

durevole portata che, d'altra parte, nulla tolgono ai meriti di un volume ormai, da tanto tempo e da più parti, riconosciuto fondamentale. Forse le critiche più produttive sono state quelle rivolte a far notare come il modello della pertinenza riduca la comunicazione ad un fenomeno di analisi e interscambio informativo, ignorando il versante sociale, conativo, non strettamente conoscitivo che presiede a una grande parte dell'elaborazione linguistica umana¹.

Debole (in senso strettamente aggettivale e non teorico-filosofico), finalmente, e alquanto dubbia in opinione di chi fa la presente recensione (ma non solo²) risulta la trattazione degli aspetti «vaghi» (non intellettivi) dell'uso comunicativo del linguaggio, elementi che, secondo ciò che fanno notare gli autori, costituiscono «qualcosa che può essere comunicato eppure (...) inspiegabile nel quadro delle teorie attuali della comunicazione.» (1993:93), e che loro invece considerano di poter afferrare sotto l'analisi terminologica della loro diversa sostanza: «debole», nei confronti delle inferenze intellettive «forti»³.

Per concludere, senza estendere il campo delle critiche che la teoria di Sperber e Wilson ha sollevato (a proposito dell'origine del linguaggio come «ideazione» di messaggi, completamente ignorata dagli autori, per esempio⁴), bisognerà comunque ribadire che il testo, che viene presentato in italiano in una veste tipografica poco attraente, costituisce comunque un volume fondamentale che ha posto le basi di ulteriori sviluppi in grado di sopperire alle sue eventuali manchevolezze.

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Gabriele D'Annunzio: The Dark Flame, by Paolo Valesio. English translation by Marilyn Migiel. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992. Pp. XVIII, 269.

Hayden WHITE

In this book, the transatlantic critic, poet and novelist, Paolo Valesio, reexamines the career and seeks to redeem the reputation of Italy's greatest modern writer,

¹ Cfr., per esempio, CLARK, H. H. (1987); O'NEILL, J. (1988-89); WALKER, R. C. S. (1989).

² Cfr. SÁNCHEZ DE ZAVALA, V. (1994: 70-71).

³ Cfr. SPERBER, D-WILSON, D. (1993: 94 e ss.).

⁴ Cfr. SÁNCHEZ DE ZAVALA, V. (1994: 83).

Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863-1936). D'Annunzio dominated Italian letters for over half a century and excelled as a writer in every field he turned to: poetry, novels, theater, criticism, journalism, political polemics, patriotic oratory, and autobiography. He was a great and very public lover of interesting women, a genuine military hero, and passionate patriot. His works bear such «decadentist» titles as *Pleasure*, *The Innocent One*, *Roman Elegies*, *The Triumph of Death*, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, *The Dead City*, *Glory*, *Fire*, *Maia*, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, *Iron*, *Leda without the Swan*, and *Contemplation of Death*. He was a fascinating figure who, according to Valesio, was the last writer to combine erotics and heroics in e «living idea». His life was as interesting as his writing, but both his life and his writing have been ignored both in Italy and abroad since the fall of Fascism, with which he has been routinely associated, and the end of the Second World War. Recently, there have been signs of revival of interest in d'Annunzio's life and work, and Valesio's book will contribute to it in a major way.

This is not, however, a survey of the «life and works» variety. Quite the contrary, Valesio uses the figure of d'Annunzio as an occasion to investigate the relation of twentieth-century Italian writing to cultural modernism and therewith the relation of modernist literature to fascism. On the basis of this investigation, Valesio indicts contemporary Italian literary culture for its denial of its own immediate, d'Annunzian past and its betrayal of its longer tradition of cosmopolitan writing which began with Dante, extended through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and culminated in D'Annunzio himself.

Valesio argues that the attitude of post-fascist Italian culture towards d'Annunzio exemplifies a complex process of remembering and forgetting of its past which has, on the one hand, cut Italy off from its cosmopolitan traditions and, on the other, blocked its participation in the modernist program of cultural renewal. Thus, d'Annunzio is remembered (and even slyly celebrated) as the dandy and decadent, the florid rhetorician and military adventurer, in a word, the figure of «the artist as fascist». And as thus enfigured, he stands for everything of Italian culture that must be repudiated if that culture is to become genuinely modern. But in remembering *this* figure, Italian literary culture effectively obscures d'Annunzio's (and consequently its own) affiliations with the inventors of literary modernism (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud, Wilde, Whitman, etc.) and, beyond that, the intimate relation between modernism and the great tradition of Italian literary-political cosmopolitanism that extends from Dante to d'Annunzio.

