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Ungaretti and Valéry: From Intertextuality to Hypertextuality

BARBARA CARLE

*"Hélas! nous ne pouvons vivre que par rares
instants sans ancêtres, et saluer le jour qui
s'éveille comme l'Adam du Paradis."*¹

Innocence and memory are the poles of Giuseppe Ungaretti's universe. We find many variations on the theme of innocence and memory throughout his work, as, for example, in the "ancestors" (ancêtres) theme which evolves into the "Padri". The "Padri" are those who determine us historically, culturally, and literarily. How may we free ourselves of these "Padri" who set our course? The poet attempts to go beyond this determination and achieve "innocence," a mythical condition unblemished by the omniscient "Padri."

Ungaretti's illuminative vision is worth exploring on many levels, but what interests us here is its *literary* significance. If we follow the evolution of the ancestor theme, we realize that it begins as a mythical vision and, with time, also becomes a vision of literature, a poetics, a lucid self-awareness. In his early poems Ungaretti is endlessly confronted by ancestors he cannot escape and who prevent him from experiencing "un solo/minuto di vita/iniziale." In "Conclusion" (*La guerre*, 1919) he wrote: "partout me guette un réveil de regrets d'ancêtres." We also find this theme in an early poem entitled "Girovago" (in *Allegria di naufragi*, 1919). In "Girovago" Ungaretti expresses his quest for innocence, for "un paese innocente" free of the past's determination, and therefore free of the presence of unnamed "ancestors."

In nessuna
parte
di terra
mi posso
accasare

A ogni
nuovo
clima
che incontro
mi trovo
languente

che
una volta
già gli ero stato
assuefatto

E me ne stacco sempre
straniero

Nascendo
tornato da epoche troppo
vissute

Godere un solo
minuto di vita
iniziale

Cerco un paese
innocente

As time passes, these "ancestors" become the more immediate "Padri" who condition every word the poet writes. They are Ungaretti's literary fathers, other poets who preceded him, thereby setting the parameters of his poetry. Indeed, they prevent the poet from being himself; he is forced to wear a mask. He is haunted by their "blandizia fanatica," and their "buia veglia" seems to be a "beffa infinita" because he never speaks entirely with his own words. The theme of literary determination is developed in "Canto secondo" and "Canto terzo" of "La morte meditata" in *Sentimento del tempo* (1933). It is also treated much later in "Monologhetto" (*Un grido e paesaggi*, 1952). The first stanza of "Canto secondo" and a fragment from "Monologhetto" will suffice to illustrate the lyric intensity with which this theme is expressed:

Scava le intime vite
Della nostra infelice maschera
(Clausura d'infinito)
Con blandizia fanatica
La buia veglia dei padri
("Canto secondo," "La morte meditata" 1–5)

* * *

Poeti, poeti, ci siamo messi
Tutte le maschere;
Ma uno non è che la propria persona.
("Monologhetto," 163–165)

This vision seems theatrical (the mask could recall Greek tragedy) and yet it expresses a clear poetics. Literature is the continuous re-writing of anterior texts. The notion of originality as we have known

it is false, naïve, or must be re-formulated, for memory is impossible to avoid. The only solution is to "transform" memory for an ephemeral instant into "innocence," through dreams or poetry. This solution of illusory transformation is adopted in the second part of "La morte meditata."²

The beauty of Ungaretti's vision is that it is at once lyric and deeply conscious. Yet the self-conscious aspect of it was absent in his early collections, *Il porto sepolto* and *Allegria di naufragi*. This intense self-awareness expressed as a literary and poetic theme has a direct precedent, or "padre," in the work of Paul Valéry where the myth of Narcissus plays a major poetic and intellectual role. Indeed we may say that "literary self-consciousness" is typically Valéryan. In his "Cimetière marin" we find the theme of the "Pères," who prevent the poet from speaking autonomously. The following quotation is from Valéry's "Lettre sur Mallarmé"; it expresses the notion that poetry is determined by previous poets. The same is true of all forms of art and science:

