Colleges, inspiring eighteenth-century fantasy literature – such as *Gulliver's travels*, illustrated once again by Grandville – continued to trigger the imperturbable logic of the imagination. Through the lens, the scientist's imagery of wonder was able to pass to other territories, transforming itself into the daydreaming of his uncanny double, the *rêveur*.

In conclusion, the ékphrastic tear in the fabric of Arena's text, leading the analogical implications of scientific lexicon to a second-level complexity, resonates with a long-term aesthetic metaphor. The aesthetic or scientific origin of this phantasy of crystallization is not knowable; finding traces of the mutual, subtle connection between these two dimensions, is the task of an approach to the history of culture, which, in the footsteps of Bachelard, brings out the imaginary framework within which scientific reason is immersed, in order to raise doubts about its hypostatization.

DESCRIPTION AND IDOLATRY
OF THE IMAGES.
ROBERTO CALASSO'S ÉKPHRISIS
TOMMASO GUARIENTO

The directly lived returns. It burns the images, their inexhaustible, shielded dream. They carry you off. The bodily eye does not see beyond the precincts of the square, but the sadness reaches farther, deep into the plains behind, into the forest, the bald hillocks, into the dusk, the imaginary, it will not return home, it will stay there, looking for something, yet that something has been destroyed, and afterwards, it must take leave under the light of the shattered skies.

(Gottfried Benn, *Sämtliche Werke*)

Origin

The history and works of Roberto Calasso are inextricably connected with the history of one of the most important Italian publishers: Adelphi.¹ Since the beginning of his career the connection between literature and image has a crucial role on his production. He graduated in fact with a thesis on the hieroglyphs of Thomas Browne with Mario Praz, author of a fundamental study on the parallel between literature and visual arts.² It is possible to read this study in different ways. At a first glance the text shows a collection of relations/struggles between literates and painters from classical Greece up to the Avant-gardes. A less naïve and attentive reader can discover some references hidden

1 Roberto Calasso, Lila Azam Zanganeh, 'Roberto Calasso, The Art of Fiction No. 217', *Paris Review*, 202 (2012).

2 Initially published in English: Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), and subsequently translated into Italian (*Mnemosine: parallelo tra la letteratura e le arti visive* (Milano: Abscondita, 2012).

among the footnotes (Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* and Barthes' *Fashion System*), which allow us to understand in deeper way the method of the Italian Anglicist.

This double interpretation, confirmed by Gombrich's review of the text,³ allows us to sketch some of the main themes of Praz's visual culture that we will find in the literary production of Calasso. According to Praz, the point of comparison between the arts is defined by the *ductus*,⁴ or that peculiar element that attests the individuality of a calligraphy.

For Praz the *ductus* functions as a sort of "distinctive element", similar to those identified by Foucault and Deleuze in their philosophy of history.⁵ Thus we can find an *analogon* of Praz's methodology in the study devoted by Gilles Deleuze to Baroque culture. They both try to formulate a principle which can express the culture of an epoch through the definition of a single structural element that resonates in different disciplines. In the case of the Baroque epoch, the fold or "serpentine line" echoes from mathematical analysis to painting, and from philosophy to architecture and fashion.⁶

Calasso has similarly tried, in *La Folie Baudelaire*, to put in evidence an element that works as a link between decadent literature and visual culture: this gravitational center is not, however, a stylistic form or an aspect of fashion; it is instead the very *persona* of Baudelaire. Following Benjamin,⁷ Calasso does not hesitate to designate Paris as the capital of the 19th century: at its center stands the figure of Baudelaire with his women, his painters, his love for Poe, Orientalism and Dandyism. But there

3 See Ernest H. Gombrich, 'Review of Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts*', *Burlington Magazine*, 114 (1972), 345-346.

4 Praz, *Mnemosyne*, pp. 32-33.

5 See Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et Les Choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Paul Bains (London-New York: Continuum, 2003).

6 Praz, pp. 94, 134; Deleuze, p. 141.

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Belknap, 1999).

is more: at the heart of this crowd of peoples, names of streets, *Passages*, revolutions and disillusion Calasso places a dream, something archaic that smells of ancient Greece. In the center of this dream: the images.

An entire gallery of images that culminates with the encounter of a living being that, anciently, had been a god and his simulacra.⁸

Summarisches Überblicken

La Folie Baudelaire can be considered a fragment of a triptych which also includes *Tiepolo Pink*⁹ and *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*.¹⁰ Each volume contains texts and images: technically speaking, they are “iconotexts”. In each of the three volumes, writing invents images and images describe the writing process. Two statements of Calasso can be useful to clarify the *mélange* of images and words in his works: the first is contained in an interview of Antonio Gnoli for the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*,¹¹ the other appears in the appendix to *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, entitled as a literary fragment of Gottfried Benn, *Summarisches Überblicken*.¹² *The Marriage* belongs to a particular literary genre, mythography, and it is a long and erudite narration of stories and variations on the themes drawn from Greek mythology. In this study we consider the Italian edition of the book, published in 2008, in an *in folio* edition, enriched with 384 images spacing from photos to frescos, from sculptures and Greek vases to the painters of the School of Fontainebleau and Rembrandt. The aspect of “material culture of the book” is fundamental to understanding the editorial and literary operation of Calasso. The editorial model of *The Marriage* is in fact that

8 Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, pp. 173-203.

9 Calasso, *Il rosa Tiepolo* (Milano: Adelphi, 2006).

10 Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia* (Milano: Adelphi, 2009).

11 Antonio Gnoli, ‘Quando il mito creò l’immagine: Le nuove nozze di Calasso’, *La Repubblica*, 13 October 2009. The text can be found at this address: <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2009/10/13/quando-il-mito-creol-immagine.html?ref=search>.

12 Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, pp. 483-86.

of the *Hypnoerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, first volume printed by the publisher Aldo Manuzio in 1499.

That model has been for me of immense help. I have taken the format and the mirror of page. And each of the twelve parts of the book is introduced by an image of the *Hypnerotomachia* connected with the histories that are narrated. In that book there are 26 different possibilities to arrange the woodcuts on the page and I have rigorously follow these combinations. In this way, inside a mirror of page of magnificent proportions, it is possible to make an enormous number of variations which produce a continuous and unpredictable series of changes.¹³

The *Hypnerotomachia* tells the story of Polifilo who pursues the nymph Polia in dream through a long sequence of architectures, inscriptions, hieroglyphics; at the end he reaches the extreme moment of possessing her, but he loses his beloved and wakes up again.¹⁴ Whoever has had the opportunity to scan, even vaguely, the beautiful pages of this book will realize that the volume is an exaltation of ékphrasis in all of its forms. In addition to a very vast series of notional ékphrasis¹⁵ describing bas-reliefs, friezes, architectures and hieroglyphics, one has also to consider that the very “contents” of the story (which are developed through a *mise en abîme* of overlapped dreams) are rendered through the juxtaposition of textual narration and the presence of innumerable woodcuts.

13 Gnoli.

14 A similar narrative structure can also be found in the final part of Lynch's *The Lost Highway*. The masculine main character, after having entered an hallucinatory dream that allows him to forget the homicide of his wife, pursues through all the dream her specular double, never possessing her completely. Before his return to reality, the image of his wife announces him the end of illusion telling that he will never succeed in possessing her (*You'll never have me*). In this precise moment there is a brusque return to reality (Slavoj Žižek, *Lacrimae Rerum: Cinq Essais Sur Kieslowski, Hitchcock, Tarkovski Et Lynch*, trans. by Christine Vivier (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2005), p. 228.

15 In order to understand the distinction between mimetic ékphrasis (which is referred to the practice of describing existing works of art) and notional ékphrasis (which pertains to “non-existing images” created by literature), see Hollander, ‘The Poetics of Ékphrasis’, pp. 209-19.

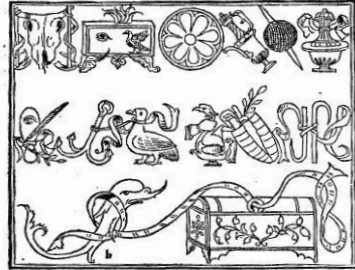
all'Intuito preziosissimi & iucundissimo, & allo intelletto gratiosamente contemplabile. Il fuschetto folido delq̄le scintilla era q̄ta opatura & exata, spicca ua del hyacintho, più toro & rotolato, q̄le al toro nō si farebbe cōiuncto. Solamētē sotto alle foglie, era uno tenete rethico, che ritenuta el folio scotto cū el fuschetto hyacintho, p̄mo gūio & del fuschetto sparato q̄li polcarico. Le finestre foglie cū tutti gli limamēti accenti fabre depolite, cū tenera armalitū della natura, nō meno unquelo fructi p̄cipini & errati farculi. Ad q̄ta mirida factura n̄ se ag gli pocolo del diuo Alchimedite. Nechora la copa di Alcone. Il q̄le ua era copolo de minuto & scō cūcie.

Retorniamo allambiēte cūctura di p̄tiosissimo uso, o turo phrygia le facia. Nel uacuo tra le caude rethico. Vidi q̄de biliorale digere di iusti ma admiratiōe & tale scalpura. Nella faccia diuisi di esso uso mirificata o primamētē lo altorante Ioue. Illo nella destra mano tenia una ta gliefe spaha aurea di uena di Chrysolithodi ethiopia lipidite. Nella tra uno fūalico cōfusiōe di uena rubinaea. Et egli cū minate aspecto deue na Gallatie coronato di scintillanefelle q̄le el fulmine. Sopra stante de uno sacro altare Zaphiritico. Nella diuina & tremēda maiestate di q̄leguar dai uno festiuare choro de sette Nymphē cadide di idumeo, religiosamē te idicādo di cātare, cū uenerabōdo plaudo. Le q̄le poica le trallormatio te idicādo di cātare, cū uenerabōdo plaudo. Le q̄le poica le trallormatio te idicādo di cātare, cū uenerabōdo plaudo. Le q̄le poica le trallormatio



Dall'altro lato anaglyppo appareta uno festiuo & iucundo Nume, cū fēmitate di una lubrica fanciulla, coronato di lungi & cōglobati fer piuno

retico bafamento in circūto in scalpo digniffimamēte tali hieroglyphi. Primo uno capitele esso coronato di Ioue, cum dui instrumenti agricul-tura, alle cornemnodati, & una Ara fundata sopra dui pedi hierici, cum una ardente fiammula. Nella faccia della qualesera uno occhio, & uno uilture. Dopo q̄ta uno Mallusio, & uno uaso Gutturnio, se quōdo uno Glo mo di filo, iuxto i uno Pyrono, & uno Antiquario uso cū lorificio obtu rato. Vna Solea cum uno occhio, cum due fronde intran forate, luna di oliua & l'altra di palma politamēte lorate. Vna ancora, & uno anferē. Vna Antiquaria lucerna, cum una mano tenente. Vno Temone antico, cum uno ramo di fructigera Olea circū fasciato. pōcici dui Harpaguli. Vno Delphino. & ultimo una Arca reclusa. Erano questi hieroglyphi optima Scalpura in quefti graphiamēti.



Lequal uectuosissime & sacre scripture p̄ficulante, cūfio le interpretai.

EX LABORE DEO NATVRAE SACRIFICIA LIBERA
LITER. PAVLATIM R. EDVCEAS ANIMVM DEO SVBIE
CTVM. FIR. MVM CVSTODIAM VITAE TVAE MISER. I
COR. DITER. GVBER. NANDO TENEbit, INCOLVMEM
QV. ESER. VABIT.

c

Pages from *Hyperotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, 1499 (woodcuts)

The presence of in-text illustrations makes, if possible, even more intricate the attempt to sketch the function of the description of images.¹⁶ The illustrations “in the text”, as Michele Cometa claims in *La scrittura delle immagini*, must be considered as part of the scopie regime. A comprehensive analysis of *ékphrasis* must considers: 1. the material production and diffusion of images in a precise historical period; 2. the meaning of their presence/absence in a literary text; 3. the relations between these elements.

Image and text contribute to the creation of a disorder among levels (meta-narrative function) so the reader may confuse the notional *ékphrasis* with the narrative level, since the woodcuts represent equally the “plot of the novel” and “the objects of description”. Moreover, the end of paragraphs are filled with

16 Cometa, *La Scrittura delle immagini*, p. 75.

typographic solutions similar to those of the *tecnopaeginia*; rebus-like hieroglyphic are juxtaposed to their Latin translations/interpretation in other circumstances.¹⁷ Calasso not only reuses the “typographic model of Hypnoerotomachia” for the *in folio* editions of *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* and *La Folie Baudelaire* (those with additional images): *Hypnoerotomachia* becomes also a source of inspiration for the *contents* of narration.

But what is indeed the content of *The Marriage*? Inside the curious bibliography of the volume we can find mostly Greek and Latin classical authors, in conjunction with studies of German and French philology. The older edition of the book (1988) was published without images; nevertheless, according to Calasso’s statements, during the writing process textual and visual sources had the same status:

While I was working on the book [*The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*] textual and iconic sources were on the same level. With the new edition, part of the pictorial texture that was implicit and implied in the text since the beginning appears on surface. But I have discovered other images during the twenty years that have passed from the first publication. Further images, finally, have been chosen during the publication of this book, a work that, perhaps because it took place in a hurry and mingled in the final stages of a book with pictures has a lot to do (*La Folie Baudelaire*), has thrown me in a kind of rapture.¹⁸

It is quite difficult to place Calasso’s books within a theory of literary genres. *The Marriage* combines philology, philosophy, and art history but it also speculates on the function of myth and novel; and moreover it contains a historical study of rites in Greek culture. The meta-analysis on the nature of the book that the author added in the appendix of the new edition (the one with images) under the title *Brief glance*¹⁹ is therefore crucial. Here Calasso introduces what could be defined as «a theory of literary

17 Inside a constellation of the possible relations between text and image, these two examples belong to the category of *iconism* (See Cometa, ‘Letteratura e arti figurative: un catalogo’).

18 Gnoli.

19 Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, pp. 479-89.

production as inter-medial translation» through a quotation of a fragment by Gottfried Benn. Calasso claims as “his method” the technique of the “brief glance” used by Benn in the writing of *The novel of phenotype*. Calasso quotes a passage from the German writer in which are exposed the “rules of production” of a literary text with the aim of visual sources. Benn tells us that after having scanned a volume of art history entitled *The Beauty of Feminine Body* (which encompasses around two hundred images of painters like Botticelli, Veronese, Rubens) he found himself taken by a sort of “rapture”, then he began to write a text that is the “confused translation” of what he has just seen. We report a quotation from the text:

Just brief glances, turned pages, now and again, make him feel slightly exhilarated. Venuses, Adrianes, Galateas, rise from their cushions under arcades, pick fruit, gloss over their grief, drop violets, send a dream. Venus with Mars; Venus with Amor, reaching out to a white rabbit on her thigh, two doves at her feet, one light colored, the other dark, before a landscape which fades away.²⁰

This peculiar method, that we find both in *The Marriage* and in other Calassos’s works, can be explained according to the Freudian logic of “condensation”, described by Michele Cometa as:

(...) a breathtaking assemblage of details drawn by different images, as in the figurative dynamics of dreams. Here the words evoke and assemble figurative details picked from paintings of pictorial tradition which produce a *tertium* never existed, but absolutely likely.²¹

What is the relation between the “first” version of *The Marriage* and the more recent one, which has been augmented by an iconographic supplement. If some images already belonged to the compositional process of the first edition, why they have

20 Benn, *Sämtliche Werke 4, Prosa*: 2, p. 406, English translation in Benn, *Double Life*, p. 107.

21 Cometa, *La Scrittura delle Immagini*, p. 60.

not been included in the first edition?²² A possible interpretation of this “censure of the visual in favor of the verbal” could be underlined with the aim of the three levels of the ékphrastic practice conceptualized by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Picture Theory*.²³ The relationship between images and their descriptions is shaped by a continuous exchange of “indifference”, “hope” and “fear” towards the suppression of the difference among visual and verbal. The presence of images in the flowing of the text would make less effective the “inventive force of the verbal”, because “it would disclose” the visual sources of inspiration that were initially adumbrated. Nevertheless the case of Calasso does not confirm this situation because one cannot verify the links among the text and the images accompanying it is always oblique: there is not an unbalanced relation in favor of the visual or the verbal, because both are echoed by the very source of “myths”.

Idolatry

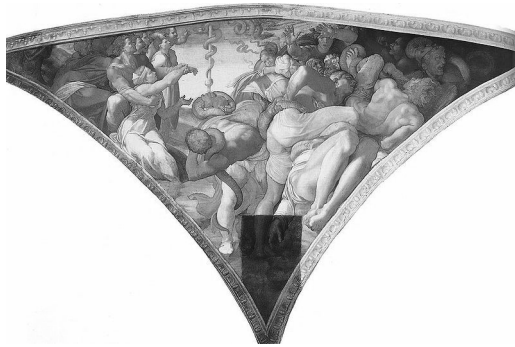
The image can save only those who have already been poisoned. Essential is however the separation, the passage to image, the ability to move away the gaze from the snake that crawl and bite and to look on the metallic snake, brandished in air. In this separation it is implicit death (...) Moses’s gesture, when it brandished a bronze serpent told the murmuring Jews to look at it, was the discovery that the evil can be cured by its image.²⁴

If one opens the *Old Testament* on the *Book of Numbers* and looks for the chapter 21, verses 4-9, one finds a rather puzzling episode. Here is written that God sent poisonous snakes to punish the Jews, than, begged to stop his wrath, he orders to Moses to build a brazen serpent. Anyone who is bitten, looking at the snake, will be cured.

22 Keeping in mind that, as editor, Calasso has devoted a specific study on the importance of bibliography as a form of “hidden” autobiography: see Roberto Calasso, *La Follia che viene dalle Ninfe* (Milano: Adelphi, 2005), p. 103.

23 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 152-54.

24 Calasso, *Il rosa Tiepolo*, pp. 179, 190.



Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel*, particular, 1511 (fresco)

The episode in point, brought by Calasso both in *Tiepolo Pink* and in *La follia che viene dalle ninfe*,²⁵ works as a paradigm to understand the “philosophy of the image” that moves his literary project.

In *The Marriage* Calasso tries to re-narrate stories of Greek mythology, creating some narrative frames that actually are hidden *ékphrasis*, otherwise, in *Tiepolo Pink* all the descriptions of images are “mimetic”. Specifically, the second chapter (*Meridian Theurgy*) is a detailed description of the work of Tiepolo as engraver, consisting of ten *Capricci* and twenty-three *Scherzi*. Calasso in this case “does not invent anything”, he is rather the interpreter of “the indescribable”. *Scherzi* is in fact a work without commission, a personal one, it does not represent episodes of classical mythology or the Bible. The facts here narrated have the appearance of strange ceremonious rites, the figures that appear in the sequences have similar physiognomies and seem to perform gestures that have lost sense.

25 See Calasso, *La follia che viene dalle ninfe*.



Giambattista Tiepolo, *Capriccio*, 1775-78 (etching)

How to make sense of what happens in these engravings?

Calasso reads Tiepolo's engravings as an enchantment of the image, which does not describe, but rather "produces effects". For this reason he recalls the myth of the Brazen Serpent²⁶ as the *Urszene* in order to understand the function of images. For him Tiepolo's images, as well as the whole mythological narratives, don't have a "mimetic function" but a "performative force".²⁷

26 The *Scherzi* are full of snakes: changing locations, lying on the ground or twisted round a wood beam. There is also a drawing by Tiepolo that probably depicts the biblical scene: *La folla e i serpenti* (Calasso, *Il rosa Tiepolo*, p. 190).

27 The same concept of "operational images" can be found in Agamben's characterization of "signatures": «What is the meaning of these enigmatic

This is confirmed by the fact that when he comes to find a philosophy of image adequate to his “idolatrous” interpretation, Calasso evokes the Warburg’s lecture on the ritual of the snake.²⁸ It is interesting to relate the biblical scene of the iconoclasm, so to say Moses’s “destruction” of the Golden Calf built by Aaron²⁹ (Exodus 32: 1-35), with this scene of “idolatry”, in which God himself orders the construction of a simulacra. What do Calasso’s pictures want? Not only to be looked at, but, through their gaze, to be able to cure.

La clef des songes

On March 13 1856 Baudelaire had a dream, in which he has come forth through the “gate of horn”.³⁰ Before the early morning, he hastily recorded some notes of what he has seen and sends to his friend and art critic Charles Asselineau.³¹ The content of this

figures so precisely recorded in the manuscripts illustrations? Unlike the constellations, they in no way refer to the figures that the stars seem to draw in the sky, nor do they describe any properties of the zodiacal signs to which they refer. Their function becomes clear only when we place them in the technical context of the production of charms or talismans that *Picatrix* calls *ymagines*. Whatever the matter of which they are made, the *ymagines* are neither signs nor reproductions of anything: they are operations through which the forces of celestial bodies are gathered and concentrated into a point in order to influence terrestrial bodies (*ymago nihil aliud est quam vis corporum celestium in cotpotibus irifluencium*)» (Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D’Isanto with Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 55.

- 28 Calasso, *Il rosa Tiepolo*, pp. 37-43. It should be noted that, in addition to having studied at the Warburg Institute during the writing of his thesis, as editor Calasso published Warburg’s conference *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*, Aby Warburg, *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual* (London: Warburg Institute, 1938), and also the works of Wind and Baltrušaitis.
- 29 For the conceptualization of the scene of Aaron as *topos* of the Visual Culture see William J. T. Mitchell, ‘What Do Pictures “Really” Want?’, *October*, 77 (1996), 71-82.
- 30 To quote a well-known passage from the *Odyssey* (XIX, 560-569), where we can find a description of the two doors of dreams. Dreams that come through the gates of horn tell the truth, unlike the dreams of ivory door that are false.
- 31 Charles Baudelaire, *De L’amour* (Paris: Société anonyme d’édition et de librairie, 1919), pp. 180-85.

dream is relevant for the theory of “notional ékphrasis” because it describes, through the oracular language of dreams, a kind of bizarre architecture, halfway between the *cabinet d’amateur*, a brothel and a science museum.

Which kind of images did Baudelaire see in his dream? Obscene pictures, but not only: there are also architectures, Egyptian figures, sketches, photographic prints. The content of the latter are birds with flashy colors, and with “lively eyes”. Sometimes they are representations of amorphous beings, as fallen from the sky. The pictures are all dated and titled, and the authors are the same girls that frequent this unusual place. Toward the end of the dream Baudelaire meets a living being, of ambiguous form, with a long appendix that falls from his head. The two talked at length about their unfortunate condition, and finally the dream fades, interrupted by the companion of the poet.³² In *La Folie Baudelaire*³³ Calasso collects this dream from the correspondence of the poet³⁴ and places it at the center of the volume, presenting it as a short story. What is the meaning of the images in Baudelaire’s dream? Which logic is unfolded in the notional ékphrasis of the dream? According to Yacobi,³⁵ we can consider various types of

32 The museum, as well as the gallery and the *cabinet d’amateur* are “apparatuses” in the sense that Giorgio Agamben and Michele Cometa give to this term «(...) the apparatus is never something completely real (an architectural space) but it shapes, even in the very architectural frame, a constant transition between metaphor and reality, between the verbal and the visual (...) And we must say immediately that the so-called real spaces are always mental spaces, built metaphors, transitions of *logos* and stone» (Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 73).

33 Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, p. 173.

34 More likely the source is Michel Butor, *Histoire Extraordinaire: Essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). Even if the text never quotes it expressly, from a comparison of the quoted letters and from some you postpone intertestuali it results evident that Calasso has consulted the volume.

35 Tamar Yacobi, ‘Pictorial Models and Narrative Ékphrasis’, *Poetics Today* 16, 4 (1995), p. 602. The relation between the logic of dreams and the composition of images is also sketched in Didi-Huberman’s *Confronting images*, precisely in the chapter entitled *The Image as Rend and the Death of God Incarnate* (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting images: Questioning the ends of a certain history of art*, trans. by J. Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), pp. 139-219.

relationships between the *ékphrasis* and the object: not only the distinction between truthfulness or fictiveness of the described work, but also their *quantity*. We can identify in Baudelaire's dream a series of "rhetorical operations" as "condensation",³⁶ leading to a complex relationship with the description of images. Calasso helps us to understand the logic of condensation acting in the dream, through a detailed reflection on the poetic and critical works of the French poet. In a certain way Calasso recognizes in Baudelaire the same method of composition (the brief glance) that he had used to write *The Marriage*:

The greed of the eyes, nourished by the innumerable objects of art sifted and scrutinized, was a powerful stimulus for the prose of Baudelaire. He trained his pen to "to fight against the plastic representations". And it was a *hypnerotomachia*, a "strife of love in dream", rather than a war. Baudelaire wasn't passionate in invent from scratch. He always needed to elaborate a preexisting material, some ghost seen in a gallery, in a book or on the road, as if writing were first of all a work of transposition from a register to another. In this way some of his perfect sentences were born, which are left to contemplate at length, and leave soon forget that they could be also a description of a watercolor.³⁷

Once again the same reference to the volume of Francesco Colonna, guiding the work of Calasso as a source of literary inspiration. As in the case of *The Marriage*, we have consulted the *in folio* edition of *La Folie Baudelaire*, enriched by a wide iconography. In this volume the variety of the sources is much wider: it goes from Greek sculpture to Impressionist paintings, newspaper's photos and sketches. Differently from what happens in *Tiepolo Pink* the *ékphrasis* in *La Folie* are both notional and mimetic. Then there is a "third type" of *ékphrasis*, defined by Calasso as "reverse", and that describes the logic of *condensation* of a book into a single image:

36 See *infra* and note 21.

37 Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, pp. 17-18.

What was supposed to be that image on the cover? The *reverse of ékphrasis* – I would try to define it today (...) Ékphrasis was the term that was used, in ancient Greece to indicate the rhetorical procedure that consists in translating in words the works of art. There are works – as *The Images* of Philostratus – only devoted to ékphrasis. Among the modern, the *virtuoso* of ékphrasis was Roberto Longhi (...) But, beyond Longhi, the unmatched teacher of the ékphrasis remains Baudelaire (...) Now, when an editor chooses a cover – knowingly or not – he is the last, obscurest and humblest descendent of the lineage of those who had practiced the art of ékphrasis, but this time applied in *reverse*, trying to find the equivalent or *analogon* of a text in a single image.³⁸

More than the *Hypnoerotomachia*, the image that inextricably links the three books taken in analysis is that of the Orphic god *Phanes*. The *Nachleben* of this Orphic and Mithraic divinity, studied by Panofsky in a chapter of his *Studies in Iconology*,³⁹ and mentioned by Calasso in *The Marriage*, which contains an entire chapter on this image⁴⁰ «four eyes and four horns, gold wings, heads of ram, bull, lion and snake placed on a young and human body, a phallus and a vagina, hoofs».⁴¹

38 Roberto Calasso, 'In copertina metteremo un Beardsley', *La Repubblica*, 28 December 2006. The text can be found at this address: <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/12/28/in-copertina-metteremo-un-beardsley.html>.

39 The chapter is devoted to the iconology of Father Time. The divinity that Calasso identifies as Phanes (the one who appears) is identified by Panofsky both as *Aion*, or the representation of the time as inexhaustible creation, and as with the Mytraic cults. «On the other hand, the exact opposite of the “Kairos” idea is represented in ancient art, namely the Iranian concept of Time as “Aion”; that is, the divine principle of eternal and inexhaustible creativeness. These images are either connected with the cult of Mithra, in which case they show a grim winged figure with a lion’s head and lion’s claws, tightly enveloped by a huge snake and carrying a key in either hand, or they depict the Orphic divinity commonly known as Phanes, in which case they show a beautiful winged youth surrounded by the zodiac, and equipped with many attributes of cosmic power; he too is encircled by the coils of a snake», Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Westview Press, 1972), pp. 72-73. For the iconology of Mithra see Franz Valery, Mary Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, trans. by Thomas Joseph McCormack (Chicago: Open Court Pub. Co., 1910), pp. 104-50; 209-29.

40 Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, pp. 252 ff.

41 Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, p. 256.

We find the same image in *Tiepolo Pink*, within the ékphrasis of the Tiepolo's *Crono affida Cupido a Venere*.⁴² Finally *Phanes* is identified by Calasso with the living idol that is found to the center of the Baudelaire's dream which presumably is the double of the poet himself, since he found himself awakened, he rolled up in the same position.⁴³ In the interpretation of the dream proposed by Calasso the museum becomes the place of a "vivification of the image". From "pure representations" (obscene drawings and architecture), it passes to "inanimate artifacts" (drawings of fetuses, photos), then to portraits of "birds with livingly eyes", and finally it appears a "totally alive being", which comes in the form of an ancient pagan deity. The monster is, of course, Baudelaire himself, most developed product of the *phantasmagoria* of the XIX century, created by the accumulation of images by positivism and again, ancient idolatrous soul.

Lost image

One last ékphrasis draws our attention in *La Folie*: it is actually a hybrid between notional and mimetic description. The image in question is a daguerreotype which reproduces two paintings by Ingres, one known and the other one lost, probably a portrait of his ex-wife.

The daguerreotype, when viewed without knowing anything about these circumstances, immediately appears as one of the most erotic images from the beginning of photography. Its remarkable strangeness is given by the position of the woman, who is lying on the bed and not resting on its side, but has reached a balance that seems unlikely at the same time resting almost vertically on the side in front of the observer and relaxed. The effect is given by a certain angle formed by

42 «The mother, who perhaps is not the mother, gives the child to an old man, which is perhaps the real father. In both paintings the gesture is maternal, Time is protective towards the little Eros, holding him in his arms. Venus only shows herself, with her chest exposed. It is the Appearing himself, as in ancient times Eros, as Phanes» (*Il rosa Tiepolo*, pp. 268-69).

43 Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, pp. 202-03.

the body, which creates the illusion of a double posture. You will look in vain in history of painting an optical mixture so successful of one reclining nude and the other lying on one side. But there was a reason to choose that angle? One can only say that this posture shows the greatest possible surface of the body and all the same, soft lighting value, while the focus of the light goes transversely between the right breast and the left side of the abdomen. The center of the composition is the navel of the woman, whose eyelids are lowered, suggesting a sentence of Ingres, “the navel is the eye of the torso”. The effect is that of a total vision, which it would have if it contemplates the body from above. While here the body bended towards the observer.⁴⁴

On one hand this description is based upon a “reproduction”, from the other hand the original has disappeared. This image perfectly corresponds to the “phantasmatic logic” of “melancholia” as a form of disappearance of the object-cause of desire and its reconstruction in phantasy. Images do not completely disappear: only materials are consumed. So it is possible to find in the dream of a poet of the XIX century an Orphic and Mithraic *simulacrum*, and it is also possible that the image, in a time even more remote, was worshiped as the concrete presence of Gods.

44 Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, p. 133.

AWAKE YOUR FAITH: WHEN REALITY
REPRODUCES THE IMAGE OF ITSELF.
THE WINTER'S TALE (V, 1-3)

GIUSEPPE LEONE

A Theatrical Ékphrasis

The plot of *The Winter's Tale* (1611), set in the kingdoms of Sicily and Bohemia, masterly ties King Leonte's love for Queen Hermione to his pernicious and unmotivated jealousy towards Polixenes, sovereign of Bohemia. Yet, it is known that the psychological drama of jealousy is followed by an unpredictable conclusion that transforms the text into a fully balanced tragicomedy.

Analyzing the plot, it is clear that it presents a perfectly bipartite scheme. In particular, the first three acts seem to prelude a catastrophic end. Leontes breaks first the "terrestrial codes": he repudiates his wife, reneges his friend Polixenes and banishes his daughter Perdita from the kingdom. Later on, he also breaks the "heavenly codes": the violation begins when the King disowns the veracity, and hence the holy and predictive power of the oracle of Apollo, interrogated to decree Hermione's innocence or culpability. As a consequence of Leonte's atrocious acts there comes first Mamillius's death then that of Antigonus, and finally Hermione's "disappearance". The plot, thus, seems to move in the direction of an intricate and well-defined tragedy. However, starting from act IV, the violence of the play is gradually mitigated by several events which eventually lead to restoration of old friendships, to the rejoining of the family members and to the formation of new couples and so of new life.¹

1 According to this perspective, it is not by chance that the third act closes with a line full of good proposals, able to presage the propitious shifting of the dramatic action: «'Tis a lucky day, boy, and we'll do good deeds on't» (*The Winter's Tale*, 3, 3, 132)

Most relevant to this essay, leaving aside the plot development, is that, in act V, an extraordinary product of art is put on stage: a sculpture representing Hermione (whose death had been previously announced by Paulina) able to reproduce the Queen's very "nature". In a few words, the Shakespearian play "invents" a statue so well sculpted by the Italian master Giulio Romano that it seems provided with the faculty of speech:²

that rare Italian master [...]
so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that
they say one would speak to her and stand in hope
of answer.³ (5, 2, 95-100)

The lines which describe the plastic perfection of the statue, skilfully incorporated in the plot, act both as a verbal legacy and as a fundamental descriptive completion, placing themselves in between the notional ékphrasis, illustrated by John Hollander,⁴ and the "synaesthetic integration" to which Michele Cometa refers.⁵ It is known that the ékphrastic process is to be considered among the oldest rhetorical devices: there are several image descriptions in aesthetical essays,⁶ or in poems or in novels.⁷ Yet now the ékphrasis is produced in a playhouse, it becomes a verbal

2 It must be underlined that Giulio Romano, who was a painter not a sculptor, died in 1546. Therefore this can be considered an evident anachronism: in fact Shakespeare stresses, by way of Paulina, that the statue was recently completed by the artist, but actually *The Winter's Tale* (1660-1611) is set in pre-Christian period.

3 References to Shakespeare's play are drawn from the Arden Shakespeare edition, John Henry Pyle Pafford (ed.), (London: Arden, 1999).

4 As is known, John Hollander defines notional the description of inexistent works of art; an example of notional ékphrasis is the famous description of Achilles' shield in Homer's *Iliad*, see Hollander, 'The Poetics of Ékphrasis' (1988), pp. 209-19.

5 For a thorough analysis of synaesthetic, hermeneutic, associative or transpositive integrations, see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2012), pp. 116-42.

6 See Winckelmann's *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*; or Lessing's *Laocoon* or, to furnish another example, Foucault's description of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.

7 There are several examples: the famous Homeric description of Achilles' shield (later on evoked by Auden in his *The Shield of Achilles*, 1952), but it can be mentioned also Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819), or *The Unknown*

appendix to the onstage presentation of a work of art. The theatre resounds with “iconic speeches”: observation of the statue mixes with ékphrastic elocution. Oral and visual overlap, incorporated in the simultaneity of the dramatic action.

The accurate descriptions of Hermione’s statue recall to the observers an emotive experience which completes the cold inspection of the gaze. Leonte’s sentences definitely hark back to the olfactory and tactile memory of Polixenes and Perdita who rushed, with the King, to see the sculpture. Their previous knowledge is driven by a word that aims at evoking their respective earlier information.⁸ Thus, on the stage the details of the vision blend with the uneasiness of the remembrance, whereas the phenomenon of recognition starts:

Leontes: O royal piece!
 There’s magic in thy majesty, which has
 My evils conjured to remembrance, and
 From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
 Standing like stone with thee. (5, 3, 38-42)

Vision and listening, simultaneity and recalling, work together to create a dimension of the gaze that is no longer merely physical. Observation is now an emotive, passionate event. The spheres of listening and watching participate at the same time in an admiring identification process while the stage is filled by experiences of perception that involve both the senses and the imagination:

Leontes: See, my lord:
 Would you not deem it breathed? and that those veins
 Did verily bear blood? (5, 3, 64-66)

The consciousness is deeply influenced by the suggestions of the gaze. As a consequence the representation conveys all its

Masterpiece (1832) by Honoré de Balzac. All of them are obviously examples of notional ékphrasis.

8 See Umberto Eco, “Descrizione con richiamo alle esperienze personali del destinatario” in Id. *Sulla letteratura* (Milano: Bompiani, 2002), see in particular the chapter entitled *Les Sémaphores sous la pluie*, pp. 191-214.

power of “presentification”.⁹ Instinctive impulses of passion, yearning and wonder intervene during the examination of the motionless image, meanwhile a “synaesthetic ékphrasis”¹⁰ also reports on the perception of the vital warmth:

Polixenes: Masterly done:
The very life seems warm upon her lip. (5, 3, 67-68)

Image and word meet and face up to each other. Representation exposes itself to description, and the latter, as a rhetorical technique, grasps and communicates details able to overcome the information provided by the eyes: ékphrasis becomes an indispensable factor to “complete”¹¹ the work of art, thus revealing the insufficiency of the gaze. And as a matter of fact, as Cometa states, the connection between literature and visual art has always provoked a lively and ceaseless discussion:

Painting [or sculpture] and literature have played the leading role in an endless conflict regarding the power of the visual in comparison with the power of the verbal, regarding also the limits and interferences between visual and verbal signs, and the irreducible gap between the expressible and the visible or, more exactly, between the inexpressible that painting claims to show and the invisible that literature claims to represent.¹²

The act of watching is now enriched by the description and, in some way, modified and influenced by it. All this happens thanks to the capacity of the spoken word of changing and adapting itself to the sense that it wants to express. Moreover, the description, so the word, has the specific faculty of reproducing itself endlessly, of reappearing each time potentially different, renewed. Prerogative which is not permitted to representation that can only furnish a unique account of itself. This account is always immutable, it is

9 For further information, see Michael Foucault *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

10 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 116-42.

11 The reference is to the well-known Peter Heinrich von Blanckenhagen’s definition; for further information, see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 39.

12 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 52 (translated by the author).

of course eternal, but it is always limited to the same shape, to the same outline. Furthermore, it must be underlined that *ékphrasis* has the capability to ‘move’ the vision, to transform and to animate it; to permit, in other words, a “dynamization” process¹³ which allows the image to expand itself in the space, an image that without this process would remain immobilized in its fixity. The report of the perception of a breath coming from the marble furnishes a perfect demonstration of the dynamizing aptitude of the verbal process:

Leontes: Still, methinks,
There is an air comes from her: what fine chisel
Could ever yet cut breath? (5, 3, 78-80)

The line triggers a fictitious process of vivification of the block of marble: now the sculpture seems to produce a motion of lung contraction and the observer can almost hear the noise of the expelled breath; he can nearly see the statue moving. According to *Leontes*, the representation of life is so perfectly reproduced on the statue that life itself seems to be present:

Leontes: The fixture of her eye has motion in't,
As we are mocked with art. (5, 3, 65-66)

The King’s words fully express admiration for an expiratory process that seems to be carved in the marble, giving powerful evidence of a sense of verisimilitude which deceives the gaze.

Even Less Than the ‘Minor Truth’: the Deceived Art

The representative vitality of the sculpture strongly raises the topic of the fraudulent verisimilitude of art that many centuries ago was investigated by Pliny in his tale on the grapes drawn by *Zeuxis*

13 The *image dynamizing process* is exhaustively pointed out by Cometa in *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 90-115.

and the curtains painted by Parrhasius.¹⁴ Yet now, as through an upside/down shift, each process of art production and observation is inverted. The sculpture is actually an extraordinary falsehood: a representation within the representation.¹⁵ Hermione's statue is in fact Hermione herself. Truth now pretends to be an image. The original material becomes imitation, a false otherness. The objective reality cancels every difference between itself and its representation. The subject is no longer different from its depiction: the Queen is simultaneously flesh and image, reality and fiction.

