TWENTIETH-CENTURY ITALIAN POETRY

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Twentieth-Century Italian Poetry
An Anthology

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Foreword

The objective of this anthology is to take the reader on a journey through the fertile and varied territory of twentieth-century Italian poetry. We have made every effort to provide a well-balanced selection of poems by authors who worked from the end of the nineteenth century to our own *fin de siècle*. Therefore, it is important for us to describe to readers what we have envisioned as we have put the book together. In making our poetic selections and in writing the introduction, prefaces, and notes, we kept in mind the student who is venturing into the world of twentieth-century Italian poetry for the first time. This student might be an undergraduate or graduate student at the university level or, in some cases, a student in the upper levels of secondary school. However, it is not our intention to exclude the interested reader from outside the academic context. All first-time explorers of the world of twentieth-century Italian poetry should benefit from the selection and apparatus of this anthology.

In our selection we have also attempted to maintain a balance between the first and the second half of the century. All anthologies published in recent years inevitably overemphasize the first half of the century, seemingly oblivious to the fact that the latter half is just about to come to an end. In our view, it deserves as much attention as the first half.

As we all know, no anthology can escape exclusions. We were forced to exclude important poets, such as Rebora, Cardarelli, Gatto, Penna, Caproni, and Volponi, who have gained, over the years, respect and recognition. Undoubtedly they could find a place in any anthology. Their exclusion was dictated by one extremely important factor: we wanted to provide an ample selection of texts for the poets we deemed most representative of each movement. A selection limited to two or three poems chosen from a greater number of poets would certainly not

serve any purpose in a classroom. To explore even the most basic themes and linguistic peculiarities of any poet, a reader needs more than that. In short, an anthology which tried to include "everyone" would not only reflect an editor's inability to make critical judgments, but ultimately would be impractical in a pedagogical context.

We believe that a special feature of this anthology is its panoramic sweep from the well-established figures of twentieth-century Italian poetry through important younger poets of the last two decades. We wanted to portray modern Italian poetry as it actually is: one of the most innovative and influential poetries on the European continent. Further, in order to serve the needs of English-speaking students engaged in Italian studies, selected texts from each poet have been accompanied by annotations and preceded by a critical introduction written by distinguished scholars who have been teaching twentieth-century Italian poetry in Canada, the United States, England, and Australia.

The notes are intended to perform the function of clarifying linguistic difficulties and ambiguities only in those cases where the average undergraduate student, or the general reader with a reading knowledge of Italian, is likely to encounter obstacles. Notes also clarify cultural, historical, or mythological references with which the student might not be familiar. These notes are not intended to provide interpretations, since interpretation, in our view, is the student's task.

The prefaces have followed the same didactic direction as the notes; their aim is to provide students with a general profile of the poet, and not an interpretation of the poems selected in the anthology. With the exception of the last two, which deal with groups of poets, the prefaces present the essential characteristics of each poet. They include biographical information, and a brief discussion of the milieu in which the poet operated, the literary circle or movement to which he or she belonged, the poet's stylistic and linguistic peculiarities, recurrent thematic nuclei, the poetics of the author, and the social, historical, and cultural context. Prefaces are followed by a selected bibliography of the author's works and by a selected critical bibliography which can help direct the reader to essential works by and about each author.

It is our hope that, as assembled, the anthology will fill a gap in the teaching of twentieth-century Italian poetry in English-speaking countries. We also hope it will stimulate the study of modern Italian poetry in comparative literature programs.

Reading poetry is never an easy, unchallenging process. We believe, however, that the pedagogical tools provided by this anthology will, in some ways, reduce the strains which inevitably accompany any process

of initiation. We have no doubt that the reward which awaits the inquisitive reader will be an inspiring cultural and literary experience.

John Picchione, York University
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Introduction

Twentieth-century art in its various manifestations, from painting to architecture, from music to literature, is dominated by a persistent restlessness. This restlessness concerns not only the meanings of its production, but also the nature of the various arts themselves. The characteristically self-reflexive quality of our century encouraged the arts to pose difficult questions for themselves, and this in turn has led to a total re-evaluation of their function as well as the exploration of new and unforeseen paths. The result has been a break with traditional canons that is without historical precedent. Poetry has played an especially important role in this undertaking of innovation and renewal.

Italian poetry, with its diverse directions, movements, currents, and "isms," presents a particularly lively panorama in our twentieth-century landscape. It is a panorama full of surprises, since the solutions of artistic problems which have arisen have been unexpected and extraordinary. This is not to say, however, that a foray into the territory of twentieth-century Italian poetry is without obstacles and perils. Such difficulties become even more obvious when undertaking the kind of literary historical survey that customarily precedes the texts of an anthology. Objectivity is problematical at best, but it is necessary to strive for some sense of balance, if only for pedagogical reasons. We have tried to achieve such a balance.

Beginnings are always difficult to identify. This is especially true for twentieth-century poetry. However, putting aside possible distant influences, the last decades of the nineteenth century provided the foundation for the poetic language of the new century. The last two decades of the nineteenth century, a period referred to as *fin de siècle*, witnessed profound changes in the arts which led directly to the upheavals of the twentieth century. The movement which dominated the *fin de siècle* was Symbolism, a reaction against realism and an exaltation of the mysteri-

ous and metaphysical. Rationalistic conceptions of the world were also challenged elsewhere as Positivism, a philosophical movement headed by Auguste Comte, entered a crisis from which it would never fully recover. The collapse of Positivism had a direct effect on the arts. The Positivist belief in knowledge based on empirical evidence and factuality had greatly influenced the emergence of the literary movement called Naturalism (*Verismo* in Italy). Naturalism carried with it the same scientific determinism, with its social and ethical implications, as Positivism. There was a conviction that reality was accessible through rational observation. This led Naturalist writers to claim objectivity in their externalized representations of social conflict. They believed that the scientific method used in the natural and applied sciences was equally valid in the study of the individual and society at large. Positivism crumbled in the face of the new philosophies presented by such thinkers as Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche. To the impersonality of universal natural laws, to the tyranny of reason and scientific mathematical knowledge, they responded with individualism, intuition, and the "irrational" components of the psyche.

