

MARIO LUZI'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT:

MARIO LUZI WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST ITALIAN POETS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY BELONGING TO THE HERMETIC CURRENT OF THE ITALIAN POETRY. IN THE LAST VOLUMES IT WAS FELT A CERTAIN POSTMODERNIST NOTE IN HIS POEMS. THIS INTERVENTION IS MEANT TO BE A PRESENTATION IN A FOCUSED SUMMARY, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, OF THIS POETRY.

KEYWORDS: HERMETISM, POSTMODERNISM, AUTHENTICITY, ORPHIC LINE, MODERNISM.

Mario Luzi was one of the greatest Italian poets of modernism and even of postmodernity. In one of his volumes entitled “All fuoco della controversia” (“In the midst of controversy”), observes Marin Mincu, Luzi was approaching prominently postmodernism.¹ In 1997 came close to take the Nobel Prize for literature. He can be framed in the so-called Italian hermetism with Eugenio Montale and Giuseppe Ungaretti, differing from them, in the opinion of the above mentioned critic because “he preferred temptation to adventure in poetry, fighting back to experience, desire and reactions to disillusionment”². Also “to the Ungaretti and Montale's feelings he preferred Campana's song, sometimes tense, sometimes tarnished”³. It should be mentioned here that the Italian hermetism is largely different from the French one, in Stephane Mallarme and in Paul Valéry poetry. However, in an article published recently in “Literary Romania”, Geo Vasile noticed, placing the hermetic period of Mario Luzi between the debut with La Barca (The boat) and Quaderno gotico (Gothic notebook), that there was an “Orphic” line of modernism “with archetype in Mallarmé, but also in the type Coleridge or Nerval visionary romance”⁴ a line that was not foreign either to Mario Luzi. It should be added that, in view of the same critic, the lines of force of the poetry of Luzi were rendered by the absence of elitist ascesis and immobility without illusions⁵.

The boat – La Barca

This collection of poems appeared in 1935, ten years after Eugenio Montale published his famous book of poems Ossis di seppia (Cuttlefish Bones). In the grey houses of Luzi's poetry there is a lot of talk, the protagonist of the poetic discourse is an old woman assisting to the natural course of events such as births, marriages and deaths. The existential line is present in other lyrics, the poetic voice well knows that “I corpi si spengano un giorno” (“the bodies will fade one day”) be in the moonlight or in the wind. And he knows that somewhere there is a boat

waiting swaying in the light. In fact, as we saw, the title of the first volume of the poet is *The Boat* (1935). And we can read about it in the *Dictionary of Symbols*: "The boat is a symbol of marriage, of a sailings met by the living or the dead." ⁶ It may have other connotations, thinking about Caron's boat, boat of human misery. But as we read in the *Dictionary*: "To G. Bachelard, the boat leading to this birth is the cradle rediscovered" ⁷. So it is also a symbol of intimacy and the silence of the earth from the end of this beautiful poem can be only complementary.

The indwelling is connected with the truth, because on earth happen the unfathomable truths. It stays memorable the image of the summers coming down from the trees doubled by the faltering autumn roses. Anyway ... We are in a day "too low on love" and the too vast world is not exempt from accidents, because we see how the flying of the dove is suddenly broken and the lake and the path fade away.

Nocturnal arrival - Avvento nocturne

As we have seen, Geo Vasile referred here a certain "Orphic" modernist line. There are however plenty of other aspect to note. We learn first from the poem *Citta lombarda* (*Lombard City*) that suffering serves as a modeler, contributing to the perfection of things. Night and nausea are two striking presences. We are in full nighttime image, and the ice is still felt. The uncertainty seems more pronounced now and Spring's image positioned against the pale walls confirms it. It is raining in silence on roads and life's a shadow...

A toast - un brindisi

A little more declarative poem is found in this volume. His beloved presence is barely felt, as if doubled by silence and winter. The feminine silhouettes are more present in these texts than earlier, but nonetheless uncertainty persists as for instance in the poem *Donna in Pisa* (*Woman from Pisa*) where we read "E talvolta era incerto tra noi chi fosse assente" ("and sometimes it was not sure whom of us was absent"). And maybe this is the spirit of poetry: travelling, meaning implicitly initiation. Life itself is a journey, "vivere e ancora ciò che ci rimane" ("because to live is all that we have left") and already the cold is felt: "occupate le dita già dal gelo" ("fingers are fighting frost"). Frost again. Freezing even the voice of the people, pastors, in a poetry as *Croce di Sentieri* (*Crossroads of footpaths*). In spite of so many uncertainties, beings continue and noises of the world become the object of study: "ascentiamo stridere gli uccelli da veranda di rose" ("I was listening the song of the birds / on the porch with roses").

