

INNOVATIVE STYLISTIC RESOURCES IN EUGENIO MONTALE'S
RECENT POETRY

Giovanna Sansalvadore

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg 1982

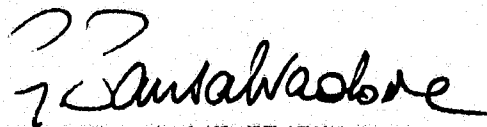
DECLARATION

I hereby declare:

that this dissertation entitled 'Innovative
stylistic resources in Eugenio Montale's
recent poetry' is my own work except to the
extent indicated in the Acknowledgement, Notes
and References and by comments included in the
body of the dissertation

that this dissertation has not been submitted
to any other university for degree purposes

Signed:-----



Giovanna Sansalvadore

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out firstly to review the recent Italian and non-Italian bibliography on the problems in Montale's last three volumes. The opening chapter shows how the Nobel prize winning poet's manner altered sharply after La bufera e altro with the collection Satura (1971). It reviews the major responses to Satura, before passing on to a rassegna of responses to the two Diari, Quaderno and Altri versi. Having covered the new critical tradition it analyzes Montale's typographical presentation of long, short, titled, untitled, free, rhyming, epigrammatic, punning, polemical, lyric, semi-serious, tendentiously polemical or whimsically anti-literary poems.

The second chapter considers the texts' studied 'occasionalness' and apparent 'anti-poeticity', as well as component parts which break this pattern. The study admits that Montale's recent production does not stand the test of high lyric perfection which most commentators detect in Ossi, Occasioni and Bufera.

Chapter III considers the Diari, Quaderno and Altri versi as (a) Montale's assiduous annotation of a

modus vivendi in our own time, (b) a dissolution and relativization of all interpretations of time, (c) the 'permanent oxymoron' of the recent years, present in Satura but now flowering in the lack of affirmation and negation, in short, the constant and oscillating and uncertain affirmation of contraries, (d) lists, elenchus, (e) the linguistic privileging of totem fau-na and talismanic objects, (e) enumeration as well as elenchus, of sub-species of items scarcely relevant to the poet's immortality and so forth. As an example of our line of enquiry we recall the slapping water in v.7 of 'Casa sul mare' (1927), 'Un altro, altra acqua, a tratti...', where semantic effect is subordinated to the genderless trap set by water in eternal motion; mindful always of Montale's own warning that his reader can be 'depistato' by his work and its effects, we refuse to be 'misdirected', in this thesis, by the poet's biography or prose criticism.

There are four Appendices which give a selection of colloquial terms used in the three collections, as well as a complete listing of animals, parentheses and foreign words.

We have attempted to show that poetry, that supremely useless human occupation, is part of art after all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. B.C.Merry, for his guidance, support and infinite patience, and to Rita Wilson, Elizabeth Meintjes and Irene Sansalvadore for their invaluable help during the final stages of this dissertation.

The following abbreviations have been used for Montale's works and all page references have been taken from the Einaudi collected edition, L'opera in versi (1980) unless otherwise stated.

<u>Ossi di seppia</u> (1920-1927)	<u>Ossi</u>
<u>Le occasioni</u> (1928-1939)	<u>Occasioni</u>
<u>La bufera e altro</u> (1940-1954)	<u>Bufera</u>
<u>Satura</u> (1962-1970)	<u>Satura</u>
<u>Diario del '71 e del '72</u> (1973)	<u>Diario</u>
<u>Quaderno di quattro anni</u> (1974)	<u>Quaderno</u>
<u>Altri versi</u> (1980)	<u>Altri versi</u>

INDEX			PAGE
ABSTRACT			iii
CHAPTER ONE			1
CHAPTER TWO			85
CHAPTER THREE			128
APPENDIX I			195
APPENDIX II			202
APPENDIX III			207
APPENDIX IV			212

Chapter I

Si risolve ben poco
con la mitraglia e col nerbo.
L'ipotesi che tutto sia un bisticcio,
uno scambio di sillabe è la più attendibile.
Non per nulla in principio era il Verbo.

(Quaderno di quattro anni, p. 608)

Montale's fourth collection of poetry, Satura, which gathers together the verse written between 1962 and 1971 has been variously received by contemporary critics. An animated discussion is currently centred on Montale with a view to a redefinition of his poetic contribution and the validity of the later artistic phase. Satura's appearance, particularly after the ten year silence which separates it from Bufera, caused a considerable stir in European critical circles. Grimshaw gives a comprehensive description of the interest generated at the moment of its appearance:

Natural but nonetheless impressive in its scale was the critical interest generated by the 'event' of this publication. For years both the verse and the prose of the author have been anatomized with the dedication which has promoted items of the Montalian bestiary and mere household inventory to matters of national debate. The immediate consequence of Satura was to stimulate the industry of literary criticism to completion of the legend which now envelops the celebrated master. In the murmur of innumerable bees around the pot-pourri or dish of fruit offered to the gods can be identified a cult of personality unseen since the age of D'Annunzio. Gentlemanly reserve and gastronomical expertise will serve as well, it seems, as military and sexual heroics for the creation of a mostro sacro. More important, with regard to the understanding of Satura, is to evaluate the inevitable collusion of the author in such a creation. The critical festival or triumph around this collection is not irrelevant to the text if in some manner encouraged by the poet. 1

The appearance of a new work by the best known Italian

poet of the day was bound to be surrounded by the amount of critical debate that has followed in its wake. In a sense Montale has played a decisive part in the creation of this self-image and therefore contributed to the appraisal of the work. Even in his earlier verses Montale had set up an image of himself as an old age pensioner, knowledgeable but distanced. As such his poetic voice was the law behind the verse and stood as a more solid background than almost all commentators. Now the image of the poet has been made to backfire. Montale is now an old man as well as something of a bard. He faces himself less seriously than previously and diffuses the heaviness that accompanies the voice of authority. While his former concern had always been the conveyance of a pressing existential issue which formed the cognitive nucleus of the poetic text, Montale now finds the essence of his message in the quotidian experiential world of political and social trivia. Where it exists, the existential message of the post-Satura phase is a reiteration of old and well tried ideas that have been carried over into the linguistic garb of the late seventies. Montale has based his poetic aspirations and general innovations on his personal daily squabbles with the domestic, the pet and the neighbour. Yet, in spite of the essential, and often disconcerting emptiness of the subject matter, the poetry has contributed greatly to linguistic innovation and stylistic experimentation. In view of this problem, his

critics have found themselves faced with work of a different character to the early examples. The situation tended towards an animated discussion not only in relation to the work itself but around the relative merits within its own genre. In such a critical climate it is natural to assume that camps would soon consolidate and critics would find themselves engaged in what has often been vicious argumentation. Much unfavourable response has followed the line of accusation against the element of subversiveness inherent in Montale's late style. This has also been seen as a betrayal of Montale's usual poetry by his own hand. In an article on Montale's late works in general, Costanzo di Girolamo makes the following appraisal:

Xenia e, più in generale, ... tutto il più recente Montale, ci sembra invece un complessivo depotenziamento del linguaggio poetico, una perdita di incisività e pregnanza lirica, con una conseguente banalizzazione dei significati del testo, spogliato ora (in gran parte) di tutte le virtualità polisemiche già note al poeta delle Occasioni e della Bufera. D'altra parte, va senza dubbio sottolineata l'intenzionalità e la piena coscienza di questa operazione: lo scandimento della lingua poetica a livelli più umili, verso uno stile 'comico', è generale e coinvolge tutti i piani della poesia: da quello metrico a quello sintattico a quello lessicale. 2

Although the critical tone of the piece tends towards a harsh condemnation of the poetry, di Girolamo is forced to concede the innovativeness and, above all, the strongly imposed difference with the earlier poetry.

The 'depotenziamento del linguaggio' is a technique which attempts to destroy the association of élitism imposed on all aspects of poetic discipline. Also the emptying out from the text of the semantic dualities which di Girolamo calls the 'virtualità polisemiche' helps to direct the reader's attention towards the external contours of the text rather than to its semantic content. In a sense Montale's latest poetry has channeled its efforts into the single direction of form, thereby deepening this single field of interest. Paradoxically, this tendency has appeared to contemporary critics as a thinning out of the usual richness of Montale's poetry for the sake of elaboration and effect. A similar criticism had already been formulated shortly after the appearance of Montale's second collection of poetry, Le Occasioni, by the critic Alfredo Gargiulo in his article 'Le Occasioni', published in the April 1940 edition of Nuova Antologia:

severi appunti contro il secondo libro montaliano, accusato di essere solo l'esempio di una prosa d'arte, prodotta dall'abbandono della strada della vera poesia; privo di ogni possibile rivelazione sentimentale: "...in queste Occasioni-scrive il Gargiulo di Montale-egli normalmente tace il sentimento che lo anima e nemmeno lo riversa nelle figure esteriori. E pertanto il maggior numero di queste liriche sono delle figurazioni esteriori non animate da alcun sentimento". 3

Gargiulo associates the concept of an art form par se

with the notion of 'non-poesia' or the deviation from the standard of poetic form and content. In a sense this is a reiteration of the old and scarcely resolved issue of the purple passage, although the slant of the verse has moved away from the purely beautiful towards the ingenious. If this opinion was already presented in relation to the lyrical style of the Occasioni, how much more valid, asks the contemporary critic, can this be in relation to the suspect and often disputable qualities of the present style? The question, as tempting as it can at times appear, can be discounted on a number of points. Firstly, Montale's preoccupation with form has always played as large a part in his poetic output as the existential content or message. Secondly, Montale's poetry has revolved around the essence of poetic expression both in the sense of linguistic adaptability and in his personal solution to the problem of communication. Language has every right to occupy a central position in the poetry even if it now tends to become the nucleus of both meaning and formal presentation. Finally, such a question can only be put if the poetry is allowed the latitude and divergence from the canonical definition that it demands. Earlier critics, like Gargiulo, were basing their artistic criteria on the well-established Crocian values of subjective lyricism that Montale was attempting to replace. Such criticism by-passes the issues at stake in favour of a questionable literary 'respectability'. The revolution to

which artistic thought has been subjected should have played a large part in expelling this rigidly destructive dogmatism. Surprisingly, a number of modern thinkers have aligned themselves with this critical current, most notable of all Pier Paolo Pasolini. In his article on the poetry of Bufera, 'Montale', in Passione e Ideologia, Pasolini accuses Montale of a deathly aestheticism and self-centred concentratedness which denies the spirit of real poetic expression.

Pasolini nel suo scritto accusa il terzo libro montaliano di assoluta mancanza di ogni novità: un testo estetizzante, teso soltanto ad un personale compiacimento: "Questa aridità si maschera in forme di estrema intelligenza, lucida soprattutto nell'atto di trasformare le sensazioni in esposizioni, di elegantissima esclusività, come manutenzione del segreto inesauribile della propria persona, di pathos calcolato". Alcune liriche soltanto si salvano, appaiono "sostanzialmente" rinnovate, ma non basta ad un positivo giudizio sull'opera. 4

Pasolini's negativity was based on a different ideological approach to Gargiulo's. His objection to this poetry derives from the uselessness of pure form. Yet, in comparison to the post-Satura phase, Le Occasioni and La Bufera present themselves as a positive and lyrical manifestation of the Montalian norm. What, therefore, should now be said of Satura?

A number of prominent critics have attempted to provide the answers. Contini, in his comment on Gargiulo's

article, which he demolishes, makes the following statement on the question of form as opposed to lyricism:

Che cos'è dunque la crisi del Gargiulo innanzi al nuovo Montale? È la crisi d'un'alta cultura innanzi a una sensibilità che non ama l'eloquenza intorno al suo proprio limite (assenza di sentimento=oscurità), ma può far tremare il linguaggio in un desiderio superstite dell'antico discorso (volubilità). Come in quella del suo grande maestro, anche nella critica del Gargiulo l'intelligenza dura più a lungo che nella fecondità tutt'altro che esausta dei suoi insegnamenti. 5

Contini cleverly manages to turn the criticism from the door of Montale's poetry to the system of thought on which the critic hinges his interpretation and judgement. This is probably the basis on which to set an analysis of Montale's present style. If the older methods of analysis are not discarded, the whole of Montalian criticism, not to say Italian literary criticism in general, risks being smothered in a pile of redundant argumentation. Satura must be allowed this latitude and the criticism that aims at dissecting the text must bear its specific end clearly in mind. If this post-1970 phase of Montale's poetry is looked at in these terms the style will be dynamically novel and thus contribute to the whole development of an oeuvre.

Predictably, a number of diverse rôles have been assigned to Satura and various summaries have attempted to define its relevance. One voice calls Satura a depiction of a particular historico-social situation from which it derives,⁶ and supports his interpretation by quoting Raboni, whose closeness to the poet has put him in the forefront of Montalian criticism:

Satura is the testament of a certain historical order or truth, the psychological or intellectual portrait of a 'verità in fuga'. It is more than ever incumbent upon us to distinguish, as Fortini asserts, 'le parole della poesia di Montale nell'ordine storico, dalla classe, che le emana e che sempre tenta di riassorbirle...' (in Ramat, 1965, p.405). Today however, in Raboni's view, a 'new poet' is active. Perhaps we should say that a new personage has made an entrance into European literature. The author of the conviva satur, sated with nobility and with misery, has, like the phoenix in the desert, provoked his own metamorphosis and created a character ready to stand by those of Svevo, Joyce and Beckett. 7

Flattering and true as the above statement is, it cannot be applied indiscriminately to Montale's canon. The image of the phoenix cannot be used for our poet, whose greatest merit was never to have 'died' and thus never to have needed the 'rebirth' by fire of creativity. The ten year silence separating Bufera and Satura must be re-interpreted in a different and more constructive manner. The gap, as will be shown later, was filled with other creative disciplines which allowed Montale's style to make tangen-

tial moves into more recognizable forms. The innovations in Satura are more diffuse and fundamental than some of the first reactions were prepared to admit. True, Svevo, Joyce and Beckett stood out in literature as definite landmarks, but exactly why and at which point constitutes a question that is somewhat more difficult in the case of Montale. The more authoritative Montalian voices agree to see Satura favourably, either as a positive poetic statement consequent on characteristics already in embryo, or as a moment of decisive stylistic modification and thus a clear break with the three earlier collections.

Montale's work is already divided into distinctive periods which critics agree to call the first, second and third Montalian styles. The differences between the earlier works were minimal and partially explained by discussion of innovative technique. On the whole the three early collections show an inherent similarity which make them easier to group together. The fourth collection breaks away from these relatively similar styles to herald another phase in the critical reception of the poet's work. This is how Angelini sums up the situation:

Avec Satura, paru en février 1971, et les Carnets poétiques 1971 et 1972, publiés en avril 1973-qui donnent à Satura son approfondissement et sa suite logique-on peut à présent parler d'un quatrième, voire d'un cinquième temps de cette oeuvre. 8

The partition of Montale's poetry into specific periods has created a thorny critical question and no conclusive solution is available as yet. Whether the collections preceding Satura can be classified into diverse stylistic modes does not concern the present study. No attempt will be made to add another controversial view to those already in print.

The fact remains that almost all prominent critics welcome Satura as a decisive moment in Montale's private struggle with language:

questo non è un libro di conferme nè di ricapitolazione, al contrario è un libro che comincia un discorso nuovo e insospettabile nella misura in cui l'opera è nuova e inattesa, non prevedibile...Montale non si è limitato a sviluppare nell'ordine delle conclusioni il suo lavoro ma è andato oltre, in un certo senso ci troviamo di fronte a un altro capitolo. 9

The critical appraisal puts emphasis on the rôle of Montale as a foremost exponent of linguistic renewal. Montale is the principal innovator in current technical experimentation and therefore would deserve his reputation as a rebel. It can be said that with Satura the break in the style is such that this revolution must be seen as far more than a modification of Montalian writing as codified in the successive phase of Ossi, Occasioni and Bufera. At its first appearance, the break preceding the new style was to seem so radical that Satura was described as 'non-poetry', a label that

has stuck to the two subsequent works. Diario and Quaderno. This Crocian term, already referred to in the present study, was used by the critic Gianfranco Contini in the article 'Introduzione a Ossi di Seppia' first published in 1933 in Rivista rosminiana in relation to the early works of Montale. The same term has assumed a different meaning in relation to the later works. In the early collections Contini detected areas of poetry which he considered either descriptive, enumerative or prosaic and which he then dubbed 'non-poesia':

quella parte della poesia di Montale che costituisce uno sfondo ancora disorganico, un impasto, per così dire prosastico, è prosastica, semmai, perché vi nascono, e non si decidono, troppi ritmi; perché vi abitano troppe cose. La sua stessa negatività ha un valore: non serve solo per risalto di quella "zona determinatissima" e talora alta, lirica, ma se ne esprime un senso complessivo, di poesia in fieri. Non è né oratoria né sillogistica. È lo stesso tormento, la stessa crisi teoretica in atto. Insomma la non-poesia di Montale ha una faccia ben più positiva, significante, che non abbia la non-poesia d'un Leopardi. 10

In this early use of the term 'non-poesia', it was seen as a divergence from the style of the traditional lyric rather than a positive assertion of subversive poetic technique. Contini himself stresses this difference in a later article 'Pour présenter Eugenio Montale' written as an introduction to the book Choix de poèmes translated by D.A.Avalle and S.Hotelier, originally published by

Editions du Continent, Genève in 1946:

Ce n'est évidemment pas une absence de style qui marque la poésie de Montale; tout au contraire, son langage très spécifique, l'abondance parfois anxieuse de la nomenclature technique exigée par son descriptivisme, les formules magiques de la destinée du retour risquent de donner précocement à ses vers l'impression d'un 'poncif'. Mais ce style a quelque chose d'involontaire, ce vocabulaire naît sans provocations, sa métrique n'a rien de trop recherché: ce n'est pas un labeur ascétique opérant avec des symétries et des sections d'or qui oppose chez lui le rempart d'une structure indéfaisable aux forces destructrices du monde. 11

Now 'non-poesia' is a term that has taken on a subversiveness of the kind which attacks the essence of traditional writing and the conventional aim of poetry in general.

Since Montale's early application of 'non-poesia' has gradually assumed the image of volition on the part of the poet, it demands an exegetical revaluation:

la formula negativa di tradizione crociana che Contini provvisoriamente e, ci pare, con intenzione provocatoria, adopera, quella della non-poesia, potrà arricchirsi in una indicazione positiva di linguaggio o conoscenza poetica...Vogliamo dire, insomma, che una nuova e più attenta lettura di Montale ha "messo in luce come la sua opera si sporga verso un'altra" concezione della poesia entro i confini della quale essa tende a collocarsi, mentre resta "sui limiti" della tradizione tardo romantica, simbolistica ed ermetica. Solo quando questa tradizione venga più o meno consapevolmente assolutizzata, la poesia di Montale può apparire come irritante ermetismo" o, spesso, come una forma insolita

di non poesia. 12

While one might agree with Jacomuzzi's theory of volition and technical extension, one should note that it is not so much an adherence to the limits of romantic and hermetic poetry that pushes Montale's late style into the realm of 'non-poesia'. The self-conscious obstruction of exegetical openness and the contrived linguistic obscurity hides the 'non-meaning' and reduces it to the non-poetic confines of art. Not for nothing Contini's early use of the term was the description of an inclusion by the poet of prosaic elements into lyrical form. Now that Montale had the experience of ten years' journalism the tendency crystallized into an organic grafting of divergent elements into a single new whole. Jacomuzzi's contribution, written in relation to Bufera, can in fact be applied to the late writings:

la nozione critica di non-poesia in Montale si risolve in quella di una poesia impura, che non aspira a una condizione metafisica, ma la tenta e la interroga, che non crede alla sacralità del linguaggio, ma dell'efficacia della sua funzione comunicativa sempre proporzionata alla forza con la quale il fonema viene subordinato e si risale nella destinazione semantica, che non scarica la responsabilità del discorso nella suggestione lirica, che non cerca l'onestà della memoria fuori dei compromessi con la storia, nè a questa si aggrappa per un estremo tentativo di contaminazione arcadica. 13

In this new mode we find a realization of the terse exis-

tential message characteristic of Ossi. We no longer scan the simple language ('lingua scarna' or 'lingua secca') of Bufera but encounter rather an amused creation of pure linguistic playfulness. In an addendum to his collected writings on Montale, Contini says in relation to Diario:

qui una parola 'vuota' e neutra, Diario,
integrata in un puro indice temporale.
E ciò significa una totale 'apertura' alla
disposizione poetica, guadagnata (le date
improbabilità oltre il ciclo ormai concluso
della ragione...Naturalmente la metrica
'prosaica'. risale al momento così ben de-
finito con Satura: un 'pasticcio' che in-
tride la poesia-poesia con la prosa, e
prima ancora presuppone la prosa di fanta-
sia (non già d'invenzione!) del dopo-
guerra montaliano. 14

The diaristic appearance of Diario and Quaderno begins with the transitory collection Satura. This name, amongst a number of other meanings, has the associations of a miscellaneous collection of dispersed and often unrelated texts, leaning towards a general sense of satire and social comment. In such an open-ended work it is easier to find a thrust towards the prosaic and the so-called 'unpoetic' rather than in the stricter forms of poetic mannerism. Contini agrees with the fundamental point concerning a hypothetical break with the former style. This, he would agree, takes place in the phase beginning with Satura. As Contini seems to imply, Montale's late poetry has been given a different inspiration to the poetic tradition of Italy in the post-War years. The writer can no longer call this 'poesia d'in-

venzione' and has to find refuge in the fantastic qualities on which it is based. The concept of reality itself has undergone a radical change. This criticism is nevertheless favourable to Montale's present mode and is prepared to accept its broader implications and influences in the pattern of contemporary artistic discourse. When approaching poetic production in an age of experimental Italian writing, Montale must be seen as a landmark in the re-writing of a traditional form, the poetry of the lyrical Petrarchesque tradition.

