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Mario Luzi's Pictorial Poesis: Avvento notturno (1940) and Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini (1994)

*Non negarmi mai il mio ritorno,
da dove che sia aprigli il tuo regno*

In Mario Luzi's first book of poetry, *La barca* (1935), a central theme which would recur in multiple variations through his work, was already present: the transformation of self in the flow of nature and the world. The phenomenon of fluid metamorphosis was reflected in the author's desire to merge with "un'altra infinita dolcezza d'esistere."¹ Luzi's pre-Hermetic first book was characterized by fresh and melancholic poems whose syntax and imagery also "flowed" clearly. There were, however, some exceptions to this graceful lyricism. Giovanni Raboni wrote that texts such as "Serenata di Piazza d'Azeglio" suggested the change of tone and poetics that followed in Luzi's second book *Avvento notturno* (1940) where the more conventional structures of *La barca* were replaced by intense metaphoric contrasts:

Si fa vistoso e si impone una vorticosa accensione metaforica, con chiaroscuri violenti, accostamenti ardui, accelerazioni analogiche che spezzano, or ricompongono drasticamente altrove, l'ordine "comune" delle cose e delle emozioni. (Raboni 8)

A similar, though less extreme style characterized *Un brindisi* (1946) and *Quaderno gotico*, a collection of love poems (1947). *Primizie del deserto* (1952), *Onore del vero* (1957), and *Dal fondo delle campagne* (written between 1956–60 but published in 1965) could be said to comprise Luzi's second phase and make up a group or "trilogy" because of the similar themes, techniques, and elegiac tone. The style of these works contrasted with the first phase: the poet floated in a slow and anguished dream, observed signs that no one else saw and asked questions that remained unanswered. The entrance of the Montalian *tu* has been remarked as well as the influence of T. S. Eliot.² Luzi's style was cleansed of intense metaphoric contrasts, a sort of "grey" lexicon was privileged. Key words were distinct in these texts: "vento" and "voce" reflected two terms between which Luzi's entire production would move: enigma and drama.³

The enigmatic level was more discernable in the early poems of *La barca* and *Avvento notturno*. Yet the frequent use of interrogatives and

vocatives created a dramatic undercurrent; this current emerged in Luzi's mature production or third major poetic phase. *Nel magma* (1963) presented as much of a change of style as *Primizie del deserto* did after *Un brindisi*. The compactness of the previous verse, the self-interrogation, gave way to a more prosaic, thetic confrontation with reality. The dialogic structure became quite strong and gave way to Luzi's first plays: *Libro di Ipazia* (1972) and then *Rosales* (1983). Thus the space of representation became vaster. The texts also became longer as seen in the subsequent *Su fondamenti invisibili* (1971), which contained three long *poemi*: "Il pensiero fluttuante della felicità," "Nel corpo oscuro della metamorfosi," and "Il gorgo di salute e malattia." In these long poems different characters and manifestations of the *io* interact and confront each other as they contemplate events. Such texts form dramatic narrative "tapestries." *Al fuoco della controversia* (1978) prolonged the dialogic style initiated by *Nel magma* and continued in *Su fondamenti invisibili*, although the poems were shorter, *poesie* and longer *poesie* as opposed to *poemi*. Luzi's third poetic phase was marked by a new involvement in and more theatrical representation of the complex, disappointing, and fluctuating levels of reality and history.

Luzi's poetry continues to evolve and grow as we observe in his fourth or present poetic phase. This latest phase became apparent with the publication of *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* (1985). The texts of this volume are not long *poemi* as in *Su fondamenti invisibili*, nor are they long *poesie* (such as "Graffito dell'eterna zarina" in *Al fuoco della controversia*). Most poems fit on a page or two and the versification itself is varied: shorter more traditional lines reappear along with longer prosaic lines and a combination of the two. Most of the themes of Luzi's previous books are present, yet in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* they evolve towards a surprising affirmation of light. This light reflects a divinity found everywhere, one which goes beyond binary concepts of good and evil. Luzi discovers truth in the other, that is, what he calls the "antagonist." This omnipresent divinity must be "conquered" even by God himself:

Dieu lui-même, dans le poème "Tu es si loin que je ne peux te rejoindre," doit conquérir sa divinité. De ma part, il n'y a pas de volonté de nier mais de rendre plus total. C'est l'égalisation de tout: Dieu qui se réalise pleinement comme l'homme, comme la nature. La diversité éliminée. . . . Tout brûle dans cet immense brasier! (*Pour le baptême* 23)

Luzi's two most recent books of poetry, *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare* (1990) and *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* (1994), continue to affirm life's becoming in all its forms. The poems in these works use the space of the page in a different manner. The looser typographical disposition of the text exists in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*, but

is not widespread nor as effective as in these last two works. We will have occasion to consider Luzi's "scattering" and recomposing of verse on the page in the second part of this article.⁴

Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini

The title of Mario Luzi's most recent book of poetry tells us much about the work. It describes a "viaggio" but is not necessarily a narrative, nor even, as Lorenzo Mondo has written, a "poema" because each fragment stands alone and the relation between the various parts of the text are not always evident. Nor may it be said that the various parts necessarily form a continuity, at least not in a conventional sense, even though elements of the classic voyage structure may be distinguished.⁵ The section entitled "Dopo la malattia, Deliri, vaneggiamenti, visioni" suggests a "shipwreck" ("naufragio"), but this does not mean, as we will try to show, that the "viaggio" culminates in a typical Dantesque "ascent" (the last part is entitled "Ispezione celeste"). The traveler in this case is Simone Martini, the famous Sienese painter.