As Anatole France in one of his prose, Mario Luzi sometimes has a dialogue with the child that he was. He sees him "nel silenzio della sera" ("in the evening silence ") and on memories lane. Sometimes summer comes faster than usual, even if the poetic utterance may involve also "a muto delirio" ("a silent delirium"), regarding the poem *Epistolium*. Something happened because now it is also invoked the hidden wound, yet another precarity. Alone in front of the city the man of Mario Luzi gets to exclaim, as the man of Paul Valéry in *Marine cemetery*, that it was time to give life her share. The Italian poet's words: "E tempo di levarsi su, di vivere/puramente" ("It's time to rise, to live / simply").

The Gothic notebook - Quaderno gotico

If Eugenio Montale wrote *Quaderno di-quattro anni* (*The four years notebook*), Mario Luzi wrote the *Quaderno gotico* volume (*The Gothic notebook*).

The flame and burning doubled by restlessness, a cruel anxiety ("penosa ansietà" says Luzi) greets us from the very first lines of this collection. The poet himself would want to be a fire regenerated by the burning, which entitled Geo Vasile speak in a number of "Romanian literary"

in 2010, about a certain "knowledge by zeal" at Mario Luzi . But that can lead the Thought at a certain Gaston Bachelard, the one from fire Psychoanalysis and his glosses "closed in his home, the fire was, undoubtedly, the man's first subject of reverie, the symbol of rest, invitation to rest. It is possible to conceive a philosophy of repose without a reverie in front of burning wood stocks."⁸ The resting reverie is so felt that even the echo falls asleep "un'eco quieta dorme nella loggia" ("and a peaceful echo falls asleep on the terrace").

Scattered poems - Poesie sparse

The nighttime of the image and of the human condition perhaps, brings a new dimension, the poet says, because things get extra depth, even if dreams are rare.

First fruits of the desert - Primizie del Deserto

Geo Vasile noticed in "Literary Romania" that, starting with this collection of poems, the poet's few certainties collapse and there is a dark and barren landscape. Luzi rejects mimetic poetry and universally or imaginary becomes increasingly more and more "a repertoire of defeat, suffering, oblivion."⁹

The boundaries between poetry and prose are deleted, and hedonism is replaced by icy fierceness. Like Rainer Maria Rilke before him, Mario Luzi here praises the life and death alike. A strange topos greets us now called by the poet "limitless land" more exactly "la nostra regione senza limiti". One in which the flowers are sad, herbs mute and the desert field enhances grief. The condition of the individual is precarious, he plunges in the shadows. The lyric protagonist is always looking for a time of enlightenment, a suitable time he says, that can shatter the mold. The space of the village no longer knows any target and dominant seems to be "la densità near dun bosco" ("the black thickness of the forest"). Although still, the essence retains its attributes and, in turn, the time "adduce e porta via la forme" ("brings and banishes forms"). The sacred space, the mountain is sometimes in consonance with the night. A poem as Brughiera (The Moorland) confirms the words of Geo Vasile in "Literary Romania", as indeed certainties are destroyed, the landscape is barren and dark, errors and delusions are everywhere present. Even the wind is arid ("arido vento") and the space seems not to be consonant with the time anymore, because you see yourself running on "una di quelle vie senza stagioni" ("on one road without seasons").

The honor of truth - Onore del vero

Mincu Marin notes that "since the volume Onore del vero, Luzi wants to recover the ego dimension, as double authenticity, as a subject involved directly in the existential experience, and as an I participating in writing. Metaphysical compulsions appear as in Montale. Life and test are, in fact, inseparable."¹⁰ The bird's fly is also tired and the wind increasingly harsh. Like a man, the sea struggles and torments itself. Lucidity implies to know you're not more than mere "shadow changing place in the flame of/ perpetual death" ("ombra che muta luogo nella fiamma/della morte perpetua"). The same wind that is now one of autumn raises dust on roads and the poet knows that some of the loved things may be also lost... A bitter lesson, yet the flow of time is life even if it can be less, "e poco" says the poet and, in the addition, there are not any other signs: "d'altro non vi sono segni". The poem is called as we can see, "Come deve" ("As it should"). It seems that George Bacovia was not the only modern poet that used black as one of the most present colors. Mario Luzi even has a poem called Nero (Black) where we meet the "vento degli agissi neri e viola" ("wind of black abysses") which stirs

dry gardens along a street that has only drunks and lanterns ... And that the bacovian note be even stronger, the rain comes and it seems to be governing people, the smoke, but also "alberi, bani di citta, cariaggi" ("trees, bits of town, vans").