Other writers and critics of note have been less indulgent towards the three latest collections. Violent dislikes have been voiced and harsh criticism has been put in the way of serious analytical discussion, possibly preventing a clear view of its worth. In the words of Carlo Cassola the late style has broken away from serious artistic pretensions as seen in the tradition of Romantic poetry in general and Leopardi in particular:

Il tema di Montale è lo stesso di Leopardi, il sentirsi esclusi dalla vita: un tema estremamente serio, che vieta gli accenti frivoli, mondani, salottieri. I quali predominano purtroppo, negli ultimi componimenti poetici di Montale, e l'impediscono di apprezzarli. 15

Cassola's statement is unfair since it ignores the aims of Montale's new style and negates the validity of a predominantly stylistic and linguistic analysis of poetry in general. By harping on the traditional touchstone of the-

matic content for critical appraisal, Cassola shows how he rejects Montale's struggle with modern Italian poetic form. There is only the sanction of tradition behind the idea that existential isolation should be couched in serious and often morbid accents. Strong as tradition may in fact be, there is no reason for such a view. Why should Montale not break the means of expression and introduce an ironic humour into the burning questions of life, death and their derivatives? Montale's humour can be said to be more important in the latest writing than these large existential questions of which Cassola speaks. While they exist in the verse as an excuse for the writing, the introduced note of sardonic self-comment is new, and more technically promising. The over-all feeling behind Cassola's appraisal seems one of personal taste. This type of literary criticism is bound to arise when a style breaks away from the canons of tradition in order to introduce innovative, often not particularly successful, forms.

Varying interpretations have been offered for the change. People have adduced rare contributions by the artist himself. Montale sees his most recent poetic mode as the sole means of adaptation left to the artist in a world that has lost all capacity for communication. F.J.Jones pessimistically sums up the situation as follows:

in the present complex intellectual

and emotional climate, he Montale... considers human feelings have outstripped the expressive resources of language and they have to be conveyed through a form of symbolic and conceptual involution rather than through the outmoded discursive language of the tradition. 16

The 'symbolic and conceptual involution' no longer manifests itself through the traditional process of eschatological symbolism but through the re-creation of life's communicative difficulty in the process of reading itself, and therefore through the language patterns in which the style is moulded. C.Huffman takes this notion a step further, including into her interpretation the import of the late style in the general context of poetry:

Montale has said that the poems of Satura are in part realistic, episodic and spontaneous, reflecting to some extent his experience as a journalist. The fact that the language of this volume also violates linguistic registers and styles other than the journalistic ones including those of public relations, literary criticism and lyrical poetry, makes the volume an implicit comment on the cultural deterioration of the past decades and on the situation of present day poetry itself 17

One would be inclined to agree with Huffman except that rather than a 'cultural deterioration of the past decades' Montale sees traditional poetry as lagging behind the expressive needs of a society that has outgrown them. While valid as art forms in themselves, other styles can have no immediate relevance to the needs of the isolated, disturbed individual trapped in

the present emotional context. Much of the theoretical work Nel nostro tempo concerns itself with this issue.

L'isolamento dell'artista (che assume spesso forme di sfacciato esibizionismo pubblicitario) era inevitabile in un campo in cui azione e conoscenza camminano senza conoscersi o s'incontrano casualmente. Alla volgarizzazione, in senso etimologico, delle arti corrisponde la sfiducia nel linguaggio e la convinzione che ormai tutti i ponti sono tagliati. Partecipare a un urlo collettivo, a un no universale sembra essere la sola ambizione dell'artista d'oggi. 18

Whether Montale's new poetry can be called 'un urlo collettivo' in the sense that it conveys a strong and vibrant existential message, as his early writing did, is a point of debate. It does embody the spirit of linguistic inadequacy in the writing itself, thereby conveying an indirect; and often obscure, message of which it is a transparent container.

In Satura Montale has introduced an unprecedented emphasis on the occasionalness of the pieces and on the miscellaneous nature of the collection as a whole. Corti points out that 'Satura' had already been used as the title of a limited edition of 50 copies published by Madersteig in Verona in 1962.¹⁹ From this fact she deduces the implications of miscellaneousness inherent in such a title. Corti sees the reference to the early collection as an annotation in the progression of Montale's oeuvre:

Il richiamo alla rara e preziosa raccolta ha qui scopo, più che informativo, scoliastico, in quanto suggerisce di dare preminenza, fra i vari possibili significati del vocabolo "satura" a quello di miscellanea, che l'attuale volume si fa calcolatissima miscellanea, se pure un ruolo, ma non preminente, è mantenuto alla connotazione di genere satirico. 20

The new slant to the writing is a well thought-out innovation that gives away the intentionality of a fusion between prose and poetry, the fundamental difference at the basis of the two genres. Therefore form is the most important aspect in the exegetical analysis of the texts and is also the founding principle of the artist's ideology. There is in Satura an unusual episodic quality tending at times towards the gnomic and the epigrammatic in the texts themselves. This directs the collection towards an over-all prosaic appearance removed from the structured lyricism of the early works. This quality is one of the most surprising aspects of Satura even though, on closer analysis, some sequentiality does bring this collection into structured coherence. For example, the Xenia are essentially sequential, related to the single inspirational force of Mosca, Montale's dead wife. These must then be seen as a structured entirety rather than a set of separate units.

Satura è infatti per un aspetto un libro ancora ordinato, se non pianificato, allo stesso modo dei primi tre, anzi di più: una breve introduzione di due poesie, IL

TU e BOTTA E RISPOSTA I, quattro parti, i due Xenia, le due Sature. Le prime tre parti hanno perfino quattordici componimenti ciascuna: ma l'ultima ne ha un numero del tutto irregolare rispetto al ritmo precedente, cinquantuno. Così Satura si configura come una sorte di sonetto, insomma un componimento chiuso, con lunghissima coda. 21

In addition, the opening lyric IL TU and the closing piece L'ALTRO can be seen as a framing device producing an introduction and a conclusion to the rest of the texts. In the words of Corti:

i due assenti protagonisti che aprono
la via verso l'Ignoto; fra questi due
lontani poli si dipana in tre sezioni
del libro il pluridimensionale collo-
quio con le cose e le ombre 22

The 'pluridimensionale colloquio' of which Corti speaks forms the actual substructure to the collection, the unitary network of cross-references and personal tropes which bring the work into the coherent wholeness which it reveals on close scrutiny. The plurality of effects is structured beneath the apparently disorganized and largely spontaneous whole.

Un confluire di significati singolari
e assillanti, un'apparenza inorganica
e composita, sotto cui si scopre una pro-
fonda unità, l'esattezza e organicità di
struttura del libro 23

Finally, the crucial link in the texts is the reference to Mosca in the recurring 'tu' of Montale's oeuvre which constantly turns the reader's attention to this one par-

ticular invariant in the poetry. In itself this forms a unifying force in the symbology as well as the stylistic foundation of the fourth collection. For Corti the two Xenia are a springboard for the further unifying references that help to structure the work:

gli Xenia son il locus deputatus al colloquio con un'ombra, la moglie morta ma la presenza di questo 'tu' sacro (l'aggettivo risale al poeta) è tale che rimbalza alle successive due sezioni di Satura, raramente sostituito da un 'tu' profano, e collega in un tutto unitario il cammino memoriale al di là dei singoli nuclei evocativi ben individuabili 24

It is obvious that while appearing 'miscellaneous', Satura introduces a game which leads to an impression of casual writing but exists as a literary falsehood. In this respect Satura differs from the fashioning of Diario and Quaderno, as will be seen in the subsequent analysis of these two collections.

In Satura miscellaneousness is a carefully cultivated aspect and attests to a literary concern with the qualities of the satiric genre.²⁵ Paradoxically, an inherent structure need not be a negation of spontaneous miscellaneous composition. If the starting point of the texts in Satura derives from external diaristic events rather than from the inner landscapes typical of the early collections, the final product is nonetheless grounded in purely literary structures. Corti

quotes a comment made by Montale in an interview on Italian Radio:

addirittura preziose alcune affermazioni di Montale in una recente intervista alla Radio Italiana: il poeta riconosce che buona parte delle poesie di Satura sono 'nate da se', autonome sicchè solo dopo, a cose fatte, il poeta ha riscontrato che esse si legavano, facevano insieme disegno.²⁶

Montale emphasises the fact that the initial inspiration stemmed from a quotidian, diaristic occurrence of theme and idea which was then recorded before being finally re-touched with an eye to its structural organization and placement in the economy of the collection. Aldo Rossi attributes the autobiographical foundation of the texts to the general process of anti-poetry, seen in its sense of subversive action within a traditional ambience:

Fra l'altro non si può dimenticare che Montale, sotto le vesti dimesse dell'anti-poesia, nel tono dell'antiretorica conversazione colloquiale, sta portando avanti con la massima autorità una personale visione del mondo, magari sempre fortemente angolata, ma non per questo meno ferma nei suoi presupposti di base. Partendo sempre (o quasi) da occasioni autobiografiche che avevano inciso la memoria, solcandola in maniera indelibe, si trattava di esprimere senza indugi l'oggetto, di immergere il lettore in medias res, portando avanti tutte le implicazioni di carattere generale (esistenziali, teologici, sociali, ecc.) 27

With this combination of the two genres, the rôle of the exegetist is to come to a definition of the nature of this style and to see its relevance in the linguistic experimentation of the present mode. No longer

can the critic hope to gain new messages but only new forms. Even though Rossi sees the new style (at the moment of his article this was represented by Satura only) as a form continuing the fundamental existentialism of the earlier works, it would now be more accurate to say that the style uses earlier ideas solely as a pretext for stylistic experiments. Therefore, the critic can no longer hope to glean new messages from the worn-out idea still repeated by this poetry, but must direct his efforts to the zone of real fecundity, the stylistic patterning itself. On the whole Satura and the two subsequent collections have added nothing to the familiar semantic thesaurus of Montale's early verse. There is no deepening of the existential message nor a revaluation of the theories of time and memory. His early ideas still stand good and have been encrusted with no additional layer of working. Thus the fecundity of the cognitive foundation can be said to have exhausted itself in the span of the first three collections. However, if the critic attempts a condemnation of this poetry on this level alone the result is doomed to fail. What Montale can be said to have achieved in this later phase is the deepening of linguistic levels and the re-elaboration of the diverse strata of phonetic effects already present in his earliest writing. The rewriting of familiar semantic moments and stylistic topoi has become one of the conspicuous elements of the recent poetry. Another line of critics has taken this as

the touchstone on which to set their appreciation of the current style. Mengaldo's highly influential article on Satura finds this the most important aspect:

la nuova raccolta dà retrospettivamente ragione, sviluppando appieno tendenze prima latenti, a chi aveva insistito sugli aspetti narrativi e di 'durata' dell'affabulazione montaliana. Per cui non solo la serie di Satura si collegano a distanza ad analoghe prove già del primo Montale ('Mediterraneo' in particolare), ma invitano a una rilettura in prospettiva diversa di testi generalmente percepiti in accezione squisitamente puntuale e lirica. 28

The fact that Mengaldo sees the latest poetic output of Montale as an active re-elaboration of familiar poetic items supports the critical appraisal that channels its investigation to the theoretical and linguistic analysis which this study hopes to undertake. Mengaldo goes on to stress how an elaborately technical approach can be responsible for a number of dynamic innovations of far-reaching consequence:

nel complesso del quarto libro di Montale sono frequenti i recuperi e le rielaborazioni di materiali tematici dei precedenti... Tuttavia questa disponibilità al recupero e alla variazione, del resto tutt'altro che nuova in Montale, non porta con sé alcun atteggiamento "postumo", retrospettivo: la dimensione di Satura è invece piuttosto, sia nel senso dell'apocalisse che in quello dell'utopia (ma è lo stesso), proiettiva, e da ciò fra l'altro deriva il senso di vitalità che il libro comunica al lettore, al di là di quell'amor vitae che inevitabilmente scaturisce dai poeti del negativo... Ne esce l'evidente propensione, ignota alle precedenti raccolte, per il divertissement mentale e verbale, l'epigramma e lo scarto d'umore; e, più in profondo, l'emergere di una nuova misura ritmica e formale, la misura balzante e

In this favourable appraisal of Montale's late mode, Mengaldo notes the frequently ignored 'innovations' that make Satura worthy of the critical attention that has been lavished on it. The important thing, however, is that the mentality of divertissement goes beyond the pure innovation of style. It represents, rather, the new outlook that Montale brings to the analysis of his earlier writing and which then leads him to the re-writing of his former technical loci.

Whether Satura is seen as a moment of decisive break or as a point of mutation and re-adaptation of earlier techniques, the collection must be seen as a turning point both in Montale's writing style and in the appraisal of poetry itself. Many interpretations have been offered for the need on the poet's part to establish a modified expressive mode. In describing the stylistic break following Satura Montale himself stresses the time-lag that separates the three earlier collections from the later works. In the interview for Italian Radio broadcast on 12 April, 1971 the poet made the following statement:

Tra i primi tre libri e questo quarto sono passati alcuni anni, anni occupati da un mestiere preciso che prima non avevo, quello del giornalista naturalmente, e in questi anni di intervallo io pensavo che avrei mai più scritto versi. Quando poi ho cominciato a fare qualche epigramma pubblicato in coda a certi elzeviri sul giornale, allora è

rispruzzato fuori il verso e ha preso una dimensione anche, diciamo musicale diversa: la dimensione di una poesia che apparentemente tende alla prosa e nello stesso tempo la rifiuta. 30

It is interesting to note that Montale lays emphasis on the time aspect, rather than seeing the change as a mutation in the very goals of his poetic striving. We cannot be asked to believe, as Montale expects us to, that a prolific poet would stop thinking about poetry and then find himself spouting ('spruzzare') verses. This period of time was occupied with other literary disciplines, which were eventually to rub off on the later poetic output. While engaged in his journalistic period, Montale's poetic thought was being infiltrated by a discipline totally at loggerheads with the immediate work of the moment. Another interesting concept not expressed by Montale is the idea of poetry as akin to musical rhythm. In the quotation from Mengaldo, at pp.24-25 above, the critic makes a similar appraisal of this poetic moment calling it a 'misura balzante e scorrevole da scherzo musicale'. The notion, though not particularly surprising, is appropriately applied to Montale, whose preoccupation with form has assumed a concern for external structural perfection, much in the vein of a Baroque scherzo. Montale insists on the subconsciousness of the process of change and consequently of the language used in the recent volumes. He goes on to explain:

La mia voce di un tempo - si può sempre paragonare la poesia a una voce - ora una voce, per quanto nessuno l'abbia detto, un po' ore rotundo, diciamo così... La nuova invece si arricchisce molto di armoniche e le distribuisce nel corpo della composizione. Questo è stato fatto in gran parte inconsciamente; poi quando ho avuto alcuni esempi diciamo di me stesso, allora può darsi che io abbia seguito degli insegnamenti che io mi ero dato. Ma all'inizio, è stata veramente una cosa spontanea. 31

Other critics concur with Montale's explanation of the newness of the style. Mengaldo finds the journalistic discipline responsible for the diversity of both style and subject matter:

In realtà lo stretto legame, anche talvolta di tono, con l'attività di pubblicista la dice lunga sulla fisionomia di Satura e sulla poetica che la regge. All'origine del taglio narrativo, diaristico, quotidiano, prosaico anche del libro anzitutto...una mutata concezione della poesia stessa...In Satura si fa strada una diversa e più relativistica concezione della poesia come strumento quotidiano e quasi riflessione 32

The obvious continuation from the principle governing the journalistic writing is the prosaic quality of the poetry in the recent mode. Mengaldo's 'relativistica concezione della poesia' stems directly from a conscious lowering of lyrical register after the early works through the introduction of an obsessive concern with the quotidian event and its idiom.

The move towards everyday language has had repercussions on the philosophical substructure of the poetic output

of the '70 s. Whereas Montale's language had tended towards the obscure, or at the very least the recherché, examples which funnelled the poet's observations into the realm of metaphysical universality, now the idiom focuses the reader's attention on the immediate, the daily and the ordinary. At times the current mode uses extremely rare or archaic forms, but, as will be seen in the following chapter, they are used expressly for their obscurity and quasi-mystical incomprehensibility. In a sense the telescopic observation of human existence has changed into a myopic groping among immediate, earthbound surroundings:

qualcosa della lingua in tutta l'opera
 si è coassialmente spostato, come se
 Montale avesse introdotto nel tessuto
 connettivo della lingua montaliana di
 sempre dei fili nuovi, a testimonianza
 di come un poeta della sua natura possa
 appropriarsi della lingua quotidiana,
 mimarla o violentarla, comunque immetterla
 in un universo linguistico-poetico autonomo. 33

The language in which Montale finds his means of expression, the quotidian and the 'low', accompanies the break in the subject matter. Now the attention focuses on the quotidian happening in its finite quality as opposed to the existential message which enters the realm of pure idea. The reversed telescope which gives him the extreme close-up rather than the clear vision is at the base of the new style. The Zanzottian image of the reversed telescope gives a clear picture of the essence of the poet's vision. Paramount is his nearness to so-called 'reality', or the everyday event; and this cannot

escape into flights of poetic fancy, but must find its justification and its status within the immediate environs of its 'daily life':

Siamo di fronte a una delle costanti più specifiche della poesia di Montale, al continuarsi della ricognizione di una realtà sentita come 'scialo di fatti triti' e di cascami, contro la forza neutra e opaca dei quali reagisce lo "scarto in vitro". 34

The newness of the style should be seen as largely derived from the alteration in Montale's career interest and the journalistic effort which filled the greater part of that time. After the publication of Bufera in 1956 Montale produced no other poetry till the appearance of Satura in 1971. But it is hardly feasible to say that these years were devoid of literary interest. Montale's complete oeuvre of travel journals and prose pieces was written during this period. These volumes follow each other with but a limited time-lag, testifying to the growing interest on Montale's part in the discipline of journalistic prose in the conventional form of the short story or impressionistic piece. Farfalla di Dinard (1956), the first of these prose collections, is still closely related to the fantastic qualities of the Occasioni and Bufera periods. Then follows Auto da Fè (1966), introducing the scattered theoretical writings which culminate with the more recent Nel nostro tempo (1972) and Sulla poesia (1976) the latter an edited collection

of dispersed Montalian writings on poetry and poets. Finally, the collection of short stories Fuori di Casa made its appearance in 1969. Although the present study cannot dedicate time to Montale's prose writing, it is instructive to devote some attention to the problem. The obvious feature that should attract the critic's attention is the prosaic quality and the related theme of the journey, which plays a large part in the short stories as well as in the later Montalian poetry. This gives coherence to the individual pieces of the collection and announces the strong tendency to narrative progression in Satura, Diario and Quaderno. Although the later poetic collections consist of fortuitous, impressionistic pieces, the entirety forms a journey through the writer's years in which he was occupied with the writing itself. Thus, even though the Diario and Quaderno phases can be seen as miscellaneous, their inspirational points follow each other closely in the single temporal span within which they were written. In addition, the ambience of travel is extended into the realm of the familiar locus which brings back memories and thoughts. In the words of Graziosi, the narrative quality is manifest in a pastiche of travel and home, leading back continuously to the traveller-poet:

ritagli spaziali di una sola vicenda home e hotél, per mimare col pastiche linguistico l'internazionalismo di etichetta, non solo antitetici quanto complementari rispetto a quella immagine montaliana dell'artista da vecchio che si bilancia tra il ritratto in pantofole e quello in valigia. E questa reciprocità tra spazio domestico e spazio turistico, tra l'universo del rimanere e quello

del partire è garantita appunto dalla presenza continua del tema del viaggio, del fuori di casa che richiede partenze e ritorni e una serie di soste intermedie. 35

This is not the only relevance of the travel theme. The writing is given the added dimension of motion through time which is the essence of narrative progression. The importance of the journalistic phase cannot be restricted simply to the new linguistic mode, but to the structural design itself.

Time and space travel manifests itself in the various references and cross-references to the location of previous memories and the sites of earlier holidays spent with Mosca, in Satura, Diario and Quaderno. More important, for our purposes, is the stylistic influence that this narrative tendency was bound to have on the subsequent poetic output. The spatial dimension of the latter works is often the same (e.g. Venice and the lagoon, the trains and public transport of Italian coastal cities and foreign holiday resorts). Also the inspirational background is of one mould. The new 'occasioni' are the impressionistic 'fixing' of a moment in eternity, the recapturing of a sensation rather than the conveyance of an existential situation. It is the integrated level of stylistic and thematic influence that should be taken into consideration when comparing the poet's earlier phases with the post-Satura writing.