Didi-Huberman, in *L'image ouverte*, points out that painting has often been considered a "*moins-être*: travail de l'apparence"; "qui dit peindre dit feindre", he adds.¹⁶ This theoretical concept can be obviously applied to the whole area of the plastic arts. Each representation can be considered a pretence or, more exactly, the account of a "minor truth" – a truth "on a scale" – that tries to establish a verisimilar relationship between the object, as it appears to the eye, and the reproduction which is made of it. Yet, now Hermione's statue, in its prominent originality, can be considered as an imperfect reproduction: it is even less than the minor truth, even less (or much more) than the appearance. The sculpture of the Queen, as an artistic product, is to be judged as a betrayal of the image,¹⁷ as a counterfeiting practice.

Analyzed from this point of view, the statue shows itself, quoting from Fabio Bazzani, as an "insufficiency of truth and a

14 See Adam Max Cohen, *Transalpine Wonders: Shakespeare's Marvelous Aesthetics*, in Michele Marrapodi (ed.), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 89.

15 It is worth remarking that the scene triggers a process of theatrical mise en abyme. Hermione herself, in fact, is not but an actress who plays the role of a Queen. Moreover, at Shakespeare's time there were only male actors playing female parts. Thus the statue arouses the very complex question of analogy between human existence and theatrical performance.

16 "minor-being, a work of appearance"; "who says painting says faking"; the translation is mine. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image ouverte: Motifs de l'incarnation dans les arts visuels* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 78. Among others, Didi-Huberman also quotes Isidoro di Siviglia's famous statement: «Pictura autem dicta quasi fictura» (*Etymologiae*, XIX.16).

17 The reference to Magritte's 1929 painting *La Trahison des images*. (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*) is not a chance one.

need for truth”.¹⁸ It is insufficient in truth because of its shamming nature, because it pretends to be a work of art. Consequently, it expresses a demand for truth just because it is a fake, a mock copy, though paradoxically real.

It is better to move with due caution: the relationship between the image rendered by the statue and the reality is still present, but now it is not based on truth, it could be said on good faith, anymore. The statue still represents the Queen, it describes her with precision; each detail is well carved in the “marble”; the language of the representation obtains excellent results, the viewers are astounded and the impression is long-lasting:

Paulina: I like your silence, it the more shows off
Your wonder (5, 3, 21-22)

Nevertheless, that representation lies. It belies the viscera, no more inert marble but pulsating flesh irrigated by dynamic and nourishing liquid. It belies the gaze, burdened by emotions yet forced into a controlled and fixed pose, into a glassy look. It belies the body’s rigidity, simulated with a physical effort and with a remarkable power of endurance. And each lie contributes to the creation of a theatrical reality that is a perfect appearance inside the appearance. The regal carriage, as much as the colour of the lips, flawlessly help to present a perfect image of the Queen. Thus, Nature can find in this work of art, immobile beyond the curtain brought down by Paulina, a perfect mould:

Paulina: prepare to see the life as lively mocked as ever
Still sleep mocked death: behold, and say ‘tis well! (5, 3, 18-20)

But, actually, the sculpture does not refer to an external image, just because it is itself the image it wants to reproduce.¹⁹ The

18 “Insufficienza di verità ed esigenza di verità”; see Fabio Bazzani, *Introduzione*, in *La questione dello stile. I linguaggi del pensiero*, ed. by Fabio Bazzani, Roberta Lanfredini, Sergio Vitale (Firenze: Clinamen, 2012), p. 8; translation by the author.

19 Thus, quoting from Foucault, “l’équivalence entre le fait de la ressemblance et l’affirmation d’un lien représentatif” disappears. The translation is mine. See M. Foucault, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* (Fontfroide-le-Haut: Fata Morgana, 1973), p. 42.

deceit is triple because it involves all of the three elements of the representation: the model, the product of art and the *ékphrasis*. Or, in other words, the cosmos, the reproduction of the cosmos and its description. Now, the relationship between art and truth that until then had characterized each marble carve, or better each work of art, has been altered. As a consequence the *ékphrastic* deal between the description and the object of art has also been altered. The breaking of the deal is provoked by the fact that the description does not have a direct relationship with a copy of Nature, but with Nature itself.

The deception acts *in primis* on the bystander's gaze. A gaze that, laying on the image, erects and shapes the work of art, a gaze that "creates" the work of art. Leonte's stare, in particular, slides on the marble to fixate itself, rapt and incredulous, on the statue's face. The image he sees is identical to the one he kept in his memory. So, trusting the vision, the King mortifies the real thinking of it as a copy; he considers the flesh as an image, the model as a work of art; he confuses pulsating life with the depiction of the vital pulsation. He is totally trapped in the intentional misrepresentation. The King of Sicily, as well as Perdita or Polixenes, certain that they are in front of an object of art, in reality stare at its origin, at its source. Their gazes fall into an enduring imposture. Thus, the *ékphrasis*, the meticulous description of the artefact, reveals itself as nothing more than the certification of a perfect trickery. Now it is no longer sufficient to determine a relation of likeness between the object of art and its original model to identify a work of art:²⁰ in *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione's statue is presented on the stage as a product of art, it is considered as a product of art, it is described as a product of art, but actually it is living flesh, animated simulacrum, deception.

20 See Foucault, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. See also Keir Elam, "Look here upon this picture": *Shakespeare e i paradossi tragici del sembra*, in Susan Payne, Valeria Pellis (ed. by), *Il Teatro inglese tra Cinquecento e Seicento. Testi e contesti* (Padova: Cleup, 2011), pp. 153-79; and Claudia Corti, "The Winter's Tale tra 'speaking pictures' e 'dumb poesies'", in Payne, Pellis, *Il Teatro inglese*, pp. 267-88.

Hermione: Before and Beyond the Representation

It has been highlighted that Hermione, as an object of art, can be considered an inauthentic article. A totally different consideration must be made reflecting on the Queen as a living body that pretends to be a statue. In this case, the Truth, Hermione, is simultaneously model and copy: she is “before and beyond the representation”. She is “before” the representation because she pre-exists it and determines it: she is the guide and the matrix of the representation.²¹ The Queen “precedes” the representation because she embodies the reality to which the sculptor must refer to in order to fulfil his task. The artist has to manipulate the raw material according to the sovereign’s silhouette to obtain the similitude, which is the necessary condition to define as successful an artistic object conceived with mimetic purposes. Hermione’s outline and the expression of her face represent the framework to carve on the marble. The final result will be perfect only if every part of the statue, every marble inch, is able to call to the observer’s mind the Queen’s equivalent bodily feature. A similar observation can be made referring to the shape of the hands and the volume of the arms. In sum, the living flesh of the sovereign, her figure, will be the criteria to judge any duplicate.

Yet Hermione is also “beyond” the representation since she surpasses it because of the perfection of the features and because of her condition of being a “real” image, absolutely independent of any iconic reproduction. Her body is not an inert statue, but a motionless figure acting as a statue. And probably the Queen would not remain in that position for an indefinite or very long period, or even for a very short time considering the curiosity of the observers, who cannot avoid touching it and perceiving, through the fingers, the sculpture’s perfect roundedness, and even kissing it. Moving closer and closer to the simulacrum is an instinctive act, just as the tactile identification is the expression of a deep veneration which it is hard to oppose. Both Leontes and Perdita will try more than

21 Hermione, in sum, exists before than any representation of Hermione.

once to brush against the marble. Only Paulina's interventions will prevent them from touching the statue:

Leontes: Let no man mock me,
For I will kiss her.

Paulina: Good my lord, forbear.
The ruddiness upon her lip is wet:
You'll mar it if you kiss it, stain your own
With oily painting. (5, 3, 79-84)

Hermione is "beyond" the representation because she is physically alive, real in her perishability. The passing of time has actually lined her body: creases make an attempt on her beauty, attacking her face. Leontes is the first to notice the wrinkling of the skin, perhaps because more than the others he can remember the smooth charm of his wife:

Leontes: But yet, Paulina,
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems. (5, 3, 26-29)

Also Polixenes seems bewildered in front of a statue which, despite being absolutely similar to its original, looks incomprehensibly older. Once again it is Paulina who, continuing the cheating plotted with Hermione, will find the right answer to solve the Kings' doubts. And answering, Paulina will trot out the sculptor's great ability to refer to Nature imitating even the effects of the flowing of time:

Paulina: So much the more our carver's excellence,
Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes her
As she lived now. (5, 3, 30-32)

In point of fact, it is that "As she lived now" which supports the entire deception. The betrayal of the depiction is in the "naturalness" of the artistic object. Art and Nature thus equally participate in the Shakespearian *mise-en-scène*.

Even before in the text, the relationship between Nature and Art,²² i.e. between the truth and its duplicate, had been presented thanks to a dialogue between Perdita and Polixenes. The opportunity was given by a brief dispute on the possibility for man to improve Nature through the use of grafts. The hypothesis, as is known, was smartly rejected by Perdita who still deemed Art an imitation of Nature, or a form of understanding reality, and not as a form of experimentation or overcoming of Nature:

Perdita: For I have heard it said
There is an art which in their [of the grafts] piedness shares
With great creating Nature.

Polixenes: Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. [...] This is an art
Which does mend nature – change it rather – but
The art itself is nature. (4, 4, 88-97)

Apart from the quarrel, however, quite prophetically, the quick dialogue between young Perdita and the King of Bohemia seems to give clues to the next appearance on the stage of Hermione's statue that, from this point of view, is nothing but Nature that becomes Art.²³

22 The Nature versus Art debate is very frequent in the Renaissance period, as is pointed out, among others, by Harold S. Wilson. See, Harold S. Wilson, "Nature and Art" in W. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Kenneth Muir (ed. by) (Houndmills-Basingstoke-London: Macmillian Press, 1988⁹). So, for example, the Nature versus Art question is examined by Sidney in *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), by Spencer in "Bower of Bliss" in *The Faerie Queene* (II, xii, 42-87) or by George Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589). For further information, see Edward W. Tayler, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964) and R. Headlam Wells, "Civility and Barbarism in the Winter's Tale", in Michele Marrapodi (ed.), *Intertestualità shakespeariane* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2003), p. 277-92.

23 With reference to the close relationship between Nature and Art in *The Winter's Tale*, the considerations made by Northrop Frye are of great interest: «Hermione, like Thaisa in *Pericles*, is brought to life by the playing of music, and references

Awake Your Faith

An ambiguous relationship between appearance and presence is therefore set up on the stage. But since literature, like art, is nothing but a search for truth, every simulation, every insincerity that is an obstacle to this goal must be removed. The figural disguise must be denounced and unmasked. And in order to obtain it, in order to complete the dramatic path, the sacrilegious act *par excellence* must be carried out: iconoclasm. The statue must be broken, destroying its representative intention. The image must be “opened”, removing any fetishism to achieve the truth. Didi-Huberman well explains this concept by analyzing a text by Baudelaire:

Baudelaire, better than anyone else, formulated the concept of *opened image* in all its cruel logic: you need to look inside to understand, you need to open to see inside, but *to open you need to destroy*.²⁴

However, now, iconoclasm is followed by an event different from destruction: now the marble, after the undoing, lives. The reproduction, proving itself to be false, gains more strength than the evocative and symbolic power given to the icon. The sculpture is no longer a representative substitute, it is no longer a fetish, compelled to recall to mind an image, a person, but becomes authentic existence. The image does not reproduce anymore, but “is”; it is now consubstantial with the original. Realism becomes reality. Destruction, in this case, is an act of knowledge. It is necessary that Hermione’s statue is “opened” to reveal its *alétheia*, its intimate nature, its truth. It is just in order to reveal this truth that Paulina asks Leontes for an act of faith:

to the art of magic follow. Art, therefore, seems part of the regenerating power of the play», in “*Recognition in The Winter’s Tale*”, in W. Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, K. Muir, (ed.), p. 190; see also Northrop Frye, “Romance as Masque” in Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (eds.), *Shakespeare’s Romances Reconsidered* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

24 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’image ouverte*, p. 58. Didi-Huberman refers to a text by Charles Baudelaire entitled *Morale du joujou* (*The Moral of the Toy*). For further information, see also G. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2003).

Paulina: It is required
You do awake your faith. (5, 3, 96-97)



Henry Van Der Weyde, Mary Anderson as Hermione, 1887

The dissolution of the image, the recognition, will be possible merely thanks to a “faith” which permits the simulacrum’s annihilation. So substitution will take the place of destruction, consequently there will be a vivification of the effigy. *Faith* is necessary to let representation coincide with reality.²⁵

According to the Christian notion of life in the simulacrum, of the Truth in the reproduction, after Paulina’s intervention, form

25 In this way “*inner experience*” will change into external experience, into a physical involvement, into a mutual, active exchange of feelings. For the concept of *expérience intérieure*, see Didi-Huberman, *L’image ouverte*, pp. 25-27.

changes into presence, “metaphor becomes metamorphosis”.²⁶ Yet, now, everything happens in a way inverse to the Christological process. In this case, in fact, it is the icon that “generates” a living body, whereas in the Christian doctrine it is Christ’s death which determines the proliferation of images charged with a holy meaning and a theological presence. In both cases, however, icon and presence, appearance and flesh, belong to the same vortex of the evocative substitution.

Hermione comes back to life and, as by an unexpected prodigy, every appearance will recover its authenticity. Hermione will be the Queen of Sicily again: the portrayed person will rescue herself from representation, disentangling herself from between the two natures (the figural and the corporal), once again becoming a wife and mother. Obviously, this happens while a deep, collective, sense of wonder strikes all the characters of the romance, and of course all the audience. As Michele Marrapodi has pointed out, in fact, the viewers too are fully deceived:

For the first time in the canon, Shakespeare infringes his dramatic rule of always informing the audience, by means of aside or soliloquies [...] In *The Winter’s Tale* he uses an effective strategy to make the audience believe in the fiction of Hermione’s death.²⁷

Here, Shakespeare proposes on the scene a variant of *arte-viva* dramatic *topos*, which is in actual fact a holy-mythic traditional heritage. Even not considering the examples coming from the holy hypostasis of the divine images of the Christianity,²⁸ there are several precedents able to testify the recurrence of the theme. We can consider, for example, Medusa’s cut-off head set in Athena’s

26 See Didi-Huberman, *L’image ouverte*.

27 Michele Marrapodi, *Of That Fatal Country: Sicily and the Rhetoric of Topography*, in *Shakespeare’s Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Michele Marrapodi and others (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997²), p. 223.

28 See, for example, Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (München: C. H. Beck, 2005), but see also H. Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (München: C. H. Beck, 1990) and Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, translated by Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

aegis;²⁹ or the living statue moulded by Hephaestus;³⁰ or finally the lady carved in ivory by Pygmalion and later on transformed into a living woman by Venus³¹ who, thus, permitted the young artist, who has fallen in love with his creature, to have a loving affair with the simulacrum now made of flesh and blood. Like Pygmalion, Leontes too can join his Queen, until then believed to be a sculptural product. At the same time, of course, Perdita may well start a filial relationship with her mother who is ready to return to life accepting the invitation of her loyal accomplice:

Paulina: descend; be stone no more; [...] come away,
 Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
 Dear life redeems you. (5, 3, 99-103)

Thoroughly analyzing the line, Paulina's exhortation seems to be loaded with the power described in the myth of *Genesis*. It has the typical connotations of the supreme performative act, correspondingly to the *fiat lux* that belongs to the Christian tradition and that reveals the creating power of the highest Will. Now the word is knotted to a prodigious and peremptory gesture: now the *logos* does not communicate anymore but immediately acts, thus undertaking a sacred role, a vivifying function, i.e. transforming into living flesh the inanimate substance (or at least judged to be inanimate). Paulina's invitation to life has the same power of resurrection as the formula used by Christ to rescue Lazarus³² or Jairus' daughter.³³ In any case, regardless of the theological power of the exhortation, the Queen responding to

29 See Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, IV, 790-803. It is worthwhile to remark that *Metamorphosis* must be considered a fundamental source for the Shakespearian play; see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993): pp. 233-39; see also Leonard Barkan, 'Living Sculptures: Ovid Michelangelo and *The Winter's Tale*' in *Journal of English Literary History*, 48/1981, pp. 639-67.

30 For example, consider Talos, the giant man forged in bronze to protect the island of Crete, or the creation of Pandora, the first woman formed out of clay.

31 The myth of Pygmalion was described by Ovid in *Metamorphosis*, X, 243-97.

32 *John*, 11, 17-45.

33 *Matthew*, 9, 18-26. See also *Mark*, 5, 21-43 and *Luke*, 8, 40-56.

Paulina's stimulus recovers her corporality: the object becomes subject and the deception disappears.

From Picture to Image

As a consequence, Hermione's enlivening transfiguration, the resurrection, gives her back the status of an "image", an entity that can be represented and can become, once again, a "picture" if reproduced by a *medium*³⁴ (and it can be granite, or wood, or canvas). Hermione recovers flesh and motion, freeing herself of marble fixity. The return to life and the disclosure of identity permit the Queen to transform herself from "a false artistic representation" into a real "potential artistic model". She changes from "picture" to "image". The artistic production path inverts again. At the beginning, the Queen's body and features assumed a fictitious rigidity to look like an artefact (the "image" becomes "picture"). Now that same body and that semblance are transformed again into a living form: the exhibition of the simulacrum is abruptly interrupted. The verification process coincides with the crisis of the representation, with the infringement of the icon; it coincides with the not merely symbolic demolition of the "picture".

34 See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Pictorial Turn*, ed. by Michele Cometa (Palermo: duepunti edizioni, 2008), pp. 9-11.



Joseph Durham, *Hermione*, 1858

On the other side, it begins a resurrection process of the “image”, a regeneration which arises from the iconic ruins. Therefore, Paulina has not taken a sculpture away from art³⁵ but she has accompanied a woman to life. In this way, the Queen recovers a presence on the stage and melts away the evocative task that art had momentarily assigned to her. The mimetic function, that is to say the function of representative haziness, dissipates after the statue’s annihilation. Nature becomes Nature again, re-establishing its legitimacy and its autonomy from Art. And almost as if to ratify her return to the living *status*, Hermione regains the power of speech, and thus she blesses her daughter and gives explanation for her actions:

35 Compare Apelles’ gesture related by Ausonius, by Pliny the Elder and by Plutarch and well analyzed by Didi-Huberman in *L’image ouverte*, pp. 89-95.

Hermione: You gods, look down,
 And from your sacred vials pour your graces
 Upon my daughter's head! [...] for thou shalt hear that I,
 Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
 Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
 Myself to see the issue. (5, 3, 122-128)

Nor can the return to life be considered a fortuitous event. *The Winter's Tale*, in fact, was conceived and written in the concluding part of Shakespeare's dramatic production; a period to which there belong the last "romances" i.e. – besides *The Winter's Tale* – *Pericles* (1607-1608), *Cymbeline* (1607-1610) and *The Tempest* (1611). And all the romances' dramatic plots, after an opening sequence of sorrowful events fit for a cruel tragedy, bend towards a happy unexpected ending,³⁶ in keeping with the hybrid use of literary genres theorized by Geraldini Cinthio, who first presented the notion of *tragedia di fin lieto*.³⁷ It has already been underlined that Shakespeare's last period, the one in which it is possible to observe the coexistence of both tragic elements and of a final happy solution, must be considered, quoting Agostino Lombardo: "expression of a dramatic and human experience that, on the one hand, reached its highest plenitude and maturity and, on the other hand, is enlivened by an experimental passion which is one of

36 See Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: OUP, 1992); G. Melchiori, *Shakespeare: Genesi e struttura delle opere* (Bari: Laterza, 1994); Michele Marrapodi, *The 'Woman as a Wonder' Trope*, in M. Marrapodi (ed. by), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

37 See Michele Marrapodi, *Introduction: Shakespeare against Genres*, in M. Marrapodi (ed. by), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories*, pp. 2-22. Also very famous, at that time, was the pastoral tragicomedy *Il pastor fido* (1590) by Giovan Battista Guarini, which was later adapted by Fletcher in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610). In any case, it is worthwhile to remember that *The Winter's Tale* main source is Green's *Pandosto* (1588) from which the Shakespearian play takes inspiration. Among *The Winter's Tale* source must be listed also Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590-1596), Sydney's *Arcadia*, but also *Aeneid*, *Odyssey* and, as previously mentioned, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.

the constant elements of Shakespearean art”.³⁸ During this period Shakespeare expresses the purpose of representing a society ruled by the ethical values of reconciliation and forgiveness, conceiving a plot in which all bitterness and all complexity are resolved; a play, all told, where every antagonism slowly vanishes.

Therefore Hermione’s resurrection perfectly fits into this renewed Shakespearian organization of the plot. Hermione’s rebirth can be considered a paradigmatic example of the route that leads from loss to reunification, from falseness to authenticity or, more generally, from tragedy to “romance”.

The archetype, i.e. Hermione, comes to heal the imposture of the *imitatio*, to guide the text to a final harmony and to a goal of truth, accordingly to the precepts of Shakespeare’s last production.

Nevertheless, as if by a paradoxical “nemesis of the false”, the statue, the “imitation”, will find a continual reproduction. It will often be presented as an artistic object to all intents and purposes. In the centuries to come, there will indeed be carved statues of Hermione [fig. 2] and real canvases depicting the Queen in her sculptural pose will be painted [fig. 3]. Sometimes, the subject will be impressed on a surface different from marble, but in all cases the “image” will be fixed on an iconic stand. The effigy will be transferred to a evocative *medium*, finally becoming “picture”. It will regain the rule, temporarily usurped by Hermione, of original work of art, released from the archetype: completely true in itself.

38 «espressione di un’esperienza teatrale e umana giunta, da un lato, alla sua massima pienezza e maturità e animata, dall’altro, da una passione sperimentale che è tra i segni costanti dell’arte shakespeariana». See Agostino Lombardo, *Il trionfo del tempo, la vittoria sul tempo*, in Shakespeare, *Il racconto d’inverno* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011), p. V; the translation is mine.



William Hamilton, *Leontes Looking at the Statue of Hermione*, 1790

THE BODY ARTIST BY DON DELILLO: WORD, IMAGE AND (IN)DESCRIBABILITY OF THE BODY IN POST-MODERN ART

MIRKO LINO

What happens to literary writing when it employs its tools (i.e. words) to seize hold of a body on stage in a performance of body art? Can literature reconstruct this complex artistic representation, in which the body has become a reflection of the society producing it?

This essay will try to investigate this fascinating literary challenge by analyzing the novel *The Body Artist* by the American writer Don DeLillo, incorporating it with certain issues relating to *ékphrasis*, a literary genre encompassing a variety of interpretative possibilities, here it is to be understood as a space in which literature reflects on its own representational limitations when attempting to describe the visual aspects of figurative art.

To discuss *ékphrasis* entails, first of all, tackling the complex issue of the relationships between word and image, time and space, movement and stasis within Western culture; inside the refined literary workshop whole worlds are built up from words, in order to vividly convey to the reader's imagination the literary form and the creative process, as well as the feelings aroused in experiencing a work of art. Some of the most relevant contemporary reflections regarding "*ékphrasis*" are vented in the intense pages of DeLillo's novel, which assigns to the word the arduous task of restoring to the reader certain visual experiences, subsequently connected to other sensorial worlds of smell and sound. The novel introduces the categories of the fictitious through the invented filmography of a director who has never existed, using scraps from reviews that exist exclusively in the space of the words; it concentrates its attention on the creative process of a body artist, and the description (also, in this case, via a newspaper article) of

the (again, in this case) imaginary performance by the protagonist Laureen Hartke. This type of artistic performance enables one to shift the traditional attention of the *ékphrasis* from the static figures depicted in painting and sculpture to the moving figure in body art; what is often a provocative art plays with the actual limitations of the tradition with which the concept of “artistic” is defined, whilst updating, in the system of art, a series of cultural issues such as look, body and gender.

The Body Artist poses a series of questions commonly encountered in contemporary theories regarding *ékphrasis*, as developed by scholars such as John Hollander, Murray Krieger, James Heffernan and W. J. T. Mitchell, whilst including the literary genre of verbal description of a work of art within the figurative representations of post-modernism. In addition, through its descriptive passages, DeLillo’s novel provides food for thought regarding literary creation itself, focusing on a continual confrontation of the word with its own limitations and other areas of artistic representation, as an exercise in the word’s survival in cultural contexts that have jeopardized its standing.

Interferences: Body and Words

DeLillo’s *The Body Artist* recounts the intimate thoughts of Laureen, a young female performer of body art, after her husband, the elderly film director Rey Robles, has committed suicide. After Rey’s suicide, Laureen decides to cut herself off from surrounding reality, remaining alone in an old rented house in the country in an unspecified area outside New York. Her days are marked by a ritualistic monotony; she watches birds from the window, carries out complicated aerobic exercises, depilates her body-hair, listens to messages from her friend Mariella Chapman on the answer-phone, stares intently at internet images of an anonymous road in the town of Kotka in Finland. Her days are suddenly disrupted by the appearance of an unknown character, Mr. Tuttle (perhaps her husband’s ghost or a hallucination), in one of the rooms in the house. After this discovery, Laureen establishes a complex

relationship with this figure, consisting of hesitant conversations and questions without an answer, observations, considerations and recorded dialogue; subsequently these would become the basis for an engrossing artistic performance, *Body Time*. This is described in the novel employing the style and form of an article for a specialized magazine, written by her friend Mariella Chapman.

DeLillo's powerful and elegant writing illustrates her loneliness, and in doing so, heads towards the contorted paths of deep reflection on contemporary art; this sees in the body not only an object of worship, but a fundamental vehicle for restating the presence of death as a constant element of existence, and as such, something to be exorcised and developed through representation: on the first level, a body art performance, and on the second level, literary creation or performance.

The latter is involved by this process as an artistic operation that is able to describe the art object at the heart of the novel, and consequently, is able to represent the painful and mournful creative process underlying Laureen's performance. From the very first pages one has the impression that the word is mainly being carried forward to a confrontation with its own representative limitations, so as to describe to the reader sensorial experiences (smells and sounds) that fall within the sphere of the "barely speakable" and the "barely describable".

For the purposes of our discussion three instances, or narrative passages, can be individuated in the novel. In the first, certain problems emerge that can be traced back to the capacity of the word to depict strikingly what other sensorial systems (smell and hearing) render it difficult to describe. In the two subsequent instances, the description of Rey's films and Laureen's body art performance respectively, one finds oneself faced by what (according to the distinction made by John Hollander) might refer to a notional *ékphrasis*, i.e. a description of a work of art that does not exist in reality (thus imaginary), opposed to the mimetic *ékphrasis*,¹ which is the description of an existing work of art that the reader can actually encounter in the real world. DeLillo's

1 Hollander, *The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, pp. 209-19.

descriptions, which are analyzed here, carry this ékphrastic distinction, because of its difficult resolution, to more fertile terrain; although these are imaginary artistic instances, a reader sensitive to the worlds of cinema and contemporary art cannot fail to recognize direct references to films and performances of body art as part of the vast range of contemporary artistic forms.

The first instance to be considered is Lauren's breakfast with her husband in their house outside New York, on the last morning before Rey's suicide. From the very first exchanges this takes on the flavor of a daily ritual where inconclusive dialogues between spouses are instrumental in giving greater emphasis to gestures, body position and their actions in the confined space of the kitchen:

It happened this final morning that they were at the same time, in the kitchen, and they shambled past each other to get things out of cabinets and drawers and then waited one for the other by the sink or fridge, still a little puddle in dream melt, and she ran tap water over the blueberries bunched in her hand and closed her eyes to breathe the savor rising. He sat with newspaper, stirring his coffee. It was his coffee and his cup (...) «I want to say something but what». (...) she reached into the near cabinet for a bowl and shook some cereal out of the box and then dropped the berries on top. She rubbed her hand dry on her jeans, feeling a sense somewhere of the color blue, runny and wan (...) «Yes exactly. I know what it is», he said. She went to the fridge and opened the door. She stood there remembering something. She said, «What?» Meaning what did you say, not what did you want to tell me. She remembered the soya granules. She crossed to the cabinet and took down the box and then caught the fridge door before it swung shut. She reached in for the milk, realizing what it was he'd said that she hadn't heard about eight seconds ago.²

The vividly described details provided by DeLillo add something more to a description of a simple breakfast; it transforms it into an artistic performance. Moreover, as a result of one small detail, a hair that finds its way into Lauren's mouth and which belongs neither to her nor her husband – «She held the strand of hair between thumb and index finger, regarding it with

2 Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (New York: Scribner, 2001), pp. 10-11.

mock aversion, or real aversion stretched to artistic limits»³ – the constant artistic tension of the performer is revealed, resulting in the banality of the breakfast ritual that sees a dance involving bodies grappling with gestures, articulated in such a synchronized manner as to take up the whole of the kitchen. The transformation of the everyday and its banality into works of art is a recurring motif in contemporary art. In their sphere artists such as La Ribot and Bobby Baker adopt the commonplace in art as a symptom of daily changes in psychological structure, breaking down the barriers between interior emotionality and exterior physicality. Ribot overturns artistic conventions in dance by rejecting the codes of the spectacular, whilst repeating commonplace gestures such as opening and closing a seat in *Chair* (2000), and loading them up with a powerful and compelling physicality. Baker, in her videos, for example *Kitchen Show* (1991), refers to the spectacle of physicality in the everyday, using tools and instruments with which one usually does the cooking in an extravagant, unusual and grotesque manner. In the performances by these artists, who use various devices (dance, video) for their representational purposes, actual words can be muted in order to increase the power of the gestures (as in the case of *Chair*) or can extend throughout the duration of the performance in an excess of explanation (as in *Kitchen Show*). In this latter case it ends up highlighting the gesture (throwing bits of fruit whilst keeping them in one's hand) and presents it as an emphatic moment in which it is the onlooker's imagination that creates meaning so that he can better enjoy the sensations that the artist is conveying. DeLillo actually prefers to make his words stutter, to make them limp along until they are concealed behind other experiences of sense and feeling; this emerges in the dialogues between Laureen and Rey, providing space for an extreme descriptive search that is not a pursuit of the figurative, but of smell and sound. While she is preparing breakfast Laureen is struck by the smell of soya, and DeLillo does not fail to describe the world of sensations that this smell arouses in the artist, and consequently, in the writer,

3 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 3.

involving directly and significantly the corporeal dimension (the smell of feet), which is fundamental to the artistic creation of the body artist:

She took the soya granules back to the table as well. The soya had a smell that didn't seem to belong to the sandy stuff in the box. It was a faint wheaty stink with feet mixed in. Every time she used the soya she smelled it. She smelled it two or three times (...) she poured granules into the bowl. The smell of the soya was somewhere between body odor, yes, in the lower extremities and some authentic podlife of the earth, deep and seeded. *But that didn't describe it [...] nothing described it.* It was pure smell. It was the thing that smell is, apart from all sources (...) it was as though some, maybe, medieval scholastic had attempted to classify all known odors and had found something that did not fit into his system and had called it soya.⁴

In the same way, sounds, in their phonetic breakdown, thwart a complete linguistic description: «The birds broke off the feeder in a wing-whir that was all *b*'s and *r*'s, the letter *b* followed by a series of vibrato *r*'s. But that wasn't it at all. *That wasn't anything like it.*»⁵

Words are therefore not enough; they suggest and leave the field to the imagination. DeLillo de-functionalizes them and withdraws them, only to re-launch them towards a “perfect descriptive imperfection”. For the reader, the breakfast scene between Laureen and Rey beckons to the world of artistic representation that sees the body as an active protagonist, communicating directly with the personal and cultural experiences of the end-user.

Following in the footsteps of Umberto Eco, in the words of Michele Cometa, in the implicit complicity that is created between writer and reader «there is at stake the capacity of the target audience, the end-user, to fill in the gaps in the description using one's imagination and senses, much more often, applying one's own artistic and cultural pre-knowledge».⁶ DeLillo's descriptive efforts when faced with the unclassifiable smell of soya and the phonetic uncertainty of the beating of birds' wings, fascinates the

4 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, pp. 14-18, *emphasis added*.

5 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 19, *emphasis added*.

6 Cometa, *Letteratura e arti figurative: Un catalogo*, p. 18.

reader, because it fires the reader's imagination and experience; these everyday events, within easy sensorial range, are part of the catalogue of post-modern arts in which the futile and the commonplace become themes of social and political import.

In this case it is difficult to argue the distinction between actual and notional *ékphrasis* as proposed by Hollander, because one is confronted by a description of an "occasional" work of art, a daily performance from marital life or existence itself («She took the kettle back to the stove because this is how you live a life even if you don't know it»⁷) not explained or recognizable if not by the vibrancy of DeLillo's writing and the reader's cultural baggage. From the very title of the novel the reader understands the central theme of the narrative: the body and artistic creation.

The other instances or spaces taken into consideration show the novel's tendency to confuse the two types of *ékphraseis* in a more direct manner than in the afore-mentioned case. In fact, both cases propose a typical interference in the regular narrative flow as proposed by the novels' chapter headings. The *ékphrastic* description was considered by Murray Krieger⁸ to be a moment for pause or narrative stasis; the scholar recognizes in the *ékphrasis* a spatial function that triggers a procedure where the word that is describing takes on a plastic dimension typical of figurative art, consequently interfering with the narrative flow. It is within this "plastic pause" that the narration presents itself as a space for inner-reflection, in which the artist and the writer, albeit indirectly, reflect on the language of their art and its representational potential.⁹

7 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 14.

8 Murray Krieger, *Ékphraseis and the Still Movement of Poetry, or Laokoön Revisited*, in *The Poet as Critic*, ed. by Frederick P. W. McDowell (Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 3-6.

9 It was James Heffernan's merit to have acknowledged in the *ékphrasis* the function-pretex for reflecting not only on the object being described, but also on the actual representation. The French scholar Philippe Hamon also comes to similar conclusions, concentrating mainly however on the *ékphrasis* as a self-representation of the writer and his craft; Philippe Hamon, *La description littéraire: De l'antique à Roland Barthes. Une antologie* (Paris: Macula, 1991).

The news of Rey's suicide is reported in the first and second chapters of the novel *Rey Robles, 64, Cinema's Poet of Lonely Places*, which imitates the style of a newspaper or magazine article. In this section the difficulties in the artistic life of Lauren's husband are summed up from his first steps, through his successes to his artistic decline. All the elements that create the effect of veracity are present (film titles, critical reviews, very brief synopses); an attentive reader cannot fail to spot their reference to a pre-existing literary case, whilst acknowledging a particular cinematographic poetry:

He directed eight features in all. The third of these, *My Life for Yours*, a French-Italian co-production about a wealthy woman kidnapped by Corsican bandits, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. It was followed by *Polaris*, a tense American crime drama with an undercurrent of Spanish surrealism. The film developed a cult following and ran for extended periods in a number of art houses in this country and abroad. «His work at its best extends the language of film», wrote the critic Philip Stansky. «His subject is people in landscapes of estrangement. He found a spiritual knife-edge in the poetry of alien places, where extreme situations become inevitable and characters are forced toward life-defining moments».¹⁰

The literary case to which DeLillo seems to be referring is that of the filmography of the director James O. Incandenza, invented by David Foster Wallace in the novel *Infinite Jest*.¹¹ In this masterpiece of post-modern literature seventy eight imaginary films are invented, accompanied by synopses and design specifications elaborated to the last detail. It is worth remembering that the two writers knew each other's works¹²

10 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 31.

11 David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2006), pp. 985-93.

12 In his interesting essay on the relationship between television and post-modern literature, *E Unibus Pluram* (1990), Wallace quotes a long passage taken from DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985). Moreover, the theme of garbage and refuse disposal in DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) is already actually present in Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (which had come out a year earlier).

and that they corresponded by letter.¹³ Moreover, as evidence of Wallace's influence on DeLillo, the case of Ray Robles clearly brings to mind that of J. O. Incandenza, since both these fictional directors committed suicide. By including the newspaper article about Rey, DeLillo exploits the expedient that Wallace has already used in his novel *Found Drama*; invented reviews lend weight to a film for the simple reason that a critic appears to have written them. The application of this verbal ploy on DeLillo's part is certainly very different from the extreme and captivating ploy adopted by Wallace, but the purpose behind this literary gesture can be clearly deemed very similar; the relationships between word and image, between narrative and cinema, are being taken to extremes in a typically post-modern artistic context, where the two representative forms are overstepping each other's territorial boundaries. The cinematographic references that emerge in the descriptions of Rey Robles's fictitious films include a clear allusion to Andrej Tarkovskij's visionary *Solaris* (1972); this is explicitly substantiated by the title *Polaris*; in the same way the reference to the act of "redrawing the boundaries of cinematographic language", insisting on the otherness of places as an existential metaphor, seems to refer precisely to the cinematographic poetry of Werner Herzog. Moreover, DeLillo has never disguised his passion for the cinematographic medium; from his very first novel, *Americana*¹⁴ (1971), up to his latest, *Point Omega*¹⁵ (2010), the cinema has always represented a narrative motor and terrain to be explored, as demonstrated by the vast range of references in his novels to movies both existing and imaginary.

The ékphrastic description of *Body Time* also interrupts the linear progression of the novel's chapters with an insertion: Mariella Chapman's article, *Body Art in Extremis: Slow, Spare and Painful*. The description of Laureen's performance provides a wealth of allusions to both classical and social theorization regarding ékphrasis, and re-proposes, as in the previously

13 At least one exchange of written correspondence was documented, in 1995; Also see: <http://perival.com/delillo/ddwriting.html>.

14 DeLillo, *Americana* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

15 DeLillo, *Point Omega* (New York: Scribner, 2010).

analyzed narrative instance, an interesting interference between the notional and actual. The object of the artistic description leads the *ékphrasis* back to the classical debate in which stasis is opposed to movement. Traditionally *ékphrasis* has been interpreted as verbal art capable of giving birth and movement to static bodies in painting and sculpture, but DeLillo updates and, as a consequence, problematizes this issue, since the object described is not a static image, but a body in motion within the confined space of the stage. Whereas *ékphrasis* was classically capable of making the static bodies in painting and sculpture move, in DeLillo's post-modern world the body in motion is frozen; the word does not generate action, but petrifies the body. Chapman's description seems to be a sequence of frames or snapshots that freeze the moment, interrupting the visual fluidity of the artistic performance and the continually changing shape of the artist's body; in fact, in the first lines it actually seems as though the style of the article is transforming the sequences of the performance described into an act of leafing rapidly through an exhibition catalogue, glancing swiftly at the images:

Hartke is a body artist who tries to shake off body – hers anyway. There is the man who stands in art gallery while a colleague fires bullets into his arm. This is art. There is the lavishly tattooed man who has himself fitted with a crown of thorns. This is art. Hartke's work is not self-strutting or self-lacerating. She is acting, always in the process of becoming another or exploring some root identity. There is the woman who makes paintings with her vagina. This is art. There are the naked man and woman who charge into each other repeatedly at increasing speeds. This is art, sex and aggression. There is the man in women's bloody underwear humps a mountain of hamburger meat. This is art, aggression, cultural criticism and truth. There is the man who drives nails into his penis. This is just truth.¹⁶

In the pages of this catalogue, which have been leafed through or swiftly described, it is quite easy to recognize a series of aesthetic and formal references to contemporary body art (Matthew

16 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, pp. 106-07.

