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'Anzichè allargare, dilaterai!'

Allegory and Mimesis from Dante's *Comedy* to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La Divina Mimesis*

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ABSTRACT: Early in his life Pasolini showed interest in Dante: in a letter sent to Luciano Serra in 1945, he declared that 'la questione di Dante è importantissima.' He later reaffirmed his interest in Dante in two attempts to rewrite the *Commedia: La Mortaccia* and *La Divina Mimesis*. *La Mortaccia* is an unfinished text from 1959 written as free indirect speech in Roman dialect, in which the author tells the story of a prostitute. Walking at night along the Via Tiburtina, she meets three 'canacci lupi', which she tries in vain to escape. Eventually Dante comes to her rescue and takes her to the Rebibbia jail. But by 1963, Pasolini had already left behind the project of *La Mortaccia* and its linguistic perspective, dependent on the legacy of the fifties. In that year he mentioned *La Divina Mimesis* for the first time. In the seventh section of *Poesia in forma di rosa* ('Progetto di opere future'), it is described as 'opera, se mai ve ne fu, da farsi':

‘ANZICHÈ ALLARGARE, DILATERAI!’

Allegory and Mimesis from Dante’s *Comedy* to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La Divina Mimesis*

Davide Luglio

Early in his life Pasolini showed interest in Dante: in a letter sent to Luciano Serra in 1945, he declared that ‘la questione di Dante è importantissima’.¹ He later reaffirmed his interest in Dante in two attempts to rewrite the *Commedia*: *La Mortaccia* and *La Divina Mimesis*. *La Mortaccia* is an unfinished text from 1959 written as free indirect speech in Roman dialect, in which the author tells the story of a prostitute. Walking at night along the Via Tiburtina, she meets three ‘canacci lupi’, which she tries in vain to escape. Eventually Dante comes to her rescue and takes her to the Rebibbia jail. But by 1963, Pasolini had already left behind the project of *La Mortaccia* and its linguistic perspective, dependent on the legacy of the fifties. In that year he mentioned *La Divina Mimesis* for the first time. In the seventh section of *Poesia in forma di rosa* (‘Progetto di opere future’), it is described as ‘opera, se mai ve ne fu, da farsi’:

Ah, non stare più in piedi nel sapore di sale

Del mondo altrui (piccolo-borghese, letterario)
Col bicchiere di whisky in mano e il viso di merda,
– ché mi dispiacerebbe solo non rappresentarlo

così com’è – prima che per me uomo si perda –
nella ‘*Divina Mimesis*’, opera, se mai ve ne fu,
da farsi [...].²

In the new project, there is no sign of the linguistic contamination to which the poet referred three years earlier in the *Mortaccia*. Meanwhile his project had taken on a new focus: the representation of the ‘mondo [...] piccolo-borghese, letterario’ and of the ‘Inferno dell’età / neocapitalistica, per nuovi tipi / di peccati [...] a integrazione degli antichi’.³ In 1963 Pasolini completed the first and the second canto, while most of the other fragments date from 1965. The evolution of this work has

been carefully described by Walter Siti in his edition of Pasolini's complete works. Here I will only refer to the letter to Livio Garzanti in 1967, where Pasolini writes about a 'rifacimento dell'Inferno, che credo non compirò, ma che raccoglierò come "editore", quasi si trattasse di un testo frammentario ritrovato, e completato con appunti e con progetti schematici'. 'Probabilmente', he adds, 'resterà ancora un po' nel cassetto'.⁴ The finished version of *La Divina Mimesis*, fully edited by the author but published a few days after his death, does not significantly differ from the project described in the letter. However, the rewriting of Dante's work is not complete and the editorial project itself is described in the paratext. On the other hand, an iconographic section not mentioned in the letter was added.