Montale attributed to prose the fertile zone of poetic inspiration:

Dal canto suo Montale aveva riconosciuto con molta precisione nella celebre "Intervista immaginaria" del '46, 'Intenzioni': "Naturalmente, il grande semenzaio d'ogni trovata poetica è nel campo della prosa". 36

Montale has taken the inspiration of prose writing a step further. The technical effects of the former have been grafted into the linguistic patterns of the latter, obscuring the clear division that usually determined the boundaries in the traditional appraisal of the two genres. Since this poetry exists as a formal experimentation, moving within an area of semantic undefinability, Montale can allow himself the luxury of arbitrariness taken to its logical limits. In this type of prose-poetry the linguistic pattern is allowed to gain its full potential and to exist on the level of technical speculation. Montale no longer finds it necessary to convey a specific meaning. He can hide behind his linguistic game and undefined prose-poetry to enjoy the fruits of critical incomprehension. Clearly the prose writing has direct ideological influence on the so-called 'years of silence' between Bufera and the surprisingly novel Satura. In such a state of affairs it would be a mistake to attempt a strict categorization of Montale according to traditional notions or techniques. He himself defies the structuralization that the modern critic wishes to impose upon him. Rossi says:

Quello che in conclusione ci sembra vitando per eccellenza è la pretesta di tenere fisso Montale in una formula che lo contenga: quantunque felice, sarà sempre monca. Sono tanti i piani su cui si muove che illuminare ora l'uno a preferenza di un altro può essere operazione legittima e feconda: ma non bisogna mai dimenticare che si tratta di piani sapientemente organati fra loro, anche se di volta in volta il giudizio da dare sulle singole parti non debba essere necessariamente entusiasta. Esistono temi, toni, tecniche che Montale maneggia con doti disparate: specie le miscele sono spesso pericolose. 37

The cumulative nature of this later output combines a series of levels and styles which coagulate (or fall just short of this) to form a highly new, often successful but always sophisticated, art form. The exegetist will deploy the professional honesty of facing this poetry on its own merit and allowing it the benefit of its own experimental moves. Satura's prosaic poetry elucidates a new linguistic transparency and extends the potential of word play to a point of near-exasperation.

Definite signs are given by Montale as to the nature of Satura, and the subsequent two collections, in the works themselves. Satura's incipit lays bare the rules by which the entire collection is controlled. The first text in the work, the little poem IL TU, which serves as a preface, introduces the reader immediately into the revised world of inconsistency, ambiguity and linguistic playfulness. The text functions as a prolepsis, warning the reader of the deliberate trap into which the poet intends to lead him:

IL TU

I critici ripetono,
 da me depistati,
 che il mio tu è un istituto.
 Senza questa mia colpa avrebbero saputo
 che in me i tanti sono uno anche se appaiono
 moltiplicati dagli specchi. Il male
 è che l'uccello preso nel paretaio
 non sa se lui sia lui o uno dei troppi
 suoi duplicati.

(Satura, p.275)

Montale's meta-poetic message is intended to warn the reader, and consequently the critic, of the purposeful 'depistamento' or side-tracking into contrived linguistic ambiguity. The text itself does not relinquish its own full meaning and the interpretations that have been offered are purely speculative. Almansì and Merry make the following point:

Will this 'tu' be a biographically explained address to some second person singular or will it be, by a process inherent in meta-poetic analysis, part of an appeal to the 'tu' which is the Reader? Or again, will it be an internalized 'tu' that is supposed to stand for the contradictions latent in the 'I'-figure? Once again the answer lies concealed in the new 'depistamento' which is featured in the following lines... the bird (in ll.7-8) does not know if it is a bird, and analogously the poet is unaware of being a poet. All that is left for the critic is to establish the contours of the labyrinth of implications into which he has been pulled off track by the poet's voice. 38

The hypotheses presented by Almansì and Merry are feasible and admissible in the interpretation of the text. Not only is the poet himself trapped in a state of existential confusion, but so is the surrounding world, the 'tu',

whether this is the poetic 'I' or the loved one, the bird or finally the critic.

La persona amata, 'duplicata' anch'essa
tra i duplicati, specchio e limite dell'io
scrivente, delle antimonie da lui patite,
è apprezzata per la sua vigile irrequieta
umanità. 39

The splitting of the image into a number of reflected surfaces sums up the inconsistency of reality, the unknowable and the unknown. The exegesis of these lines, is not what counts so much as the meta-poetic message which it conveys to the critic. The text's essence is the revaluation and conscious confession of the 'fault' of ambiguity and the technical theory that has led to the criteria governing the writing style. Jacomuzzi sees the piece as a movement of misguided critics into a futile quest after traditional patterns alien to Montale's thought:

I critici "depistati" che volessero
varcare in questa direzione il senso
specifico e la novità della ricerca
poetica di Montale si troverebbero inevitabilmente in un veicolo cieco, in un sentiero che li condurrebbe forse nel centro dei luoghi più comuni del dibattito letterario della prima metà del Novecento, ma decisamente fuori mano rispetto agli itinerari veramente significativi e specifici dell'opera montaliana. 40

The critic is trapped by a contrived deflection into unknown depths that depart from actual interpretation of the texts and the exegetical moment at hand. This opening forewarns the reader of the dangers involved in the poet's concern with the various layers of language

and the concept that these embody. The decisive message contained in the composition IL TU establishes the tone and the rules of the subsequent work:

Com'era accaduto per Ossi di Seppia ed Occasioni ecco anche per Satura apparire il breve corsivo, la premessa dichiarazione che già preannunci il tono stesso dell'opera: satira nella satira...la scoperta di quei critici 'depistati', convinti ormai di una verità contro la quale difficile sarebbe ora porre varianti: il suo 'tu' diventò ormai com'è 'un istituto'. Eppure grosso è l'inganno, e il chiarimento occorreva: era necessario alla salvezza di quella 'colpa' che volontariamente il poeta s'è attribuita. 41

In spite of the apparent openness of this declaration, Montale's confession' has externalized the problem rather than helped the critic in a constructive interpretation. With what should be seen as a gesture of literary fair play, Montale has issued to the exegetist the weapons that allow him to defend himself in the linguistic battle with the texts.

In such a situation language is one subject that should not be underestimated for the structuring of poetic effect in the late works. In his effort to understand the nature of Montale's late style the critic must restrict himself to an understanding of the formal function of language rather than attempt to extract meaning from the particular texts. In a sense it can be said that the real poetry lies outside the semantic content of the individual text. Corti takes the concept a step further than a simple analysis of form:

la struttura..è un punto di arrivo, al che offrono conferma le varie fasi di organizzazione del materiale a volume, quali mi risultano dall'esame dei manoscritti montaliani e dei successivi indici. La seconda postilla concerne la natura singolare del libro: è accaduto che le liriche nascessero da se come le battute di un dialogo, le quali sempre acquistano vero senso, più che dal loro separato contenuto, dal rapporto e dal ritmo dell'intero colloquio 42

Corti takes the structural organization if not as the most important feature of the presentation at least as one of the main features on which to base exegetical exercise. Her close scrutiny of the texts, not fully reflected in the above quoted article on Satura, establishes the importance of the notion of formal concentration to be found in Montale's latest oeuvre. Naturally, the principle is not uniformly valid. The varying qualities and merits of an individual text are resolved and contained by the linguistic games that pervade the style. Were it not for its striking formal technique, the poetry of Satura, Diario and Quaderno would already have been dismissed as uninspired, unimportant, undesirable.

In this way the poet has equipped the reader in preparation for the ambiguities that form the nucleus to the three latest collections. Zanzotto calls this layered structure of ambiguity an in-depth progression of cognitive levels or trompe-l'oeil effect:

Sovrapposizioni di significati, dunque, trompe-l'oeil, ambiguità e anche nascondimento: proprio là dove il linguaggio sembra farsi - ed è per molti aspetti - chiaro come un'urgenza di aggredire, travolgere, strappare veli e rajnatele, porsi come liberazione-da-qualcosa (di interiore ed esteriore), secondo una chiarezza sparata in faccia e persino un po' teppistica (se si vuol riprendere la fantasiosa espressione di Pasolini). Effettivamente il critico, il lettore, corrono il pericolo di venire 'depistati' nel momento stesso in cui sono messi in guardia grazie alla chiave, o non-chiave, offerta nel componimento iniziale del libro, 'Il TU': depistati secondo l'accezione comune del termine, cioè 'scovati' (o 'colti in fallo?'), e secondo quella eccentrica, cioè 'portati fuori strada'. 43

The eccentricity of which Zanzotto speaks is the key to the difficulty of the language and the whimsical 'depistamento' which implants itself in a soil of non-semanticity. Language has had a reversal; what should be a means by which the reader strips away the last remnants of ambiguity, has become the means for solidifying such ambiguity and extending it to the undefinable. Strangely enough, such linguistic ambiguities increase in proportion to the rise in the 'domesticity' of the language. In a sense the process follows the principle of 'depistamento' at the basis of these later works. While the reader is lulled into false security at the sight of a linguistic structure of the utmost familiarity, his true insight is led away towards the mythical and the mystical. This is never, however, allowed to reach the self-fulfilment which is typical of Ossi so that the reader is left in a state of suspension and exegetical uncertainty.

In a sense this poetic moment has managed to defy the traditional associations of poetry. The subsequent production Satura, Diario and Quaderno is influenced by the theoretical background that is summed up in the text IL TU, and the change in style is best aligned with the new concern with 'depistamento'. However, this never really becomes negative in Montale's poetry. Albeit a frustrating point for the exegetist, the 'depistamento' of the present poetic mode is responsible for the stretching of language to its limits. Montale's central preoccupation has therefore shifted from the interest in content to the formal presentation of the potentialities of language so as to extend the possible function of a substantially worn-out language. Another meta-poetic moment from Satura strengthens this interpretation:

INCESPICARE

Incespicare, incepparsi
 è necessario
 per destare la lingua
 dal suo torpore.
 Ma la balbuzie non basta
 e se anche fa meno rumore
 è guasta lei pure. Così
 bisogna rassegnarsi
 a un mezzo parlare. Una volta
 qualcuno parlò per intero
 e fu incomprensibile. Certo
 credeva di essere l'ultimo
 parlante. Invece è accaduto
 che tutti ancora parlano
 e il mondo
 da allora è muto.

(Satura, pp359)

The concept of the difficulty of expression in communication is not new in Montale's oeuvre. Already in the

'Mediterraneo' section of Ossi Montale had expressed his resentment at the limitation of the language at his disposal:

Potessi almeno costringere
in questo mio ritmo stento
qualche poco del tuo vaneggiamento;
dato mi fosse accordare
alle tue voci il mio balbo parlare:-
.....
Ed invece non ho che le lettere fruste
dei dizionari, e l'oscura
voce che amore detta s'affioca,
si fa lamentosa letteratura.

(Ossi di Seppia, p.58)

The sea's expression is a delirious rambling which, due to its breadth and freedom, is able to travel further than any form of structured language. The equation between the diversity of the sea's expression and an ideal state of language that would serve the poet's communicative needs has been changed and somehow resolved in Diario. The poet, no longer young, has given up his struggle with an inappropriate language that cannot be made to robe his poetic needs, but has made a choice for cacophonous stuttering as the solution to the former staticness of language. The final solution is the 'mezzo parlar' which manifests itself in INCESPICARE as the response to the linguistic impasse. The phrase, taken over from its earlier use in 'Mediterraneo' as the 'balbo parlar' of the isolated individual, has become an ideological foundation for new artistic development. It is with-

in the scope of these arguments, and to some extent clues, that the critic must find his orientation.

In another text from Diario, LA LINGUA DI DIO, the indecipherability of language and man's inability to express himself fully become a cosmic, engulfing problem. The idea of stuttered attempts at communication as a sole means of expression is re-iterated:

Se dio è il linguaggio, l'Uno che ne creò tanti altri
per poi confonderli
come faremo a interpellarlo e come
credere che ha parlato e parlerà
per sempre indecifrabile e questo è
meglio che nulla. Certo
meglio che nulla siamo
noi fermi alla balbuzie. E guai se un giorno
le voci si sciogliessero. Il linguaggio,
sia il nulla o non lo sia,
ha le sue astuzie.

(Diario, p.445)

While in the Satura text the 'balbuzie' itself is incapable of bridging the gap between half-communication and its alternative, non-communication, in Diario language has been transmuted into 'balbuzie'. Now this half-language pertaining to man has its own rules and virtues, its own 'astuzie' or cunning tricks. This, in other words, is the principle that Montale has set out to demonstrate in the writing beginning with Satura. The impossibility of a comprehensive imitation of the language of God, or language in its ideal form, is so over-riding that it becomes incomprehensible to man, leading him to the compromise of semi-speech, the 'balbuzie'.

INCESPICARE serves another purpose. The difficulty the reader encounters in voicing deliberately cacophonous words is a physical rendering of the writer's struggle in delivering the message itself. The need for a radical unlocking of the linguistic impasse is by now the dominating factor in the writing, its ideological root. Paradoxically the breaking of this linguistic impasse does not preclude verbal obscurity. Rather than creating a poetic manner that develops the semantic content to its ultimate conclusions, Montale utilizes language expressly for its ambiguities. In this way Montale has allowed language the freest reign in all its subtle shifts and colorations. If this has obscured the actual meaning, Montale may excuse himself by stating that at least he has been faithful to language; and what else is a poet but the words that he puts down on to paper? Montale has proved that semi-speech or the 'balbuzie' has validity as the only form of existing communication. Thus, to analyse the later works without clear and definite attention to their verbal structures is to deny both their specific meaning and their raison d'être. The final paradox is the notion that the only means of communication is a non-communication, a physical stuttering transposed into linguistic complexity. This is what Jacomuzzi calls 'il trionfo delle balbuzie':

la balbuzie, nelle due significazioni,
la positiva del 'balbo parlar', della
'storta sillaba e secca come un ramo'
da un lato, la negativa del parlare

unanime a voce spiegata dei dannati dall'altro, è ancora un termine nascosto tra le pieghe del discorso e, al più, nei comportamenti ideologici e linguistici che esso designa al limite, un tema della poesia montaliana. Essa diviene metafora del tema dominante e criterio della configurazione formale dei testi in Satura e poi, nel Diario del '71 e del '72. Come tema la balbuzie, nella sua condizione letterale, nei suoi sintomi e nella sua anticipazione e prolungamenti, attraversa tutto l'arco di questi testi e abbozza nel suo sviluppo una fenomenologia del linguaggio. 44

As a specific theme the 'balbuzie' is not as important or all-pervasive as the general philosophy of language that it eventually becomes. The choice of cacophonous and disjointed language is the mould into which thoughts, impressionistic flashes and objective moments are engulfed and re-structured. It is for this reason that Jacomuzzi finds the programme positive and a foundation on which to develop the personal style of the later years:

lo stento, la difficoltà del dire sono connotati positivamente, assunti attivamente come condizione e come programma. Ma il rovesciamento del segno, dal negativo al positivo, si esercita su un altro livello di quello proprio dei LIMONI e di Mediterraneo: ma più alla situazione dello strumento all'interno di una vicenda letteraria, non più su una questione di stili, ma su una idea della lingua, della sua funzione e della possibilità, nella quale la crisi del concetto della realtà è dunque un'assunzione ideologica-sempre più incisivamente si riflette e si traduce. 45

Satura stands at the centre of the new Montale's experi-

mental venture into personal solutions. His previous enjoyment of linguistic enterprise has brought him to a point of advanced linguistic acrobatics that have become the essence of the writing. In a sense the poetry should not have been placed beneath the scrutiny of an exegetical brand of myopia. In fact, as will be seen in the following chapter, the later poetry cannot really stand up to repeated readings. The effect on first reading is often the best light for an opinion. Montale himself admits the difficulty of the critical process before his latest poetry. His opinion bases itself on the general refusal of annotation by the poetic process in general:

Con orrore
la poesia rifiuta
le glosse degli scoliasti.
Ma non è certo che la troppo muta
basti a se stessa
o al trovarobe che in lei è inciampato
senza sapere di esserne
l'autore.

(Satura I, ii, p.352)

In an article of 16 February 1950 Montale made the following comment on the undefinability of his personal images:

Anche l'oscurità di certi moderni
finirà per cadere, se domani esis-
terà ancora una critica. Allora i
così detti commenti estetici gettano
sul mistero della poesia. Tra il ca-
pir nulla e il capir troppo c'è una
via di mezzo, un juste milieu che i

poeti d'istinto rispettano più dei
loro critici: ma al di là di questo
margine non c'è salvezza né per la
poesia né per la critica. 46

The obvious implication is that obscurity, far from being negative, can be constructive in the appreciation of poetic effect. In this sense Montale's esoteric obstruction of all exegetical discipline can be interpreted as a fully conscious poetic act. The danger, however, is that should the poet feel at a loss for ideas or striking imagery, the techniques available to his hermeticism can be a logical escape into the realm of the incomprehensible and abstruse. Has Montale actually retreated willingly into this poetic no-man's land or are legitimate messages simply hidden from immediate view for the sake of effect? From the evidence so far gleaned in the current poetry, this seems less likely than the hypothesis of a non-existent message and an over-developed sense of form. It is mainly on these terms that Diario, Quaderno and the scattered fragmenta should be read and analysed.

Following the eventful appearance of Satura, Diario and Quaderno were naturally to receive an equal amount of critical attention mingled with an inevitable dose of professional scepticism. Faced with the problem of these two works the Montalian critic finds himself grappling with the analytic questions that were embryonically presented in Satura but whose lateral depth has developed into the surface patterns that define the essence of the pre-

sent style. As such, these collections represent a final point in the ever-developing course of Montalian poetry and artistic principle. The central idea which is at the basis of the fecundity of this later period is the underplayed ironic tone that undercuts the usual pretension inevitably accompanying poetic discipline at the stage of recapitulation and old age. Giorgio Luti, for one, sees the Diario phase as a further myth-breaking process operating in Satura:

Ciò che importa è cogliere il nesso tra i due registri, cioè fra le sperimentazioni di Satura e l'assestamento nel Diario del tono meditativo e ironico, con la saldatura e l'intreccio ormai consolidati in un'unica modulazione...si tratta di una stagione nuova che insieme possiede una sua stringente unità e una sua logica scansione di tempi: demolizione e ricostruzione, insomma, in un iter ben ricostruibile. 47

The essentially related styles of these final collections must be seen as a continuing interest in related themes and, more important, linguistic patterns. Fortini makes the following equation between Satura and the subsequent Montalian writings:

Nel Diario...Montale mostra un contegno affabile e ironico, interessato più a registrare 'un reale diaristico, prosaico o narrativo' piuttosto che a 'trascrivere visioni trascendentali' 48

A line of critical appraisal has therefore taken the view

of this later Montalian stage as the logical continuation of his earlier experiment and ideologies. Zazzaretta, clearly admiring this later phase, goes as far as to describe it as generally summative of all the foregoing experimentation:

La poésie de Montale, ici, circule
sans cesse du quotidien à l'éternel,
de l'infime au cosmique, du banal au
miracle et au mystère...Le poète du
'mal de vivre' des Os des Seiches
brasse ici à pleines mains la vie,
sa vie, au point que Satura et les
Carnets se présentent un peu comme
un bilan moral de toute la vie du
poète, avec ses lieux et ses saisons. 49

Ramat also sees this later period as an on-going process which takes the earlier experimentation to its logical conclusions. Ramat considers this later phase as either a continuation of the moment begun with Satura or alternatively as a single moment beginning with this volume:

Il Diario del '71 e del '72, edito nella
sua forma integrale del 1973, si colloca
sulla scia di Satura, e d'altronde sembra
ozioso chiedersi se in esso si-esprime il
preteso "quinto Montale", o una propaggine
perfezionata del "quarto". 50

Be this as it may, the final moments have been attacked as instances of degeneration in Montale's poetic signification. While Satura had been followed by a great deal of surprise and critical debate, the latest efforts have drawn the extremes of praise and scorn. If nothing else, Montale has once again forced the critic to review his working material and his easy definitions. No lon-

ger can the exegetist afford the sweeping statement of conventional praise or condemnation since Montale's current mode exists on a number of diversified planes each with its own merit or demerit. An issue has thus been made of the worth of the poetry itself, particularly after the assignment of the Nobel prize to Montale in 1975. A new dimension has opened up in the critical debate surrounding our major poet after the discussion which followed Satura.