Simone Martini's brilliant style had a clear impact on Sienese painting for the 100 years or so that followed his death. His date of birth is uncertain, but by 1314 he was already famous since he received the commission for the "Maestà" in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena. Although he was influenced by Giotto and Duccio, Simone's work was unmistakable because of its inventiveness and grace. In his book on Sienese painting Bruce Cole writes of the "world of languid, melancolic beauty unmatched in the entire history of Trecento painting" (83) created by Simone's saints and angels. It is this world with its fluid lines and resplendent golds and lapislazzuli that we rediscover in Luzi's recent poetry: in particular, the stories of San Martino in the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi, or that of the "Annunciazione" now in the Uffizi in Florence. The ethereal quality of the "Annunciazione" as well as the rich golds are frequently evoked in *Viaggio terrestre e celeste*. Many of the poems recreate visions that "echo" Martini's work.⁶ Enzo Carli wrote that the "Annunciazione"

takes the Gothic taste for sheer line to the extreme limits of melodic expressiveness, and it is this line, with its impetus, its inflexions, its sinuous cadences, that expresses the very bodilessness of the Angel and the Madonna, whose gestures seem perfectly weightless, on the point of vanishing into the great gold light of the background. (26)

As we will see, poems such as "Sibilla" describe an analogous dissolution into light and weightlessness.

Simone Martini, who had become a great friend of Petrarch, died at the end of July in 1344 in Avignon.⁷ Luzi, however, tells us in an in-

introductory note, that he imagined the painter returned to Siena shortly before his death. The protagonists of the poems are Simone Martini, his wife Giovanna, his brother Donato and his wife (also called) Giovanna, and a theology student who accompanies them as witness, interpreter, and chronicler of their adventure. Luzi himself is present in each of these characters, and, as he writes, in none of them in particular. The titles, Luzi adds, should function as "didascalie," that is, stage instructions or captions beneath a picture or illustration. This introductory note confirms that his work has dramatic and pictorial dimensions. Characteristics of drama may be distinguished in the extensive use of interrogative forms, of the *tu*, of simple questions as in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*. The dramatic element is further emphasized by the fact that each character has a double or antagonist: Simone/Donato who are both painters, and their wives, Giovanna and Giovanna. Only the theology student has no apparent corresponding other, except perhaps the author himself. This opposing parallelism infuses a multitude of perspectives into the "viaggio" thereby creating a wider more all inclusive vision. Nevertheless the dialogic structure of the previous books is not as prevalent here. The verse is more compact, less prosaic and drawn out, perhaps closer to the poetry of *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare*, where we find hendecasyllables, (at times broken or divided) along with other traditional verses, novenari, settenari, and free verse.

The fact that Luzi chose to reproduce a detail (the musicians) from Martini's "Storie di San Martino" on the cover of his volume of collected poetry, *Tutte le poesie*, now appears to have been specially significant. Yet this pictorial dimension, has not been evident in Luzi's recent production with a few exceptions, as the poem which describes Michelangelo's fresco, entitled "Sistina" in *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare* or in more generalized references to art such as "Carovana per l'arte" in *Al fuoco della controversia*. The only book based on intersemiotic relations between poetry and painting before *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* was *Avvento notturno* (1940).

Painting indeed plays a role in the "accostamenti ardui" Giovanni Raboni described while trying to explain the unusual poetics of Luzi's second book. Although it was considered the "culmination" of the Hermetic movement, when *Avvento notturno* appeared it received mixed criticism, much of it negative. One of the earliest reactions was voiced by Mario Alicata who judged it "giovane."

Ma la poesia di Luzi . . . è giovane: si nutre ancora di speranze, è ancora un invito e un'ipotesi di confortevoli incertezze a venire, è ancora il canto scandito d'un sogno piuttosto che il racconto di una esperienza oramai tutta scontata e riconosciuta. (206)

Many critics have a reductive approach to the Hermetic movement.