The French Symbolist poets Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud began to explore inner sensations and emotions in a highly musical, rhythmic poetry which derived from the recurrent use of the phonetic and sensual resources offered by language. The principles of a realistic, mimetic art were totally refuted by the Symbolists. They searched for the unusual in the realm of the senses, deep evocations of the psyche, and mysterious revelations hidden behind the ordinary physical appearance of things. Similar transformations were also occurring at that time in painting. The works of Gauguin, Nabis, Segantini, Previati, and Seurat depict the physical world with some naturalistic qualities, but these works of art are charged with emotional and psychological resonances. They were painted more according to the subjective mood they evoked than the perception of the physical eye.

Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele D'Annunzio, different as they were, are the two poets who travelled through the Symbolist world and brought Italian poetry into the twentieth century. Straddling the two centuries, Pascoli and D'Annunzio defined the basic paths and directions that would influence Italian poetry for many years to come. Their poetry, taken either as models to be emulated or precedents to be overcome, became a constant point of reference for subsequent writers.

In Pascoli, naturalistic data dissolve into a vague and indeterminate emotional evocation. He produces a spiritualization of nature which envelops objects with strong allusive and symbolic values. Unlike the poetics of Naturalism, which aimed at depicting the object according to

the canons of objectivity and verisimilitude, in his poetry Pascoli tries to discover the elusive, hidden essences behind the external reality of things. In other words, natural objects are not depicted with mimetic intent, but rather to refer us to a reality of a psychic order. Pascoli constantly projects his own sense of loss and inquietude onto the world. He gathers signs and events of the real into a prerational dimension which wraps them with a sense of mystery. The poetic of the child ("fanciullino"), which is central to Pascoli's writing, subverts the norms of reality in favour of an innocent and prelogical contact with the world. Spontaneity represents the only authentic contact with reality; it is the only form of knowledge that can go beyond rationality and science. Pascoli connects his myth of childlike innocence with the myth of a pure and idyllic countryside. Both represent the longing for a lost Eden, an uncontaminated reality to be counterposed against the cruelty, injustice, and suffering caused by a corrupted humanity.

The "I" in Pascoli's poetry is filled with anxiety, but it is an anxiety with broad implications. The crisis of reason, exacerbated by disillusionment with socialism and scientific progress, together with the increasingly evident problems produced by the industrial revolution, was translated in Pascoli's poetry into a sense of victimization and cosmic loss that included the destiny of humanity as a whole. Beyond these decisively anti-Naturalist and anti-Positivist motifs, there is a new language which separates Pascoli's experience from that of his contemporaries who were still rooted in the nineteenth-century context. Pascoli's language—subdued, middle register, reflecting the everyday—assumes the status of a poetic principle which was to reappear time and again throughout the twentieth century. However, Pascoli's language is never confined to the limits of denotation. It explores the emotive and prelogical regions through sound symbolism and evocative analogies, as well as through the use of prelinguistic and pregrammatical devices which are directly tied to the theme of childlike innocence.

D'Annunzio's poetry rises out of the same historical-cultural situation as Pascoli's, but presents very different attitudes. The flight from the rational in D'Annunzio's poetry is manifested in a disenchantment with empirical reality and the quotidian, coupled with a frenzied search for extraordinary perceptions and sensations. D'Annunzio's hedonistic vitality, his Dionysian spirit, his belief in Nietzschean superhumanity, the exaltation of Eros, and the pursuit of the sensual, all rise from a rejection of the supremacy of reason and the Positivist world model. In place of the rational separation between subject and object on which the Naturalist/Positivist model is based, D'Annunzio substitutes two things: the sensory aesthetic possession of the real, and an attempt to combine

the "I" and the external world through the search for a primitive, instinctual contact with it.

The cult of beauty, aestheticism, the desperate desire to make life into a work of art, completely overturn the artistic canons of Naturalism; it is life imitating art, not the other way around. D'Annunzio reaches the pinnacle of his decadent refinement in *Alcyone*, a collection which is well represented in this anthology. Unlike Pascoli's, D'Annunzio's language derives its power from ritual and dance; it is characterized by highly musical and sensual rhythms. It is through these refined phonetic and prosodic devices that he tries to enchant and seduce us. The search for a mythical, aestheticizing, sensual dimension to life finds a precise correspondence on the formal plane in D'Annunzio's learned and aristocratic language. He creates poetry out of word-sensations, with a suggestive musicality that transforms the real and transports us into a magical, hallucinatory world.

If Pascoli and D'Annunzio operated as individual voices, the first poetic movement of the twentieth century arose around 1905, even if its unprogrammatic nature makes "movement" a questionable term. Poets like Sergio Corazzini, Guido Gozzano, Fausto Maria Martini, Carlo Chiaves, Marino Moretti, Carlo Vallini, Nino Oxilia, and several others found themselves moving in similar directions. In 1910 the critic Giuseppe Antonio Borgese termed these writers the "Crepuscular" or "Twilight" poets, referring to their weary, melancholy tone, which recalled the tenuous light that marks the end of day. Crepuscularism is characterized by a sense of sentimental exhaustion, decay, and renunciation, emptiness and languor. Like the poetry of D'Annunzio, the work of the Twilight poets is rooted in the crisis of reason, although here it manifests itself quite differently. We witness all the sustaining myths giving way to a disillusionment with life that often translates into a sense of imminent death. Deserted streets, abandoned towns, cemeteries, hospitals, dusty and forgotten places, melancholy accordion music, ordinary objects in a state of decay, become symbols of the misery of life. In response to the splendour and vitality of D'Annunzio, the Crepuscular poets offer, with a sensitivity reminiscent of Pascoli, a sense of victimization, but victimization in a banal and unheroic world. Life and literature are irretrievably split. In contrast to the exultant Dannunzian seer-poet, they are ashamed to be poets; literature becomes a malaise that can only produce alienation from life. Poetry to the Crepusculars serves no public or social function, but is only a form of self-consolation.