Recently both critics and writers of note have accused Montale of a bald and often degrading commercialism which has been held responsible for an intrinsic deterioration of his present style as well as the negation of intellectual and aesthetic principles. This trait in Satura, Diario and Quaderno initiated the arguments that have now been reopened in relation to the most recent manifestations. A number of prominent critics justify this phase of Montalian writing in terms of the advanced levels of experimentation which it offers to the reader. Almansi and Merry make the following appraisal in the monographic study which tends to lay praise on the earlier works rather than the later examples:

His fifth and sixth collections cover the two 'Diaries' of 1971 and 1972. They follow at close quarters the new found fecundity of Satura. They continue the latter's line, where all but a few of the compositions are couched in a casual and ironic mood...Satura witnessed the poet's extensive travels, as he moved around the hotels, cafés and boutiques of Europe. But in Diario this vagabond, poetical tourist has been replaced by a sentimental meditator who stays at home to think. 51

Clearly the narrowing down of the poetic horizon has had a profound influence on the general impression of the style and semantic import of the later works. By its very nature the poetry now no longer imposes itself on the reader as a moment of significant redefinition of life but rather as a superficial reflection of daily occurrences. Grimshaw sums it up in the following slighting phrase:

The poetry of Montale's latest volume, Diario del '71 e del '72, published only two years after the appearance of Satura, predictably shapes itself within the same ambit of petty irritations and among the same pitiless abstractions. 52

In a sense, Diario and Quaderno are the most recent 'occasioni', the new collection of occasional, daily and often prosaic events translated into brief, impressionistic pieces:

Nel Diario,...Montale mostra un contegno affabile e ironico, interessato più a registrare "un ruolo diaristico, prosastico o narrativo" piuttosto che a scrivere "visioni trascendentali". 53

The impressionism of these pieces, however, does not extend into the profounder human experience but rather into the immediateness of quotidian vision. They are the banal extensions of the day's event into the realm of public exposure. While Satura included certain sections of vital existential concern, particularly in Xenia which deal with Mosca's death, Diario and Quaderno transfer to the reader no greater or more momentous

event than the death of the pot plant. Yet it would be unfair to take exception to the lack of outstanding content since this would be denying Montale's present ends, and therefore, his real achievement in this phase of his career. The texts currently sum up Montale's new consciousness, both of his life and its artistic production, the day to day encounters and his odd reflection on past occurrences. In this way the lack of precise semantic content is compensated for by an enigmatic linguistic playfulness obvious even to the less ardent Montale reader. The formal presentation of the collections has now become the raison d'être of this later Montalian phase, but ironically the culmination of former points of prestige. In a final, if somewhat drastic conclusion, Marchese justifies Montale's latest production by the formal pattern offered in it:

Sarà proprio la qualità del trattamento formale a riscattare dal mero documento- anche se alto documento, 'journal intime' di uno spirito quanto mai alieno alle confessioni o ai ritratti interiori per i posteri- l'intenzionalità varia e talora contrastante di una serie fin troppo esuberante di testi. 54

It is fair, as Zazzaretta does, to see the formal aspect of this poetic output as the element that stands out both influential and innovative. The concern with the formal is responsible for saving this new style from a monotonous reiteration of personal data of limited interest. If this had been the only subject embodied in the poetry, Montale's late work would have

existed as a tertiary addendum to the already existing legend. Although ostensibly diaristic, Diario, Quaderno and the scattered fragmenta move away from the realm of the personal and the intrinsic into the area of literary experimentation which transcends content in favour of form. Montale himself makes a statement in Nel nostro tempo which explains the importance of this aspect in the new verse:

la poesia è una macchina fatta di
parole e che queste sole, e le
connesse immagini, debbano essere
studiate nelle loro combinazioni,
rifiutando di estrapolarne ipotetici contenuti. 55

By shifting his emphasis from content to form, Montale remains one of the most influential poets in the present state of play of European literature. While Montale uses personal data as the springboard from which to launch his linguistic experiments, the subject matter is never at the centre of the artist's or the reader's cognizance and intellectual appraisal. As such this poetry is naturally a reversal of the earlier preoccupation with semanticity and existential message.

With the publication of the collected works by Einaudi, an honour usually conferred posthumously, the same issues have become even more thorny. The earlier accusation of commercialism has now reached harsher proportions, not only is the new style itself under fire but Montale's motives have also been seen as suspect. The inclusion of his 'spazzatura' or refuse, now

for publication after years of exclusion from his earlier collections, has led critics to see Montale's latest contribution as bulk presented to the public for the ultimate aim of profitable gain to be had from Italy's foremost literary 'holy cow'. If one remembers the accusations which follow in the wake of such an attitude in the respected philosophical writers, Montale's latest critics seem mild in their scorn. Schopenhauer's classic comment on the integrity of the writer underlines the forceful tradition which Montale should stand for.

Writing for money and reservation of copyright are, at bottom, the ruin of literature. No one writes anything that is worth writing, unless he writes for the sake of his subject. 56

Although Schopenhauer is fair in his scorn of what is now seen as the best-seller, can the obverse situation merit such harsh criticism? Montale's current popularity is ensured even without pandering to public opinion. But some critics are not so sure:

Didattiche, retoriche, molte di queste poesie sembrano freddure scritte per gioco. Forse è proprio così. Ma allora dove è finito Montale? Ed è finito? Certo, se non si sapesse che sono versi suoi...Ecco, se queste poesie non fossero uscite in opera omnia insieme agli indiscussi capolavori, beneficiando dell'ombrello protettivo di Ossi di Seppi, delle Occasioni, di Bufera e altro, come sarebbero stati giudicati? Se fossero uscite prive dell'appoggio del nome, come un libretto di poesie di un autore sconosciuto, di

un poeta giovane, che cosa sarebbe successo? 57

Although extremely pessimistic, this seems to be the consensus of contemporary Italian poets and critics faced with the problem of prolific output. Although it may not appear fair to judge texts against the relative merit of his earlier works, Montale's latest output purposefully opens up discussions of merit and, above all, the reason for the constant publication of new texts by a poet whose early production can be considered rather small:

Queste ultime poesie sono i trucioli
di una bottega che ha dato buoni mobili,
sono i resti della lavorazione. Montale
prende in giro il vecchio Govoni, che
continuava a scrivere, e ora fa come lui.
Perché scrivere quelle due righe sulla
carta diventa un'abitudine, fa parte della
routine della giornata, soprattutto serve
per sentirsi ancora vivi. 58

Pietro Cimatti's cynical conclusions find an echo in a number of other prestigious critics and poets. Elio Pecora, a contemporary Italian poet, goes even further:

Se davvero un giovane e sconosciuto poeta pubblicasse questi versi, e non è detto che ci riuscirebbe, nessuno lo ammirerebbe... Al massimo, lo giudicherebbero un elegante giocoliere. Comunque, questi ultimi versi sono vera poesia. Sono i commenti disperati e un po' tristi di un vecchio signore che strizza l'occhio al lettore e alla sua poesia precedente. Certo, quando si parla di pubblicare, ci sono delle convenzioni, gioca il retroterra di un poeta, più che il valore delle singole composizioni. E questo è un discorso ancora più valido per un poeta famoso come Montale. Si può solo notare che quando Montale scri-

veva della grande poesia, scriveva o meglio pubblicava, raramente. Poi, dopo il Nobel, le sue poesie sono diventate un'alluvione. 59

This criticism is justified in relation to the constantly proliferating poems churned out by Montale in very recent times. Testifying to this is the latest collected works, the Opera in versi, 1980, which comprises a new selection, not separately named but amounting to what can be seen as a seventh collection, of approximately one hundred new texts written after the publication of Quaderno in 1974. When I compare the dates and volume of the later years to the three early periods, it is obvious that time has certainly given Montale the knack of easy and quick writing. However, this may be, Montale's poetry should not be discarded on such a basis. His style has moved to such an extent that earlier standards can no longer be presumptuously applied to him without a radical revision if only of our temporal terms of reference.

Appropriately enough, Montale's late poetry has not been completely shunned but has found favourable criticism in an authoritative section of the critical intelligentsia. The principal admirers of Montale's late poetry see the recent manifestation as a logical conclusion to the poet's experimentation and personal quest in the specific style of writing that he has been instrumental in shaping. Leone Piccione, journalist and literary critic, finds the totality of Montale's work the most important aspect to be considered

by the reviewer:

Non sembra molto verosimile l'ipotesi di un giovane poeta che pubblichi questi versi. L'opera di Montale ha un inizio e una fine che tracciano un ben preciso itinerario morale, umano e poetico. Ed è il percorso di un grande poeta, una strada che va giudicata globalmente. Anche se un giovane poeta, accettando per un attimo questa ipotesi assurda, scrivesse poesie di questo genere, voglio dire come quelle che ha scritto Montale negli ultimi Diari e negli inediti pubblicati da Einaudi, ebbene direi che questo fantomatico nuovo autore è un poeta di notevole importanza. 60

In this case, then, Montale's late poetry is not to be seen as important simply because of the name which accompanies it. Montale himself has made a comment on this very point. In an interview with his biographer, Giulio Nascimbeni, at the moment of the publication of the complete works, Montale made the following revealing statement:

"Contini e la signora Bettarini sono venuti spesso a trovarmi a Forte dei Marmi durante l'estate del '78 e durante quella del '79. Però qualcuna delle poesie inedite è posteriore a quelle date: l'ultima entrata nel libro è della scorsa primavera."

"E dopo ha scritto ancora?"

"Sì, qualcosa, ma poi ho distrutto quei fogli. Niente di importante, insomma. Le poesie potrebbero sempre portare la firma di un altro. Tutti i poeti scrivono le stesse cose, chi peggio e chi meglio." 61

Montale's statements imply a certain degree of choice

and editorial selection alongside a total disregard for subject matter as divorced from the more obvious formal aspect of which more will have to be said in Chapter II. If Montale has chosen these texts for inclusion in a complete volume of poetry they must represent a certain moment in which he feels both respect and artistic integrity. Therefore such chosen pieces may be definitely taken as valid moments of the more recent Montalian writing style. Marco Forti, director of the Mondadori collection "Lo specchio", is one of the foremost admirers of Montale's recent verse though offering certain qualifications that aid us in our reading of it:

Di queste nuove poesie di Montale penso molto bene. Naturalmente vanno viste nel quadro dell'opera completa del poeta. Ho trovato molto sviluppato il discorso metafisico, anche se la ricchezza dell'immagine è minore. Ma questo è tipico della poesia senile. Se invece di essere le poesie della vecchiaia di Eugenio Montale queste fossero le poesie di un giovane, direi che sono moraleggianti. Ma per Montale dico che sono un passo avanti, un'ulteriore acquisizione rispetto agli ultimi Diari. Toccano il discorso ontologico finale del vecchio poeta e dal punto di vista formale si liberano della poesia che simula la prosa, per diventare invece un recitativo. 62

In this statement Forti pinpoints what should stand out in all analysis of Montale's most recent production. In the final count, their place in the master's work and life is the only importance that they can have. The critic, therefore, should not judge the relative merits as much as see them fundamentally related to an unusual

mind in its final process of growth. What they will show us, then, will be the final intellectual and artistic experience of Montale the poet. More than as an ontological poetic base, as Forti would have it, the current Montale founds his work on the already well developed metaphysical process operating in his early poetry, dressing it in the new style of linguistic involution. It is Geno Pampaloni who makes the decisive and wittiest comment on this Montalian phase:

Il mio giudizio...è senz'altro positivo. Anche nell'ultimo Montale, sia pure in questa forma di crisalide autoprosciugata c'è molto del suo humus. E non possiamo non riconoscerlo. Potremmo dire che ormai Montale è un post-montaliano, comunque il più bravo dei post-montaliani per la sapienza dell'ironia, che è ancora a livelli altissimi, anche se manca di quel particolare "sublime naturale" che era la sua caratteristica. Anche la vena aforistica delle sue ultime composizioni rivela una forte presenza della poesia anteriore. Non è altro che una glossa che rimanda al testo. 63

Most critics give this poetry credit as a moment within the on-going process of Montale's personal tendency towards an ironic evaluation of poetic form. Therefore, whether this poetry is deemed to be 'good' or 'bad', its real value lies in its global relevance. In the words of Ramat:

Dopo Satura e Diario del '71 e del '72, sulla base di quanto i due volumi hanno lasciato intendere sull'altro 'crepuscolo', (il crepuscolo della maniera 'alta', della tradizione 1925-1956 di Montale) il Quaderno ora chiede a più riprese che si lasci alla poesia il tranquillo svolgimento d'un suo ruolo, remoto ormai da illusioni totalizzanti e da curiosità radicali 64

Montale has become the point of reference within his own self-ordained system of poetic inter-reference. So Montale has now taken the ultimate step allowed to poetry. By reverting to his personal innovations of the past and setting them up as the understood and generally accepted norm, he has established himself as the final arbiter. In this sense Montale's final stage is a thing apart, not restricted to general rules but existing purely on its own terms. It should not be compared by external rules but be seen simply as the cumulative moment of experimentation. Giorgio Luti concurs with this theory of culmination of earlier moments in the present poetic style:

è spiegabile la querelle, subito esplosa tra i sostenitori di una ormai raggiunta decadenza a chi insisteva per il "canto del cigno", un canto conclusivo che reggeva il confronto con quelle due stagioni che lo avevano preceduto. Per mio conto non ho esitazioni: credo che l'ultimo Montale, a conti fatti, abbia vinto pienamente la sfida aperta con Satura e proseguita nel Diario. Se la Bufera chiudeva un discorso aperto con gli Ossi e culminato nelle Occasioni..., Satura e il Diario iniziano e concludono una storia nuova che stabilisce una presenza "autonoma" all'interno del diagramma montaliano. 65

The innovations are simply the on-going steps of the thought process that finds fulfillment in this series of new technical discoveries. All former theoretical assumptions have been destroyed for the sake of the personal rehabilitation of form. Ramat goes so far as to say that this phase of Montale's oeuvre requires a revaluation of the validity of systematic discourse as such:

L'abituale ricupero di temi e lemmi della propria tradizione personale...viene stravolto a significare l'impossibilità e anzi l'illegittimità della previsione, del discorso sistematico: addirittura della poesia come sistema...fin da Satura smonta più che può i monumenti concettuali di una volta, le architetture logiche ed emotive che ne avevano mostrato la tensione e lo slancio. 66

It seems redundant to attempt to judge this late poetry ideologically without a prior knowledge of the general oeuvre which creates the figure known as Montale. Naturally, such a wide-ranging analysis is outside the scope of this study. It is necessary above all to isolate the structural patterning of the newer poems.

Perhaps the ultimate judgement on the nature of the late style may be left to the poet, whose sensibility and capacity for self-analysis are among the recurring elements of his work. Bearing in mind Montale's warning about 'depistamento' in Satura, LETTERA A MALVOLIO in Diario '71 may be taken as a moment of intellectual honesty and introspection, and can be seen, with only limited reservations, as a declaration of personal artistic preoccupations:

No,
non si trattò mai d'una fuga.
ma solo di un rispettabile
prendere le distanze.

Non fu molto difficile dapprima,
quando le separazioni erano nette,
l'orrore da una parte e la decenza,
oh solo una decenza infinitesima
dall'altra parte. No, non fu difficile,
bastava scantonare scolorire,
rendersi invisibili,

forse esserlo. Ma dopo.

Ma dopo che le stalle si vuotarono
l'onore e l'indecenza stretti in un solo patto
fondarono l'ossimoro permanente
e non fu più questione
di fughe e di ripari. Era l'ora
della focomelia concettuale
e il distorto era il dritto, su ogni altro
derisione e silenzio.

(Diario '71, pp.456-457
vv. 6-25)

This text enjoys a special significance in the collection as a whole since it closes, chronologically, the first part of Diario. As a frame it stands at a point of artistic introspection and thus conveys an openness not usually found in the later poetry. It is one of the oldest texts in the collection and recalls stylistic moments from Bufera and follows the style of Satura. Its theme takes over an earlier moment, the question left unanswered in BOTTA E RISPOSTA I from Satura, and offers a solution in the present instance. It also takes up the issues of political involvement and the evasion of commitment of which Montale has so often been accused:

La lirica che conclude cronologicamente la sezione del '71 nel Diario del '71 e del '72 rappresenta una delle poesie di massimo rilievo del quinto libro di Montale e segna il ritorno del poeta ad un'agonistica e strenua difesa della propria vocazione umana e artistica. 67

Montale's concern with human life and its predicament has always been central to his poetry. Now, however, a review of his former position will lead to the understanding of his present preoccupations. Here the poet's voice is laid

bare; the games and ambiguities of the entire late oeuvre are partly unravelled. It is to this text that we turn for a key to understanding the scope of the late poetry. LETTERA A MALVOLIO bases itself on the already well-tried image of the youth of the artist in relation to the 'stalle d'Augia' and the concept of distancing and escape in the earlier Montale. The artist has finally bent back on himself and has discarded the many subterfuges behind which he normally hides so as to allow a clearer view of a vital if less noble poetic production. Montale takes up the familiar image of the Satura locus:

Uscito appena dall'adolescenza
per metà della vita fui gettato
nelle stalle d'Augia.

(Satura, p.277, vv.1-3)

The autobiographical source of the image becomes the foundation for the mythifying process in the loci. Most critics agree on the reading of the 'stalle d'Augia' as a reference to the period of fascist rule against which Montale revolted both intellectually and emotionally. The 'prima e dopo', the 'before and after', clearly indicates the division of the author's life into two distinct periods. Yet can these be seen as of only limited temporal import? The periods seem to represent an entire life and mental condition rather than the purely temporal divisions of pre- and post- fascist rule. They can be seen as summaries of the former thought processes that shaped the early periods of Montale's writing and the later conditions summed up in the paradoxical suspension of the poet's 'ossimoro perma-

nente', the permanent oxymoron. Through his usual detachment, Montale is able to take stock of these two distinct periods and to see their relevance within the span of his entire life.

The topos of the 'stalle d'Augia' is found twice in the work of Montale and is on both occasions associated with the author's youth and the concept of poetic production. It could be seen as either a conscious or subconscious reiteration of a mythical element transferred into the realm of personal typology. The Herculean myth, in which the classical hero is impelled to clean the Augean stables and accomplishes the deed by diverting the rivers Alpheius and Peneius, is adjusted and readapted to the author in his rôle as creator. The connotations of strength in the traditional myth are applied to the figure of the poet whose power with words is no less a manifestation of Herculean strength. Does Montale, therefore, see himself as an artist engaged in the Herculean labour of verbal communication? Just as some readers see Montale in the garb of an old age pensioner suffering the pangs of acute introspection, so the image of the enormousness of the Herculean task becomes the final link in the ruthless self-criticism of the artist's own work and abilities. His approach to the problems of communication, always keenly felt, has now reached substantial proportions and the solution which has been proposed is none other than the corpus of works which we, his audience, are engaged in reading; Diario, Quaderno and Altri versi. This is the importance of a text like LETTERA A MALVOLIO in a collection that

has been subjected to so much criticism. The image of the stables has mythical connotations of special significance in relation to the rôle of the poet. Jacomuzzi sees this quality as a wish, in its first locus in Satura, BOTTA E RISPOSTA I, II, for a biographical summing up of the poet's life into an earlier period and a later period, a 'before and after':

Il testo si presenta esplicitamente come una sorta di summa biografica, o per dirla nei termini della montaliana 'disgrazia di sempre', un estremo tentativo di repêchage che abbraccia l'arco di un'esistenza, il suo prima e il suo dopo; ma è anche, inscindibilmente, il repêchage di una poetica e di luoghi poetici operato a un livello di ulteriore consapevolezza, non nella prospettiva, sostanzialmente romantica, di una poetica come testimonianza di una biografia, ma in quella rovesciata, di una biografia che esclusivamente consiste, si riduce e chiarisce nei termini di un itinerario di poetica. 68

The text should therefore be seen as a Montalian 'resa di conti', a review of an entire life's production with the relative objectivity of the critic rather than the subjectivity of the writer. Zanzotto sees the summative quality of the piece as its principal quality:

Di rado avviene che un componimento riassume il passato e delinea abbastanza esplicitamente il futuro di un'evoluzione poetica come accade per BOTTA E RISPOSTA I. In esso, scritto con un forte anticipo di anni rispetto al resto di Satura, viene a raccogliersi e ad essere interpretato (reinterpretato) il lavoro di Montale fino a La Bufera inclusa, mentre si costituisce in nuce il programma del nuovo libro, articolandosi fino al Diario del '71 e del '72. 69

In BOTTA E RISPOSTA I the poet of Satura, and later of Diario, Quaderno and Altri versi, shows himself to be as ambiguous and hermetic a poet as that of Ossi but with greater consciousness and malice in his intent. The delight in 'depistamento' finds free reign in the pretended modesty of the poet's relative objectivity. The chosen mask of the 'topo', the mouse, placed in direct opposition to the more traditional image of the eagle, gives a final punch to the carefully constructed self-image:

Ma dal topo, meno abietto di quanto si
creda, e infine eroicamente accorto parente
della talpa (si oserebbe dire della "vecchia
talpa" rivoluzionaria) ci si può attendere
ogni resistenza, ogni riapparizione, anche
se priva degli orpelli della fenice,
dell'aquila. 70

The author, while assuming the mask of the humble mouse, soars artistically higher than the eagle, traditional symbol of grandeur, and sets out to prove the claim in the subsequent writing. From this factor the rewriting of the Augean myth gains added significance.

A similar argument could be applied to the second locus of the image, in LETTERA A MALVOLIO in Diario. In this citation, the 'dopo' of the earlier text has been explained more fully; it is the present tense of the writer of Diario, the writer who has somehow 'betrayed' the essence of his preceding style and has concentrated on those aspects which no longer seem to satisfy the critic. Bearing out this interpretation are the many references to

the Montalian figure-symbols, Gerti, Liuba, Clizia, which make a reappearance in choral fashion in the BOTTA E RISPOSTA example cited above. It can thus be seen as a parade of a life, a style, and an idea. Therefore it is correspondingly easier to apply this interpretation to the second example when we bear in mind the simple preliminary typology.