For example, Lisa Rizzoli and Giorgio Morelli in their recent book on Luzi's work write about how Hermeticism tends to degenerate in a sort of complacent Narcissistic virtuosity without any regard for conventional (we might add banal) communication:

La tendenza dell'ermetismo a degenerare nell'individualismo tecnico-stico ha posto la critica in una difficile posizione, da cui a volte si leva una condanna verso quella lingua individuale che si mostra paga di sé. (63)

These types of approaches reduce the specificity of poetic experience to extra-textual criteria, or representational premises that considerably distort and misunderstand the object in question. Other critics, such as Macrì in 1956, were, however, enthusiastic about *Avvento notturno*.⁸ In 1968, Giuseppe Zagiarro's in-depth study of Luzi's poetry appeared. Zagiarro was the first and perhaps only critic to have considered this visual dimension. Concerning the beginning of "Avorio" ("Parla il cipresso equinoziale, oscuro") he wrote:

Si vide il massimo del secondo ermetismo e addirittura dell'ermetismo in genere nel suo essere, risibile o sublime. E non si vide invece che si poteva trattare dopo tutto di una mimesi dei temi emergenti dalla tavolozza di qualche pittore: De Chirico (i cavalli metafisici) Segantini (il camoscio morto) Rosai (i cipressi fiorentini—cipresso equinoziale) che si poteva trattare dunque di *un vero e proprio esperimento di poesia-pittura o di poesia visiva, disposta a delegare alla pura immagine grafica ogni valore semantico della parola.* (50; emphasis mine)

Luzi's "asematic" style, created a visual poetry whose unrelated images derived not from reality or nature, but paintings. In other words, the strident colors and disconnected imagery of *Avvento notturno* consist in an attempt to imitate the spatial techniques of paintings. This is distinct from ekphrasis that could be exemplified by a Baroque text like Marino's *La galeria* where the poet describes paintings and sculpture while using a fundamentally discursive style.⁹ Luzi's text goes well beyond mere descriptions of paintings since it attempts to imitate their spatial rapports by juxtaposing images and colors that have no apparent representational links. Furthermore, what Luzi brings about in *Avvento notturno* is not merely an Italian version of French Surrealism because his texts are too rigorously and deliberately constructed in a formal, classical sense to be called Surrealistic. He uses endecasillabi, settenari along with free verse as well as traditional and modern rhyme schemes.

Recently in reply to a question addressed to him concerning *Avvento notturno* and painting, Mario Luzi wrote as follows: "I rapporti con la pittura . . . sono chiari, e sì, erano coscienti, mi sembrava essere al centro e nel vivo di quel grande discorso di immagini."¹⁰

In order to make clear the relations between poetry and art, I will consider several texts that imitate paintings in an unmistakable manner. One of the most "typical" poems in this sense is "Se musica è la donna amata." It contains a "list" of disconnected images that reflect a distinctly pictorial poetics. In many poems, images are juxtaposed, paratactically. Their relation to each other is spatial as in paintings; these rapports contrast with those of images unified by "realistic" representation of nature and the world. Throughout Luzi's second collection the technique of pictorial poetry is reinforced by a marked and repeated reference to colors as in this poem: "rosse," "viola," "bianca," "grigia," "bruna:"

Ma tu continua e perditi, mia vita,
 per le rosse città dei cani afosi
 convessi sopra i fiumi arsi dal vento.
 Le danzatrici scuotono l'oriente
 appassionato, effondono i metalli
 del sole le veementi baiadere.
 Un passero profondo si dispiuma
 sul golfo ov'io sognai la Georgia:
 dal mare (una viola trafelata
 nella memoria bianca di vestigia)
 un vento desolato s'appoggiava
 ai tuoi vetri con una piuma grigia
 e se volevi accoglierlo una bruna
 solitudine offesa la tua mano
 premeva nei suoi limbi odorosi
 d'inattuate rose di lontano.

"Le rosse città dei cani afosi / convessi sopra i fiumi arsi dal vento" calls forth Futurist paintings, such as Boccioni's red city scapes in motion. The "veementi baiadere" are reminiscent of Symbolist figures as found, for example, in the paintings of Gustave Moreau. The technique of "poetic painting" is also evident in "Esitavano a Eleusi i bei cipressi" where the first stanza begins with references to color, "celeste" and "indachi ansiosi," to evoke the evening ("Indachi," indigos, is a color referred to frequently throughout *Avvento notturno*). The images of stars in the last stanza, besides being personified, are distinct since they are perceived as colors: the "istrioni dorati" and the "sorriso giallo dei basilei" (emphasis mine). "Vino e ocra" is another such example since the syntactical structure is anti-representational or non discursive and its meaning is created through the juxtaposition of images and metaphors. The title "Vino e ocra" (red and yellow), could evoke sunset, night fall, the appearance of Venus ("Più lucente là esorbita la stella / di passione . . ." 1-2) and other stars as well as the

moon's passage through the sky. In any case it is apparent that a temporal metamorphosis is *visually* depicted. The final image of "Vino e ocra," the horses nuzzling the clouds ("E là lungo invisibili / pianure e lo sfarzo dei torrenti / discorrono cavalli forsennati / e presso l'onda annusano le nuvole"), calls forth German Expressionist paintings; Franz Marc's "Blue horses" and "Stables" could well have inspired "cavalli annusano le nuvole."