One verse as "il freddo di Pasqua è crudele con i fiori, ("cold Easter is cruel to flowers") sends us intertextually to the incipit of the famous poem *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot and we remember it was said that April is the cruelest month.

The criticism was right when observing, among others, in the case of Mario Luzi, the differences or boundaries between poetry and prose disappear ... The lyrics of this collection confirms it. And what could the poet be if not the "albero di dolare" ("the pain tree") that "scuote i rami" ("shakes its branches").

Another observation is the large presence of an obsessive metaphor as the French critic Charles Mauron said. Here, the wind: "il vento/lungo le strade" ("The wind / along the streets"). And we are again dealing with a cruel spring, as in T. S. Eliot, for we read: "il giorno lungo e freddo di primavera illumina/e strapazza le fioriture effimere" ("The long and cold spring day shines / and destroys all fleeting blooms").

From the depths of the plains - Dal fondo delle campagne.

Despite the title, the mountain appears first in these poems. The pure space of sacredness in which, from what we learn, silence prevails, for "La vita della montagna tace" ("Life in the mountains is silent"). However, the symbolism of the mountain is clear, as it notes Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant "the rich symbolism of the mountain is related to height and centeredness."¹¹

The grass (the text) can be seen everywhere, even near the secure area of the house. The poem, in fact, has a superb ending: "Tra lampo e lampo, flutto e flutto d'erba" ("Between a lightning and another, waves of grass"). The plain is found in the late autumn of November in a landscape almost deserted and humiliated... It can only see a few trees and a few strings of vines.

In magma - Nel magma

It is surprising, said Marin Mincu, Mario Luzi's Catholicism breaking into postmodernism¹². The poet's confession is tense and his authenticity stiffened, thus raising the tragic consciousness. Rene Char formulated the phrase "pour une sérénité crispée". Over the poet's imaginary universe fog is laid. It was raining and the people sheltered in the coffee houses. It's a sad and unhappy world, which is apparent from all Mario's dialogues with people. The conclusion of these discussions could be summed up in a single line with a special force "Abbiamo avuto in sorte tempi duri" ("We had rough times"). The flickering light makes the day uncertain. A series of dialogues with multiple characters cannot express but the idea of painful defeat. And all these, the protagonist of the lyrical discourse records, happens: "Mentre fuori e giorno, mentre la vetrata canta/scolpiti nella luce nuova i monti/e ili ago raso rigato da un solo cigno" ("While outside is daylight, and the windows sing / in a new light, the mountains / are carved and the smooth lake is crossed by a single swan").

On invisible grounds - Su fondamenti invisibili

Marin Mincu believes ¹³ that now appears, the training of the witness in the discourse, of the other as a dialogue partner, which makes Luzi postmodern.

The shouting or exclamation has no address now. The exact address. This could be a good friend or even a shadow. The cold again put his print on things. The lyrical voice would want to regain a distant childhood. The existential lyrical space the ego is now moving is the one between sleep

and wakefulness (“ira sonno e veghia”), between innocence and guilt (“tra innocenza e colpa”). The destiny or the hazard have projected the lyrical protagonist in a “fool sphere” (“sfera impazzita”), one Sunday in the city in which you can hear only the groaning of a radio. The poet will observe at a certain time a bizarre afternoon, “il pomeriggio fuori tempo” (“afternoon outside of time”), suspended at sea. Some beings that he will call “i Cacciatori d’immortaita” (“hunters of immortality”) beating their wings. The poem is conceived as a journey, therefore the initiatic aspect is also present. But also the spiritual one, because: “The symbolism of the journey, extremely rich is resumed the search for truth, peace, immortality, the search and discovery of a spiritual center”¹⁴. He would want a truer light, one “senza margini d’ombra” (“boundless shadow”), which is after all natural for the seeker of truth: “Going into the light, we take on a road that seems it can lead beyond any feeling and any notion.”¹⁵

In the midst of controversy - Al fuoco della controversia

From the past no longer remains anything, only some unreliable memories, and you begin to doubt that they even belong to you. Now, says Luzi, life makes you silent. And the journey mentioned before, should have a therapeutic role. But the human pain map, concludes the poet, is hard to read, decipher, and this because it is forgotten in time.