Barney, Pina Bausch, Marina Abramović, Veronika Bromová, Hayley Newman, to name but a few) as an art of provocation, with regard to social relationships, and criticism of the cultural institutes themselves. These provocations and reflections find in the body of an artist or performer (such as Laureen Hartke) a place where one can express oneself and tackle wide-ranging cultural issues, obviously without neglecting the dimension of self-representation in the artistic process and an examination of intimate psychological and existential issues. Chapman's description continues by articulating the phases of the artistic performance:

Hartke's piece begins with an ancient Japanese woman on a bare stage, gesturing in the stylized manner of Noh drama, and it ends seventy-five minutes later with a naked man, emaciated and aphasic, trying desperately to tell us something (...) through much of the piece there is sound accompaniment, the anonymous robotic voice of a telephone answering machine delivering a standard announcement. This is played relentlessly and begins to weave itself into the visual texture of the performance. The voice infiltrates the middle section in particular. Here is a woman in executive attire, carrying a briefcase, who checks the time on her wristwatch and tries to hail a taxi. She glides rather formally (perhaps inspired by elderly Japanese) from one action to the other (...) the last of her bodies, the naked man, is stripped of recognizable language and culture. He moves in a curious manner, as if in a dark room, only more slowly and gesturally. He wants to tell us something. His voice is audible, intermittently, on tape, and Hartke lip-syncs the words.¹⁷

From Lessing¹⁸ onwards, *ékphrasis* has expressed the verbal capacity to render the static nature of the art object, especially the body in painting and sculpture, more dynamic, thus bringing these figures to life. On the other hand, DeLillo's *ékphrastic* usage seems to be leading the reader towards a representation that is opposed to vitalism, which is to say funereal: the removal

17 *Ibidem*.

18 G. Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoön*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Lachman and Franz Muncker (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1979), XIII.

of stasis from movement. This reversal of the ékphrastic tradition, the passage from death-life to life-death, is reconfirmed in Chapman's allusion linking Laureen's performance to the mourning for Ray's suicide. However, this reversal again gives the impression of breaking down the solidness of the word; therefore the word does not suffice to go beyond the denotative level in describing what has been observed on the stage:

How simple it would be if I could say this is a piece that comes directly out of what happened to Rey. But I can't. Be nice if I could say this is the drama of men and women versus death. I want to say that but I can't. It's too small and secluded and complicated and *I can't and I can't I can't*.¹⁹

The body, with its continual metamorphoses, comes to represent the collapse of time in a spatial dimension from which it cannot free itself. This carnal trap cannot fail to reflect on the word, which is once again saddled with the onerous task of actually describing this process. In the pages preceding Chapman's article, DeLillo accurately describes the aerobic exercises that Laureen usually carries out in an empty room in the house and recounts the transformation of her carnality into an empty substance. The performer de-constructs her own body, removing all body hair, smearing depigmentation cream over her body, peroxidizing her hair, cleansing her skin of dead cells, until she feels terrible; in any case, in the words of DeLillo describing her physical preparation as if it were a rite of passage, from the too full to the too empty: «this was her work, to disappear from all former venues of aspect and bearing and to become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance».²⁰

The body, object and instrument of Laureen's art, is painfully approaching its own level-zero, transforming Baudrillard's appealing definition of the body as a «mass grave of signs»²¹

19 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 110-11, *emphasis added*.

20 DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, p. 86.

21 Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 42.

into the exact opposite, i.e. an empty sign. In this way the verbal dimension cannot help spinning around vertiginously on itself, representing at the same time the vanity of Laureen's artistic body/object and restoring the complex creative process of her performance. Spaces framed by a continuous babble of words are established, a search for her level-zero: for example, the dialogues (perhaps real, perhaps imaginary, between Laureen and Mr. Tuttle) several times restate phrases like "say some words", considerations regarding the weakness of language and the juncture between language and the perception of space and time. The verbal sphere therefore produces interference: the interruption of the diegetic progression on the part of the *ékphrasis* as a moment detached from the rest of the narration and the mysterious appearance of Mr. Tuttle (perhaps a ghost or a hallucination ascribable to Rey) as personification of the competitive and conceptual preparation of the artist to produce his/her own art object and the emptying out of language.

It seems evident how Chapman's article describing *Body Time* is only on the surface an interference with the time of the narration in the novel, and instead becomes the moment in which (coherently with what Grant Scott²² wrote following in the footsteps of Mitchell and Heffernan) the description recaps the elements scattered throughout the text and represents the cultural context in which the novel finds its niche. As a consequence it becomes interesting to note how in the description of *Body Time* the traditional distinction of gender is demolished, the distinction that Mitchell²³ spotlighted in his interpretation of *ékphrasis* as a social custom. The description of the art object is interpreted as a strategy permitting an object to pass from one representative code to the other, creating a comparison with a semiotic otherness with consequences for a social structure in which issues of gender and looking intervene. The American scholar reflects on the tendency to identify the *ecfrastic* technique with observation of an image

22 Grant F. Scott, *Sculpted Words: Keats, Ékphrasis and the Visual Arts* (London-Hannover: University Press of England, 1995).

23 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.

that finds its scopic equivalent in the female figure as the object of the male gaze; moreover, from this point of view, one might consider how the female body has been traditionally seen as the incarnation of a threatening otherness for the male, in virtue of the subconscious danger of castration.²⁴ This is equivalent to considering the male gaze and its tradition in words, as a political strategy to keep these threats under control in the face of scopic power and typically male and patriarchal social consequence. It is therefore clear how problematic issues force their way into the theories of *ékphrasis*; these issues are linked to the representative tensions that comprise the structures of desire, fear, control and politics. Laureen breaks with this scopic tradition because she manages to transform her own body into a multiplicity of sexually varied subjects and because, at the same time, the gaze describing her is not that of a male, as used to happen in the scopic tradition, with which art has always had to compare itself, but of a female, that of Laureen's friend, Mariella.

DeLillo, therefore, activates the verbal mechanisms of the "notional *ékphrasis*" by combining it with the mimetic, through a series of references to contemporary art that can be recognized by the end-user; in this way he indicates precisely Hollander's basic idea, which is that "notional *ékphrasis*" is the rhetorical area where modern narrative experiments converge, and we might add, with regard to the post-modern ones, that they take it upon themselves to represent a work of art:

Notional *ékphrasis* inheres in modern poetry's actual *ékphrasis*, and provides a thematic microcosm of a basic paradox about poetry and

24 The visual pleasure when confronting an artistic object, often coinciding with the depiction of a female body, is explained by Mitchell as follows in Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 163: «If a woman is *pretty as a picture* (namely silent and available to the gaze), it is not surprising that the pictures will be treated as feminine objects in their own right and that violations of the stereotype (ugliness, loquaciousness) will be perceived as troublesome». Moreover the author, in the same text, takes up again, as an example of this mechanism, the extreme case of the danger of the effeminate, via a description by Percy Bysshe Shelley of the Medusa by Leonardo Da Vinci and Freud's description of the Medusa by Caravaggio.

truth. Ékphrastic poems that are always representing poetic process, and the history of poetic readings of works of art, can by those means get to say rather profound things about the works of art in question. By constructing some fictional versions of them, they put powerful interpretative construction of them, construe them with deep effect.²⁵

The notional ékphrasis within the post-modern cultural system, where the true and false, the real and fictitious tend to evocatively confuse their respective boundaries, prods the reader's imagination, binding it to frameworks of what has already been seen and what has already been read. The writer who creates figurative works of art can but play with variations on the existing material, in such a way that the fictitious elements described are recognizable both as invention and citation. In accordance with the ideas of Heffernan, ékphrasis is the representation of a representation, «verbal representation of graphic representation»²⁶ and if one recognizes the shift between representative modes of departure and arrival one will attain in the reading a type of fulfillment that we might define as “second level”, which in any case will not affect the gratification of an imagination that is unaware of the semiotically re-elaborated citation.

In conclusion, to quote a famous work by Heffernan, what DeLillo constructs is a museum of bodies restored to experience through the written word. By visiting this museum it is possible to perceive the survival of verbalism in a cultural system such as the post-modern, which favours extra-verbal systems to represent itself socially. The insistence in DeLillo's novel, on making explicit a limitation («not being able to describe» certain sensorial experiences such as the smell of soya, and certain existential experiences such as death), becomes instrumental in attaining the highest degree of expressivity and brilliance of the word.

25 Hollander, *The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, p. 209.

26 Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 3.

PAZIENZA IN HIS LIMITS: LIVING EXPERIENCE AND ICONOTEXTUAL PRACTICE

DANILO MARISCALCO

“Patience has a limit, Paziienza no!”

(A. Paziienza)

The analysis of the relationship between verbal and visual textualities can find a favored object of study in the comics: an “iconotextual” device characterized by features comparable to other traditional artistic works – in order to limit ourselves to the “narration by images” mechanically copied we can think about the “moral series” by William Hogarth, not to mention but the “narration through (mechanically copied) images”, it shows. In the comparison between its figurative elaboration and at least a meaningful part of its verbal solutions, comics show some differential specificities: beyond the inscription of the words in the balloon – with voices and thoughts of the represented subjects –, the writing often attends the images with an evident descriptive intention – irreducible to the didactic “reason” – in this way configuring themselves as a form of *ékphrasis* wherein the correspondence with the other medium doesn’t limit itself only to its relationship with an effective or imagined picture – as in each case of “modern” *ékphrasis*¹ (“actual” or “notional” *ékphrasis*² –,

1 On the modern conception of *ékphrasis* and its relationship with the classical meaning of the term and the “crisis” made by the contemporary artistic practices see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 11-23.

2 On the distinction between actual *ékphrasis* and notional *ékphrasis* see Hollander, *The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, pp. 209-19. On the unsolved problems of those definitions see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 48: «It is clear – and Hollander soon realizes this – that the borders between the two forms are constantly put in crisis precisely by the linguistic creativity of the authors, who

or to the coincidence between the writer and the visual artist (in other occasions already emerged and found in other occasions³), but it involves also the lead time of the two texts.⁴ The antagonism between writings and images (or pictures), that is the continuous redefinition of the respective limits and borders, in the objects that will be analyzed right there, and in many other not considered objects, solves itself in the space and lead time of a single work. It expresses itself in a single (re)production, showing, from a certain perspective, the ambiguities and the meaningful tensions of a complex unity articulated in many ways.

The cultural experience of Andrea Pazienza, totally characterized by a constant practical and theoretical comparison with the expressive possibilities and limits of the different figurative and verbal media, acquires in this view a paradigmatic feature. The conceptualization of the “limit”, in particular, obtains a theoretical centrality, confirmed by Pazienza himself in some autobiographical fragments, which proves the intentional and radical exercise of a subjectivity exceeding the traditional forms of the representation by pictures:

Before writing comics I used to paint denouncing pictures. It was a period wherein I couldn't avoid doing that. But my pictures were bought by pharmacists who put them in their bedrooms. The picture kept on pulsing in that atmosphere: I considered this fact not only as a contradiction but also as an enormous limit. My desire of writing comics starts from that.⁵

were interested since the classical antiquity to show the rhetorical potentiality of their description which programmatically exceed the artwork. Moreover it is just the mimetic modern *ékphrasis* that seems to be the place where the rhetorical models, tested by the ancients, are recovered. It is hard to distinguish between the two *ékphrasis*, already in Filostrato» (translation is mine).

3 It is also the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's “double works”: see Maryann Wynn Ainsworth, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1976); see also J. Hillis Miller, ‘The Mirror's Secret. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Double Work of Art’, *Victorian Poetry*, 29 (1991), 333-49.

4 The time, according to Hillis Miller, is irrelevant in the mutual “overwriting” relationship between the two media. See Miller, p. 335.

5 Andrea Pazienza, ‘Il plesso solare e la tecnica del fumetto’, *Il Grifo*, 23 (1993); reprinted in Andrea Pazienza, *Paz: Scritti, disegni, fumetti*, ed. by Vincenzo Mollica (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), p. 47.

The adhesion to the comics, that is the adhesion to the production of cultural objects characterized by a high communicative potential – determined by the “inexpensive” mechanical reproduction, by the specificity of a device which combines visual and verbal facts – corresponded to the participation to the “autonomous” movement emerged in Italy during the Seventies;⁶ in fact it guaranteed a partial “overcoming” of the contradiction which, at least in Pazienza hypothesis, existed between the traditional artistic activity and the political exercise, even if, meanwhile, it offered further occasions of comparison with the specific characteristic – with the limits and possibilities – of the representation and its forms, as in the last page of the first episode of *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal* (1977-1981), a realistic and dreamy narration, adherent to material conditions, experiences, needs and desires of the social antagonism emerged in particular in Bologna in 1977.⁷ This page was added substituting a previous page unknowing the facts of the March 1977: the murder of the militant Francesco Lorusso, the correspondent conflicts between the police and the demonstrators and the raise of the radical praxis;⁸ through it Pazienza exalted the happened resolution of a certain retard, recognized by himself, of the cartoon device compared to the living process and in particular to the practices of the autonomous movement. The page shows the protagonist (Pazienza’s alter ego) a radio which reproduces the tactical information promulgated by “Radio Alice” («Comrade! Don’t scatter tonight, at the end of the various meetings», don’t scatter), an alarm clock in front of the only visible Pentothal’s eye, a flag which affirms Lorusso’s political and ideal survival («Francesco is still alive and he fights with us!»). Omitting an iconological interpretation, the element which suggests considerations about

6 See Mauro Trotta, *Andrea Pazienza o le straordinarie avventure del desiderio*, in *Settantasette: La rivoluzione che viene*, ed. by Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 1997), pp. 204-11.

7 *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal* was published on the magazine *Alter* since April 1977.

8 See *In ordine pubblico*, ed. by Paola Staccioli (Roma: Associazione Walter Rossi, 2003), pp. 93-104, and pp. 165-66.

the specific characteristics of representation is the expression of protagonist's thoughts: «Expelled... I'm totally expelled». This assumption – also related to the political “infertility” of the comic illustrator detected and stigmatized by the most traditional fringe of the movement – starts from the admission of the “limits” of the comics determining the above-mentioned gap art/life and consequential extra-artistic efforts, as affirmed by Paziienza in the endnote of the page:

When I was working to these pages in February 1977 I believed I was drawing a flash, being totally in error because instead it was a beginning. If I had had this presentiment, I would have waited for this beautiful March and I would have drawn it. So I don't know what I have to do. Twenty days ago I gave all the material to *Linus*, but – God! – many things have changed during this time and many other things will change till the day wherein the comic book will be published; I feel bad and idiot because I haven't thought about it. Drawing a comic isn't not like writing for a daily paper, if you understand what I mean. So I draw this page and try to give it to *Linus* to replace the last original page with it, hoping to make it on time. The last original page had the sentence «so it's the end» – in place of the typical “end” placed in the lower right corner – which now has the wrong overtones. Good Heavens! I swear you, I believed it was a flash, instead it was a beginning. Yeah! Andrea Paziienza, March 16th 1977.⁹

In this writing Paziienza compares the temporality of his own practice with the practice of the “daily paper”, but similar considerations can emerge also during the analysis of the texts of the 1977 movement which attests the radio supremacy – metaphorically attested in *Pentothal* with the representation of an ever updated “Radio Alice” – over the other textual, “clean” and “paralyzing” practices – different from the real “dirtiness” found by Hans Magnus Enzensberger¹⁰ – traditionally used in the antagonist political activity:

9 Andrea Paziienza, *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal*, in *L'arte di Andrea Paziienza* (Roma: Panini, 2004), p. 32.

10 See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien', *Kursbuch*, 5 (1970); partially reprinted in *Piccole antenne crescono: Documenti, interventi e proposte sulla vita delle radio di movimento* ed. by Paolo Hutter (Roma: Savelli, 1978), p. 129.

To break every demand of cleanliness, the delay of writing in comparison to the real process: the (clean) text speaks about the Movement, but only to paralyze it, to crystallize it, to show it motionless inside categories which – made in the past – want to constrain the present to retrace the past. To write, in this way, a dirty text. A dirty book about Radio Alice, like so “Radio Alice” broadcasts dirty texts. The “moving” text is dirty because it contains much a part of real experience which cannot be reduced within formalized categories, within linguistic codes universally understandable. The code, this common denominator of the comprehensibility, is called into question; outside the code, we comprehend ourselves only from another common denominator of comprehensibility, that is the participation to a process, that is the collectivized experience. Radio Alice broadcasts in Bologna since February 9th 1976. The premise on which the collective worked for more than a year, before starting transmissions, is the analysis of the obsolescence of the written language, of the codified media – within the political code, too – rather than the transformation of the needs of the Movement. It’s not possible to propose an analysis of the “metropolization” of the figure of the social class using a so such a “clean”, slow and ritual medium: the flyer. This one played an extraordinary role when a vanguard had to extend and develop in the masses a revolutionary intention during the Sixties. But when the levels of knowledge raise, and especially when the circulation of the experiences uses communication channels more persuasive than the flyer (for example the internal demonstration, the exemplary act), it is necessary to transform the language of the Movement.¹¹

Other limits of the representation – which guide ourselves to the hypothesis about the “self-referring” and “simultaneous” ékphrasis described in the introduction – are explored in some pages of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeo* (1984-1986), a diary through images and words, an autobiographical but at the same time “personal and political” work about a generation of activists during the years of the so called “reflux”:¹²

11 Collettivo A/traverso, *Alice è il diavolo: Sulla strada di Majakovskij: testi per una pratica di comunicazione sovversiva*, ed. by Luciano Cappelli and Stefano Saviotti (Milano: L’Erba Voglio, 1976); reprinted with the title *Alice è il diavolo: Storia di una radio sovversiva*, ed. by Franco Berardi and Ermanno Guarneri (Milano: ShaKe, 2002), pp. 112-13.

12 *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeo* was published in the magazine *Alter* since 1985.

the “full” pages of *Pompeo* deal with everyone, through the expedient of the autobiographical tale. They deal with the vices and the virtues of who is looking for his own direction. They deal with the tragedy of a generation that lived the arrival of the heroin in the territory.¹³

In *Pompeo* (the last Pazienza’s alter ego) the visualization of the experience and in particular of the protagonist’s drug addiction is often accompanied by a third person description which reinforces, by words, what the pictures show or could show; namely it is accompanied by an *ékphrasis* – its lead time is inseparable from the lead time of drawing – of “artistic” images, realized or realizable, produced or suggested by the writer-describer himself. This correspondence between description and material and ideal figurative representation accompanies the narration to the last picture: *Pompeo-Pazienza*, recently survived a heroin overdose and fled in the countryside, shows himself chained to a birch and knelt near a ravine. Upward a text describes and interprets gestures and thoughts:

He was sitting there and he thought. He thought they were his last thoughts. And to whom he could dedicate them to. He felt his face, the wind and the ground. He smiled. A puff from his lips swept away a little insect from the chains... There, the chains scared him. Some tears, in order to take a little bit of time?¹⁴

But the suicide, revealed only in its intention by the drawing, doesn’t materialize itself in a picture, which backs away leaving the burden of representation to the words: «He threw himself as if he had been, suddenly, pushed». ¹⁵ The “final” image, between the two options of representation offered by comics, namely picture and writing, obtains a visual form in the words, through the description of an imagined “scene”, necessarily “artistic” – considering that it is a story about a drawn “actor”¹⁶ – but unrealized.

13 Davide Toffolo, *Lo strano complotto*, in Andrea Pazienza, *Pompeo* (Roma: L’Espresso-Panini 2006), p. 11.

14 Pazienza, *Pompeo*, p. 131.

15 *Ibidem*.

16 A specificity of the comics, in the light of an *ékphrasis* theory, maybe the “structural” relationship between the image evoked by the description and its

The hypothesis about the subjective “reasons” pertaining to this scene could evoke Lessingian ghosts¹⁷ to which the intention of this work substitutes, exorcizing them, a comparison between the real Pazienza’s experiences and the Pompeo’s (re)produced story. This one, in the pages which precedes the imagined death, shows practices and effects of a failed suicide through the representation of an intentional and lethal heroin intake:

The following morning Pompeo was using two big syringes of 5cc, both of them plunged in his right arm. There were dissolved more than four grams of heroin. It was a lethal dose. Wasn’t it? Now the problem is to be able to press entirely the pistons of the syringes at the same time without losing immediately consciousness.¹⁸

Surviving the overdose he will find, in another way and in other “forms”, his end. An its “mimetic” description – without artistic metaphors and practices, only in part different by from the

artistic objectification, even if it is unrealized; in particular, the description of a not drawn image have to lead to a picture in the imagination of the author and the reader.

17 «If the artist, out of ever-varying nature, can only make use of a single moment, and the painter especially can only use this moment from one point of view, whilst their works are intended to stand the test not only of a passing glance, but of long and repeated contemplation, it is clear that this moment, and the point from which this moment is viewed, cannot be chosen too happily. Now that only is a happy choice, which allows the imagination free scope. The longer we gaze, the more must our imagination add; and the more our imagination adds, the more we must believe we see. In the whole course of a feeling there is no moment which possesses this advantage so little as its highest stage. There is nothing beyond this; and the presentation of extremes to the eye clips the wings of fancy, prevents her from soaring beyond the impression of the senses, and compels her to occupy herself with weaker images; further than these she ventures not, but shrinks from the visible fullness of expression as her limit. Thus, if Laocoon sighs, the imagination can hear him shriek; but if he shriek, it can neither rise above nor descend below this representation, without seeing him in a condition which, as it will be more endurable, becomes less interesting. It either hears him merely moaning, or sees him already dead», G. E. Lessing, *Laocoon* (1766), trans. by Edward Calvert Beasley, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, with an introduction by T. Burbidge (London: Longman-Brown-Green-Longmans, 1853), pp. 16-7.

18 *Pompeo*, p. 107.

figuration but adherent to the concrete – will be offered, *ex post*, by the “real” report: Andrea Paziienza, drawer and “autonomous” like Pentothal-Pompeo, died due to a heroin overdose in his location in the Montepulciano country on June 16th 1988.

PARISE AND THE *ARTISTI*: THE FLASH OF DESCRIPTION¹

ERICA MAZZUCATO

The arrival of Goffredo Parise in Rome in 1964 coincides with his acquaintance with Giosetta Fioroni and consequently with the artists known as “Scuola di Piazza del Popolo”: here, the author returns to the starting point of the figurative arts, which attracted him when he was a teenager, allowing him to express his vocation through the pictorial medium, before leaving the brush for the pen.² This turn left unforgettable marks in his style, characterized by a strong visual element, especially when he depicts the bright images of *Sillabari*.³

Today it is impossible to find an up-to-date edition of these texts: this lack needs to be integrated through the revaluation of these writings not only for their theoretical importance, thus giving a chance to fully understand the production of this author, but also because they can represent an example of an interesting methodology of interpretation. The aim of these works in fact

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- 1 *Artisti* was published in 1984 by *Le parole gelate*, and then again in 1994 by Neri Pozza, ed. by Mario Quesada. This article is based on the collection contained in Goffredo Parise, *Opere* (Milano: Mondadori, 1987), vol. II, edited by Quesada too. All the following translations from Parise are mine.
 - 2 We know of this crucial decision thanks to a statement contained in Goffredo Parise, ‘Natura d’artista’, *Eidos*, 1 (1987), p. 5, that is the transcription of a conversation between Parise and Enrico Parlato, broadcasted on the radio station Radio3 on april 20th and the august 31st 1986, also quoted in Vito Santoro, *L’odore della vita. Studi su Goffredo Parise* (Macerata: Quodlibet Studio, 2009), p. 62.
 - 3 The current translations from this edition distinguish *Sillabario n. 1* from *Sillabario n. 2* (originally published in 1972 and 1982): *Abecedary*, trans. by James Marcus (Evanston: The Marlboro Press/Northwestern University Press, 1998), and *Solitudes*, trans. by Isabel Quigley (Evanston: The Marlboro Press/Northwestern University Press, 2006). Here we will consider only the Italian edition contained in Parise, *Opere*.

is not the mere critical assessment: Parise admits that he does not have the necessary authority, but he also specifies that he is not interested in judgements, defining his relationship with the pictorial arts as unjustified intrusions, which belong to the universe of that “colpo di tosse montaliano”, the aesthetic emotion *tout court*, which either does or does not arise, without any apparent reason.

Obviously, these aspects do not exempt him from elaborating a personal theoretical approach, expressed by subdued descriptions through which sketches profiles of few artists and their works of art, bound together by the *hic et nunc* lace, and preferred by Parise for their particular way of walking, of moving, of being.

The *ékphraseis* contained in *Artisti* are so important because they fit into the author’s aesthetics, which is entrenched in a full and synesthetic sensoriality. Parise believes that any human being should learn to reach it, falling into a sort of addiction, in a «vice of recognizing things, which becomes a part of a moral in code, because things can express the relationship between human being and the physical world». ⁴ Thanks to the sensory experience, according to the writer, the instant of contemplation becomes the suitable ground for the development of an interrogative confrontation between subject and object. ⁵ This relationship, in the author’s words, is called “sentimental” and, with the support of Merleau-Ponty, it should be better to say that an object “perceives itself in me”, rather than “I perceive”, because we are in the world, and we recognize ourselves in it. ⁶ For this reason the *leitmotiv* of “the feeling” continuously emerges in the texts,

4 According to Ricciarda Ricorda the expression «vizio di riconoscere le cose» (habit of recognising things) is extracted from the article *Vecchia Italia dagli odori buoni* – in *Gli oggetti nella narrativa di Parise*, in Goffredo Parise, ed. by Ilaria Crotti (Firenze: Olschki, 1997), p. 217 – published in *Corriere della Sera*, 9 February 1985, and contained in *Opere*, pp. 1583-87, where Parise defines honor as the ability of giving importance to the sensorial gave towards everything; a honor that, in turn, has got a flavour and a smell.

5 From an interview contained in Claudio Altarocca, *Goffredo Parise* (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1972), p. 7.

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). Italian translation by Andrea Bonomi: *Fenomenologia della percezione*, (Milano: Bompiani, 2003), p. 277.

especially in *Sillabari*, when the union between the subject and the environment becomes absolute; in these reviews (*Artisti*), “the feeling” discloses the osmotic relationship not only between the artists and their works, but also between them and the universe in which they work. Thus, thanks to the “feeling of art”,⁷ Guttuso’s *Vucciria* becomes not only a representation of Italy, but Italy itself; the same happens with De Pisis, who is able to give the “feeling of Paris and Venice” through some little dots of paint, usually pink.⁸ The oil paintings, exhibited at the De Martiis’ *Tartaruga*, through their *trompe l’oeil*, produce «emphasis, nostalgia, ecstasy and the rhetoric of painting», which «cheats the heart through the eye», thus creating the «feeling of Baroque».⁹

Therefore, it is now clearer how Parise chooses the artists of his very personal anthology: he strongly believes in the power of senses, or rather the “feeling of senses” of the customary and synesthetic contemplation, through which it is possible to express the world in the particular connection with ourselves. According to Parise, this intelligent but also intuitive approach is the unique mean he has to convey vitality through representation, and not through “caption”:

There is a wide difference and another quality in this distinction. It is the same distinction and the same difference in quality that happens when two persons are lying on a Ionian beach, enjoying the breeze. One of them sensually keeps quiet, releasing his sensuality through this silence, the other instead feels the need to say “Such a nice wind” (*O2*, p. 1210).

We will see how this particular visual approach, instead of deforming things, perceives them for what they are, thus blending with them.

Following a circular way, the same occurs when the spectator watches the work of art: in the pictorial experience, the gaze opens the doors of perception and, lingering for another second

7 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1197.

8 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1205.

9 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1216.

on the work of art, «becomes sharper, voracious and willing to be possessed by the spell of art».¹⁰

«Don't try to understand, you just have to watch» says Guttuso's *Vucciria*, using a prosopopoeia in which the primeval desire of the spectator reemerges: in this process (well-described by Spitzer) a sudden yearning attacks the spectator when he sees the work of art, and invades him with the desire to drink at the source of truth, before the ideological usurpation of the experts.¹¹ This happens in the representation of Italy by Guttuso, where Italy itself teaches Parise the importance of the simplification achieved by his perceptual system: regaining a contemplative wonder is necessary to be unfamiliar with the world and, thanks to this unfamiliarity, to see its transcendence.¹² The personification of Italy guides the observer in its exploration: the result is a mimetic ékphrasis, with an insistent enumeration of terms, held together by asyndeton, which intensifies the belief that things are the only “thing” that matters, beyond any useless ideology:

I have seen fish, lots of fresh fish: slices of swordfish, heads of swordfish with the erect sword, and parsley in their mouth. A very big and red rockfish, some striped tunas, shining gilt-head bream, sea basses, cods, octopuses, squids, prawns. Then I have seen sun dried apricots, white and black olives and stacked jars of jam. Then, some men and women, twelve in total, almost buried in vegetables and fruits, [...] a young lady in the foreground, facing backwards and hanging some shopping bags, with hair, hips and bottom which are typical of the whole Italian population from north to south [...].¹³

In this respect, it is important to highlight Parise's natural ability in showing a dynamic view through description: as in his narratives, the frequent descriptions do not have the topical role

10 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1193.

11 Leo Spitzer, *The Ode on a Grecian Urn or Content vs. Metagrammar*, in *Essays on English and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962), p. 89. Also see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 119-21 (here the author identifies prosopopoeia as typical device of the synaesthetic integration, which causes a constant transgression of the limits between reality and fiction).

12 Merleau-Ponty, p. 24.

13 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1198.

of slowing down the rhythm of the prose, on the contrary they show how gaze can be a primary source of action.¹⁴

The particular perspective that privileges the sensory expression produces, as a direct consequence, the rise of the sheer truth of things. This process is apparent in the description of Cornell's *L'Égypte*:¹⁵ a fine wooden box, covered on the inside by an antique paper, filled by small glass bottles of mysterious contents. Even in this small box, and quite surprisingly to Parise (who in that moment is in New York), «an enormous trash can but simultaneously *marché aux puces* of the European culture and soul»,¹⁶ it is possible to find things reduced to their basic and fundamental essence:

It was the case of that tiny and sublime knick-knack that was there, in front of my eyes: *L'Égypte*. It was all in those twelve bottles filled with a mysterious, and forever inexplicable, content. Egypt? *L'Égypte*. Was it possible to lock the whole Egypt – Pharaoh's bandages, perfumes, ointments, lacquers, mummy's irises and corneas, papyri and palms, camels, including illustrated post cards with Pyramids and Sphinx, atmospheric pressure and Nile – in six wooden bars smoothed by an anonymous Yankee artisan (Dutch? Irish?) as much American as European? Yes, it was possible.¹⁷

We saw how *Vucciria*'s details are meant to satisfy, equally and completely, the observer's senses, so as to create Italy. It is the same for these fragments trapped in Cornell's box, which give life to Egypt. For this reason, tagging Guttuso's art as "socialist realism" is inappropriate: this particular kind of visual approach highlights things merely in their thingness, without the necessity of explanatory norms, and at the same time it shows their intrinsic transience, which becomes their deepest beauty:

14 On *ékphrasis* as an incarnation of gaze dynamism and on the reductive theories of description, see also Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 110-43.

15 De facto, the complete title is *L'Égypte de Mlle. Cléo de Mérode cours élémentaire d'histoire naturelle*.

16 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1212.

17 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1213.

«Were men dead or alive?»

«Alive but, due to that nature doomed to perish, and to that lightness and that blood, I had the feeling that the destiny of man consists in spoiling and dying, like the destiny of that hanging ox, of that rabbit, or of that swordfish and all those beautiful, fresh, colourful and summery vegetables, portrayed during the warmer time of the year. In other words what I have seen, so beautiful and colourful and living, is inexorably drifting towards death».¹⁸

This method is therefore necessary to understand the intrinsic precariousness of things and it is the only approach that is able to disclose a unique and total beauty to the spectator, at the precise moment when he realizes that decline is forthcoming. The secret of Gauguin, who lets the scraped painting express «the beginning and the end of matter, as it happens for everything and everyone»,¹⁹ as well as Guttuso's ripe fruits and vegetables, are examples of how art is able to express the ephemeral of life. When gaze elicits the spectator to merge into the work of art, he becomes aware of his own decadence, which is specular to the decline of the illustrated objects. This deep consciousness of the imminent twilight causes melancholia, but also an extreme thrill given by the majesty of life, which shines in its precariousness:

When we, lucky observers of a “pictorial memory”, walking by a Pompeian wall, lightened by the summer sun [...], there, where some plaster of the ancient painting persists, which is now faded into a sort of a mere pictorial ghost, of a pale skeleton, at that point we feel a great emotion: not only the emotion of the ephemerality of history, suggested by the ephemerality of the pictorial matter which was spread on that wall thousands of years ago, but also the ephemerality of the matter that forms our body, and therefore, the ephemerality of all things.²⁰

Intensity of contemplation, sudden revelation of truth and beauty before its vanishing: all belong to a theoretic universe that is peculiarly oriental; a philosophical and religious universe Parise

18 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1199.

19 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1223.

20 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1229.

became acquainted with during his travel to Japan – which inspired *L'eleganza è frigida* – but also after the biological mutation of his body in 1965: obviously, the disease and the awareness of the impending death shaped his gaze. In particular the instantaneous illumination, reached after an adequate contemplation, seems to leave a deep mark on Parise's aesthetics: what the Japanese calls *satori* (from *satoru*: “be aware of”) a sudden epiphany, a sort of loss of consciousness, where «the suspension of senses» creates a «complete, immediate and fleeting comprehension that belongs to the whole *Zen* mindset».²¹

Satori, as well as all his preferred aesthetic categories, is pursued in art, the quintessential eschatological nucleus: it should not be surprising that his descriptions of works of art try to convey as clearly as possible the brief and fleeting pleasure reached through gaze, even if «that instant, that shadow, that illusion, means everything».²²

It is now clear why Parise is interested in these artists: Fioroni and her way to touch reality through *rapidi istinti*; the visual flash of the neurotic painters from Verona, who reminds him Mazzoli's and Chucchi's *rips*, which are also seized in a short-lived instant.²³

The aesthetic of *satori* perfectly corresponds to another category, defined by Parise as “living”,²⁴ the «purest and most perfect art, the physical appearance in a specific moment, and never again».²⁵ We will see how “living” becomes crucial in these reviews, given the premises that, in his opinion, the artist and his work of art are never separated: unlike a writer, who expresses himself indirectly, a painter is direct, because «he looks at reality and lets the artistic expression flow directly

21 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1548. This is explained in *Troppo occidentale per l'enigma Giappone*, where Parise criticizes Barthes' *Empire of Signs* defining this work excellent but paranoid and useless, since Japanese culture can be understood only through an «almost infinite series of electroshock», which is precisely *satori*.

22 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1230.

23 Parise, *Opere*, pp. 1221-39.

24 English in the original.

25 Goffredo Parise, *Lontano* (Cava de' Tirreni: Avavigliano, 2002), p. 33.

from his unconscious».²⁶ This is exactly the *Zen* way to produce art, where the artist is not “in search of”, but he finds himself when he begins the quest.²⁷ Parise does not cease to repeat that painter and painting are not unrelated.²⁸ When he is writing about Ceroli and his particular wood-craft, Parise explains how there is not any mediation between the creator and his material, except for the instruments, which are merely extensions of the artist’s hand, invented by humans to institute this mysterious (almost mystic) relationship.

Such an artistic creation is endowed with ineffability: another common feature with the Japanese aesthetic, whose categories are highly resistant to defining classifications for they cannot be understood through definitions but only through illuminations. The shock caused by the artistic experience leads Parise to say that he cannot or that he is not able to write about it accurately. He often specifies that he is not a critic, but he lies when he declares his failure in the conclusion of many of his texts: his biggest talent lies in fact in his peculiar ability to investigate the human sensitivity, watching it closely, in all its expressions. This is a sort of empathy, arisen from careful contemplation, similar to the pictorial experience: apropos of which Zanzotto talked about «ethology (fantastic ethology)», thanks to which he «carries out surveys on the human being, as he used to do with animals and, above all, insects».²⁹ This is an interest he shares with one of his favorite authors, Nabokov, who, as it is known, was a notable entomologist. Once Parise, questioned about his poetics, replied: «carefully watching things of life and their details, and also people’s physical details, in order to disclose, if possible (but with friendship and tenderness, not with severity), their nature and feelings».³⁰ Electing the methodical study of the human being to a

26 Parise, *Natura d’artista*, p. 50.

27 From a letter of december 1st 1984, transcribed in Andrea Gialloredo, *La parola trasparente: Il “Sillabario” narrativo di Goffredo Parise* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2006), p. 145.

28 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1195.

29 From *Prefazione* in *Opere*, pp. XVI-XVII.

30 Translated by the interview contained in Altarocca, *Goffredo Parise*, p. 11.

personal poetics makes Parise's descriptions evolve to something different from the mere live description of the work of art. We have seen previously how gaze moves along the image, shaping a perfect mimetic *ékphrasis* and showing how words can flow parallel to the picture.³¹ Following Parise's preferred approach to human observation, we can move on to a realm whose features are similar to the notional *ékphrasis*, using the definition Hollander coined to designate the poetic representation of imaginary works of art, also valid for works that existed once and are not available anymore.³² When the focus moves from the creation to the creator (strictly related), through an unchanged gaze, the object of interest becomes the artist's human figure, magnificent in its "living" and as perishable as his material. Here, indeed, lies the originality of these reviews: while, thanks to the technical reproducibility, it is possible to find the artistic product and to recall it to mind (this is why Parise is not sure about the loss of the aura), nobody tries to capture the other side of the artistic process, the maker, in all his movements and features.

When the imaginary interviewer asks Parise to talk about Schifano and his works, he replies that they are the same thing: «Mario Schifano "is" his paintings, so watch his paintings and you'll know Schifano». This belief will lead to a comparative and applied anatomical approach, and the interviewer will have to observe the representations while he listens to Parise talking about the painter's body, resting or moving:

Well, Schifano is a thirty years old man, with Mediterranean, or even Arabic, features. When still, his body measures about one metre and seventy centimetres, and weights forty-five kilograms. First of all, if his body is seen from different perspectives, it expresses a feline languor, harmless and astonished. Just like a little puma, whose musculature and reflexes are unsuspected. I have said astonished, can you hear me? Astonished is the word that is also related to the painting that you are watching.³³

31 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1186.

32 Hollander, *The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, p. 209.

33 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1187.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that in the making of this particular kind of *ékphrasis* Parise can operate both on the synchronic and on the diachronic level, or better, how he can intertwine these two fields.