The next to the last poem of the book, "Patio," conjures a series of ephemeral illusions as seen through the "vetri," the "specchiere" and the "prisma." The "prisma ammalato" suggests Cubist and Orphic geometrical techniques and color effects. They are "immagini strane" because they suggest evanescent qualities of night and otherness as well as paintings. The recurrent image "vetri" is not only a Mallarméan intertext from "Don du poème,"¹¹ but could also be related to the "Orphic" poetics of *Avvento notturno*, that is, poems that imitate Orphic paintings as distinguished by the French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire. Such texts are structured around the colorful juxtaposition of images that create a sort a abstract intertextual, and interpictorial tapestry. In *History of Modern Art*, Arnason explains why Apollinaire called the abstract paintings of Delaunay and Kupta "Orphic:"

Apollinaire named the abstract experiments of Delaunay and Kupta "orphism," a recognition that what was involved was an art . . . divorced . . . from the representation of the visual world or literal subject. (216–17)

The poetics of *Avvento notturno* could be said to reflect those of pictorial Orphism since it too rejects representation of the literal subject. In other words these texts perceive through the filter of the "vetri," or window, another reality in which images are juxtaposed and fragmented. We note repeated references to color in "Patio": "Arrossano le mele," "il colore dei cedri," "bianche lucerne," "febbre viola dei basalti" as well as to different qualities of light: "oscure lanterne," "chiarore," "nitente," "pallida rete," etc. Several images from the last poem, "Maturità," come from the street scenes of De Chirico: "The Melancholy and the Mystery" 1914—amber tones, ochre, nocturnal scenes—for example:

Gelo, non più che gelo le tristi epifanie
per le strade stillanti di silenzio
e d'ambra e i riverberi lontani
delle pietre tra i bianchi lampi delle fontane.
Ombra, non più che un'ombra è la mia vita
per le strade che ingombra il mio ricordo impassibile.

In a text by Eluard entitled precisely "Giorgio De Chirico" the image

of the “ombre” is also rhetorically repeated: “Et l’ombre me défend de mon ombre peureuse.”

Although the poems we have considered reject a pre-conceived representational subject, there would seem to be one exception, namely the poem “Annunciazione.” The title suggests the painters’ “theme of themes” (especially in the Trecento and the Quattrocento). The first stanza describes a painting; perhaps Fra Angelico’s famous rendition or Simone Martini’s masterpiece inspired the following lines: “La mano al suo tepore abbandonata, / nelle lacrime spenti i desideri, / forse è questo una donna: un tempo esangue, / nell’ombra la bontà opaca di ieri.” The difference between this sort of “poetic painting” and that of texts such as “Se musica è la donna amata” is that “Annunciazione” is ekphrasis, description of a specific painting while the former attempts to imitate painting through spatial techniques of juxtaposition and parataxis. “Poetic painting” prevails over ekphrasis in *Avvento notturno*. Titles such as “Yellow,” “Vino e ocra,” “Danzatrice verde,” and “Avorio” are significant in this context as are the recurrent references to color.

In *Viaggio terrestre e celeste*, “poetic painting” is less of a technique than a subject of representation: it is the focus of the protagonist/author’s reflections. Some poems describe paintings (ekphrasis) as in “Risveglio inquieto”: “Ma lei, volto fiorito / sulla grazia dello stelo, / tutto domina, ovale / appena appena / granito porporino, / tutto in sé contiene, / seduta sul suo trono / di pace e di vertigine.” While in the section “Lui, la sua arte” the craft of the painter is the main focus: his use of colors, the importance of light, the various stories and persons to be depicted (the dramatic story of Oloferne and Giuditta from the Bible is considered and rejected). Fewer poems, however, may be said to “imitate” pictures as radically as *Avvento notturno* since a discursive “realistic” (but not narrative) representation is rarely abandoned. Many if not all of Luzi’s other major themes are also present in this work, the incessant flow, transformation, and evolution of life is reflected in the recurrent images of light, the multiple facets of nature and reality, the contemplative or interrogative self questioning and questioning of others, and as in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* and *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare*, the contemplation of divinity, what Zagarrio called *itinerarium ad deum* referring to *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*. Yet the structure and obsessive use of interrogatives in *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare* and *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* suggest that the movements of these last two works are not necessarily transcendent, rather they are circular; they may be considered “returns” since the “ends” send us back to the beginnings. Rizzoli and Morelli distinguished the circular structure of *Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare*:

In tal senso l'ultima raccolta ha un andamento circolare: procede dalla prima poesia "Auctor" all'ultima appena riportata "Prova, prova umana," che chiude ma rimanda idealmente ad "Auctor" rendendo così questo libro un'opera conclusa e leggibile all'infinito. (207)

The same may be said of the movement of *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* whose first poem "Natura, lei / sempre detta, nominata / dalle origini . . ." (emphasis mine; from the first section entitled "Estudiant" containing considerations of a divine or spiritual nature) is echoed by the last text in the section entitled "Ispezione celeste": "E, l'essere. E" which concludes typically with a question: "E forse il paradiso / questo? oppure, luminosa insidia, / un nostro oscuro / *ab origine*, mai vinto sorriso?" (emphasis mine).