According to Valesio, d'Annunzio was not only one of the greatest of modern *European* writers but specifically the poet who, especially in his execution of the symbolist program, actually «inaugurates literary modernity». Valesio does not try to meet all of the charges, moralistic, aesthetic, and political, brought against d'Annunzio (and, through him, against Italian letters in general) during and after the Fascist era. He aims primarily at an *aesthetic* reassessment of «a great poet, a major novelist, a brilliant playwright», who distills the essence of «the spirit of the two centuries at whose turn we find him» (p 4) In a word, Valesio wishes to identify in

d'Annunzio's work what an older critical tradition would not have been ashamed to call «poetic genius». To this end, Valesio disposes an impressive, original, complex and, ultimately, very demanding strategy of literary interpretation.

Valesio is a philologist, linguist, and semiotic critic. He has published important books on such subjects as «structures of alliteration» and «rhetorics» conceived as the theory of «the politics of language». He is, finally, the theoretician of what he calls «semiohistory» -which envisages cultural history as a history of sign production, exchange, consumption, and reproduction, but more importantly seeks to distinguish between those writers and intellectuals who are merely «symptomatic» of the forces at work in the period in which they write and those who «signify» those forces, expropriate them, turn them to their own uses, combine them with other forces, and consequently give them directions and purposes they would not otherwise have had.

In this book, Valesio applies the principles of semiohistory to the examination of a single writer, Gabriele d'Annunzio, considered as a «living sign» or point of exchange at which modernist literature and modernist politics intersect, interanimate one another, and by a complex process of sign alchemy succeed in endowing each the other with a distinctively «period» meaning. The period in question is that of modernism, and Valesio argues for D'Annunzio's status as the representative of a unique modernist sensibility. On his account, d'Annunzio was in his earliest work a writer fully the equal of Gide, Proust, Rilke, and Yeats. In addition, he was in his later period the inventor of distinctively modernist, even postmodernist literary genres- such as the anti-narrative novel, the autobiographical «semifiction,» the anti-theatrical drama, the poem in prose, and so on. He was also- in the manner of Baudelaire- a cartographer of the modern urban mental landscape and -better than Gramsci- a deconstructor of fascism, «the melancholy of the century». As the foremost visionary poet of this century, d'Annunzio, in his five-volume *Lauds*, not only challenged Dante and Petrarch as a writer of the «total poem», but anticipated and indeed alone made possible, among many other modernist projects, the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound.

In defense of these claims for d'Annunzio's pre-eminence in our century, Valesio reconstructs the «genealogy» of d'Annunzio, not as a chain of influences, borrowings, and imitations, but rather as a congeries of anticipations and retrospective expropriations, involving poetic rhythms, themes, images, and obsessions shared by such predecessors as Pindar, Dante, Petrarch, Hölderlin, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Walt Whitman; and such successors as Pound, Eliot, Ungaretti, Vittorini, Pasolini, Thomas Wolfe, Faulkner and Allen Ginsberg. Thus Valesio hopes to dis-figure d'Annunzio, and, on the basis of this dis-figurement, retrieve «the living idea» of the quintessential modernist poet and re-establish his actual «historical relation» to his time and ours.

How does he go about this task?

Valesio distinguishes among four different aspects of a writer's corpus. These are, first, the material remains (manuscripts, editions, variants, etc) which it is the

task of philological criticism to sort out, classify, and reassemble as a linguistic unity. Valesio is superb at this operation, and his minings of the fine textures of a poetic line is a model of its kind. Next, there is the writer's status as a «sign», discernible in the trajectory of a career and consisting of his or her role within a period or place within a tradition, which it is the task of the semiohistorian to establish. Here Valesio makes astonishing claims for d'Annunzio's centrality to both his era and the great traditions from which he descends. Whether all of these claims -such as d'Annunzio's status as a «trasatlantic» writer- can be sustained is a question for specialists to decide. Third, there is the writer's place in a «genealogy» which consists of his or her affiliations with different representatives of world «literature» and which falls to the literary critic properly so called to identify. Here Valesio provides his own version of what poststructuralists have come to call «intertextuality» and does so with compelling authority. Finally, there is the writer's «idea», which is the esthetic essence contained in the work and which is discernible only at the level of a specifically «philosophical» inquiry. Valesio makes claims for the ontological status of the great work of art which appear to indicate not only an interest but a belief in the kind of «estheticism» which d'Annunzio is supposed to have represented. The book on d'Annunzio is, in short, very much a defense of an «estheticist» philosophy of art, quite at odds with the kind of ideological defamation of esthetics in general which has emanated from the political Left over the last half-century. In any event, Valesio utilizes these notions of the «levels» at which a writer's work can be invested by the critic to weave a complex account, not so much of d'Annunzio or specific works of his, as rather of his function as a sign of his time and as a «living idea» whose «time» as a model of poetic creativity has «come around» again.