Concerning the first case, the “living” description seems to fit perfectly in Steiner’s “pregnant moment”, meaning the equivalent (in literature) of the pregnant moment in figurative arts, able to seize the instant that implicates what came before that moment and what follows it. According to this theory, the verbal would aspire to the timeless eternity of the action that was captured in the painting.³⁴ If we read some descriptions of *Artisti*, it is actually possible to “observe” how Parise is able to outline perfectly this sublimation of the instant. The result of this style of writing, based on visuality, is the creation of another work of art, or rather a meta-picture, for example when Parise depicts De Pisis while he is painting:

He was sitting on the *gondola*, wrapped in a pink shawl, I think, covered by a little baize tippet where a roosted parrot stood (the little tippet was necessary to protect the shawl from the parrot’s excrements). He was wearing a blue gondolier-cap with a red pom-pom, and smoking a clay pipe made in Chioggia. I was fourteen years old and he really amazed me. People were passing by and someone was laughing, others recognised him and spoke ill of him and of his homosexuality. But his person astounded me: his face and his way of painting. He was really sweated and he stopped painting just for few instants. He was continuously staring at the canvas with a sort of erotic voracity, with half-closed eyes, and never-ending movements of his hands and brushes, which were jumping from the canvas to the palette with a very light and flying agility which, I perfectly remember even if I don’t know why, made me think of the greed and distraction of a pecking sparrow or of a thrush.³⁵

The same illumination occurs in the description of Ontani: instead of delineating the artist when he performs as a *tableau vivant*, Parise focuses on his bizarre figure, on his plain existence,

34 Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: Form Against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 13.

35 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1208.

on his body covered in multicoloured and bright fabrics, on his eccentric garments, or on his strange house, full of magic and disturbing objects. Here Parise's goal, i.e. seizing the eternal moment, becomes clear. At the end of the ékphrastic itinerary, the author reveals: «I envy him for his ability to walk on this earth with a lot of irony and agility, wearing his shoes made of boa skin, with enormous soles. I am not talking about the irony of reality, but about the metaphysical one, which is far more subtle and, with the best intentions, eternal».³⁶

The creation of a verbal painting is therefore possible thanks to the crystallisation of the pregnant moment, which concerns the artist himself, on the paper; a moment that eventually will be expanded, thus inspiring the narrative. The interweaving of the synchronic and diachronic is possible when ékphrasis frees its traditional narrative impulse: according to Heffernan, this prerogative is limited to figurative arts.³⁷

We have already seen how “living” description develops into the creation of a new work of art: however, it is not just a way of painting a new picture through language, but a process aimed to exploit the narrativeness of the image for the creation of a new narrative, unrelated to the starting ékphrasis.

This happens in *Sillabari* when Parise, with the entomologist's curiosity, observes his characters. For example, he dedicates the tale *Eleganza* to Schifano, wistfully applying the “anatomy” to the artist, who is not young anymore, and precisely remembering his ill-tempered features and his fitful movements.

The overflow of visuality becomes clearer in Fioroni's ékphrastic development, starting from her recognizable presence in the tale *Eleganza*: the nameless protagonist bows to «pick up a little stone, a plume, a twig» that other people can't see.³⁸ In *Artisti* instead she picks up some leaves, some grass, a four-leaf clover, a nightingale's feather:³⁹ a *continuum* from visuality to written word that offers a clear evidence of the fundamentals of Parise's art.

36 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1251.

37 Heffernan, *Ekphrasis and Representation*, p. 302.

38 Parise, *Opere*, p. 511.

39 Parise, *Opere*, p. 1203.

PICTORIAL WRITING: INTERMEDIALITY
AND ÉKPHRASIS IN *L'ŒUVRE*
BY ÉMILE ZOLA

VALENTINA MIGNANO

Published in 1886, *L'Œuvre* by Émile Zola is a novel in which the text and pictorial images enter into a kind of cryptic game of narrative, aesthetic and meta-textual cross-referencing, building up a literary *tableau* of the cultural scene in Paris at the time of the Second French Empire. Zola's text is strewn with pictorial images and in this paper I shall be analyzing the text starting from the relationship these pictorial images have with the relative ékphrastic forms. The general idea underlying this is to sketch an outline of the mutual links between literature and the figurative arts, and in particular the intermediality that merges image and text in Zola's work, given that «in the intermedial game one is not only wagering on artistic creativity, but on the very foundations of culture itself».¹

Plein air

I shall go straight to the heart of the matter by beginning with one of the fundamental paintings in the work. Of all the canvases introduced in the novel only two are described more than once and are subsequently interlinked and developed within the advancement of the plot. The first large canvas by Claude Lantier that Zola shows us is entitled *Plein air*:

1 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 16.

It measured about sixteen feet by ten, and was entirely painted over, though little of the work *had gone beyond* the roughing-out. This roughing-out, *hastily dashed off*, was superb in its violence and ardent vitality of colour. A flood of sunlight streamed into a forest clearing, with thick walls of verdure; to the left, *stretched* a dark glade with a small luminous speck in the far distance. On the grass, amidst all the summer vegetation, lay a nude woman with one arm supporting her head, and though her eyes were closed she smiled amidst the golden shower that fell around her.²

Zola's "faithful painting" represents a condensation of several paintings; because of its setting, as well as its size and the light, this canvas intimates to the reader several of the actual features of *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*; as well as sharing with Manet's painting, which so scandalized the general public at the *Salon des Refusés* in 1863, a striking and improvident, scornful tone, the canvas by Zola's artist possesses the same sylvan setting and the same chromatic features. If we look closely at the woman lying naked in the grass, the figure is much more similar to Manet's *Olympia* than the woman in the foreground of *Déjeuner*. Further interpretations suggest that Lantier's canvas resembles more closely *La Lutte de l'amour* by Paul Cézanne, with the additional male figure in civilian clothes.³ From this latter painter *Plein air* takes, above all, several of the thematic features of both *Nouvelle Olympia* and *Enlèvement*.⁴ This initial overview gives us an idea of how the novel is permeated with allusions to the "logic of recognition";

2 Émile Zola, *L'Œuvre* (Paris: Charpentier, 1886), trans. by Ernest A. Vizetely, *His Masterpiece* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1902), p. 22.

3 Patrick Brady, 'La Peinture de Claude Lantier. Contribution à l'étude de Zola, critique d'art', *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 101 (1961), 89-101. See also John Rewald, *Cezanne et Zola* (Paris: Sedrowski, 1936).

4 We must note that there are some differences in the number and positions of characters: in Manet's real picture we find two men talking together with the woman in the foreground and one only girl in the background, in Zola's literary picture there is a only male figure close to the woman in the foreground and two female characters fighting farther: exactly what we can find in *La Lutte de l'amour* by Cézanne. On the debate about visual sources of *Plein Air* you can see P. Brady, *L'Œuvre de Émile Zola. Roman sur les Arts, manifeste, autobiographie, roman a clef* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1967); Robert J. Niess, 'Another view of Zola's *L'Œuvre*', *The Romanic Review*, 4, XXXIX (1948), 282-300.

the paintings described in the *Oeuvre* are, to an extent, inspired by real canvases, but none of the images described in the novel are completely faithful to actual existing representations; as soon as we think we know which painting the author has in mind, we are immediately thrown into confusion by further details alluding to other paintings. One might say that the pictorial images described here stand halfway between the mimetic level and the notional in Hollander's definition;⁵ residing precisely in this liminal zone, the verbal images in Zola's novel create a sort of "uncertainty" that «renders ékphrasis attractive as a device that relativizes the predominance of the verbal over the visual, and vice versa, insisting on the ontological ambiguity of art»,⁶ which, moreover, often makes use of a dizzying range of details drawn from various images, resulting in "condensations" that are simultaneously faithful and visual. To render the experience more complex, or, in other words, to enhance the experience of decoding on the part of the reader, Zola effects an actual fusion of the works by Manet and Cézanne, which are stimulated by the ékphrastic game to re-evolve the details of his own experience of pictorial vision. The fact that Zola decides to include in a single painting details and references from other paintings leads us to conclude that we are in the presence of a "textual metapicture",⁷ which synthesizes, disguises and assembles the work of an artist in a new representational form; to quote Umberto Eco: «for the hypotyposis to be realized, the text must induce the reader to collaborate with references to personal visual experiences»⁸ of the addressee; this is the position that the novelist assumes the moment he combines in the same ékphrasis (exactly halfway between the mimetic and notional) the heterogeneous elements of a complex visual discourse. Lantier's painting embraces multiple levels, something which is made

5 John Hollander, *The Gaze's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

6 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 60.

7 William J. T. Mitchell, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Image Science*, in *Visual Literacy*, ed. by James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008).

8 Umberto Eco, 'Les sémaphores sous la pluie I e II', *Golem. L'indispensabile*, http://www.doccity.com/it/umberto_eco_les_sémaphores_sous_la_pluie/501484/ (30.10.15).

feasible mainly through the collaboration of the reader, who is literally caught up in the textual *mise en abyme* of the large canvas; in this case the painting is a device for highlighting the writer's skill in bringing to life a fresh and unprecedented synthesis of a whole range of images already familiar to the reader.

The relationship between textual-pictorial depiction and the observer is further intensified by the dynamic features in *Plein air*, by the relationship between background and subject; in fact, another striking aspect in this first hypotyposis is the vitality of certain pictorial shapes and the capacity that some of these possess to actually leap off the canvas; this is somehow echoed by certain shapes on the canvas retracting into the distance along the dark road. From the strictly medial point of view this ékphrasis provides the literary image with a three-dimensionality very similar to that deriving from the artistic technique of *trompe-l'oeil*. Here, in fact, the reader/observer finds himself in what is almost a proxemics relationship with the description; he is encouraged to interact with it, to take a step back when certain features “emerge”, and then to virtually penetrate into the substance of the painting in the instant that his gaze is invited to follow «the dark road that fades into the distance». In this ékphrastic game it can be seen how the observer/reader of the description is lured into the work; he is urged to concentrate his attention on the shapes projecting from the canvas in order to then penetrate the depths, to cross the threshold of depiction and wander around in fictional space. It seems clear that the novel has as its theme the relationship between the arts of space and the arts of time and is aiming to break down the boundaries that have been traditionally defined by Lessing: here the narration avails itself of ékphrastic projection and incarnates the “typical” spatiality of painting; in fact ékphrasis allows us to move about inside the picture frame of the actual canvas by dynamizing our gaze, which is transformed from extradiegetic to intradiegetic. It should also be noted how, in Zola, the ékphrastic process is “outbound”; the features of the painting on many occasions emerge “from”⁹ this.

9 Several literary devices in Zola's novel let something arise “from” paintings “to” characters («se dégageaient de l'ébauche», Zola, *L'Œuvre*, p. 32; «et la

In the whole first part of the novel, at least, the descriptions of pictorial works are allotted mostly to the narrator rather than to dialogues between the characters; moreover these descriptions are often correlated to moments of manifest and explicit silence on the part of the subjects of the narration, who are unspeaking observers of the kaleidoscope of canvases described by the author. In this way Zola overlays our purely extradiegetic scrutiny with that of the characters¹⁰ within the narrative structure; as soon as silence descends a particular type of contemplative perception of the pictorial images is set in motion in these characters, as if the long gaze into the depths of the canvases has entered an inversely proportional relationship with the dimension of silence. Far from constituting a narrative digression *ékphrasis* in these cases enhances the novel's architecture, constituting visual appendices in which the characters, together with the reader, become silent and motionless observers of the images «allowing themselves to be included in a common "vision"». ¹¹

The novel takes us through the various phases of painting; in the artists' studio we are present during the painting's birth-pangs and then we observe the work-in-progress, the painter changing his mind, the criticism and encouragement from friends, and finally the reaction of the general public and the critics. In the part of the work with which we are dealing, for example, the author explains to us how the first draft of *Plein air* had been thrown together unpredictably, in one go, in a "dynamizing of the creative process" that helps us to understand the enthusiasm of which Claude Lantier is capable when he is getting down to starting a new work. On the same theme Zola lingers over the reasons for some of the protagonist's pictorial choices: the gentleman in a velvet jacket in the canvas is, in this case, the solution to a need for a dark juxtaposition.¹²

tache sombre du dos s'enlevait avec tant de vigueur», Zola, *L'Œuvre*, p. 51).

10 Zola, *L'Œuvre*, p. 51: «Un long silence se fit, tous deux regardaient, immobiles», p. 32; «Puis, tous deux regardèrent, de nouveau muets», p. 51; «Il s'interrompt, devant le silence du peintre, qui s'était retourné vers sa toile», p. 60.

11 Cometa, *Il fantasma delle immagini*, in Filostrato, *Immagini*, ed. by Andrea L. Carbone (Palermo: Duepunti Edizioni, 2009), p. 130.

12 Ima N. Ebin, "Manet and Zola", *Gazette de beaux-arts*, 27 (1945), 357-58.

After the initial description of *Plein air*, Zola adds a second one in which the dynamizing and the three-dimensional scansion of the painting direct one's thoughts, in a manner that is occasionally Gestaltic, towards the perceptive experience of figures wafting across the surface of a screen:

The gentleman in the velveteen jacket was entirely roughed in. His hand, *more advanced* than the rest, furnished a pretty fresh patch of flesh colour amid the grass, and the dark coat *stood out* so vigorously that the little silhouettes in the background, the two little women wrestling in the sunlight, seemed to *have retreated further* into the luminous quivering of the glade. The principal figure, the recumbent women, as yet scarcely more than outlined, *floated about* like some aerial creature seen in dreams.¹³

One might note in this second description of *Plein air* the synaesthetic involvement associating our sight with the “freshness” that the tones of the canvas manage to assume; moreover, this clever use of the ékphrastic technique means that once again the limits of the canvas reach out towards the reader/observer. Thus this leads us (from Filostrato to Diderot) “inside” the spatial scansion of the canvas, which the eye, as Filostrato teaches us, has to “penetrate”,¹⁴ so as to learn «to distinguish the various planes of the painting whilst the observer passes across them with his own body».¹⁵ In the descriptions of *Plein air* the figures stand out from the background and seem to move about in the space of the representation. Zola's enthusiasm for the painter Manet, at least initially,¹⁶ is almost total, mainly because of the

13 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 37, *emphasis added*.

14 Filostrato, p. 26.

15 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 118.

16 At any rate in the sixties Zola and Manet lived a strong and mutual intellectual consideration. It is a well-known fact that the novelist stood up for the painter's work from official critics of that age. But the situation will be quite different in 1880, when the writer «voiced negative opinions concerning the impressionists whose illogical, incomplete and powerless art did not find an expression in a single masterpiece» (Ebin, *Manet and Zola*, pp. 372-73) no artist belonging to this group did manage to realize in a striking way what in Zola's mind was the *en plein air* way of painting: a kind of painting strictly close to real life (realist), that had to correspond visually to his naturalistic way of writing.

painter's skill in rendering so simply the reality of all things, and in this new painting:

every object takes its place, Olympia's head stands out in a "sharp relief" against the background, the bouquet becomes a wonder of brilliance and freshness (...) the painter has proceeded by luminous masses, by large stretches of light, *like nature herself*, and his work gains the slightly rough and austere aspect of nature.¹⁷

In this explicit *ékphrasis* of Manet's work the link between *Plein air* and Manet's nude is clear; this is principally because the painting in question imitates the reality of all things, in the same fashion as literature of a naturalistic bent. In this novel it is sufficient to distance oneself appropriately from the threshold of the representation in order to penetrate the vitality of its features: «He ceased speaking and drew back a few steps to judge of the effect of his picture (...) and then resuming (...) "We, perhaps, want the sun, the open air, a *clear, youthful real light*"».¹⁸ Of course, the perceptive effect sought by Lantier had to make the painted figures seem to be "on the point" of coming to life and starting to move about; this is why *ékphrasis* in this case «recounts an episode that addresses our imagination, *as if* it were happening before our very eyes».¹⁹

Salon des Refusés

Salon des Refusés described in the novel coincides with the scene in which Claude, in presenting *Plein air*, encounters ruinous failure for the first time. In this narrative section we encounter a series of *ékphrasis* in which few essential features of the paintings at the exhibition are described, what here emerges

17 Zola, *Édouard Manet, étude biographique et critique* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1893), p. 358, *emphasis added*.

18 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 35, *emphasis added*.

19 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 91.

is a chaotic multitude of bad pictures,²⁰ so Emilie Sitzia can say that «*L'Œuvre* is the child of aesthetics' crisis of XIX century».²¹ Zola's *Salon* is made of a literary proliferation of images which seems to forecast the representation's crisis of twentieth century with its flood of visual images, a crisis that Zola also recognizes in *Mes Haines* when he quotes Hyppolite Taine: «We are living in full anarchy, and, in my opinion, this anarchy is an odd and interesting show».²²

According to Liliane Louvel, it is fundamental to study the relationship between the frequency with which the image described is encountered in the text and the actual temporality of the narration, in order to examine the inclusion of paintings «as they interact with their textual manifestation».²³ With regard to *Salon des Refusés*, the writer begins with descriptions of several canvases initially encountered at a certain distance from each other in the narrative; then the frequency is gradually increased and becomes relentless until finally a series of “visual events” is listed, ending up in «a multiplicity of events that, by filling up the space, evoke the space that they are invading».²⁴ Above all, when the rhythm of the paintings being described becomes frenetic, the novel throws up several very synthetic sketches of paintings juxtaposed with each other:

20 Even in the description of the last Salon in which Claude presents a picture, Zola emphasizes a pictorial chaos: «Ah! Those three thousand pictures! Placed one after the other alongside the walls of all the galleries, including the outer one, deposited also even on the floors, (...) they were like an inundation, a deluge, which rose up, streamed over the whole Palais de l'Industrie, and submerged it beneath the murky flow of all the mediocrity and madness to be found in the river of Art» (*His Masterpiece*, p. 262).

21 Emilie Sitzia, 'De Manet à Moureau: 'évolution artistique des tableaux de Claude Lantier dans *L'Œuvre*', *Revue-Textimage*, 3 (2011), p. 19.

22 Zola, *M. H. Taine artiste*, in Id. *Mes haines: Causeries littéraires et artistiques* (Paris: G. Charpentier et E. Fasquelle, 1893), p. 215.

23 Liliane Louvel, *L'Oeil du texte: Texte et image dans la Littérature de langue anglaise* (Toulouse: PUM, 1999), and *Texte/Images: Images à lire, textes à voir* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002); trans. by Laurent Petit, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, ed. by Karen Jacobs (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), p. 62.

24 Eco, *Les sémaphores sous la pluie*.

An abomination of Chaîne's, a *Christ pardoning the Woman Taken in Adultery*, made them pause; (...) But *close by* they admired a very fine study of a woman, seen from behind, with her head turned sideways. The whole show was a mixture of the best and the worst, all the styles were mingled together, the drivellers of the historical school elbowed the young lunatics of realism, (...) A dead Jezebel, that seemed to have rotted in the cellars of the School of Arts, was exhibited near a Lady in white, the very curious conception of a future great artist; then a huge shepherd looking at the sea.²⁵

Given the ékphrastic fragmentation of the rhythm of the narrative, it might be suggested that these descriptions of the *Salon* are mimicking in a structural homology, the pictorial genre of the *cabinet d'amateur*, in which the juxtaposition of a series of visual elements gives rise to excessive stimulation of our visual experience. In this textual *cabinet* we do however note a particular descriptive style: the basic features of the paintings are revealed very swiftly, somehow mimicking the *staccato* brushstrokes of impressionist painting. In the words of Robert Niess, with regard to the descriptions of paintings appearing in the novel: «not many are described in detail and rarely does Zola go beyond a short indication of subject and a line or two about technique or light effect».²⁶ Might we therefore find in these aspects traces of a form of impressionistic writing? After all, how could Zola have gone into minute detail with regard to the paintings strewn throughout the novel, if, in impressionism, the details are absent by definition? We might note a form of structural homology between the paintings and the way in which they are described: incomplete, sketched, imprecise, through fleeting visual impressions. Niess continues: «*L'Oeuvre* was clearly intended to exemplify in prose the practice of the Impressionist school, (...) Light effects are everywhere, and they are Impressionist light

25 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 114, *emphasis added*: here Zola goes on with this random accumulation of pictures: «nothing execrable was wanting, neither military scenes full of little leaden soldiers, nor was antiquity, nor the middle ages, smeared, as it were, with bitumes».

26 Niess, 'Another view of Zola's *L'Œuvre*', p. 244.

effects». ²⁷ Even when *Plein air* is pilloried by a general public incapable of understanding the explosive potentialities, Claude looks on in dejection, but still firmly convinced of the originality of his painting: «but on the other hand what a pretty general tone, what a play of light he had thrown into it, a silvery gray light, fine and diffuse, brightened by all the dancing sunbeams of the open air. (...) and the sun came in and the walls smiled under that invasion of springtide. The light note of his picture, the bluish tinge that people had been railing at, flashed out among the other painting also». ²⁸

However, we clearly cannot speak of an impressionistic style *tout-court* in the novel and the writings of Zola the naturalist, «whose sense of method and desire for “finish” made him rebel at the very idea that a painting could be anything like an impression»; ²⁹ what we can say is that in this section the novel certainly demonstrates an “ékphrastic impressionism”, and this is especially evident in the structural homologies that the naturalist novelist’s writing establishes with an impressionistic style in the frames of the precisely described paintings. Zola applies a swift narrative “touch” in this novel and his “pictorial” writing: «suits its subject well: he uses a vocabulary rich in colour and suggestions of light, and applies successive layers of paint in the impressionist manner, with the extensive use of disjointed phrases». ³⁰ Claude occasionally produces varying images of the same scenery captured at different times of day and in different periods of the year, obtaining essential visual sensations: «the idea of capturing the passing of time – the seasons and the hours – in one’s own visual expression, is essential to the impressionist conception of scenery». ³¹ Zola manages to «link images with words by faithfully replicating the speed and rhythm of the images that he evokes, whilst integrating time and space». ³²

27 Niess, ‘Another view of Zola’s *L’Œuvre*’, p. 244.

28 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 120.

29 Niess, ‘Another view of Zola’s *L’Œuvre*’, p. 84.

30 Sitzia, ‘De Manet à Moureau’, p. 14.

31 ‘De Manet à Moureau’, p. 14.

32 ‘De Manet à Moureau’, p. 14. Also see Louvel, *Texte Image*.

La Cité de Paris

The last painting by Claude Lantier described in the novel, in the same way as *Plein Air*, is a complex collage of other paintings «intermingled with descriptions of authentic paintings»,³³ and is a landscape of the Cité of Paris, which had one day enchanted Claude Lantier so utterly, a magical vision, bursting with life, and a variety of layers, details and hues: such an emblematic scene of modernity as to captivate his vision for ever.

The heart of Paris, had taken full possession of him. (...) There were patches of vivid light, and of clearly defined shadow; there was a brightness in the precision of each detail, a transparency in the air, which *throbbed* with gladness. And the river life, the *turmoil* of the quays, all the people, *streaming* along the streets, *rolling* over the bridges, *arriving* from every side of that huge cauldron, Paris, *steamed* there in visible *billows*, with a *quiver* that was apparent in the sunlight.³⁴

In these lines Zola uses terminology closely linked to the dynamics of movement, reproducing the feverish energy of city life bursting out before Claude's eyes in the very instant that he vainly decided to depict it.

Claude's vision, had it been fixed in that precise moment, would have enabled him to realize his dream of «a painting capable of showing life», a wish he had clearly expressed when, years before, talking to his friend Sandoz, a writer with many of the characteristics of Zola himself, he had declared his need to be able to:

see and paint everything. (...) Life such as it runs about the streets, the life of the rich and the poor, in the market places, on the race-courses, on the boulevards (...) and every trade being plied, and every passion portrayed in full daylight.³⁵

33 Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, p. 62.

34 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, pp. 200-01, *emphasis added*.

35 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, pp. 36-37.

In its final painting the artist includes several features that were to scandalize more than a few of his long-time friends: a naked woman on the prow of a boat, her skin burnished like precious metal, the area where her belly should be depicted with flowers; these clearly symbolist features are far removed from all his previous production, and the descriptions of this unfinished picture in Zola's writing are quite different from the Claude's impressionist period ones: here the novelist «denies naturalist aesthetic and submerges his writing in a world made of artificiality and decadence».³⁶ Christine, the protagonist's long-time partner, takes charge of defining the new painting in a jealousy outburst:

And you love what? A nothing, a mere semblance, a little dust, some colour spread upon a canvas! But once more, look at her, look at your woman up yonder! See what a monster you have made of her in your madness! *Are there any women like that?* Have any woman golden limbs, and flowers on their bodies? Wake up, open your eyes, *return to life again.*³⁷

In this violent words Zola is maintaining his complete adhesion to the realistic aesthetic. Is not a chance that Claude committed suicide whilst standing before the unfinished painting of the "heart of Paris", an extreme act which drove him to participate in his own failure; perhaps this was the only way Lantier had of irreversibly exalting his obsession, of conjoining with his inability to depict "the vision" that had struck him one afternoon when beholding "the heart" of Paris. In fact, Claude's failure lay in his inability to vanquish what it was that really captivated him, the city of Paris in its urban fabric and from all its perspectives, and not managing to do it with the instruments he possessed.

This aspect of the novel is symptomatic of what, according to Louvel:

36 Sitzia, 'De Manet à Moureau', p. 17.

37 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 331, *emphasis added*.

often constitutes the artist's quest: to get close to the thing, to represent it, while at the same time feeling that it is ineluctably slipping away. Conversely, this is also what explains the feeling of loss in front of the object that Georges Didi-Huberman condenses in the phrase: "It is there (...) and yet, it is lost".³⁸

The tragedy occurs because of his failure to capture the appearance that the *Ile de la Cité* had assumed on that particular afternoon. After that vision he returns to the same spot many times in an attempt to unearth the original vision, but he is hampered by his total inability to depict his visual obsession; this is because the vision that he would like to capture is dwarfed by all those times in which that scene subsequently reveals itself to him, always in the same way and yet always slightly different. This experience of loss and an unceasing search for the instant characterizes the whole final part of the novel and echoes Baudelaire's evocative declaration to his transient "Passer-by"; it had in some way already been pre-announced in the initial part of the narrative, when, in a dialogue between two friends of Claude's «a landscape, "dwindling away" in the distance» is described, «a bit of melancholy road (...) and then a woman passes along, scarcely a silhouette; on she goes and you never meet her again, no, never more again». ³⁹ In other words we are being shown what destiny has in store for the painter, who, like Baudelaire, will find himself in the condition of experiencing the loss of something transitory that will become a "fleeting" vision. Christine is portrayed in the initial stages of their relationship as a «fleeting, regretted vision, a charming silhouette which had melted away in space, and would never be seen again»;⁴⁰ but in the final painting, the artist's objects of desire, the woman and the city, coincide and Claude finds himself in the impossible situation of wanting to return, via pictorial representation, to the moment that "has been". Rather than a pictorial vision, therefore, Zola is thematizing the need for a vision that is principally

38 Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, p. 20.

39 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 74, *emphasis added*.

40 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 80.

photographic, with Claude vainly trying to reproduce the instant that so bewitched him. In this sense, the surface of the canvas, along with the whole range of paints and brushes that invariably accompany him in his work, is revealed to be an instrument that is ontologically inadequate for assuaging his creative obsession. We are faced by the painter's ontological shortcomings, with the "heart of Paris" scenarios, variously capable of catalyzing his gaze, revealing themselves under conditions of continually changing light, colour and mood; these copious and evanescent visions overlap with each other kaleidoscopically, clogging up his mental and visual experience. His frenzied approach to this work renders the artist incapable of depicting in definitive fashion something that had once represented an utterly ecstatic vision. In the final part of the novel *Ile de la cité* is described repeatedly as if to mirror Claude's obsession as he goes off time after time, in search of that vista and the exaltation that it had originally aroused in him; yet he always finds altered situations, all equally captivating and all capable of over-exciting his, by now ailing, creativity.⁴¹ This aim of reproducing on canvas the variety of colours, shapes, movements and tones that the *île* manages to flaunt is not only spectacularly difficult, it is impossible. The outcome is a mass of paint applied and scraped off, layer over further layer of paint on the canvas, which turns into an object brutalized by sudden hysterical bursts vented violently on its surface; the canvas support is broken up, torn into shreds, only to be immediately and remorsefully sewn together again.

On reflection, it is the logic of the still photo that prevails here; Claude is thoroughly incapable of painting "his" landscape using the artist's "box of tools". In its final part the novel thematizes the «modifications that scopic regimes are gradually undergoing in relation to the development of visual technology».⁴² The development of this topic hinges on the fact that, in order to reproduce this variety, it might have proved more appropriate

41 Zola, *His Masterpiece*, p. 219: Claude is here compulsively in need to see that place: «He beheld it also at noon (...) He beheld it, moreover, beneath the setting sun».

42 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 93.

to utilize a technique capable of rendering diachronically the passing of the days and hours, with the chromatic variety that characterizes every instant in a place of such dazzling sunsets; Zola also suggests the need for a «filmic vision, where one does not so much describe what one is seeing, something fixed in time once and for all (like the Apollo of the Belvedere or the Venus of Milo), but a dreamlike sequence, where things are in a state of *continual transformation*».⁴³ The painter is obsessed with a place that has captivated his soul, but it is impossible to assuage his passionate needs because painting a place means subduing it and annulling its volatility, thus denying it its “true” nature. To a certain extent *His Masterpiece* is a novel recounting the failure of pictorial representation. In this character’s physical struggle against the limitations of the canvas, Zola is describing a hero who is both titanic and impotent: the “painter of modern life” who finds himself existing at a very delicate moment of our cultural history, a phase in which, in European life, there is an upsurge of new media full of potential and yet to be explored. In these early stages, for example, photographic technique is starting to render superfluous (almost ingenuous) the challenge that painting has set itself in tackling reality. It is for these reasons that the novel, with its crisis of classical depiction, carves its niche in the literary tradition; and yet it does so in such a way as to represent a shrewd compendium of the aesthetic conscience of the time, highlighting contradictions, anxieties, passions and failures of an artistic age that continues to cast its shadow on the present day.

43 Eco, *Les sémaphores sous la pluie*.

SEMANTICS OF THE PAINTED IMAGE IN HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL'S *TOD DES TIZIAN*

MAURIZIO PIRRO

In *Tod des Tizian* (1892), the second of the verse plays that form the basis of the precocious literary output of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the painted image and its verbal evocation carry out a rather relevant function of poetics. The supremacy of the visual senses in the characters' perceptive activity is already explicit from the introductory words spoken by the page, who illustrates his own state of aesthetic hypersensitivity by placing it in relation to the suggestion conjured up by «alte Bilder / Mit schönen Wappen, klingenden Devisen, / Bei denen mir so viel Gedanken kommen / Und eine Trunkenheit von fremden Dingen, / Daß mir zuweilen ist, als müßt ich weinen...».¹ At the centre of this brief drama there is a climate of feverish expectancy, generated in Titian's disciples by the news that the master, now approaching death, has with enthusiastic determination set to work on a last painting; the subject is unknown and it can only be confusedly reconstructed through the testimony of the girls who had been summoned as models. Although the subject and the details of the work remain obscure, this painting still has the effect of representing from a new perspective (and, therefore, in a certain sense, invalidating) all Titian's previous production. Struck by a moment of enlightenment about the unity of all living things, Titian decides to revoke all his main works. The canvases that are

1 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Tod des Tizian*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, ed. by Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt am Main: Fisher, 1979), vol. I: *Gedichte – Dramen I. 1891-1898*, p. 247. For an analysis of the prologue, see Sandro Zanetti, 'Lyrisch aus der Kulisse der Historie treten. Vergangenheit und Vergänglichkeit in Hofmannsthals *Der Tod des Tizian*', *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch*, 20 (2012), 141-160.

then carried off to the pupils' circle (most likely *Baccanale degli Andrii* and *Venere di Urbino*) are in fact stigmatized as products of a formal culture lacking, in its superficial perfection, the vital spirit aroused by grasping the basic principles of being.

It is clear that we are here dealing with a theme deeply rooted in the aesthetic program of the young Hofmannsthal, in the hope of justifying the exercise of art through a spiritual bedrock that might recover the function of praxis without conforming with its fortuitous character, but by revealing its secret and non-perishable substance. The construction of totality is an issue that is repeatedly raised in his essays from the 1890s, in which Hofmannsthal denotes a sort of half-way term between the extremes of a pure and simple formalism (a long way from the reality of life) and of the phenomenology of existence applied to the mere probing of appearance and, as such, lacking any possible principle of necessity. In fact, in writing about Stefan George's *Bücher*, dated 1896, the merits of the work reviewed are identified in its dissociation from a typical bad habit of the «schlechte Bücher unserer Zeit», in other words the uncritical and indirect adhesion to a fortuitous cause: «eine lächerliche korybantenhafte Hingabe an das Vorderste, Augenblickliche hat sie diktiert. Zuchtlosigkeit ist ihr Antrieb, freudlose Anmaßung ihr merkwürdiges Kennzeichen».² Remaining faithful to the inflexible measure of impersonality typical of his own poetics, George succeeded in his objective of conquering life without negating it, whilst revealing its innermost unity: «dem Leben überlegen zu bleiben, den tiefsten Besitz nicht preiszugeben, mehr zu sein als die Erscheinungen».³

Moreover, in Hofmannsthal, this impulse towards a form supported by a sort of reciprocal empowerment of life and art takes on an eminently aesthetic configuration in which it ends up rediscovering the specific duty of the aesthetic individual. Especially in the context of the great processes of

2 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gedichte von Stefan George*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, vol. VIII: *Reden und Aufsätze I. 1891-1913*, p. 215.

3 *Gedichte von Stefan George*, p. 218.

modernization that involved European society between the 19th and 20th centuries, the artist's formative potential could only take concrete form in the reunification of that which tends to separate itself irreversibly: Man and his style (according to the expression employed by Hofmannsthal himself in his essay on Maurice Barrès).⁴ In other words, Man and a higher-level form that contains his entire existence and reveals his greater determination, without, however, suppressing the material details. Hence the controversy with regard to the model of existence of the aesthete, who rejects life, perceiving it as abandoned to chaos and disorder, and is incapable of replacing it with any other form because he exalts life as an object of mere idolatry, as a pure and simple instrument of defense from the pitfalls of life. This theme is widely documented in all Hofmannsthal's works, from the description of Claudio's sentimental desert in *Tor und der Tod* (1893) to the judgments regarding Gabriele D'Annunzio in the three essays, between 1893 and 1895, dedicated to the Italian writer; this theme also very strongly influences *Tod des Tizian*, where Titian's disciples seem to lapse into a condition of sterile and paralyzing dilettantism.

It is precisely the search for a footing outside the formal structure of the work of art that propels Hofmannsthal in the direction of a medial paradigm that is different from the verbal one. The pull towards general semantics of the aesthetic state, which Hofmannsthal attempts to observe with formulations of poetics based not on *techniques* of fictional coding, but on *praxis* of an existential character (e.g. "pre-existence", but also the

4 «Uns pflegt Glaube und Bildung, die den Glauben ersetzt, gleichmäßig zu fehlen. Ein Mittelpunkt fehlt, es fehlt die Form, der Stil. Das Leben ist uns ein Gewirre zusammenhangloser Erscheinungen; froh, eine tote Berufspflicht zu erfüllen, fragt keiner weiter. Erstarrte Formeln stehen bereit, durchs ganze Leben trägt uns der Strom des Überlieferten. Zufall nährt uns, Zufall lehrt uns; dankbar genießen wir, was Zufall bietet, entbehren klaglos, was Zufall entzieht. Wir denken die bequemen Gedanken der andern und fühlens nicht, daß unser bestes Selbst allmählich abstirbt. Wir leben ein totes Leben. [...] Diesen Zustand nannten die heiligen Väter das Leben ohne Gnade, ein dürres, kahles und taubes Dasein, einen lebendigen Tod», H. von Hofmannsthal, *Maurice Barrès*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, pp. 118-19.

utopia of a “thought from the heart” elaborated in *Chandos-Brief*, 1902), finds a mode of preferential articulation in the probing of expressive systems of lower-index denotation, such as painting and music. By the term totality Hofmannsthal generally implies a state that surpasses the level of verbal expression, since its superabundance of signs can only be adequately contained within a structure of semantization extended to the multiple fields of the “human”. The poet is evidently moving from a traditional conception of totality resulting from the correlation between general and particular, macrocosm and microcosm, he is operating in a system of romantic derivation that is already inclined to see, in the connection between the arts, a reinforced mode of elaboration of meaning.⁵ However, into this line of thinking, an unprejudiced tendency is inserted to grasp the semantic fecundity nestling in the pragmatics of human relations and activity, even when these have no connection to the sphere of the aesthetic.

In the *Letter from Lord Chandos* the situation of crisis evoked is intensified not only by the deterioration of the instruments of “aesthetic representation” of reality, but also, and above all, by the weakening of the subject’s capacity to “understand comprehensively” reality itself, that is to say, to understand it as a unitary whole, in which every manifestation of the “human” is oriented towards an overall design. It is not by chance that, in this sense, the shortcomings of these capacities are juxtaposed to circumstances, such as a political speech or pedagogic talk in a familiar context; here the use of the verbal medium appears deprived of any potential aesthetic intent, and, in addition, intuition

5 In the essay entitled *Philosophie des Metaphorischen* (1894), which is a review of the homonymous book by Alfred Biese, Hofmannsthal defines the condition of readiness to comprehend the character of interrelationship of all that exists as the «seltsam vibrierender Zustand, in welchem die Metapher zu uns kommt, über uns kommt in Schauer, Blitz und Sturm: diese plötzliche blitzartige Erleuchtung, in der wir einen Augenblick lang den großen Weltzusammenhang ahnen, schauernd die Gegenwart der Idee spüren, dieser ganze mystische Vorgang, der uns die Metapher leuchtend und real hinterläßt, wie Götter in den Häusern der Sterblichen funkelnde Geschenke als Pfänder ihrer Gegenwart hinterlassen», H. von Hofmannsthal, *Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, p. 192.

of a recovery of those impaired faculties is engendered when in contact with still mainly desemanticized forms of objectivity, as in the celebrated passage dedicated to several objects casually glimpsed in a field and from which the subject anticipates a surge of knowledge regarding the secret nature of things.⁶ In *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* (1907) this skill in blending form and praxis, and in discovering how far each of these will allow the other to emerge into the light more incisively, takes on a fully culturological character, since the “eye” in *Returnee*, introduced as a businessman generally inclined towards a conception of existence in the aesthetic sense, endeavours to understand relations of form in fields as far-removed as possible from art, as long as there is that condition of happy *sprezzatura* that he defines as “guter Zug”:

The whole man must move at once

wenn ich unter Amerikanern und dann später unter den südlichen Leuten in der Banda oriental, unter den Spaniern und Gauchos, und zuletzt unter Chinesen und Malaaien, wenn mir da ein guter Zug vor die Augen trat, was ich einen guten Zug nenne, ein Etwas in der Haltung, das mir Respekt abnötigt und mehr als Respekt, ich weiß nicht, wie ich dies sagen soll, es mag der große Zug sein, den sie manchmal in ihren Geschäften haben, in den U.S. meine ich, dieses fast wahnwitzig wilde und zugleich fast kühl besonnene »Hineingehen« für eine Sache, oder es mag ein gewisses patriarchalisches grand air sein, ein alter weißbärtiger Gaucho, wie er dasteht an der Tür seiner Estancia, so ganz er selbst, und wie er einen empfängt, und wie seine starken Teufel von Söhnen von den Pferden springen und ihm parieren, [...] wenn etwas der Art mir unterkam, so dachte ich: Zuhause!⁷

The subject seems interested in a model of material totality capable of rendering itself visible not so much in the achievements of those individuals possessing it, as in their system of sign

6 For the ample spectrum of imaginal typologies implicated in *Brief* see Sabine Schneider, ‘Das Leuchten der Bilder in der Sprache. Hofmannsthals medienbewußte Poetik der Evidenz’, *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch*, 11 (2003), 209-248.