The Twilight poet wanted to retrieve the simple life—the world of humble things, of little everyday pleasures (this is particularly true of

Gozzano)—but a subtle sense of self-irony continually intervened to declare that an impossibility. It is the irony of Gozzano's poetry, subverting myths and demystifying the world, which creates a detached, modern anti-hero who takes such pleasure in undercutting D'Annunzio's superhuman stance. While Gozzano's poetry is characterized by irony, the poetry of Corazzini speaks to us in a tone of desolation and internal exhaustion. These two voices, taken together, best exemplify the Crepuscular paradigm.

If Crepuscularism is a poetic tendency more than an actual movement, the sudden entrance of Futurism onto the scene marks the beginning of the first true poetic and artistic group of the twentieth century. On February 20, 1909, on the front page of the prestigious Paris newspaper *Le Figaro*, appeared Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "First Manifesto of Futurism." It was a momentous occasion. The Futurist movement, precursor of Dadaism (1916), Surrealism (1924), and the entire twentieth-century avant-garde, presented a program for the renewal not only of literature, but of art, morality, and the general social and political system. With its numerous manifestos, produced over a period of ten years, Futurism proclaimed a total rejection of the past and set about destroying every classicist and humanist conception of art. The Futurists wanted art to be analogous to the new social and technical realities. Guided by a strong desire for newness and modernity, the Futurists, with their provocative and iconoclastic fervour, produced a cultural revolution which in succeeding years would extend to painting, the plastic arts, music, architecture, and theatre.

The Futurists called museums the "cemeteries" of culture. Against every conception of museum art, Futurism rose out of the awareness that artistic codes could be broken and traditional beliefs could thus be destroyed. Under the guidance of the dynamic and explosive personality of Marinetti, the Futurists were the first to demonstrate a total understanding of the obsolescence of traditional forms and the necessity of rapidly transforming expressive modes. They believed that art was a search for new techniques and forms that would convey the transformations and developments of reality itself. It was certainly not sentimental inspiration parading under the banner of artistic autonomy. The Futurist urgency to achieve an interaction between art and life, art and society, art and the world of industrial technology, gave birth to the Futurist myth of the machine. Speed, dynamism, and movement were endowed with almost sacred qualities. The Futurists' unconnected images and *"parole in libertà"* are in fact the expressive correlatives of speedy airplanes and cars, the accelerated rhythms of factories, the rapidity of the new technological world.

The Futurists mythologized the machine: they exalted aggression, nationalism, and imperialism, and thus "aestheticized" war. These characteristics led to the later alignment of many Futurists with Fascist ideology. In spite of their anarchic and aggressive revolt against the status quo, the Futurists did not realize how their ideology and mythology would feed the power of the capitalist class. Ultimately, heedless of the rapport between art and political power, structure and superstructure, Futurism became an instrument of Fascism and the bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, the poetry of Marinetti, Paolo Buzzi, Luciano Folgore, Enrico Cavacchioli, Ardengo Soffici, and Farfa, stands as testimony to a radical new conception of art whose effects and repercussions reverberate through many of the experiences of the twentieth century, from the poetry of Ungaretti to the experimentalism of the post-World War II period. Their fracture of linear models, syntax, and traditional harmonies and their introduction of simultaneity and analogism (the latter are particularly apparent in the Soffici selections in this anthology) represent a decisive turning-point for twentieth-century art.

Two poets who participated both in Crepuscular tendencies and in the Futurist movement, even though they maintained some distance and autonomy, are Corrado Govoni and Aldo Palazzeschi. Since the reader can better come to terms with their poetry after having examined the characteristic elements of the movements in question, these poets have been placed in a separate section of the anthology. Govoni's first poetic attempts, dating back to 1903, anticipate the Crepuscular mode of writing in their prosaic and humble tone. At the same time, Govoni would allow the free play of images, practising a paratactic method that presented objects in all of their physical and existential immediacy. Govoni's drive to transcend the limits of words, by experimenting with visual elements in his poetry, helps us to understand his brief connection with the Futurist movement.

Palazzeschi's poetry, in contrast, is so anarchic, multifaceted, and subversive, it is almost impossible to talk about it in schematic terms. The grotesque humour and nonsense of his work anticipate Dada, while his oneiric qualities look forward to Surrealism. But there are also traces of Expressionism and Symbolism in Palazzeschi's poetry. Since the nature of anthologies is to discover a niche for the authors included, we will have to invent one between the two poles of Crepuscularism and Futurism. However, even this rather vague location is not without problems. Palazzeschi's poetry, with its sense of play, parody, and nihilism, avoids the grand social vision, and therefore does not risk, like that of the Futurists, being absorbed by the very power it sought to oppose. Marinetti's vitality, his faith in technology, and his projection

of cultural and social alternatives have little in common with the clown-like disengagement of Palazzeschi. The latter's use of irony and the anti-sublime might seem to align him with the Crepuscular poets, but they were never so playful.

One of the noteworthy characteristics of the period between the turn of the century and the beginning of World War I is the appearance of many literary reviews, chiefly from Florence, such as *Leonardo*, *Il Regno*, *Hermes*, *Lacerba*, and *La Voce*. Even though their approaches varied widely, these journals all proposed drastic literary and social changes. *Lacerba* (1913–1915), founded by Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici, and *La Voce* (1908–1916), directed first by Giuseppe Prezzolini, then by Giuseppe De Robertis, were particularly known for their attacks on the traditional literary establishment. Although the editors shared concerns with the Futurists, they also continued to engage in lively debates with them.

La Voce was interested not only in renewing the literary world, but also in re-evaluating ethical and spiritual matters. In an era dominated by the machine, and a growing urbanization and industrialization which led to a loss of roots, loneliness, and alienation, *La Voce* called for spiritual regeneration. It wanted to return the subjective self to the individual. For this reason the poets of *La Voce*, and those influenced by them, opposed objective realism and descriptive naturalism. In its place they proposed an expressive subjectivity. The *Vociani* were the Italian proponents of the great movement of European Expressionism. They chose to concentrate on the struggles of the inner world, the interior landscape.