In order to achieve the utmost freedom of introspection the artist must be able to attain a degree of distance from the subject of his art. This function has led to a number of harsh criticisms of the artist's conduct in relation to the ideal which commentators tend to see as 'poésie engagée'. Montale's indignation at the accusation is reflected in this important text. The cry of artistic indignation ('No, / non si trattò mai d'una fuga / ma solo un rispettabile / prendere le distanze') makes clear the degree to which the artist and the critic have become separated and how the objections of the latter have by-passed what Montale sees as the most important aspect of his current poetic style. Does Montale feel that he has been 'betrayed' and the later work completely misunderstood? The 'fuga' or escape, as the poet sees it, is the first step into a direct introspection of self from which springs a concern with general human principles:

Il linguaggio di un poeta è un linguaggio
storicizzato, un rapporto. Da molti anni
la poesia va diventando più un mezzo di
conoscenza che di rappresentazione. Il
bisogno di un poeta è la ricerca di una
verità puntuale, non di una verità generale.
Una verità del poeta-soggetto che non rinne-

ghi quella dell'uomo-soggetto empirico. Che parli di ciò che unisce l'uomo agli altri uomini ma non neghi ciò che lo disunisce e lo rende unico e irripetibile.

L'argomento della poesia che mi è stata a cuore (e credo di ogni possibile poesia) è la condizione umana in sé considerata; non questo o quell'avvenimento storico. Ciò non significa estraniarsi da quanto avviene nel mondo; significa solo coscienza, e volontà, di non scambiare l'essenziale col transitorio. Non sono stato indifferente a quanto è accaduto nell'ultimo mezzo secolo; ma non posso dire che se i fatti fossero stati diversi anche la mia poesia avrebbe avuto un volto totalmente diverso. 71

Introspection in the modern artist must therefore be accompanied by his self-examining isolation. By concentrating on the microcosm, Montale defines and understands the macrocosm. The taking of distances becomes the inverting of a telescope that redirects the cosmos into the poet's consciousness and then re-releases it in poetic expressiveness. In Auto da Fè Montale explains his idea of artistic isolation more fully:

Ritengo che anche domani le voci più importanti saranno quelle degli artisti che faranno sentire attraverso la loro voce di isolati, un'eco del fatale isolamento di ognuno di noi. In questo senso solo gli isolati parlano, solo gli isolati comunicano; gli altri - gli uomini della comunicazione di massa - ripetono, fanno eco, volgarizzano le parole dei poeti. 72

Montale still assigns to himself the rôle of poet in this meaning of the word. He is the man who communicates while all others are mute. Communication, however, has now tur-

ned to a babble which no longer conforms to the traditional confines of poetry but strays into the fields of prose and of the meta-poetic essay. This is perhaps the compromise every artist must make in order to enable himself to be understood in a world of 'incompleto parlare' and 'mezzo parlare', semi-speech. It is the only way that Montale has been able to continue as a poet and influence contemporary Italian poetics. Such a function is obviously at the basis of any criticism of Montalian language and communicative ends. The mode makes itself conspicuous in the three newest works, Diario, Quaderno and Altri versi.

At several levels of reading these three works have a great deal in common and stem from an interest in recurring theoretical concerns. They should be seen as the immediate successors to Satura and its period of stylistic experimentation. Montale has also added a recent corpus of occasional fragmenta, now included in the Einaudi collected works. Altri versi I and II comprise all the poems written between 1977 and 1979 and form what amounts to a seventh collection of scattered impressionistic pieces grouped under the bland generic title typical of Montale's late compilation. The final section of the complete works prints Poesie disperse for the first time; all the poems previously rejected by Montale in the compilation of the published collections. They date from the earliest days of Ossi to the experimental years of Altri versi, reflecting a full range of linguistic

and stylistic speculation in Montale's career. This section shows the most disparate set of styles and the most debatable quality of all the collections.

The works subsequent to Satura are composed in a flowing, free journalistic form, neutrally encapsulated under unrevealing and generic titles that indicate simple temporal spans rather than betray the thematic content of the work. The break with earlier Montalian tradition is radical. Formerly the collections had been supplied with names, usually taken from one of the texts, which gave a glimpse of the lyrical intuition to be expected in the reading. This is still operant in Satura, although the ambiguity of this title leaves the reader with a vagueness of understanding that is uncommon in the Ossi/Occasioni/Bufera period. With the appearance of Diario begins the long series of neutral titles that characterize the late works. Montale has also dropped the sub-titled mini-collection which formed a constituent part of the earlier works. Ossi consisted of 'Movimenti', 'Ossi di Seppia', 'Mediterraneo', 'Meriggi e ombre'; Occasioni of 'Occasioni I' and 'II' and 'Mottetti'; Bufera of 'Finis-terre', 'Dopo', 'Intermezzo', 'Flashes and dediche', 'Silvae', 'Madrigali privati' and 'Conclusioni provvisorie', in which the musical, visual or emotive quality of the titles charged the lyrical impact of the mini-collection. Satura still uses the sub-titled introduction in the Xenia sections. With the post-Diario phase, however, this tendency disappears and the single texts flow freely in the undifferentiated neutrality of the umbrella title. In fact the

titles themselves give away Montale's concern with the momentary impression rather than a thematic development in the confines of a tightly structured whole. The titles of the individual texts have also undergone something of a change. While the pre-Diario works tended to leave the texts untitled, and therefore subject to the broader implications of the whole, they now tend to have individual labels of a transparently explicatory nature.

Still in the diaristic mode, Montale's name tags often reflect the flash or impression that has inspired the poetic moment. At times this is of a visual nature but more often than not the text is nothing more than elaboration on a reflection of a political or merely personal nature. Thus most texts are encoded by the single article plus noun combination that directs the reader's attention to the problem at hand. A few such titles would be: 'Il pirla', 'Il positivo', 'Il negativo', 'Il fuoco', 'Il rondone', 'Il poeta', 'Al Congresso', 'Il frullato' in Diario; 'Il pieno', 'Due destini', 'Il sabià', 'La memoria', 'Il vuoto', 'La solitudine', 'L'eroismo', 'L'armonia', 'I travestimenti', 'L'opinione', 'Un poeta', 'Il furore', 'L'euforia', 'In negativo', 'La cultura', 'La verità', 'L'obbrobrio', 'La poesia', 'I miraggi' in Quaderno and 'L'allevamento', 'L'allegoria', 'Lo spettacolo', 'In oriente', 'I nascondigli', 'Nel dubbio', 'Una visita' in Altri versi. These titles, only the most important of which have been listed above, show the extent

to which the new type of heading has found pride of place in the late collections. They prepare the reader's expectation and invite immediate apprehension of the semantic content. In their explicatory index the content is foremost and leaves the reader free to concentrate on the formal convolution of the text. Often, the texts do not give a greater semantic definition than that already gleaned from the titles. Other titles show the obvious impressionistic location or temporal 'fix' that gives rise to the private recollection and quiet general reflection. These are 'Corso Dogali', 'Nel cortile', 'Il lago di Annecy', 'Sorapis, 40 anni fa', in Diario; 'Il giorno dei morti', 'Sera di Pasqua', 'Pasquetta', 'Sul lago d'Orta', 'In una città del nord', 'Le ore della sera', 'Fine di settembre', 'Sulla spiaggia', 'Al mare (o quasi)' in Quaderno and 'Al giardino d'Italia', 'Un invito a pranzo', 'Una visita', 'Postilla a una visita' in Altri versi. In their spatio-temporal dimension these texts are the extension of real events, life episodes projected into structured literary moments. Another range of titles sets up internal discourses within a dedicatory format. They are intrusions of the diary into the three-dimensional presence of a second actor. In their way they emphasize the diaristic preoccupation of the later years. Texts such as 'A Leone Traverso', 'Lettera a Bobi', 'Lettera a Malvolio', 'A un grande filosofo', 'Al mio grillo' in Diario; 'A Pio Rajna', 'L'onore-a Guido Piovene' in Quaderno and 'All'amico Pea', 'A Charles Singleton', 'A Claudio Muzio' in Altri versi.

These texts are the most personal and tend to isolate the poet and the addressee in a single memorial encapsulation from which the discourse is only partially relayed to the reader. On the whole, few of the titles have the lyrical impact of those for the early texts but merely label the daily and relatively banal act.

The generic, time-bound titles of the late collections betray an unequivocal interest on Montale's part in the poetic transcription of recorded daily events. These texts are momentary reflections or instantaneous whims, never arranged into clearly defined sequential patterns. Naturally, such a structure puts no emphasis on semantic continuity nor on any particular thematic strategy but rather on the movement within a free, open-ended progression of individually structured texts. One critic⁷³ has found a strong similarity between the collected works and the poetic flow of Byron's Don Juan; in common they have the free-flowing form held together by the single yet nonetheless rambling poetic discourse. In its general form, the collected work transcends the limitations necessarily imposed on poetic collections by virtue of their structured concentratedness. Of central importance is the progression manifested in the entirety rather than the semantic unity of a single individual text. Just as a Picaresque novel moves across a range of unrelated episodes and divergent situations, so Montale's late works move rapidly through a number of topics unrelated except for a single authorial voice or a binding single character. The focus has shifted from the geocentric

concern with existential questions to a diffuse concern with the subjects and events of contemporary life.

In the interview with G. Nascimbeni, his biographer, Montale points out the casualness of the process of composition that characterizes these works, going as far as to question their poeticity:

Sono poesie nate di giorno in giorno.
Il libro si è formato da se; perchè
non pubblicarlo? Non tutte sono poesie.
A volte sono semplici appunti: li ho
lasciati così perchè sarebbe stato un
errore amplificarli in poesie. Alcune
di queste mie cose giocano proprio sulla
loro brevità. 74

In this moment of candid descriptiveness Montale blurs the boundaries between prose and poetry and defies the conventional presentation of poetry as a carefully wrought pattern. The casualness is as much a part in the presentation of these works as the lyricism of the early works in stylistic convolutions there presented. In his movement towards the diaristic genre Montale has chosen the stylistic artifice of daily annotation. This is in keeping with the expectations inherent in the genre itself, where stylistic elaboration is secondary to the jotting down of an event-impression. When the reader expects to be confronted by a momentary daily reflection, the elaboration of isolated texts becomes subordinated to the flow of thought and continuity of motion of the loose discursive form. As Guillen⁷⁵ points out, the choice of a particular genre is an 'invitation to form', determining the response that will meet the work

on first reading.

Also integral to the diary is the cognitive fusion of the reader with the writer into a single perceptive element. In this genre the process of reading becomes integrated with the process of writing itself. Both the reader and the writer have an imperfect knowledge of the 'plot', the reader because of his lack of knowledge of the parts and the writer because of his reliance on daily events for inspirational force. The time-bound, unplotted work follows an autonomous progression dictated by the daily events which mould the discourse. Montale has transposed the rules governing the diary into the canons of the poetic collection. A triple text from Poesie disperse clarifies the enigmatic nature of the work:

PICCOLO DIARIO

Sono infreddato, tossicchio
 è lo strascico dell'influenza,
 domani andrò a ricevere
 una medaglia per benemerenze
 civiche o altre che ignoro.
 Verrà a prendermi un tale
 di cui non so più il nome. Ha una Mercedes,
 presiede un Centro Culturale (quale?).

Si accumula la posta
 'inevasa' sul tavolo. Parrebbe
 che io sia molto importante
 ma non l'ho fatto apposta.
 Dio mio, se fosse vero
 che mai saranno gli altri?

Comunicare, comunicazione,
 parole che se frugo nei miei ricordi
 di scuola non appaiono. Parole
 inventate più tardi,
 quando venne a mancare anche il sospetto

dell'oggetto in questione.

(Poesie disperse, p.793)

The impressionism of the recorded daily events alters the poetic format into a time-bound transmission of domestic trivia. The pretended ignorance and modest uncertainty of the poetic voice are typical of the momentarily observed and recorded daily event in Montale's late oeuvre. The text exists at a point between prose and poetry where the daily event is neither an emblematic fact of existence nor a simple trivial occurrence. The obtrusive present tense of the text compresses temporal possibilities and universal meanings, central to the poetic discipline, into the arena of summary events. In such compressed forms the reader cannot find intellectual diversion other than the immediate relayed event. In another similar text from Quaderno the title itself is indicative of the summary nature of the impressionistic text:

APPUNTI

Sarà una fine dolcissima
in ppp
dopodiché ci troveremo
sprovvisti di memoria
con anima incorporea
stordita come mai e timorosa
d'altri guai.

Ahura Mazda e Arimane
il mio pensiero persiano
di stamane
.....
e noi poveri bastardi
figli di cani
abbassata la cresta

attenti disattenti a nuovo spettacolo
che non ci riguarda.

GINA ALL'ALBA MI DICE
il merlo è sulla frasca
e dondola
felice.

(Quaderno, p.570)

These are the cursory notes of textual preparation rather than the finished products of a poetic process. In their temporal dimension, the texts are at dual poles of objective observation and momentary reflection. Their original inspirational force is always the external referent of a casual word, image or event. The three impressionistic moments of the text recapture stock images, phrases and preoccupations of Montale's late production. The obsessive concern with death and the afterlife, the mystical connotations of oriental wisdom and the stock notion of life as a cabaret, fuse with the homely image of Gina, Montale's housekeeper and the pet 'merlo' or blackbird, symbol of domesticity and tranquility, to form a rich medley of sights, thoughts, momentary impressions and tangential memorial instances. The idiosyncratic manipulation of the style, though pretentious, adds to the sense of other-worldliness of the text, its existence along a diffuse temporal axis. The reader is led along a diverging path of here, now, then, to come, perhaps and home, the suspension dots and unmotivated capitals of the text serving merely as jolts to the reader's imagination rather than having a structural end in the poem.

In two other short texts, collected under the label APPUNTI, the epigrammatic nature of the writing gives a reason to the pieces themselves:

I

A caccia

C'è chi tira a pallini
e c'è chi spara a palla.
L'importante è far fuori
l'angelica farfalla.

(Altri versi, p.640)

II

Può darsi

Può darsi che il visibile sia nato
da una bagarre di spiriti inferociti.
Ma tempo e spazio erano già creati?
Peccato, dice Crono al suo collega.
Si stava molto meglio disoccupati.

(Altri versi, p.641)

Although the inspirational force here is a thought rather than an event, the manipulation of the reader leads to a similar end. The ironic twist in the meaning is secondary to the enjoyment of the linguistic lightness. A single whimsical thought lends itself easily to the compression of semantic strata into a single poetic puff. Such poetry adds nothing to one's understanding of the poet's ideological stance. It merely presents us with a whimsical temporal annotation.

The process is made explicit in a key example from Altri versi:

Notiziario ore 9 a.m.

Quel bischero del merlo è arrivato tardi.
I piccioni hanno già mangiato tutto.

(Altri versi, p.632)

Here the dual experience of time and event stand alongside each other. The recording of the time ('notiziario ore 9 a.m.') fixes the temporal dimension of the 'appunto', the moment of its conception. It also, however, functions as a spy, indicating the true nature of the text. The piece itself is a 'notiziario', a personal news bulletin, the intimate and closed recording of a fleeting moment embedded in the author's experiential reality. Again the pervasive present tense further heightens the quality of recorded fact, thereby directing the reader into the realm of individual minutiae. The event in itself is not worthy of note but Montale's focusing eye increases its valutative presence and gives it the type of distancing that increases its emblematic isolation. Clive James⁷⁶ nicely describes the late style as a 'dream in the presence of reason', a reverie stemming from the circumstantial presence of quotidian life.

In these poems the single event becomes the essential feature of the single, isolated poet, the man who has dominated Italian poetry for fifty years and has managed to review his daily experiences with fine detachment. These texts are important because they relate to him but still exist as banal items of no profound meaning. This is essentially true of most diaristic writing when it is

formed by the pure recording of happenings rather than artistically contrived notes.

Montale has broken the clear-cut definition between the sender and the receiver in the game of literary communication. Also typical of the diaristic mode is the use of a code easily understood by his audience. If this is withheld one of the principle tenets of diaristic form, the conveyance of information, is broken. While Montale uses a linguistic register readily recognizable by his audience, the same cannot be said for the code into which this is embedded. Montale presents the reader with a personal, unresolved level of non-communication to be decoded, analysed and understood without his immediate help or interest. In this privately encoded world Montale aligns himself with the receiver, or seen in another way, Montale throws the receiver of his private, non-defined code into the deep end of his hermetic discourse. In this general sense, diaristic writing is at odds with poetic form: while the former is founded on a movement along the axis of information-communication, the latter is more concerned with the minute elaboration of individual texts. Montale achieves a curious blend between the two different disciplines.

The choice of open, free form gives Montale the chance for speculative research that has become the raison d'être of this new stylistic moment. With his current blends of temporal and spatial strata the occasional fleeting moment of stylistic ornamentation recalls the lyrical den-

sity of earlier Montalian manifestations. Now, however, these passages are not accompanied by semantic complexity but by a focus on pure form. Generally, the ornatus involves little stylistic elaboration at the sophisticated levels of Ossi but greater convolutions for immediate, eye-catching effect. The texts show little reworking and seldom stand up well to second or repeated readings. By calling them 'appunti', annotations, Montale blocks a traditional notion of exegetical analysis, leaving the texts to find their existence at a point outside the confines of the poetic form. They cannot be classed strictly within classes.

The inherent open-endedness of diaristic collections contrasts sharply with the closed perfection of texts up to Satura. Diario, Quaderno and Altri versi have no confining thematic barrier which channels the individual texts into a single discourse. Now the sole structuring element is the temporal progression implicit in the diaristic form. The texts of the last years of Montale's life are more numerous than those written over the first thirty years and have a greater variety of technical manipulation and artistic novelty. They now flow more easily with less of the order typical of the early collections. The reader is led speedily along the texts much as one is carried along by the circumstantial impetus of a satirical or social novel. It is interesting to note that Montale himself has pointed out the tendency to narrative unfurling in these texts. Speaking of the Opera in versi, Montale has called the entire oeuvre an unfinished novel, which

eventually builds a narrative development.

ma certo il libro è grosso, un mattone.
Ma penso che, tutto compreso, andrebbe
letto come un romanzo. Una specie di
uomo senza qualità...si un romanzo in-
compiuto. Del resto può darsi che tutti
i romanzi siano incompiuti. 77

The notion is useful in our definition of the sequentiality of the complete Montale. Rather than perceive the internal workings of Montale's mind as it has manifested itself through the poetry of ideas, one can deduce the final development of the experiments begun in the early years of Montale's career.

In the post-Satura period, Montale has been at pains to establish a colloquial flow (both in the structuring of the texts and in the linguistic registers applied) that diverges sharply from the formal regularity of the lyrical tradition. Therefore, Montale's notion of narrative development offers the critic an illumination of his poetic ideals. The range of Montalian poetic types in the later period far surpasses the expectations of the Ossi-Occasioni-Bufera years. Now the free form offers hospitality to a vast gamut of structural types and typographical presentations.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Grimshaw, 1974, p.74
2. Di Girolamo, 1973, p.359
3. Gargiulo quoted in Vannucci, 1975, pp.390-391
4. Ibid., pp.396-397
5. Contini, 1974, p.57
6. Grimshaw, p.86
7. Ibid.
8. Angelini, 1975, p.5
9. Bo, 1972, p.194
10. Contini, p.12
11. Ibid., p.64
12. Jacomuzzi, 1978, pp.19-20
13. Ibid., pp.32-33
14. Contini, pp. 97
15. Cassola, 1977, p.94
16. Jones, 1973, p.107
17. Huffman, 1977, p.333
18. Montale, 1972 (A), p.2
19. Corti, 1971,
20. Ibid.
21. Scrivano, 1978 (b), p.467
22. Corti, p.218
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. The comment was made by Montale in an interview broadcast on the programme 'Piccolo mondo' on 2 April, 1971. Corti, 1971, p.219
27. Rossi, 1971, p.5
28. Mengaldo, 1972, p.16
29. Ibid., pp.30-31

30. Corti, 1971, p.200
31. Ibid., p.232
32. Mengaldo, p.32
33. Corti, 1971, p.233
34. Zanzotto, 1971, p.216
35. Graziosi, 1978, p.112
36. Rossi, p.6
37. Ibid., p.19
38. Almansi & Merry, 1977, p.129
39. Zanzotto, 1971, p.219
40. Jacomuzzi, 1978, p.148
41. Vannucci, 1975, pp.212-213
42. Corti, 1971, p.219
43. Zanzotto, 1971, pp.215-216
44. Jacomuzzi, 1978, pp.150-151
45. Ibid., p.149
46. Montale quoted in Rossi, p.17
47. Luti, 1976, pp.201-202
48. Fortini, 1978, p.478
49. Zazzaretta, quoted in Angelini, 1975, p.20
50. Ramat, in Letteratura '900, p.3407
51. Almansi & Merry, p.152
52. Grimshaw, p.86
53. Marchese, 1977, p.34
54. Ibid.
55. Montale, 1972 (A), p.
56. Schopenhauer, 1892, p.291

57. Giorda, 1981, p.3
58. Cimatti, quoted in Giorda, p.3
59. Pecora, quoted in Giorda, p.3
60. Piccione, quoted in Giorda, p.3
61. Montale, quoted in Nascimbeni, 1980, p.7
62. Forti, quoted in Giorda, p.3
63. Pampaloni, quoted in Giorda, p.3
64. Ramat, 1979, pp.111-112
65. Luti, 1976, p.15
66. Ramat, pp.112-113
67. Ferrara, 1978, p.73
68. Jacomuzzi, pp.62-63
69. Zanzotto, 1977, p.115
70. Ibid., p.122-123
71. Montale, 1972 (A), pp.46-47
72. Montale, 1972 (B), pp.54-55
73. Kay, 1978, p.85
74. Montale in Nascimbeni, 1975.
75. Guillén, 1971, p.209
76. James, 1981, p.7
77. Montale in Nascimbeni, 1975.