7 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, vol. vii: *Erzählungen – Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe – Reisen*, pp. 546-47.

language, in the equilibrium and self-control that filters out from their sensitive presence in the world.⁸ The holistic paradigm announced by the introductory proposal, which the *Returnee* claims to have heard from a fellow patient in the hospital in Montevideo («einer von denen, die weit gekommen wären»),⁹ demands to be applied in a real and personal dimension, linking with Man's capacity to appear as if in a state of complete alignment with himself, a state of compact and sealed-up self-referencing. The *je ne sais quoi* that holds together the overshadowed construction of totality in *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* is a principle of formal capacity that cannot be codified, but is recognizable intuitively in the conduct of whoever possesses it, like a sort of mark of reinforced humanity.

This condition of perfect mastery of style (which is here coupled with the tradition of the *courtier*, but is linked elsewhere to other typologies such as that of the gentleman) presupposes a supreme level of reticence and linguistic restraint, since it is based on a strategy of aplomb and control of one's passions, which aspires to manifest itself directly through its effects, without recourse to mediation.¹⁰ The search for a code of totality that might render the return to Wilhelmine Germany more bearable for the subject of *Letters*, ends most coherently in the discovery of painting and, in particular, the encounter with the hyper-connotative semantics of Vincent van Gogh's paintings. Contemplation of the paintings is liberated from their fictional character and introduced into a declaredly existential perspective; they end up carrying out a therapeutic role, in a relationship which to Hofmannsthal must

8 On *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* see Ursula Renner, *Die Zauberschrift der Bilder*, in *Bildende Kunst in Hofmannsthals Texten* (Freiburg i. B.: Rombach, 2000), pp. 387 ff., and Sabine Schneider, *Verheißung der Bilder. Das andere Medium in der Literatur um 1900* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006), pp. 221 ff.

9 *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, p. 546.

10 See Gerhard Austin, *Phänomenologie der Gebärde bei Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1981), pp. 71-81 and Brian Coghlan, 'The whole man must move at once. Das Persönlichkeitsbild des Menschen bei Hugo von Hofmannsthal', *Hofmannsthal-Forschungen*, 8 (1985), 29-47.

seem to represent close continuity with the ethical nature of his conception of poetics. The effect aroused in the onlooker on discovering van Gogh clearly responds to the issue raised in *Letter from Lord Chandos*: the need for a non-verbal form capable of illustrating the mysterious, dynamic continuity that the subject feels between himself and the objects bordering along his perceptive horizon.¹¹ The wonderful description of the psychic disturbance brought about by the painted landscape is, in reality actually, the story of sudden spiritual healing:

Wie kann ich es Dir nahebringen, daß hier jedes Wesen – *ein Wesen* jeder Baum, jeder Streif gelben oder grünlichen Feldes, jeder Zaun, jeder in den Steinhügel gerissene Hohlweg, ein Wesen der zinnerne Krug, die irdene Schüssel, der Tisch, der plumpe Sessel – sich mir wie neugeboren aus dem furchtbaren Chaos des Nichtlebens, aus dem Abgrund der Wesenlosigkeit entgegenhob, daß ich fühlte, nein, daß ich wußte, wie jedes dieser Dinge, dieser Geschöpfe aus einem fürchterlichen Zweifel an der Welt herausgeboren war und nun mit seinem Dasein einen gräßlichen Schlund, gähnendes Nichts, für immer verdeckte! Wie kann ich es Dir nur zur Hälfte nahebringen, wie mir diese Sprache in die Seele redete, die mir die gigantische Rechtfertigung der seltsamsten unauflösbarsten Zustände meines Innern hinwarf, mich mit eins begreifen machte, was ich in unerträglicher Dumpfheit zu fühlen kaum ertragen konnte, und was ich doch, wie sehr fühlte ich das, aus mir nicht mehr herausreißen konnte – und hier gab eine unbekannte Seele von unfaßbarer Stärke mir Antwort, mit einer Welt mir Antwort!¹²

The fictional image, with its deliberate reduction in points of reference, settles in the psyche of whoever contemplates it as a medium for ensuring the existence of a circular relationship between the individual and the world; thus, it positions itself right in the centre of that conception of poetics based on the conciliation and reciprocal innervation of art and life that had dominated Hofmannsthal's output ever since his very first works.

11 See Claudia Bamberg, *Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), pp. 263-79.

12 *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, pp. 565-66. See Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Dichtung als Schau-Spiel: Zur Poetologie des jungen Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 16 ff.

In *Tod des Tizian* the dying master is evidently sustained by this very ideal. According to the testimony of Gianino (the young aesthete and bearer of a candid instinct for truth unimaginable to the other pupils), the statement with which Titian bursts into ecstatic enthusiasm in setting his hand to his last painting («Es lebt der große Pan»),¹³ aims to indicate, as the principal element for legitimizing supreme style, possession of intuitive enlightenment regarding the character of totality of everything that exists; at the same time, it also seeks to introduce the non-verbal semantics of the painted image as a medium electively destined to render this enlightenment effective.

Titian's depiction of stylistic sovereignty cuts across his depiction of the charismatic sovereignty that he exercises in the small community of followers gathered together under his guidance. This aspect also targets Hofmannsthal's interest in practical and ethical elements concerned with aesthetic existence, since it involves the sociability of the primacy held of verbal expression, but on the de-structured and polysemic code of communication through by a great artist. By testing a model of communication based on the master's suggestive power and charismatic conditioning of his pupils, the author evidently intends to put to the test a paradigm of non-linear semiotic relations, based not on the formalized code sign-language.

The creation of a restricted but solid group of companions sharing a common conception of art, responds, moreover, to an exceedingly widespread trend in the sociology of symbolic forms between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, when the circle establishes itself as a system of protest and reaction with regard to processes of transformation in collective living at the threshold of Modernity. As with *Tod des Tizian*, Hofmannsthal had recently personally experienced the force and also the destructive potential of a system of discipleship founded on suggestive persuasion promoted by an individual equipped with elements of distinction and determined to use them in authoritarian fashion.

13 *Der Tod des Tizian*, p. 250.

Between 1891 and 1892 one of the most notorious episodes characteristic of the whole fin-de-siècle Europe took place in Vienna, when Stefan George, four years older and already engaged in the constitution of the primitive structure of the *Kreis*, had made Hofmannsthal the object of such a pressing and aggressive recruitment campaign that it aroused his suspicion and eventually led to a firm rebuttal.¹⁴ The equivocal and problematic character of the relationship with George, who in any case did not hamper Hofmannsthal's regular contribution to the first issues of *Blätter für die Kunst*, is substantiated by the poet's tendency to see the danger, in aesthetic existence, of a shortfall of sociability that is incompatible with the universal/human nature of art. In the play, Titian's disciples seem paralyzed by the prospect of losing their master and allocate a merely exorcistic consideration to the form, whilst focusing an expectation of distinction on it, aimed at deactivating the danger that they feel emanating from material existence (their distancing from the city, achieved by concentrating all school activities in a house in the country, is several times thematized during the play).¹⁵ The reduction in formative tasks as part of aesthetic existence and the subordination of a passive

14 For hints of the relationship with George in *Tod des Tizian* see Bernhard Böschenstein, *Verbergung und Enthüllung. Georges Präsenz in der Fortsetzung zum Tod des Tizian, in Verbergendes Enthüllen. Zu Theorie und Kunst dichterischen Verkleidens. Festschrift für Martin Stern*, ed. by Wolfram Malte Fues and Wolfram Mauser (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), pp. 277-87.

15 For example, in the teaching that Desiderio tries to impart to Gianino, putting him on his guard against the ugliness and vulgarity that would dominate the anti-aesthetic environment of the city: «Siehst du die Stadt, wie jetzt sie drunten ruht? / Gehüllt in Duft und goldne Abendglut / Und rosig helles Gelb und helles Grau, / Zu ihren Füßen schwarzer Schatten Blau, / In Schönheit lockend, feuchtverklärter Reinheit? / Allein in diesem Duft, dem ahnungsvollen, / Da wohnt die Häßlichkeit und die Gemeinheit, / Und bei den Tieren wohnen dort die Tollen; / Und was die Ferne weise dir verhüllt, / Ist ekelhaft und trüb und schal erfüllt / Von Wesen, die die Schönheit nicht erkennen / Und ihre Welt mit unsren Worten nennen... / Denn unsre Wonne oder unsre Pein / Hat mit der ihren nur das Wort gemein... / Und liegen wir in tiefem Schlaf befangen, / So gleicht der unsre ihrem Schläfe nicht: / Da schlafen Purpurblüten, goldne Schlangen, / Da schläft ein Berg, in dem Titanen hämmern – / Sie aber schlafen, wie die Austern dämmern», *Der Tod des Tizian*, pp. 253-54. For the position of the disciples see Schneider, *Verheißung der Bilder*, pp. 186 ff.

relationship with a supreme individual, reduce the pupils to the angst of an epigonal condition. Their deprived spiritual condition, which is reflected in their incapacity to experience life and art in a relationship of organic continuity, renders the survival of the master's doctrine beyond death impossible; in other words it will not survive beyond the limitations of the individual and personal relationship.

From this perspective, Gianino is the key character in the whole work, since he is the only one of the companions that does not waste his life cultivating the residual sense of superiority generated in the group by Titian's presence, and appears to be beleaguered by imaginal fantasies that are fully coherent with the flashes of illumination that suggest to the master his final painting. The long interlude taken up by the story of the vision experienced by Gianino during a nocturnal vigil at Titian's bedside, hints at the content of the painting to which the artist will devote his final hours; at the same time it prepares the interpretative framework required to clarify its significance, integrating the meagre clues that will be provided by the three female models in the final scene. The words of the young disciple shape a composition of a Dionysian character, based around the depiction of nature pervaded by an orgiastic reawakening of vitality. This primitive roaming energy does not bring about a slump in the formal cohesion of the image evoked by the boy, since Gianino's vision coalesces around a solidly structured unity; in fact it inclines towards stability of a monumental order that powerfully brings to mind the paintings of Arnold Böcklin, omnipresent author in the figurative culture of modern-day poets. To mention but two of the many possible examples, Stefan George dedicated to Böcklin a lyric poem of a programmatic character, inserted in the section *Zeitgedichte* of *Siebenter Ring* (1907), and Hofmannsthal himself earmarked a revised version of *Tod des Tizian*, which was performed on the occasion of a commemoration for the painter held in Munich in February 1901.¹⁶ The most ideologically marked feature of the fantasy overshadowed by the character, however, coincides with

16 With regard to the Böcklinian weave in *Tod des Tizian*, see Renner, pp. 161-76.

the elaboration of a visual link between the world of nature, to which images developed in the first part of the monologue pertain, and the world of the city, in which Gianino's imagination finds its ultimate fulfillment.¹⁷ Setting his presentiment of the higher unity of existence¹⁸ in the realm of the metropolis, the disciple impulsively by-passes the reservations espoused by the other pupils regarding the sociability of the concept of poetics applied in the group and begins to outline the universal/human curvature that characterizes Titian's final painting.¹⁹

The testimonies of the young girls who have just emerged from the master's studio do not provide an overall picture of the subject painted; reconstructing the way in which Titian dressed up and positioned each of the models, this does however consent one to infer quite clearly the aesthetic goal that governs the composition of the image. The allegorical arrangement linked to the presence of Venus, who is portrayed with conventional attributes, is subjected to a shift of focus by the enigmatic depiction alongside her of the god Pan, who takes on the hyper-symbolic form of a blindfolded marionette, clutched in the hands of one of the models. The fact that it is the girl herself who unhesitatingly provides an interpretation for the figurine, in accordance with the artist's wishes («Denn diese Puppe ist der große Pan, / Ein Gott, / Der das Geheimnis ist von allem Leben. / Den halt ich in den Armen wie ein Kind. / Doch ringsum fühl ich rätselhaftes Weben, / Und mich verwirrt der

17 See Claude Foucart, *La mort du Titien: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, l'écriture magique des images*, in *Écrire la peinture entre XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Clemont-Ferrand: Presses de l'Université Blaise Pascal, 2003), pp. 475-85.

18 «Ich war in halbem Traum bis dort gegangen, / Wo man die Stadt sieht, wie sie drunten ruht, [...] / Da aber hab ich plötzlich viel gefühlt: / Ich ahnt in ihrem steinern stillen Schweigen, / Vom blauen Strom der Nacht emporgespült, / Des roten Bluts bacchantisch wilden Reigen, / Um ihre Dächer sah ich Phosphor glimmen, / Den Widerschein geheimer Dinge schwimmen. / Und schwindelnd überkams mich auf einmal: / Wohl schlief die Stadt: es wacht der Rausch, die Qual, / Der Haß, der Geist, das Blut: das Leben wacht. / Das Leben, das lebendige, allmächtige – / Man kann es haben und doch sein vergessen!...», *Der Tod des Tizian*, p. 253.

19 See Rolf Tarot, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Daseinsformen und dichterische Struktur* (Tübingen: Neimeyer, 1970), pp. 57-84.

laue Abendwind»),²⁰ shifts interest in the scene from the plane of allegorical decoding to that of co-operation and symbolic recreation. The power of the image, and its actual motivation, are not subordinated to comprehension of its narrative logic, but rather to the pragmatic sharing of its existential meaning, which clearly alludes to the Dionysian intuition of the profound totality of being.²¹ The sightlessness inflicted on the marionette Pan thus alludes to the need to preserve this affirmation from contact with the contingency of chance circumstances and, instead, to direct it towards an appreciation of the fundamental laws of existence, which at the approach of Titian's death, leads us back, via the mediation of one of the girls, to the ever constant rhythm of the building-up and dismantling of forms.²²

20 *Der Tod des Tizian*, p. 258.

21 G. Brandstetter talked of a theatricalization of the image in the final scene of the play, *Dem Bild entsprungen. Skripturale und pikturale Beziehungen in Texten (bei E. T. A. Hoffmann, Honoré de Balzac und Hugo von Hofmannsthal)*, in *Zwischen Text und Bild. Zur Funktionalisierung von Bildern in Texten und Kontexten*, ed. by Annegret Heitmann and Joachim Schiedermaier (Freiburg i. B.: Rombach, 2000), pp. 223-36. See also Márta Gaál Baróti, *Hofmannsthals Der Tod des Tizian als intermedial orientiertes Netzwerk*, in *Verflechtungen: Intertextualität und Intermedialität in der Kultur Österreich-Ungarns*, ed. by Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Magdolna Orosz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 149-59.

22 «Im bläulich bebenden schwarzgrünen Hain / Am weißen Strand will er begraben sein: / Wo dichtverschlungen viele Pflanzen stehen, / Gedankenlos im Werden und Vergehen, / Und alle Dinge ihrer selbst vergessen, / Und wo am Meere, das sich träumend regt, / Der leise Puls des stummen Lebens schlägt», *Der Tod des Tizian*, p. 258. According to Gerhart Pickerodt the link between Titian's intuition and his imminent death places the wisdom contents implicit in the vision of the unity of everything, in an irremediably subjective and non-socializable sphere; this is linked to direct communication between the master and his pupils and can no longer be tapped in his absence. See Pickerodt, *Hofmannsthals Dramen. Kritik ihres historischen Gehalts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche, 1968), pp. 23-33.

BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ: IMAGES AS FILM AND IMAGES AS NARRATIVE TEXT. THE NOVELISTIC PROCEDURES OF ALFRED DÖBLIN IN THE LIGHT OF BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF INTERTEXTUALITY

MIRELA RAMLJAK PURGAR

Introduction

In his book *Povijesna poetika romana* Viktor Žmegač draws attention to “cinematic style” (*Kinostil*) that was programmatically established by Alfred Döblin in his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, all in the name of “objectivity”:

Döblin himself has been emphasizing how modern prose needs to achieve “objectivity” by completely removing a narrative commentator (...) and surrendering to a torrent of images that invade our consciousness on a daily basis. He too uses a notion of “cinematic style” (originally *Kinostil*), wishing to convey that descriptions have to act like documentary images, made by a photographic or a film camera, and how their substantiality has to appear suggestive, though not statically but rather in movement, in a quick exchange that displays perceptual superficiality of modern media reality.¹

1 Viktor Žmegač, *Povijesna poetika romana* (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 2004), p. 275, acc. to Alfred Döblin, *Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Olten-Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter, 1963), pp. 17-18. A syntagm of “documentary images” – a mode of supposed functioning of descriptions – can be placed between two poles of Döblin’s theorizing. On one hand there is Döblin’s invention of the so called “Döblinism” (as opposed to Marinetti’s futurism). Žmegač says: «Döblin reproaches his Italian contemporary for not being radical in the application of his futuristic principles, his prose often falling prey to old rhetorical molds, as he’s using comparisons which, despite being unusual, remain a part of the old rhetorical apparatus, remain – in Döblin’s words – “literature”». Žmegač, *Povijesna poetika romana*, p. 273, acc. to: *Der Sturm*, 115/151, March 1913. On the other hand, acc. to “Berliner Programm” (An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker), published in *Der Sturm* in the same year. «a strict border between art and other forms of life practice should be abolished».

A content of Döblin's novel should be viewed as operating alongside a method for outlining a new, different subject matter; as a unique, «truly singular attack on the certain poetological traditions of European literature». Attacking the traditional novel for being absorbed in the erotic and the “feminine”, Döblin focuses at a different engagement with life as a narrative source. The new prose epic will break away «from quotidian human experiences (like sexual love) and move towards supra-individual occurrences concerning historical turns, technical inventions, adventures, conquers, natural disasters».²

Written in 1929, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* captivates by the richness of its narrative procedures, that was early on compared with visual contextualization by the critics. Not only the author insisted on the above mentioned *Kinostil*, but critics have also discovered a path that directly connects his writing with cinematic procedures. However, this essay will endeavour to widen the already familiar insights by attempting to systematize literary procedures, which happen to border with authentic visual connoting, and therefore specifically realize the theoretical problem of intertextuality.

We shall attempt to demonstrate that the montage procedure of “cinematic writing”, as proposed by Ekkehard Kaemmerling, is by no means unambiguous. The problem will be further considered through a theoretical prism of Konstantin Seitz, who proposes the notion of “inter-multimedia epic” and does so in the name of allowing for the bigger autonomy of text, therefore also for the literary procedures, instead of the cinematic ones. Examining the

in other words, a measure of «creativity» is a «novelty of a human endeavor, whether an esthetic creation or a technical project». This should be expanded by opposing «the psychological ambitions of older novel» in the function that «novel's epic character» plays in acknowledging the ancient past: «It is important that we know that a crucial task of the prose is to come to grips with the reality of modern times and to sing about “reality deprived of soul”, in other words, the reality grasped in its naked substantiality and not refracted through a prism of subjective moods experienced by oversensitive literary characters». Žmegač, *Povijesna poetika romana*, pp. 274-75.

- 2 Žmegač, *Povijesna poetika romana*, p. 278, acc. to: Alfred Döblin, *Bemerkungen zum Roman* (1917), in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur*, ed. by Erich Kleinschmidt (Olten: Walter, 1989).

example of Mihail Bakhtin, his theory of novel and “dialogism of word”, we shall attempt to reveal the multidimensionality of literary procedures that lead towards, as we’re about to propose, “simple” and “complex” inner transitions from one language into another language.

Ekkehard Kaemmerling and “Cinematic Writing”

In 1975 Ekkehard Kaemmerling wrote a critical essay on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, titled *Cinematic Writing*.³ The essay starts by describing a notion of “montage” as “space” (*ein Raum*) that appears as the comprehensiveness of «simultaneity of all the events, states of things, peculiarities and relations». Montage is the initial descriptive notion which Döblin uses in «the countless fragments of narrative, dialogue fragments, riveting descriptions of places, excerpts from official reports, newspapers clips and poster texts». So called “systemic succession of images” (*systematische Abfolge von Bildern*), stemming from consideration of the subject of metropolitan life (that penetrates «the finest syntactic and semantic structure of literary portrait», whose «order pushes the individual towards communicative chaos and opposes the linear, discursive course of description») results in an attempt to stop “for a moment” (*für einen kurzen Moment aufzuhalten*), while images «flow in reader’s eye as they do in a film». ⁴ The author concludes: only “cinematic writing” (*filmische Schreibweise*) could achieve «aesthetic experience of seeing/writing i.e. reading/representing». Only such writing enables the abolishing of «separation existing between immovability of pictorial artwork, that has to be experienced in all of its parts at the same moment, and mobilizing of the written text, which is experienced during reading». ⁵ Regardless of introducing a new

3 Ekkehard Kaemmerling, *Die filmsiche Schreibweise*, in *Materialien zu Alfred Döblin Berlin Alexanderplatz*, ed. by Matthias Prangel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 185-98.

4 Kaemmerling, pp. 185-86.

5 Kaemmerling, p. 186.

manner of reading the novel's text, namely simultaneous reading and pictorial comprehension through words, the author seemingly raises a more important question: isn't there an analogon in "cinematic" technique for each narrational mode, irrespective of the time in question?

The answer is symptomatic and guides us to keep reading Döblin's novel in a manner that will be developed further on in this essay: Kaemmerling points at «the attitude of altered reading» (*die Haltung eines veränderten Lesens*). That is: «The technique of film has established forms and possibilities of human cognition in the moment when the novel ceased to follow a mode of writing that was overcome in the second half of the 19th century».⁶ Cognitively, novel could no longer track the changes in environment, hence the relation to film, as well as seeing and describing that are congenial to film, became novel's ownership. The author's essay endeavours to explore which «aesthetic, historical and cognitive – critical functions» adopt the film technique in mediating the cinematic writing within a linguistic structure of a narrative text, i.e. novel. This is not the matter of an ordinary imitation of film, neither it is about the «law of the primacy of the image».

Which are the procedures listed by Kaemmerling? Primarily, the camera movement. In a narrative text it is imposed as an interrupted sentential flow, and there is no "expanse of descriptive arch". On the other hand, the author outlines an excerpt offering a total of six differing frames: in this way the text is translated into «an enclosed frame succession, wherein a conflict is rendered through the opposition of frames».⁷

6 Kaemmerling, p. 186.

7 Kaemmerling, p. 188. What ensues is a specific film experience of time: so called pictorialized reductions or extensions of time, thereupon the pictorializable recurrence of one narrative course and the alternation of sequences within a certain narrative course. What changes here is not only the time, but also the actual «*observer's meaningful experience* of duration and temporal-narrative course». Briefly, narratives that are so described return to the reader's cinematic experience and «aesthetic moment is doubled in a linguistic depiction of cinematic narrative». Kaemmerling, p. 189. Here we have an interesting emphasis on the importance of film industry in the 1920s, as it in-

However, the largest part of Kaemmerling's essay considers the issue of montage. He argues that Döblin based «the structural principle of his writing» on the knowledge of theoretical foundations of «Russian revolutionary film», i.e. on being familiar with Pudovkin's and Eisenstein's montage techniques. Strictly separating «the types of montage» (Pudovkin) from «the types of conflict» (Eisenstein), Kaemmerling creates a glossary of concepts, by considering exclusively the first notion, and neglecting the latter. In this manner he commits to «the differentiation of single images and their integration into a consolidated film system», which occurs through «structural relations between a frame, a scene and an episode» all with the aim of adequately formulating the connections between the wholes of «different levels of film narrative». ⁸ Therefore, by neglecting a conflicting relation within the actual frame to the advantage of what lies between frames, ⁹

fused the experience of linear time with montaged links between past or future and present narratives. Further on, time “loop” means that human movements are exchanged for machine motion; this became historically possible when something could be described after it previously became visible. On the other hand, it could have been described in such a manner, since the writer became capable of transferring a metaphor into the very manner of writing (*in die Schreibweise selbst*). And while, on one side, the writer attempts to stretch language by using time, his other procedures attempt to shorten, quicken the time: «Change of place (*Ruck, sind sie in Freienwalde*) does no longer seek the natural motion of man, but merely the motion of film reel». Kaemmerling, p. 190. Finally, let us bring attention to another general place. On one hand, the author lists «the turn of procedure as the turn of “depiction” of procedure». On the other hand, «film shows an exchange of narrative's components as an exchange of images/frames of narrative's components». In this sense the author analyses paragraph «Dann wollen wir nachher in der Gegend rumfahren, mits Auto. Das will Karl, Reinhold und Mieze, rueckwaerts Mieze, Reinhold und Karl, und auch Reinhold, Karl, Mieze, alle miteinander wollen es». Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Muenchen: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1987), p. 307. The sentence's first part refers to the other one, hence the logical structure of sentence, rendered in cinematic writing (of movement in various directions: driving, backwards, then all together, and at the same time montage of frames), points at the sentential meaning.

8 Kaemmerling, p. 192.

9 Kaemmerling outlines what is characteristic of Eisenstein's type of montage; it encompasses «graphical conflict, volume conflict (*Volumen-Konflikt*), conflict of time, thematic conflict (*Sache-Konflikt*), and point-of-view conflict» (*Gesichtspunkt-Konflikt*). Kaemmerling, p. 192.

and neglecting the “idea” to the advantage of the “description”, Kaemmerling consciously purges his analysis from the issue of mindfulness of “conflict in an observer’s awareness” (*des Zuschauers*) and is concerned with Pudovkinian division into contrasting, comparative, symbolizing and synchronous montage. And while in the first, “contrasting” type, Pudovkinian “analysis” consists of the oppositional “alteration of the perceptual forms”, as the intelligible content is contrasting the sensual content (that is, a narrator, on behalf of a character, goes from observing a landscape onto observing a herring),¹⁰ “parallel montage” establishes a relation between an individual (Franz Biberkopf) and the historical context:

Only through a conquered distance that enables the reconnection of spatially separated political and social events, can we still experience history. However, the experience of simultaneity of individual action and historical events seems forever lost, as different levels of action feature different representational notions of its historical i.e. temporal character, while its mediation is no longer possible.¹¹

It is clear that Kaemmerling warns of defamiliarization, which, though not treated as a problem, is evoked by apposing the historical facts («Am Abend des 9. Februar 1928, an dem in Oslo die Arbeiterregierung gestuerzt wurde...») and the fictional “experience” of main character (an diesem Abend stand Franz Biberkopf am Alexanderplatz an einer Liftfasssaule und studierte eine Einladung der Kleingaertner von Treptow-Neukoelln...).¹²

Unlike the stated “synonymous parallelism”, “opposite parallelism” appears in text’s excerpt, where the eyes of main character glide over a newspaper’s article, whose image we are

10 In this matter it is important to mention that Kaemmerling parenthetically concerns himself with a reader’s position. In this case a reader “reconstructs”, by linguistic expression, that which an observer experiences in film, that which in film he “can observe simultaneously”. Thus a reader is deprived of a true cinematic experience, and is forced towards a recurrent reading (*Zurücklesen*), towards identifying the meaning due to a disturbance produced by contrast between images. Kaemmerling, p. 193.

11 Kaemmerling, p. 194.

12 Döblin, *Berlin-Alexanderplatz*, pp. 150-51.

“reading”, while a character’s comment refers to something else completely, namely the wonder because of money offered for participation in robbery. This disproportion between images fixated by eyes and newspaper headlines and character’s expression speak in favour, says Kaemmerling, of the main character’s grave psychic condition, wherein «seeing and speaking became two domains, mutually unrelated».¹³

“Symbolizing montage” is analyzed on the example of alternating the “objective” account telling of the manner of slaughtering a calf, and short statements on relation between female and male character who is going to kill her.¹⁴ “Synchronous montage” speaks of refuting the possibility of realizing the relations in simultaneous storylines.¹⁵ At the beginning, the stated cinematic writing comprises other expressive style means as well. Kaemmerling titles this chapter: «The novel as a shooting script» and begins with so called scene directions. This includes listing the people and objects in external space, ending up with narrator’s “double perceptual distancing”, as we read the following: «Franz laesst seinem Blick drueber gehn». The narrator takes a description of realistic event and blends it in, concluding it in a manner which

13 Kaemmerling, pp. 194-95.

14 This connects so called “symbolizing” narrative with “symbolic” narrative.

15 Synchronous montage points at refuting the possibility to realize a relation in simultaneous narratives: while Mieke does not succeed to seduce a fat passerby, her partner Franz Biberkopf lies mutilated (by the hands of his other partners) in another part of the city. We find it symptomatic that Kaemmerling does not succeed in escaping the interpretation of this paragraph’s idea and of “montage” based on that same interpretation. Because, he says: «The irony of this synchronous montage consists in a fact that a narrative’s section in which Mieke attempts to end both the time flux and a hunched accident, is followed by an undeferrable state of things, only few lines ahead...» Kaemmerling, p. 196. Namely, the synchronicity of montage lies not only with simultaneous events in two parts of the city, in the cases of two main characters, but also with the fact that they are connected by the life flux and further rely on each other, fatefully and unbreakably, as far as the novel is regarded. Mieke’s powerlessness to prevent a single thing regarding Franz’s tragic suffering is later on developed in opposite direction: Franz’s hardship is but a start of later suffering of Mieke herself, actually thanks to Franz and his mind-boggling naivety.

suggests it is seen by the character himself. Kaemmerling speaks of “artificial” (*Künstlichkeit*) in description:

As a sentence refers to its origin in a shooting script, whose easier readability demands strict graphic separation between image and tone/dialogue, this manner of writing transforms objects and figures into decoration (*Dekor*). A single object becomes a typical object, an American becomes a typical American, and a single place turns into a place of sentence in a book.¹⁶

Here, Kaemmerling does no longer speak of montage. However, it seems that this is the ideational montage in practice, and the author approaches it from another position, seeking a foothold in conventions of film media. Because, that which the author speaks of – the change of something into its typical counterpart, that is, the transformation of something real into something seen and experienced, happens only in the reader’s eyes, in his or her consciousness.

Of course, it first happens in the eyes of the main character, and then, one should say, through “double perceptual distancing” in our eyes as well.

This objectivity is recognized by Kaemmerling in same terms as used when talking of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a German visual arts phenomenon from the late 1920s. Without a special reference, Kaemmerling recognizes this objectivity as he returns to the film media, in “film dialogue”: there are no words that denote a description of characters’ speech, there are just colons. Yet here, as well, Kaemmerling notices the unavoidable reader’s experience: «A dialogue seeks its own movement (attitude) and shows no more traces of those individuals that make up the actual dialogue by their speech».¹⁷

Concluding his essay, Kaemmerling focuses at the problem of a way by which we reach insight; if this is a cinematic mode translated over into the writing, then he is looking for the new ways of reading a literary work. On one hand, this reveals how

16 Kaemmerling, pp. 196-97.

17 Kaemmerling, p. 197.

important is the position of text's reader, as one who translates the cineaste's experience into a text. On the other hand the author renders literary shape to his own experience of film:

The cinematic writing recreates the reading as a film vision in reading a written text. Resultantly, cognition occurring during the reading becomes an aesthetically and technically doubly mediated experience, since that which is cognized is hardly separable from a manner in which the experience has been produced. The construction of aesthetic meaning represents the reconstruction of film in a text, through a mode of writing.¹⁸

Konstantin Seitz and "Inter-Multimedia Epic"

In his research titled *Exploring "film writing" in relation to Berlin Alexanderplatz* Konstantin Seitz attempts to refute the significance of film as a paragon for Döblin's novelistic writing.¹⁹ «A young film media was admittedly "the key notion of dynamic and simultaneous depictions of reality" of a confusingly altered world, but finally proved as merely one of many factors to influence Döblin's style».²⁰ Therefore, Seitz argues that it is justified to doubt the theses which claim that Döblin consciously wrote his novel in a cinematic way, perhaps primarily because the notion is "insufficiently unambiguous" (*nicht eindeutig genug*) in relation to «the author's experiential reality».²¹ He objects Kaemmerling for failing to precisely differentiate between literary and film montage. The difference «appears clear, when later on we see a derivation of the single parts of montage. While in film montage the author (director, cameraman, actor, etc.) arranges sequences from consciously designed /edited

18 *Ibidem*.

19 Konstantin Seitz, *Untersuchung zur "filmischen Schreibweise" in Bezug auf Alfred Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz* (München: GRIN, 2007), pp. 2-17.

20 Seitz refers to a text by Matthias Hurst: *Erzaehlsituationen in Literatur und Film. Ein Modell zur vergleichenden Analyse von literarischen Texten und filmischen Adaptionen* (Tübingen: Niemayer, 1996), p. 259; Seitz, p. 12.

21 Seitz, p. 10.

and shot images»,²² in literary montage, especially in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the randomly associated content gets divided according to those qualities that make up isolated parts, instead of following previous spatial-temporal logic. Further on, Seitz refers to Harald Jaehner, establishing how text cannot be read as usual. Instead, the «associative parts of montage elements do not wish to get out of our minds so quickly, opposing the current of linguistic flux».²³ Therefore, Seitz concludes, the result cannot be that separation between immovable image and a mobilized text is abolished, as argued by E. Kaemmerling. More probably, regarding the involvement of montage parts with a peculiar linear course, their volume «based on inherent associations, establishes the slow, dotted emergence of an image in front of reader's eyes, similar to puzzle or collage».²⁴

Therefore, a syntagm of “cinematic writing” covers the expressionist, Dadaist and futurist descriptions of how a modern man experiences time, in contemporaneity, as well as the man's awareness of contemporaneity i.e. jitteriness of universalism, as mediated by the technique.²⁵

In order to arrive to an analysis of issue regarding the multitude of voices and the position of narrator (*Stimmenvielfalt und Erzählerstandort*), Seitz reminds us of the film's universal value, therefore excluding a specific value, in the case of Döblin's novel: «Each narrative sentence can thus be divided into film frames, since every descriptive sentence or excerpt, as a rule, describes some reality's fragment».²⁶ Seitz refers to the specific excerpt from a novel's beginning: «Der schreckliche Augenblick

22 Seitz, acc. to Jaehner: *Erzaehlter, montierter, soufflierter Text: zur Konstruktion des Romans Berlin Alexanderplatz von A. Döblin* (Frankfurt a. M.-Bern-New York-Nancy: Lang, 1984), Europaeische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 1, Dt. Sprache und Literatur, Bd. 757, pp. 140, 141; Seitz, p. 11.

23 Jaehner, p. 142, in K. Seitz, p. 11.

24 Jaehner, p. 142.

25 Seitz, p. 12. In this deduction Seitz joins quotes from several sources: from Döblin's “Worttechnik”, from Hurst's (p. 258) and from Hauser in Hurst (p. 256).

26 Hurst in Seitz, p. 13.

war gekommen (schrecklich, Franze, warum schrecklich?), die vier Jahre waren um».²⁷ And then he continues:

Though an omniscient narrator is reporting here, it is Franz who speaks during the subjective estimation of the *terrible*; a recurrent question is intended for himself: coming from himself, from a reader, from the narrator, from one of his acquaintances (who would be the first to call him Franze?).²⁸ By using this multitude of voices, Döblin surpasses the possibilities of cinematic writing in a single sentence. Such openness in a written text can be translated into film only through director's interpretation; a director has to opt for one of the possible variables.²⁹

Referring to Döblin,³⁰ and later on to C. Zalubka,³¹ Seitz arrives to a conclusion that this is no more about «narrator or narrator's positions». Rather, it is through «the destruction of authorial narrator», through the multitude of voices «that is not always definable» that one recognizes “narrative situations”.³² This is the matter of alternating the narrative variants, based on

27 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 8.

28 Original says: «schrecklich, Franze, warum schrecklich?», in Seitz, p. 13.

29 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, pp. 13-14.

30 Seitz quotes Döblin: «Entselbstung, Enttaesuerung des Autors, Depersonation' sind Forderungen Döblins an Romanautoren, die in BA ueber weite Strecken umgesetzt werden». Acc. to: Alfred Döblin “An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker. Berliner Programm”. In *A. D., Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbaenden. In *Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters* edited by Walter Muschg (Freiburg im Breisgau: Olten, 1963), pp. 15-19 (p. 19).

31 Acc. to Cecylia Zalubka the novel features «the frequent change of perspectives, in which process the unity of narrative situation was given up, while a depiction leaps from one place into another, between authorial, personal and neutral mediation». See: Zalubka, *Döblins Reflexionen zur Epik im Spiegel ausgewählter Romane*, Poznan 1980. (Seria Filologia germanica Nr. 21), p. 110; In Seitz, p. 14. Seitz does not agree with terms, therefore suggesting “neutral” to be replaced by a notion taken over from H. Jaehner: «the objectification of autonomous linguistic substantiality in texts», see: Jaehner, p. 139, in Seitz, p. 14.

32 While «the destruction of authorial narrator» is taken over from Helmuth Kiesel, *Literarische Trauerarbeit: Das Exil-und Spaetwerk Alfred Döblins* (Tuebingen: Niemeyer, 1986); “Studien zur deutschen Literatur”, Bd. 89, p. 297, in Seitz, p. 14), a syntagm of “narrative situations” is taken over from M. Hurst; see: Hurst, p. 247, in Seitz, p. 14.

literary montage and unstable narrative forms and perspectives (inner monologues, stream of consciousness, experienced speech, character's and author's narrative situations, montages texts, quotes), of the associative technique and the conscious mixing between perceptual levels and reality. All of these procedures result in "the dissolution of stable narrative perspective". Quoting Harro Segeberg, Seitz arrives to a peculiar conclusion on specific «ultra-cinematographic writing mode», a conclusion he shares with Hurst (according to Bazin).³³ Quick shifts in perspectives, as well as «quickening and dissolution of stable narrative situation in the process of dynamization»³⁴ present "literary forms of film design that are more extreme" than the actual cinematic writing.³⁵ Finally, the author proposes a syntagm of "inter-multimedia epic", derived from Schaerf's syntagm of "multimedia epic", which the latter relates to a notion of "mythical technoimage".³⁶ In this manner Seitz allows for Döblin's notion of *Kinostil* which describes mutuality between media of novel and film, "on the border between writing and audiovision". Seitz invites the help of Mookyu Kim and media theory. Namely, pictoriality and literarity do not alternate merely textually but also as media, since transformation of old media conditions gives rise to new

33 See Harro Segeberg, "Die Schriftsteller und das Kino. Zur Literatur- und Mediengeschichte der Weimarer Republik". In: *Tiefenschaerfe online* 1/2002. Ed. Universitaet Hamburg: «Ueberall dort, wo (wie in Döblins Welterfolg Berlin Alexanderplatz 1929) aus dieser Mischung aus filmnaher Zeichen-Repraesentation und dezidiert literarischer Schrift-Aufzeichnung ein literarischer Mehrwert entsteht, ist der Uebergang zu ultrakinematographischen Schreibweisen vorgezeichnet», Hurst, p. 262, in Seitz, p. 15.