Qu'il s'agisse de la science ou des arts, on observe, si l'on s'inquiète de la génération des résultats, que toujours *ce qui se fait* répète *ce qui fut fait*, ou le réfute; le répète en d'autres tons, l'épure, l'amplifie, le simplifie, le charge ou le surcharge, ou bien le rétorque, l'extermine, le renverse, le nie; mais donc le suppose, et l'a invisiblement utilisé. Le contraire naît du contraire. (*Oeuvres*, I. 634)

Unlike other French poets such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Rimbaud, Valéry plays a leading role, not only in Ungaretti's formation, but in the evolution of his work as a whole. Ungaretti does not evolve away from Valéry, as he does with Apollinaire or Rimbaud; rather, he approaches him. Ungaretti's debt to these French poets has been duly noted, especially by Luciano Rebay and Carlo Ossola, but no detailed study of his literary relationship to Valéry has been undertaken.³ This partial lacuna in Ungaretti criticism may be filled by studying the literary relations between these two authors. The poetics of both Ungaretti and Valéry call for an intertextual approach. After reviewing their intertextual relations, I will focus on a case in which one of Valéry's poems was transformed by Ungaretti.

Ungaretti transformed or re-wrote Valéry's "La Fausse morte" into "Canto." This was not the first time Ungaretti transformed a French text into an Italian one. Jean-Charles Vegliante recently showed that many of Ungaretti's poems were born in an oscillation between French and Italian. In several cases ("L'isola", "L'île", "Il capitano", "Le capitain") Ungaretti translated his own Italian poems into French prose. In the case of "La Fausse morte" and "Canto" a similar process of transformation has taken place, except that one of the texts in ques-

tion is not Ungaretti's and here we proceed from French into Italian. Valéry's rhymed verse is *transposed* into Ungaretti's unrhymed verse. Therefore the relationship between Ungaretti and Valéry may not be considered one of a general intertextual nature, but rather, to use Gérard Genette's term, one in which there are specific *hypertextual* relations as well. In *Palimpsestes* Genette defines a hypertext as "any text derived from an anterior text through simple transformation" (he calls this "transformation"), "or through indirect transformation, that is, imitation."⁴ In the case of "La Fausse morte" and "Canto" a process of *transformation* has taken place. The difference between hypertextuality and intertextuality is that hypertextual relations are not only based upon themes and quotations but also on structural relations between complete texts. For Genette, intertextual relations consist of the "copresence between two or more texts, and more often by the actual presence of one text in another."⁵ In other words intertextuality concerns parts of texts, either thematic or literal, while hypertextual relations concern the rapport between two complete texts, that is, in our case, the transposition of one text into another.

Intertextual Relations

Ungaretti came into contact with Valéry's work in 1920 while he was living in Paris and working at the Press Office of the Italian Embassy. He later referred to this initial encounter in his essay, "Punto di mira" (1924), where, for the first time he explicitly recognized his debt to the French poet: "Qualsiasi parola di gratitudine sarebbe inefficace a dire di quale soccorso mi sia stato a questo punto l'incontro dell'opera di Paul Valéry."⁶ In "Punto di mira," Ungaretti also quotes Valéry's "Au sujet d'Adonis," the text in which the French poet implicitly described his own poetics while considering La Fontaine's "Adonis." Ungaretti also discusses the change in his poetic style and divides his poetry into two phases, the first ending in 1919, and the second beginning around 1920 in "Punto di mira." This new phase or "season," was distinguished by a more complex style. Ungaretti's first collection, *Il porto sepolto* (1916), was characterized by its irregular verse and condensed lyric impact which created a stark, "essential" style. At that point Ungaretti's poems were, for the most part, not deliberately "musical" because they were constructed around individual words rather than verses. In the early poems of *Sentimento del tempo* (1933), however, Ungaretti used metrical verse for the first time and achieved greater musicality; in this sense the poems of *Sentimento del tempo* contrast with the sparsely worded poetry of *Il porto sepolto*.