This tendency is apparent not only in Luzi's last two books of poetry, but in his entire poetic oeuvre, the idea of "return" is one of the main themes of *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* and is announced by the initial epigraph taken from Augustine's *Confessions*: "Ascolta tu pure: è il Verbo / stesso che ti grida di tornare. . ." Simone's return was "anticipated" in "Passata Siena" (*Frasi e incisi*), which could be read as a *mise en abîme* of *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* since its themes and form reflect Luzi's latest work. The *viaggio* back to Siena is expressed as a desire and prayer: "non negarmi mai il mio ritorno, / da dove che sia aprigli il tuo regno." Siena is a *topos* in Luzi's poetry that first appears in *Su fondamenti invisibili* ("La strada tortuosa che da Siena conduce all'Orcia") and that then becomes a *topos* of *return* in *Al fuoco della controversia* ("Lo stesso viaggio verso lo stesso borgo. / Verità o ricordo? / Il pelago di dune che oltrepassata l'Arbia / si rompe in un calvario / di guglie cinerine. . .") and *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* (Finché nel furore policromo / del bruciante mulinello / mi guarda Siena / da dentro la sua guerra . . .). Return is the theme of many poems in *Viaggio terrestre e celeste* such as, for example, "Quell'alone, quell'eccitato lembo":

Quell'alone, quell'eccitato lembo,
quell'aria rilustrante
in cui balena
la ventura primavera
ancora chiusa
nel cuore dell'inverno—
Ritrova,
il senso, ritrova
tra sorpresa
e attesa quel mirifico
vacillamento,
ritrova lo stupore
del ritorno

a se stessa della vita—
 da dove? non ha esilio,
 non ha fuga né uscita
 essa—ritrova quel portento
 e il suo tremore, il suo
 indicibile sperdimento,
 ritrova il tempo,
 ritrova se stesso
 prodigiosamente il senso.

The return concerns not only Simone Martini who is making his way back to Siena, but the author Luzi since Siena was the city of his adolescence. Yet the idea of “return” is not merely “autobiographical” nor is it only representational.¹² It is also present in the work’s poetics. The section entitled “Lui, la sua arte” develops reflections on the craft of painting that serve also as a metaphor for poetry and creation in general. The poem that begins: “Pittura, mi mancavì” announces a return of the author to a subject and mode of poetry from which he has distanced himself for a very long time. Indeed the presence of the word “avvento” in this text is particularly significant for several reasons. It refers to the “avvento” of light, essential to the painter’s realization, and reflects a divine light, that “ci unifica e ci assolve.” “Avvento” suggests the “event” of life, which can but return to itself (“la vita cerca la vita” we read in *Frasi e incisi*), one of the dominant themes of Luzi’s poetry.¹³ Furthermore, the concept of “avvento” is related to Luzi’s vision of history. Since our memories are incapable of capturing the “reality” of the past we are obliged to continuously reinvent it in the future. The past is constantly transformed within us and projected forward. “History” therefore, exists for Luzi as interrogation and quest, as “avvento,” that which [be]comes:

Le passé est en transformation à l’intérieur de nous et l’histoire elle-même est une matière en devenir; elle collabore, par son poids, ses résidus et ses sédimentations plus ou moins obscures à l’intérieur de notre conscience, à l’*avènement* de ce qui, continuellement, *advient*. L’histoire existe—c’est même une dure épreuve—mais seulement comme interrogation et recherche, non comme pourvoyeuse de leçons toutes faites. (*Pour le baptême* 13; emphasis mine)

“Avvento,” as an image of divinity becoming, is also found in the last poem: “Tutto senza ombra flagra. / E essenza, avvento, apparenza.” “Avvento” also contains the word “vento” that recurs very frequently throughout Luzi’s poetry from the very beginning and that also suggests a continuous becoming. “Vento” is a key word in Luzi’s poetic lexicon since it is associated with the notion of “voce” and “anima.” Finally “avvento” echoes the title of *Avvento notturno*. The text follows:

Pittura, mi mancavi. Infine eccolo,
 è forte, è nell'aria,
 lo captano a uno a uno
 i miei sensi magati

il desiderio

umano e non umano
 dei palmizi e delle dune,
 dei cieli e delle rocce,
 delle cose,
 tutte, di natura e d'arte
 che accompagnano l'uomo,
 ne commentano la sorte—
 anelano, è il momento,
 a entrare nella spera
 della loro vera forma, esse,
 ciascuna nella propria
 come stelle nel loro firmamento,
 ciascuna a dimora nella gemma
 del suo colore vero
 da materia e essenza.