Critics have mostly focused on the work's unfinished (also defined as 'amorfo') condition as a sign of the poetic crisis which Pasolini experienced at the end of his life.⁵ Scholarly interpretations of *La Divina Mimesis* can be divided into three main groups: the first strain can be primarily attributed to a 1979 essay by Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, four years after the publication of *La Divina Mimesis*.⁶ Bàrberi Squarotti attributes Pasolini's difficulty in completing his rewriting of the *Divine Comedy* to the author's ideology. The work's intermittent irony and its unfinished state are good indicators of the impossibility of recreating Dante's achievement, in particular the Dantean ideology. Lacking real ideology – in other words, real faith – the traveller and his guide can do nothing but be witnesses 'dello stato diviso dell'anima e del mondo, non superare tale divisione, neppure al termine del viaggio'.⁷ Deprived of real faith and an 'ideologia di ferro' – to use the traveller's term – the quest to find divine judgement and perfect knowledge appears doomed to failure and incompleteness. Bàrberi Squarotti underscores the traveller's uncertain and indecisive character, although he forgets that the lack of an 'iron ideology' is viewed by the character not as a limit but as the defining characteristic of his voyage.

The second strain of interpretation stresses the work's linguistic dimensions. The period when Pasolini conceives of the project of *La Divina Mimesis* corresponds, according to his repeated declarations, to a time of dramatic change in the Italian linguistic context. The distinction between the language of the educated and the language of the people dissolves into the standard Italian spoken by the middle class from northern Italy. Pasolini names this language the 'lingua dell'odio'.⁸ Lacking the possibility of a mimesis of the multiple languages of society, the

author would only be left with ‘un discorso libero indiretto (piccolo-) borghese che Pasolini, pure tentando *Teorema* nel 1968, non sente suo’.⁹ However, this statement conflicts with Pasolini’s intention to change completely ‘il carattere stilistico e l’impianto strutturale dell’opera, rispetto a quel primo infelice embrione’ represented by the *Mortaccia*.¹⁰

Finally, the third type of interpretation locates *La Divina Mimesis* in the theoretical context of Pasolini’s final conception of poetry. Here critics stress in particular the difference between the poet’s intentions and the final result: on the one hand, the *Divine Comedy*, an ‘opera-mondo’ which, by definition, manages to fully express the totality of reality and its multiple and contradictory features; on the other, the Pasolinian project, doomed to remain mere imitation (or almost), unable to fulfil its goals. Through its incompleteness, its structural weakness, and its inability to reach a conclusion, the work would seem to exhibit its failure as a constitutive element, an act of expression that, for Pasolini, mirrors the crisis and profound transformation undergone by Italian society at the beginning of the 1960s.

These three interpretative strains share the conviction that, in comparison with its model, Pasolini’s project ends in failure. It is a failure in at least three senses: on the level of its ideology (not as strong as Dante’s), on the level of reality (because of the linguistic standardization of Italian society), and on the level of aesthetics (even though the author pretends that his failure possesses an aesthetic value). This paper would like to question this conclusion: by redefining the object of mimesis and its conditions – to which the title of my essay enigmatically refers – I will try to understand the reason why the author decided to print his work in a form that at first sight appears ill-defined and fragmentary.

In the text entitled ‘Lo ripeto: io sono in piena ricerca’, published at the beginning of 1965 in *Il Giorno*, Pasolini evokes the project of *La Divina Mimesis* when he summarizes his well-known theory concerning the birth of a new national language. This language was produced by the growth of a dominant leading class, ‘il cui reale potere economico le consente realmente, per la prima volta nella storia italiana, di porsi come egemonica anche in ambito linguistico’.¹¹ The emergence of the new class marks the advent of a new ‘*spirito* (a sostituzione dunque di quello letterario umanistico) [che] investe dal profondo la nostra lingua. È lo spirito della nuova classe egemonica tecnocratica: lo spirito tecnico’.¹² This is a very famous concept, often considered the terminus of Pasolini’s analysis. In fact, for the writer it was simply a statement

of fact, a mere premise. In other words, this theory simply mirrors the reality that all of us face and that an ‘umanista elegiaco’ – as Pasolini defines himself – has no choice but to dislike. Given this premise, Pasolini explains that ‘il futuro mi si configura come una lotta tra “comunicatività” ed “espressività”’: ma come? In che termini? Con che mezzi? È questa la serie di problemi che dobbiamo affrontare’.¹³

