

# THE DIVINE MIMESIS

Pier Paolo Pasolini



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## Preface

*The Divine Mimesis*: I publish these pages today as a "document", but also to spite my "enemies": in fact, offering them another reason to despise me, I offer them another reason to go to Hell.

*Faded iconography*: these pages want to have the logic, better than of an illustration, of a (rather, very *legible*) "visual poetry".

## Canto I

Around my forties I realized I was in a very dark moment in my life. No matter what I did in the "Forest" of reality of 1963 (the year I had reached, absurdly unaware of that exclusion from the life of others which is the repetition of one's own) there was a sense of darkness. I wouldn't say nausea, or anguish: even in that darkness, to tell the truth, there was something terribly luminous: the light of the old truth, if you will, before which there is nothing further to say.

Darkness equals light. The light of that morning in April (or May, I don't remember well: months in this "Forest" pass by without reason and even without name), when I arrived (the reader should not be shocked) in front of the Cinema Splendid (or was it Splendour? or Emerald? I know for certain that once it was called Plinius: and it was one of those marvelous times—it was clear I was experiencing a form of life *for the purpose of expressing it* ). A light men know well, in spring, when the first—the most joyous, the dearest—of their sons come out in their light vests, without jackets; and walk along the



New Aurelia quietly and quickly—with noses lowered like mice attracted by some stupendous distant odors—the seventeenth century of the bourgeois families of Rome; to the first picnics on the meadows, the governesses with cane fences and wistaria, down towards the foggy, speckled Appenine...

A happy and evil light: down there between the two great doors of the cinema, having just turned my car off a long avenue which the Aurelia narrows into—Avenue Gregory the Seventh, I think—between a show of gas fumes in the sun and the little covered market, in the distance, with its little green stalls—down there something red, a lot of red, a little altar of roses, like those prepared by the faithful hands of old women, in the disinherited towns of Umbria, Friulia or Abruzzi, old as their old women had been old, willfully repeating themselves through the centuries. An awkward little altar, but festive in its way, an arrangement of red roses I wouldn't know how to describe: and when I grew near, among those red roses I noticed the portrait, doubly funereal, for the man had died two days before, of a hero of theirs, a hero of ours. The superficial look of his eyes, under the bald forehead (a full baldness of adolescent sweetness leavened by the good of life). The light was there, illuminating the roses and the portrait, and flags around them, perhaps, bundled up, *in the humblest popular solemnity* (work of the

wives of enlisted men of Fort Boccea regiment? or of the enlisted men themselves, drivers or masons, with their big hands intimidated but inspired in that work of roses?)

All that between the portals of this Cinema Splendid: sparkling in the evening, now impoverished by the light, by this light. Miserable doors of glass and metal: and here the slightest, the very tiniest anguish in the heart—tenderness, languor, weeping. The proof of misery of this little display also had the power to torment me.

And they were there, to listen to me, with an old senator, with a new candidate for the Chamber: black and dark, like peasants who come to the city for business, and gather all together in a piazza, which blackens, by their solemnity, in that dazzling emptiness the new summer is preparing between the palaces and back streets. And the greetings, the shaking of hands, the looks of argument and agreement.

And here were gathered, in the aisles of the orchestra pit, which, even it, pained the heart, in that morning light (the light of shops, terraces, avenues, not of the cinema) in that hall with the splendid name—and which was the splendid meeting place in their corner of the district, in the long series of nights in which, without a flag, life marches on.

Meanwhile, all of them, all of us, were gladdened by the fact that eighteen new boys had enlisted, after a meeting of the governing party, our party: that gladness like that of having drinks together, a reference to the coming true, fatally, of certain facts whose occurrence had been hoped for together and followed together, and now greeted together as a success: and that success pained my heart.

The circle was meeting at its own center, excluding the world.

(Which was there, outside, as the half open window on the ceiling of the Splendid demonstrated with shining clarity: a silken blue, from the Appenines, with the air of the sea.)

The stage of one's forties; the flags of one's forties; the fortyish microphone: all rocking on the old wood, from a warehouse, nailed down with four blows of the hammer, and covered with poor red cloth. How the heart bled!

Darkness on darkness. I was there, in front of the workers: all dressed up; the fathers in dark, the sons in their light little vests—of the pomegranate red, the canary yellow, the gilded orange that were fashionable that year—: there was the face of the toothless one, assigned to certainties as is a typhus patient to his sick bed; the

humorous note that faith renders daily: his post is in the center of the pit, and his chair seems highest of them all. When he claps his hands, with his toothless mouth opening in a traditional smile, it is the sign that he *must* clap his hands: and happily. The circle is meeting around that center it has full of certainty: the world is outside, radiant and indifferent. And the heart is rent.

I am here, then: to count as the *only* given good of the world in which historically I test the fact of living—the existence of these workers (which pains the heart).

Ah, I don't know how to say, very well, when it began: perhaps it has been going on forever. Who can indicate the moment when reason began to sleep, or better to desire its own end? Who can determine the circumstances in which he begins to leave, or return where reason was not, abandoning the road he had believed to be right for so many years, for the sake of passion, ingenuousness, *conformism*?

But as I arrived, in that dream of mine outside reason—of brief duration, and so definitive for the rest of my existence (at least so I imagine)—at the foot of a "Mountain", at the base of that horrible "Valley"—that had so filled my heart with terror for life, and for poetry—I looked up, and saw, there at the top, a light, a light (that of the old sun reborn) that blinded me: like

that "old truth", about which there is nothing more to say. But that the fact of finding it again fills one with joy, even if it carries with it, just that, really, the end of everything.

In the fatal light of that old truth, I was slightly calmed by anguish: which had been the only real feeling during the whole period of darkness to which my road, *the right one!*, had fatally carried me.

Like a castaway, who comes out of the sea and clings to an unknown land, I turned back, towards all that is darkness, devastated, shapeless: the fatality of one's own being, one's own birthmarks, the fear of change, dread of the world: which no one ever was able to escape, carrying off to safety his own totality.

I rested a little, didn't think, didn't live, didn't write: like a sick man: then I started up again (it's the old story). Up the deserted slope, where I could truly say I was alone.

Alone, conquered by enemies, a tiresome survivor to my friends, a stranger to myself, I plodded along to that absurd new road, pulling myself up the slope like a homeless child, a missing soldier.

But just then, after a few steps of my solitary and discouraged climb, there it was, emerging from the usual

recesses of my soul (which desperately continued to consider, to defend itself, to survive—turning back!), there it was, the agile and unscrupulous beast, changing like a chameleon, so that its colors are always changing to those of before. The external colors, first of all: those found being born, and soon the object of a tremendous affection, which cannot really see them change. And then those within, in the image of and like—because of the error of infantile and youthful loyalty—those of the world. The color of purity, especially, of high morality, of intellectual honesty—damned colors painted by illusion!

So, the "Leopard" (in which, at once, I had no difficulty recognizing myself), with all those colors spotting its skin, did not move from my eyes; like a mama's boy, like a church-boy. Rather, by a terrible force—that of the truth, of the necessity of life—he stopped me from proceeding along my new road—chosen not by will, but by the lack of any will—and about which there is no need for mystification, because one is *alone* because of the squandering of an honestly desired sincerity—was again ready to surrender, to turn back to the overbearing, stupid, vulgar world I had just left.

But moving ahead there, next to the "Leopard", sleep and ferociousness joined in the single form of "Lion"; which, though hairless, fetid, with animal dung, lazy, vile, insolent, stupid, void of any interest other than

idling, alone, and devouring, alone—still had the power of one not knowing evil, the stuff of which it consisted, by its nature, being only good. By its sleep and ferociousness, egoism and ravenous hunger, the "Lion" drew out an inspiration to live that distinguished him, with absolutely brutal violence, from the outside world. Which almost trembling sheltered him.

The idea of self is not correct: when one expresses himself he destroys reality, because he devours it. ✓

The ability to devour reality then gives a certainty which is difficult to keep from using: to block oneself from entering, by means of such a science, the world, and installing oneself there, like a king, an overbearing poet. However partially, in that "Lion" too, as in an exaggerated warning sign, I recognized myself.

But I was still to recognize myself in something much worse. From the silence in which one is—an uncontrollable determination or a phenomenon formed little by little, apart from the fierce and ingenuous pictures a child offers of himself all his life—a "She-wolf" came out, flanking the other two beasts. Its markings were disfigured by a mystical leanness, its mouth worn thin from kisses and impure works, the cheek bone high up against the eye, the jaw bone low on the dried up skin of the neck. And between them an oblong cavity, that made

the chin protrude, almost pointed: ridiculous as any death mask.

And the eye dry in an agony; the more abject the closer to the agonies of the saints: a deceptive dryness, where its eye rests it seems to stick like glue trickling from the round pupil, now too direct now fleeting and in the middle the nose, fatty in the skin and nostrils over the upper lip, itself vanished from consumption: the human nose of the beast, that makes itself a guinea pig of its own longings, becoming gangrenous, always more natural.

That "She-wolf" frightened me: not by the degradation it represented, but for the lone fact of its being, almost objectively, an apparition: the definition of itself, an "ecce homo", so to speak, the reality of which the intelligence could in no way avoid. Its presence was so indisputable as to sever any hope of ever being able to reach that mysterious peak I glimpsed ahead of me, in the silence. I had travelled there so willingly—parched, without living, without writing, and still, right in the lack of everything, save the "abomination of desolation", I was gripped by a new form of vitality—that now, having to credit to the presence of that peaceless beast an insuperable force—something against which it was simply ridiculous to try and measure oneself—brought an anguish that rendered me impotent. I was driven back by the temptation to return there where one is required, in the

end, only to be quiet.

And as I fell to ruin, righteously absurd in my victory over a world to which I belonged, having no reason to consider myself above it, by now deprived of the authority of poetry and grown ignorant from long obscurantist visitations, practical and mystical, there appeared to me here a figure, in which once again I had to recognize myself, withered and faded by

As I perceived him—in the middle of that solitude, that oblivion, to which I was reduced, I screamed: "Pity, please", as in dreams, when all dignity is lost, and whoever must cry cries, who must ask for pity asks for pity. "Look at the state in which I find myself, look, even if I don't know if you are a survival or a new reality!"

"Ah—it went, watching me, with a subtle but unnatural irony in its eyes made by being serious—you are right, I am a shade, a survival... I am fading slowly in the fifties of the world, or, to put it better, of Italy..." And here he still smiled, ironic, mildly neurotic: because seriousness, or passion, was the only possible light in his eyes: tepid brown eyes under the pronounced cheek bone, the lean and infantile cheek, the mouth full of sweetness from the ugly smile: saved by his grin from the tangles of one

who must beg forgiveness for an ancient crime. So with that smile that deformed him, he slightly resembled a poor dirty disheveled thief. And he said: "I'm from the north: my mother was born in Friuli, my father in Romagna; I lived a long time in Bologna, and in other cities and towns of the Paduan plain—as is written in the liners of those books of the *Fifties*, that fade with me..." And here he had another toothless smile—though none of his teeth were missing. But when the smile, good or bad, stopped drawing the mouth over the shadow of points sunken in the yellowish area around his teeth, an air of ingenuous nobility invaded his entire face.