Io l'accendo. Tutti noi attendiamo
 l'avvento della luce
 che ci unifica e ci assolve.

We may observe that the longest lines of this poem are hendecasyllables (7 out of 21), which are frequently broken. The others range from settenari to novenari. The first line is an “endecasillabo sdruciolato” with the “cesura” (and “dialefe”) after the seventh syllable (in the second hemistich we note instead the “sinalefe” between “Infine,” and “eccolo”): “Pittura, mi mancavi. Infine, eccolo.” Other examples of broken hendecasyllables are:

i miei sensi magati

il desiderio

dei cieli e delle rocce,

delle cose.

This type of versification is also found in *Frasi e incisi*. To a much lesser degree some similar instances may be found in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*. Luzi's recent return to the more classic, compact poetic verse is reminiscent of his earlier poetry. In *Avvento notturno*, for example, as well as in the other early books, the hendecasyllable is used extensively, though not exclusively. Other characteristics of his earlier (more lyric) poems are also present in this text. The use of the opening vocative recalls the first line of “Se musica è la donna amata”: “Ma tu continua e perdisti, mia vita.” Many poems open with such

vocatives: for example, "Dove mi porti mia arte?" "Arte, cosa m'illuminia il tuo sguardo?" "A che vi lascio, miei posteri?" "Rimani dove sei, ti prego." Such poems are more discursive and contemplative. They create the impression of clarity and transparency. Yet anguished concerns or troubled questions are not absent from these luminous texts as in "Rimani dove sei, ti prego" where the artist/poet speaks to his own work in order to express a desire for a synthesis between image and substance. He expresses the fear that his art will remain "absent from Spring," and fall back on itself becoming "vaniloquio, colpa."

Rimani dove sei, ti prego,
così come ti vedo.
Non ritirarti da quella tua immagine,
non involarti ai fermi
lineamenti che ti ho dato
io solo per obbedienza.
Non fare che la mia opera
ricada su se medesima,
diventi vaniloquio, colpa.

It would seem that the author is aware of the dangers inherent in his work's circular structure. Although this movement *is* circular, it is not repetitive as we may observe through the present comparison.

The images of light and transparency throughout Simone Martini's "viaggio" are not associated exclusively with painting or divinity, but also with the relations between the artist/author's *io* and his art. The distinction of the artist from his work is repeatedly affirmed: "In quale punto / la separazione è posta / in quale freme? / di me dai miei colori, / dell'arte che fu mia." In "Dove mi porti, mia arte?" the artist practices his art, but does not possess it: "Mia? non è mia questa arte, / la pratico, la affino." In "Sibilla" the *io* dissolves into light just as the angel flows into the brilliant gold background of Simone Martini's "Annunciazione:"

Eccola, non ha sangue,
ha luce nelle vene
inetta dall'aurora
diffusa dal mezzogiorno.

E diafana, inesistente

In other instances the self goes back "nel vago" while the work of art returns "in mente Dei."¹⁴

Gioiosa libertà che aspetti
di là dalle regole osservate
noi artisti, a anche la nostra opera.

Freschissima ritorna in mente Dei
essa, noi nel vago.

Keala Jewel has written on the dissolution of the *io* in *Su fondamenti invisibili* but this “self-effacement” occurs already in “Presso il Bisenzio” (from *Nel magma*).¹⁵ However it is not accompanied by the theme of the artistic work’s re-integration into a greater order as in *Viaggio terrestre e celeste*.

Although many of these texts are discursive, poems whose spatial relations are analogical and even antithetical as in *Avvento notturno* may be found, for example, “Stasi—morta l’immagine.” This text evolves through a sort of paratactical enumeration and metaphor. It begins with a hiatus and the “death” of an image:

Stasi—morta l’immagine,
a picco, in se medesima. A piombo
caduta la visione,
decomposta in brani,
esatta l’insolazione.

Paradoxically, the image or vision is then reconstructed metaphorically: “Occhio verde del fiume—è luglio—tra il fogliame; vetro pigro-fluente, / verde, verde liquame / O estate, oh minima stazione / d’immensa verità.” The opposition between “minima” and “immensa” in the last line creates an antithetical parallelism that reflects the correspondence between “stasi” at the beginning and “Nume” at the end. “Stasi” also corresponds or varies on the poem “E fermo il fiume. Sonnecchia”—from the section entitled “Carovana.” “E fermo il fiume” evokes a parallel situation, the oxymoronic “immobile river,” the “nume” and the “estasi.” The antithetical situation of these poems may be observed in other texts. A particularly striking example exists in “Infrapensieri la notte” where the images and typographic arrangement of the text deny its semantic meaning: “Sono oscuri / il turchese ed il carminio / nei vasi e nelle ciotole, / li prende / la notte nel suo grembo, / li accomuna a tutta la materia.” Although these colors supposedly “sleep,” the typographic disposition of the text on the page, for example:

Sono oscuri
il turchese ed il carminio
nei vasi e nelle ciotole,

gives us the opposite impression: the colors are vividly suggested since they occupy the space of one entire poetic line.