34 Hurst, p. 262.

35 *Ibidem*.

36 See Christian Schaerf, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Roman und Film. Zu einer intermediellen poetik der modernen literatur* (Stuttgart: Steiner 2001), p. 14. Acc. to Seitz, p. 16. «"Mythical technoimage" connects Döblin's pre-Homeric understanding of the mythical with Flusser's notion of technoimage», technoimage represents «a depiction from beyond the culture of text, an image whose arising is based completely on texts and should serve to negotiate the impenetrable amount of texts, i.e. to reduce the complexity», Schaerf (p. 10) in Seitz, p. 16.

media forms.³⁷ Seitz connects them to all of the reality fragments (*Wirklichkeitssplitter*) which we “read” in Döblin: visible, aural, tactile, gustatory, olfactory.

The Cubism of Image and Text with Mihail Bakhtin

In his theoretical work *The Dialogic Imagination*³⁸ Mihail Bakhtin speaks of a single language³⁹ and a language stratified into “social-ideological languages”. He argues that «centripetal forces» act constantly along with «centrifugal forces», and that «parallel to verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward»:

And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing.⁴⁰

Novel is a specific place of such linguistic activity: «The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice» or: «the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its “languages”».⁴¹ Further on,

37 Mookyu Kim, *Mediale Konfigurationen: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie der Intermedialität* (Konstanz: Diss, 2002), p. 10, in Seitz, p. 16.

38 Mihail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

39 Outdated stylistics are familiar with a definition of unique language as it was known by linguistics and philosophy of language in regard to rhetoric, and which comprised a union of language (system of common linguistic norms) and a union of individuality. Opposing such understanding of unique language, Bakhtin proposes a somewhat different understanding: «We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life» (Bakhtin, p. 271).

40 Bakhtin, p. 272.

41 Bakhtin, pp. 261-62. The author lists the characteristic types of compositional and style unities with which “an investigator” in a novel as “variform in

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity (...) Every utterance participate in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces. Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so forth.⁴²

Speaking of a space of such utterance, Bakhtin speaks of "dialogized heteroglossia", which is nameless and social "as language", but concrete, content-saturated and emphasized as individual utterance. In order to find an adequate example for such a use of language, he commends medieval French and German literature, *fabliaux* and *Schwaenke*, which tell

of street songs, folk sayings, anecdotes, where there was no language-centre at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the "languages" of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all "languages" were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face.⁴³

In these "lowly" examples heteroglossia

was not merely heteroglossia vis-à-vis the accepted literary language [...] but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language.

speech" "is confronted": «1. Direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants); 2. Stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration (Skaz); 3. Stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc); 4. Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth); 5. The stylistically individualized speech of characters».

42 Bakhtin, p. 272.

43 Bakhtin, p. 273.

It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. It was heteroglossia that had been dialogised.⁴⁴

How can we apply dialogized heteroglossia to Alfred Döblin and his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*? We shall begin by turning once again to Viktor Žmegač's text, especially the part where the author speaks of Döblin's opposition to the actual laws of writing i.e. actual debates on benefits of changing the traditional writing. Namely, besides resisting the traditional domination of love narrative (which we've already stated), he wishes to remove «a narrative commentator and surrender to a torrent of images that invades our consciousness daily».⁴⁵ Also, in accord with accepting the so called *Kinostil*, he wishes to realize «the contemporary extensive epic permeated by Homeric spirit, one opposed to the analytical intellectual psychologism of the nineteenth century».⁴⁶ This text, deprived of a traditionally comprehended narrative (Döblin «thinks of that type of a developing narrative action that incites reader's tension and stimulates identification»),⁴⁷ adopts the intimacy of behaviourism «that records concrete behaviour, its modalities and yields a phenomenal image of events, without aspiring to internationalization».⁴⁸

As opposed to previous features, that were isolated based on Döblin's texts which concern writing, Žmegač outlines three foundational procedures, that ensued from his own textual insight:

the application of cinematic technique, already announced in “Berlin programme”, simulated documentariness present in the extensive record of contemporary realities and, finally, unexpected return to the game featuring a transcendental narrator.⁴⁹

Since he united the narrative procedures that are not traditionally united, such as transcendent narrator and documentary procedures,

44 *Ibidem*.

45 Žmegač, p. 275.

46 Žmegač, p. 274.

47 Žmegač, p. 276.

48 Žmegač, p. 280.

49 Žmegač, p. 281.

Döblin arrived to entirely new wholes, which, following Bakhtin's theoretical consideration we shall read as «heteroglossia that had been dialogized». Žmegač argues that montage is one of the ways to unite these characteristics:

Documentariness is based on a presumption that literary text acquires both special character and special meaning from a communicational context, wherein the literary works is being realized. A particular element (fragment) that is achieved, for example by montage, carries an information that engages in an immediate relation with other fragments i.e. information, and this cluster then immediately confronts a recipient. Documentariness has been purged of meta-textual procedures and therefore of the consciousness's signals which present an artwork to be a result of spiritual game. The transcendental narrator is one of the manifestations of that consciousness.⁵⁰

This implies at least three things: that the author intends to bring documentariness into literary procedure, that montage procedure counts in this matter, and that one cannot grasp the importance of first two procedures without reader's active consciousness. Namely, Bakhtin, speaks of «the internal contradictions *inside the object itself*» («the dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it»),⁵¹ and of «contradictory environment of alien words»:

in *consciousness of the listener*, as his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections. And every utterance is oriented toward this apperceptive background of understanding, which is not a linguistic background but rather one composed of specific objects and emotional expressions. There occurs a new encounter between the utterance and an alien word, which makes itself felt as a new and unique influence on its style.⁵²

50 Žmegač, p. 282.

51 Bakhtin, p. 278, *italic added*. In relation to this matter, Bakhtin speaks of «orientation of discourse» as a phenomenon peculiar to «any discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse. On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction». Bakhtin, p. 279.

52 Bakhtin, p. 281, *italic added*. On this subject, the author says the following: «Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under

However, both of these statements «of internal dialogism of the word» can mutually intertwine: style analysis practically cannot discern between them, says Bakhtin. Peculiar to novel, the «internal dialogization» becomes «a crucial force for creating form»

only where individual differences and contradictions are enriched by social heteroglossia, where dialogic reverberations do not sound in the semantic heights of discourse (as happens in the rhetorical genres) but penetrate the deep strata of discourse, dialogize language itself and the world view a particular language has (the internal form of discourse) – where the dialogue of voices arises directly out of a social dialogue of “languages”, where an alien utterance begins to sound like a socially alien language, where the orientation of the word among alien utterances changes into an orientation of a word among socially alien languages within the boundaries of one and the same national language.⁵³

Therefore, this is about languages, not a language – and in that matter of horizon, the immediate expressive space of object within a word and its orientation to listener/reader; it encompasses those «specific points of view on the world», «forms for conceptualizing the world in words».

consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social ‘languages’ come to interact with one another. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver...». Bakhtin, p. 282. «Alien word», as we see it, is equally present in «dialogical relationship», «in object», as well as in the «horizon of the listener».

53 Bakhtin, pp. 284-85.

Therefore they are all able to enter into the unitary plane of the novel⁵⁴ which can unite in itself parodic stylizations of generic languages, various forms of stylizations and illustrations of professional and period-bound languages, the languages of particular generations, of social dialects and others...⁵⁵

Put differently:

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.⁵⁶

Hence, this is not just about the diversity of languages, but about the integration with historical and social processes, which in every moment lament a word, “alien” until writer actively engages it.⁵⁷ Here, a parallel with cubism is imposed in and of itself.

Namely, Bakhtin imagines the intention of word, “directionality toward the object” to be as fair, therefore

54 The dialogic diversity («a diversity of social speech types» and of «individual voices») is actually most completely realized in a novel: «The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel», Bakhtin, p. 275.

55 Bakhtin, p. 292.

56 Bakhtin, p. 293.

57 A semi-alien word (“is half someone else’s”) is the word. «It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention», *Ivi*, p. 293. And: «Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process». Bakhtin, p. 294.

the living and unrepeatably play of colours and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself, but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.⁵⁸

Simple and Complex *Inner Transitions*

Let us read the novel. To begin with, let's consider an example of simple cubist multitude of voices:

Der schreckliche Augenblick war gekommen (schrecklich, Franze, warum schrecklich?), die vier Jahre waren um. Die schwarzen eisernen Torfluegel, die er seit einem Jahre mit wachsendem Widerwillen betrachtet hatte (Widerwillen, warum Widerwillen), waren hinter ihm geschlossen.⁵⁹

Apparently, this is not just about multitude of voices, as introduced by Konstantin Seitz. This is the inner blending of narrative perspectives, so that we no longer can tell whose voice is talking, that is, we cannot discern when one voice transits into the other. Though the first part of the sentence «Die schwarzen eisernen Torfluegel, die er seit einem Jahr mit wachsendem Widerwillen betrachtet hatte...» is easily ascribed to the omniscient narrator, the bracketed text (Widerwillen, warum Widerwillen) influences the ensuing part («waren hinter ihm geschlossen») and in this manner the narrated content transits into the content that is «thought» by the main character, since we are inclined to ascribe the bracketed text to the actual character. Here we sense «a scent» of «certain man», «day», «moment». Now that we know the text, let's us go backward and reconstruct its history. It concentrates around an «object» and a certain historical moment. The novel was written in 1929; the narrator introduces us to a narrative by

58 Bakhtin, p. 277.

59 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 8.

briefly retelling the plot, revealing that we are about to follow a story of Franz Biberkopf in Berlin, after the latter served a four years sentence for murdering Ida, a woman he used to live with. We learn of a dual fateful game which almost killed him. It is dual because the narrator warns us both of objective circumstances and of the subjective features which have lead the main character to his ruin and nearly his death as well:

Und (das lag) zwar an ihm selbst, man sieht es schon, an seinem Lebensplan, der wie nichts aussah, aber jetzt ploetzlich ganz anders aussieht, nicht einfach und fast selbstverstaendlich, sondern hochmuetig und ahnungslos, frech, dabei feige und voller Schwaeche.⁶⁰

It is impossible to interpret the context which is revealed in such a retrospective, without realizing it was intended for a reader, since it is reader's consciousness that becomes aware of context's polysemy, as blending of three languages, three «special worldviews». What remains as a cubist painting after the reading is our survey of narrative situation, which we become aware of as a new image, «object – expressive background of understanding». In this matter “alien word” is embodied by the bracketed text – raising questions in brackets – as to whose voice, text, word this is about. In this place Bakhtin would say: «The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background».⁶¹ If every utterance simultaneously belongs to both a single language and to «the social and historical speech diversity», being presumably «the language of day, epoch, social group, genre, trend», than at the very beginning of the novel we are familiarized with the author's conception of novel, set in space and time: at the very beginning we know what will happen to the character and why. In the penultimate chapter, the subchapters are titled with a date («Saturday, September 1st», while the paragraph begins with a statement saying «it is Wednesday, August 29th 1928»). This is

60 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 7.

61 Bakhtin, p. 282.

also the narrator's language, signifying something that is related to reality, like a didactic manual for a contemporary of Franz Biberkopf (hence Döblin as well), and is intended for a reader who could be stricken with a similar fate, if he or she repeats the mistakes committed by the main character:

Das furchtbare Ding, das sein Leben war, bekommt einen Sinn. Es ist eine Gewaltkur mit Franz Biberkopf vollzogen. Wir sehen am Schluss den Mann wieder am Alexanderplatz stehen, sehr veraendert, ramponiert, aber doch zurechtgebogen.

Dies zu betrachten und zu hoeren wird sich fuer viele lohnen, die wie Franz Biberkopf in einer Menschenhaut wohnen und denen es passiert wie diesem Franz Biberkopf, naemlich vom Leben mehr zu verlangen als das Butterbrot.⁶²

The previous example could be referred to as “the simple inner transition” (from language to language). Let us now analyze “the complex interior transition”. This is an example of language becoming independent, with the aim of following the main character's stream of consciousness: joining dialogue with a discourse that possesses no unique connotation, only a reference to a reality's fragment, occupying a place where we expect a stream of consciousness. All of this happens after the author denoted, in the paragraph's first part, that the main character has ceased speaking and is now thinking. It is the paragraph describing a meeting between Franz and a sister of a woman that Franz had killed:

Und gluppscht sie an und steht auf: Weil sie mich rausglassen haben, bin ich eben da. Mich haben sie schon rausgelassen, aber wie. Wie, will er sagen, aber kaut an seinem Zwirnsfaden, die Trompete ist zerbrochen, es ist vorbei, und zittert und kann nicht heulen und sieht nach ihrer Hand. «Was willst du denn, Mensch. Ist denn was los?».

Da sind Berge, die seit Jahrtausenden stehn, gestanden haben, und Heere mit Kanonen sind druebergezoegen, da sind Inseln, Menschen drauf, gestopft voll, alles stark, solide Geschaefte, Beanken, Betrieb, Tanz, Bums, Import, Export, soziale Frage, und eines Tages geht es:

62 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 7.

rrrrrr, rrrrrr, nicht vom Kriegsschiff, das macht selber hops, – von unten. Die Erde macht eienn Sprung, Nachtigall, Nachtigall, wie sangst du so schoen, die Schiffe fliegen zum Himmel, die Voegel fallen auf die Erde. «Franz, ich schrei, was, lass mich los. Karl kommt bald, Karl muss jeden Augenblick kommen. Mit Ida hast du auch so angefangen».⁶³

This is not just about the montage of dialogue and narrator's discourse. The author first makes it clear that he is following the main character's consciousness («Wie, will er sagen...»), and then mixes the voices of respectively the character and the narrator («... aber kaut an seinem Zwirnsfaden»), after which he continues as if writing on behalf of them both: «...die Trompete ist zerbrochen, es ist vorbei, und zittert und kann nicht heulen...» The return to reality is denoted by a female character's replica, following which we expect a sort of reaction from the main character. What ensues is a language of specific world, maybe "language of a day" or "language of an epoch", uniting the guidelines of contemporary world with the guidelines of war, all in the service of pointing out the main character's consciousness. After he failed to quench his lust in previous sexual encounter, here he finally manages it. So, when the author writes «Die Erde macht einen Sprung, Nachtigall, Nachtigall, wie sangst du schoen, die Schiffe fliegen zum Himmel, die Voegel fallen auf die Erde», it denotes that Franz successfully reached bliss. This can be drawn from a female character's comment that closes the chapter. Different times merge: time of meeting, time of main character's inner life, and time which is tentatively ascribed to the main character, as the narrator glides over the notions which we link to reality, both immediately precursory (war) reality and contemporary reality. Therefore, this cannot be the unambiguous voice of neither the character nor the narrator.

The situation becomes even more clear as, in continuation, the narrator includes a movement of train:

Minna kann ihre Hand nicht loskriegen, und seine Augen sind vor ihren. Son Mannsgesicht ist mit Schienen besetzt, jetzt faehrt ein Zug

63 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 30.

drueber weg, sieh mal, wie der raucht, der faehrt, FD, Berlin/Hamburg-Altona, 18 Uhr 5 bis 21.35, drei Stunden 30 Minuten, da kann man nichts machen, solche Maennerarme sind aus Eisen, Eisen. Ich schrei Hilfe, Sie schrie. Sie lag schon auf dem Teppich.⁶⁴

Now everything is clearer, since this is the female character's consciousness. But neither this is unambiguous: what occurs is language's independence («sieh mal wie der raucht, der faehrt... da kann man nichts machen, solche Maennerarme sind aus Eisen, Eisen»), which borders with recording the stream of consciousness of a female character, but does not completely dwell in it. Perhaps this is the place to speak of Bakhtin's focus on answering, where "each word is directed": «Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue».⁶⁵ Namely, in Döblin's text, in coexistence of various languages, there is no immediate connection within the actual writing, but only in reader's consciousness. Hence the author is necessarily oriented at reader's "understanding", which matures «only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other».⁶⁶

However, it seems this chapter also features the intertwining of "dialogic relationship" «toward an alien word within the object and the relationship toward an alien word in the anticipated answer of the listener».⁶⁷ Not only the chapter describes something which we relate to reality (...solide Geschaefte, Banken, Betrieb, Tanz, Bums, Import, Export, soziale Fragen...), but we also experience a difficulty in connecting this text to the speaker. As it functions in a place where we expect character's consciousness, we cannot completely agree to "exit" from the narrator's text. We could say that "dialogic reverberations" «penetrate the deep

64 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 31.

65 Bakhtin, p. 280.

66 Bakhtin, p. 282.

67 Bakhtin, p. 283.

strata of discourse, dialogize language itself and the world view a particular language has (the internal form of discourse) – where the dialogue of voices arises directly out of social dialogue of “languages”, where an alien utterance begins to sound like a socially alien language...».⁶⁸ Fragment of a text in which the main character and narrator distance themselves from the precursory text, does not have its own independence or – has nothing but its own independence. If it belongs only to itself, than we have to search for its meaning within the phenomenon of absurdity. However, the fragment is being repeated in the text, before the fragment with train, hence its meaning can be read only based on this contextualization.

An excursion – a documentary fragment – probably a newspaper clipping

Was ist eine Frau unter Freunden wert? Das Londoner Ehescheidungsgericht sprach auf Antrag des Kapitaens Bacon die Scheidung wegen Ehebruchs seiner Frau mit seinem Kameraden, dem Kapitaen Furber, aus und billigte ihm eien Entschaedigung von 750 Pfund zu. Der Kapitaen scheint seine treulose Gattin, die demnaechst ihren Liebhaber heiraten wird, nicht allzu hoch bewertet zu haben.⁶⁹

is followed by a partial repeating of the fragment:

Oh, da sind Berge, die seit Jahrtausenden ruhig gelegen haben, und Heere mit Kanonen und Elefanten sind druebergeezogen, was soll man machen, wenn sie ploetzlich anfangen, hops zu machen, weil es unten so geht: rrrrrr rumm. Wollen wir gar nichts dazu sagen, wollen wirs nur lassen. Minna kann ihre Hand nicht loskriegen, und seine Augen sind vor ihren.⁷⁰

The narrator manifests self-consciousness (Wollen wir gar nichts dazu sagen...), while *Berge*, *Jahrtausende*, *Heere*, «weil es unten so geht: rrrrrr rumm», manifest a return to the already said. Therefore, we internally revisit the main character’s

68 Bakhtin, pp. 284-85.

69 Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 30.

70 *Ibidem*.

previous associative field, aware that this is not a mere image of his consciousness, but the mutual blending of narrator, documentarism and character's awareness. By saying that something sounds as «socially alien language», we allude to the ambivalence in the actual text fragment with «hills, millenniums, armies» etc. It is therefore not the case that montaging various languages is merely an evident blend of languages. Actually, the very language comprises «dialogism of words», which compels us to reflect, and consider the uncertainty regarding the conclusion we have thus arrived at.⁷¹ Moreover, by returning to the documentary excerpt, maybe we could draw on another Bakhtin's thought, namely one referring to «extra-artistic prose (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly)», when «dialogization usually

71 We could consider a possible comparison with the so called “intellectual montage” that Eisenstein spoke of. In his book, titled *Theory of Film*, Andrew Tudor discusses an essay by Sergei Eisenstein, dating from 1929 and titled “Dialectical approach to film form”. Besides metric, rhythmic, tonal and montage of overtones, Eisenstein discusses the intellectual montage, that was closest to the function of reader in relation to the junction of social-historical and subjective-expressive worlds, whose reading is offered by Bakhtin. «A frequently referred sequence features a range of images portraying various religious idols, starting with temporally close Christian figures to the most primitive tribal figures. The intention was to drag... the notion of God back to its origin, leading an observer towards the intellectual grasp of this “progression”». Indirectly, this sets up opposition to the said tenets on cinematic writing by E. Kaemmerling. Eisenstein in Tudor, p. 19. See: Tudor, *Teorije filma* (Beograd: Institut za film, 1979). Bakhtin delivers definition of the so called “heteroglossia” as: «another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. (...) Examples of this would be comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre – all these discourses are double-voiced and internally dialogized» In: Bakhtin, p. 324. However, this is not just a parody, but also the problem of motif, concern, topic: «...the internal dialogism of double-voiced prose discourse can never be exhausted thematically (...); it can never be developed into the motivation or subject for a manifest dialogue, such as might fully embody, with no residue, the internally dialogic potential embedded in linguistic heteroglossia». Bakhtin, p. 326.

stands apart, crystallizes into a special kind of act of its own and runs its course in ordinary dialogue or in other, compositionally clearly marked forms for mixing and polemicizing with the discourse of another...». ⁷²

In the midst of already fragmented narrative which describes a meeting between Franz and Ida's sister Minna, the author inserts a documentary fragment, in order to express his method of simultaneism, apposing and opposing various texts, languages, levels of consciousness and worldviews. This quickens the rhythm of reading and suggests content's polysemy: again a reader is the one who has to know how to manage such textual approach. ⁷³ In this matter the author remains «distanced from the language of his own work» or, perhaps, this insistence on mixing the languages is actually the author's language. In the service of montage and simultaneism, a documentary excerpt seems as if the author «merely ventriloquates». ⁷⁴ In this manner the narrator approaches the "alien speech", forming heteroglossia by opposing "the special horizon" to those horizons against whose background it is perceived. ⁷⁵

72 Bakhtin, p. 284.

73 Bakhtin also establishes a division on the text's other side, one where the author is standing. He says the following: «certain aspects of language directly and unmediatedly express (as in poetry) the semantic and expressive intentions of the author, others refract these intentions; the writer of prose does not meld completely with any of these words, but rather accents each of them in a particular way – humorously, ironically, parodically and so forth; yet another group may stand even further from the author's ultimate semantic instantiation, still more thoroughly refracting his intentions; and, there are, finally, those words that were completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express himself in them (as the author of the word) – rather, he exhibits them as a unique speech-thing, they function for him as something completely reified». Bakhtin, p. 299.

74 Bakhtin, p. 299: «a prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work, while at the same time distancing himself, in varying degrees, from the different layers and aspects of the work. He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as semi-alien or completely alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions. The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, "through" language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates».

75 This is Bakhtin's subject in a chapter dedicated to English humorist novel, where he details the narrative procedures of forms and the degrees of "parody

After reading the text by Alfred Döblin, perhaps we could disagree with Kaemmerling and conclude that, by no means, a separation between immovable image and mobilized text is abolished. However, is this not about a puzzle or a collage? Certainly this is the matter of complex narrative situations, and the problem pertaining to the multitude of voices and narrator's positions.

Besides, the novel features the examples of rather extreme literary form of cinematic shaping, dissolution of stable narrative perspective and, truly, the participation of all the reality fragments, such as those visible, aural, tactile, gustatory and olfactory ones. However, thanks to Bakhtin, we have arrived at a new place for all that is mixed, diverse, polysemic, simultaneous, omnipresent, social and historical: "the inner dialogism of word" enables unity in ambivalence between the unique (grammatical, linguistic) and that which is present both socially and historically. This is the union not only between literally heterogeneous elements of experiential reality, but the heterogeneity in the sense of "alien word" of author, narrator and character. It is the heterogeneity which we recognize within an otherwise homogeneous whole. Heterogeneous languages (in both "simple" and "complex" inner transitions) form a cubist image around an object and within a reader, hence there is no unambiguity or single connotation, but merely the constantly emerging meaning. «The prose art presumes a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity, a feeling for its participation in historical becoming and in social struggle...»⁷⁶ Bakhtin proposes a syntagm of «the image of a language».⁷⁷

stylization" which, especially for the amount of diverse languages used in the text, are close to Döblin's novel.

76 Bakhtin, p. 331.

77 Bakhtin, p. 336.

THE WORD AND THE GHOST ÉKPHRISIS AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN *SPIONE* BY MARCEL BEYER

NICOLA RIBATTI

In recent years, the panorama of German culture has been dominated, both in theoretical and in literary realm, by the theme of memory and transgenerational transmission. On one side, the passing of eye witnesses of a historical caesura such as the *Shoah* has created the necessity to consolidate *communicative memory* in *cultural memory*.¹ On the other side, the events connected to the *Wende* have called for a revisitation of the entire Germany history of the 20th century and have shown the necessity to create a memory shared between the two Germanies. Thus, it's no surprise to see the spread of *Familien-* or *Generationenromane*² in which the members of second and third generation confront themselves with the historical reconstructions and memoirs of their parents and grandparents. It is interesting to note how in many of these authors the reflection on memory and history weaves a tight connection with the role of “mediator of memory” carried out by photographic images, which can be directly inserted in the textual continuum, thus creating literary “photo-texts”, or evoked indirectly through the literary process of the ékphrasis. In these texts, the photographic images, and in general the metaphorical plexus of visuality activate a complex and articulated metatheoretical reflexion concerning the possibility and the limits

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- 1 For more on these themes, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift: Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 2002); and Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: Beck, 2006).
 - 2 For more on *Generationenromane*, see Elena Agazzi, *Erinnerte und rekonstruierte Geschichte: Drei Generationen deutscher Schriftsteller und die Fragen der Vergangenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); and Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2005).

of historical representation through the linguistic *medium* and the visual *medium*. Particularly interesting is the trilogy by the German author Marcel Beyer, comprising the novels *Flughunde*, *Spione* and *Kaltenburg*,³ in which the author carries out a charged confrontation with the National Socialist past investigating the media mechanisms inherent in every mnemonic process. While in *Flughunde* the accent is placed on the auditory media dimension,⁴ in *Spione*⁵ the author proposes a comparison between the capacity of the visual *medium* (photography) and the verbal *medium* to access the past: in this comparison, a central role is assigned to the ékphrasis of the photographic images. The novel tells of the Easter Vacation which an adolescent, anonymous first-person narrator passes in the company of his cousins Nora, Paul e Carl. During this period, the youth tries to reconstruct their family's past, about which they know very little, because past events have

3 See Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1996); *Spione* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 2000), and *Kaltenburg* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008).

4 The novel tells of a sound technician, Karnau, who participates in the tortures perpetrated by the Nazis in order to record the voices of the victims: his objective is to chart a complete "topography" of the human voice in order to capture its ultimate secret.

5 For more on the novel, see: Silke Horstkotte, *Literarische Subjektivität und die Figur des Transgenerationellen in Marcel Beyer's Spione und Rachel Seiffert The Dark Room*, in *Historisierte Subjektivität – Subjektivierte Historie: Zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, ed. by Stefan Deines, Stephan Jaeger, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2003), pp. 275-93; Stefanie Harris, 'Ima(gin)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*', *Gegenwartsliteratur*, 4 (2005), 162-84; Silke Horstkotte, *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Köln: Böhlau 2009); Lorella Bosco, *Ricomporre la storia ricordando le storie: Fantasmii della memoria e segreti di famiglia in «Spione» (Spie) di Marcel Beyer*, in *Il segreto nella letteratura moderna*, ed. by Patrizia Guida and Giovanna Scianatico (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2010), pp. 119-52; Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Meike Herrmann, *Vergangenwart: Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), pp. 254-62; Kai Marcel Sicks, 'Die Latenz der Photographie. Zur Medientheorie des Erinnerens in Marcel Beyers *Spione*', *Monatshefte für deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur*, 102/1 (2010), 38-50.

undergone a radical process of repression by family members. The grandfather, even though he lives close by, has in fact broken off all contacts with his adult children and his grandchildren, while these same adult children avoid any questions about the past. The family's history is thus characterized by a generational gap in communication and collective memory, as declared by the first-person narrator: «Secret has marked our family, right from the start».⁶ The chance to reconstruct the family's past comes by the unexpected discovery of a family photo album, through which he hopes to obtain sure information about the past. Instead, the photographs prove to be difficult to be “read”. The images are not arranged in a chronological-rational way, but rather «here are only single images, placed here and there in the album, as if they had been attached in the album at a later time».⁷ Many images are «blurry»⁸ and the faces contained within are often «barely recognizable».⁹ The images have very generic captions («jotted down on the back of the photo only the place, date, and occasion»)¹⁰ and there are no family members present for contextualizing the photos in a narrative. From this «epistemic instability»¹¹ of the photo album derives the necessity to fill the gaps «with imagination, suppositions and suspicion».¹² Taking a cue from the images, the youth turn to their own imagination and fantasy in the attempt to “re-construct” their own past by creating stories that often go far beyond what is showed in the photographic images. They decide, in a substantially arbitrary manner, that the soldier represented in numerous photographs (dating from the Nazi era) must be the grandfather; starting with a caption present on the back of one of the images («return from Spain, summer 1937»),¹³ the youth elaborate a real spy-story in which the grandfather secretly participated, as a member of

6 *Spione*, p. 93.

7 *Spione*, p. 42.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 *Ibidem*.

10 *Spione*, p. 50.

11 Fuchs, p. 65.

12 *Spione*, p. 91.

13 *Spione*, p. 135.

the Condor legion, in the bombings of several Spanish cities during the civil war. The youth also look for the photo of their deceased grandmother, who, again according to their imaginary reconstructions, was a famous Italian «Opera singer»¹⁴ from whom they inherited certain facial features, the mysterious “Italian eyes”,¹⁵ that unite them while also distinguishing them from the other neighbourhood youth. In any case, in the album there is no *Porträt* that clearly shows the face of the woman. While initially the youth think that the grandmother simply avoided being photographed, soon they develop a new story in which the grandfather’s second wife, indicated in the course of the story as «the old woman»,¹⁶ removed all traces of the first wife and kicked out her children from the house, threatening them with an axe. The descriptions of the “old woman”, at times presented as a novel reincarnation of the witch of fairy tales, at other times as an authentic «Ghost»,¹⁷ clearly reveal the imaginative character of the “re-constructions” developed by the youth, who, starting from the photographic image, develop stories following precise “narrative models” such as the spy-stories (the grandfather as secret member of the Condor legion, fairy-tales (the grandmother as a ghost or witch who banishes her stepchildren) or the romance (the love story between the grandfather and his first wife). The novel, born from the uncontrolled «Fabulierlust»¹⁸ of the protagonists, is thus constituted for the most part by imaginative reconstructions developed starting with the observation and focus on of the photographic images: the novel thus has its grounding structure in the *ékphrasis* of the photographs.

Through the allusion to well-consolidated narrative model, Beyer actually suggests an allegorical interpretation of the novel, representing the efforts of the third generation (here represented by the youth) to come closer to the past removed by their family

14 *Spione*, p. 45.

15 *Spione*, p. 42.

16 *Spione*, p. 95.

17 *Spione*, p. 96.

18 Horstkotte, *Nachbilder*, p. 203.

through the use of fictional and “postmemorial” forms.¹⁹ In this way, Beyer proposes a metaliterary reflection centering on the confrontation between the photographic and linguistic *media*. Despite the “iconic-indexical” function traditionally assigned to photography, this device, in the course of the novel, is not able to provide a steady, sure access to the past, instead constantly making references to something which cannot be fully recovered: the photography is a trace²⁰ (*Spur*) of a mysterious past which is latent within²¹ and which must be deciphered, but this process of deciphering proves to be substantially infinite: «We never would have thought that each of these photos hides a secret, that each piece of information can hide yet another».²² Each trace necessarily refers to other traces, but this process does not lead to that which Derrida defines as «archi-trace»,²³ that is, the original reference.²⁴ Thus, in Beyer’s novel, photography is not a *medium* able to encourage a sure, objective conscience of the past; photography does not produce an «effet de réel»,²⁵ but rather an «effet de secret»: ²⁶ it alludes to a secret which is present within, to a dimension of *other* which unavoidably escapes. In this way,

19 On postmemory see Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

20 On this theme in Beyer’s work see Sicks, and Eleni Georgopoulou, *Abwesende Anwesenheit. Erinnerung und Medialität in Marcel Beyers Romantrilogie «Flughunde», «Spione» und «Kaltenburg»* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012).

21 See Sicks.

22 *Spione*, p. 87.

23 Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 90.

24 Referencing the ideas of Derrida, Weingart affirms that in photographic images there is an interaction between «referenzielle mit differenziellen Spuren» (Brigitte Weingart, *Bildspur*, in *Spuren, Lektüre. Praktiken des Symbolischen Bildspur*, ed. by Gisela Fehrmann, Erika Linz, Cornelia Eppig-Jäger (München: Fink, 2005), pp. 227-42, p. 234. On photography as a trace, see Peter Geimer, *Das Bild als Spur: Mutmassungen über ein untotes Paradigma*, in *Spur: Spurenlesen als Orientierungstechnik und Wissenskunst*, ed. by Sybille Krämer, Werner Kogge, Gernot Grube (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), pp. 95-120.

25 R. Barthes, ‘L’Effet de réel’, *Communications*, 11 (1968), pp. 84-9, p. 84.

26 J. Derrida, *Être juste avec Freud: L’histoire de la folie à l’âge de la psychoanalyse*, in Id., *Résistance de la psychoanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), pp. 90-146, p. 116.

in photography, as Kai Sicks observes, «The past emerges not in its photographic depiction, but as the Other of depiction».²⁷

In the course of the novel, the iconic-indexical status of photography is repeatedly cast into doubt. A particularly significant example of it consists of the photographs taken by the grandfather during the bombing of the Spanish cities: these photos show «guttled streets with columns of vehicles (...) buildings in flames and the numerous craters just created, but no dead».²⁸ The photographic images are not able to capture the authentic dimension of war: Death. It is to this crisis of the indexical function of photography that can be attributed the interest manifested by the first-person narrator in the *Geisterphotographie* which, permitting a vision of that which is not visible to the human eye, refers to a latent dimension, present but not visible.

If the past is something hidden and latent in the photographic image, then the act of remembering is equivalent to a process (potentially infinite) of research and deciphering of traces that can be carried out only through words. For this reason, the *ékphrasis* of the images takes on a fundamental role in the novel. Among the many descriptions, particularly significant is the *ékphrasis* of the photograph which shows the grandfather seated in a theatre box. This description, located not by chance at the beginning of the first chapter, takes on a “generative function”²⁹ because it is from the description of this image that the entire narrative takes its cue. The *ékphrasis* of this photograph returns multiple times in the text,³⁰ according to a constantly changing focalization. In the first description, the grandfather, seated in a theatre box at the opera, observes the spectators near him and, through the use of the “Opera binoculars”, looks for the Italian eyes of the singer who would later become his wife:

27 Sicks, p. 40.

28 *Spione*, p. 128.

29 I'm referring, here and subsequently, to the taxonomy proposed by Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 81-166.

30 *Spione*, pp. 16, 21, 53, 58, 68, 77.

He has an acceptable income, he's dressed in his new evening wear and a fresh shirt, he can let himself be seen at the Opera. And he possesses something that few here among the audience have: a secret. (...) The officers up on stage. How they sit, how they speak, how they look at the audience, below the light goes out. (...) The musicians play. He takes his program. The musicians play again. He has discovered an image which unmistakably shows his woman. The musicians play a final time, the lights go out, he takes out his opera binoculars from their case. Already, during the course of the Overture, his gaze will search for the Italian eyes, he cannot wait.³¹

Next there is the description of the moment in which the grandfather, at the end of the performance, goes backstage to the dressing rooms to meet the woman.

Note how in the cited text, the focus oscillates from the point of view of the anonymous first-person narrator («He has an acceptable income...») and that of the character, whose thoughts are reproduced in *Erlebte Rede* («How they sit, how they speak...»). But the most interesting fact is that the reader only later understands that the part read so far is not part of the narrative *diegesis* but is the description of the photography given by the narrator. The first *ékphrasis* is thus above all the result of a “dynamization of the image”: in fact, there is the description of «the actions which have lead to the *punctum temporis* predetermined by the artist and possibly also the continuation of the action».³² The dynamization concerns not only the image, which can be said to be brought to life in the eyes (mental) of the reader, but also the “intradiegetic” gaze of the character and the “extradiegetic” gaze of the reader. The description follows, in an extremely detailed way, the gaze of the character, which pauses now on the officials present in the theatre, now on the stage, on the search for his future wife, now on the dressing room of the singer. In this way, thanks also to the internal focus of the character, the gaze of the reader and of the narrator are “projected” inside the image itself. Furthermore, the *ékphrasis* reveals forms of

31 *Spione*, p. 72.

32 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 91.

“synesthetic integration” and is clearly the fruit of “hermeneutic integration”: the first-person narrator, in describing the musical and theatrical setting, must necessarily make use of his own “encyclopaedic knowledge”. Similar procedures are present in the second *ékphrasis* of the same photograph:

In this picture our grandfather has a concert program on his knee, his head inclined, as he stares into the dark without any movement (...)

He is looking for something. He takes his opera binoculars and looks down towards the stage, he focuses the binoculars, then he lets them drop again. He looks anew at the photo with attention and squints as if he were missing his glasses.

Now he is at peace again. For a moment, his gaze strays far from the stage, he knows this part note for note and now he has the impression that the female singer’s words are directed at him.

In this long moment he has the impression that the singer is addressing him alone, as if she had fixated on this figure in the audience, the young man with his binoculars in front of his eyes and the concert program on his knee.³³

Initially, the *ékphrasis* seems to present itself as a form of “denotation”, as the zero grade description of an image. In reality, there are clear signs present which reveal a process of “synesthetic integration”: the first-person narrator underlines, in a paradoxical way, how the photograph shows the immobile position of the grandfather (how else could he be in a photograph?) in a moment in which there is no music in the scene (but how can this be deduced from a photograph?). These are details which usher in a new dynamization, carried out with an almost cinematographic technique, in which the grandfather, from being an object of observation, becomes once again a subject which observes. But gradually there is the introduction of an additional point of view, in which the character imagines that it is now the singer who is observing him in this pose, captured by the photographic image, which opens and closes this second *ékphrasis*.

From this situation rises up a narrative mechanism of chinese boxes which fit together three different levels of focus (narrator,

33 *Spione*, pp. 21-22.

grandfather, actress) following a model which returns in the next ékphrasis. The idea of the exchange of gazes is clearly thematized here; once again there is the passage from the perspective of the grandfather to that of the woman who secretly observes him through a “peephole” located in the wings of the stage:

But there is a peephole. Before the intermediate space becomes dark, when the audience members look for their seats (...), this is when the singers can look at the audience through a hole devised in the closed curtain (...) every evening she can observe him very well through the peephole, only for a brief moment. But this is enough.³⁴

The theatrical scene, with continuous references to the exchange of gazes between characters who reciprocally observe each other in secret, represents, if carefully considered, a *mise en abyme* of the actions of the protagonists of the story, when they view and describe the photographs in the family album, or when the first-person narrator describes his custom, dating back to his childhood, to observe through the peephole (*Spion*) of the door. Here emerges the meaning of the German word *Spion* that gives the title to the novel. The term has in fact a double meaning that in the course of the novel takes on an evident allegorical meaning. On the one hand, it indicates the activities of the spies who reveal and decipher possible secrets: this is what the youth do as they try to interpret the photographs of the album to discover the mysteries of their family past. The word also refers to “visual devices” such as the peephole, the *Opernglas*, the *Guckloch* (and also the very same lens of the photographic apparatus) which on the one hand allow one to see without being seen, but on the other hand allude to a separation, to a boundary between inside/outside, present/past, near/far. The understanding of the past through the photographic images, according to this double metaphorical valency, is represented on the one hand as a form of deciphering of mysterious traces, on the other as a kind of *spionieren* that reveals the tension in coming closer to what is found above and beyond the surface of the image, but which at

34 *Spione*, p. 78.

the same time shows the insurmountable distance which separates the observer from the observed:

«Through the peephole – affirms the first-person narrator – everything is at once near and fleeting».³⁵ The photographic image, far from being a window on the past, presents itself as a sort of barrier separating past and present. Nevertheless, the theme of the intertwining of gazes underlines the strong ties which exist between past and present: the awareness of the past is indissolubly tied to the demands of the present, while life in the present cannot help but to remember the past.