"I was born under fascism, though I was hardly more than a boy when it fell. And then I lived for a long time in Rome, where fascism, with another name, continued: while the culture of the high bourgeois did not hint a decline, going step by step (does one say it that way?) with the ignorance of the unbounded masses of the petty bourgeois..." He smiled, he still smiled, like a culprit, he almost wanted to stretch out what he had said, or wanted to excuse himself for the generality to which he was confined by circumstances, or by his anguish as well.

"I was a poet,—he added, quickly, now he almost wanted to dictate his tombstone—I sang of the split in consciousness, of one who has fled his destroyed city, and goes toward a city that should already have been built.

And who, in the pain of destruction mixed with the hope of the founding, darkly exaggerates his mandate..." He looked at me for a moment, no longer as one looks at a victim to help, but as a scholar, or an interviewer: "And because of that—he added—I am destined to fade so prematurely: because the wound of a doubt, the pain of a laceration, soon become confined to the one who is ill, in whom others are right to lose interest. And then...everyone has a moment alone in life..."

Still, he had the trace of a malicious and sorrowful smile in his eye, unable to smile it, so he added, with a friendly air: "But you, why do you want to turn back, into that degradation? Why don't you continue to climb up here, alone, as you were destined to do, and as you are?"

I looked at him. Such kindness, such a desire to help out and place himself at my disposal, in that quandary, comforted me. My succourer was miserable, minute: he wasn't a father, he wasn't an older brother, he didn't have the overbearing consolation of one representing authority; he could be all the more a mountain guide. But holy heaven!, in a circumstance like that, in which my life seemed to implicate heaven and earth, being presented like a great edifying fable—an experience surely from "the beyond", an ascent through mystical inclines with a paradisaical sunlight—as happens to the saints when they are

already characters in their sacred songs—in such a circumstance, a slightly better encounter could have happened to me, or at least one a little more romantic! Everything was done for this; it seemed to me: to be involved with a great guide, who came up along the ways of the necessary, with the splendour of poetry, from the bottom of my history, my culture. He might be, for example, Gramsci himself..., emerging from the little tomb in the English Cemetery in Testaccio, with his back of a small erect Leopardi, the rectangular forehead of his Sardinian mother, the slightly romantic head of hair of his twenties, and those poor eyeglasses of the bourgeois intellectual... Or, there!, Rimbaud might have come along, my eighteen year old Rimbaud, my contemporary, and castrator, with his destiny and his language already divine, like those of a classic, but beautiful and covered with ribbons like Alcibiade, and not to make love with him, but to admire him in all his infantile soul... Or finally, it could have been Chaplin...

Instead I had no one in front of me but him, a small civilized poet of the Fifties, as he used to say bitterly: unable to help himself, to imagine himself as another. And yet it was clear that in the world—in my world—I couldn't have found—though so miserable, so peasant-like, so timid—any other guide but this.

“Oh it's you!—I said then—I recognize you! Uh—and I blushed to say it, not for the vice confessed, but for the fact that, once again, I was confessing—I loved you very much. You always seemed to me, in the end, to be the ‘greatest of the poets of our time’, effectively their true guide. I have read and re-read your volumes, with great satisfaction: it would suit me now, to get out of this ‘impasse’, aha—you laugh—the long critical work I did on you, not for the sake of social prestige, but narcissism! You are the one whose style was my reason for affirmation and success!”

I looked at myself—stunned by the unpleasant trauma of such an unlimited confession, from the bad taste of repeating a conscience which was by then without novelty—I looked around me: and, of the three beasts, the one that scared me most was the “She-wolf” by its mystic leanness (with its flesh devoured by degradation of flesh, fetid with shit and sperm).

“I need your help—I stammered, as insecure as I had ever been in my life—because this beast would end by taking away my strength and will to express myself. And I cannot even bear the idea of no longer being a writer.”

“You need to change roads—he then said to me, with his frightful wisdom, seeking to modify the gravity of what he said with tones of a mundane speech, as banal as

possible—if a situation seems 'dangerous or unworthy.'"  
"With this beast whose presence makes you lament, there is little to joke about..." he continued: I heard his continual linguistic correction, and was moved; because I understood that, as with irony, it wasn't done by him, the champion of the seriousness, the passion, the rigor of slang... It was litotes he now used: attenuation. Learned perhaps in the meetings of his literary contemporaries. Basically, basically... yes, it was a bourgeois attitude: the fear of telling the truth in the sublimity of frontal expression, the need to deliver it almost secretly, negligently, *speaking of something else...*

It's a tapeworm. And you know it. The repetition of a sentiment becomes an obsession. And the obsession transforms the sentiment..." He smiled, making fun of his own didactic tone, and humbly clarifying: "Like the repetition of a word in the litanies... Repetition that is loss of meaning; and loss of meaning that is meaning... Exalting... Ha, ha, ha!" I watched him laugh in the silence of the "abomination of desolation", in the oblivion.

He stopped the poor, innocent, childlike laughter of a connoisseur of style, and continued, constantly depending on the tone of the spoken language: "Repeat the word 'sex' into infinity: what sense will it have in the end? Sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex... The world becomes an object of sexual

desire, it is no longer a world, but a place of only one feeling. This feeling repeats itself, and with it the world repeats, until finally it accumulates and is annihilated... Of the world only the miraculous projection remains... Obsession, becoming religion, needs to see who it is, marrying. But meanwhile Institutional Religion has made all possible marriages. And it still has some to make. Its desire is endless; it desires males... Until it finds one male so fat that it will kill it. Ha, ha, ha! That one, so well endowed, won't be the boss of factories or newspaper chains, he will not possess feudal lands in the south, but his riches will be business spirit, paper capital, and the multi-national country. Ha, ha, ha! He will be the salvation of the world: which will not quite regenerate the absurdly heroic dead to which the humble youth of always are assigned: the boys of Reggio, or Palermo, the Cuban or Algerian adolescents, Grimau and Lambrakis... He will hunt for it in the deepest Hell, in all the Cities of the West where it still reigns, in the service of those who precede him and of whom he is historical heir. For your good, now, the best thing, seems to me to lead you to a place none other than the world. Beyond this, you and I will not go, because the world ends with the world. As far as the prospectives of Hope (for which one dies) and the plans of He who is coming, I am premature to their laws. Therefore I am not authorized to lead you in those

kingdoms: one, as I said, hoped for, the other projected or planned."

"I don't have to choose—I said—I'm coming with you." He looked at me an instant, examining me, timid and hard, fleeting, with a wet eye over his consumed cheek bone. Then he moved, and I followed behind.

## Canto II

I watched him walk ahead of me, up a steep path overgrown with a bad and innocent weed: in one of those places in the world where still, with all that has happened, what counts is the grass—the tufts of grass heaped up from Spring like groups of beggars, stinking like gypsies in the compact purity of the agrarian epochs—the broom flower, immortal, the poor passing acacia—that only in that moment of the year enjoyed its triumph: of big crinkly flowers, pressing one on the other, smelling with the immodesty of the stupid, the innocent—or the elders, nice and warm, the transparent acacia blooms—and the other pure trees: mulberry, vine, oak,—and those a bit more mysterious, common in the south, poplar, alder, willow— and the eucalyptus, fierce with a grey-red mane, memories of other climates—mahogany, and mango, colored by the lymph of one who grows verdant on death—or, the acacias of Kenya, red and green—and cinnamon trees, sugar cane and clumps of palm trees in the oceanic light, I watched him walk up that steep path on the outskirts of the city where the evening light fell like a

summer storm. There was no boundary in that light between man and man, between those who, down there in the wonderful and humble kingdoms of life, plains, shanty-towns, cities (that were now only a mournful weaving of lights) were content in the triumph of just being there, like the acacia flowers that were still falling, and smelling rotten: glorious in this too, more glorious still.

I alone was outside of so much glory, so much melancholy.

And a flaming point of tears cut into my chest with a steady pain from the most distant years of life.

I alone, defined by a boundary: a disproportion, incredible, between this little me and all the rest of the world, so large, inexhaustible even in nostalgia!

Old inspiration, used to compiling mixtures of places, entire flying panoramas over Italies and Europes, and other crusts of the world, you must help me, like a repudiated woman, no longer useful for anything, but who, for some old friendship, continues to visit a husband gripped by other loves (impossible ones, if ever there were any, and mildly ridiculous and infamous) to return to him the old, indispensable services!

Help me you, in this betrayal: in this which is the worst of the visionary arbitrarinesses in which you have helped me so. Help me give a body to abstractions, that

want to be so new, with the old concreteness of the domestic and elegiac fantasy!

Enough: he walked ahead of me, defenseless. And I couldn't stop myself from staring at his neck, his shoulders, in the way that only ends by humiliating both observer and observed. An undue appropriation of the other's reality, which makes even more unjust the straining at pity which is then attempted.

He walked agilely ahead of me, with a quickness that could have been a boy's. And it was this, especially, that bound me to a disturbing sense of pity: he was a man between thirty and forty years old, a poet about whom university studies were already being made, and therefore that sporting walk of his, muscularly relaxed, had something base about it, exaggerated: like one who confesses without modesty, and almost without being aware of it, to certain of his own weaknesses... as long as they don't concern such a pitiful flirtaciousness...

Because throughout his body there was something shameful, humiliating: and therefore that youthful health of his, which in the gestures of walking up that difficult rise, was suggested behind the apparent thinness and exhaustion of his body, irritated ones who didn't love him, and drew pity from those who loved him.

And then those clothes: those sickening clothes, tied to the financial possibilities of the famous Fifties, bought according to taste, a little plebian, exactly the style of those years: a sportcoat found in a ready-to-wear shop, of a strange little color a little rust and a little orange; the shirt collar open, it too bought ready-made, in a shop in the center of town; the trousers sagging slightly, worn and a little short; the shoes eaten up on the outside by the heels, like one who walks a little ape-like; and especially those short, horrible socks, with these little red dots, stretched by elastic a little over his ankles. He walked unaware, ahead of me: son of a poor bourgeois nation, poet become a poet who knows how, who knows in what provincial corner, in what distressing torturous intimacy, in what poorly lived, noble mixture of rebellion and conformism.

I grew deeply discouraged. Just like a neurotic: a totally black vision, all around, and a perception of things unexpectedly impoverished, maimed, like mannikins or ghosts full of a frozen melancholy. And that evening, setting all around, with the tremendous calm warmth of a silent hurricane...

I regained my courage, and succeeded in speaking, with my voice cracking in my throat, and with the exact tone of protest that children have when they are ready to cry.

"Must I go on with this Barbaric Work, in which that work of Two Paradises is but an impulsive and infantile theory?": thus, crippled, my question resounded, but enclosed in the usual self-irony. And he:

"Sure: why not?"

He had turned around, with his eye like a glad little snake on his cheek bone.