According to my analysis, this struggle between communication and expression corresponds entirely – although *in nuce* – to Pasolini’s view of poetry in the last years of his life. It is this theoretical setting, however, that Pasolini describes as ‘in piena ricerca’, adding two very important remarks about *La Divina Mimesis*. On the one hand, he declares that:

non rinnego affatto il mio lavoro degli anni Cinquanta [...] Sento tuttavia superata, oggi, quell’operazione di scavo in materiali sublinguistici che è stata poi l’operazione principe della letteratura impegnata. Occorrono evidentemente altri strumenti conoscitivi: ma quali?¹⁴

On the other hand, he also answers his own question when he writes:

Ho in mente un *remake* dell’*Inferno* dantesco. Si tratta di un’opera pamphlettistica e quindi ironica in più direzioni: e, siccome del Paradiso in costruzione, esistono due progetti, uno marxista e uno neocapitalistico, pensavo di esporre il progetto neocapitalistico in una lingua italiana futura: puramente comunicativa, col suo principio unificatore e omologatore tecnologico.¹⁵

As is well known, Pasolini eventually gave up his project of describing the neo-capitalist paradise through the use of the Italian language of the future. Nevertheless, this renunciation does not diminish the irony of a work conceived as a pamphlet. The 1965 article also succeeds in sweeping away an element often stressed by critics, that is, Pasolini’s inability to imitate Dante’s peculiar form of realism, which Pasolini defines as the ‘*mimesis* negli strati bassi della lingua, nelle sottolingue dialettali o dialettizzate, o parlate da categorie speciali minute della nazione’.¹⁶ In fact, this is not the kind of mimesis to which the title of Pasolini’s work refers. On the contrary, as we will see shortly, the language analysed and employed by Pasolini in his work is standard Italian, which had been adopted as a national vernacular in the preceding years.

La Divina Mimesis recounts the story of a poet who has lost his inspiration and seeks a path by which he can reconnect himself to

poetry. Reality is the source of inspiration continually acknowledged by Pasolini. In a 1966 interview, he declares that ‘La mia filosofia, o il mio modo di vivere non mi sembra altro, poi, che un allucinato, infantile e pragmatico amore per la realtà’.¹⁷ Even more explicitly, at the end of a 1960 essay included in *Passione e ideologia*, he declares that his poetry is comprised of his feeling for things, or, in other words, reality felt and understood in its entire complexity. The feeling for things, he writes, ‘è amore fisico e sperimentale per i fenomeni del mondo, e amore intellettuale per il loro spirito, la storia: che ci farà sempre essere “col sentimento al punto in cui il mondo si rinnova”’.¹⁸ The first canto of *La Divina Mimesis* is primarily dedicated to a description of the character losing his love and deep feeling for the world and for things. The canto’s opening is very explicit in this sense, although written in the ambiguous and enigmatic style evident in the rest of his work:

Intorno ai quarant’anni, mi accorsi di trovarmi in un momento molto oscuro della mia vita. Qualunque cosa facessi, nella ‘Selva’ della realtà del 1963, anno in cui ero giunto, assurdamente impreparato a quell’esclusione dalla vita degli altri che è la ripetizione della propria, c’era un senso di oscurità. Non direi di nausea, o di angoscia: anzi, in quella oscurità, per dire il vero, c’era qualcosa di terribilmente luminoso: la luce della vecchiaia verità, se vogliamo, quella davanti a cui non c’è più niente da dire.¹⁹

The sense of obscurity felt by the poet results from his exclusion from the world due to its repetitiveness and to his faithfulness to a ‘light’ that has become old and thus is no longer a source of inspiration. This thesis is not new in Pasolini’s poetry; on the contrary, the canto’s opening finds its source of inspiration – through literal quotation – in the collection of poems *La religione del mio tempo* published by Pasolini in 1961. Indeed, this work is characterized by the poet’s uneasiness in dealing with the new form of reality. As we read in the section *Poesie incivili*:

E non so più, ora, quale sia
il problema. L’angoscia non è più
segno di vittoria: il mondo vola
verso sue nuove gioventù,
ogni strada è finita, anche la mia.
Come ogni vecchio, io lo nego: sola
consolazione per chi, se trema, muore.
Negando il mondo, nego le sue nuove ère,
o provo per esse furia indiscriminata,
vedendo contaminata

ognuna d'esse da un'uguale miseria.
 Tu splendi sopra un sogno,
 buio sole: chi vuole non sapere,
 vuole sognare
²⁰