In this greatly diversified poetic context belong such figures as Piero Jahier, Giovanni Boine, Clemente Rebora, Arturo Onofri, Camillo Sbarbaro, and Dino Campana. They share with the Expressionists the tendency toward the autobiographical, with all of its existential tensions, avoiding abstract or generalized visions. These writers are often grouped together under the rubric of *Frammentismo* (Fragmentism), indicating their inclination toward a poetry made up of fragments of life, fleeting moments drawn from the general flow. This fragmentation is testimony to a crisis which does not allow making any final sense of life, and thus makes rational explanatory discourse impossible. The title of Clemente Rebora's 1913 collection, *Frammenti lirici*, says it all. Unfortunately, because of space restrictions, we were not able to include examples from this book. However, we concluded that many of the stylistic and thematic concerns which characterize Rebora's work are also evident in Sbarbaro, who is well represented here.

We have placed Campana with Sbarbaro, not so much because of the

legend of the "cursed poet," whose personal crises end in madness, but in order to contrast the prosaic clarity of the latter with the emotionally turbulent lyricism of the former. If Campana's orphic leaps through intense and violent images represent a unique experience in this century, Sbarbaro's poetic motifs have been developed in succeeding generations, particularly in the work of Eugenio Montale.

In the period between the two world wars there was drastic social and political change, from a liberal democracy to a Fascist dictatorship. There were also changes in poetic directions, the chief tendency among them represented by Umberto Saba, Giuseppe Ungaretti and Eugenio Montale—the New Lyricists (*i lirici nuovi*) as Luciano Anceschi defined them. Unfortunately, our concentration on these important poets has necessitated the exclusion of Vincenzo Cardarelli and other associated poets from the anthology. Cardarelli founded the journal *La Ronda* (1919–1923) in order to oppose the programs of the Futurists, the Expressionists, and the avant-garde in general. He wanted to return to what he saw as the untroubled clarity of classical literature. *La Ronda* represented a call for order and rationality, a program of neoclassicism, a meditative and reflexive lyric based particularly on Leopardi. Like all neoclassical reactions in literary history, lacking the vitality of the innovative movements they opposed, the *La Ronda* movement was short-lived. The dominant poets of the time remained Ungaretti and Montale.

Although not exactly in the mode of Cardarelli and *La Ronda*, Saba's linguistic solutions were also neoclassical in nature. He wanted to move toward semantic concreteness—a clear and simple poetic communication. Saba resisted every form of symbolism and aestheticism, concentrating exclusively on the denotative properties of language. He wanted clarity and transparency, not the suggestive qualities of connotation. Even though Saba's poetry does not have the weight of Ungaretti and Montale, it would be wrong to mistake his studied simplicity for naïveté. Saba's choice of elementary language is based on his desire to make poetry an instrument capable of leading one to an authentic knowledge of the self. Saba wanted to reintegrate the consciousness of the individual with him or herself, bringing back the fundamental relationships with nature and the community of humankind. He attempted simultaneously to produce a clarity of form and of interior consciousness. The autobiographical aspects of Saba's poetry are not just echoes of Petrarch and Leopardi; they are enriched by the world opened by Freudian psychology. Saba is a distinctly twentieth-century poet.

Giuseppe Ungaretti's poetry is based on a diary of interior life and on a spare, essential use of language. However, Ungaretti's poetry represents a radical departure from traditional forms, one of the most daring

and revolutionary of the first half of the twentieth century. He pushes fragmentation to its ultimate point and, at the same time, realigns himself with the major European avant-garde movements. His poetry is reduced to the most scant verbal elements. Isolated words, interspersed in the poetic text with substantial white spaces, create unexpected resonances and semantic density. Ungaretti's poetry is a combination of correspondences, allusions, and symbolic suggestiveness. His evocative language, often analogical and synaesthetic, reflects an attempt to regain lost innocence, absolute purity. It manifests the desire to retrieve the roots of being, a primitive and uncontaminated essence. Ungaretti's return to origins is his bid to overcome *angst*, the threats of the void and non-being. It represents a human response to the fragility of life. At the various stages of his career, even when he returned to more traditional verse, Ungaretti's production, with all its existential restlessness, marks the beginning of a new period in Italian poetry. He established a new poetic language which would become the foundation of the Hermetic movement.

Unlike Ungaretti, who made radical formal innovations early in his career, Eugenio Montale started out staying close to traditional models. In adhering to his anti-lyrical and anti-rhetorical principles, he became part of the poetic line which extended from Pascoli through the Crepuscular poets (Gozzano in particular), and later through the poetry of Rebora and Sbarbaro. In spite of the fact that he de-emphasized formal invention, Montale was truly modern; his work has managed to embody, like no other poet of his generation, the sense of menacing crisis which characterizes our century. In its stoic rejection of all consolation, Montale's poetry offers no glimmer of hope, or even the possibility of discovering the truth. Instead, he offers only the clear and lucid knowledge of life's negativity. Objectified in an arid, petrified landscape, in minor occurrences, fragments of memory, and brutal historical events, Montale's world-view is marked by an existential defeat which implies the dissolution of all ideological or transcendental foundations. Epistemological and metaphysical limits drain existence of every meaning, leaving behind an absurd enigma. In its obstinate resistance to embracing any myth, Montale's poetry records the dire consequences of a historical crisis brought about by a state of profound intellectual and spiritual impotence. Montale's scepticism and relativism finally undermine the value of poetry itself, for the individual and for society as a whole.

These motifs in Montale's poetry are not confined to his early production; they characterize his work, with all of its stylistic developments, throughout his career. It is for this reason that our selections have emphasized the work which came after *La bufera e altro*. Without ar-

guing that his last poems are his most important, we believe that a close look at the later work, which is more open to formal experimentation, is crucial to understanding Montale. As of the early sixties, Montale had not significantly changed his world-view. But at the moment of the explosive entry of the Italian *neoavanguardia*, Montale's absurdist vision of everyday life, coupled with his drastically new style—diaristic, parodic, sometimes epigrammatic, other times narrative—had various affinities with the revolutionary new literary developments.