The *ékphrasis* of the photograph in the theatre, with its references to memory and to the *spionieren*, thus possesses a “metaliterary function” because it embodies the central themes of the novel, but at the same time it carries out a central “metapoetic function” because it proposes a theory of narration itself, in relation to the visual. In fact, at the end of the novel, the photograph of the grandfather reveals itself to be an invention, fruit of the imagination of the first-person narrator. It’s the cousin Carl who confirms this fact in the course of an interview with the narrator which takes place in adulthood. The cousin states that this photo probably never existed, also considering the technical impossibility to take it. Furthermore, he admonishes his cousin for a regressive-infantile behaviour consisting in an inability to distinguish the past from the present, the true from the false, the dead from the living. According to the cousin, the first-person narrator himself has in this way become the character in a story that he himself has invented. Thus, from here derives the appeal to abandon all infantile make-believe and finally become an adult.³⁶

After this return to the “principal of reality”, the first-person narrator must admit that not only the photographic image of the grandfather at the opera is the fruit of his imagination, but that the entire novel is nothing more than «An invented album of family photos».³⁷ Having reached the end, the novel seems

35 *Spione*, p. 9.

36 *Spione*, pp. 298-301.

37 *Spione*, p. 365.

to annul itself and subtract from the *ékphrasis*, even if in the rhelm of the “*ékphrastic pact*” which is created between author and reader, all objective foundations: there is no longer any distinction between “factual” and “notional” *ékphrasis*.³⁸ But it’s precisely in overcoming this distinction that lies the interpretative key to the novel. According to some scholars³⁹ the novel shows the dangers faced by those who rely too much on their own imaginations, confusing them with reality. Considered carefully, it’s precisely through means of the literary pretense, through a “narrativization” of the past that *the past* may be recovered: the dead (in the final analysis, this is the central theme of the novel) may be re-evocated in that fantastical *Zwischenwelt* which only the literary word is capable of creating. In an essay dedicated to the *La chambre claire* by Roland Barthes, Monika Schmitz-Emans proposes several observations that are relevant to the novel by Beyer. In this scholar’s opinion, in the second part of the essay by Barthes, centered on the search for the real image of the mother, the accent is placed not on the photograph itself, but on the narration that this search has generated. In the essay, the photograph itself, irreversibly separated from its reference, is not central, rather central is the capacity of the word to indirectly evoke that which the photograph is not able to show. The accent is here placed on «the power of words»⁴⁰ and on its capacity to bring the dead back to life, even if in a *gespentsisch* manner.

These considerations are also useful for interpreting Beyer’s novel, in which the *topos* of the (missing) photography showing the grandfather’s face constitutes a clear allusion to Barthes’s essay. Also in Beyer the accent is place on the power of the word. The narrator expressly declares that it’s precisely words that generate and bring to life the ghosts of the past: «Whoever wishes to wake the dead or make the living disappear needs nothing other than words».⁴¹ The necromantic act is an exquisitely verbal act: thus

38 See Hollander, *The Poetics of Ékphrasis*, pp. 209-19.

39 Monika Schmitz-Emans, ‘Literatur-Photographie – Erinnerung’, *Der Deutschunterricht*, 75 (2005), 63-72 (p. 67).

40 *Spione*, p. 299.

41 *Spione*, p. 102.

it is the literary word, and not the photograph, which configures itself as an authentic *Phantombild* in which the past can reveal itself, even if in a *gespöntisch* manner. The «surplus value»⁴² of the photographic image consists not in its documentary value, but in the narrative movement that it sets in motion around itself. There should be no surprise at another dramatic turn of events at the end of the novel in which the narrator declares to have met the grandmother in Rome, even though the youth believed she had been dead for some time. The grandmother claims to have intentionally erased all traces of herself in order to keep her grandchildren from knowing of her existence. This story, told by a narrator who has become unreliable, must instead be understood as a metaphor of the capacity of the word to “shed light” on the past and evoke the dead. The *ékphrasis* “dynamizes”, renders “mobile” and active to the (mind’s) eye of the reader/observer what is fixed by «the dead gaze»⁴³ of the camera. The *ékphrasis* is thus an allegory of a narration which, contrary to the photographic image, is able to bring the dead back to life, to recover the past, even if in a fictitious way. Indeed, it’s precisely this fictitious aspect that allows the literary word to draw near to the past. The *ékphrasis* of the photo in the theatre thus has, as we’ve said, a “metapoetic function” because it proposes a theory of literature seen in antithesis to photography. If the latter, despite of its indicative function, both sets and conceals the past, the former, thanks to its fictitious nature, is able to give speech and life to that which had been considered dead. It’s no accident that this “performative” component of the literary word is underlined by constant references to the theatrical scene which becomes in turn a metaphor for literature. It’s in this *Zwischenwelt*, where all distinctions disappear between past and present, document and fiction, identity and difference, that the grandchildren can finally meet their grandparents.

42 Mitchell, *The Surplus Value of Images*, p. 1.

43 Gerhard Plumpe, *Der tote Blick: Zum Diskurs der Photographie in der Zeit des Realismus* (München: Fink, 1990).

«ACTUAL IMAGES OR WORD IMAGES»: FAKE PAINTINGS AND NAMELESS PAINTERS IN LEONARDO SCIASCIA'S NOVELS

MARIA RIZZARELLI

Leonardo Sciascia's narrative work, in confirmation of his great passion for the languages and the arts of vision, offers an extraordinary range of examples of figurative quotations that, more or less explicitly, innervate themselves in the diegetic structure of his novels. From the reference to Guttuso and Picasso in *Il giorno della civetta*, to the *tableaux vivants* that in *Il consiglio d'Egitto* take as a model Boucher's paintings, to the constant comparison that in *Il cavaliere e la morte* the main character establishes with Dürer's engraving that suggests the title of Sciascia's second-last novel, the author's narrative plot stages a subtle, constant dialogue between visuality and verbality. In this perspective, *Il contesto* and *Todo modo* represent two particularly interesting "case studies", that here I shall analyse, also with the aim of showing how the interplay between words and images turns out to be strictly connected to the complicated dialectic between truth and falsity enlivening the plot in these crimes with no solution.¹ They undoubtedly represent a turning point in the author's fictional trajectory,² also because starting from the early 70s the mimetic representation of reality goes through a deep metamorphosis and the relationship between literature and reality radically changes: one does not reflect the other anymore, on the

1 Leonardo Sciascia, *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco*, in *Opere 1971-1983*, ed. by Claude Ambroise (Milano: Bompiani, 1989), p. 1196.

2 Although Paolo Squillaciotti maintains a continuity between *Il contesto* and the previous *A ciascuno il suo: Note ai testi*, in L. Sciascia, *Opere: Narrativa. Teatro. Poesia*, I (Milano: Adelphi, 2012), vol. I, pp. 1828-1834, this novel most certainly represents a watershed in Sciascia's work: see Massimo Onofri, *Storia di Sciascia* (Bari: Laterza, 2004), p. 138; Giuseppe Traina, *Leonardo Sciascia* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1999), p. 84.

contrary it appears in competition with it, because it is considered as the most authentic source of the truth.³

Fake Masters

Il contesto (1971) marks already a change through the choice of an intentionally abstract setting, in which the story of detective Rogas inquiry is placed. The detection of Sciascia's anti-hero, grappling with a serial killer who murders a dozen of judges guilty of making a judicial error that led to his wrongful imprisonment of five years, already in the subtitle (*Una parodia*) produces a clear metatextual dimension.⁴

In the first part, as in the conclusion, the main character chases Cres, the murderer, almost forestalling his moves as he is somehow aware of the logic behind the architecture of the perfect crime⁵ perpetrated by him. Inside this complex diegetic mechanism the dialectic between appearance and reality, between truth and fiction often turns out to be given in a purely visual dimension. Cres' story and criminal design fully measure themselves with the ambiguities of the statute of the image, that crosses the theme of identity in the novel's pages. Since his first mention, Cres character seems created by Rogas' imagination as the last step of his accurate reading and re-reading of the trial documents, confirmed by the faces and the testimony of two other suspects.

For Rogas, having the man before him, talking with him, getting to know him, counted more than clues, more than facts. "A fact is an empty sack". One had to put the man, the person, the character inside the sack for it to hold up. What kind of man was this Cres, sentenced to five years for attempted homicide (...)?⁶

3 See Onofri, p. 174.

4 On the metatextual dimension of Sciascia's narrative work, on which the critics largely dwelled, see Attilio Scuderi, *Lo stile dell'ironia. Leonardo Sciascia e la tradizione del romanzo* (Lecce: Milella, 2003).

5 See *Il contesto*, p. 633.

6 Leonardo Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, trans. by Adrienne Foulke (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2003), p. 31.

Paradoxically Rogas would never fill that “empty bag” with a direct knowledge of Cres (except maybe towards the end of the novel), because the latter arranged his own escape removing any trace of his face, hiding any picture that might reveal his features, in his house, the prison archives and in the passport office.

The blurring of the last pictures, recovered from newspapers published at the time of the trial, metaphorically seems to confirm the invisibility gained by Cres carrying out his plan. Their description reveals exactly the new physiognomy of the character, by now faceless: «In one Inspector Contrera appeared in focus, and in the other the defense lawyer; in both, Cres was like a shape behind smoked glass».⁷ To read through this opacity and recognize Cres, towards the conclusion, Rogas would not even need the description of the picture that the fugitive removed from his frame and that a friend of Cres, doctor Maxia, reconstructs by memory:

The empty portrait frames in the house sparked a sudden seizure of awareness in Maxia. He remembered very well one of the vanished photographs. It was of Cres standing and leaning slightly, in an attitude of affectionate concern, toward his seated mother; the old lady holding an open fan in one hand, was all intent than the camera’s eye should capture that gesture of abiding flirtatiousness. Why had Cres removed it? Obviously because he did not want a likeness of himself to fall into the hands of the police.⁸

The identikit, traced by the Police drawer on the basis of some generic information from doctor Maxia himself, doesn’t allow to recover this picture now irreparably taken away from the Police together with the character himself, because «the artist eventually produced a portrait the distribution of which would have risked causing harassment to a celebrate film star».⁹ Thus when Rogas meets Cres, carrying out the last act of his revenge and about to murder the President of the Supreme Court, he “recognizes” him

7 Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, p. 43.

8 Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, p. 42.

9 *Ibidem*.

although he had removed any trace of his face, because the opaque glass hiding the murderer's shape has turned out into a "mirror". The dazed atmosphere in which the fleeting scene of the meeting takes place, however, leaves the reader facing the enigma of a recognition taking place without a previous "cognition".

Like a sleepwalker, Rogas found himself once again in the elevator; in the entrance hall, as the gates swung quickly open, he had the sensation for a moment of finding himself before a mirror. Except that in the mirror was another man.¹⁰

Apart from the game of the double that, as in many famous Sciascia's couples of characters, supports also this story,¹¹ the most interesting aspect in this case is that the recognition is mediated by the mirror reference, which allows to go beyond the limits of "invisibility" that the character had previously gained. However Rogas becomes, by Sciascia's own admission, Cres' "alter ego".¹² In other words, the "vision" allows to go beyond the "sight": So Rogas identifies Cres even without having met him because the man standing in front of the lift has the same characteristics of the wanted man's description, but also because he is a character generated by his imagination. Thus Cres becomes "a mask" on his own face, charged of rendering justice as he can't, that is, of murdering the President of the Supreme Court and thus foiling the *coup d'état* he is planning. The last act of Cres' revenge takes place at the end of the novel at the same time as Rogas' death. The conclusion, however, offers three possible interpretations: the official "truth" filtered by the news images and the speaker's voice announcing the finding of the detective's body together with Amar's one (the secretary of the Revolutionary Party, whom Rogas met in order to tell him his suspects), is overlapped by the version of the story revealed by the vice-secretary to the writer

10 Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, p. 93.

11 See Giuseppe Traina, *Leonardo Sciascia*, pp. 82-85. On the theme of the double see Massimo Fusillo, *L'altro e lo stesso: Teoria e storia del doppio* (Modena: Mucchi, 2012).

12 *Il contesto*, p. 707.

Cusano, friend of the detective whom he had given his written record. But the latter, reporting the most reliable version, remains hidden between the pages of *Don Chisciotte*. The truth “attained” by Rogas’ detection thus seems to die with him in a scene where Sciascia places the ultimate sense of his story and that takes place in a museum, in which the writer puts two “fake” paintings.

The toothachy face of the newscaster dissolved (Cusan was now standing before the TV screen). Next appeared the entrance to the National Gallery, the stairway, the succession of exhibit rooms. Room XII. A dark mass at the feet of a standing portrait. “The body of Mr Amar was found under a famous portrait by Velàzquez.” Room XI. “The body of the Inspector of Police, under the painting of the “Madonna of the Chain”, by an unknown fifteenth-century Florentine artist.¹³

The fact that Velázquez never painted a portrait of Lazaro Cardenas and that there isn’t any *Madonna della Catena* with angels and saints painted by a Florentine painter of the 15th century cannot be explained only through the parodic play in the novel.¹⁴ As Michele Cometa has pointed out, even the mere denomination of a work of art can be anything but an innocent method.¹⁵ The “fake masters” drawn by Sciascia’s pen through a “notional” ékphrasis¹⁶ made more complicated through the filter of the television, that shows them both to the character and to the reader as second-level images, refer not only to the fake truth reported in the news. As one of the first readers of this novel had rightly understood, we must solve the allegory by drawing a comparison between the names of Lazaro Cardenas and Velázquez. In other

13 Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, p. 93. Note that by expunging the reference to Lazaro Cardenas, english translation misses precisely the “notional” ékphrasis.

14 See Scuderi, pp. 76-77.

15 See Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 85.

16 Here I use the well-known distinction made by John Hollander between “notional” and “actual” ékphrasis, the first one referring to never existed works of art, the other one to real ones (John Hollander, ‘The Poetics of Ékphrasis’, 209-219. However, my analysis also draws on the important remarks provided by Cometa on the limits of this distinction and on the complex true-false dialectic involved in the ekphrastic strategies (Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 48-62).

words, «the winning Mexican revolutionist who became president of an essentially immobile Mexico foreshadows the eventual fate of Amar».¹⁷ The famous Velázquez's Portrait of Lazaro Cardenas and the Madonna della Catena by an anonymous Florentine of the 15th century, hide in their faking process a deepest meaning. The invention of their names then appears as the form assumed by truth in a particular "context", such as the years of the terrorist outrages in Italy, full of shadows and mysteries. The first one refers to the homonymous Mexican revolutionary passed away in 1970, while the second one recalls the church of *Madonna della Catena* in Piazza Marina in Palermo (a *topos* with a high symbolic meaning for Sciascia); they both allude – as it has already been pointed out¹⁸ – to the death of any subversive spirit and the persistence of an inquisitive atmosphere, that seems to be the most reliable conclusion of the «a fable about power anywhere in the world»¹⁹ given to the novel's pages. The fake paintings at the bottom of which the author places the dead bodies of Amar and Rogas play as a distorting mirror, as the one making the meeting with Cres possible, proving itself able to lead to the recognition of truth. The false denomination at the origin of the creation of these pictures "reflects", thus, the most authentic among the paradigms represented by the two characters: Amar and the historical compromise he prepared, *alias* the death of revolution; Rogas, a lonely man executed by an Inquisition perpetuating itself through the centuries.

17 These are extracts (quoted in *Note ai testi*, in Sciascia, *Opere*, p. 1842) of the correspondence with Italo Calvino, whose interpretation Sciascia confirms (my translation).

18 See Giovanna Jackson, *Nel labirinto di Sciascia* (Milano: La Vita Felice, 2004), pp. 188-89; Thomas O'Neill, *Sciascia's Todo Modo: La vérité en peinture*, in *Moving in Measure: Essays in Honour of Brian Moloney*, ed. by Judith Bryce, Dough Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), pp. 215-28; Giuseppe Traina, *Una problematica modernità. Verità pubblica e scrittura a nascondere in Leonardo Sciascia* (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2009), pp. 140-41.

19 Sciascia, *Equal Danger*, p. 119.

A Crime with an Onlooker

In *Todo modo*, the counterpart of *Contesto*,²⁰ the figurative passion of the Sicilian writer reaches its acme through the figure of the anonymous painter, the main character, witness to the dark plots of the power of the Democrazia Cristiana. Giuseppe Traina, in his attempt to discover the real name of the artist hiding behind the mask of anonymity, has correctly proposed Renato Guttuso and Fabrizio Clerici as the main suspects, and has pointed out the visual implications derived from this choice.²¹ In other words, the narrator's voice can be immediately seen as a "narrator's gaze" through which the story is filtered and in which the several figurative quotations seem to allude to a constant, paradoxical imitation of the works of art by the reality represented. Using a painter as first-person narrator,²² complicates the typical thick intertextual scheme of Sciascia's narrative works, enriching it with visual references already shown from the paratextual apparatus. The cover image of the novel's first edition is *Tentazione di Sant'Antonio* by Rutilio Manetti, whose copy – as Sciascia tells in *Todo modo* – is held in the crypt of Zafer hermitage chapel, the location of the story. The ékphrasis of Manetti's painting, placed in one of the first dialogues between the painter and his antagonist, don Gaetano, introduces in the novel's pages the play of *ordine delle somiglianze*²³ with the works of art, that would appear again later in more than one occasion.

...And then there was this painting... he pointed. I hadn't noticed it till then: a dark-skinned bearded saint with an open book before him and a devil, sanctimonius and mocking, whose red horns were like flayed flesh. But what struck me most forcibly in the devil was the fact that he

20 See Leonardo Sciascia, 'Non obbedisco a niente e a nessuno', interview by Giovanni Giuga, *La Fiera Letteraria*, 14 luglio 1974, quoted in Squillacioti, *Note ai testi*, p. 1889.

21 See Traina, *Una problematica modernità*, pp. 139-50.

22 About the choice of the first-person narrator see Francesco Pontorno, *Io Sciascia: Appunti su Todo modo*, in Antonio Motta (ed. by), 'Leonardo Sciascia vent'anni dopo', *Il Giannone*, 13-14 (2009), 159-72.

23 See Sciascia, *L'ordine delle somiglianze*, pp. 987-93.

wore glasses – black-rimmed pince-nez. Moreover the impression that I'd seen something of the sort without being able to remember when or where gave the bespectacled devil an aura of mystery and dread – as though I'd seen him in a dream or in a terrifying childhood vision.²⁴

While don Gaetano explains the meaning of the legend of the devil with glasses, just using the detail revealing the diabolic nature of «any contrivance which enables us to see clearly»,²⁵ the painter realizes that the priest's *pince-nez* eyeglasses are very similar to the ones represented in the painting. Beyond from the easy identification of the luciferin aspect of the character of don Gaetano,²⁶ what appears particularly interesting is his description, in his conversations with the painter, of the nature of temptation. But now we need to go off the novel's pages and refer to the essay Sciascia dedicated, only one year before publishing *Todo modo*, to Fabrizio Clerici, who however had been a witness and mentor in Sciascia's discovery of Rutilio Manetti's painting.²⁷ In this work Sciascia traces back Clerici's metaphysical style to the symbolism of Odilon Redon. In his engravings, in to the series of *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, of *Apocalisse* and of *Songes*, Sciascia identifies «the logic of visibility at the service of invisibility».²⁸

I believe that the same sense of the enigma characteristic of Sciascia's most complex crime novel can be found in the cryptic elegance of his writing dedicated to the “mysterious beauty” of Redon's painting (and, as we will see later, of Clerici). In

24 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, trans. by Sasha Rabinovitch (Manchester-New York: Carcanet, 1987), p. 27.

25 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 29.

26 On this subject, see the re-reading of Ivan Pupo that questions this easy identification: Ivan Pupo, *Passioni della ragione e labirinti della memoria: Studi su Leonardo Sciascia* (Napoli: Liguori, 2011), p. 72.

27 See Sciascia, ‘Clerici e l'occhio di Redon’, *Galleria*, XXXVIII, (1988), 240-45; Fabrizio Clerici, ‘Gli occhiali del diavolo’, *Nuove Effemeridi*, 9, III (1990), p. 86, in which the painter tells how, during Sciascia's visit during the summer of 1973, in a small church in the Tuscan countryside, the writer looked a copy of Rutilio Manetti's work held in S. Agostino church in Siena.

28 Sciascia, *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, p. 240 (the English translation is by Silvia Greenup. I should like to thank her for the translation of the quotations of this essay).

this essay we find, through the reference to Redon's gaze, the perspective dimension through which the writer checks the perverted system of the "microphysics of the power"²⁹ (already observed through the deforming lens of the parody of *Contesto* and which would be the central theme in the pages of *Affaire Moro*). The intertextual chain connecting Clerici and Redon right to *Todo Modo*'s pages, passes through the visual quotation in Flaubert's *Tentation* (which, among other things, is indirectly implicit also in Manetti's *Tentazione*). In his essay in honor of Clerici and his "Redonian" gaze, Sciascia compiles a brief and personal "anthology of the eye" that ranges from the "flaubertian-redonian"³⁰ texts, through the Bible, to Machado and Borges. The Flaubertian and Redonian flaming pupils («partout des prunelles flamboient»), the eyes floating like molluscs («Et que des yeux sans tête flottaient comme des mollusques») allude to the hopeless look breaking against the inaccessible horizon («Mon regard que rien ne peut dévier, demeure tendu à travers les choses sur un horizon inaccessible»)³¹ drawn inside the "Lager"³² of *Todo modo*. Moreover in Sciascia's critical imaginary Redon's and Clerici's eyes are connected by their common attention to the space and its architectonic dimension.

So, to discuss Clerici let us begin with Redon (...); this on account of their being architects at the service of invisibility, *from within*. Let me explain: symbolist, surrealist and metaphysical painting is filled with squares and avenues, porticos and colonnades, bifurcations and crossroads; but the eye that takes them in, the eye from which the lines depart and towards which they converge – the eye, in other words, of De Chirico, of Magritte, of Delvaux – is *outside*, occupying a specific position. Redon's eye (which of course is not only Redon's eye) is instead within the architectures, within the buildings, which cannot be

29 See Onofri, p. 138.

30 See *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, p. 242.

31 The extracts from Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* are mentioned by Sciascia in *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, p. 242. The drawings to which the writer hints refer to several series of illustrations created by Redon (1888-1896) for Flaubert's work: see *La Tentation de Saint Antoine de Flaubert*, illustrations de Odilon Redon (Paris: Les Peintres du Livre, 1969).

32 See Traina, *Una problematica modernità*, p. 147.

said to sing, but rather to entrap, within no specific spot: like a bat flitting fretfully against the walls, moving from one object to the other (...). In Clerici there occurs something like a doubling and a metamorphosis: on the one hand there is the point-of-view-eye of Piero della Francesca and Magritte, an eye which irradiates and gathers perspectives both minute and obsessive; on the other, there is Redon's bat-eye, which at times is uncovered and sectioned as in an anatomical table, at others camouflaged, petrified, a stone among the stone ruins. This eye may yet come sparkling into life, carbuncle-like, unleashing a deathly ray, aimed directly at exploding and blinding some other eye, placed in the head of those simulacra of sacred and mythical beasts which are portrayed as engaging in a sort of indecipherable "conversation" outside of time".³³

This long quotation is essential to understand the sense of the reference to Clerici, hidden behind the anonymity of the main character. As Clerici/Redon's, the painter's gaze in *Todo modo* observes the space (surreal and too real at the same time) in Zafer's hermitage staying at the same time inside and outside. His role of external spectator becomes more and more compromised as he little by little gets into the vision through the conversations, with don Gaetano (his alter ego), almost surrendering to the temptation of metaphorically picking up his glasses, and his cynical and amused gaze on the massacre game developing in front of their eyes. Since the very first pages of the novel, the painter himself describes his ambivalent visual condition in a landscape in which he is at first, through his room's window, a distant observer of the hotel's yard where he would witness the coming in of the notables of the Democrazia Cristiana going to attend the spiritual exercises; later an onlooker ready to take a seat in the stalls made up of deckchairs which «They recalled, on account too of the colours – natural wood and widely striped blue and red canvas – some early de Chirico. I entered into the picture».³⁴ But his gaze does not really move from the outside to the inside, because, as the narrator's voice adds, he never gives up a metaphysical perspective:

33 Sciascia, *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, pp. 241-42, translation by S. Greenup.

34 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 20.

anyone looking out of one of the windows would have taken me for a mannequin abandoned on a chair (I experience the paintings of others more than my own – especially the work of those painters most different from me).³⁵

Here the reference to De Chirico's iconography has value particularly in the hermeneutical perspective expressed by Sciascia in the essay already mentioned, in which Surrealism and Metaphysics are to be interpreted as metahistorical categories, helping the author's voice in drawing that architecture "at the service to invisibility" inside which he would place the show of the infernal bedlams of his present.

Before analysing the other passages of the novel showing the ability of the main character to let live and live inside someone else's paintings, we need a last explanation about the complicity he discovers with don Gaetano's eyes. Already since his first appearance, the character of the priest is marked by an enigmatic visual dimension,³⁶ that the author himself feels an obligation to justify through an explicit interference in the story:

Here I want to explain why, when describing Don Gaetano's departures, how he leaves or has left, I use the word's "vanish" or "diaspear" – and shall go on using them and perhaps others such as "fade away", "dissolve". To do so I must resort to the memory of a game we palyed as children: we would draw on a sheet of paper a completely black figure with a single white spot counting up to sixty, then shut our eyes or look up at the sky – and we still saw that figure, but now white, transparent.³⁷

The silhouette play thus helps, as a further visual reference, to give the sense of *sdoppiamento* ("duplication"), of *sfera dell'ipnosi* ("hypnotic sphere"),³⁸ of a perceptive method got as a kind of infection through don Gaetano's gaze. Therefore, the painter appears to be aware that the spiritual exercise proposed to

35 *Ibidem*.

36 Sciascia, *Todo modo*, pp. 846-47.

37 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 18.

38 Sciascia, *Todo modo*, p. 851.

him is more than just a visual exercise: it deals with a particular way of looking at reality, turning one's back on it as Redon did, so that, by closing one's eyes, all that remains in the eyes is the memory of an unclear and invisible life.³⁹ Don Gaetano, being in his own way also «architect at the service to the logic of invisibility», proves himself a sympathetic spectator, amused by the show the painter is going to witness. As a matter of fact, he claims to be the third one (together with the cook and the painter) who enjoyed the scene of the Rosary;⁴⁰ and as the priest is also the actor and the director of the infernal choreography, as well as the main character is the narrator's voice in his painting, the scene contemplated by their eyes continuously confuses and overlaps «actual images or word images».⁴¹ The picture of the Demochristian power system, mentioned in the conversations among the notables reunited in the hermitage, coexists with the fantasmagory of the silhouettes that they leave in the painter/writer's eyes, in his memory fed with images and words, whose purpose is to go beyond the horizon of the visible «like x-rays»,⁴² and to catch its most absurd inconsistency and its macabre dance towards death.

Thus in the repeat of the show of the telling of the Rosary the colours of the scene change: from the ironic representation of the first evening we move to a grotesque and tragic one «the absurd to-ing and fro-ing like caged animals, their hovering and lingering in the half light and their quicker terrified scurrying towards the dark»,⁴³ where a gun shot, together with a clear spot, appears. And the crime is registered by the eyes of the narrator onlooker, too, inside the painting drawn by his voice:

The lights came on in three waves – a blinding crescendo. At the far end of the esplanade the dead body, foreshortened in my angle of vision, seemed more dead than before. Then two waiters, dropping

39 See Sciascia, *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, p. 240.

40 Sciascia, *Todo modo*, pp. 873-74.

41 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 84.

42 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 94.

43 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 46.

a sheet over it, turned it into a little mound of snow. The night was suddenly filled with a dense ballet of midges, with geckos streaking across the walls towards the glaring lamps. It was as though a horror, till then unperceived, had been unexpectedly exposed.⁴⁴

The Last Painting

Therefore, when in the middle of the novel the scene turns red, the character of the painter reveals clearly his connection with the author's vision, but the impression is that the detective plot joining the story has here, just like in *Contesto*, a parodic dimension and that the solution to the enigma is to be found especially from the point of view of the visionary, hypnotic look "serving to the logic of the invisible" revealed to the main character in his conversations with don Gaetano. From this point of view, the several figurative quotations play an important role. The presence of a narrator's voice "compromised" with the figurative representation encourages, as already noticed, the writer to provide a diversified range of ekphrastic strategies: those with "actual" features, such as the description of Rutilio Manetti's *Tentazione di Sant'Antonio*, or of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, a perfect metaphore of the deviation to cannibalism by the Church and by the political party connected with it;⁴⁵ those with "notional" features, dealing with the main character's drawings, such as the ugly nude of a woman that he gives as a gift to the prosecutor Scalambri and the portrait of Jesus Christ, painted as a surrender to don Gaetano's temptation. Actually there is no real description of the last two paintings, but only of their creative process. However, Sciascia's figurative disposition expresses itself especially in forms of hybridization and dynamization,⁴⁶ using the most diversified pictorial references in order to place the invisible "in the logic of the visible".

44 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 49.

45 See Sciascia, *Todo modo*, pp. 875-76.

46 On the ekphrastic rhetoric about the dynamization of the images see Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 90-115.

One of the first scenes of the novel is set up as a *tableau vivant*, where the main character, walking in the wood around Zafer's hermitage, glimpses the Demochristian notables' mistresses, lying under the sun, who would shortly afterwards appear: «It was a vision. Something mythical and magic. If one pictured them completely naked (wich required no effort of imagination), the result was a painting by Delvaux».⁴⁷

“The order of likenesses” allows Sciascia to prefigure the context in which the story he is going to tell is set, somehow suspended between reality and imagination, between a physical and a metaphysical scenery, in a setting balanced towards surreality. The reference to Delvaux suggests to the author «The manner in wich they were disposed, the perspective from which I perceived them was pure Delvaux. As well as what couldn't be represented but which I knew».⁴⁸ But once again the metaphysical perspective prevails, the look from a certain distance, before meeting don Gaetano, whose eye on the contrary – as we tried to show – is used to scan the infernal processes from inside, in accordance with the “Redonian” perspective described in the essay on Clerici.

Even the coexistence of both points of view, of the double perspective (inside and outside the painting) through which the story is told, is represented again using precise figurative references, which in the author's hands become the result of his own original creation, manipulating these sources for his own purposes. Thus, for example, when “painting” the scene of praying the Rosary, the main character portrays himself as a De Chirico mannequin; and to suggest to Scalambri to reconstruct the layout of the “beleavers” praying in the crime scene, he sends him a drawing in Steinberg's style «I took out my sketch-pad and sketched, in the manner of Steinberg, the ranks of the faithful. Underneath I scribbled: “The ranks should be reconstituted”».⁴⁹ In this case as well, in imitating the American artist, he portrays himself inside the painting, or, at least, the reference to Steinberg

47 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 14.

48 *Ibidem*.

49 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, pp. 56-57.

indicates that the area where the praying people are situated might include the author's hand or pencil. The "order of likenesses" with the works of art, the interchange between reality and imagination, goes on until the last painting, in which the narrator's voice seems to free itself and leaves don Gaetano's gaze, which had tented it to lean out towards «the edge of the abyss, inside us and outside us».⁵⁰ Accepting the challenge of going beyond Antonello, Rouault and Redon,⁵¹ after drawing his Christ (whose description, however, is not available), the painter "paints" with his own voice the portrait of the priest as a dead man:

He lay in disarray and as though out of joint. His legs, almost at right angles, stretched his cassock which had been rucked up as he slipped exposing his thick white woollen socks. And all eyes focused on those socks because they contrasted sharply with the black shoes and the black cassock and because they were winter socks and it was high summer. After the socks one's gaze, or at least mine, was drawn to his glasses which, from the cord attached to his breast, hung down on to a root where they rested at an odd angle to a sunbeam filtering through the foliage – it was like the detail of a painting by a minor pupil of Caravaggio. And I say minor because everything about the dead Don Gaetano and his surroundings was minor – diminished, reduced, low-key in relation to what he's been alive.⁵²

In the studied direction of the eyes laying on the painting, in the winking balance of black and white, the narrator's voice celebrates in this "dying painting" his requiem for the character through which he had pointed his eyes at the horror of Power. The ray of light falling on the glasses is a tribute to Caravaggio, but at the same time it is a quotation from Fabrizio Clerici and his «dritto raggio di morte, che va ad esplodere e accecare un altro occhio».

50 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 66.

51 See Sciascia, *Todo modo*, pp. 924-25. An in-depth analysis of the theme of the christological image in Sciascia's works, considering its complex implications, cannot be carried out here; on that see the important works by Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (München: Beck, 2005), and Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image ouverte: Motifs de l'incarnation dans les arts visuels* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

52 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 98.

Sciascia like in Clerici, inside of him there is an “enlightened”⁵³ side making him abandon the look inside the painting. We have the impression that, if it is true that Christ revealed himself once and for all to Redon «must truly have had such features and the once only, centuries later. He revealed them to Redon»,⁵⁴ it is also true that the hell of our Seventies found in *Todo Modo* its most authentic interpretation, and in Sciascia an admirable «architect at the service to the logic of invisible» setting which was under everybody’s eyes and which, a few years later, would reveal the *effet de réel* of the *Affaire Moro*.

53 Sciascia, *Clerici e l'occhio di Redon*, p. 243.

54 Sciascia, *One Way or Another*, p. 94.

THE TORCH AND THE MASK: ILLUSTRATIVE CAPTIONS FOR THOUGHT. AN EXEMPLARY PAIR OF PICTURES BY PAOLO DE MATTEIS

ALESSANDRO ROSSI

In order to describe an image, there are two basic possibilities: above all, one needs to see it, or having seen it (mimetic *ékphrasis*), or, if this is not possible, it has to be invented (notional *ékphrasis*). When there are instructions for creating an image, as was often the case with patrons and painters, there emerges a third possibility, which at once inverts and combines the two kinds of *ékphrasis* we have just cited. The painter, who must respect the patron's indications, will in fact have to invert the concept of mimetic *ékphrasis* and represent what the words say, that is, translate verbal requirements into an image. At the same time, such requirements will describe an ideal image that does not yet exist, remaining in a state of potentiality that stands in opposition to that which contains images "invented" by literature (notional *ékphrasis*), precisely because the latter already exist, perfectly complete, within the terms of their description, and have no value as projected concepts. The instruction communicated verbally or in writing by the patron to the painter whom he wishes to realize the image the former has in his mind, will in turn have to combine itself with the image prompted by such a description in the mind of the painter, who will make it objectively visible initially through sketches, then small-scale models and finally the painting itself. Between one stage of artistic realization and the other, further comments will appear, modifying the final visual outcome. Often the patron's instructions will refer to a written text, usually a literary classic, and thus the painter will have to create an image drawn from a text mediated by the words of the patron, who will select the episode and indicate how to represent it. An exemplary case of this multi-*ékphrastic* process, or «dynamic treatment

of the compositional process»,¹ is offered by the relationship between the English philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, and Paolo De Matteis, a painter from Cilento, an Italian geographical region of Campania district.

Towards the end of 1711, the seriously ill Lord Shaftesbury journeyed to Naples to enjoy the mild Mediterranean climate. There he composed a small treatise entitled *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules*, which consisted of precise precepts about the choice of attitudes and feelings, the importance of individual figures in reciprocal compositional interactions, and the moral significance and unity of time a painter ought to observe in the translation of a subject into painting.² These rigorous standards on how to transfer a story or fable onto canvas through drawing and colour, combined with Classicising taste and the Platonic notion of the moral unity of Beauty and Truth, as well as the Aristotelian principle of the unity of time, space and action, were far from abstract considerations, being expressly directed to the painter Paolo De Matteis, so he could paint scenes drawn from Classical mythology according to an appropriate criterion of aesthetic *decorum*. The treatise was originally written by the Earl of Shaftesbury in French, that is, in a language also known to De Matteis.³ The artist thus found himself obliged not only to observe simple suggestions from his patron, but an actual series of theoretical precepts specifically written so they could be put into practice without their meaning being misunderstood.⁴ As the title of the treatise itself suggests,

1 Michele Cometa, *La scrittura delle Immagini*, pp. 100 ff.

2 *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules* was first published in French with the title *Le Jugement d'Hercule* in the *Journal des Sçavans* (November 1712), and was then reprinted in English as a pamphlet in 1713, subsequently appearing in the volume *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times* in 1714 (repr. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999).

3 The *Foreword* to the 1713 edition of *A Notion of the Historical Draught* states that the treatise was originally communicated in manuscript form to a foreign painter, in French.

4 Lord Shaftesbury writes: «To preserve therefore a just Conformity with *Historical Truth*, and with the *Unity of Time and Action*, there remains no other way by which we can possibly give hint of any thing future, or call to

the specific mythological subject to which Lord Shaftesbury's aesthetic theories should be applied was the episode of *Hercules at the Crossroads between Vice and Virtue*.⁵ The work painted by De Matteis in accordance with such precepts is *The Choice of Hercules*



Paolo De Matteis, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1712

now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, site in Oxford, in which the Aristotelian unities of space, time and action are strictly observed.

mind any thing past, than by setting in view such Passages or Events as have actually subsisted, or according to Nature might well subsist, or happen together in *one* and the *same* instant. And this is what we may properly call the *Rule of Consistency*» (*A Notion of the Historical Draught*, n.p., 1713, I, 9).

5 The subject was by Prodicus of Ceos, and was transmitted by Xenophon in the *Memorabilia Socratis*.

Apollo and Daphne

The relationship between the Italian painter and the English philosopher with respect to the creation of this painting has already been properly studied by Livio Pestilli.⁶ The scholar extended his research to other paintings by De Matteis, believing that contact with such a cultivated and demanding patron constituted a stylistic watershed for the artist – that is, that De Matteis' painting and his way of composing, after he had worked for Lord Shaftesbury, was profoundly and almost indelibly marked by this association; indeed, that recognizing the presence of the philosopher's canons could be used to date works attributed to the painter, according to the customary *ante* and *post quem* parameters. The test case for this criterion is offered by two distinct versions of *Diana and Actaeon* painted by De Matteis (Munich, Alte Pinakothek and England, private collection) and a canvas with *Apollo and Daphne*⁷ (Berkeley, James A. Coughlin collection).



Paolo De Matteis, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1702 ca.

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- 6 Livio Pestilli, 'Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis: Ercole al bivio tra teoria e pratica', *Storia dell'arte*, 68 (1990), 95-121.
- 7 The subject is drawn from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, pp. 452-567.