"I don't know if you realize who 'corruptible' still, went to an immortal century'.<sup>1</sup> Besides the fact —I continued, hiding my sloth under the mundane argument, disheartened that he was sustained by an ideology of iron —I said it just like that—the most potentially unitary one of our entire culture, the final product of all of the Middle Ages etc. And then, stylistically, think, you who are a master of these things, think what a unique case: the removal of the elevated point of view, that adds immeasurably to the number of things and of their names, right at the moment in which it reduces and synthesizes everything..." And at this point I added, just for the sake of litotes: "As a university professor would say". And I continued: "Well, in summary, I simply wanted to say... that to make this journey again consists in raising oneself, and seeing everything together from a distance, but also in

1. *corruptibile ancora, ad immortale seculo andò* (still alive, he went to the divine world)

lowering oneself and seeing everything close up—to continue to express myself without the least bit of modesty. You know what cultured language is; and you know the common one. How could I make use of them? They are by now together a single language: the language of hate."

He, with his eye gleaming over his cheekbone, while plodding along like a fullback up the steep foul pasture, breathed: "Rather than growing larger, you will dilate!"

I understood, but was not convinced: "Yes, but...": and I wanted to say: "What will people say?" (that is, the thirty or forty persons I love, but whom nevertheless nothing could stop me from knowing: even in their lacunae, for example in their not knowing what the hell difference there is between growing larger and dilating). But I corrected myself and proceeded, barely breathing: "Assymetry, disproportion, the law of programmed irregularity, the mockery of cohesiveness, the mob's introduction to the arbitrary... Whatever..." And here again, saving myself triumphally, if only for a few moments, I quoted the expression of another: "I deign to do what neither I nor others believe in".

Having relished the fleeting taste of the Vulgar, I sank right back into the vulgarity of the "Language of Hate": mine—historically mine—that of my time, of my father, my mother, my professors, my shopkeepers, my

newspapers, my radio, my television, my balls! "And I said: 'Isn't this madness?'"

What I had wanted I wanted no longer (about this there is no doubt), but with the black, flayed pain of the neurotic. Who sees the end of what he has begun, and, in beginning, has the desolating pain of the end: the sense of a goodbye bid to things before ever having known them; a hellish nostalgia for what one barely has: a thing that cuts the throat and chest like a burning point of tears.

"If I have understood well—he said (in my own Language!)—you have a cursed fear. And one which doesn't honor you." And he looked at me with a look exactly opposite from his words: the word *fear* modified by that *cursed* that tempered it making it more tolerable and opportune; the words *doesn't honor you*, that reticence to say *dishonors you*.

His gaze was instead without "modifiers", full of courageous love.

And as he spoke, he grew ironic again, because, yes, in our world one can only speak thus: "Faith pushed me here; and Faith was pushed to push me by the Id...".

He was silent. Being ironic, that is, emphasizing two words by capitals, one can say it all: but the look he still cast over me, in the place of some elegant laic variation,

worldly or refined— was so desperately pure: like something vaguely luminous that persists in the dark passing of a winter rain; something that, in the honor of life, and almost of the cosmos, insists on shining in a little dismal mud. It was perhaps the stubbornness of poetry: its material presence.

I had before me the face of a partisan condemned to death, who in the pallor of terror, keeps—in his brown eye, in his virile cheek bone—the hardness of his hope, by now useless to him.

I followed behind him, looking at the ground.

I looked to the ground like one who must brood, without showing anyone, on the ingenuousness of his zeal: a hope, a desire to act (in this useless world), that is revived, requiring even more shame. Woe to the one among us who discovers himself! And with head bowed, I went on, to hide what instead makes man worthy of his name.

I looked at the flowers at my feet, that grew up amidst the grim and innocent weeds: I was like them, the ones incredulous at death, and destined to a life of just a few days. Little flowers without names: unnamed, and so many, one equal to the other, scattered by chance along the sides of the muddy path, one equal to the other not only in its sublime unattainable form, with its clear blue

almost white out of humility, with its candor, for poverty, faded into violet or yellow, like watered down wine—but one equal to the other in the ignorance of frailty, of vanity: of the smallness of their life.

Little flowers in which there was only gladness, shared among thousands and thousands of little brothers and sisters, made thirsty by the beautiful sun. And now that day was passing, spilling over them its sad wetness, astonished, they closed up, all together: but glad even in this!

Whoever pays humble attention to man's testing of his difficult fate is his tenderest friend. And yet—I thought, walking and watching my poor shoes pound in the mud—I will go on without knowing the names of these flowers, that were for so many years my silent companions.

I observe, in them, how much I resemble them: indistinct brother, who trembles, surprises himself, whose spirit revives with the sun, the morning, credulous of the eternity that morning again steals from he who wakes up and begins again, like a good-willed father.

Tiny flowers grouped in a single clump, thousands of humble twins in beautiful party dresses, cheap, but with hems and hues of a mysterious regal preciousness. Weak, poor things, made of a substance little more consistent

than dust, or frost, a bit of which is enough to make them disappear.

Little flowers isolated, or far apart, each with a stem all its own, which mysteriously have located here, some night, coming from who knows where, onto this grass tread upon only by flocks of survivors, or whores grown old and sad, who ask for a little money from workers returning from the city, from the sons of peasants who live on a countryside where the periphery of the city has stacked up, over the curve of a river, or the straight lines of a super-highway.

Little flowers come from regions of the past never dead in the cosmos— they camp down here, according to the whim of sun and wind, like bands of gypsies that never choose places to camp, but leave it to accident.

I too, like a flower—I was thinking—no more than an uncultivated flower, obey the necessity that would have me gripped by the gladness that comes after discouragement. Then something will certainly come that still offends me and will massacre me: but for me too, like the flowers of other springs, the past is confused with the present, and a meadow is here, and at the same time, in the cosmos!

I watched those shoulders ahead of me, in that tight jacket that pained the heart. And, with this fullest pain of

the heart—of a wee flower— I followed him. He walked decided, intent, and I stayed behind him; I too, by now, had the stride of a partisan going towards the mountains.

(1963)

Notes and fragments for Canto III

1

In that ancient corner of the City, one immediately heard all that it was. Different languages resounded around me, pronounced by mouths slightly repugnant, though marvelously designed—like Berbers, or Welshmen: people of a race unfamiliar (as the world always is, in its different places, by deadly obsession). Dialects or slangs, spoken by the rich or poor: they were the first words, as always, to socially reveal the speakers. But here they revealed them, instead, so to speak, under a frightening, asocial aspect.

Finally contented, I asked: "Master, what is it I hear?" "Here live—he answered me, equally reassured himself, but not without Leopardian "longing"—those who have chosen as an actual ideal a condition which is inevitable anyway: anonymity. Fatality, glory, the curse of being "whatever", or, if you prefer (and I see you suffer wildly for it) *to be like everyone else*. But this hasn't been a condition of real innocence for them. How many

partisans weren't men and boys like the rest? And their staying up in the mountains—that smoking of one last cigarette before dying—keeping their guns between their knees beside a fire—that singing on rare evenings of truce—their hope in a distant peace and their knowing of having to die—didn't they become a part of the acts and days of everyone? How many of those partisans weren't equal among themselves? Look at their faded photographs. They were the people. They were young. They were working class.

These ones here have instead made their condition of equality and lack of uniqueness into a faith and reason for living: they have been the moralists of the duty to be like everyone else."

I looked at those people with pity, and with that nostalgia my guide had read on my face as the "shadow of wild sorrow". "But what do they have to complain about so?" I asked. They were in fact (as opposed to in life) unhappy here, they were crying and moaning. "What they have renounced—he answered—makes them suffer. They don't know it. But nothing is given up with impunity. What gives man the greatest pleasure (even if it means a false pleasure) is success. He who, in making ideologies and codes—he smiled—of his own impotence, renounces it, suffers, naturally, the greatest displeasure. They are unaware of it: so for this they suffer even more!"

2

It wasn't hard for me to realize that in reality all those people, along the streets of their world of clerks, professionals, workers, political parasites, petty intellectuals, really were running like madmen behind a flag. Through medieval alleys, or along great bureaucratic and liberty-style streets, or, finally, through the new residential or popular districts, they didn't just drag themselves around—as it seemed—through the orgasm of traffic or of their duties: but ran behind that flag. It really was little more than a rag, that flapped and rolled obtusely in the wind. But, like all flags, it had a symbol drawn in its center, discolored. I looked closer, and didn't take long to notice that that symbol consisted of nothing other than a Shit.\*

(1965)

\* Meditating on Hell, they tell me my brother Shelley found it was a place rather similar to the city of London. I, who don't live in London but in Los Angeles find, meditating on Hell, that it must resemble Los Angeles even more.

Notes and fragments for Canto IV

1

The two of us descended, like a couple of blind men. We two knew quite well what Unreality was, a sight we lived in the middle of every day. And just for that we were pale as corpses. All the fake gestures, the uncertain words and summaries, the cowardice, the omissions: knowing how to be saints and not being them.

I saw the color of those cheeks: he surely had poor digestion, my Conscience: or perhaps his stomach or liver wasn't right. Or he was exhausted. Or all these things together. So much fatigue, and so much passion, for then not to live, in an entire day, even an instant of sincerity.

"Maintenant c'est la nuit que je travaille. De minuit à cinq heures de matin": I then saw in him that color of insane work. And I asked him how I could have come down with him, if he too, usually so courageous—almost invulnerable—was contaminated by that pallor that sets apart the exploited, the poor, the passive, the Christs who find themselves suddenly lifeless after never having lived.

He answered: "This pallor of mine is no more than pity for all those people down there who live in confusion. Alright, maybe it's an excuse, but it's also the truth. Pity in me is in fact only the apprehension of the lack of freedom..."

2

I ask the reader at this point to pardon the disproportion between what I would like to say and what I know how to. But I haven't been able to put off any longer the drafting of this passage of my Ship. What in hell should I have waited any longer for? Sure: in about a year of work I would have been able to increase the amount of things I know: but our knowledge is a form. And the form of my knowledge—however many more things I might learn—as many more experiences as I may have—will always stay the same.

All poets have always complained about their smallness, and ingenuously: because having been children and having lived in the provinces determines in a substantial way the form of knowledge of a man:

De profundis, Domine, suis-je-bête!

The form of a knowledge is then manifest as rhythm. And this rhythm too, in a prose work, in a poem, always repeats itself in the same way. Petty knowledge is ingenuousness and pride mixed together. Ignorance is an

infantile terror. Among the thousand looks hurled about, at the world—anxious, vital, interested, and ingenuous like those of dogs—only a few have value: and they get lost in our greed of animals who, within their silence really haven't the interests of civil men, but of poor needy men, with the reserved adolescences of petty bourgeois and workers. Only speaking do we manifest knowledge: in silence we feel nothing but an ingenuous and shameful avidity (exactly formless). In silence we foresee something: in the ingenuous way of a boy who feels inferior, and envies the animals and birds. He dreams of being lazy and brutal, of returning from Africa with limbs of steel, with dark skin, with a furious look. We foresee some general condition of man, which interests every man. But it's not much. In fact we struggle against our intimate conformism only in spurts and lazily. We have never before truly analyzed it and then eliminated it point by point. Our intimate conformism is contested only by a mysterious force, by a glory of vitality, idolatry and love of sacrilege.

