

## Enrico Tatasciore. *Moderne parole antiche. Cardarelli, Quasimodo, Saba e i classici*

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**Enrico Tatasciore. *Moderne parole antiche. Cardarelli, Quasimodo, Saba e i classici*. Novate Milanese: Prospero, 2020. Pp. XXXIII + 552. ISBN 9788885491991.**

Usually, academic volumes on Classical receptions in modern literatures tend to emphasize the relevance of Graeco-Roman themes to the modern world. As such, they connect contemporary authors directly back to the supposed Classical source. In contrast with this tendency, Tatasciore embraces an opposite perspective: the volume investigates not the distance between source and reception, but rather the chain of receptions between Classical literature and Italian poetry of the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, earlier European and Italian instances of reception of Classical antiquity — original poetry and prose, modern translations, figurative arts — influence later receptions linguistically, thematically, and hermeneutically.

The book consists of four rich chapters. The first one deals with Cardarelli's poem *Ajace* (pp. 1–90); the second with Ungaretti's poems from *Terra promessa* (pp. 91–316); the third with Quasimodo's *Lirici greci* (pp. 317–404); the fourth with Saba's *Mediterranee* (pp. 405–530). A preface, a bibliographical note and list of abbreviations, a very short epilogue, and a useful index of names complement the chapters.

The first chapter, in which Tatasciore mainly examines one poem (as opposed to the following chapters, where he explores several poems within a poetry collection), serves as an introduction to the methodology and main thesis of the book. Tatasciore follows the historical evolution of Cardarelli's poem *Ajace* by cross-examining the poet's private epistolary and literary prose and poetry within a soundly historicist framework. The poem, first conceived after World War I in connection with the newly-created figure of the *Milite Ignoto*, was finished in 1933, under the new fascist climate. Although in some poems Cardarelli did express his enthusiasm for the regime, the poem goes in a different direction, in that it lowers the epic hero to the level of an everyday man, rather than offering an 'epicization' of the present. While Ajax refers to Homer and to other classical sources, in the case of Cardarelli its reception is filtered through 19th-century Italian neo-classical poetry, specifically Vincenzo Monti's *Iliade* and Foscolo's *Sepolcri*. Thus, Cardarelli engages not directly with Classical culture, but with a classical 'code' already incorporated by Italian literature. The mediated nature of this contact marks a change with the direct engagement with the classics that characterized Pascoli and D'Annunzio, the last great poets-classicists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is

emblematic of a noteworthy, general change of the fruition of Classical culture in the Italian 20th century, as it is shown in the following chapters.

The very long chapter on Ungaretti's *Terra promessa* (1950) focuses mostly on *Cori di Didone* and *Palinuro*. Through a close examination of Ungaretti's prose *Pesca miracolosa* (1932), *Commemorando D'Annunzio* (1938) and of his academic lectures on Petrarch and Dante, Tatasciore reconstructs Ungaretti's long interest in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Ungaretti engaged with it primarily through Annibal Caro's Italian 16th century hendecasyllabic translation, only occasionally going back to Vergil's Latin original. Caro's translation supplied stylistic and emotional models to *Terra promessa*, which Tatasciore retraces by following some word-motifs. Vergil's *Aeneid* received special public attention with the celebration of Vergil's bimillenary in 1930 as a key text of fascist imperialistic ideology. Notwithstanding the poet's support of fascism, *Terra promessa* reconciles a Classical myth with a Biblical hope of regeneration far from the imperialistic, triumphalist ideology of the regime. Indeed, although Ungaretti's interest in the *Aeneid* first emerged in the 1930s, *Terra promessa* came to being after his return from Brasil, the disaster of World War II and the poet's private losses, which are central in *Il dolore* (1947). Along the way, Ungaretti's rarefied poems show influences from Dante, Petrarch, the baroque, and Leopardi.

The chapter on Quasimodo's *Lirici greci* (1940) is particularly interesting in that it blurs the boundaries between original poetry and translation, and highlights Quasimodo's free relationship with the Greek poets. With Anceschi as ideal 'co-author' and Lavagnini's anthology *Aglaia* as his guide, Quasimodo unified unrelated fragments of Sappho into a single poem, while he left aside an extant section of a poem by Mimnermus. His poems from the 1930s influenced the poet's translation of the Greek poets; in turn, the translations influenced later poems. Even though Quasimodo's *Lirici greci* broke away from stiff neoclassicist solutions, marking a change in translation style, certain linguistic choices point to Foscolo's and Leopardi's influence. The choice of translating Greek lyric was at odds with the fascist cultural climate.

The last chapter explores the use of Classical myths to represent psychological situations in Saba's *Mediterranee*. Myths are seldom to be found in Saba's poetry before or after *Mediterranee*: in the collection, the Mediterranean Sea becomes a symbol of union between the Classical past and Judaism, but also between Rome and his distant Trieste, where the poet was temporarily unable to return after the end of World War II. Saba's Classical mythology was shaped by Nietzsche and especially by Freud, and also mediated by modern figurative art. Particularly,

the poems *Il ratto di Ganimede* and *Narciso al fonte*, whose genesis and sources are examined in detail, reflect on psychoanalytical notions of homoeroticism and narcissism, especially in connection with Saba's relationship to his younger friend and poet Federico Almansì.

Tatasciore's rich prose at times leads the reader into digressions apparently unconnected to the main theme of the chapter. Yet, his style, *recherché* and often literary, makes for a pleasant read and an acute exploration of the reception of the classics into Italian poetry. Despite its length, the book exhibits very few typos. The many directions of research and the bibliographical richness attest to the author's wide array of tools and to his highly sensitive readings of the texts. While the book painstakingly illuminates the single author's relationship with the classics and the Italian literary memory with an overwhelming abundance of data, it also provides a valuable theoretical insight in reception studies and a sound methodology for the practitioners of the field.

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**Mimmo Cangiano. *The Wreckage of Philosophy. Carlo Michelstaedter and the Limits of Bourgeois Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. Pp. 186. ISBN 9781487504649.**

Not only does Cangiano's provocative investigation in *The Wreckage of Philosophy* reconfigure the philosophical value of a lesser-known actor of European modernism, the young Goritian Michelstaedter, it also shows the innermost dialectic that words make meaning, and that the value of meaning determines power structures and roles of subjugation.

Especially for the English-speaking world, such inquiry stands out as an original departure in dialogue with a variety of literatures of thought that defined socio-cultural semantics of early twentieth century. It delves, primarily, into the knot of Italian modernist thought(s) within the "anarchy of chiaroscuro," György Lukàcs's expression employed by Cangiano here to reveal how peculiarly Michelstaedter interpreted the material unraveling of his time and exposed how "Rhetoric" of power permeates bourgeois society of social consensus as well as the anthropology of *technè* (3). In contrast to relativistic views of the philosopher, Cangiano persuades us to reconsider the words of the young Goritian as