Chapter II

Poco filo mi resta, ma spero che avrò modo
di dedicare al prossimo tiranno
i miei poveri carmi. Non mi dirà di svenarmi
come Nerone o Lucano. Vorrà una lode spontanea
scaturita da un cuore riconoscente
e ne avrà ad abbondanza. Potrò egualmente
lasciare arma durevole. In poesia
quello che conta non è il contenuto
ma la Forma.

(Quaderno di quattro anni, p.30)

The major area of critical interest in current writing on Montale is the lowering of the linguistic register through the increasing use of colloquial words and phrases in the fabric of the poetry. Montale's divergence from his previous communicative form, disrupts the normative level of language, converting it into a highly personal code. The hermetic discourse of Montale's late work preserves the distanced neutrality that hinders a full exegetical entry into the private memorial inspiration to which it owes its origin. His current language no longer adheres to a single linguistic register but combines a variety of modes, some more, some less successful but nevertheless always new. In this way Montale is able to preserve a stylistic density that has now taken the place of the semantic density of the early works: a fusion of style and of code at the very roots of the poetic discourse; the frequent use of the cliché, the colloquialism, the odd popular 'frase fatta', or idiomatic expression which embodies the banal home truth, has been incorporated into the texture of the writing at the plane of inspirational ground force. Montale's use of linguistic strata attempts a casual newness of rhythm which revitalizes old forms and introduces constructive tensions and added richness of effect. At this level, the inclusion of new linguistic strata functions as an ideology rather than as a style. It has surpassed the level of superficial relevance to become an actual world-view. Therefore, what had begun as an experimental venture into new stylistic forms has now become Montale's

personal ideological norm. An alternate norm must introduce a number of new lexical forms as well as a radical revision of the rhythmic patterns of expression. Modern day language manifests itself in Montale's modern verse as a racy, syncopated rhythm which undercuts traditional lyricism in favour of half-verse form. Arbitrariness confronts the reader, breaking the traditional connotations of lyrical poetry and with it the sense of false security which accompanies traditional modes of poetic discourse. In this way Montale's latest verse attacks accepted norms for radical innovation.

It is interesting to note that Montale's admiration for Gozzano, his ideological predecessor, stems from just such a theoretical concern. In an article of 1951, 'Gozzano dopo trent'anni', published in the journal Lo Smeraldo, Montale made the following statement:

[Gozzano] infallibile nella scelta delle parole [fu] il primo che abbia dato scintille facendo cozzare l'aulico col prosaico. 1

The ideological basis is the same in both cases even if much of the resultant writing is dissimilar. Gozzano's use of dialect undercuts traditional usage for the purpose of stylistic freshness. Montale takes the process a step further. His inclusion of alternate rhythm and pattern undercuts the strata of discourse and welds them into stylistic concepts that transcend mere style. In

a number of cases the levels of the discourse co-exist so as to create a rich blending of dappled stylistic impressions:

Diario

Si tratta di arrampicarsi sul sicomoro/ per vedere il Signore se mai passi.

(*'Come Zaccheo'*, p.417)

Tentammo un giorno di trovare un modus/ moriendi che non fosse il suicidio/ né la sopravvivenza.

(*'A.C.'*, p.420)

Se frugo addietro fino a corso Dogali/ non vedo che il Carubba con l'organino/ a manovella...

(*'Corso Dogali'*, p.421)

Sto seguendo sul video la Carmen di Karajan/ disossata con cura, troppo amabile.

(*'El Desdichado'*, p.427)

Siamo alla Pentecoste e non c'è modo/ che scendano dal cielo lingue di fuoco.

(*'Il fuoco'*, p.433)

Quale sia il grande affare non s'è mai saputo.

(*'Il grande affare'*, p.440)

Non ho amato mai molto la montagna/ e detesto le Alpi. Le Ande, le Cordigliere/ non le ho vedute mai...

(*'Sorapis, 40 anni fa'*, p.502)

Quaderno

La Gina ha acceso un candelotto per i suoi morti./ L'ha acceso in cucina, i morti sono tanti e non vicini.

(*'Il giorno dei morti'*, p.526)

Quasi ogni giorno mi scrive un testimone di Geova/ che mi prepari all'Evento.

(*'Testimoni di Geova'*, p.537)

Al tempo dei miei primi vaneggiamenti/ non era
ancora nata l'Opinione.

(L'opinione, p.540)

Non si può esagerare abbastanza/ l'importanza
del mondo/ (del nostro intendo)

(Elogio del nostro tempo', p.545)

Sono sempre d'avviso/ che Shakespeare fosse una
cooperativa.

(Le storie letterarie', p.547)

Alla televisione/ Cristo in croce cantava come
un tenore/ colto da un'improvvisa/ colica pop.

(Sera di Pasqua', p.549)

La capinera non fu uccisa/ da un cacciatore ch'io
sappia.

(La capinera non fu uccisa', p.555)

Altri versi

L'inverno si prolunga, il sole adopera/ il
contagocchie...

(L'inverno si prolunga, il
sole adopera', p.633)

Mi sono allungato sulla sabbia e rifletto.

(A zig zag', p.644)

Non mi affaccio più/ dal parapetto/ per vedere
se arriva la diligenza a cavalli/...

(Monologo', p.670)

La vecchia strada in salita è via Càffaro./ In
questa strada si stampava il Càffaro,/...

(Càffaro', p.677)

Un mio lontano parente era collezionista/ di
piante grasse...

(Le piante grasse', p.680)

Stavo tenendo un discorso/ agli 'Amici di Cacania'/
sul tema 'La vita è verosimile?'/...

(Nel dubbio', p.687)

A Ginevra alle felicemente defunte/ Rencontres
Internationales c'era una poltrona/ sempre
vuota...

(La gloria (o quasi)', p.688)

In these few first lines from the three late collections the strong influence of a discursive quotidian language, narratively structured, has clearly shown the new Montalian bias away from an intense lyricism. The only concession to poetic form is the simple line division that imposes breaks in an otherwise prosaic continuity. None of these lines share the sharp tensions of Ossi nor the brittle semi-rhymes of Bufera.

Ossi

Mia vita, a te non chiedo lineamenti/ fissi,
volti plausibili o possessi./...

(Mia vita, a te non chiedo lineamenti', p.31)

Là fuoresce il Tritone/ dai flutti che lambiscono/
le soglie d'un cristiano/ tempio,/...

(Là fuoresce il Tritone', p.35)

Il canneto rispunta i suoi cimelli/ nella serenità
che non si ragna:/...

(Il canneto rispunta i suoi cimelli', p.39)

La farandola dei fanciulli sul greto/ era la vita
che scoppia dall'arsura./...

(La farandola dei fanciulli sul greto', p.43)

Bufera

Il canto delle strigi, quando un'iride/ con in-
termessi palpiti si stinge,/...

(Nel sonno', p.192)

La veste è in brani, i frutici/ calpesti rifavilliano/
e la gonfia peschiera dei girini/...

(Il tuo volo', p.202)

quando si sciolse oltremonte/ la folle cometa
agostana/ nell'aria ancora serena/...

(Ballata scritta in una clinica,
p.209)

Fluisce fra te e me sul belvedere/ un chiarore
subacqueo che deforma/ col profilo dei colli
anche il tuo viso./ Sta in un fondo sfuggevole,
reciso/ da te ogni gesto tuo; entra senz'orma/
e sparisce, nel mezzo che ricolma/...

(Due nel crepuscolo, p.213)

Comparing these different moments, one sees the radical shift away from the terse manipulation of linguistic tension in favour of a free-flowing, unimpeded linearity. Narrative openings ('Tentammo un giorno', 'sto seguendo sul video', 'La Gina ha acceso un candelotto', 'Quasi ogni giorno mi scrive', 'Sono sempre d'avviso', 'Non mi affaccio più', 'Stavo tenendo un discorso') couple with familiar forms ('che non fosse', 'non c'è modo', 'ch'io sappia', 'Un mio lontano parente') to enable the deceptively simple style to become the all-pervasive norm. In the self-analytic, revelatory mood of the later years there is no longer a place for the strict macrocosmic burrowings of the young Montale. His musings reside, like the poet himself, in the closed environs of his Milanese apartment. No longer does the reader encounter the lacerating confessions of Montale's space-defying Ossi but is now immersed in the warm, casual, myopic introspection of Via Bigli 15. As in a private dialogue of sorts, the poet cannot maintain a lyricism that has no illuminating place in self-confession.

One critic goes as far as to suggest that the introduction of speech patterns is central to the destruction of the residual lyricism in Montale's style:

Questo Montale colpisce per il vigore e la libertà delle parole e per il ritmo travolgente del discorso. Anzi è proprio dalla forza di tale convinzione che parte la nuova stagione poetica e il superamento di quel tanto di elegiaco o soltanto di commosso che respirava nelle liriche d'un tempo. 2

The dynamic rhythmic structures of this new Montalian style function mainly to the exclusion of conventional rhetorical forms although at times they fuse at a level of structural integration. The combination of rhetorical ornatus with the quotidian register is responsible for the diversification of colouristic patches that contribute to the surprising rhythm and stunning effects of some of these texts. The blend transcends the stricter unity of form of the early years to create a layering of tension strata. For this reason most of the texts seem more concerned with formal research. Semantic content is often the excuse for a combination of formal elements independent of it. Therefore, the enjoyment of rhetorical form is most pronounced in the texts that find their scope within the realm of pure form: the joy resides in the meaninglessness of the contrived linguistic game.

IL TUFFATORE

Il tuffatore preso au ralenti
disegna un arabesco ragniforme
e in quella cifra forse si identifica
la sua vita. Chi sta sul trampolino
è ancora morto, morto chi ritorna

a nuoto alla scaletta dopo il tuffo,
 morto chi lo fotografa, mai nato
 chi celebra l'impresa.

Ed è poi vivo
 lo spazio di cui vive ogni movente?
 Pietà per le pupille, per l'obbiettivo,
 pietà per tutto che si manifesta,
 pietà per il partente e per chi arriva,
 pietà per chi raggiunge o ha raggiunto,
 pietà per chi non sa che il nulla e il tutto
 sono due veli dell'Impronunciabile,
 pietà per chi lo sa, per chi lo dice,
 per chi lo ignora e brancola nel buio
 delle parole!

(Diario, p.430)

Life and its opposite, death, akin to the 'tutto/nulla' dichotomy, are part of the 'Impronunciabile', the unpronounceable reality of existence. The notion, overexpressed to the point of repetitiveness, is hidden by the multitude of rhetorical devices that serve their own limited end in the economy of the text rather than aiding the reader in a semantic discovery. From the opening polyptoton 'vita/vivo/vive' the text moves into a long series of mock liturgical anaphora ('pietà' repeated five times) and the effective somehow phonetic chiasmus of ll. 12-13 'partente/arriva'; 'raggiunge/ ha raggiunto' are the real subjects of the text. On the whole, however, the reader is left with a feeling of intense unfulfilment; the rhetorical devices have stopped short the integrated effectiveness of the whole and the hidden 'meaning' has found no profundity. In the language game at work in this text, the play on effect has overruled the semantic depth to create resonances beyond the boundaries of 'understanding'. At such times Montale's linguistic acrobatics destroy that modicum of structural

persuasiveness that the text may have. Word patterns have a tendency to overreach themselves for a performance far beyond the scope of true efficacy.

In a sense Montale is creating a personal myth of language. His rhetorical patternings are hermetically trapped in their own artistic elaboration and by-pass semantic precision. If his former poetry had fixed the inchoate image of personal agony, the verse now resides in the nether regions of an impersonal elaboration of form. To achieve such ends Montale has had to deflect language, to bend it at will in the creation of a code fluid enough to embody shifting forms and undefined meanings. Montale's recent use of language has evolved patterns that take the place of meaning and stand as idols to which the poet turns in his search for expressive dynamism. Montale issues new orders to standard language and introduces it into the realm of literary concern. Naturally, this area has been much discussed in recent years. It is wasteful to see literary language as entirely distinct from normative spoken language. Literary language stands at a certain point of detachment from normative levels and results in a multiplication of effects rather than of communicative messages. The poet, in his manipulation of linguistic elements, is introducing a newness and a vitality which would not normally have a place in the context of simple speech patterns:

L'uso critico e attivo dei materiali linguistici della comunicazione appare dunque ciò che distingue essenzialmente il lin-

guaggio letterario dalle altre forme di linguaggio...Se c'è, insomma, un utente del linguaggio che lo parli e non sia da questo parlato, questi è appunto il poeta, la cui funzione non è spesso metaforizzata nella figura di chi ridesta, risveglia le parole. 3

Linguistic structures are responsible for the plurality of the discourse in Montale's late writing. Often, this intentional plurality is the only directional force of the writing. This emphasis in his verse allows the co-existence in the text of a maximum number of meanings and presents the exegetist with the kind of complexity which is normally excluded from a straightforward semantic encoding. In this purposeful misdirection of the reader, Montale uses all the available forms to the paradoxical end of apparent simplicity. The semantic privacy embedded in the popular linguistic code can be interpreted, as Dallamano does, as the private language which blocks entry into a secret, personal world:

Appare più importante...vedere come il Senatore abbia dolcemente lasciato cadere le spoglie della letteratura e le punte di manierismo che trasformavano certe poesie, molte, da Le Occasioni in poi in privatissimi appunti di diario scritti in una stenografia affascinante, ma senza codice. 4

Montale has, in fact, increased his choice of elegant, sometimes sharp, but starkly original words and images. Now, the privacy has assumed levels of apparent simplicity further removed from all clear definition. Even in places

where Montale's style has remained similar to the earlier mode his attitude has assumed more of the iconoclastic and a greater belligerence in the battle with poetic élitism. The 'dimesso' or low-key structure strikes a positive blow at forms of traditional 'sonorous' lyricism. Even if it can be found in embryo in the early works, only with the post-Diario phase has the tendency become a normative outlook. On close scrutiny, the poetry of these years presents a number of disturbing traits. The private code that governs the style bars exegetical clarification and appears at times to be Montale's means to hide the dearth of semantic density in his verse. In his efforts to restructure formal presentation Montale by-passes the message. In a strict definition of poetry, this late Montalian style is a negatio of the genre itself. Jakobson makes the following definition of poetry and uses it as the main feature of differentiation from prosaic form:

The proper subject of inquiry into poetry is precisely language, seen from the point of view of its preponderant function: the emphasis on the message. This poetic function, however, is not confined to poetry. There is only a difference in hierarchy: this function can either be subordinated to other functions or appear as the organizing function. The conception of poetic language as language with a preponderant poetic function will help us in understanding the everyday prosaic language, where the hierarchy of function is different, but where this poetic (or aesthetic) function necessarily exists and plays a palpable role both in the synchronic and diachronic aspects of language. 5

In terms of Jakobson's definition, Montale's late work

stands at a point between prose and poetry; the language does not attempt an elucidation of a message, which is at best tenuous, but exists for self-fulfilment on the level of a high rhetorical density. It purposefully obscures the message, or non-message, and stands on the level that should be its external manifestation rather than its raison d'être.

Montale's linguistic ideologies form part of the general atmosphere of experimental unrest associated with the literary figures of the Sixties and Seventies. All levels of communication were attacked and the barriers between accepted norms made more fluid. Language assumes an undefined texture. A dynamically innovative system of application, cutting across social strata and linguistic codes, combines them into new patterns. Montale's place in the experiments of these years is amply manifested in the post-Diario period. He is faced with the problem of the fusion and systematization of expressive strata, the diversity of the codes of communication in opposition to those of expression. Whilst the former belongs to the area of commercial application, the latter appertains to literature. Corti, quoting the philologist Charles Bally, makes the following distinction:

È stata di recente riproposta al lettore in traduzione italiana un'opera di Charles Bally, dove è rilevante come lo studioso francese, allievo di Saussure, senta in modo quasi drammatico l'antinomia fra la tendenza all'espressività e quella alla sistematicità della lingua, vista come in-

sieme di strutture interdipendenti, il contrasto fra i bisogni dell'espressione e della comunicazione; i secondi tendono infatti a far applicare alla lingua i principi economici che regolano la vita del prodotto industriale: massimo rendimento con minimo sforzo, riduzione al massimo della diversità dei tipi, con la contropartita di una perdita nel settore dell'espressione, per cui vengono turbati e danneggiati i liberi movimenti della sensibilità, ridotte le possibilità espressive ed evocative del linguaggio, accentuato il processo verso una uniforme e monotona linearità. 6

The diversity that Bally sees between the two codes seems to imply a contradictory divergence which makes the two types opposing forces in the stratification of discourse. Yet Montale manages to combine two levels within a single poetic format. At a deeper level Montale's late poetry manifests the uncomfortable co-existence of the language typical of advertising or the commercial world and the code of expressive linguistic application that aims at greater stylistic density. In the non-communication of the latter code, Montale has extended the linguistic content beyond the possibilities of normative language. Montale seems to have resolved the dilemma between communication and expression in tightly knit surface textures of diversified language ranging from the colloquialism of working class speech to obscure Latin rhetoric. The result is a constructive effort towards the revitalization of obsolete poetic forms by new, dynamic rhythms. Barberi-Squarotti sees this as the most important aspect of the 'giovane poesia' or new poetry in which Montale's post-Seventies phase shares. In their efforts to find new forms, the artists of the

'giovane poesia' built upon the lessons offered by tradition to create individual forms of modern expressiveness.⁷ Such an environment supports the supremacy of linguistic density over semanticity. In Montale's poetry in particular surface texturization seldom complements clearly defined semantic substructure.

Ever since the early days of Ossi, Montale's language has shunned the outmoded linguistic registers of lyricism in favour of a terse, arid language particularly suited to the message of existential tension that he was conveying. In subsequent years Montale emphasized the aridity of his language for the purpose of an ever-growing tension in the stylistic code. Now the former poverty of the verse has found a new dimension in the inclusion of popular idiom. This has naturally drawn a great deal of critical interest and is seen as the most important innovation of his late style. Barberi-Squarotti points out that the incorporation of the spoken idiom has brought about a change at a deeper level of cognition, that of rhythmic patterning:

Il rapporto col parlato si è imposto qui di necessità e ciò perché il parlato pare contenere in se, nel suo uso della parola anche più consueta, una forza concreta e vitale. Ma la soluzione non è venuta da una trascrizione immediata del parlato (esito chiuso, negativo, senza possibilità innovative) ma dall'accoglimento dell'energia insita nelle forme del passato, come intimo mutamento e rinforzamento della parola poetica. Ne deriva al lessico un arricchimento interno, sia quantitativo (i termini delle nostre vicende quotidiane, della nostra civiltà, e il peso che essi hanno anche sulle parole più consuete dei sentimenti e della moralità), sia in senso qualitativo,

come rinnovata concretizzazione di parole
svuotate e alleggerite dall'uso metaforico
e allusivo dell'ermetismo. 8

In this general discussion on new poetic forms Barberi-Squarotti pinpoints the essential quality that changed the nature of recent Italian poetry. Thanks to the introduction of popular forms new poets have moved away from the ideology that formed the founding principle of lyricism. Dynamic structures have added density to stultified idioms while allowing the growth of technical innovation. With the introduction of the spoken idiom, the cliché, the colloquialism, poetry has broken a rhythmic patterning which limited expansion. Metaphorical enigmas have given way, in Montale, to surface patterns that maintain a distanced ironic ambivalence conducive to a new kind of ambiguity. This is of the external kind, dissociated from the semantic intensity of "content poetry". An ironic stance, accompanied by a self-effacing insistence, breaks the moralizing tendency of earlier forms. The inclusion of often divergent language registers and the resultant textural irregularity permits a greater freedom of form and novelty of usage. Montale endows the cliché with new life and articulates phonetic values while the intrinsic ambivalence draws the reader's attention more to the external forms than to the content. The 'arricchimento interno' of which Barberi-Squarotti speaks, is a broadening of the field of poetic expression an innovation that directs the reader into labyrinthine patterns of striking complexity.

In his process of innovation, Montale has begun a blatant campaign against outmoded forms of poetic discourse residing in the realms of élitism. Montale serves the reader an ironic view that defuses the pretensions of tradition with texts that play on the juxtaposition of the old with the new, the buffoonery of the incongruous:

LA DANZATRICE STANCA

Torna a fiorir la rosa
che pur dianzi languia...

Dianzi? Vuol dir dapprima, poco fa.
E quando mai può dirsi per stagioni
che s'incastrano l'una nell'altra, amorfe?
Ma si parlava della rifioritura
d'una convalescenza, di una guancia
meno pallente ove non sia muffito
l'aggettivo, del più vivido accendersi
dell'occhio, anzi del guardo.
È questo il solo fiore che rimane
con qualche merto d'un tuo Dulcamara.