In 1925, Ungaretti wrote "La rinomanza di Paul Valéry," the first of five essays and articles dedicated to the French poet. In this article Ungaretti made a veiled allusion to his own work in progress by suggesting that Valéry's "insegnamento" had already been influential: "Quest'insegnamento ha già dato i suoi frutti."⁷ In "Va citato Leopardi per Valéry?" (1926), Ungaretti quoted from "Rhumbs," which he had recently read, declaring that this work had made him experience time "come non saprà mai nessun collezionista di clessidre."⁸ "Rhumbs" may well have helped to inspire the title of Ungaretti's *Sentimento del tempo*. Ungaretti's other writings on Valéry, "Introduzione a Eupalino" (1932), "Testimonianza per Valéry" (1946), and "Discorso per Valéry" (1961), confirm his ongoing interest in, together with his special fascination for "Fragments du Narcisse" and "Le Cimetière marin."

It is especially in Ungaretti's second major collection of poems, *Sentimento del tempo*, that we discover the presence of Valéryan texts, even though, as Zanzotto and Portinari have pointed out, there are traces of Valéry's poetry "tra le righe" of *La terra promessa* (1950).⁹ In particular, Ungaretti's theme of "mental dawn" in "Canzone" has an anterior variation in Valéry's "Aurore."

In *Sentimento del tempo* we can isolate three major Valéryan themes and specific images and even translations and quotations of Valéryan lines: the "ébranlement" (shaking or rocking) image from "Palme," the theme of the Fathers (from "Le Cimetière marin"), the theme of Narcissus (from "Fragments du Narcisse"), and the theme I discuss below, that of "New Death" from ("La Fausse morte").

In the first case we have an inter-linguistic quotation, but there are no thematic links between the two poems considered: "Palme" (*Charmes*), and "Canto quinto" of "La morte meditata." Ungaretti achieves an almost literal translation of Valéry's line from "Palme": "L'ébranlement le plus doux" becomes "E il dondolio, dolcissimi." Valéry's "l'ébranlement" becomes "il dondolio". "Le plus doux" becomes "dolcissimi." Ungaretti pluralizes the adjective because it refers also to "l'equivoco della luna" in the previous line.¹⁰

In the second instance there are not only quotations but major thematic affinities between the two texts in which the "Padri" play a leading role, with their "endless mockery." In both the image of the cicadas occurs.

Among the many themes that run through Valéry's "Cimetière marin" (meditation on consciousness as opposed to sensation; timelessness versus time; immobility as opposed to motion; death versus life; the creation of a poem; a materialistic view of existence; the need to act and live), that of the "Pères" plays an important role. The nineteenth stanza of "Le Cimetière marin" begins with the vocative

"Pères profonds," the natural complement to the homophonic *mer/mère* theme we also find in the poem. The Pères are obviously the poet's ancestors who now "sleep" beneath the tombs. But "Pères profonds" may also refer specifically to Valéry's literary fathers, those he discussed later on in his "Discours en l'honneur de Goethe": "Pères profonds de la pensée" and "Pères sublimes de la musique."¹¹

Pères profonds, têtes inhabitées,
 Qui sous le poids de tant de pelletées,
 Êtes la terre et confondez nos pas,
Le vrai rongeur, le ver irréfutable
N'est point pour vous qui dormez sous la table,
 Il vit de vie, il ne me quitte pas!
 (Emphasis mine)

This stanza, as do all the "cemetery stanzas" in the third part of "Le Cimetière marin," focuses on the contrast between life and death. The poet himself lives: "*Le vrai rongeur, le ver[s] irréfutable*" (*ver*, worm, is homophone of *vers*, verse), and he cannot always write in the shade of his "Pères" ("N'est point pour vous qui dormez sous la table"). Paradoxically, as we have seen for Valéry, the poetry of poets is, to a great extent, determined by previous poets.

We find an analogous thematic development in "La morte meditata" where the "Padri" play a leading role. In the first part of "La morte meditata" ("Canto primo," "Canto secondo," and "Canto terzo") the focus is on the sentiment of memory, the inescapable presence of the "Padri," and the impossibility of expressing oneself with full autonomy, in total "innocence," free from the past. It is this part especially that shares an affinity with "Le Cimetière marin."