The Hermetic movement in the thirties rose out of the influence of Ungaretti and the French Symbolists, especially Mallarmé and Valéry. Echoes of Hermeticism continued on into the period after World War II. Florence was the movement's centre of operations and that city produced the journals *Il Frontespizio* (1929–1940) and *Campo di Marte* (1938–1939) to display and promote the new poetics. Later, *Corrente*, published in Milan, was also to have major significance. Hermeticism opposed every form of logical discourse or description. The Hermetic poets believed that language was pure intuition, made up of sudden illuminations and revelations of spirit and truth. The word was not an instrument of communication, but assumed an ontological function that sought for an "absence," an absolute, which was capable of regaining the lost sense of the world. In its inclination toward a transcendental reality, Hermeticism reveals the religious and metaphysical underpinnings which differentiate it from the social-historical tradition. Closed and abstract, Hermetic language privileges ellipsis, fractured syntax, and obscure and allusive analogies.

In spite of these general tendencies, it is important to recognize that there was a great deal of variety of poetic approach within the Hermetic movement. On the one hand, the Catholic wing was represented by poets like Carlo Betocchi, Piero Bigongiari, and Mario Luzi. With these poets the religious thrust dominated; they saw poetry as a point of contact with meta-historical realities. The secular wing, with poets like Alfonso Gatto and Vittorio Sereni, remained open to addressing historical events and civil matters. The placement of Salvatore Quasimodo among the Hermetics is problematical. After World War II, he openly rejected Hermetic tendencies and embraced a realistic vein, with great popular success. Nonetheless, the presence of certain expressive motifs throughout his career makes it clear that he is part of the Hermetic movement. Along with Quasimodo, we have added Luzi and Sereni, the former the central figure of the Florentine group, the latter the central figure in the extension of Hermeticism into Lombardy. Thus, the selection presented in this anthology should give the reader a sense of the Hermetic canon, from its earliest moments through the postwar period.

There are other poets who could be placed in the Hermetic context: Alessandro Parronchi, Sergio Solmi, Libero De Libero, and Leonardo Sinisgalli. Even the poetry of Sandro Penna, Attilio Bertolucci, and Giorgio Caproni rose out of the Hermetic movement. These poets have followed a less flamboyant poetical practice, retaining the Hermetic lyrical compression, but moving toward linearity and simple poetic discourse, with Saba as the prime literary antecedent. The poetic line which emerged as a reaction to Hermeticism was made up of poets who chose Realism as the way to readdress historical-social issues. These were poets who drew their strength from Marxist ideology, from Antonio Gramsci in particular, even though they were in constant conflict with the Communist party itself.

Lavorare stanca by Cesare Pavese is without doubt the source and inspiration of the Realist line of ideologically oriented poetry. In fact, this anti-lyrical narrative poetry is the precursor of the redevelopment of Realism which led to the founding of the journal *Officina* (1955–1959). Pier Paolo Pasolini, Roberto Roversi, Francesco Leonetti, and Franco Fortini played major roles in the life of this journal, but Pasolini was its reigning spirit. His flamboyant ideological nonconformity and his vigorous engagement in political and social debate, often embracing self-contradicting positions, made him one of the dominant literary personalities of the postwar period. If we can, however, put aside Pasolini's personality, we can see that his poetic style is not as innovative as one might expect. While he intended to represent a common language, reflecting the language of people by incorporating elements of slang and dialect, he was very much tied to older, even archaic, lyrical traditions, not to speak of the influence on his work by the linguistic trends of *neorealismo*. Pasolini had a talent for combining the personal and the political, but his autobiographical confessionalism often echoes the lamenting strains of the Crepuscular poets, without any of their counterbalancing irony.

Franco Fortini's poetry is also based on Marxist ideology; he sees poetry as the testimony of history. The poetics of neorealism, coupled with his reading of Lukács, were a strong influence on Fortini's vision of poetry as an ethical and political statement. However, like Pasolini, Fortini rejected the formal experimentation of the historical avant-garde movements as well as the changes brought about in the sixties by the new avant-garde, and maintained an attachment to traditional forms through much of his career. Elio Pagliarani presents a more problematical case when it comes to placing him in a group or movement. Pagliarani was one of the five poets included in *I Novissimi*, the anthology which began the Italian neo-avant-garde. His linguistic pluralism and

syntactical fractures show a clear predisposition toward open forms and experimentation. However, from the beginning of his career Pagliarani had a tendency toward the epic narrative voice, which often embraces political and ideological content in a straightforward way. This is an indication of his connection to the canons of Realism, and for this reason we have placed him in the Realist group.

Several poets, including Luciano Erba, Nelo Risi, and Giovanni Giudici, define a subgroup that is different from the ideologically oriented realists. They all believed that poetry should be an instrument of social conscience and revolution; in this way, they are similar to the Realists. However, in their emphasis on irony, anti-eloquence, and even the demystification of the role of the poet and poetry itself, they recall the Crepuscular poets. This subgroup of poets writes with a subdued, prosaic language, but it is spiked with strong doses of irony that often becomes sarcasm or biting satire directed at the stupidities and hypocrisies of contemporary life.

The publication of *I Novissimi* in 1961, including the work of Elio Pagliarani, Edoardo Sanguineti, Nanni Balestrini, Antonio Porta, Alfredo Giuliani, and edited by the latter, marks a turning-point in Italian literary history. This provocative and revolutionary anthology was to open the way to the formation of Gruppo 63, a movement which is synonymous with the new Italian avant-garde. In general terms the five poets share a conception of poetry as negation of the normal linguistic code, although Pagliarani fits in to a much lesser degree, as we have seen. That code was rejected because of its reification and commercialization, and because of the conservative ideological implications it conveyed. The alternative language was to be that of disorder, ambiguity, and estrangement. These poets thought that the deliberate construction of a language in crisis was the only way to engender a crisis in the normal representation of reality. At the same time, this crisis would force the reader to establish a more active and involved rapport with the text. In Giuliani's words, the reader would be treated "come un adulto." In fact, the experimental texts of the *Novissimi* are so contrary to the reader's understanding of what constitutes a poem, they often leave the reader shocked and frustrated.