Echoing this poem's last line, the opening of the first canto of *La Divina Mimesis* shows the path traversed by the poet in order to leave the distressing *Selva* in which he finds himself, as though in a 'sogno fuori dalla ragione', until he reaches the foot of a *Colle* at the end of a horrible *Valle* – 'che mi aveva talmente riempito il cuore di terrore per la vita e per la poesia':

Come un naufrago, che esce dal mare, e si aggrappa a una terra sconosciuta, mi voltavo indietro, verso tutto quel buio, devastato, informe: la fatalità del proprio essere, dei propri caratteri natali, la paura di cambiare, il timore del mondo.²¹

Meeting the three beasts from the *Comedy* represented here as the illusions, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies of the poet's soul, he feels as if he were 'respinto indietro dalla tentazione di ritornarmene là dove non si richiede, in fondo, che di tacere'.²² While falling down the slope, 'ormai privo dell'autorità della poesia, e fatto ignorante dalle lunghe frequentazioni oscurantiste, pratiche e mistiche, ecco che mi apparve una figura, in cui dovevo ancora una volta riconoscermi, ingiallita dal silenzio'.²³ This is how he meets his double, 'il piccolo poeta civile degli anni Cinquanta', as he puts it, but also – according to the traveller's description – 'il più alto dei poeti del nostro tempo, la loro vera guida'. This is one of the most illuminating inventions of *La Divina Mimesis*, allowing us to read this work as an account of Pasolini's own poetic conversion.

Meeting his former self in a changed form corresponds to a kind of regression to a preceding stage of the self for which poetry was still relevant and vital. By taking his former self as a guide, he finds a solution that allows him to possess poetry again in a different age and world. This movement expresses his faithfulness to himself, but does not merely repeat what he already was; instead, he ritualizes what led him in the past to become a poet. As a traveller, Pasolini can then say, echoing the *Comedy*:

‘[...] Ho letto e riletto i tuoi volumi, con grande soddisfazione: mi valga ora, per uscire da questa “impasse”, ah, ah, ah,’ risi ‘il lungo lavoro critico operato su di te, nel segno, senza prestigio sociale, del narcisismo!’²⁴

The *impasse* to which the traveller refers is, on the one hand, his inability to escape continually into a dream dimension, and, on the other, his fear of surrendering to the temptation (embodied by the wolf) to ‘ritornarmene là dove non si richiede, in fondo, che di tacere’. The traveller then says to his guide: ‘Ho bisogno del tuo aiuto perché [...] non posso sopportare nemmeno l’idea di non essere più uno scrittore.’²⁵

The answer to this request for help is that ‘bisogna cambiare strada’.²⁶ Pasolini’s rewriting of Dante’s famous line ‘A te convien tener altro viaggio’ (*Inf.* I, 91) can then be interpreted as an invitation to a long path of purification, provided that it is interpreted in light of the existential and poetic crisis in which the *Religione del mio tempo* finds its main source of inspiration. Once again what must be carefully avoided is repetition because, as the guide states,

La ripetizione di un sentimento si fa ossessione. E l’ossessione trasforma il sentimento ... [...] Come la ripetizione di una parola nelle litanie ... Ripetizione ch’è perdita di significato; e perdita di significato ch’è significato ... Esaltante ...²⁷

Here the ‘piccolo poeta civile degli Anni Cinquanta’, that is, the author of the *Ceneri di Gramsci*, reasserts the lesson of these lines, which warn us to be always ‘col sentimento al punto in cui il mondo si rinnova’. It is not a coincidence, then, that the first canto ends with the guide inviting the traveller to turn to the world: ‘Per il tuo bene, ora, mi pare la cosa migliore condurti in un luogo che altro luogo non è che il mondo. Oltre, io e te non andremo, perché il mondo finisce col mondo.’²⁸