We hate the conformism of others because it is this that keeps us from getting involved in our own. Each of us hates his own destiny in the other one as in a concentration camp. We can't bear it that the others have a life and a few habits under another sky. We would always want something external, like for example an earthquake,

a bombardment, a revolution, to break the habits of millions of petty bourgeois that surround us. For this Hitler was our true, absolute hero. He was the representative of the Rimbauds of the provinces, who walked over the paved roads of their cities, with the same arrogance with which the other young petty bourgeois—and especially those who from laborers were becoming petty bourgeois—accepted the conformism of their fathers. Convictions and habits; fears and violence; work and festivities; countries and churches. Hitler understood the discussions—soft and hypothetical, fanatical and confused—mixed in with little green trails of fireflies which indicated heat under the dark vines; or with the voices of cabbies in dusty piazzas, who nostalgically indicated a layer of moisture on the stone steps of the monuments...

Hitler, our horrendous hero, incarnation of the unhappy children, who would have wanted to stop the sound of bells over the corn fields, or the sirens in the back of views through city gates—so that the sleeping petty bourgeois might wake up, and run to the piazzas to repeat, *malgré soi*, the creative sufferings of Christ.

I excuse myself then to my reader—who has reason to be impatient—for not knowing how to represent to him or her a vision of the world corroborated by the wisdom or extremism I would want.

The Hell I have in my head to describe has already been simply described by Hitler. It is through his politics that Unreality has truly been shown in all its light. From it the bourgeois have gotten a true scandal, or, I am ashamed to say it, have lived the true contradiction of their life.

Hitler was the fruit of their poet sons, who made a dream much truer, greater and more terrible than they were prepared to make. (Even poet sons of Jews.) It's true: some poets, no less great, suffered and suffer for all this; and would want for men a Germany and a Europe truly and completely innocent: even wretched and humble, for wretched and humble is the great life of man. But the first poets, those who dreamed the exterminations between the barracks, the heaps of little bodies under the long coats, and the hair on the skulls of cadavers moved by the breeze of the rivers' calms and of the northern green, they were the ones who were right, because Spring has always brought and will always bring the terrifying smile of the idiot.

3

Where had I seen something similar to this garden full of poets I now had before my eyes? Surely I've seen it: and if I'm not mistaken, if memory isn't lying by some block I'm not aware of, it concerns the villa of S., a few kilometers from Prague.

It was an eighteenth century villa, built by Bohemian princes: other facts I don't know, nor if I knew them would I say, because

in this case the real exactitude consists of ambiguity itself, as in fact it was, and as the sad countryside informed, all a tangle of thin branches prematurely dry, but it also could have been Parisian, or upper-Italian. There was a tall, elegant but anonymous outer wall, towards the State road—on which, further on, rose one of those farming towns, which being situated right on a heavily trafficked road was transformed centuries ago into a rest stop: tearing it away from the melancholy of the rural expanses, their sorrowful smell of frost. Just beyond this surrounding wall and its gate was a large courtyard (covered with symmetrical flower beds of an intense but pale green) the general color of which was a faded red, like the small tiles that were the color of cow's blood and now are faded into a light and sensual sanguine—a dream sculpted in the corneas of the servants. In the back of this courtyard rose the villa, facing North. It rose with its luxury profoundly deadened by who knows what timidity

(rooted in the hearts of those who had planned and paid for it. If it was a country villa, it still had the severity of a kind of convent; and behind its high walls of illuministic civilization seemed to hide the darkness of souls exacerbated by the mysterious sorrows deriving from wealth.)

On the other side of the villa spread the true and proper garden: its borders were the deserted countryside and the sky.

Such a garden consisted of an unbounded geometrical play of round and oval flower beds, and bristled plants, maybe juniper, between knotty evergreens and gathered about themselves as in a calm spasm.

Those paths, those flowerbeds were full of poets who, taking advantage of a little sunlight, strolled and chatted softly and without a care, waiting to sit up to the table.

They were Czech poets and Slovak poets, and among them some Italian poets, guests of that villa: which was just that, a villa for poets.

In an analogous Italian location (at least according to my personal experience) a similar gathering would have had, in its depth, in its substance, a profoundly vulgar air. With their good clerk's clothing—forced into some second job to earn a living—the Italian poets, in a similar gathering would have had rather the appearance, not so much of poets, but clerks.

Their petty bourgeois condition would have made them, even there, fatally determined; and they would have had all the timidity, fears, anxieties, greed, humors, good or bad, of persons economically similar to them. And, because the petty bourgeois is vulgar, they could have only been vulgar. More than anything, in a similar gathering—and especially the eventual communist poets—they would have felt they had reached what was even a modest worldly goal: and their vulgarity, unaware, would thus have pained the heart.

Here, instead, among these Bohemian or Slovak poets, the pity was there, it was different. Their economic figures were those of poets and no more, because the State considered them as such, and so qualified them. Their society didn't force them to do other work to earn a living. They had the necessary guarantees for food and shelter, for special expenses and illnesses. But such economic figures were themselves still paltry: and therefore they too "pained the heart". No sooner does a man represent—with his own physicality—the proper means for earning his bread, than he provokes pity. And then he defends himself, and to defend himself he looks for goals other than bread. Worldly goals that might save him from his condition of producer of goods which, valued in gold, make him always live, however, as a petty bourgeois. And then the negligible particulars of his articles of

consumption take on a shape, as in nightmares, his jacket, his pants, his shoes defenseless against the look cast to his prosaic feet, that no poem could ever redeem, his tie, his shirt, oh, slightly dark on the edge of the collar, and bought in some fancy snob shop in the city, or in some big bright store the same for everybody (a thing of intolerable cruelty). The petty bourgeois poverty thus vulgarizes the petty poet, but also the great poet not yet recognized and honored.

4

The truth one cannot tell (as the ancients couldn't tell their dreams because they believed them to be something other than what they really are) is this: each of us is physically the figure of a buyer, and our anxieties are the anxieties of this figure (as our terrors are the terrors of our dreams). The world of men as we know them in our life, shaped by the majority, is a world of buyers. Everything we use to display ourselves is bought. But the true look that observes us as buyers isn't the look of another buyer. Only in certain moments is such a look also our own: but then it regards a divination, whose value is neither established or recognized by anyone. Therefore, our vital experience remains the experience of one revealed by his humble acquisition. In the best cases, however, we are able to make this deluded experience into a real experience: we are able, that is, to identify the experience of

the buyer who is living us with the experience of that unrealized figure called man. As long as the figure of the buyer doesn't also take advantage of such a presumed identification —by a maneuver we know well—to live in us yet longer in peace. The laws that govern us took form in a world belonging to no one. For it is always we who, if we want, become first cutthroats and cataphumens, and then masters of production of those goods of which we are buyers. Doing this we try to suppose a solution of continuity between subject and master, between laborer and capitalist. No advancement *ever* cancels the previous condition: just as the fact of being adults doesn't cancel the fact of having been children. Instead, in every case the *first conditions or states* are the important and definitive ones. Even one who participates in production will always have the character of the consumer. He will always return to his first anxieties. To his not belonging. The look is not his which looks at who is present and expresses itself by buying his goods.

5

"The poet lives the desire for acquisition in the pure state. Why here exactly, in this Garden, is there no shade of vulgarity? Because the economic figures are smashed by their own desire. The poet wishes in fact to live all possible economic figures, he wants misery and wealth together. He is not a buyer! He is a producer who doesn't

earn! He is one who produces goods that can and cannot be acquired or bought! And if acquired by adventure, it cannot be consumed! Worse than plastic or tar or detergents! A buyer without aspirations (his self-expression is enough in itself) and a producer without buyers, or at least without consumers, he passes through life to live the desires— that remain within him—of those who want to buy and sell: but at a level which for them is unacceptable. They can't be objectified because they are no longer historical. A thing about which it isn't said poets need be aware. They manifestly live such a chaos. A farce in which each has his own part.

“To cause desires for acquisition and production to degenerate into something which is their purity and their lack of function, is the part of the poet.

“If he knows it, all the better. If he doesn't know it, he knows other things. Suddenly you see a man different from the rest, who screams: “Priests, professors, bosses, you were mistaken in assigning me to justice. I have never been of this people; I am of the race of those who sing to beg; I don't understand the laws; I have no moral sense; I am a brute...” These negative affirmations are the negative exaltation of the impossibility of having an economic figure or status. And so he goes through the streets on winter nights without shelter, without clothes, without bread; and he wants gold. And he has himself,

only himself, as a testimony of his own glory and reason. Such a testimony is hardly received and perceived by others; naturally it becomes impure: that is, a pretext for justifying normal consumers to themselves, reassuring them of the possibility of freedom (realized by a poet who at every opportunity they either persecute or corrupt).

“Whether beggar or gentleman, the poet belongs to neither the economic figure of the beggar or that of the gentleman. He must be without stable economic status. I repeat: now he has one, now another, now all of them together. And naturally he suffers for all of them! He can very well write beautiful poems about civic or intimate pain, but only from the real pain of not having a little money in his pocket for dinner, or worse yet, perhaps, to buy himself an automobile; when not for the pain of having too much money because of a rich father.

“The degeneration of his social status assures that his desires really are all realized. If he dreams of seeing the death of the petty bourgeois of his time, the self-confident conformists, thugs, weaklings, abysses of imperfection and mostrosity, blackmailers, brutes, ignoramuses, flagwavers of an idiotic faith, of an imbecilic Christ and a shitty country—there his desire is actuated, in a dissonant and non-chronological time, right away or fifty years later. And the infamous become innocent; the innocents infamous. Certain old bourgeois—falsely enamored of

good music—or owners of villas worthy of ancient Greece, etc.—from infamous monsters become innocent vermin, crushed, infested, stripped, made to stink; or contrarily, certain blond young innocents, no longer workers and not yet petty bourgeois—and still with all the cruel integrity of children—become miserable prison guards or hangmen.

“Other times it happens instead that a poet’s words of hate are realized by a revolution, the one he dreamed of.

“But then naturally such a revolution is another thing: it degenerates, because in fact the dream of the poet was impure, was born from the abysses of unjustified pain; worthy of that of the bourgeois among whom it was born, and was transmuted unjustly into a libidinous desire for action.

“Still here, in this Garden, there is no vulgarity. The first quality of the poet is the elevation of his style, the purity of his speech. In this lies his witnessing of reality. And that needn’t seem contradictory to what I’ve said, because Reality is also made of Unreality (that horrendous one of the petty bourgeois). Poetry is the only communication that escapes—not from economic determinism, which nothing escapes, but from every determined determinism: from the moment in which the poet, as I said, no longer identifies with any economic figure.

“Foresight does not pertain to the speakable; but rather to how, when and why an economic desire is not prevented from becoming—I’m not saying revolutionary consciousness—or a mysterious desire for life—and therefore thought and philosophy—a desire for expression. Reality is revealed when it resembles this.

“Here in this Garden there are no literati—because the literati are all in Hell, and, as you will see, especially in the Circles where the most typically bourgeois and petty bourgeois of the sinners are punished. Still, though poets, none of these here has ever been afraid of literature. One is not afraid of things of which he is so much stronger.”