"Le Cimetière marin," "Canto secondo," and "Canto terzo" combine the themes of the sentiment of time and the "Padri" in different ways. Yet, these three texts all focus on "the pastness of the past" and on its "presence."¹² "Death" defines not only the contours of the "infelice maschera" the poet wears, the "clausura d'infinito," but also the conditions of his expression. The past as represented by the "Padri" is a "clausura d'infinito" in the sense that literature is a closed system, a "beffa infinita" that repeats itself. The poet speaks through the "mask" of the "Padri" and poems are the "masks" of previous poems. The obsessive presence of the "Padri" is stressed by the comparison of their singing, "cantare," to cicadas. The subject of the verb is "death," "morte"; thus the poet hears death singing within himself "come una cicala." The powerful incongruity between the cicadas and their "cantare" (the sound of cicadas is not particularly melodious) suggests that the reason they sing is because they represent a specific ancestral vein (the "sanguine" of line 8) or heritage, certain "Padri"

present in Ungaretti's collective poetic consciousness. The entire text of "Canto secondo" follows:

Scava le intime vite
 Della nostra infelice maschera
 (Clausura d'infinito)
 Con blandizia fanatica
 5 La buia veglia dei padri.

 Morte, muta parola,
 Sabbia deposta come un letto
 Dal sangue,
 Ti odo cantare come una cicala
 10 Nella rosa abbrunata dei riflessi.¹³

The fathers of Valéry's poem (in the last two verses of the eighteenth stanza) also mock the poet with their "rire éternel": "Qui ne connait, et qui ne les refuse,/Ce crâne vide et ce rire éternel!" Ungaretti has borrowed not only the theme of the mocking fathers and the image of the cicadas (in the twelfth stanza of "Le Cimetière marin" we read "L'insect net gratte la sécheresse"), but also Valéry's "rire éternel," which becomes the more intense "beffa infinita."

Another, somewhat more complex case of what we may call literature "to the second power,"¹⁴ is that of the Narcissus myth in which Ungaretti has used typically Valéryan images, themes, and phrases. In this instance Ungaretti also aspires to a Valéryan poetics of "pure evocation" or "poésie pure."¹⁵ The poems in question are "Lido" (1925), "Leda" (1925), and "Lago luna alba notte" (1927). These texts may be considered variations on the myth of Echo and Narcissus. They all derive from a text entitled "Lido," originally published in the French review, *Commerce* (1925). "Lido," as well as other texts published in *Commerce*, had been written in Paris and Rome between 1920 and 1925, the period during which Ungaretti first conceived "La morte di Crono," an early version of what was to become *Sentimento del tempo*. In this period Ungaretti wrote that he was "assorto nello studio dell'atmosfera musicale della poesia."¹⁶ It is probable that the "Fragments du Narcisse" were among the texts read by Ungaretti. The first "Fragment" was published in the *Revue de Paris*, on September 15, 1919, while Ungaretti was still in Paris.

The myth of Echo and Narcissus is indeed central to all of Valéry: his oeuvre may be interpreted as a continuous dialogue between le Moi (the self) who speaks and acts and the self that is represented. In "Fragments du Narcisse," Valéry overturns the Romantic interpretation of the myth in which Narcissus tragically seeks to realize an amorous union with his alter ego. Valéry's Narcisse is disturbed by the approach of night which will cancel his own image in the pool; on

the other hand, he is deeply immersed in a dialogue with his self which does not "conclude" at the end of the poem but is continued in other texts such as "La Jeune Parque" and "Le Cimetière marin." Such a dialogue with the self renders possible a heightened form of consciousness (this is the positive aspect of Valéry's Narcisse).

Ungaretti's "Lido," "Leda," and "Lago luna alba notte" all express the poet's voyage on water, a theme we find in *Il porto sepolto* and *Allegria di naufragi*. The poet experiences the "joy of shipwrecks" when he attains the buried port, "il porto sepolto," a poetic source of joy and mystery and from which he emerges with his *canto*.

In *Sentimento del tempo* this typically Ungarettian theme is combined with that of the sensation of time passing, the perpetual consummation of all things. The poet's voyage on water reinforces the sensation of the passage of time and the cycles of nature. The meditation on cosmic time leads to the awareness of one's own mortality which, nevertheless, is tempered by the experience of dawn and the sun.