In order to overcome this *impasse*, the traveller/poet clearly needs to return to reality and face the world again. In the second canto – the last to be completed following the original plan – the poet refers to the ways in which his confrontation with the world will be carried out. It is beyond the scope of this study to compare Pasolini’s reinterpretation with the original source in order to show how philologically precise Pasolini is in rewriting and echoing Dante’s canto. Rather, I wish to focus on one central issue in order to understand Pasolini’s criteria for mimesis. As in the *Comedy*, here too the main focus of the canto is the question about what kind of strength the wayfarer needs for his jour-

ney – or, in other words, how to describe the place to which his guide is about to take him. Because that place is nothing but the world itself – ‘perché il mondo finisce col mondo’ – it is clear that the core of the question regards the representation of reality and its poetic representation in particular. The invocation of the Muses at the beginning of the canto – constructed according to the Dantean model – expresses a wish to find once again poetic inspiration in spite of the artistic distress previously analysed:

Vecchia ispirazione, [...] aiutami tu come una donna ripudiata, che non serve più a niente, ma, per una qualche vecchia amicizia, continua a frequentare il marito preso da altri amori [...] a rendergli gli antichi, indispensabili servizi! [...] Aiutami a dar corpo alle astrazioni, che vogliono essere così nuove, con la vecchia concretezza della fantasia domestica ed elegiaca!²⁹

Nevertheless ‘un profondo scoraggiamento’ follows this invocation. It occurs in the central part of the canto when the traveller asks his guide whether he will have the opportunity to proceed with his work. To his guide’s affirmative answer, he replies:

‘Non so se *ti rendi conto* ... che questo viaggio l’ha già fatto, per dirla prudentemente, chi “corruttibile ancora, ad immortale secolo andò”. *A parte il fatto*’, continuai [...] ‘che egli era sostenuto da una *ideologia di ferro*’ dissi proprio così ‘la più potentemente unitaria di tutta la nostra cultura, prodotto finale di tutto il Medioevo ecc. E poi, stilisticamente, pensa, tu che sei maestro di queste cose, pensa che caso unico: lo spostamento del punto di vista in alto, che aumenta smisuratamente il *numero* delle cose e dei loro nomi, proprio nel momento in cui restringe e sintetizza tutto ... [...] Ecco, insomma, volevo dire semplicemente ... che rifare questo viaggio consiste nell’*alzarsi*, e vedere insieme tutto da lontano, ma anche nell’*abbassarsi* e vedere tutto da vicino [...]. Tu sai cos’è la lingua colta; e sai cos’è quella volgare. Come potrei farne uso? Sono ormai un’unica lingua: la lingua dell’odio’.³⁰

Pasolini gives a commentary on this passage – perhaps the most famous of *La Divina Mimesis* – in an essay written two years later, entitled ‘La volontà di Dante a essere poeta’ (1965). Here he examines Gianfranco Contini’s theory of Dantean plurilingualism, which is grounded in the ‘spostamento tomistico e trascendente del “punto di vista” in alto, così da allargare l’orizzonte lessicale, in una compresenza panoramica dei suoi casi limite’.³¹ Pasolini makes clear the linguistic impossibility of

repeating the Dantean experience because the vernacular and cultivated languages have by now melted together into the intermediate language corresponding to the language of the dominant social class, the bourgeoisie. It is nevertheless at this moment that the guide admonishes the traveller: ‘Egli, leggiamo, sospirò: “anzichè allargare, dilaterai!”’.³² Even though it is formulated as an oracle and an enigma, this admonishment sounds perfectly clear to the traveller, although he questions himself about the semantic difference between *dilatare* and *allargare*:

Capii, ma poco convinto feci: ‘Sì, ma ...’: e volevo dire: ‘che cosa dirà la gente?’ (cioè le trenta o quaranta persone che amo, ma che tuttavia niente mi può impedire di non conoscere anche nelle loro lacune, per esempio nel non sapere che diavolo di differenza ci sia tra allargare e dilatare).³³

The narrator then decides to suggest the meaning of this dilation, which, according to Pasolini’s point of view, should replace the Dantean enlargement:

Ma mi corressi e proseguì, appena fiatando: ‘Asimmetria, sproporzione, legge dell’irregolarità programmata, irrisione della coesività, introduzione teppistica dell’arbitrario ... Ad ogni modo ...’³⁴