(Diario, p.506, vv,1-12)

In this lighthearted send-up of Parini's poetic idiom, Montale's razor-edged criticism works its way through the unbelieving, ironic eyes of a linguistic jester. The irony is aimed principally at a linguistic register grossly outmoded and dissociated from meaningful communication. The piece amounts to a 'disossamento', a picking to the bone of the structure of the text. Montale dismantles the mythical language of Parini's register and undermines the raison d'être of the élitist linguistic padding of traditional forms. Archaic, contrived words, at odds with the language and rhythms of quotidian speech, are singled out for ridicule in their stark

juxtaposition to forms significant to the contemporary reader. The poetic voice initiates a section of lexical questioning that renders the language of tradition ridiculous and empty ('Dianzi? Vuol dir dapprima, poco fa./E quando mai può dirsi per stagioni/ che s'incastrano l'una nell'altra, amorfe?'). The awe that such lyrical poetry always evoked is undermined by the clear terms 'dapprima', 'poco fa', 's'incastrano' and the colloquial forms of everyday speech 'quando mai', 'dirsi', 'poco fa'. Montale then twists the irony further by imitation of an archaic 'lyrical' form in the style of the original (Ma si parlava della rifioritura/ d'una convalescenza, di una guancia / meno pallente ove non sia muffito / l'aggettivo, del più vivido accendersi/ dell'occhio, anzi del guardo '). In his assumed rôle of annotator Montale discards an entire poetic convention. The more familiar forms are the realities of our culture diametrically opposed to the mystifying register of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. The agitated rhythms and truncated, syncopated elision of article with noun or pronoun, typical of current quotidian speech, win the reader's sympathy in its confrontation with outmoded registers. Montale, however, is not satisfied with this simple message. In the final ironic twist at 11.11-12 the poet clinches the satire in a vicious mockery of mystificatory stupidity. ('È questo il solo fiore che rimane/ con qualche merto d'un tuo Dulcamara'). The adaptation of the colloquial form 'dulcamara', quack or charlatan, to the personal name of a hypothetical poet redirects the entire sequence

in a personal careful comment on a formal style. What makes the insult deeper is the fact that the poem, 'Torna a fiorir la rosa', is a central text to the hallowed literary tradition of the Eighteenth century. While the modern critic is often inclined to admire such scurrilous treatment of outmoded forms, the joke reverts to Montale himself who has changed the idiom but not the form in the mystification of language. Montale tends towards a re-utilization of rhetorical devices which mystify more than they clarify. While his early poetry had favoured the stark and the 'elemental', his current forms favour rhetorical density and the obstruction of clarity. A very interesting text from Altri versi offers the unique blend of his former poetics alongside the new mode of the '70 s:

Come si restringe l'orizzonte
a un certo punto.
Dove sono andati i vasti acquari
in cui si sguazzava
come il pesce nell'acqua senza il sospetto
della lenza e dell'amo.

La felicità
sarebbe assaporare l'inesistenza
pur essendo viventi neppure colti dal dubbio
di una fine possibile.
Dice un sapiente (non tutti sono d'accordo)
che la vita quaggiù fosse del tutto improbabile
col corollario (aggiungo) che non era
nient'affatto opportuna. Molti eventi
confortano la glossa. La sconfortano
piccoli faits divers; magari il volo
di una formica mai studiata o neppure vista
dagli entomologi.

(Altri versi, p. 650)

The stylistic clash between the first and second strophes shows Montale's change-over from a lyric stance to a more obscure, discursive private code. In the first

strophe the poetic discourse is sustained largely by the manipulation of general concepts and typical images. The watery substance of Ossi, medium of memory, makes a decided re-entry into the structure of the verse ('Dove sono andati i vasti acquari'). The placement of 'acquari' in eniambement isolates the image into a prominent symbol beyond time and space. The visual 'sguazza' recalls the silvery flashes of L'ANGUILLA in Bufera where the 'guizzo' and the 'scintilla' had turned the animal into an emblematic vision dissociated from its humble origins. The gutsy repetition of the 's' and 'z' sounds which pervade the strophe in a tightly structured network of sounds; 'si', 'sono', 'vasti', 'si sguazza', 'pesce', 'senza', 'sospetto', 'lenza' are the auditory correlation of the semantic content. The rippling of the verse is a projection of the transparency of the water. In the second strophe Montale's obsessive idiosyncracies of the '70 s make a reappearance and the linguistic game takes precedence over stylistic tightness. The oxymoron at the level of structural assimilation attacks the roots of semanticity and spreads its influence over a full stylistic field; 'l'inesistenza/ pur essendo viventi neppure colti dal dubbio'. The range of negative and positive: negative →
(inesistenza)

positive → negative
(essendo viventi) (colti dal dubbio) hinders
a solution to the problem in favour of the fluctuation
of language. The reader is struck primarily by the
quick succession of forms and does not attempt a
semantic definition on first reading. The impetus of

the movement carries the day. To further obstruct entry to the text's finer points, Montale makes an extensive use of the bracket, a habit that has gained prominence in the later years (for further use of the form see Appendix III). The discursive second strophe does away with rhythmic development and follows a prosaic rather than a lyrical patterning.

Already in Diario the question of language had taken a prominent position in Montale's stylistic concerns. The text LA LINGUA DI DIO (see page 41) comes to the ambivalent conclusion that the essence of language is its ability for trickery ('Il linguaggio, / sia il nulla o non lo sia, / ha le sue 'astuzie'). The 'astuzie' or tricks are the subtleties that mould words into divergent shapes and colours, the stuff of form itself. Naturally, poetic language cannot be seen as independent from normative language but merely as a 'scarto' or break that moves back and forth between the norm and its opposite. Montale goes further and admits the manipulative qualities of such voluntary ambiguity. The encoder sets up a process which is almost totally irreducible by the average decoder. The fracture between the emitter and the receiver often takes place on a plane of personal memorial events that reintroduce past occurrences and forgotten people. The clarity of the message is blurred and left elliptically circulating within the closed confines of the text itself. In DIAMANTINA Montale blends the earlier images and ideas into the structural patterns of the '70 s:

DIAMANTINA

Poichè l'ipotiposi di un'arcana
 Deltà posta a guardia degli scrigni
 dei sommi Mercuriali non si addice
 a te, Adelheit, apparsa come può
 tra zaffate di Averno baluginare
 una Fenice che mai seppe aedo
 idoleggiare
 così conviene che io mi arresti e muti
 la mia protasi in facile discorso.

Si trattava soltanto di sorvolare
 o sornuotare qualche eventuale specchio
 di pozzanghera e dopo col soccorso
 di sbrecciati scalini la scoperta
 che il mondo dei cristalli ha i suoi rifugi.
 C'è un tutto che si sgretola e qualcosa
 che si sfaccetta. Tra i due ordini
 l'alternarsi o lo scambio non può darsi.
 Forse un cristallo non l'hai veduto mai,
 né un vaso di Pandora né un niagara
 di zaffiri. Ma c'era la tua immagine
 non ipotiposizzabile, per sua natura,
 anzi sfuggente, libera e sfaccettata
 fino all'estremo limite, pulviscolare.
 Ma il mio errore mi è caro, dilettezzissima
 alunna di un artefice che mai
 poté sbalzarti nelle sue medaglie.
 Era appena la Vita, qualche cosa
 che tutti supponiamo senza averne le prove,
 la vita di cui siamo testimoni
 noi tutti, non di parte, non di accusa,
 non di difesa ma che tu conosci
 anche soltanto con le dita
 quando sfiori un oggetto che ti dica io e te
 siamo UNO.

(Diario, p.499)

Launching into the long and complex text that is to follow, the poet opens with a declaration of pseudo-concern for the reader which is designed to mislead him in his expectations. Rather than 'muti la mia protasi in facile discorso', change my poem or song into a simpler form, the poet embarks into a tightly structured rhetorical game that directs the reader along the course of a confined circle within the text, finally offering him a solution in a puzzle-like game of odds. The word 'sor-

volare', to skim the surface, leads to a coinage 'sornuotare' which, as its derivation, leads back to the original word in sound rather than in meaning. The determining factor is the prefix 'sor' which not only links the two halves of the derivatio but forms an intricate network of sounds in the thirteen repetitions of 's' in the sequence. Thereby Montale is able to create the uncertain reflections of water, mirrors and crystal transparencies ('specchio', 'soccorso', 'sbrecciati scalini', 'scoperta', 'cristalli', 'si sgretola', 'si sfaccetta', 'scambio'). While the semantic certainty of the verse is drastically reduced, Montale's phonetic effects are increased and the quasi-mystical values of memory are emphasized. Therefore, the isotope of uncertainty becomes a tangible presence that suffuses the central part of the lyric solely through the medium of a strategic sonorous substratum. The inevitable ellipsis arising out of the Montalian memorial process achieves a status of incantation through emblematic linguistic processing.

At times the most banal of poems achieves formal acceptability through the use of derivatio that removes language from a quotidian plane and puts it in the regions of organic internal growth. IL PIENO achieves a personal status at the point at which the semantic formula is all but burned out:

IL PIENO

Non serve un uragano di cavallette
 a rendere insolcabile la faccia del mondo.
 È vero ch'esse s'immillano, si immiliardano
 e formano una scorza più compatta di un muro
 ed è quello che basta a farci ammettere
 questo scambio di barbe. Non fa male a nessuno.

(Quaderno, p.514)

The coinage-cum-polyptoton forms the pivotal point for the stylistic effect of the lyric as well as for its semantic nucleus. The words lengthen ('immillano/ immiliardano') as they describe ever-increasing numbers of locusts, while the enjambement at 1.3 suspends the reader in the horrible inactivity of such a situation. Language in this instance has become a law unto itself. In this generative internal growth the effect of the accumulation exonerates the reader from giving life to the text but puts him in the position of witness to its show of virtuosity. IL PIENO, however, is not a resoundingly successful text. Its impact is limited to first reading and even then it is too clever to be sustained. Its sister text IL VUOTO re-utilizes similar techniques to create a complementary standpoint:

IL VUOTO

È sparito anche il vuoto
 dove un tempo si poteva rifugiarsi.
 Ora sappiamo che l'aria
 è una materia che grava su di noi.
 Una materia immateriale, il peggio
 che poteva toccarci.

Non è pieno abbastanza perché dobbiamo
 popolarlo di fatti, di movimenti
 per poter dire che gli apparteniamo
 e mai gli sfuggiremo anche se morti.
 Inzeppare di oggetti quello ch'è

il solo Oggetto per definizione
 senza che a lui importi niente o turpe
 commedia. E con che zelo la recitiamo!

(Quaderno, p.533)

The negative value of existence which has become the sole philosophical 'spunto', is complemented by the reiteration of oxymoronic manipulation (see pp. 133-154). Through its reference to the notions of contemporary physics, the text misdirects the reader into the zone of non-message. While in the first text the images found their efficacy in the conciseness of the writing, the second text has only an obscure link with the former through the similarity of their labels. Its 'message', that space cannot give alienated man protection, had already found its locus in LETTERA A MALVOLIO. Naturally Montale considers the theme of poetry as subordinate quality to be considered after its formal aspects. However, when Montale re-writes themes he moves axially away from linguistic density, taking to the realm of isolated linguistic juggling. The 'vuoto', 'emptiness', makes its reappearance in paradoxical opposites of weight and matter ('materia che grava su di noi', 'materia immateriale') which gives it its reality and existence. Having established the value of this 'full emptiness', Montale feels free to draw upon pet notions, such as the object, which has now become both the salvatory amulet of the early poetry and the malefic, all engulfing presence of recent years, the 'rottami e casse', the debris and empty packing-cases that form a backdrop to modern life ('Inzeppare

di oggetti quello ch'è / il solo Oggetto per definizione'). In the rewriting of the notion, Montale has added nothing to the semantic level of the text but has reduced the efficacy of the word-play.

There is a marked tendency in the later years to re-work a single image or idea into a number of variants. Words and images crop up with obsessive regularity and usually become more and more distanced from the original version into increasing zones of rarification. In a particularly representative series Montale re-elaborates the image of the bird caught in the net first presented in IL TU, the opening poem of Satura. Each new locus builds upon the preceding one and creates a mini-collection that often exhausts the possibilities of the original idea. In these exercises in linguistic adaptability Montale most clearly proves his ability for regenerating apparently worn out poetic moments. His gradual building up of effects creates a horizontal linguistic gradient that leads to exhausted stylistic density:

T.1 IL TU
 I critici ripetono,
 da me depistati
 che il mio tu è un istituto.
 Senza questa mia colpa avrebbero saputo
 che in me i tanti sono uno anche se appaiono
 moltiplicati dagli specchi. Il male
 è che l'uccello preso nel paretaio
 non sa se lui sia lui o uno dei troppi
 suoi duplicati.

(Satura, p.275)

T.2

RETI PER UCCELLI

Di uccelli presi dal ròccolo
 quasi note su pentagramma
 ne ho tratteggiati non pochi
 col carboncino
 e non ne ho mai dedotte conclusioni
 subliminari.
 Il paretaio è costituzionale,
 non è subacqueo, né abissale né
 può svelare alcunchè di sostanziale.
 Il paretaio ce lo portiamo addosso
 come una spolverina. È invisibile
 e non mai rammendabile perchè non si scuote.
 Il problema di uscirne non si pone,
 che dobbiamo restarci fu deciso da altri.

(Quaderno, p.562)

T.3

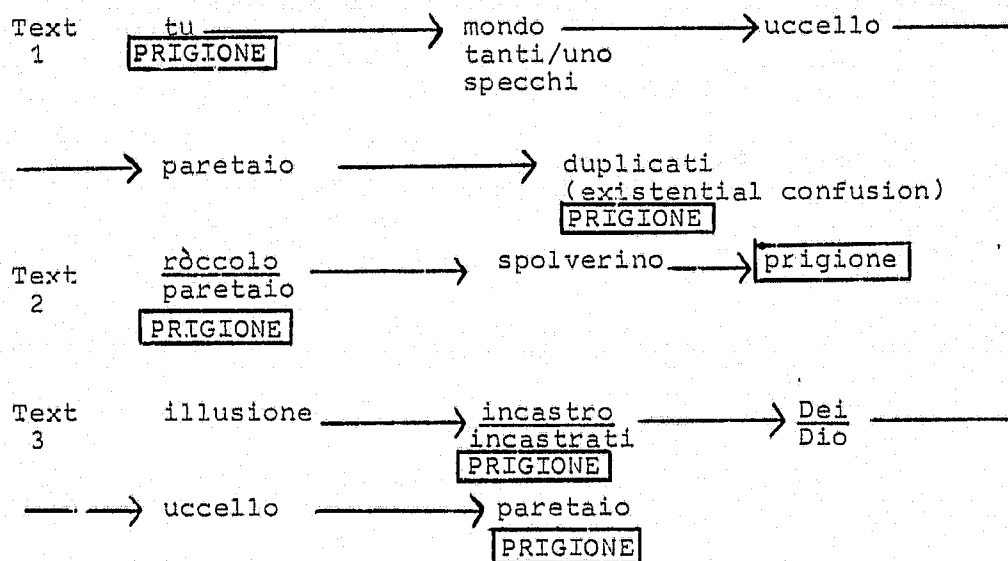
La buccia della terra è più sottile
 di quella d'una mela se vogliamo supporre
 che il mondo materiale non sia pura illusione.
 Tuttavia in questo nulla, ammesso che sia tale,
 siamo incastrati fino al collo. Dicono
 i pessimisti che l'incastro include
 tutto che abbiamo creato per surrogare i Dei.
 Ma la sostituzione non fu feconda
 affermano i fedeli del vecchio Dio.
 Forse verrà Egli stesso dicono
 a strapparci dal magma e a farsi vivo.
 Siamo e viviamo dunque una doppia vita
 sebbene l'egolatria ne vorrebbe una sola.

O madre Terra o cielo dei Celesti
 questo è il guàio
 che ci fa più infelici dell'uccello
 nel paretaio

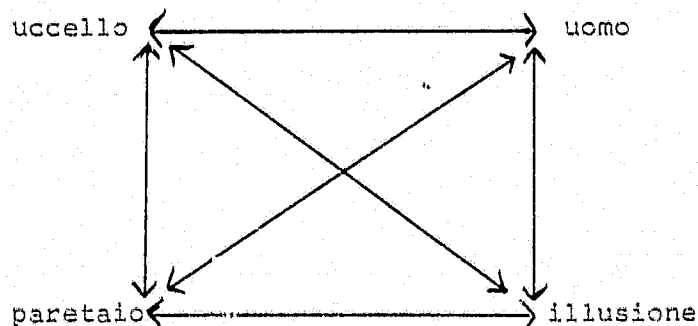
(Altri versi, p.651)

Montale manages to outgrow the initial
 image from Satura by the accumulation of extraneous
 elements that still reinforce the central notion.

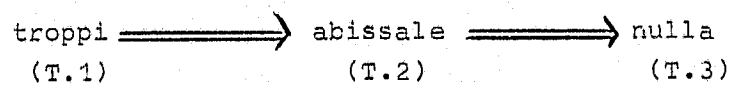
In all these texts the basic premiss is the same: man is trapped like the bird caught in the hunter's net. Its plight extends beyond the physical entrapment and becomes a psychological and emotional destiny as well. Beyond this simple message, Montale uses the re-writing as an opportunity for elaboration of stylemes in the accumulated poetic discourse. A diagrammatic sketch of the internal working of the texts best illustrates the points of semantic continuity of the mini-series:



The theme, or the 'message' is the same in all three texts. The binary oppositions are based on common dichotomies:



The link binding all the texts is the central image already discussed and the paradoxical similarity between 'nothing' and 'everything'. The sequential flow of the text can be summed up in the following diagram:



This is the semantic nucleus that moves cognitively through the series but is not new in Montale's oeuvre. The differences, however, give us the key to Montale's poetic concerns of these years:

In common:

- paretaio (trap) and uccello (victim)
- (= isotope of confinement:
 - i. paretaio (net)
 - ii. spolverino (dustcoat)
 - iii. pentagramma (pentagramme))
- reflecting surfaces or watery forms
- (= isotope of uncertainty:
 - i. specchi (mirror)
 - ii. subacqueo (water)
 - iii. magma (mud)

Differences:	T.1	Il tu, i critici
	T.2	Tratteggiato con carboncino spolverino rammendabile/ stuce pentagramma
	T.3	Buccia della terra/mela Dei/ Dio pessimisti doppia vita l'egolatria

The discovery from the Satura text is that man, caught up in the existential confusion of reflecting aspects

of reality, becomes similar to the bird caught in a net from which escape is impossible. The textual progression in the subsequent two texts builds on the restrictive associations of 'paretaio' which in T.2 become an isotope of confinement ('ròccolo/costituzionale/spolverino'), an alternation between a real net, a law or metaphorical net, and a dustcoat which becomes a tangible form of the same parano'a. Again, in T.3 the 'paretaio' develops into the 'incastrati/incastrato' or fusion between objects and shifts to the tyranny of hypothetical deities and the allied restrictions of 'egolatria'.

In the three stages of development Montale builds an accretive system of values which culminate in all forms of existence and its limitations. With the differing elements in the texts Montale adds the personal and quotidian imagery of the later writing. His efforts as a figurative artist are alluded to in lines from T.2 ('tratteggiato con carboncino') while the domesticity of the dustcoat ('spolverino') recalls the quotidian preoccupation of the diaristic pieces. Finally, the lot is heightened into the universal by the introduction of 'pentagramma', 'egolatria' and words belonging to more obscure registers of linguistic range. These furnish the suitable 'poeticity' while emphasizing the vagueness of the message.

Another set of poems follows a similar building up of patterns into an ironically buoyed mini-series. These texts base themselves on Donne's sonnet THE FLEA, itself a metaphysical exercise in literary orgiastic convolution. Building upon Donne's already innovative word patterns, Montale further updates the language and adapts the notion of mixed bloods to the more prosaic idea of mixed forms. In these two texts Montale subverts the poetic 'spunto' and places it in the region of nether meta-poetic experimentation:

LE PULCI

Non hai mai avuto una pulce
che mescolando il suo sangue
col tuo
abbia composto un frappé
che ci assicuri l'immortalità?
Così avvenne nell'aureo Seicento.
Ma oggi nell'età del tempo pieno
si è immortali per meno
anche se il tempo si raccorcia e i secoli
non sono che piume al vento.

(Altri versi, p.634)

PROSA PER A.M.

Forse si fu chiamati per lo spettacolo
ma l'attesa fu lunga e a cose fatte
rincasando nel gelo e rimbucandoci
là dove uscimmo per il nostro turno
si è incerti se tra il tutto e il nulla pesi
onesta e necessaria la bilancia.

Retrocedendo ed avanzando siamo
al terzo in cui la dolce Anne More
non resta all'undicesima gravidanza.
In tali casi sono male spesi
i curricula pronti per siffatte emergenze.
Resta il mistero perchè tanto sangue
e inchiostro non poterono alla fine
rendere degustabile il cacciucco.
Forse è per far nascere la Poesia
e l'Averno con lei?
Tra l'orrore e il ridicolo il passo è un nulla.