Valesio's book consists of 287 printed pages divided (depending on how one counts) into fourteen sections. These are: a Preface, a Chronicle of the principal events in d'Annunzio's «Inimitable Life»; an Introduction, subtitled «A Living Idea»; four Parts (entitled «Context: The Literature of Politics,» «Text: Poetry and Drama»; «Subtext: Poetry and Criticism»; and «Poetic Genealogies») spanning seven chapters; an Appendix, consisting of d'Annunzio's 1914 essay on Dante, written in French; Notes on the Texts of d'Annunzio's works; Notes on Valesio's own text; and finally, an analytical Index. I recite this table of contents in order to suggest the (what I take to be planned) *fragmentary* nature of Valesio's presentation of d'Annunzio.

I said earlier on that this was not a «life and works» survey. Valesio steadfastly resists any temptation to narrativize the course of d'Annunzio's life. Anyone wanting information on d'Annunzio's sensational «life», then, must look to the bare chronicle at the beginning of the book. As for the «works», Valesio resists any impulse to summarize the plots of d'Annunzio's novels or paraphrase the contents of his essays, poems, and plays. The problem, therefore, according to Valesio, is not so much to re-read d'Annunzio's works *seriatim* and divide them into periods as it is rather to grasp the «living idea» of his achievement as a poet. This can be done only

by applying the most rigorous *philological* methods to crucial passages in the d'Annunzian corpus and then subjecting what has been uncovered in these passages to the most serious *esthetic* analysis.

What does this mean? It means, first, locating points of poetic fusion in the corpus, points at which different concepts or whole discourses are grasped in an image that illuminates not only the rest of the writing but the «living idea» of the writer and his age as well. For Valesio, such images are almost always products of the effort to fuse opposed entities into unities: life and death, darkness and light, nobility and humility, heroism and cowardice, youth and old age, earliness and belatedness, and so on. In fact, Valesio offers the title of his book, «Gabriele d'Annunzio: The Dark Flame», as an emblem of such images; according to him, this title «concentrates ... the special quality of d'Annunzio's work and an entire epoch in European cultural history, taking account of symbolism at the same time as it ushers us toward modernity». The «concentration» consists, first, of the pleonasm contained in d'Annunzio's name («The name of the poet ... names not once, but twice 'the Annunciation' ... Gabriel being the announcing angel par excellence; ... [and] his family name translating the etymon of 'Gospel' or 'Godspell'»); and, then, the oxymoron «dark flame» evoking «d'Annunzio's work at a level of intensity and profundity that requires careful reading». The image of the «miles patiens» («the suffering soldier»), with its suggestion of both heroism and abasement, not to mention its ironic allusion to the traditional religious icon of the «Christus patiens», is another such image; Valesio uses it to focus discussions of d'Annunzio's response to World War I, his sense of the triumph of fascism as a reaction to Italy's «victimage» in that war, and his prophetic vision of fascism as a kind of sacrificial rite which Italy must live through if it is to redeem its debt to its people.

This «Jungian» notion of the «joining of opposites» informs Valesio's catachrestic readings of everything from the nature of decadentism («a creative declension»), modernism (product of an effort to join religion and literature or, what amounts to the same thing, the sacred and the profane), and fascism («a beautiful lie,» «a corrupted poetic idea,» a «desperate *imitatio* of the Passion») to specific works and their characteristic styles.

The notion of the crucial image as a fusion of opposites is a translation -or so it seems to me- into modernist terms of Jakobson's definition of the «poetic function» as consisting of the projection of «the principle of equivalence» from the paradigmatic (vertical and metaphoric) onto the syntagmatic (horizontal and metonymic) axis of the utterance. And indeed Valesio distinguishes between the linguistic and the esthetic «moments» of a text in terms of the way it effects a turn between its horizontal and vertical dimensions, a switch within which «temporality» (*khronos*) is suspended and a «here and now' meaning» (*kairós*) flares up and epiphanically manifests a vision of wholeness specifically poetic in kind. This distinction authorizes the further distinction between the philological and the esthetic «moments» of criticism and between their respective aims. While philological cri-

ticism is concerned with the reconstruction of the text's material body, esthetic criticism is concerned with its spirit or soul. The aim of esthetic criticism is, Valesio says, to identify «the *kairós* in poems.» *Kairotic* moments are precisely those in which Jakobson's «principle of equivalence» triumphs over every impulse to disperse meaning across a series or to arrange elements of the whole into a hierarchy. What is effected in such moments is a perfect replication of the whole in the part, a representation of the macrocosm in the microcosm. This replication unites the grandest with the smallest and most humble aspects of a poem, a text, a life, a period, a tradition. And this accounts for what I can only call the phantasmagoric aspect of Valesio's own text, its sudden switches from the microscopic to the macroscopic levels, its sudden turns from the most painstakingly detailed examinations of a single lexeme, phrase, or line, on the one side, to the most comprehensive claims for a given text's originality, brilliance, influence, prescience, or sophistication, on the other.