In anticipation of spring, an uncertain spring, light and Florence's plane trees seem to have a peculiar dialect.

Notre Dame la pauvre femme

Protagonist of speech is a woman who seeks a reference to the world. Not always easy and devoid of doubts, worries or fears. These include fear of deportation: “Mi chiama in qualche parte? fuori/mi versa fuori di sé il mondo, mi espelle” (“They call me, in which part? Outside, they expel me/ the world pours me out of itself”). The idea of expulsion makes us think of René Girard's anthropology of victimity and scapegoat mechanism: “Religious thinking is necessarily bound to see the victim atoning meaning, literally the latest victim, the one that supports violence without causing new retaliation, a supernatural creature that sows violence to harvest peace, a redoubtable and mysterious rescuer who makes people sick and then heals them”.¹⁶

Light, why do you retract - Perché luce ti ritrai

Something is happening now. Light loss is a loss being. The ending (after death maybe) of history seems to cancel the person. Something unknown is being created, something that apparently cannot be learnt and that worries...

Phrases and incisions of a savior song - Frasi e incisi di un canto salutare

A murmur of hoarse voices irrupts in the world and there are some nights where gunshots are heard. At the foot of the mountain the horses of a fight can be distinguished. Only the ocean, as in Launtréamont, seems to be identical to itself ... The world is agony and disagreement during these times. And yet ... Farther yet, the vision will balance because, as the poet says, „la vita cerca la vita” (“life searches for life”). The air mixes now with “the matter of the deep” („materia della profondità”) and history involves amazement. Essences and truth always exist and should not be manufactured.

The journey on Earth and in heaven of Simone Martini - Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini

It seems that the ego arises a series of problems for the poet. The Ego is extended in passion therefore it is expected a kind of Katharsis. And this is supposed to have occurred since the poet

will remember not far of a cleansed sky again... For life goes back to itself. Authorial attitude is still oscillating since the poet speaks a blurred outline of the facts about dust, runes, masonry and scaffolds. Man is like the shadow and he is lost in “enigma della sua specie” (“enigma of his species”). Despite the precariousness, people want to be born and even despite that tight (“stretta”) original passing door. To have then reappear the decentered image of that world: “In fronte gli si scheggiano le linee,/gli si disfanno le inoliagli si frantumano i tetti/sopra una polverizzata gente” (In front lines leap shattered,/ stones unfold / roofs are broken / over a world in dust).

Always in a precarious balance, the poet, as his imaginary world, does not have “true Sundays” (“vere domeniche”), as will be written in a poem, dedicated to Eugenio Montale.

Mario Luzi lived 91 years. In 2003, when he was 89 years old, the Italian President, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, named him senator for life. You must be, apparently, longevous as an artist to enjoy authorities' appreciation...

Notes

1. Marin Mincu, preface to Mario Luzi, publisher Pontica, Constanta, 2002, p. II.
2. Ibid preface to Mario Luzi, Poems, P. I.
3. Ibid preface to Mario Luzi, op. cit., P. III.
4. Ibid preface to Mario Luzi, op. cit., P. III.
5. Geo Vasile, Mario Luzi - knowledge by ardor in "Literary Romania", No 42, 2010.
6. Ibid, Ibid.
7. Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, volume I, publisher Artemis, Bucharest, 1994, page 179.
8. Ibid, Ibid, page 180.
9. Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of fire. In Romanian by Ruxandra Lucia Munteanu. Preface: Romul Muntean, publisher Univers, Bucharest, 1989, page 14.
10. Geo Vasile, Mario Luzi - knowledge by ardor in "Literary Romania", No 42, 2010.
11. Marin Mincu, preface to Mario Luzi, op. cit., P III
12. Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, volume II, publisher Artemis, Bucharest, 1995, page 321.
13. Marin Mincu, preface to Mario Luzi, op. cit., P IV
14. Marin Mincu, preface to Mario Luzi, op. cit., P IV
15. Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, volume I, publisher Artemis, Bucharest, 1994, page 268.
16. Virel Andre, Histoire de notre image, Geneva, 1965, PP. 256 and Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, volume II, publisher Artemis, Bucharest, 1995, page 236.
17. Rene Girard, Violence and the sacred. Translation of Mona Antohi, publisher Nemira, Bucharest, 1995, page 96.