6

“And it is still life—he said—if damnation is eternal. A man who wants to mutilate himself is still damned, right? I believe in Hell therefore I stay there. It is my fulfillment of the catechism. I am a slave of my baptism. Parents, you have brought on my ruin, and your own...”

“You will wonder—he continued—why I am in Hell, your poet (who now speaks with the language of your poetry). But I have sinned. Paradise rather is only a plan, and even doubly so. My sins? Bah, the letter I wrote to Paul Demeny is the letter of a bore, who coming directly from the provinces, has a guiltily savage idea of city life.”

7

In the Garden, in the soft light of three in the afternoon that framed the eternal idleness of those shades of honored poets, there sounded—like thunder coming from the heights of the world of the living—or perhaps from the depths of a Hell buried under Hell—a sentence of the sovereign poet's, like an epigraph that never stopped resounding in my scholarly ears: "I understood that she belonged to her everyday life; and that her turn of generosity would have taken longer to reproduce than a star".

The mother! She was therefore queen of Hell: she, collected, sweet, protectress and little girl, still in the light of the Earthly Paradise.

8

The other one who came—cleansed of the signs of alcohol and unhealthy fatness, purified of all memories that were too close— also thought of the mother: but through his child he had left left on earth, the greatest one—of whom he himself had become the mother.

And, without alcohol, without fatness, without anecdotes, it was he himself who had the young face of the first born, the clean shaven face of the boy, in a moment of strong and dreamlike health of his adolescence. And, to the degree he resembled his beardless son, with the awkward but clean haircut of sporting and barbaric boys,

he exactly resembled his mother. He had become her.

And as much as he—dying with desire to die, killing himself by too much love for life—had come to resemble his mother, all the more, instead, Rimbaud, in front of him, had furiously remained a son, denying by excess of love, the mother. Denying his wild seeds, confronting the good life of the Mother.

(1965)

Notes and fragments for Canto VII

1

A sign-post, brand new—the metal post colored acrylic blue, the square sign in red—bearing the somewhat depressing message: “Incremental Work of Infernal Punishments (I.W.I.P)— Zone of the Over Continent (or the Reduced Ones)—Sector 1: Conformism”.

“In this zone, my Guide said to me, shamefully, as always, at the terror of lapsing into vulgar points of fact—a thing which enmeshed him in the Language of Hate, he pieced it apart in his throat—you won’t see punishments, in the figurative, spectacular and symbolic sense... The petty bourgeois conformists have achieved sins even more atrocious than being conformists... Conformism was simply the necessary basis for their sins, the indispensable premise. For the sake of conformism, there were... for example... some practicing religion... some who admired anything dedicated to work and family... who will finish by making themselves make the linings for their easy chairs with the skin of their victims...” Almost exhausted by

this speech, *in his conformistic way*, that is, lacking the impetus of some scandalous news—a direct product of a culture, of the Resistance, he knew well how to find himself in a state of complete institutionality—he grew quiet for a while, and, frowning and full of pain, took from his pant pocket a little bottle of optalidon, and swallowed from it a pill.

“Those who are condemned here, under these sign-posts—he explained— were only petty bourgeois by birth, by social definition, etc. They really had, as is said, the necessary tools for knowing their “sin”: *they knew how not to be conformists, and yet they were.*”

We walked along that beautiful road, high above the marsh: the white metal railings, the narrow little bridge over the slime, the cement ballast on which, below, a wild grass full of nettles pushed up thick and invincible.

“In this place—the Guide laconically added—the only punishment is being here.”

2

A barrier similar to that at railroad crossings, or at borders between State and State, was lowered on the road, with its red and white striped, just painted, still smelling of paint.

Behind the barrier the road grew wider, became an immense asphalt space, like those that spread in front of

stadiums or big swimming pools, for parking thousands upon thousands of automobiles: but in the hours when there is no game; and it is twilight; and, with twilight, the void. Nothing but asphalt and immensity, filled with the melancholy of the sun that retreats, and nearly blinding strikes things nearby, while those in the distance diminish in a spectral glimmer that renders them vague and limitless.

Beside the lowered rail there was a cement construction, rather sober and elegant: behind it, towards the expanse of the marsh, there was even the semblance of a garden, in the English style; though it was sad as are all things of the State. In front of this construction— a customs house or barracks—were the Demons. Yes: throughout that new Zone, which we saw was under the I.W.I.P., they were in fact experimenting with new detachments of female infernal police. Evidently the meekness of the sinners in that sector justified such an experiment: it dealt mostly with men of culture, used to being quiet in moments of relative tranquility. The Demons, like all novices, took their duties very much to heart. Their eyes were charged with a dark hostile light, even worse that of the male Demons. Terror at being unequal to the task rendered them, evidently, ferocious.

They immediately hated us for the exception we forced them to make: to raise the barrier to let two

strangers pass.

They opened it, and we entered the open space, a boundless parking lot without cars, lost in the twilight.

3

There a large crowd of people was gathered, all together. It was that large crowd, scattered and divided, which in the long evenings when lights are turned on later and later, meets again, there, in the big squares, the parks, under the summer chestnut trees along the rivers, on the roof-top terraces amid abundant plants, over the lengths of tables in front of kiosks in the rich sections; or inside—already gathered in the peace of dinner or immediately after dinner—with windows still wide open to the dark of the menacingly sweet twilight just departed.

Exactly as they had come from all those places—from the capitals, Rome, or London, or Paris, or from the large provincial cities— all those people were thronged together, in the indistinct shadows, whispering.

4

“Oh, Pasolini!” I heard myself called, just as one is called in the crowd at a cocktail party, with a special gentility—which alludes to a particular relationship, interrupted for some time, and now, right at that moment, recovered. An alliance grown silent, even a bit clandestine. I knew well the tone of sweet surprise in that call.

Which, after ignoring, I recovered in the depth of an eye.

And the depth of the eyes of the people from whom that fine "Oh Pasolini" could have come to me, lightly fluted, or trilled, was very sweet. Really authentically sweet. It wasn't the Sector of the Hypocrites where I found myself.

It was a matter of a group of women. No, ladies. I watched them with my myopic look, which, because of timidity, grew annoyed or restless, or somehow—not recognizing—unrecognizing.

5

"All these people—said the Master—have sinned against the greatness of the world almost by instinct. The reduction of everything occurred in them as a kind of defense... Ah—he breathed—they weren't capable of telling the grand old 'fabulation'... to do the Orlando's and the Don Quixote's—and he smiled, exhausted once again by his generous inability to use a current language—and so, they were vessels of *reduction*.

His mouth tightened in a smile at the mundane discourse, my poor Master, fearless, in the assumption of banality at a level of great culture and great passion. And he continued, out of pure kindness, out of disinterested love of knowledge:

"It is a sin born with the petty bourgeois, after the great industrialization, after the conquest of the colonies... At first, the little people *were* little: they *didn't* want to be.

In summary... All these people, for fear of greatness, are instinctively lacking in religion.

Reduction, the spirit of reduction, is the lack of religion: this is the great sin of the epoch of hate. And in fact in no other part of Hell will you see such people. The masses, my friend! The masses; who have chosen not having any religion as their religion—without knowing it."

The demon arrived with the beer. Hostile, she put it on the table, with the check, and went away.

"You've probably noticed the large number of women... Yes, of course. In them reduction, as it is said, is as old as the species: they defend the race, as well as themselves, poor things. It is because of this that conformism in them always has a certain grandeur. It is, basically, their religion. But the males!" and his eyes filled with a melancholy similar to the grip of a physical pain: the ease with which his heart was pained was one known well; and now evidently the destiny of those males, who had succeeded in carrying to the tomb, intact, their bourgeois pettiness... of vessels of reduction... upset him.

"Well, what pains my heart in all of this is the thought of how much hate their life-jackets of wretchedness have cost them. Those you've seen limited themselves to its defense. But never in all of history were such horrendous sins seen as those committed by the bourgeois in this century, to defend the actual right to hate greatness. I think of Büchenwald and Dachau, of Auschwitz and Mauthausen."

And once again his authentic indignation seemed faded and humbled by his growing old right after passing his Fifties. But it was there. And with it, in it, every possible true poetry.

So we were silent for a long time, lost in the commotion brought on by the repetition—in special circumstances or in special states of mind —of some old truth, still good.

It was difficult to interrupt the communion that was established between us in indignation, meek and knowing: any added word would have been a useless trimming...

But spells must always be broken; even those of gentleness and learning, those most sacred to man. One must do as the Christ of the Gospels, who, having barely set a spell—the contemplative pause after a word that could be endlessly questioned and thought of in silence— cast another immediately, almost with cruelty, that gave no peace.

"After this Motel a separate part of the Zone of the Reduced Ones begins. A separate Sector, as you will see. You will still find some Reduced—or too Continent—Ones there, it is true, but in them the error has found an explanation and a consciousness: it is raised in some way to the dignity of religion, because, as it will be easy for you to understand, to give greatness to one part of reality it had to agree to sacrifice that of another..."

Come on let's go..."

With fervor—with his gestures of an anguished sportsman—he got up, left the Motel behind him, set out for the highway, with its road markers, its center barrier, its sidewalks, its dividing lines, now solid now broken, painted white; its emergency stations; its elegant bridges over sordid, decrepit muddy canals.

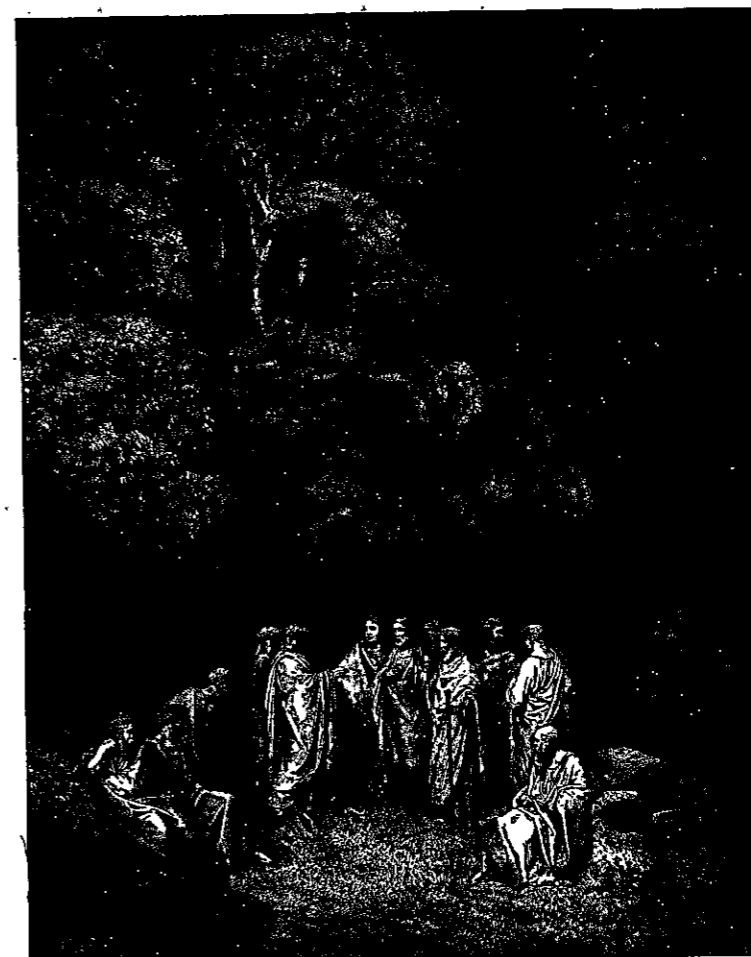
But gradually as we approached the border, with its barrier and police-like construction, the air grew darker and darker. Like a night that falls suddenly, with the quickness of a summer storm. Everything was swallowed up by the darkness, and it was done barely in time to see the sign-post: the usual I.W.I.P., followed this time by the inscription: "Autonomous Sector of the Reasoners: Irrational and Rational".