The myth of Echo and Narcissus is present in these texts because the poet's voyage on water intensifies his sentiment of time, his consciousness. In all of these texts the protagonist of the poem is always on the shore of a lake where he contemplates his own reflection in the water. The original version of "Lido," from which these texts derive, was in dialogue form with mythological characters, Clio, Echo, and the Chorus. The presence of Echo suggests that of Narcissus and creates an enchanted atmosphere of self-contemplation. This atmosphere is preserved especially in the final versions of "Lido" and "Lago luna alba notte."

In all of these texts we find quotations from, as well as thematic affinities with Valéry's "Fragments du Narcisse." In the original version of "Lido," for example, the myth of Narcissus was clearly suggested, not only by characters such as Echo, but also by Valéryan lines such as "Cristallo colmo di riflessi!" In the "Fragments" (1.90), we find "Ce cristal est son vrai séjour." In the final version Ungaretti omits "cristallo" but keeps the rest of the verse. All three texts conclude with images of trembling water:

Fragments: Penche-toi. Baise toi. Tremble de tout ton être;
L'insaisissable amour que tu me vins promettre
Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse et fuit. . .

Lido: Finisce l'anno in quel tremito.

Lago luna alba notte: Tempo, fuggitivo tremito. . . (Emphasis mine)

These three texts aspire to a poetics of pure evocation or "poésie pure." In "Lago luna alba notte," Ungaretti concludes with suspension points; so does Valéry in the "Fragments." Valéry's verb, "fuit,"

to flee, is adjectivized into "fuggitivo," and "tremble," the verb, becomes a noun, "tremito." In "Leda" the person is still on the edge of the water; the poem ends with the motion of the water, and as in the "Fragments," the myth of Leda is associated with that of Narcissus. In this instance there are intertextual themes but no quotations as in the previous two poems.

Thus we go from isolated quotations to thematic and textual correspondences. Yet this second example of intertextuality approaches hypertextuality in the sense that Ungaretti transformed the three "Fragments du Narcisse" (written in three fragments) into three condensed texts constructed around the same themes and using a similar poetic language. The pattern is one of transformation and condensation. We go from verse to free verse. Yet it would be hazardous to conclude that this is an instance of hypertextual relations; Ungaretti repeats the division of Valéry's "Fragments," the triptychal structure, by breaking up the original *Commerce* poem into three texts constructed around the same theme without, however, retaining the law of composition that renders the "Fragments" coherent.

A Hypertextual Instance

Valéry's "La Fausse morte" is anterior to Ungaretti's "Canto."¹⁷ "La Fausse morte" is written in metrical verse, a combination of longer and shorter verses: alexandrines and octosyllables in the first stanza, followed by five alexandrines and one octosyllable in the second stanza. The title of the poem announces its theme: a poem on love and death, or rather "false death" which then becomes resurrection.

Ungaretti's "Canto" is written in free verse, although the title of the poem, "Canto," presupposes a formal work carried out upon the text and places it in a "conventional" tradition. The "Canti" of Leopardi, a poet dear to Ungaretti, may be considered a precedent. Ungaretti's title does not define the theme of the poem, but it is articulated in the first line. Both texts are distributed into two stanzas. Valéry's "Fausse morte" is 5/6; Ungaretti's is 7/4 + 1. Both poems are about the same length: Valéry's 11 lines, Ungaretti's 11 + 1. In "La Fausse morte" the alternating pattern of longer/shorter verses is evident in both stanzas. In the first stanza this pattern is sustained evenly throughout while in the second it is present only in the last two verses, 10, 11. Lines 6–10 are a regular succession of alexandrines. The two texts are given below:

La Fausse morte

Humblement, tendrement, sur le tombeau charmant,
Sur l'insensible monument,

- Que d'ombres, d'abandons, et d'amour prodiguée,
 Forme ta grace fatiguée,
 5 Je meurs, je meurs sur toi, je tombe et je m'abats,
 Mais à peine abattu sur le sépulcre bas,
 Dont la close étendue aux cendres me convie,
 Cette morte apparente, en qui revient la vie,
 Frémit, rouvre les yeux, m'illumine et me mord,
 10 Et m'arrache toujours une nouvelle mort,
 Plus précieuse que la vie.