This is how the traveller translates the admonishment received from his guide. However, before analysing its significance, it is necessary to examine the reason for the dilation. This reason lies, as we have already seen, in the absorption of linguistic difference – always synonymous for Pasolini with social difference – by the pervasive ‘lingua dell’odio’, that is the *lingua* ‘mia – storicamente mia – quella del mio tempo, di mio padre, di mia madre, dei miei professori, dei miei fornitori, dei miei giornali, della mia radio, della mia televisione, dei miei coglioni!’.³⁵ This is a language without any internal separation, in which difference and the capacity for expression have been erased in favour of the mere capacity for communication. Its anti-poetic nature is allegorically illustrated in the first canto and even more strongly in the second through the gap between the irony present in the guide’s voice and the purity of his gaze. A good example is to be found in the second canto, where the guide, after admonishing the traveller, accuses him of being afraid. To this allegation the traveller replies with the following remark:

E mi guardò con uno sguardo che era esattamente il contrario di quello che erano le sue parole [...]; le parole *non ti fa onore*, quale reticenza per dire *ti disonora*.

Il suo sguardo invece era senza ‘correzioni’, pieno di coraggioso amore.

E come parlò ironizzò di nuovo, perché, ahì, nel nostro mondo non si può parlare che così [...]. Ironizzando [...] si può dir tutto: ma lo sguardo che ancora gettò su di me [...] era così disperatamente puro: simile a qualcosa di vagamente luminoso che persista nel paesaggio fosco di una pioggia invernale [...]. Era forse la cieca testardaggine della poesia: la sua presenza materiale.³⁶

The guide is therefore the real embodiment of poetry, although as soon as he starts talking, he cannot use anything other than the bourgeois’s ‘language of hate’, or, in other words, irony that puts an unnatural distance between the self and the world. It is this distance that kills poetry. The content of this allegory – the contrast between the physical presence of the guide and his language – represents the total incompatibility between poetry and the ‘language of hate’.

Immediately afterward, without any transition, the traveller sees the face of a partisan condemned to die, who is in fact his brother (killed in an ambush during the partisan war at the end of World War II):

nel pallore del terrore, conserva – nell’occhio bruno, nello zigomo virile – la durezza della sua speranza, ormai inutile per lui. Gli andavo dietro e guardavo a terra [...] come chi deve covare, senza mostrarlo a nessuno, l’ingenuità del suo fervore.³⁷

The Dantean echo is very explicit: just as Beatrice is mentioned by Virgil at the end of the second canto of the *Inferno* in order to dispel Dante’s fear, carrying with her memories from his youth when he was faithfully following his heart’s straight course, so here the traveller’s fear disappears as soon as the face of his brother, who was killed during the Resistance, appears. In this way, he can feel again, as in the fresh purity of his youth, the ‘fervore’, the ‘speranza’, and the ‘desiderio di fare’, which can be translated as his fervent return to reality and the expression of his feeling for it.

The final passage of the canto, one of the most beautifully written in the entire work, recasts the Dantean simile of the *fioretti*; after a long discourse on the flowers ‘che sbucavano tra l’erbaccia torva e innocente’, the poet identifies himself and a portion of humanity with the flowers and then declares: ‘Anch’io, come un fiore – pensavo – niente

altro che un fiore non coltivato, obbedisco alla necessità che mi vuole preso dalla lietezza che succede allo scoraggiamento.³⁸ His happiness comes from his decision to resist the distance from reality induced by irony. For Pasolini, this is the way to continue to be able to identify himself with the poor and the humble, symbolized by the flowers, and therefore to find a new source of poetic inspiration. It is for this reason that the canto ends emblematically with the following words: ‘anch’io, ormai, avevo il passo di un partigiano che va verso i monti.’³⁹

In conclusion, let us reconsider the guide’s admonition to ‘dilatare’, which represents both the task of resistance and poetry’s new mode of existence in the changed historical context of the ‘language of hate’. How can dilation help the poet to recover his ability to express himself in this new anti-poetic linguistic setting? The traveller gives the reader some hints in order to grasp the meaning of this verb (*dilatare*). These hints occupy a linguistic, structural, and rhetorical level. As we have seen above, they refer to the form of speech, ‘asimmetria, sproporzione, legge dell’irregolarità programmata, irrisione della coesività, introduzione teppistica dell’arbitrario’. In order to decipher these hints, it is helpful to refer to some passages in *Empirismo eretico*, where, employing Roland Barthes’s concepts, Pasolini develops his view of poetry. It is not possible here to analyse all the concepts he borrows from Barthes in the 1960s, which critics have recently begun to explore.⁴⁰ It is, however, clear that Barthes is a constant point of reference in these years for Pasolini in his reflections on cinema and literature. In the 1966 essay, ‘La fine dell’avanguardia’, Pasolini refers to an interview by Barthes which appeared in the journal *Cinema e film*. After referring to his switch from literature to cinema out of fidelity to his philosophy of life – his desperate and hallucinatory love for reality discussed previously – Pasolini adopts Barthes’s thesis that cinema is a metonymic art:

si è tentati di dire che al cinema ogni montaggio, cioè ogni contiguità significativa, è una metonimia, e dato che il cinema è montaggio, che il cinema è un’arte metonimica. [...] Il segno dominante di ogni arte metonimica – e quindi sintagmatica – è la volontà dell’autore a esprimere un ‘senso’, piuttosto che dei significati. Quindi a *far succedere sempre qualcosa* nella sua opera. Quindi a evocare sempre direttamente la realtà, che è la sede del *senso* trascendente i significati.⁴¹

In the interview, Barthes had in fact declared that: ‘Il senso è una tale fatalità per l’uomo, che l’arte, in quanto libertà, sembra adoperarsi,

soprattutto oggi, non a *fare* del senso ma, al contrario, a *sospenderlo*; non a costruire dei sensi ma a non riempirli *esattamente*.⁴² Pasolini therefore concludes that ‘Sospendere il senso, ecco una stupenda epigrafe per quella che potrebbe essere una nuova descrizione dell’impegno, del mandato dello scrittore’,⁴³ and adds:

Quali sono le reali domande da porre, onde sospendere il senso di un’opera? [...] Mi sembra che se noi osserviamo quel ‘qualcosa’ che sta accadendo nel mondo borghese, questo rovesciarsi nella quotidianità di valori negativi e ideali, violenti e non violenti: questo ripresentarsi della ‘povera e nuda’ problematicità, forse cominceremo ad avere qualche confusa risposta. [...] Mi sembra, insomma, che non manchi una ‘realtà’ da evocare – in qualsiasi modo. E anzi che è colpevole il non farlo. E poiché quella realtà ci parla col suo linguaggio ogni giorno, trascendendo – in un ‘senso’ ancora indefinito (è certo solo che è disperazione e contestazione furente) – i nostri significati – è bene, mi pare, piegare a questo i significati! Se non altro per porre, appunto, delle domande in opere anfibologiche, ambigue, a canone ‘sospeso’ [...] ma niente affatto, in questo, disimpeginate, anzi!⁴⁴

Pasolini’s thesis can be summarized thus: in turning to cinema, he found an ideal form of artistic expression, a metonymic form in which he could directly evoke reality and its meaning beyond mere semantic significance. In other words, through cinema he was able to transfigure reality poetically in a way that would have been impossible using a form of expression grounded in simple communication. However, the passages quoted above refer to the activity of the writer and not to that of the filmmaker. Thus the writer has to get as close as possible to a metonymic form of expression in order to be able to evoke reality directly. As we have seen, the poet says that the transformed reality of the 1960s presents itself as a “‘povera e nuda’ problematicità’ and transcends ‘ – in un “senso” ancora indefinito (è certo solo che è disperazione e contestazione furente) – i nostri significati’.⁴⁵ For this reason, in its attempt to evoke reality, a work of art can give nothing but the problematic setting of reality and its indefinite meaning. Such a work of art will therefore be ‘a canone sospeso’.

The true mimesis of reality is thus built upon a twofold resistance against everything that impinges upon the evocation of reality or the expression of what the writer feels about reality. The first kind of resistance is linguistic: it is essentially an accusation against the linguistic flattening for which the ‘lingua dell’odio’ is responsible and against the

distance that such a language builds, through the use of irony, between itself and reality. This accusation takes concrete form in the character of *La Divina Mimesis* as a pamphlet – a point critics have often overlooked – and as a work of linguistic contamination, exemplified by the union of a written and an iconographical language in the ‘photographic poem’ which concludes *La Divina Mimesis*.⁴⁶