The almost blasphemous disorder of the *Novissimi*—their programmatic laceration and fragmentation of language on the syntactical, lexical, and prosodic levels—was a linguistic-ideological confrontation with closed and anti-critical contemporary language. The latter had become, the *Novissimi* declared, a degraded object too easily consumed and rigid with stereotypes. Reading the terroristic poetic texts of Porta, Balestrini, Sanguineti, and Giuliani, the reader is forced to become a

fellow explorer of language and to realize that the "neo-content" of this poetry is to be found particularly in its formal structures. Without question, this entails a totally new understanding of linguistic and poetic experience. In its disorienting effects, *l'aspro stil novo* of the *Novissimi* refused to court the reader with seductive lyricism. The new style fractured linear discourse, violating not only the interpretative codes but previous conceptions of reality itself.

The reading of Pound, and, to a much lesser extent, of Eliot, was an important factor in the rise of the new avant-garde. Even more important, however, was its vital, active interest in the literary and artistic historical avant-garde movements, phenomenology, and the Frankfurt School. Psychoanalysis, dodecaphonic music, and experimental painting also played important roles in creating this new Italian cultural landscape. It was an opening of windows; no other literary movement in the postwar period has done as much to deprovincialize the Italian scene as the *Novissimi*. Their rebellion constitutes a decisive turning-point not only for poetry but for Italian literature at large. It would be a mistake, however, to restrict our attention to the earliest production of the *Novissimi*. Porta and Sanguineti, in particular, continued to evolve, and have made sudden shifts and turns throughout their careers. In order for the reader to participate in their later developments, we have chosen texts ranging in date of composition from the fifties through the eighties.

Two women poets were deeply involved in the formation of the new Italian avant-garde: Amelia Rosselli and Giulia Niccolai. Rosselli, in fact, was an active participant in the formation of Gruppo 63. Amelia Rosselli's poetry, in its frequent collisions between the literary and the personal, the public and the private, explores the hidden zones of the psyche. There is a strong emotive force in her voyages into the unconscious, and, at the same time, there is an ever-present fragmentation that blocks the possibility of linear discourse. The results are powerful and disconcerting. In contrast, Giulia Niccolai is a proponent of the poetry of nonsense, aligning herself with other poets like Milli Graffi and Toti Scialoja. There is a playful attitude in confronting the signifier in Niccolai's texts. It is a poetry full of puns, etymological games, and multilingual pastiches that conveys a world at once ironic, absurd, and joyously whimsical. Like the *Novissimi*, Niccolai explores the possibilities of liberating language from its fossilized accretions and linguistic stereotypes.

The iconoclastic and revolutionary thrust created by the experimental fervour of the *Novissimi* created a poetic climate that extended far beyond the sixties. In recent years there has been a revival of interest in the work of the sixties avant-garde, so its influence is seen especially in the writing of a number of the youngest contemporary poets. A much

older poet who was affected in many ways by the experimentation of the sixties generation is Andrea Zanzotto. Zanzotto was inspired to undertake a return to origins in order to rediscover an authentic subject, a union of signification and being, existence and essence. In the Heideggerian manner, his poetry listens to language, seeks access to being through language. This methodology is similar to the psycho-linguistic theories of Jacques Lacan, according to whom the world of language creates the world of things. The unconscious reveals that the individual is inhabited and transformed by the signifier. In Zanzotto we witness the actual use of the signifier to liberate repressed material. It is the signifier that establishes the point of contact between poetic language and the unconscious. The signified is always removed in Zanzotto's poetry. Therefore absence, and the signifier as an opaque rhetoric of the unconscious, can only convey a distortion of sense, a lie. Suspended between absence and presence, emptiness and desire for fullness, Zanzotto's poetry moves through slippage, the uncontrollable multiplication of signifiers, always more fleeting and ungraspable, until one arrives at a state of existential and linguistic vertigo.

Another poet who played an important role in the new experimentation of the sixties was Edoardo Cacciatore. As a loner, Cacciatore has never subscribed to a group or followed a particular movement. He has been, from his earliest work, an autonomous force. His poetry is a montage of linguistic fragments, drawn from widely varied sources, and it offers in its hallucinatory version of reality a linguistic Babel. Provocative and subtly ironic, Cacciatore's poetry, with its philosophical twists and turns, presents a hermeneutics of reality. But the decoding of the real, or, more precisely, of its edges and fragments, finds its origins in the urgings of the signifiers. In fact, the homophonic whirlpools, and most of all the obsessive alliterative games, create a poetry with a baroque air that finds in the absurdity and nonsense of the world its only possible meaning.

The poets we have grouped under the rubric of visual poetry represent an important part of the experimentation which took place in the sixties and seventies. Although their methodologies vary widely, they share the desire to transcend the semantic confines of the verbal sign, transforming it through iconographic and figurative compositions of various kinds. Our selection includes distinguished practitioners in some of the most representative areas of visual experimentation: 1) concrete poetry, which includes poets who draw on the experiences of the fifties (the Noigandres group, in particular) and who continue to explore the material and graphic possibilities of the linguistic sign; 2) symbiotic writing, in which various elements (phonetic, graphic, spatial,

figurative, chromatic) interact, conditioning and modifying their ordinary meanings; 3) technological poetry, which is represented by the poets of Gruppo 70, who explored the images of technology and the mass media (advertising flyers, commercial photographs, comic strips, photo romances, and so on). Above all, technological poetry, and visual poetry in general attempt to exorcise and demystify the language and materials of mass communication. Normal iconographic and linguistic relationships are violated, distorted, and decontextualized. This method results in political, ideological, and semiological guerilla warfare, an act of sabotage intended to destroy the codes of mass communication. The language of consumption is thereby unmasked, scrutinized, and liberated from its captivity.

As for the new generation of poets, we preferred to group them under a single heading: "The poets of the recent generation." We have made this decision because their poetry is still undergoing profound changes and developments. Rigid classifications seemed premature and inappropriate for poets who, in many cases, are hardly in their early thirties. Nonetheless, our selection amply portrays the various tendencies which have dominated the last two decades. The neo-symbolist group, represented by poets who are associated with the anthology *La parola innamorata* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), reveals a rejection of ideology and political engagement which exemplifies the general poetic landscape of the seventies. Often in search of an orphic language and a primeval expression of existence, this poetry inevitably opens itself to the dimensions of myth and mysticism. Giuseppe Conte's poetry, in particular, is a perfect illustration of this tendency. The neo-crepuscular and the psychoanalytic perspectives are well represented by Maurizio Cucchi and Cesare Viviani respectively. Space has also been given to the poetic discourse of the feminist movement, which was quite forceful in the seventies. The end of the eighties pointed unequivocally toward the return of an avant-garde movement. Undoubtedly the poetry of young poets such as Biagio Cepollaro, Gabriele Frasca, and Tommaso Ottonieri expresses the urgency of a critical and socially corrosive mode of writing.