The latter painting provides the starting-point for our considerations on ékphrasis. In the absence of external documentation, the work itself becomes the sole witness to its own circumstances, motivations and function; describing it, in fact, is the sole method of comprehending it and placing it in context. We may now come to our case study so as to verify what we have said, bearing in mind – as Michael Baxandall has written – that the descriptions / explanations we discuss, or which we ourselves will give, refer «to the effect the picture has on us» more than to the painting itself.⁸

In the Berkeley *Apollo and Daphne* Pestilli recognises an example of what was abhorred by the English philosopher, the «ridiculous anticipation of metamorphosis», since what is shown in the painting is a transformation that occurs before «the execution of that act in which the charm consists».⁹ Our description of this picture, instead, proceeds in another direction: according to the way we see it, the painter seizes and suspends the beginning of the metamorphic process, showing the transformation of Daphne's fingers and tresses into laurel branches and leaves. In this case, De Matteis' painting captures a precise moment of the narration; he does not visually describe the temporal anticipations of the narrative sequence.¹⁰ This is not a montage of several scenes but a precise shot – or, in keeping with the cinematic metaphor – a freeze-frame of a process of transformation. In this canvas, De Matteis captures, one may say, the Aristotelian unity of time, space and action

8 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 11.

9 Livio Pestilli, 'Ut Pictura Non Poesis: Lord Shaftesbury's *Ridiculous Anticipation of Metamorphosis* and the Two Versions of *Diana and Actaeon* by Paolo de Matteis', *Artibus et Historiae*, 27 (1993), p. 137.

10 Paolo De Matteis thus follows the precepts expressed in paragraph 7 of the first chapter of *A Notion*: «It is evident, that every master in painting, when he has made choice of the determinate date or point of time, according to which he would represent his history, is afterwards debarred the taking advantage from any other action than what is immediately present, and belonging to that single instant he describes (...)».

requested by Lord Shaftesbury.¹¹ The same painting is thus seen and interpreted in two opposing ways, which will naturally have consequences of an art-historical kind, as we shall see.

This description, which essentially recognises the painting as a representation of the instantaneous nature of metamorphic movement, has its origins in a comparison and contrast (according to a hermeneutical integration of the gaze¹²) with the description that could be given of another painting, also taken from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, *Pan and Syrinx*¹³ (Milan, private collection)



Paolo De Matteis, *Pan e Syrinx*, 1725 ca.

11 In the first paragraph of the *Conclusions* of his *A Notion*, Lord Shaftesbury writes that the painter can describe no more than one action at a time, and that seeking to understand two or more actions or parts of a story within a single painting is ridiculous: «The painter is a Historian at the same rate, but still more narrowly confin'd, as in fact appears; since it wou'd certainly prove a more ridiculous Attempt to comprehend two or three distinct Actions or Parts of History in one Picture, than to comprehend ten times the number in one the same Poem».

12 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, pp. 116 ff.

13 The subject is drawn from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 689-712.

Correctly recognized by Federico Zeri as a work by Paolo De Matteis and as a *pendant* to the painting in Berkeley,¹⁴ in part because of the same dimensions (101.5 x 177.5 cm), this picture expresses a mode of depicting metamorphosis in a way that is diametrically opposite to that of its pendant, *Apollo and Daphne*. Let us try first to describe the painting of *Pan and Syrinx*, and then to look at these two pictures together, since as they are pendants they were and should be contemplated together.

Pan and Syrinx

The co-existence on the surface of this canvas of three represented elements (the fleeing nymph; the bundle of reeds grasped by the satyr; the musical instrument hanging from Pan's shoulder), notionally distant in time from one another in the temporal succession of the events narrated by Ovid, would thus rule out the contextuality of one with the others, since the presence of any one of the three automatically excludes the other two; and this leads us to reflect on the pictorial devices governing the representation of temporal succession implied by the narration of any metamorphosis in a static, painted image. Pan grasps a bundle of reeds which, in the story, is the nymph herself, transformed through the intercession of her sister nymphs, whose help Syrinx sought in order to escape from Pan (I, 703-706). In De Matteis' depiction, Syrinx still has the semblance of a woman escaping from her bestial pursuer: she therefore appears twice in the painting, in both the "before" and "after" of her metamorphosis, that is, in the form of a woman and that of a bundle of reeds. As for Pan, he carries his characteristic instrument, slung from a

14 A copy of the expertise, dated 16 May 1993, is filed in the photographic library of the Fondazione Federico Zeri in Bologna (entry no. 63392, series "Pittura italiana", folder no. 0588). As regards the authorship of the painting, Zeri writes: «The author of this canvas, which is in perfect condition, is the Neapolitan artist Paolo De Matteis, born in Piano del Cilento in 1662 and died in Naples in 1728. The attribution is absolutely certain. Moreover this canvas has a companion piece with *Apollo and Daphne*, now in a private collection in Berkeley, California».

shoulder – the syrinx, or pan-pipe, which as Ovid tells us (I, 710-712) was created by the cutting and reshaping (by Pan himself) of a part of that same bundle of reeds that the satyr had grasped, panting. So, here too, the reeds are shown contemporaneously “before” and “after” their transformation, as a bundle of plants and as a musical instrument. At the same time, the painter shows us the triple transformation of the nymph, presenting her contemporaneously in the forms she subsequently assumes, in time: woman, plant, musical instrument.

The painting is thus crossed by a double movement: one from right to left, with the satyr pursuing the nymph as she heads towards her sisters, who will ensure her salvation through transformation – reflecting the proper movement of the narrative – and the other from left to right, following the progress of the metamorphoses, in which nothing is shown in transformation, but rather fully transformed. What is seen, what is offered as visible for the spectator, is fiction and deceit. The co-existence in the beholder’s gaze of “before” and “after” at once reveals and dislocates several successive episodes of Ovid’s text on the canvas, consciously placing them under the eloquent symbol of the mask, carried and displayed by the winged cherub.

Whether metamorphosis, and the inevitable temporal sequence it implies, can be shown in painting, becomes even more complicated if (as in our case) we consider Pan’s point of view. As he grasps the reeds, in De Matteis’ admirable rendering, the goat-god still has the image of the sensual, fleeting forms of Syrinx in his gaze. Indeed the much-desired body of the nymph seems to appear to him like a sudden flashback of the precise moment in which the satyr was convinced he had finally seized her flesh. For Pan, the instrument, too, which would be named after Syrinx, represents nothing more than the melancholy memory of the sound produced by his gasping before the body of the nymph, now changed into reeds. In embracing what no longer exists, unless it were within his imagination or illusion, and already bearing the instrument of his consolation, the figure of Pan evokes the hidden depths of desire, memory and action across the surface of the canvas, enabling the painter to achieve the challenging task

of spatially articulating the temporal coordinates of past, present and future, in an attempt to reconcile “representation” and “narration”. The painting thus depicts a single sequence within whose unitary realm there move characters and objects involved in the moment of the nymph’s flight, and contemporaneously involved in its dual metamorphic outcome. This simultaneity lends the painting a peculiar “iconic density”¹⁵ that allows De Matteis’ picture to acquire (in the words of Giovanni Careri) «the necessary independence needed to open an authentic “dialogue with the text of the poem”»¹⁶ by Ovid, although this is a programmatic contradiction of elements dictated by the English philosopher, such as the *Rule of Consistency* (I, 9), the *Law of Truth* and *Credibility* and the *Law of Unity and Simplicity of Design* (I, 13), which impeded the artist from depicting any type of *Anticipation* and *Repeal* (I, 12)¹⁷ within the given episode.

A Paradigmatic Pair of Pictures

If we accept that the canvases in question are pendants – that is, that they were conceived as a pair for the same patron, to be enjoyed together – and if we agree that the emphasis placed on two distinct modes of painting the metamorphosis is telling evidence of a special interest in this question, we may associate the commission of the two works with someone who would have wanted Paolo De Matteis to depict aesthetic speculations on the modes of translating poetic narrative into images, and recognise

15 “Iconic density” is the expression used by Gottfried Boehm with respect to the categories of “transition” (*Übergang*), “simultaneity” (*Simultaneität*) and “potentiality” (*Potentialität*). See Boehm, *Per una ermeneutica dell’immagine*, in *Estetica tedesca oggi*, ed. by Riccardo Ruschi (Milano: Unicopli, 1986), pp. 189-217.

16 Careri’s expression refers to the relationship between Nicolas Poussin’s *Rinaldo and Armida* (Paris, Musée du Louvre) and Torquato Tasso’s poem *La Gerusalemme liberata*: in Giovanni Careri, *La fabbrica degli affetti. La Gerusalemme liberata dai Carracci a Tiepolo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2010), p. 202.

17 A. A. Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *A Notion*.

the canvases in Milan and the United States as *pendant* pictures commissioned by Lord Shaftesbury himself. In this case we would have to ask ourselves why the English nobleman would have had his favourite painter create two pictures that are apparently similar, but profoundly different with respect to their syntactic structure. The possible response to this is surely to hang the two canvases on the same wall so as to highlight the different modes of representing metamorphosis in painting, and thus the visual narration of movement: one according to norms of acceptability and *decorum*, which has to maintain the Aristotelian unities of space, time and action (*Apollo and Daphne*), and another that should instead be recognised as incorrect and inappropriate, if not quite ridiculous, in which different temporal sequences co-exist contemporaneously within a single scene (*Pan and Syrinx*). A telling clue that supports such an interpretation for this pair of paintings is that the *Apollo and Daphne*, the canvas that represents the “correct” way of expressing the composition, is placed under the sign of light (a cherub with a torch, the light of truth in the fable), whereas the scene of *Pan and Syrinx* is placed, as we have already noted, under the sign of the mask, a symbol of falsehood. The two paintings would thus represent a *manifesto* of what to do and what not to do in painting according to Lord Shaftesbury, or better, of how the passage from poetic narration to pictorial representation should be managed by the painter following criteria of *decorum*, which in the specific case of metamorphoses could lead to their being eluded, resulting in «ridiculous anticipations».¹⁸ In the case of the *Pan and Syrinx*, such anticipations are so obvious that they could end up being counter-paradigms, to be avoided. Considered one at a time, the cherubs – bearing a torch here, a mask there – draw little attention, and can thus be reduced to little more than decoration, yet in these reassembled pendants they almost become the double caption of what the two paintings seek to express, together.

Reading *Apollo and Daphne* as a work inconsistent with the aesthetic precepts of Lord Shaftesbury leads Pestilli to consider

18 See Pestilli, *Ut pictura non poesis*, p. 137.

it to have been painted before De Matteis' contact with the philosopher, that is, before January 1712, while our hypothesis proposes that De Matteis executed both pictures under the supervision of the Englishman, who provided the theoretical line followed by the two specific compositional structures of the paintings before us, probably just after the completion of the last version of *The Choice of Hercules* (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum), shortly after 22 March 1712.

The Torch and the Mask

To attempt to support our interpretation, which considers the pair of paintings in question to be pendants – at once literary and theoretical, theatrical and philosophical – that can be recognised as a paradigm of a normative representation of visual narrative in painting according to Lord Shaftesbury, it would be well to explore the possibility that the two cherubs in the paintings could plausibly assume the illustrative function in the sense we have described above. Winged cherubs (with bird or butterfly wings) appear frequently in De Matteis' paintings; if they carry some object in their hands, it can often refer to the attributes of the principal character in the scene who is accompanied by these creatures. In his painting of *Apollo and Daphne*, for example, the torch, a symbol of light, held aloft by the little cherub, is to be associated with Apollo as God of the Sun, and in fact in the *Aurora and the Chariot of the Sun* (Schloss Pommersfelden) two cherubs armed with torches guide the chariot of Apollo-Sun.¹⁹ However, the torch held by a winged cherub is also used by De Matteis as a symbol of amorous passion in certain depictions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, such as *Alphaeus and Arethusa* (Verona, private collection), *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (private collection)

19 Another meaningful example is the cherub at the feet of Zeus, his arms held high and bearing the thunderbolts of the father of the Gods, in another painting by De Matteis, the *Allegory of a Hoped-For Alliance between France and the Kingdom of Naples* (Mainz, Landesmuseum).

and indeed the Berkeley *Apollo and Daphne*.²⁰ Yet in his *Pan and Syrinx* De Matteis decides to give less emphasis to the aspect of passion in the story, placing a mask in the cherub's hands, perhaps because – following the instructions of his philosopher-patron – he had to make explicit, through a clear, unmistakable emblem, that such a composition constituted an incorrect, deceitful and incongruous pendant. Following Lord Shaftesbury's precepts, we should understand this form of deceit not only as present within the narrative episode but also according to its "incorrect" figurative representation.

De Matteis' familiarity with the adoption of these symbols is also displayed (hardly fortuitously) in the *Allegory of Divine Wisdom Crowning Painting as Queen of the Arts* (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum; signed and dated 168...), in which two little cherubs are depicted, one holding a mirror (the traditional symbol of Truth, and similar in some respects to that of the torch) and the other a mask (symbol of Deceit). The fact that De Matteis wanted to include precisely these two symbols in an allegory of the primacy of painting – a mirror and a mask carried by two cherubs, representing the aspects of truth and fiction that painting contains within itself – might suggest that our painter wished to retain, even many years later, this iconographical element, which was certainly rhetorical, but about which he felt strongly, and had made his own, so that he could meet his patron's needs without giving up his own congenial iconographical vocabulary. In other words, the artist would have interacted with the philosophers' theoretical language through his own figurative, with a certain craft and symbolic awareness of his own.²¹ Besides, it was the

20 On the symbolic meaning of the torch in this sense, see. Vincenzo Cartari, *Le immagini de i Dei e de gli Antichi*, Venice 1556 (repr. edited by Caterina Volpi, De Luca Editori d'Arte, Roma 1996), p. 435.

21 If it is true that Lord Shaftesbury considered De Matteis as a mere *main docile* of the philosopher-*virtuoso*, as L. Pestilli reminds us, it is also true that our painter was known for being «most eloquent in speech, and very learned in fables and histories; with a most faithful memory he recited the Aeneid of Virgil, the Metamorphoses of Ovid and the Jerusalem of Tasso, other than many citations and sayings of the philosophers, and clever mottoes with which he would pepper his speeches» (*Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis*,

patron himself (or at least the one we have proposed for our pair of pictures) who established the need for a sober adoption of certain emblematic elements in order to better clarify the function of the figures represented here, and therefore the subject of the painting itself. In the chapter of *A Notion* entitled *Of the Casual or Independent Ornaments* (VI, 1), Lord Shaftesbury rejects the idea of crowding the scene with elements that are external to the characters, since these accessories would go against the principle of *Simplicity* that must govern the images, and they would distract beholders' gazes and confuse their judgement. In order to recognize Vice and Virtue in the painting *The Choice of Hercules* commissioned from De Matteis, the philosopher indicates only a few specific portable ornaments as legitimate and apt: the helmet, the bit (or bridle) to emblematically express the characteristics of Virtue such as "resistance" and "support" (helmet), and "tolerance" and "abstinence" (bit or bridle), as well as gold historiated vases and drapery thrown down carelessly, to express the lascivious feminine characteristics of Vice (or Pleasure).²² The torch and the mask depicted in our two paintings should thus be understood precisely as this kind of portable element (and in fact they are carried by two small cherubs): not external to the scene and not disturbing the comprehension of the episode's content, but on the contrary, simple and unmistakable elements capable of creating a greater understanding of not only each single episode but also the reading of the two canvases when seen together. It was, moreover, Lord Shaftesbury himself who declared that «my own designs (...) run all on *moral* emblems (...) it must be I that must set the wheel agoing, and help raise the spirit».²³

p. 114); («eloquentissimo nel parlare e molto erudito nelle favole, e nelle istorie, e con una memoria fedelissima recitava l'Eneide di Vergilio, le Metamorfosi di Ovidio, e la Gerusalemme del Tasso; oltre a molte sentenze, e detti de' filosofi, e motti arguti con cui soleva condire i suoi discorsi»): B. De Dominici, *Vite dei pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani*, (Napoli: Tipolitografia Trani, 1846), vol. IV, p. 345.

22 Earl of Shaftesbury, *A Notion*, chapter VI, pp. 4-5.

23 Benjamin Rand (ed. by), *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: Sonnenschein & co., 1900), p. 468. Commenting on the illustrations in Lord Shaftesbury's

The Beholder of the Pendants as Hercules at the Crossroads

The “wheel” referred to by Lord Shaftesbury is to be understood as a device that can directly link the emblematic elements and the spectator, who is to read their moral as well as aesthetic sense. For example, as regards how a spectator might look at *The Choice of Hercules*, the work, if well-conceived, would be transformed from a simple decorative item to a useful exercise for: «a *Royal Youth*, who shou’d one day come to undergo this Trial himself; on which his own Happiness, as well as the Fate of EUROPE and of the World, wou’d in so great a measure depend».²⁴

For the Earl of Shaftesbury, the pedagogical value that art should have seems to proceed from a total identification with the work itself; that is, the relationship between the interior and the exterior of the work must be porous and dynamic. Evidence for such a view is provided on a couple of occasions: one when the philosopher states in a letter of 23 February 1712 that the likeness of Hercules, though he remains an allegorical figure, is not an abstract one but coincides with the appearance of his young friend Thomas Micklethwayt;²⁵ the other when he gives De Matteis the instructions for his portrait, and indicates that he should be depicted with his gaze directed at the eyes of the beholder, lying on a bed in his study full of books, sculptures and drawings, and with an amanuensis busy taking notes of his reflections. Shaftesbury adds that the sentiment one should have while looking at this painting is that of a family setting, in which the spectator enters with his gaze and words that interrupt the sitter’s moment of meditation.²⁶ The philosopher himself thus

Characteristics (1711), Felix Paknadel notes how the difference between good and evil was illustrated with the (emblematic) opposition between two frontispieces, between the right and left sides of the same figure, or between the central and lateral figures (Felix Paknadel, ‘Shaftesbury’s Illustrations of Characteristics’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), p. 312).

24 Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times*, vol. III, p. 409.

25 Pestilli, *Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis*, p. 119, note 101.

26 Pestilli, *Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis*, p. 114.

makes explicit the necessity of a creative act on the part of the person looking at a painted work in order to give meaning to the beauty of the painting, which does reside in itself, but in the individual observing it through an intellectual participation that is capable of elevating the contemplative spirit from the aesthetic level to the moral one. Indeed Lord Shaftesbury writes that beauty is «the beautifying not the beautified»,²⁷ or that «it is in the creative act, and not in what is created, that beauty can be found».²⁸

Basing ourselves on what has been said thus far, we can contemplate a superimposition of the two figures (the beholder and Hercules) in our pendants – that is, the person looking at our pair of pictures of metamorphoses ought to feel morally like a Hercules at the crossroads, to whom a choice is given – not only an aesthetic one – between two distinct representations of Ovid’s myths: one permissible and correct, the other misleading and wrong.²⁹

Describing the device that connects beholder and the pendants, as we have done, means recognising in the observer’s attentive gaze a symbolic practice and a ritualization of theory, and recognising a three-dimensional quality in the emblematic thinking of Lord Shaftesbury, primarily based on a play of oppositions, as is clear not only in *The Choice of Hercules* but also in the frontispiece of the first volume of his *Characteristics*, in which an enthroned figure sits between two groups: on the left, herms and Dionysian bacchantes (dependent on Pan), on the right, poets and philosophers (dependent on Apollo).³⁰

27 Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times*, vol. II, p. 335.

28 Pestilli, *Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis*, p. 97.

29 For Lord Shaftesbury the crossroads represents the fulcrum of the moral and pictorial action in *The Choice of Hercules*, and this is demonstrated by his approval of the small-scale copy (Leeds, City Art Gallery and Temple Newsam House) he commissioned from De Matteis to give to Micklethwayt. Considering this version, the philosopher appreciated the stronger lighting of the crossroads, precisely because it gave greater emphasis to the point occupied by Hercules as he ponders and chooses between the alternative lives presented to him. See Pestilli, *Lord Shaftesbury e Paolo de Matteis*, p. 112.

30 See Paknadel, p. 69, fig c.

Conceived thus, the pendants discussed here would mean that any ékphrasis concerning them would be an essentially anthropological phenomenon, since these images proceed from, pass through and return to an individual, whether a patron, author, narrator or spectator.³¹

31 Compare Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (München: Fink, 2001), trans. by Thomas Dunlap, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

THE STRANGE CASE OF THOMAS LEAVE:
APPENDAGE OF JOURNEY IN INDIA
BY GUIDO GOZZANO

SERGIO VITALE

At the beginning of 1912 Guido Gozzano, as is well known, embarks on a trip to India, officially conducted for health reasons, but, actually, it appeared as an opportunity to test and fulfill various aspirations.¹ First of all the endurance of a exotic myth, cherished since childhood, and cultivated in a latent manner throughout his work. Even before any concrete travel hypothesis, exoticism is a theme variously scattered in Gozzano's poetic writing: let's just remember the classic example of one of his poems, though ironic and irreverent, *Paolo e Virginia. I figli dell'infortunio*.² The real journey is outlined as a sort of extension to the past, in which Gozzano had failed to satisfy his search for remote, into the deep dream dimension, which, in many cases, his desires seem to be moving: «Exoticism in space seems to grant him enough exocitism in time too; to drift him away from the past that often appears different, neither more magnanimous nor miserable than the present time he struggles to live».³ Something which draws the poet to India is also the possibility to further expand and experiment his poetics of the shock in a place always been considered the center of the cultural origins and the quintessential symbol of all possible

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- 1 Henriette Martin, *Guido Gozzano, 1883-1916* (Milano: Mursia, 1971), pp. 91-96.
 - 2 As is well kown, for the poetry *Paolo e Virginia: I figli dell'infortunio* (1910), Gozzano was inspired by the namesake exotic novel *Paul et Virginie* (1787) written by Jacques Hery Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. See Carlo Calcaterra, *Note ai testi*, in Guido Gozzano, *Opere*, ed. by Carlo Calcaterra and Alberto De Marchi (Milano: Garzanti, 1948), pp. 1215-16.
 - 3 Lorenzo Mondo, *Storia e natura in Guido Gozzano* (Roma: Silva, 1969), traslation by the author, pp. 85-86.

otherness. A place where «the most miscellaneous presences juxtapose, gather, bump into each other: it reigns anachronism and paradox».⁴ This is why the idea of travel is also closely linked to its possible literary exploitation, so that when Gozzano sails from Genova to India he has in his pocket two press passes: one released “The Moment”, the other by the “Il Resto del Carlino”.⁵ In fact, as far we learn from his Indian correspondence, the exciting initial plans are gradually downscaled to the point of complete renunciation. On one hand, the growing disillusionment with the initial expectations, and the other hand the dazzling splendor of exotic landscape where the dreams and nightmares are equivalent, will prevent him from finding a stylistic code capable to ensnare and organize Indian materials.⁶ As a matter of fact, against his will, Gozzano will be forced to disregard all the commitments engaged with periodicals.⁷ Only once he returns home, in the complete quietness of the Canavese region, away from the «luxuriant and nameless flora» he will be able to reassemble the fragments of that dream and peacefully disposed to writing. As is known, in fact, the letters from India, despite the name, were composed in Agliè, in the province of Turin, or in the Riviera Ligure where he used to spend the winter. It is in these places that he fantastically recreates his journey, in which India gets back to the island of Paul and Virginia, the distant land of the novels of adolescence trip:

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- 4 Edoardo Sanguineti, *Guido Gozzano: Indagini e Letture* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), translation by the author, p. 135.
- 5 Gozzano's cards as journalist are still kept at the Study Centre of literature Guido Gozzano – Cesare Pavese in Piemonte, initialed respectively AG IX 1 («The Moment») and AG IX 6 («Il Resto del Carlino»). See Mariarosa Masoero, *Catalogo dei manoscritti di Guido Gozzano* (Firenze: Olschki, 1983), pp. 49-50.
- 6 Giorgio De Rienzo, *Guido Gozzano* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1983), p. 161.
- 7 Guido Gozzano (1912), *Epistolario*, in *Poesie e Prose*, ed. by Alberto De Marchi (Milano: Garzanti, 1961). In his letter to his sister Erina (3 April 1912), Gozzano writes «I will be in Turin on 6-7th May. What do we do? We'll go straight to Agliè? It is best, even for escape to friends and newspapers to which I promised correspondence of all kinds – for cards – and I did not send a single word», translation by the author, pp. 1361-62.

Everything is untouched in British India, it is the same as it appears in books or oleographs: bayadere dances, colossal temples, fakirs' crew; woe to somebody who can't stand the fallacies or who misses the unusual things; at this point the literatus suffers from high regret, as it occurs when reality imitates literature.⁸

Gozzano's perception of India of is symbolically contained in these few lines, all implied in a sort of interplay: «approach and compare India as it really appears and India of exoticism as the writer may imagine before going it through, India of fallacies developed by adventure and travel literature, India of widespread oleographs».⁹ A game where the poet gets a taste for paradox, for an impact of shrill things, which is the basis of its poetic irony, though what result from it is frustration and disappointment at the inability to realize the desire to escape into a world where, due to the pressures of incipient tourism, very little exoticism is left. This attitude, typical of the traveler/writer of the twentieth century, which later Levi-Strauss summarized in these terms:

Trips, magic chests full of great promises, will not show the untouched beauty. A proliferating and overloaded civilization unsettles the silence of the seas indefinitely. The scent of the Tropics and the freshness of human beings are compromised by a stench that mortify our wishes condemning them to decaying memories (...) How could escapism be able to show us the upset things of our historical being?¹⁰

For too long time now have been identified texts and authors that Gozzano drew to use as sources, in some cases of plagiarism, in order to artificially rebuild and recreate his journey: from Théophile Gautier to the fundamental Jules Verne, from Pierre Loti to Ernst Haeckel, just to mention some. Through these readings the itinerary gets better balanced and more varied, taking on the characteristics of a pilgrimage from Bombay, India's doorway he

8 Guido Gozzano, *Le torri del silenzio*, in *Opere* (2013), traslation by the author, p. 173.

9 Sanguineti, *Guido Gozzano*, traslation by the author, p. 149.

10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 35-36.

reaches Benares, cradle of civilization, but it is – it should be remembered – a «literary pilgrimage».¹¹ Indian prose works are, according to Saba, «brainwave». Gozzano is a liar and knows how to lie. For this reason he decide to give his letters the form of a diary, for each stage marking the date of stay, although these last, of course, were false.¹² Rather than a scrupulous account of the journey, the account *Verso la cuna del mondo* is presented as a literary *invitation au voyage*. A work of prose in which the rhetorical modes typical traditional Hodoeporics, such as the use of deictics word to involve the reader, insist on using synesthesia to verbally convey the unknown, the accumulation of images¹³ (i.e. the same strategies variously employed also by ekphratic tradition) are constantly bent to overturn the objective point of view in a subjective point of view. Gozzano, as other travel writers of modern times, does not describe unknown places or virgin lands accurately but rather his rhetorical strategy focuses on showing the reader the known images as an epiphany.¹⁴

In other words, Gozzano's Indian prose writings are an "improper" reportage, in which, according to Pancrazi's stigmatization, «images on reasoning's stead, impressions are worth more than logic».¹⁵ A type of writing which in part takes into account the documentary needs, whereas, instead, it pushes his gaze beyond the limits of the seen or viewed as far as the territories of vision. *Lettere dall'India* can be associated with another article by Gozzano, a sort of travel appendix, entitled *Il fotografo dei tre magi* and published on "Il Resto del Carlino"¹⁶ on January 7th 1914 (the same month and same year as the first

11 Guido Gozzano, *Verso la cuna del mondo: Lettere dall'India*, ed. by Alida D'Aquino Creazzo (Firenze: Olschki, 1984), traslation by the author, p. VI.

12 Martin, *Guido Gozzano*, p. 96.

13 Vincenzo Matera, *Raccontare gli altri: Lo sguardo e la scrittura nei libri di viaggio e nella letteratura etnografica* (Lecce: Argo, 1966), pp. 54-58.

14 Giacomo Debenedetti, *Il romanzo del Novecento* (Milano: Garzanti, 1981), p. 326-27.

15 Pietro Pancrazi, *L'invitato speciale*, in Id., *Della tolleranza* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1955), pp. 116-18.

16 The article was published on January 7th 1914. See Franco Contorbia, *Il sofista subalpino: Tra le carte di Guido Gozzano* (Cuneo: L'Arciere, 1980), pp. 115 ff.

publication of the Indian prose work). The article is not one of the best things written by Gozzano, but it has the advantage of rarity because it is one of the few writings in which the author confronts himself directly with the world of the visual arts and the relationship between verbal and visual. The title, due to the paradoxical comparison/association of photographic techniques with the biblical figures of the Magi, is already indicative about the theme and the nature of the writing, where, in addition, if any were needed, the taste of squeaky things is never missing. Summing up, Gozzano is telling us about his meeting with an American painter, Thomas Leave, during the navigation of the Red Sea.¹⁷ This painter was sent to the Middle East «to know biblical places directly so as to write thirty, forty explanations for a short poem for children».¹⁸ It is these illustrations, inspired to a realistic painting technique, and the aesthetics that supports them, that provoke Gozzano's reactions. As Ajello supposed, the American painter mentioned in the article is to be considered «entirely non existent», a mere pretext¹⁹ to better argue his thoughts about the value and function of art. The reason of the article is, in fact, insisted comparison between painting and photography, or rather, between imagination and mimesis and the role they play in these aspects of artistic creation. Since its incipit it is clear how much and what is the distance between the aesthetics the two artists represent:

Nothing harms poetry as the certainty, nothing is approving as the absolute ignorance. (...) Now it is terrible: who seeks the truth he often finds it. The truth is – certainly – awful.

17 Gozzano, *Epistolario*, Letter to Sister Erina (February 28th 1912): «Dear Erina, here we are at the end of this long sea crossing (which lasted from Suez almost eight days) was longer than the famous Jewish, but I think it was more fun we have had the most pleasant emotions, from the biblical Mount Sinai to which we passed very close to that patriotic Massawa (...). Tonight at 10 we arrive in Aden where I'll set this and hope to find your news», traslation by the author, p. 1356.

18 Gozzano, *Il fotografo dei tre magi*, in Contorbia, pp. 126-36, traslation by the author.

19 Epifanio Ajello, *Il racconto delle immagini: La fotografia nella modernità letteraria italiana* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2009), traslation by author, p. 74.

The painter Leave found the real path, the unique down the steep valley where the travellers went through and he portrayed their passage with an outstanding accuracy worthy of a sharp advertisement about a new silver bromide paper.²⁰

Forward in the text Gozzano's thinking is better pointed out through the typical method of eckfrastica doctrine, that one of "instructions for the painter" but sometimes exchanged. In the article in fact the American painter, explaining his work's genesis, reveals the writer his "cold artist" poetics:²¹

Why don't we make use of archeology and history? Why don't we make The Three Wise Men become the enduring Medieval king, a Renaissance prince, a sultan of Costantinopoli? Why don't we portray them as accurately as possible and exactly where they passed through? Nothing has changed – the cold painter pointed out – nothing has changed in this everlasting East: neither habits nor customs nor landscapes. It's not hard to find the Christ's contemporary.

(...) Observe the Three Wise Men' types and costumes. I hired a whole caravan. You have never done something so true...²²

Faced with such coldness, made tougher by the absolute insensitivity with which Leave approaches the sacred theme that intends to represent, Gozzano's judgment can only be absolutely ruthless. Hence, when the painter Leave submits to the Italian poet his representation of the Epiphany, Gozzano, by means of a completely negative *ékpharasis*, returns a description which, focusing on the details of the hardness and aridity of the geographical location, causes in the reader an effect of total absence of sympathy:

This in front of me is desolate, authentic, ugly Judea: with its volcanic rocks more dazzling and barren than the sun; with its cursed sands where any stalk doesn't grow up; in this burning heat's view three Arabian people move forward, wrapped in their "baraccano", solemn sitting on twisted legged camels; behind them a caravan of horses and

20 *Il fotografo dei tre magi*, pp. 126-27.

21 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, traslation by the author, pp. 100 and ff.

22 *Il fotografo dei tre magi*, p. 127.

mules and everything is so true under the light of the relentless sun that I would not be amazed at seeing someone covered with a veil and a helmet, Cook's modern follower...No! In Europe and in Italy nothing is so true not even on cinema's mural advertisement; and your picture, lucky painter, is more accurate than an enlarged frame. Nevertheless it is devoid of poetry; I prefer dreaming, during this poetic day, about the Gospel.²³

For this reason Gozzano compares and contrasts the "pure archeology" and the "exact science" to the Gospel's words, to which the poet recognizes a fundamental metanarrative power, the only «on which our imagination may conceive the mysterious wayfarers as it pleases». In other words, Gozzano thinks that «the ability to dream up, to read or to interpret, therefore to make poetry is prevented by realism of Leave's photographic illustration filling up images and not allowing further digression».²⁴ So just starting from the parenthetic «as you like it best», the author carefully evokes some of the most significant artistic representations inspired, in fact, by the Holy Book's words. Thus, under the reader's gaze, an extraordinary sequence of "picture" unfolds: from the Byzantine bas-relief of the fifth century Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, to the scenes of the Nativity and of Flemish and Florentine Epiphanies, from medieval to Renaissance depictions. Images that Gozzano summarizes with accurate descriptions that highlight the variability of ways and methods of representation at various times, focusing in particular on «the marvel of features and colors» which is the *Viaggio dei Magi* (Journey of the Magi) (1459) by Benozzo Gozzoli:

Among all the epiphanies that one by Benozzo Gozzoli is worthy of mention, in Palace Riccardi, Florence. The Italian Renaissance, as well known, follows the cult of living reality, contemporary world and the Three Wise Men will follow it; they will show not only the costumes of that time but also the historical portrait of it.

So on the walls of the Chapel of Florence, on the huge ride crossing a hill and winding a valley with thin trees, you may recognize the

23 *Il fotografo dei tre magi*, p. 128.

24 Ajello, *Il racconto delle immagini*, p. 77.

Medici court; you may mention, the cardinals, the bishops, the knights, the lords who hunt the hawk, the heron flying over the rigid cypresses, the umbrella pines and palm trees... Manuele Paleologo, Giovanni II patriarch of Costantinopoli; behind in the crowd Pietro II Gottoso and Salviati; besides the famous Plato's editor: Marsilio Ficino, the grammarian Argiropulo, Platina the jurist...²⁵

An *ékphrasis*, a mimetic one this time, that, lingering on aspects of the natural landscape and the historical characters represented, as well as their clothes, is the exact opposite of the of the American painter Leave's Epiphany. Finally, with an elegant game of mirrors that fully involves writing and images, Gozzano concludes the article with another literary quotation, «eternal epiphany you know by heart», contained in a sonnet by José-Maria de Heredia. Thus reaffirming, in this respect, the importance of imagination in artistic creation based on "absolute ignorance" mentioned by Gozzano at the beginning of his article, which becomes the essential quality through which you can or cannot write poetry. Regardless of the representation technique, be it writing, photography or painting, the domain of this quality relates to the inner world of the artist, is the state of mind by which he approaches the object that is meant to represent. A more modulated poetic statement of this theory is found in a letter addressed by the poet to Candida Bolognino during his stay in Ceylon:

I observed India from a poet's point of view, I didn't analyze it deeply, but I enjoyed it superficially... I didn't come here endowed with that knowledge of scholars, archaeologists. I am ignorant of archeology, I don't go deeply into things. I live on their beauty, I enjoy it, I make it mine, I try to spread it through my letters, my lines, but then I realize that I had to say to Carducci "ma picciol verso or è". If I come again to India I will be more endowed with historical knowledge... May I enjoy it again? Maybe less than now as I travel like an ignorant but my soul is greedy for beauty.²⁶

25 *Il fotografo dei tre magi*, p. 130.

26 Gozzano, in Martin, p. 96.

Leave's brush fails to capture beauty, since he is insensitive to it, does not possess «the gift of wonder».²⁷ He is exactly like the visitors to the World Expo in Turin in 1911 «indifferent to any aesthetic perception, ignorant of the cult of beauty through dazed, astonished and satisfied eyes (...) unable to see, to feel if Baedeker doesn't feel it». American painter's hyper-realistic illustration is far from rendering the "real" scene of the arrival of the Magi, actually getting the opposite effect, because if it is true that «nothing has changed in this unchanging East», it is equally true that Palestine, like many other places of pilgrimage, had become part of: «A world dominated by tourism where the authentic exoticism is rare by now, dying out, to be replaced successfully by a defeated exoticism: a world where Cook, the Ritz hotels, the Baedeker and the similar figments of the increasing fiscal pressure have won their long-lasting battle».²⁸

Just because he understands all the contradiction inherent in the phenomenon, Gozzano would not be surprised, in fact, «at seeing someone covered with a veil and helmet, Cook's modern follower...», ironically admitting the failure of that mimetic attempt which the closer to reality, the more it returns an artificial image. Photography, or better the photographic vision, characterized in too a mechanistic way by Leave, is therefore only the metaphor of the feeling and viewing attitude of modern industrial society, which leaves no space for imagination and in which art is degraded and humiliated: «the criterion replaces the model, the decorative replaces the mode».²⁹ What emerges is a still aristocratic conception of art, represented in decadent regressive way, which enhances the value of personal intelligence and imagination the *artifex*. A concept that new ways of artistic reproduction, due to their alleged mechanical materiality, were

27 Gozzano, *Il dono della meraviglia*, in Id., *Un vergiliato sotto la neve: Scritti sull'Esposizione Universale di Torino 1911*, ed. by Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri (Catania: Tringale, 1984), traslation by the author, p. 134.

28 Sanguineti, pp. 141-42.

29 Philippe Hamon, *Exposition: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 30.

seriously calling into question. Gozzano will soon distance³⁰ himself from it, emphasizing the antinaturalistic ways already present in his writing:

Art is surely the most outstanding matter as possible experience of life – A theory that lasted until the twentieth century to the detriment or rather thanks to Nihilism – a truth that, at the end of a path beginning with Romanticism, appears as a complex and rigorous aware forging's strategy.³¹

Hence Gozzano's rhetorical strategies, in which more insistent becomes the metaphor: «the vision, the dream, the image pointing out the limits about seeing: perception of the past beyond aesthetic features; it fails to become tension of research (...) memory that finds, traced back to the past, the depth of psychic contents of awareness».³²

If, in conclusion, *Il fotografo dei Tre Magi*, for obvious reasons, considered one of the minor things Gozzano, certainly cannot be considered a paradigm of notional ekphrasis, however, far from an essentially logo-centric context, its value actually lies in offering itself a likely referent in the litmus on the ekphrastic forms of writing in the Italian literature of the early twentieth century.

30 Mauro Sarnelli, *L'ironico (disin)cantore*, in Gozzano, *La sceneggiatura del San Francesco ed altri scritti*, ed. by M. Sarnelli (Roma: De Rubeis, 1996), pp. 9-43.

31 Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini*, p. 51.

32 Gigliola De Donato, *Guido Gozzano scrittore in prosa*, in *Guido Gozzano. I giorni, le opere: Atti del Convegno Nazionale di Studi, Torino, 26-28 ottobre 1983* (Firenze: Olschki, 1984), translation by the author, p. 419.

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