The artist ponders the forms and images he must paint the following day. He worries that he may not be up to the task of transforming shapeless material into art. Like the alchemist must transform lead

into gold, the poet (Rimbaud's "l'alchimie du verbe") must transform language (langue) from a common system with a practical function into a new form (langage) that goes beyond and against the ordinary everyday usage. Language must then function like music or at least create similar effects.

Esce
 insieme ai lapislazzuli
 l'oro dal suo forziere, sì,
 ma incerto
 il miracolo ritarda,
 la sua trasmutazione
 in luce, in radiosità
 gli sarà data piena? Avrà
 lui grazia sufficiente
 a quella spiritualissima alchimia?

Light is also suggested by "oro" a constant throughout this book. Its recurrence calls forth the alchemist's task of transformation, which is mirror of a divine act. The pervasive use of "oro" to signify color and light also echoes Petrarch's use of the noun to evoke Laura in the *Canzoniere*. Throughout Luzi's latest work, the reference to colors is quite recurrent, in particular in the section entitled "Lui, la sua arte" but also in other sections as well. The dominant colors are "azzurro," "lapislazzuli," "carminio," and "oro."

In *Avvento notturno* many poems imitated paintings since the relations between textual images were metonymic, that is, these images were juxtaposed and contrasted without any apparent representational or discursive links. The systematic references to colors reinforced the pictorial poetics. Poems such as "Se musica è la donna amata" and others could be called "poetic paintings." Art, however was not a subject of reflection; no painters were explicitly mentioned, nor was there any *explicit* historical premise or reference of any kind. In *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* Luzi departs from a historical premise since Simone Martini offers the pretext for reflections on art as a craft and as a metaphor for creation and becoming. Yet the historical premise is transformed when the author imagines that Simone returned to Siena before he died. This premise then becomes a frame ("cornice" as in the *Decameron*) upon which Luzi constructs an imaginary voyage depicted by a series of texts whose so called "realistic" continuity is repeatedly interrupted. For the most part the poems are discursive in the sense that they are not founded on spatial relations of juxtaposition. There are a few exceptions to this pattern such as "Stasi" and "E fermo il fiume" and other poems such as "Infrapensieri la notte" whose graphic arrangements on the page

challenge horizontal semantic patterns. Many of the main themes and structures of Luzi's poetry find a synthesis in this pictorial poetics. Since the questions are never answered, one of the effects of the obsessive interrogatives that characterize his poetry from the beginning is to suggest the silence of the *origini*. Painting, through its silent and visual dimensions represents the *other*, the *absolute*, or that which is inaccessible through the poetic word. Both *Avvento notturno* and *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* explore this impossible rapport. The distinctive "poetica degli ossimori" pointed out by Rizzoli and Morelli in their book *Mario Luzi* also finds a synthesis through the metaphor of painting (171). Indeed, as in Baudelaire's "Hymne à la beauté" the difference between "inferno o paradiso" ("Rifulse, si screziò il diaspro" *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*) is abolished and an overall impression prevails, one in which Luzi, like the painter, attempts to transform diverse phenomena into a single synthesis and impression of light.¹⁶ In both *Avvento notturno* and *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini*, Luzi is interested in the dynamics of the painter's craft, in its spatial representation and total spontaneous impacts. After a long separation, Luzi "returns" to the art of painting in an innovative and multi-dimensional manner. *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* does not risk "falling back" on *Avvento notturno*; the recent book allows us to reinterpret the "indachi ansiosi" of the early work in the context of (the Luzian) Simone's "turchesi," "azzurri," "lapislazzuli," and "oro."

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NOTES

¹This line comes from "Le meste comari di Samprugnano," *La barca. Tutte le poesie*.

²Raboni emphasizes Eliot's impact on Luzi's poetry in "Il respiro del pensiero." See also Lisa Rizzoli and Giorgio C. Morelli, in *Mario Luzi* (119), for further analysis of the relations between Eliot and Luzi. Several critics have studied Montalian intertexts in Luzi's work. See Zanzotto: "L'ultimo Luzi," *Comunità* 59 (April 1958) also partially reproduced in *Tutte le poesie* (735–42). See also Giancarlo Quiriconi, *Il fuoco e la metamorfosi, La scommessa totale di Mario Luzi* (178–79).