The rails were lifted in the densest darkness, by the light of sinister batteries, the Demons enclosed in their

fierce novices' silence: and we left the darting of those  
lights behind us.

At last we were walking in the solides darknes.

(1963)



*Canto 4: Homer, the Classic Poets*

3 more notes for Canto VII

1

The other stage of the sin of Normality (or Continence), after that of Conformism, is that of Vulgarly.

The meaning of this word—which is almost an initiation word among the members of the small group that commits far more terrible sins—the sins of classicality lived in the great agrarian, pastoral and commercial epochs of man—the sins of sex, violence, waste—of the Incontinence, in a word, so deeply dear to God—is perhaps defined before entering the new Sector, of the Vulgar ones, by their devious eyes, behind lowered rails with the discontented devils...

Vulgarity is the moment of full luxuriance of conformism.

2

The situation presented before our anguished eyes wasn't much different from the one we had left. In the Kingdom of shades it was naturally more difficult to grasp the differences existing between Rome and Milan. But

the green countryside and grey sky were of the North. Behind the bustling crowd, which was standing, composed and decent, a little provincial, sprinkled with laughter, was heard the great peasant ditch of the Po at low water. In similar surroundings in Rome—at a reception at the Quirinale, for example, with the dazzling afternoon light coming in through big windows—there's always something a little dirty and naked for which the heart can bleed. Not here. In fact the first characteristic of Vulgarly consists in its encroaching, its wanting to render Vulgar even one who isn't, who is a stranger to its world (Northern Italy and its industries): repressing thereby that amount of comprehension, freedom or pity in this "stranger"—poor or cultured man—needed to judge him. The Vulgar are moral. What is repellent in them is exactly everything which by law or consent includes their moralism as a solid tradition!

3

"Perhaps I myself—he said—am but a simple and conventional spokesman. It is certain, however, that my science was not born totally within the enclosure of someone with neither fear nor human respect. Someone who goes all the way to the end. I too, therefore, was a privileged first-born (a wealth of spirit or money is the same).

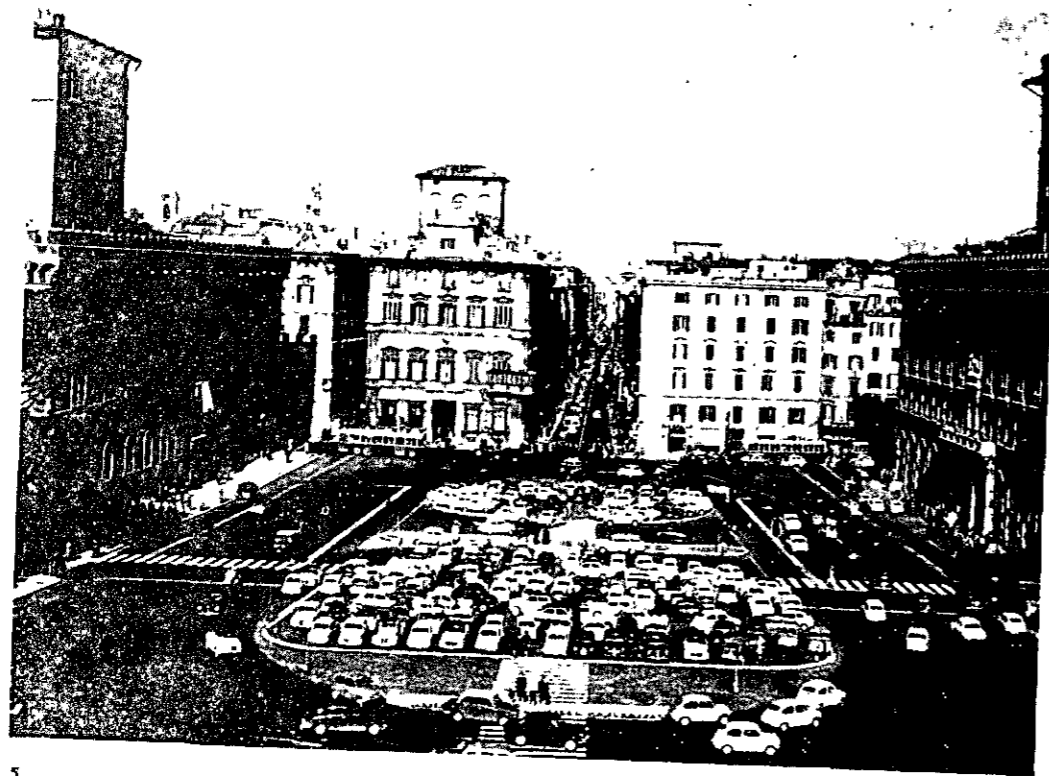
In this Hell (as in life) cynics are lacking. Nor could I have been one either. I was afraid of it. It seemed dishonorable to me. Perhaps I defended myself from cynicism just because it was a sacred antidote against the "wringing of my heart". I passed, then, like a wind behind the last walls or meadows of the city—or like a barbarian who came down to destroy, and ended by distracting himself by looking, and kissing, someone who resembled himself—before deciding to turn back.

### Faded Iconography

(for a "Photographic poem")







5

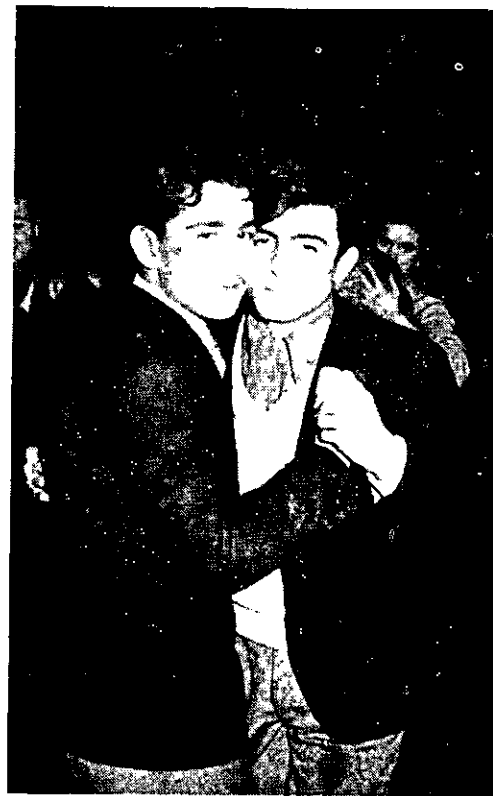


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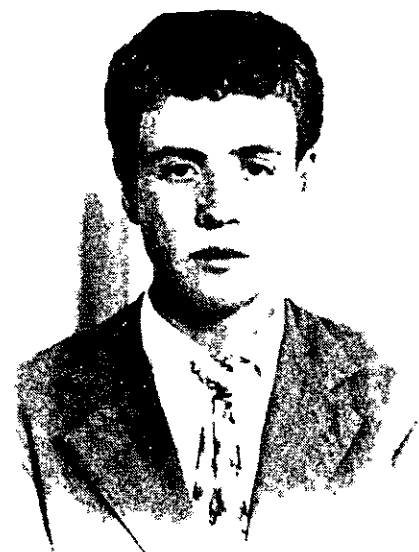
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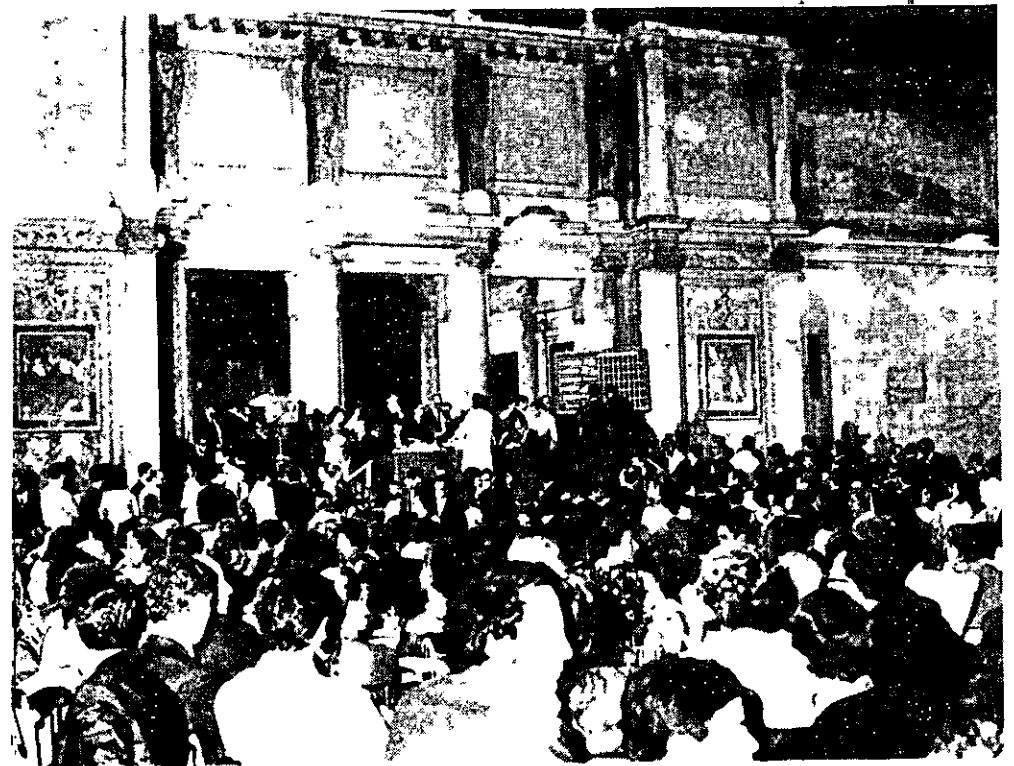
PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