Like his notion of the crucial image, Valesio draws his interpretative strategy from the symbolists. This is in accordance with his conviction, formally embraced, that the critic's metalanguage should conform to the language of his object of study, to the point of imitating and, where called for, even parodying it. This may be why Valesio, who is fluent in English, chose to write his book in Italian and, beyond that, cast it in the form of a congeries (a *sorities* or heap) of fragments. It may also account for the fact that Valesio does not, with the exception of his treatment of short lyrics, deal with whole works, but only with fragments or parts of works. In many respects, this strategy accords with the ideology of philology which, from the late 18th century on, presumed that there is no such thing as a whole work, that everything is a fragment, sherd, or part of a lost whole; but that this lost whole is perceivable by way of the part and can be reconstructed by a microscopic analysis of the structure of the part.

However, in the case of Valesio, the reconstruction of the whole means distinguishing between the poet's work as a linguistic artifact, on the one hand, and as a sign system, on the other. Signs function differently from words. Whereas words refer (or at least seem to do so) to an extra-linguistic reality, signs refer both to this reality and to other signs -so that, as in the case of d'Annunzio, for example, it can be seen how what he says makes a connection, not only between language and reality, but also among many different discourses, such as those of religion, politics, literature, and personal feeling. Thus, Valesio argues, d'Annunzio's relation to fascism is that of the creator of an original poetic idea, specifically one that envisioned the fusion of «heroics» and «erotics», to a «corrupted» version thereof. So, too, for d'Annunzio's relationship to those Italian writers who came after and were in a variety of ways inspired by him. Ungaretti, in his early war poetry, and Vittorini in his novels, Pasolini in his critical writing- all take up d'Annunzian themes and give them typically modernistic treatments of a d'Annunzian kind. But all of them, in Valesio's estimation, represent a «decesion» from -a fading or paling of- the d'Annunzian «idea».

The last chapter of Valesio's book is a *tour de force* of critical imagination. Here he examines what he calls a «number of points of contact between the territory of the d'Annunzian imagination and the territory of the North American imagination» especially as the latter is represented by the «poetic prosings» of Walt Whitman. Although d'Annunzio's allusions to Whitman and to North American writing in general are minimal. Valesio insists upon the possibility of «objective» affinities between these two territories both stylistic and thematic as well. The point here seems to be that d'Annunzio's futuristic, prophetic, metamorphic, and magical -in a word, his hypermodernist- style resembles in more than a superficial way the poetic «effusiveness» of such American writers as Poe and Whitman and, later, Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. Valesio suggests that this conjunction of poetic territories points to the formation of an «international», even transcontinental style which, once the fad of minimalist writing has passed, will recognize in d'Annunzio its annunciatory angel.

VITTORINI, E. *Las ciudades del mundo*: Traducción de Sergio Pitol, Barcelona: Debate, 1991, 327 pp.

Soledad COBOS RUZ

Abordar la crítica de una traducción suele ser un tema controvertido. En primer lugar, porque es necesario partir siempre de la inevitable subjetividad del traductor y, a partir de ahí, enjuiciar una determinada elección entre un abanico de opciones posibles, que, por ello, mantendrán siempre su carácter de discutibles. En segundo lugar, existe un prurito entre los profesionales de la traducción en virtud del cual se elude —quizás por un cierto sentido de la elegancia o tal vez por un vago espíritu de corporativismo— pronunciarse acerca del trabajo de otro. Esto conduce, por lo general, a que el único juicio al que suele someterse la versión que se ofrece al mercado sea la breve mención —cuando se hace— que algún crítico añade al enjuiciamiento general de la obra, sin tener delante —pues no es tal su principal propósito— el texto original.

Esta casi ausencia de crítica quizás sea la causa de que cuando una obra literaria se difunde en otra lengua distinta de aquella en la que fue escrita, los responsables editoriales no siempre controlen el rigor filológico del producto cultural que están ofreciendo. Tal vez la situación mejorara si la crítica de la traducción trascendiera los ámbitos académicos.

En el caso de Elio Vittorini su obra ha aparecido en nuestro país de un modo intermitente, fragmentario, disperso y mal distribuido, aunque en los últimos años parece que comienza a prestársele la atención que corresponde a un clásico de nuestro siglo. Sin embargo, algunas de las versiones que se ofrecen —en algunos casos realizadas hace más de treinta años— jamás han sido revisadas, a pesar de las evidentes deficiencias que presentan.

Porque, por ejemplo, en la obra que hoy nos ocupa, ya no se trata de cuestiones subjetivas que afectan a la libertad del traductor para elegir una opción entre varias, sino de una falta de atención manifiesta a lo que el original dice.