The second kind of resistance is rhetorical: it consists in the refusal of any kind of narrative form of rationalization that would forbid the evocation of the reality perceived by the author – as Pasolini says – as ‘magma’, as magmatic and problematic. The operation of dilation consists in deforming the closed unity of the classical forms until they explode. Only in that way can reality appear as magma, in accordance with the author’s perception. In the article previously quoted, ‘La fine dell’*avanguardia*’, Pasolini declares that:

Mi ci è voluto il cinema per capire una cosa enormemente semplice, ma che nessun letterato sa. Che la realtà si esprime da sola; e che la letteratura non è altro che un mezzo per mettere in condizione la realtà di esprimersi da sola *quando non è fisicamente presente*. Cioè la poesia non è che una evocazione, e ciò che conta è la realtà evocata che parla da sola al lettore, come ha parlato da sola all’autore.⁴⁷

Based on this declaration, we can hardly consider *La Divina Mimesis* and its poetic project to be a failure. On the contrary, the work’s fragmentary character, unachieved and magmatic, its mixture of text and paratext, its literary and iconographic language, its subversion of chronology and of the rational order of speech, represent the best form available to the author in evoking reality. This is the poet’s motive for entitling his work *La Divina Mimesis*.

Translated by Enrico Minardi

NOTES

- 1 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere 1940–1954* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 206.
- 2 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by Walter Siti, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), I, pp. 1250–51.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere 1955–1975* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), p. 624.
- 5 Filippo Grazzini, ‘Esperienze di lettori novecenteschi d’eccezione: Montale e Pasolini davanti a Dante’, in ‘*Per correr miglior acque ...*’: *Bilanci e prospettive*

- degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, Atti del Convegno internazionale di Verona–Ravenna 25–29 ottobre 1999, 2 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2001), II, p. 911.
- 6 Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, 'L'ultimo trentennio', in *Dante nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, ed. by Silvio Zennaro (Rome: Bonacci, 1979), pp. 245–78.
 - 7 Ibid., p. 274.
 - 8 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La Divina Mimesis*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), II, p. 1090.
 - 9 Grazzini, 'Esperienze di lettori novecenteschi d'eccezione', p. 911.
 - 10 Cf. Walter Siti's notes to *La Mortaccia*, in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Romanzi e racconti*, II, p. 1965.
 - 11 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Lo ripeto io sono in piena ricerca', in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), II, p. 2445.
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 Ibid., p. 2446.
 - 14 Ibid., p. 2447.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, I, p. 1544.
 - 18 Pasolini, 'Passione e ideologia', in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, I, p. 1237.
 - 19 Pasolini, *La Divina Mimesis*, p. 1075.
 - 20 Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, I, p. 1048.
 - 21 Pasolini, *La Divina Mimesis*, p. 1078.
 - 22 Ibid., p. 1081.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Ibid., p. 1084.
 - 25 Ibid., p. 1085.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 Pasolini, *La Divina Mimesis*, p. 1085.
 - 28 Ibid., p. 1086.
 - 29 Ibid., p. 1088.
 - 30 Ibid., p. 1090.
 - 31 Pasolini, 'Empirismo eretico', p. 1379.
 - 32 Pasolini, *La Divina Mimesis*, p. 1090.
 - 33 Ibid.
 - 34 Ibid.
 - 35 Ibid., p. 1091.
 - 36 Ibid.
 - 37 Ibid., p. 1092.
 - 38 Ibid., p. 1093.
 - 39 Ibid.
 - 40 Cf. Hervé Joubert Laurencin, 'Pasolini–Barthes: engagement et suspension de sens', *Studi Pasoliniani*, 1 (2007), pp. 55–67. Cf. also Antonio Tricomi, *Pasolini: gesto e maniera* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), pp. 109–18.

- 41 Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, p. 1422.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 1422–23.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 1424–25.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 In *Petrolino*, Pasolini had also planned to use the same combination of two different semiotic systems.
- 47 Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, p. 1421.

Davide Luglio, "Anzichè allargare, dilaterai!": Allegory and Mimesis from Dante's *Comedy* to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La Divina Mimesis*, in *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati, Fabio Camilletti, and Fabian Lampart, *Cultural Inquiry*, 2 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2011), pp. 339–53
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