Canto

- Rivedo la tua bocca lenta
 (Il mare le va incontro delle notti)
 E la cavalla delle reni
 In agonia caderti
 5 Nelle mie braccia che cantavano,
 E riportarti un sonno
 Al colorito e a nuove morti.
 E la crudele solitudine
 Che in sé ciascuno scopre, se ama,
 10 Ora tomba infinita,
 Da te mi divide per sempre,
 Cara, lontana come in uno specchio. . .

In both poems the author evokes an intimate memory, a moment of love that he has lived by using an enunciative form. The poet addresses the reader directly: "Je à toi" in Valéry, "Io a te" in Ungaretti. In "Canto" the love imagery is stronger; we find the verb "cadere" ("caderti," 4) also associated with "new deaths" ("nuove morti"). As in Valéry, these "new deaths" are also "false deaths." In the first stanza of "Canto" Ungaretti expresses the desire for resurrection, a longing for "new deaths," "nuove morti;" this phrase has been literally translated from French except that Ungaretti has put it into the plural: "nouvelle mort," "nuove morti." In both poems the phrase "nouvelle mort"/"nuove morti" occurs at the end of lines: in Valéry, towards the end of the text where the notion of "nouvelle mort" becomes resurrection and the poem is born as the narrator dies; in Ungaretti, however, the phrase is placed at the end of the first stanza instead of the second.

In "Canto" the verb "caderti" is placed conspicuously at the end of line 4, isolated in enjambement. It is not the first person or narrator of the poem who "falls" as in Valéry ("je tombe"), but the second person: "caderti," that is, *tu cadisti*. This may be considered an example of "inverse symmetry." This relationship of inverse symmetry may

be observed on various levels of the text, thematic, metric and structural.

In both poems we find tomb images, references to death, and specifically, as we have seen, the use of the verb "to fall." In Valéry the homophone "tombe/tombeau" derives from Baudelaire, but in Baudelaire ("Hymne à la beauté": "L'amoureux pantelant incliné sur sa belle/A l'air d'un moribond caressant son tombeau" 19–20) it is neither associated with "new death," "nouvelle mort," nor with resurrection. In Valéry the tomb image is not associated with death or separation; "tombeau" through the homophone is associated with "tombe," the act of falling amorously, and the "tombeau" is "charmant." At the end of the poem the "apparent death" in the tomb suddenly comes to life.

In "Canto" the theme is developed inversely; the tomb is named in the second stanza instead of the first and it holds a solitude real as death, in other words, a "real death" as opposed to Valéry's "false death." The "tombeau charmant" of "La Fausse morte" becomes a "tomba infinita." Ungaretti's longing for resurrection becomes the awareness of the utter inevitability of death. This may be considered another example of the inverse symmetry that links these texts.

The thematic inversion of "Canto" is stressed by its metrical inversions. The first line is a *novenario* followed by an *endecasillabo*. For reasons of symmetry we might expect the last line, like the first, to be a *novenario*. Instead we find an inversion: an *endecasillabo* (1.12) is preceded by a *novenario* (1. 11). We find the following metrical pattern in "Canto": 9/11, 9/7, 9/7, 9/9, 9/7, 9/11.¹⁸ The studied symmetry of this pattern corresponds strikingly to the architectural perfection of Valéry's "La Fausse morte."

The final instance of inversion in Ungaretti's "Canto" is found in the mirror image in the last line, which ends on suspension points like Valéry's "Fragments": "Cara, lontana come in uno specchio. . ." Love is distance and separation, to love is to become aware of the impossibility of loving. The closer one comes to the other the further away one is. Love of the other is love of one's self and in a narcissistic fashion, the closer one approaches one's self in the mirror, the farther away one is from one's self (when Narcissus finally approaches his reflection and attempts to seize it, it vanishes). The mirror image and the notion of narcissistic love are typical Valéryan themes and call attention to the hypertextual relationship between "Canto" and "La Fausse morte." In the mirror we have the symbol of the relationship with the other. In this case, the other is the lover, Ungaretti's own image, and the hypotext which is the original text, "La Fausse morte," where "false death" leads to "resurrection." The resurrection at the end of Valéry's text is also realized by the birth of "Canto."