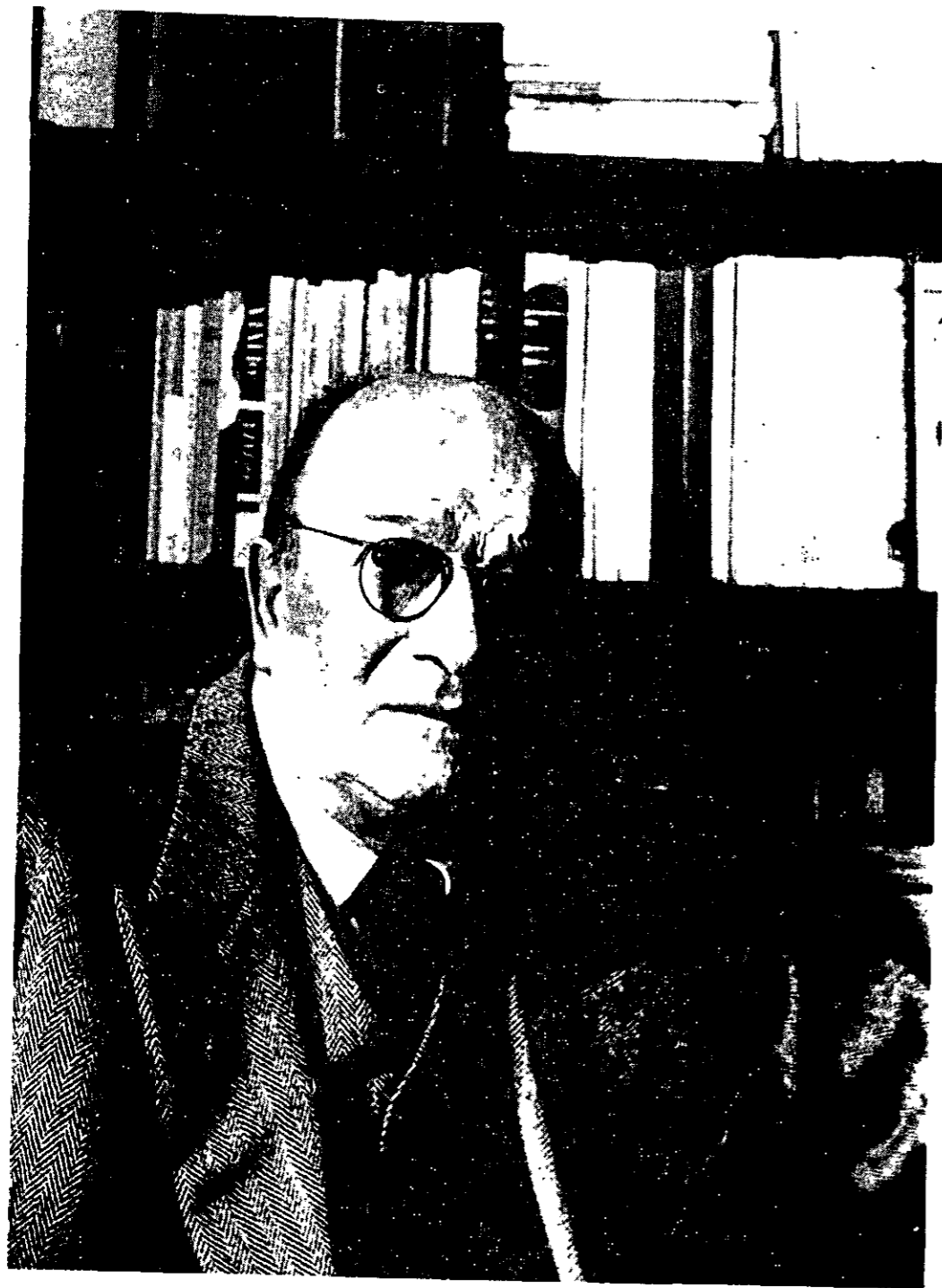
Poesia  
in forma di rosa

(1961-1964)

GARZANTI









### Faded Iconography

(for a "Photographic poem")

1. Grimaud
2. Lambrakis
- 3-4. Reggio Emilia 1960
5. Rome: anonymous crowd and cars
6. Old women
7. The author and Gadda
8. Communist rally
- 9-13. Boys, as they were at the end of the '50's
14. A group of partisans
15. Gramsci's tomb at Testaccio
16. Gianfranco Contini
17. Baptism scene (from the *Gospel*)
18. Frontispiece of *Poetry in the form of a rose*
19. Some of the "Gruppo 63"
20. Early '60's: fascists
21. At the Colonnade of Valle Giulia
22. Emilio Cecchi
23. Sandro Penna
24. Piazza della Chiesa at Casarsa
25. African landscape

Note no. 1

The book should be written in layers, each new draft should be in the form of a note, dated, so that the book is presented almost like a diary. For example, all the material written up to now should be dated (about a year, a year and a half ago): it shouldn't be eliminated by the new draft, which therefore should consist of a new additional layer or a long note. And thus through successive drafts. In the end the book should present itself as a chronological layering, a formal living process: where a new idea doesn't cancel one before it, but corrects it, or leaves it absolutely unchanged, formally preserving it as a document of the passage of thought. And because the book will be a mixture of things done and things to do—of pages refined and pages sketched out, or only planned—its temporal topography will be complete: it will have together the magmatic form and the progressive form of reality (which cancels nothing, which makes past coexist with present etc.).

November-December 1964

Note no. 2

Born of Italian as a spoken national language, based no longer on literary Italian or on instrumental dialectal Italian, as the lingua franca of commercial exchange and the first industrialization—but on Italian as spoken in the North, a lingua franca of the second industrialization (cfr. “New linguistic questions”).

“The Divine Mimesis” or “Mammon” (or “Paradise”) is presented mythically as the last written work in the non-national Italian, the Italian that keeps all diachronic stratifications of its history alive and aligned in a real contemporaneity. Therefore this Italian is spoken in Hell, in all its historical combinations: osmosis with Latin (classical and medieval), crossings of dialect-Latin, koiné-Latin, literary language Latin, technolanguage-Latin: then, dialect-koiné, literary language koiné, technolanguage-koiné; then etc. etc.—all possible crossings, according to the demands of free indirected speech of the various, socially diverse characters.

On the other hand, all views of the future—that is, the planning and construction (in progress) of the Two Paradises—the neo-capitalist and the communist—will be worded in the “supposed” new language: with its progressive sequences, its elimination of competing forms, its absolute prevalence of communicability over expressiveness, etc.

17 November 1964

For an “Editor’s note”

This is not a critical edition. I limit myself to publishing *all* that the author left. My only critical effort, a very modest one, is that of reconstructing the chronological sequence of these notations as exactly as possible. At the end of some of these the author has indicated the date: and in such cases therefore it was easy to insert them in order. But very many notes, especially the briefest ones—some of only two or three lines, nearly illegible—have no date; not only that, but they were found outside the typewritten body of the work, or in different drawers from that where the work was kept, or between the pages of books begun to read and not finished. A small pad of notes was actually found in the glove compartment of his car; and lastly, a macabre detail but also—one will agree—a moving one, a sheet of graph paper (evidently torn out of a note pad) filled with a dozen or so very uncertain lines—was found in the jacket pocket of his corpse (he died, killed by blows from a club, in Palermo last year).<sup>\*</sup> The scruple of exactness of chronological order was the only scruple I could have. I was therefore attached to it as to an anchor of salvation. Naturally I understand the reading of these fragments might be disturbed by a chronological order that is of the writing but not of sense. But I preferred rigor—any rigor—to manipulation, however honest and reasoned.

<sup>\*</sup> Pasolini's death came on a beach near Rome. (T.P.)

Inasmuch as the title is "FRAGMENTS FROM HELL" ("FRAMMENTI INFERNALI") it is only thus by a type of... necrological deduction. If the author had lived it probably would have been changed, by the placing over it of some new title. In fact the typewritten body of the work is formed by a pack of typewriter paper cut in two, and covered by five full folded sheets: on the front of the first of these sheets— which therefore is the cover—are indicated two titles, the first, typewritten, is "BARBARIC MEMORIES", but the second, hand written in big letters, is "FRAGMENTS FROM HELL". On the front of the next to last sheet, typewritten, is the title "PARADISE", and in hand written block letters, but contained in a pen-drawn circle to cancel them, the two titles "THEORY" and "THE DIVINE THEORY"; on the third to the last page there is, typewritten, the title "THE DIVINE REALITY", with a date, 1963, followed by a hyphen, as to leave suspended but rather near the date of the end of the draft. On the fourth to the last page is read the title "THE DIVINE MIMESIS"—with the date 1963 below it, followed by the same hyphen—which is evidently the first title, and so it must have remained for a long time, because it was already that of the fifth to the last sheet, the most faded one of all.

# A short extravagant allegation\*

*The whole scandal of the book regards a single, "memorable" occasion: the relationship between Contini and Gramsci. The reader should keep in mind that the note on Gramsci, in this volume that is defined—just so, scandalously—as a history of 19th and 20th century Italian literature—takes place according to the sequence: Giovanni Gentile, Roberto Longhi, Antonio Gramsci (a sequence in which are grouped together, almost without connection, De Lolliis and other university critics, Alfredo Gargiulo and G. A. Borgeese). But they are the three. Contini is very easy on Gentile (he praises him, curiously, in a kind of determined pamphlet "outside the work", for scholastic reform; he regards with a detached eye the asymmetrical, self-destructive adherence to fascism almost of a Sicilian "man of honor", and in the end—according to that extremely rigorous assumption of meekness, which, as we shall see, wants to characterize the book—supports himself on his own perfectly impartial behalf); it is useless then to tell, as regards Longhi, of his testimony of infinite love: but this love too, one must add, is objectified, restrained, almost stuffed in. And then the third one, what about Gramsci? Well, the argument doesn't change: here too, as with Gentile's fascism, Marxism is kept at a proper distance according to the laws of "meekness" which I pointed out; and here too his admiration respects the stylistic conveniences of an undramatizing professional "humour" (he concludes there, for example, that Gramsci's ideas in the beginning had "a very*

\* This is an excerpt from a note to *Italian Literature: the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* by Gianfranco Contini.

uneable heuristic significance" and still retain "the value of a very stimulating point of view"). Nevertheless, what is astonishingly true becomes clear, that is, that the only Italian critic whose problems were the literary problems of Gramsci is Contini! "Scandal for the Jews, stupidity for the Gentiles", then. Still I don't want to "reverse" the scandal to a totally positive sense. Reasonableness requires that I know and make known that the treatment of all Gramscian problems by Contini occurs in a universe that is parallel but remote, though just as potently suggestive ("stimulating"), and that great strength of spirit is needed to presuppose in them a possible integrability.

(1974)

The following poems—1951, (1951); *Friulian Paintings*, (1957); and *Plan of Future Works*, (1963)—suggest the breadth of Pasolini's poetic endeavour, and trace the path of its evolution. They were not part of the original volume, but will provide support material to the text projected and outlined in the last poem: *THE DIVINE MIMESIS*.

1951

The old crickets erupt  
in my ears, still, in the Aniene's new fields  
and scream to me in silence  
my unheard solitude.  
Disappeared inside this old calm  
countryside, not mine,  
I go home, and below distant points  
of lights in the suburbs, crickets  
breathe a song that again covers  
remorse with melancholy  
and terror with monotony.

Over a common and deep song  
of crickets, whistles of unknown  
boys, and their pure voices  
burn away in an instant  
all that is left of my anxiety, my hearing.