In short, this last section of the anthology illustrates both the general neo-conservatism of the seventies and early eighties and the shift toward innovation which characterizes the poetry of these last few years. Accordingly, the latter part of this section might also serve as a harbinger of things to come.

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The Precursors

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GIOVANNI PASCOLI

The last one hundred years of Italian lyric poetry exemplify Viktor Shklovski's observation on "schools." Apparently antithetical trends may long coexist, until one of them, by "manifesto," rises to predominance—only to cede its short-lived hegemony to its successor, which usually claims frontal opposition to it but in fact dialectically presupposes and continues it. Thus, currents as diverse as Positivism and Decadentism, the Voce and the Ronda groupings, the "Twilight" poets and the Futurists, Hermeticism and neo-realism, not only coinhabit the same space-time but in retrospect appear to be independent elements of the same labyrinthine whole.

Two monumental figures, D'Annunzio and Pascoli, preface and condition contemporary poetry—neither strictly belonging to a "school" but each recapitulating and anticipating several contemporary trends.

Carducci today appears firmly rooted in the great century of Leopardi and Manzoni, while the poetry of Giovanni Pascoli (1855–1912), his successor at Bologna University, stretches far into our own time. It foreshadows trends as distant from and seemingly alien to it as the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and the now-current post-modernist verse.

Pascoli is the first Italian poet to "wring the neck" of eloquence. Some of his best-known pieces from *Poemetti* (1897) and *Canti di Castelvecchio* (1903) have been swept away by the flood of tears (G. Bàrberi Squarotti) shed over them—"La cavalla storna," for example, memorized by generations of schoolchildren. But his first thin collection, *Myricae* (1891, enriched in successive editions), remains the cornerstone of modern Italian verse.

The title of this collection (Latin for "tamarisks") hints at the "lowly shrubs" of the Fourth Eclogue, but this "last descendant of Virgil" is far from being a versifier of simple rustic scenes—as his themes too seem to suggest: a summer storm ("Temporale"), ploughing ("Arano"),

washerwomen ("Lavandare"), and so on. His quaint syntax and vocabulary, invasive onomatopoeia, dialect and Latin words, and exotic and technical terms signal complexity underlying his deceptively simple landscapes. The rare refined word choice seems a Parnassian residue or decadentistic trait; it is the search endemic to all twentieth-century poetry for a "pre-grammatical" idiom (G. Contini) apt to define the indefinite, or rather "un-define" the definite.

Pascoli's "agricultural" interest is never addressed to the "positive" spectacle of human labour in the fields; his rural tableaux irradiate a feeling of "attesa misteriosa" (G. Trombatore), an almost religious stupor. Pascoli's initial evangelical socialism, which later slid into a Christian mysticism, was compared to contemporary "rebirth" movements. The ideological shift in his world-view can be better understood and evaluated if we keep in mind the poet's early active membership in the Socialist International. During his student days at the University of Bologna Pascoli was actually arrested and briefly incarcerated for his political activism. His prison term resulted in a complete turn-about in Pascoli's views on class struggle: a mystical faith in non-violence and "humble" pacifism became the basis for his mature ideology.

G.A. Borgese recommended an impressionistic reading of Pascoli's poems: with eyes "half-shut." The same critic called *Myricae* the most heterogeneous book of Italian poetry. A pattern in Pascoli's constructions, however, can be discerned and described. A rural view is sketched out by broad brush strokes, then filtered and "un-defined" through some optical disturbance: haze, mist, fog ("tremulo" is a favoured adjective). A minimal sign of life appears, slowed at once almost to a standstill ("lento" is another star entry in Pascoli's concordance). The cadence remains "the beating of his own heart" (S. Garofalo). At last a tiny acoustic element is added to the landscape (the chirping of a bird, the rustle of leaves, a snatch of far-away singing).

That is seemingly all; but the whole composition, in Pascoli's best moments, remains miraculously suspenseful, suggestive not of something else but of itself. Even the most "allegorical-looking" texts of Pascoli, such as his best poemetti, "Il vischio" and "Digitale purpurea," suggest, rather than a meaning, an abstract horror, a visionary experience of Evil.

In the 1897 essay "Il fanciullino," Pascoli shaped this very experience into a sort of ars poetica. Within the adult, "corrupted" and made insensitive by life actually lived, there is a child whose voice of untouched innocence is identified by Pascoli with the voice of poetry. The child in us, Pascoli held, is exempt from the influences of this harsh

world; the fanciullino retains intact a capacity for wonder, an astonished sensitivity to the eternal flux of Nature's life.

The tragedy of Pascoli's life (hinted at in his moving "X agosto"), the unsolved murder of his father in 1867, fixed his poetic age at twelve—not a state of immaturity, but one of bewildered wonder before an uncomprehended world, the urge to escape, the need for refuge (soon identified with poetry). The unknown assassin ended by assuming, in the poet's psyche, the features of mankind, driven on by the eternal enigma of evil.

Leopardi was the last Italian poet to have a geocentric view (in the poetic, not cosmologic, sense) of man's habitat. Gianfranco Contini has pointed out that Pascoli's world, in turn, is firmly heliocentric, even galaxy-centred. To us the Pascolian universe appears rather as centreless: a cold immensity in which the poet sees himself as a "tiny wanderer / lost on a star among the stars."

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From MYRICAE

Fides[1]

Quando brillava il vespero vermiglio,
e il cipresso pareva oro, oro fino,
la madre disse al piccoletto figlio:
Così fatto è lassù tutto[2] un giardino.
Il bimbo dorme, e sogna i rami d'oro,
gli alberi d'oro, le foreste d'oro;
mentre il cipresso nella notte nera
scagliasi al[3] vento, piange alla bufera.