This hypertextual relationship is one of resemblance as in the mirror: Ungaretti's poem is a reflected and inverted image of Valéry's text. Thus the theme of the mirror may be interpreted as a "mise en abyme" (or internal self-duplication) of the hypertextual relationship that links the two poems.

We have seen how the process Vegliante distinguished in Ungaretti, that is, his self-translation from Italian poetry to French prose has been repeated in "La Fausse morte" and "Canto" except that the interlinguistic process occurs between two texts by different authors from French to Italian. In *Palimpsestes*, Genette recalls an instance in which Baudelaire also transforms his own poetry into prose. Baudelaire chose to replace the original with another system: defiguration (of the initial text) + refiguration. This double work, Genette concludes, deserves the name of transfiguration or figurative transformation.¹⁹ Transfiguration must therefore be considered one possible definition of the process of poetic composition and should not be confused with imitation. In the case of imitation the writer borrows a style and this style dictates his text. In transfiguration or transformation the author borrows a text and transforms it uniformly into another style.²⁰

Within this hypertextual and interlinguistic relationship Ungaretti's "rewriting" cannot be reduced to "defiguration." For example, Ungaretti does not transpose Valéry's text into prose. More appropriately, Ungaretti's "Canto" exemplifies the double work implied by Genette's concept of transfiguration.²¹ The case of "La Fausse morte" and "Canto" also exemplifies the poetics of both Valéry and Ungaretti: literature is a closed system, a "clausura d'infinito" in which we find endless variations on the same themes and structures. As Valéry wrote, "Le contraire naît du contraire." These two poems reflect not only the poetics of their authors, but also the internal system of Ungaretti's own poetry where we find many hypertextual instances. For example, "Canto terzo" of "La morte meditata" is the hypertext of "Canto secondo." Therefore this hypertextual case exemplifies the obsessive theme of "La morte meditata": poems are the masks of other poems and the poet never writes autonomously, or "innocently." He may only create occasional illusions of "innocence," and they will be more mythical than literary; literary innocence is impossible. The poet must disguise or transform the poems that compose his literary consciousness and unconsciousness. Ungaretti is doubly admirable because he is fully conscious of the limits of the system he works in, yet this awareness never diminishes the intensity of his lyric voice, nor his innovative power.

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NOTES

¹*Correspondance Jean Paulhan-Giuseppe Ungaretti: 1921–1968*, Edition établie et annotée par Jacqueline Paulhan, Luciano Rebay et Jean-Charles Vegliante. Préface de Luciano Rebay. (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) 29.

²In “Canto quinto” of “La morte meditata,” the passage from memory to dream or the illusion of innocence is expressed: “Mi presero per mano nuvole/Brucio sul colle spazio e tempo,/Come un tuo messaggero,/Come il sogno, divina morte.”

³Carlo Ossola, *Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Milano: Mursia, 1975–1982). Luciano Rebay, *Le origini della poesia di Giuseppe Ungaretti*, (Prefazione di Giuseppe Prezzolini), (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1962). Luciano Rebay, “Ungaretti a Valéry: dodici lettere inedite (1924–1936),” (*Italice*, LVIII, 1981, n. 4), 312–324. Commenting on one of Ungaretti’s letters to Valéry, Rebay wrote: “[. . .] uno studio sistematico, condotto sul vivo dei testi, delle eventuali tracce che l’opera di Valéry può aver lasciato nella poesia ungarettiana dal *Sentimento* in poi non è ancora stato intrapreso e rimane da fare” 315.

⁴Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes, La Littérature au second degré* (Seuil, 1982) 14.

⁵Genette, 8.

⁶Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Saggi e interventi*, a cura di Mario Diacono e Luciano Rebay (Milano: Mondadori, 1974) 927. The quotation by Ungaretti on page 927 was crossed out in the manuscript of “Punto di mira.” The text was published after his death.

⁷*Saggi e interventi*, 103.

⁸*Saggi e interventi*, 110.