³In "Ricerca della propria immagine" Luzi analyzes the evolution of his poetry: "Il mutamento, la metamorfosi: questo è stato e resta il tema dei temi della mia poesia. . . . Dramma e enigma: provo a isolare queste due parole, a farne una endiadi. Non so se posso davvero riassumermi ma certo vi riconosco molto di me. Il sentimento creaturale con la sua suscettibilità di fronte alle pene e alle offese non è meno forte del giudizio etico e del senso storico dell'ingiustizia. Questo spiega, credo, perché il colloquio con il mondo assume accenti ora intimamente ora scopertamente drammatici" (see 5–7). In the the text entitled "Il silenzio e la voce" Luzi writes about the two poles "silenzio" and "voce" in poetry. These two terms are manifestations of one similar experience since "voice" detaches itself from "silence" but aspires to return to

it. The relations between voice and silence are the focus of Leopardi's well known poem "L'infinito," which is a key intertext in these reflections and in Luzi's poetry as well. See *Il silenzio e la voce* (13).

⁴This operation, breaking or scattering of the poetic verse has its origins in Mallarmé. Luzi considers the famous structure of "Coups de Dés" in *Studio su Mallarmé*; the typographic arrangement of Mallarmé's words on the page was meant to imitate the stars in the sky and associate poetry with the superhuman rhythms of universal events. There is certainly a Mallarméan dynamics in Luzi's own manner of arranging words on the page. The last poem of *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* plays between movement and immobility between "divenire" and "essere" in a very Mallarméan way. See Luzi's *Studio su Mallarmé* (119–20).

⁵Lorenzo Mondo reviewed *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* in "Simone Martini fate luce," *La Stampa* July 1994.

⁶*Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini* will be shortened to *Viaggio terrestre e celeste; Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare* to *Frasi e incisi*.

⁷Petrarch composed two sonnets in which he described Simone Martini's drawings of Laura: *Rime Sparse*: LXXVII and LXXVIII. In "Petrarca," Luzi imagines the poet intently watching Simone as he paints Laura.

⁸In *Caratteri e figure della poesia italiana contemporanea*, Oreste Macrì writes: "Egli ha portato al massimo questa potenza di significato in altro e per altro; alcuni carmi recenti inventano addirittura in un commosso ardore solitario percezioni affettuose estratte dall'intimo di ipotetici complessi preziosi; l'analogia e la trasposizione giungono cioè a invertire l'ordine delle sensazioni, a porre miticamente rarissime trame oggettive-naturali-geografiche e quindi a riceverle nell'ambito stesso della ispirazione soggettiva come forme e materie leggendarie inaudite: cipresso equinoziale" (164).

⁹In *La Description littéraire*, Philippe Hamon puts together an anthology of texts that deal with description in general but also with the relations between poetry, prose and painting from Horace's "Ut pictura poesis" to Francis Ponge's prose poems. In his introduction he distinguishes between, "ekphrasis," literary description of paintings or pictures, real or imaginary, "mimesis," based on a realistic conception of description as part of a whole and "sêmeiōsis" which is when the modern conception of description as an autonomous referential functioning (as opposed to a narrative function) that becomes the motor of the text 7–16.

¹⁰From correspondence between Luzi and myself, 25 genn. 1992.

¹¹In Mallarmé's "Don du poème" the "l'aile saignante et pâle, déplumée / Par le verre brûlé d'aromates et d'or" suggests the act of writing (the plume) and the drama of poetic creation. In this text we have the first image of the "vetri," which recurs obsessively throughout *Avvento notturno*.

¹²The structure and theme of "return" in Luzi's oeuvre should not be confused with the theme of unity as suggested, for example, by *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti*. Unity is a theme, but certainly not a structure since, as Contini, wrote the "contrasto di maniere" in Luzi's poetry is "assai netto" *Tutte le poesie* (743).

¹³The title of "Evento" from *Avvento notturno* is not only a play on the book's title, but also associates "Avvento" with the metamorphosis that characterizes life through the images of the "mutevole averno" and the nymph Aretusa's transformation into a fountain by Diana in order to escape the river-god Alpheus.

¹⁴A similar dissolution occurred in *Ipazia*: "e devi giungere al tuo termine / nel punto estremo di chiarezza."

¹⁵In her recent book, *The Poiesis of History, Experiments with Genre in Postwar Italy*, Keala Jewel devotes an entire chapter to the representation of space in *Su fon-*

damenti invisibili in relation to the dissolution of the *io* (193–242) In my article the *space of representation* is studied. The distinction is important since it is frequently avoided or ignored.

¹⁶In Baudelaire's "Hymne à la beauté" we read: "Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe, / O beauté! Monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénue! / Si ton oeil, ton sourire, ton pied m'ouvrent la porte / D'un infini que j'aime et que j'ai jamais connu?" Luzi's poem "Rifulse, si screziò il diaspro" in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* seems to equalize these two extremes: "E in alto / e più rapidi / che in ogni altro mattino. / Inferno o Paradiso? / Pareva / o era tutta quella luce / una tormentosa insufficienza / di cosa—di luce, di verità?"

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