X agosto

San Lorenzo,[1] io lo so perché tanto
di stelle per l'aria tranquilla
arde e cade, perché sì gran pianto[2]
nel concavo cielo sfavilla.

Ritornava una rondine al tetto:
l'uccisero: cadde tra spini:
ella[3] aveva nel becco un insetto:
la cena de' suoi rondinini.[4]

Ora è là, come in croce,[5] che tende
quel verme a quel cielo lontano;
e il suo nido è nell'ombra, che attende,
che pigola sempre più piano.

Anche un uomo[6] tornava al suo nido:
l'uccisero: disse: Perdono;
e restò negli aperti occhi un grido:
portava due bambole in dono ...

Ora là, nella casa romita,[7]
lo aspettano, aspettano in vano:
egli immobile, attonito, addita[8]
le bambole al cielo lontano.

E tu, Cielo, dall'alto dei mondi
sereni, infinito, immortale,
oh! d'un pianto[9] di stelle lo inondi
quest'atomo opaco del Male![10]

L'assiuolo[1]

Dov'era la luna? ché il cielo
notava in un'alba di perla,[2]
ed ergersi[3] il mandorlo e il melo
parevano a meglio vederla.
Venivano soffi[4] di lampi
da un nero di nubi[5] laggiù;
veniva una voce dai campi:
chiù[6] ...

Le stelle lucevano rare[7]
tra mezzo alla[8] nebbia di latte:
sentivo il cullare[9] del mare,
sentivo un fru fru[10] tra le fratte;[11]
sentivo nel cuore un sussulto,
com'eco d'un grido che fu.[12]
Sonava lontano il singulto:[13]
chiù ...

Su tutte le lucide vette
tremava un sospiro di vento;
squassavano le cavallette[14]
finissimi sistri[15] d'argento
(tintinni[16] a invisibili porte
che forse non s'aprono più? ...);
e c'era quel pianto di morte[17] ...
chiù ...

Temporale[1]

Un bubbolio[2] lontano ...

Rosseggia l'orizzonte,
come affocato,[3] a mare;[4]

nero di pece, a monte,
stracci di nubi[5] chiare:
tra il nero un casolare:[6]
un'ala di gabbiano.

Arano[1]

Al campo,[2] dove roggio[3] nel filare[4]
qualche pampano[5] brilla, e dalle fratte[6]
sembra la nebbia mattinal[7] fumare,

arano: a lente[8] grida, uno le lente
vacche[9] spinge; altri semina; un ribatte
le porche[10] con sua marra[11] pazïente;

ché[12] il passero saputo[13] in cor[14] già gode,
e il tutto spia dai rami irti del moro;[15]
e il pettirosso: nelle siepi s'ode[16]
il suo sottil tintinno[17] come d'oro.

Novembre

Gemmea[1] l'aria, il sole così chiaro
che tu ricerchi[2] gli albicocchi in fiore,
e del prunalbo[3] l'odorino amaro
senti nel cuore ...

Ma secco è il pruno,[4] e le stecchite[5] piante
di nere trame[6] segnano il sereno,[7]
e vuoto il cielo, e cavo al piè sonante[8]
sembra il terreno.

Silenzio, intorno: solo, alle ventate,[9]
odi lontano, da giardini ed orti,
di foglie un cader[10] fragile. È l'estate,
fredda, dei morti.

27 Giovanni Pascoli

From PRIMI POEMETTI

Il vischio[1]

I

Non li ricordi più, dunque, i mattini
meravigliosi? Nuvole a' nostri occhi,
rosee di peschi,[2] bianche di susini,[3]

parvero: un'aria pendula di fiocchi,[4]
o bianchi o rosa, o l'uno e l'altro: meli,
floridi peri, gracili,[5] albicocchi.

Tale quell'orto ci apparì tra[6] i veli
del nostro pianto,[7] e tenne[8] in sé riflessa
per giorni un'improvvisa[9] alba dei cieli.

Era, sai, la speranza e la promessa,
quella; ma l'ape da' suoi bugni[10] uscita
pasceva[11] già l'illusïone; ond'essa[12]

fa, come io faccio, il miele di sua vita.

II

Una nube,[13] una pioggia ... a poco a poco
tornò l'inverno; e noi sentimmo, chiusi
per lunghi giorni, brontolare[14] il fuoco.

Sparvero[15] i bianchi e rossi alberi, infusi[16]
dentro il nebbione; e per il cielo smorto[17]
era un assiduo sibilo di fusi;[18]

e piovve e piovve. Il sole (onde mai sorto?)[19]
brillò di nuovo al suon delle campane:
tutto era verde, verde era quell'orto.

Dove le branche pari[20] a filigrane?
Tutti i petali a terra. E su[21] l'aurora
noi calpestammo le memorie vane

ognuna con la sua lagrima ancora.

III

Ricordi? Io dissi: «O anima sorella,[22]
vivono! E tu saprai[23] che per la vita
si getta qualche cosa anche più bella

della vita: la sua lieve fiorita[24]
d'ali. La pianta che a' suoi rami vede
i mille pomi sizïenti,[25] addita

per terra i fiori che all'oblìo[26] già diede ...
Non però questa (io m'interruppi),[27] questa[28]
che non ha frutti ai rami e fiori al piede».

Stava[29] senza timore e senza festa,
e senza inverni e senza primavere,
quella; cui non avrebbe la tempesta

tolto[30] che[31] foglie, nate per cadere.

IV

Albero ignoto! (io dissi: non ricordi?)
albero strano, che nel tuo fogliame
mostri due verdi e un gialleggiar[32] discordi;

albero tristo,[33] ch'hai diverse rame,[34]
foglie diverse, ottuse[35] queste, acute[36]
quelle, e non so che rei glomi[37] e che trame;[38]

albero infermo della tua salute,
albero che non hai gemme fiorite,[39]
albero che non vedi ali[40] cadute;

albero morto, che non curi[41] il mite
soffio[42] che reca[43] il polline, né il fischio
del nembo[44] che flagella aspro[45] la vite ...

ah! sono in te le radiche[46] del vischio!