⁹Andrea Zanzotto, “Ungaretti,” *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana* (Torino: UTET, Vol. IV, 1986) 351–361 and Folco Portinari, *Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Torino: Stampatori, 1975).

¹⁰I quote the relevant stanza from Valéry’s “Palme” and the lines from Ungaretti’s “Canto quinto” below for clarity. The lines from “Palme” come from the eighth stanza of the poem: “Patience, patience,/Patience dans l’azur!/chaque atome de silence/Est la chance d’un fruit mûr!/Viendra l’heureuse surprise;/Une colombe, la brise,/L’ébranlement le plus doux,/Une femme qui s’appuie,/Feront tomber cette pluie/Où l’on se jette à genoux!” (Emphasis mine) The relevant lines (7–13) from “Canto quinto”: “Le tue mani si fanno come un soffio/D’inviolabili lontananze,/Inafferrabili come le idee,/E l’equivoco della luna/E il dondolio, dolcissimi,/Se vuoi posarmele sugli occhi,/Toccano l’anima.” (Emphasis mine)

¹¹Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Vol I (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1957) 536–537.

¹²These phrases come from T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1929) 49.

¹³Ungaretti’s poems are quoted as they appear in *Tutte le poesie* (Milano: Mondadori, 1969). Valéry’s poems are quoted from the 1957 Pléiade edition (see note 11, above).

¹⁴This expression is taken from the subtitle of Genette’s *Palimpsestes*. For clarity, the three texts discussed, all of which derive from the *Commerce* “Lido,” are given below:

Lido

L’anima dissuade l’aspetto
Di gracili arbusti sul ciglio

3 D’insidiosi bisbigli.

Conca lucente che all’anima ignara
Il muto sgomento rovinò

6 E porti la salma vana

Alla foce dell'astro, freddo,
 Anima ignara che torni dall'acqua
 9 E ridente ritrovi
 L'oscuro,

Finisce l'anno in quel tremito.

Lago luna alba notte

Gracili arbusti, ciglia
 Di celato bisbiglio. . .

3 Impallidito livore rovina. . .

Un uomo, solo, passa
 Col suo sgomento muto. . .

6 Conca lucente,
 Trasporti alla foce del sole!

Torni ricolma di riflessi, anima,

9 E ritrovi ridente
 L'oscuro. . .

Tempo, fuggitivo tremito. . .

Leda

I luminosi denti spengono
 L'impallidita.

3 E nel presago oblio sparso,
 Ricolma di riflessi
 La salma stringo colle braccia fredde,

6 Calda ancora,
 Che già tutta vacilla
 In un ascoso ripullulamento
 D'onde.

¹⁵The phrase "pure evocation" is taken from Ungaretti's programmatic poem, "Memoria d'Ofelia d'Alba," in *Sentimento del tempo*: "E a fondo in breve del vostro silenzio/si fermeranno,/Cose consumate:/Emblemi eterni, nomi,/Evocazioni pure. . ."

¹⁶Ungaretti, "Punto di mira," *Saggi e interventi*, 301.

¹⁷"La Fausse morte" first appeared in *L'Oeil de Boeuf*, n. 8, 1921, p. 3. "Canto" was first published in *Gazzetta del Popolo* (Torino) in 1931.

¹⁸Line 7 of "Canto" is a *novenario* with *sinalefe*. Lines 5 and 8 are *novenari sdruc-cioli*.

¹⁹Genette refers to Barbara Johnson's book, *Défigurations du langage poétique: la seconde révolution baudelairienne* (Paris, 1979), where the American critic studies this process and analyzes it as one of "defiguration." Genette reformulates her term "defiguration" into "transfiguration" because he states that Baudelaire (and Ungaretti, too, we may add) was not content with "defiguring" his verse poem into prose, that is, with suppressing its figures or implicit system of figuration.

²⁰I am paraphrasing Genette. See *Palimpsestes*, 88–89.

²¹This instance is unusual in that Genette does not give any examples of transfiguration in two different authors. In the section of *Palimpsestes* entitled "Prosification," Genette discusses inter-linguistic translation between two authors and transfiguration in Baudelaire.