(Altri versi, p.635)

LE PULCI opens with a tongue-in-cheek flourish that undercuts the seriousness and at times hysterical fervour of the Donne original text ('Non hai mai avuto una pulce/che mescolando il suo sangue/col tuo/abbia composto un frappé'). At the outset Montale has subverted the notion of the lovers' blood mingling in the flea and thereby achieving a mystical unity. In his re-writing the flea's blood mingles with the victim to create an absurd immortality. The break away from his habitual impersonality, (the popular 'si' form is the most common in the later years) sets up a dialogue between the poet and the reader. They both become conspirators in the convoluted game of intellectual supremacy that pokes fun at the seventeenth century and its artistic idiom. The gastronomic 'frappé', belonging to the health-conscious jargon of the twentieth century, drastically diminishes the striking originality of the Donne text. The conceit is finally reduced in the mocking seriousness of the verification ('Così avvenne nell'aureo Seicento'). The abstruse notion has become a punning joke that surpasses the manneristic experimentation of the original. In rearranging its levels, Montale has emptied the conceit, levelled it into the kind of quotidian flatness that dispels all turgid ideological exhilaration. In his second text the reference to Donne is even more tenuous and shows the increasing tendency for self-reference and abstruse self-amusement that underlies much of this

later style. Donne's fragile, long-suffering wife, Anne More, is introduced in the Montalian text as a private; undecipherable code, a personal whim with little relevance to the proceedings of the subject at hand. In spite, or perhaps because of, these irrelevant side issues the textual message is simple and of little innovative import. Life is a 'spettacolo', a show, a 'cabaret' seldom extended into eternity and dependant on the temporal fluctuation of existence. Again the obsessive 'tutto/nulla' dichotomy reiterates the essential meaning of the text. Art, a manifestation of this temporality, is also fragile and incapable of rendering existence palatable ('rendere degustabile il cacciucco'). Donne, by implication, shares Montale's fate. They are both trapped in a useless hankering for timeless existence. Existential issues have again suffered the Montalian reduction to prosaic eating and drinking. Abstractions must be seen in terms of their most simple metaphorical reduction, to have any relevance in the quotidian myopia of the late years. Poetry, 'Poesia', becomes the twin of hell 'Averno', but the relevance of the message does not extend into generic concepts, floats uncomfortably in a sea of trivia.

With the radical reduction of the early existentialism, the poet is increasingly sceptical of poetic form. Words no longer have the defining ability of former verses. Montale's distrust of poetry underlies the new poeticity of these collections.

ALL'ALBA

Lo scrittore suppone (e del poeta
 non si parli nemmeno)
 che morto lui le sue opere
 lo rendano immortale.
 L'ipotesi non è peregrina,
 ve la do per quel che vale.
 Nulla di simile penso nel beccafico
 che consuma il suo breakfast giù nell'orto.
 Egli è certo di vivere; il filosofo
 che vive a pianterreno
 ha invece più di un dubbio. Il mondo può
 fare a meno di tutto, anche di sé.

(Altri versi, p.669)

On levels of such constant fluctuation the solution itself has lost all meaning ('L'ipotesi non è peregrina/ve la do per quel che vale'). The text's own meanderings deny its solution; shifting motions bear their own weight and circle within the text's stylistic folds. The 'beccafico' and the 'filosofo' are opposing intellectual forces but while the former is oblivious of his existence, the latter who lives, 'vive', on the ground floor ('a pianterreno') is none too sure of his life. The little linguistic game is effective but far from definitive. In Montale's testament mood of the late years the solution seems to slide away as soon as he pretends to grasp its full meaning:

PER FINIRE

Raccomando ai miei posteri
 (se ne saranno) in sede letteraria,
 il che resta improbabile, di fare
 un bel falò di tutto che riguardi
 la mia vita, i miei fatti, i miei nonfatti.
 Non sono un Leopardi, lascio poco da ardere
 ed è già troppo vivere in percentuale.
 Vissi al cinque per cento, non aumentate

la dose. Troppo spesso invece piove
sul bagnato.

(Diario, p.508)

While the young Montale played the convincing rôle of the elderly sage, the mood has now given way to a self-deprecating ironic stance. It aims at gradual lowering of the poetic tone accompanied by critical and objective redefining of his previous production. In this breast-beating, mea culpa type of text, Montale's mistrust of the poetic idiom subverts the essence of poetry. He cannot comfortably use poetry as a means of communication since its boundaries have extended beyond such a confining rôle. The poet is then confronted by an anthropomorphized text that voluntarily moves ~ to its own linguistic games:

LE FIGURE

Estasiato dalla sua ipallage
il poeta trasse un respiro
di sollievo ma c'era un buco nel poema
che si allargò, fu voragine
e lo scagliò nella cantina dove
si mettono le trappole per i topi.
Di lui nulla restò. Solo qualche Figura,
scritta obsoleta, disse meglio così.

(Diario, p.472)

In this suspiciously self-revelatory text Montale shifts the asemanticity of his poetic style into a studied self-deprecation. The poet is so excited ('estasiato') by his rhetorical games that the disintegration of the text becomes secondary ('c'era un buco nel poema/che si allargò, fu voragine'). The meta-poetic spy is essen-

tial to the reading of such texts as LE GERARCHIE which serves as a pointer to Satura and the subsequent stylistic mannerism of Montalian form:

La polis è più importante delle sue parti.
La parte è più importante d'ogni sua parte.
Il predicato lo è più del predicante
e l'arrestato lo è meno dell'arrestante.

Il tempo s'infutura nel totale,
il totale è il cascame del totalizzante,
l'avvento è l'improbabile nell'avvenibile,
il pulsante una pulce nel pulsabile.

(Satura, 313)

In this late trobar the gnostic standpoint is defied before the quasi-mystical adoration of form. The extended polyptotons ('parte/parte/parti'; 'predicato/predicante'; 'arrestato/arrestante'; 'totale/totalizzante'; 'avvento/avvenibile'; 'pulsante/pulsabile') balance the six uses of the present verb to be 'è' and the two obtrusive 'più'. The final repetition of the assonance 'pulsante/pulce/pulsabile' further frays the semantic codex that delays a cognitive recognition of forms. This poetic exercise is a further example of the conscious undermining of poetry as message. It is a joke that extends to a false sense of security in the entirety of language. The elegance of the writing is circular, beginning and ending within the text itself. In this atmosphere, the poet can no longer assume a definable role. He is the artificer, the juggler, the acrobat. Hence Montale's obsessive return to

the inadequacy of the artist's 'triumph'.

In a particularly successful rewriting of this favourite theme, the image of the laurel leaf and its ambivalent symbolic association with poetic glory, as well as its true identity of aromatic herb, fuse into a number of self-deprecatory enunciations. The series becomes a triply entwined succession of poetic irony. In its first locus in Diario the image makes its appearance as the ambiguous alternative to the tradition of poetic grandeur. It is the ridiculous that accompanies the pretensions of sublimity:

A LEONE TRAVERSO

Sognai anch'io di essere un giorno mestre
di gay saber; e fu speranza vana.
Un lauro risecchito non dà foglie
neppure per l'arrosto. Con maldestre
dita sulla celesta, sui pastelli
del vibrafono tento, ma la musica
sempre più s'allontana. E poi non era
musica delle Sfere...Mai fu gaio
né savio né celeste il mio sapere.

(Diario, p.413, 11.11-19)

Montale, aware of his own poetic status can afford the tongue-in-cheek frankness that opens Diario '71 and with it the subsequent stylistic era. Here the quotidian and the poetic is successful because it pervades both the linguistic register and the ideological centre of the text. In this extended pun the laurel leaf becomes functional in the structuring of the text at several strata of reading. It refers to the traditio-

nal crown of merit awarded to 'bards', to the victorious soldier and to the leader. It is also the aromatic herb in daily use in most Italian kitchens. Is the implication of the poem that Montale as a poet is working within a tradition that has worn itself out, incapable of producing the kind of poetry that can equal that of the past, or is the poet himself at the level of linguistic infertility hinted at in L'ARTE POVERA ('Per qualche anno ho dipinto solo ròccoli/con uccelli insaccati,/su carta blu da zucchero o cannelé da imballo.')? This interpretation is supported by the connotations of 'gay saber' and the long Provençal tradition of the 'trobar clus'. Just as his muse has become the domestic hen (the 'muse appollaiate' of SUL LAGO D'CRTA) the connotive levels of the laurel have been trivialized.

In another version of the topos the same manipulation of the image is slightly reworked:

Protegetemi
custodi miei silenziosi
perchè il sole si raffredda
e l'ultima foglia dell'alloro
era polverosa
e non servi nemmeno per la casseruola
dell'arrosto -

(Quaderno, p.610, ll.1-7)

The image of the laurel leaf is further removed from its range of poetic experience. The past tense ('non servi')

adds finality to the self-imposed condemnation. Now the laurel is also dusty 'polverosa' and time has clearly added its voracious charge to the already heavy artistic condemnation. The curt 'per l'arrosto' ('for the roast') becomes the extended 'per la casseruola dell'arrosto'. The heightening of quotidian detail adds nothing to the original image which has now become a standardized poetic image. These poems aim at gaining the reader's sympathetic attention while at the same time turning him away from a closer and more intimate view of the poet's 'message'. These senilia are jokes aimed at a largely sympathetic public or devoted fans. They reside within their own boundaries and cannot be dislodged into a wide atemporal catchment area. To purposefully obfuscate the asemanticity of the verse, Montale attacks the reader with a vast barrage of inconsequential material:

PASQUETTA

La mia strada è privilegiata
 vi sono interdette le automobili
 e presto anche i pedoni (a mia eccezione
 e di pochi scortati da gorilla).
 O beata solitudine disse il Vate.
 Non ce n'è molta nelle altre strade.
 L'intelligenza a cui per mia sciagura
 appartenevo si è divisa in due.
 C'è chi si immerge e c'è chi non s'immerge.
 C'est emmerdant si dice da una parte
 e dall'altra. Chi sa da quale parte
 ci si immerda di meno. La questione
 non è d'oggi soltanto. Il saggio sperimenta
 le due alternative in una volta sola.
 Io sono troppo vecchio per sostare
 davanti al bivio. C'era forse un trivio
 e mi ha scelto. Ora è tardi per recedere.

(Quaderno, p.550)

The metaphor of road and traffic is adapted to an entire life of poetic effort. But in his ivory tower the poet cannot see the proportions of his craft and he is soon led into areas of intense linguistic contortion. The first word of the acrobatic series 'immerge', to become immersed, begins the extended and false polyptoton (it is false because it does not consist of a rewriting but merely plays on existing sound patterns). 'Immerge' is followed by a slightly changed personalized form 's'immerge'. Its value is then increased by the grafting of the French plural 'emmerdant' which in turn introduces the proleptic 'd' that leads to the ironic 'immerda' ('enshits' - to coin an equivalent). At this point the verb reverts to the subject of the sentence, the 'intelligenza'. The game is proficient, amusing and superficially impressive although its final effect is too limited and too cheap to allow it to survive as a fully compensatory element for the lack of profundity. The sad fact is that in no poetry can a mere abundance of forms compensate for the dearth of structured substance. In such whimsically anti-literary examples of his art, Montale has broken the links not only with his own former convictions but with the elemental qualities of the genre itself. His preoccupation with 'non-poetry' not only denies the intrinsic redemption offered by poetic form but isolates it, and himself, in areas of facile argumentation.

In Altri versi Montale takes this game into impressio-

nistic immediacy that recalls the act of writing itself:

Se l'universo nacque
da una zuffa di gas
zuffa non zuppa allora
com'è possibile, come...
ma qui gli cadde di mano
quella penna di cigno
che seppure in ritardo
si addice ancora a un bardo.

(Altri versi, p.664)

The text is the first draft of an idea, the actual moment of writing without the developments of elaborated poetic form. The sequential flow zuffa —————> zuffa —————> zuppa is the accumulative progression that occupies the centre of the text's exemplum. It is as if the universe, subjected to the dubious values of the 'zuppa/zuffa' dichotomy was created specifically for the parodistic word association. 'Zuffa' ('scuffle') is twisted into 'zuppa' ('soup') which turns the notion of the universe and the Big Bang theory into a pedestrian linguistic fallacy. This is further heightened by the similarity with the colloquial form for argument 'baruffa' which, although not written in the text, is all the more present because of its absence. The pun, though amusing, is predictable and familiar to many uneducated graffiti writers. Our expectations are let down and the text finds itself exploding in mediocre linguistic bravado.

In this trivialization of the 'sublime' Montale plays God to the tune of his own un-Aeolian harp. He is the creator who is tired both of his creation and of himself. His power has exhausted the themes, the forms and the effects of his poetry. He is the 'funesto mistagogo' of the text ASOR.

In his attempts at occasionalness the poet presents the personal and the trite, the unexpected and the known, without the former stance of the knowing, wise man of the world. Now he is the pedestrian commentator on an environment no longer his but inhabited by a multitude of his likes. The final trivialization is harsh because it is not solely that of the inhabitable world but that of its great contemporary bard.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Montale, 1951, p.10
2. Giannessi, 1978, p.5
3. Mengaldo, 1975, p.18
4. Dallamano, 1976, p.5
5. Jakobson, 1952, reprinted in Selected Writings,
p.558
6. Corti, 1952, p.9325
7. Barberi-Squarotti, 1956, p.2062 in Letteratura '900
8. Ibid., p.8063

Chapter III

ALL'ALBA

Lo scrittore suppone (e del poeta
non si parli nemmeno)
che morto lui le sue opere,
lo rendano immortale.
L'ipotesi non è peregrina,
ve la do per quel che vale.
Nulla di simile penso del beccafico
che consuma il suo breakfast giù nell'orto.
Egli è certo di vivere; il filosofo
che vive a pianterreno
ha invece più di un dubbio. Il mondo può
fare a meno di tutto, anche di sé.

(Altri versi, p.669)

Montale's poetry, from the early existential Ossi, through the more personal moments of Occasioni and the fraught violence pervading Bufera, has sought a definition of man's existence independent of the easy solutions offered by eschatology. In his reflection Montale contemplated the realm of idea and of soul at their widest, universal levels. Cosmic visions, lacerated by flashes of acute existential awareness, have given way to the penetrating observation of minutiae, the daily occurrences that form the backdrop to the large question of human existence. The modus vivendi of our time can no longer be dissociated from the questions of contemporary collective paranoia. Politics, news headlines, technological discoveries, cosmic redefinitions intertwine with the domestic stage-setting of pet animals, familiar house keepers and trivial debates on the neighbours and the cost of living. Already in the essays of Nel nostro tempo Montale expresses the reality of art as an extension of an individual moment in which they themselves partake:

Caduto dall'Illuminismo in poi il tentativo di creare opere che siano la copia di un prototipo eterno, morta ogni idea di proporzione, di decoro e di decenza, l'opera d'oggi tende a imbalsamare l'attimo individuale, fuggente e a farne una cosa che si vede, si tocca si palpa. Tanto più vile e più insignificante è il motore, tanto più alto il merito di chi saprà farne un oggetto, una materia duratura. L'arte d'oggi tende al museo, ma non a un museo di arti belle, di beaux arts; bensì a un museo di pezzi, di totem, di emblemi. Ne nasce un'arte che non ha limiti e sfugge ad ogni classificazione. 1

3 3 3 3

Art must therefore find its immediate existence in the moment of its creation, in the instance of its birth. It reflects the world that has given it and to it it pays a debt of devotion:

ELOGIO DEL NOSTRO TEMPO

Non si può esagerare abbastanza
l'importanza del mondo
(del nostro, intendo)
probabilmente il solo
in cui si possa uccidere
con arte e anche creare
opere d'arte destinate a vivere
lo spazio di un mattino, sia pur fatto
di millenni e anche più. No, non si può
magnificarlo a sufficienza

(Quaderno, p.545, ll.1-10)

In this startling revelation of poetics Montale announces the central preoccupation of the post-Diario phase. His art stems not only from a personal thought, experience and obsessive preoccupation but reflects the combined expressive ideals of a period. The modus vivendi of our time is carefully reflected in the differing catalogues of temporal concerns and quotidian habits. By focusing his attention on the circumstantial objects of his daily life Montale reflects the bubbling emblems of his time, his life and his works. Recurring symbols, objects and memories supersede each other and strive for an objective projection into the world of art, the ephemeral bubble destined to live 'one morning'.

The semantic poverty at the centre of the new Montalian text is compensated by the sophistication of its superstructure:

DA UN TACCUINO

Passano in formazioni romboidali
velocissimi altissimi gli storni
visti e scomparsi in un baleno
così fitti
che non c'è punto di luce
in quel rombo -
saranno i più duri a sopravvivere
secondo gli ornitologi ecologi
e ciò che sappiamo di loro
è poco ma è moltissimo -
magari potesse dirsi
lo stesso
delle formazioni sub-erranti
vociferanti
dell'uomo.

(Quaderno, p.557)

In order to describe a simple flight of birds Montale creates a text proliferating with sounds that ripple through the lines and outweigh the impressionistic semantic moment ('velocissimi/altissimi/scomparsi'; 'ornitologi ecologi'; 'sub-erranti/vociferanti'). The accumulative patternings are isolated in their own structural rôle and reside in areas that subordinate meaning to form. As with the image of the text's central point of darkness ('non c'è punto di luce') the light of semantic definition is excluded.

The formal patternings are therefore at times of such complexity that the exegetist may be lost in the fold and nuance of their linguistic movement. In such a situation it is obvious that the poet has an infinite number of rhetorical resources at his disposal. Montale uses them so as to attain the distinctive semantic neutrality and stylistic density that characterize this late phase. The rhetorical forms often repeat structures and elements typical of his earlier style. The ambiguities found there are now elaborated and infused with heightened ephemerality. Because of this the critic is hindered in his exact definition of the text and is forced to remain in the suspended regions of interpretation. Zanzotto makes this point clear:

l'imprendibilità fondamentale del referente presupposta nella poesia montaliana, perdurerà, si farà anzi macroscopica proprio nell'operazione che dovrebbe porgere distinti e catalogati i fili prima dati in un mirabile labirinto, mostrare il rovescio del tappeto, infine smascherare i 'trucchi' delle trascorse operazioni poetiche. E tutto ciò risulterà moltiplicato nell'imprendibilità del linguaggio, manifestata oltre che nei suoi giochi o slogamenti anche nella rettilinearità ingannevole delle sequenze prosastiche-colloquiali, o del 'logicismo'. 2

It is on this indefinability that the ideological basis of current Montalian poetry rests. Words have always had for Montale an infinite potentiality that extends poetic communication beyond strict lexical definition. In his arrangement of words Montale juggles meanings and subjects them to the sonorous acrobatics. It follows that the oxymoron becomes the form of greatest utility.

In its reliance on word tension, oxymoron is the perfect reflection of suspended half-meaning. Since it escapes the possibility of strict lexical definition, oxymoron is in itself the epitome of ambiguity; it cannot be defined or subjected to analytical standards. It owes its impact to the indefinability of its code. In the late years of Montale's life, oxymoron assumed greater degrees of emblematic force. Burk., in his Rhetoric of Motives, calls the oxymoron an example of lyrical mysticism:

since the mystic communicates ultimately in terms of the oxymoron (the figure that combines contradictory elements within the single expression), we would see in the packing of an image or ideas with divergent motives a more or less remote instance of literary mysticism. 3

Poetry, like mystical writing, owes much of its effect to the quality of semi-comprehension. While for the mystic ambiguity is the only means at his disposal for the creation of an unseen and unseeable world, for the poet it is necessary in the creation of states of mind. The latter, central to the experience of lyricism, are created by an indefinable play of words. Montale constantly plays on the divergent levels of oxymoron and in his late poetry uses it for the dual effect of surprise and 'non-meaning'. He extends the possibility of the conventional oxymoron, giving it the new name of 'ossimoro permanente'. The name, drawn from LETTERA A MALVOLIO in Diario '71, is the ideal definition for an imagination that structures the known world in a series of binary

Page 134 has been omitted in the pagination.

oppositions that are, in final analysis, indivisible:

LETTERA A MALVOLIO

Ma dopo che le stalle si vuotarono
l'onore e l'innocenza stretti in un solo patto
fondarono l'ossimoro permanente
e non fu più questione di fughe
di fughe e di ripari

(Diario, p.456, 11.17-21)

Since escape from the situation as defined by oxymoron is impossible, the state must be endured in its confusion and uncertainty. The text takes up the question already posed in BOTTA e RISPOSTA I in Satura where the issues converge around artistic introspection. The fusion of opposites in the subsequent forms of oxymoron move away from the clear distinction of poles that characterized the earlier manifestations of the device. In the above text Montale claims that his consciousness (and conscience) was fixed in a well-defined 'prima' and 'dopo', a 'before' and 'after'; just as his intellectual concepts were classed in categories or poles. Therefore, in this text, the previous fascist degradation, compared to the Augian stables which were cleaned by Hercules only by changing the course of the rivers Alpheus and Peneus, was easily placed on the pole of the malefico and the horrible, while decency is clearly distinguishable from it. In the 'ossimoro permanente' this categorization is lost and the situation becomes one in which opposing forces co-exist in a single whole within the limits of which the poet cannot find an emotional perch.

Author Sansalvadore G

Name of thesis Innovative stylistic resources in Eugenio Montale's recent Poetry 1982

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.