I feel a consuming, inside me, of death,  
if, pure, hot, intact, like  
a tempo, I barely notice the feint  
beating in my breast (where the weeping  
is soft, like the dampness on the  
Aniene's deaf fields), listening  
again to those crickets, those pure inflexions  
of voices, a frenetic, limpid  
rustling that in surviving, condemns me.

The more strained the cricket's cry  
lost for decades in disheartened  
callings, all the more strained  
in abandon is my breast.

Life unheard in my breast  
alone as in space, where the old song  
though, rattles in recrimination.

\* \*

Moon lit up by viscera  
of sky wounds me with mute  
light; but if reproach falls  
mute from the sky, the cricket  
stirred up again by new, unimagined night  
in the grasses of the Aniene,  
with its brief rattle,  
reaches the deaf, submissive heart.

Rain has painted the earth around  
the Aniene. Almost a voice  
from the restless clear sky, a boy  
between walls of lime and bricks  
scrapes an iron wire over a sorry  
old lid. The periphery vibrates  
confused with distant trucks, and  
my vain day ends: vain, in  
sad burning twilight, the cicadas  
sing in silence.

---

The Aniene (or Teverone) is the source and major tributary of the Tiber.

The horizon is painted deep blue  
of a southern sea, at this extreme  
hour,  
deep blue like the sea at midday,  
horizon in the faded twilight,  
with the deep blue of a sunny sea  
the horizon is carved in green beyond  
deep blue fields against the sky,  
in orchards, amid piles of wet  
stones, between light colored walls  
barely raised,  
the summer air is painted deep blue  
with the violence of a southern sea.

A furious moon showers light  
over unplowed clods,  
dry stakes. The madder,  
the calmer my step carries me  
towards anguishes once pure.

An early night rain perfumes  
the sleepless bliss of existence.

The last gesture of courage (now  
that courage is pure desperation,  
at being unloved because I do not love,  
no longer indifference but abandon)  
is to not continue. The death  
desired in the pain of the senses,  
in sin, is now desired in the pain  
of impotent reason. To die  
today means leaving nothing behind.

QUADRI FRIULIANI

Senza cappotto, nell'aria di gelsomino  
mi perdo nella passeggiata serale,  
respirando — avido e prostrato, fino

a non esistere, a essere febbre nell'aria,  
la pioggia che germoglia e il sereno  
che incombe arido su asfalti, fanali

cantieri, mandrie di grattacieli, piene  
di sterri e di fabbriche, incrostati  
di buio e di miseria...

Sordido fango indurito, pesto, e rasento  
tuguri recenti e decrepiti, ai limiti  
di calde aree erbose... Spesso l'esperienza

espande intorno più allegria, più vita,  
che l'innocenza: ma questo muto vento  
risale dalla regione aprica

FRIULIAN PAINTINGS

Without a coat, in the jasmine air  
I lose myself on the evening walk,  
breathing—avid and prostrate, weary

beyond existence, being a fever in the air  
the rain that germinates and the clear sky  
hanging dry over asphalt, street lamps,

shipyards, flocks of skyscrapers, full  
of excavations and factories, encrusted  
in darkness and misery...

I tread on sordid hardened mud, near  
newly built decrepit hovels, at the edges  
of hot grassy airs... Often experience

expands more around joy and life  
than does innocence: but this silent wind  
rises from the sunny region

dell'innocenza... L'odore precoce è stento  
di primavera che spande, scioglie  
ogni difesa nel cuore che ho redento

con la sola chiarezza: antiche voglie,  
smanie, sperdute tenerezze, riconosco  
in questo smosso mondo di foglie

\*

Le foglie dei sambuchi, che sulle rogge  
sbucano dai caldi e tondi rami,  
tra le reti sanguigne, tra le logge

giallognole e ranciate dei friuliani  
venchi, allineati in spoglie prospettive  
contro gli spogli crinali montani,

o in dolci curve lungo le festive  
chine delle prodaie... Le foglie  
dei ragnati pioppi senza un brivido

ammassati in silenziose folle  
in fondo ai deserti campi di medica;  
le foglie degli umili alni, lungo le zolle

of innocence... The premature and wanting  
odor of spring that expands, loosens  
every defense of the heart I have redeemed

by the sole clarity: ancient desires  
manias, lost tendernesses, I recognize  
in this overturned world of leaves.

\*

Elder leaves, over ditches  
bud from warm, round branches,  
between sanguine nets, faded yellow

and orange terraces of the Friulian  
dwellings, lined up in bare perspectives  
against the bare crests of mountains,

or in soft curves along festive  
inclines of riverbanks... Motionless  
leaves of cobwebbed poplars

massed in silent crowds  
beyond the deserted fields of medica  
leaves of humble alders, by worn out

spente dove le ardenti piancine lievita  
il frumento con tremolii già lieti;  
le foglie della dolcetta che copre tiepida

l'argine sugli arazzi d'oro dei vigneti.

\*

Ti ricordi di quella sera a Ruda?  
Quel nostro darsi, insieme, a un gioco  
di pura passione, misura della nostra cruda

gioventù, del nostro cuore ancora poco  
più che puerile? Era una lotta  
bruciante di se stessa, ma il suo fuoco

si spandeva oltre noi; la notte,  
ricordi?, ne era tutta piena nel fresco  
vuoto, nelle strade persorse da frotte

di braccianti vestiti a festa,  
di ragazzi venuti in bicicletta  
dai borghi vicini: e la mesta

quotidiana, cristiana, piazzetta  
ne fiottava come in una sagra.

clods of turf where small burning wheat  
plants still rise up in joyous trembling;  
grape leaves that tepidly cover

the embankment over the vineyards' golden tapestry.

\*

Do you remember that evening in Ruda?  
That giving of ourselves, together, to a game  
of pure passion, measure of our raw

youth, our hearts still little more  
than puerile? By itself it was  
a burning struggle, but its fire

spread beyond us; the night,  
do you remember?, it was full of it in the  
clear void, groups of workers on the streets

dressed to celebrate,  
children come in from nearby  
neighbourhoods on bicycle: and the daily

measure and yield, Christian, the piazzetta  
overflowing as on a feast day.

Noi, non popolani, nella stretta

del popolo contadino, della magra  
folla paesana, amati quanto  
ci ardeva l'amare, feriti dall'agra

notte ch'era loro, del loro stanco  
ritorno dai campi nell'odore  
di fuoco delle cene... uno a fianco

all'altro gridavamo le parole  
che, quasi incomprese, erano promessa  
sicura, espresso, rivelato amore.

E poi le canzoni, i poveri bicchieri  
di vino sui tavoli dentro la buia  
osteria, le chiare faccie dei festeggeri

intorno a noi, i loro certi occhi sui  
nostri incerti, le scorate armoniche  
e la bella bandiera nell'angolo più

in luce dell'umido stanzone.

\*

We, not of the people, in the strict

sense of the peasant people, the skinny  
country folk, loved as much  
as love made us burn, wounded by the bitter

Elder leaves, it was their night, their tired  
return from the fields in the smell  
of dinnertime fires... next to each other

we shouted words that,  
almost misunderstood, were the sure  
expressed promise of love revealed.

And then the songs, the poor glasses  
of wine on the tables in the dark  
tavern, the clear faces of those feasting

around us, their certain eyes fixed on  
our uncertain ones, the heartless  
harmonicas and the beautiful flag in the

most lit corner of the large damp room.

\*

Ora, lontano, diverso, nel vento quasi  
non terrestre che smuovendo l'aria  
impura, trae vita da una stasi

mortale delle cose, rivedo i casali,  
i campi, la piazzetta di Ruda;  
su, le bianche alpi, e giù, lungo i canali,

tra campi di granoturco e vigne, l'umida  
luce del mare. Ah, il filo misterioso  
si dipana ancora: e in esso, nuda,

la realtà—l'irreale Qualcosa  
che faceva eterna quella sera.  
L'aria tumefatta e festosa

dei tuoi primi quadri, dov'era  
il verde un verde quasi di bambino  
e il giallo un'indurita cera

di molle Espressionista, e le chine  
spigolatrici, spettri del caldo sesso  
adolescente—brulicava al confine

do quel luogo segreto, dove oppresso  
da un sole eternamente arancio,

Now, far away, different, in the almost unearthly  
wind which moving the impure air, brings life  
from a mortal stasis

of things, I again see the villages,  
the fields, the piazzetta at Ruda;  
above, the white Alps, and down below,

along the canals, between corn fields and vineyards  
the damp light of the sea. Ah, the mysterious  
thread still unravels: and in it, naked,

reality—the unreal Something  
that made that evening eternal.  
Swollen and festive air

of your first paintings, where green was  
almost a baby's green  
and yellow a hardened wax

of Expressionist softness, the reapers  
swooping down, ghosts of hot adolescent  
sex—swarmed on the border

of that secret place, where oppressed  
by an eternally orange sun,

dolcissimo è il meriggio estivo, e in esso

arde una crosta di profumi, un glauco  
afrore d'erbe, di sterco, che il vento  
rimescola...

Tu lo sai quel luogo; quel Friuli  
che solo il vento tocca, ch'è un profumo!  
Da esso scende sopra i tuoi oscuri

suonatori di flauto, il dolce grumo  
dei neri e dei violetti, e si espande  
da esso iridescente il bitume

sui tuoi Cristi inchiodati tra falde  
di luce franata dai transetti d'Aquileia,  
e reduci da esso, nelle calde

sere riverberanti della Bassa o nei  
bianchi mattini gelati nei canali,  
vanno i tuoi pescatori verdi di veglie,

a cui arrossa le rozze rughe il sale,  
o giovanili nereggiano i braccianti  
sulle scarpate del traghetto serale,

the summer noon so sweet, and in it

burns a crust of perfumes, a sea-green  
odor of grasses, of dung, that the wind  
stirs up...

You know that place, that Friuli  
that only the wind touches, a perfume!  
From it, over your dark flautists,

descends the sweet clump  
of blacks and violets, and coal  
is spread iridescent over your

Christs nailed between strata of light  
filtered down from Aquilean transepts,  
and his survivors, in the warm

reverberating evenings of Bassa or  
white mornings in frozen canals,  
your fishermen go to green vigils,

their coarse wrinkles reddened by salt,  
or young laborers in a blackened mass  
on the docks of the evening ferry,

appoggiati ai manubri, stanchi,  
bruciati, mentre la notte già s'annuncia  
nel triste borgo con le luci e i canti.

\*

E il vento, da Grado o da Trieste  
o dai magredi sotto le Prealpi,  
soffia e rapisce dalle meste

voci delle cene, qualche palpito  
più puro, o nel brusio delle paludi  
qualche più sgomento grido, o qualche

più oscuro senso di freschezza nell'umido  
deserto degli arativi, dei canneti,  
delle boschine intorno ai resultumi...

Sono sapori di quel mondo quieto  
e sgomento, ingenuamente perso  
in una sola estate, in un solo vecchio

inverno—che in questo mondo diverso  
spande infido il vento. Ah quando  
un tempo confuso si rifà terso

leaning over the rails, tired,  
burned, already night is signalled  
in the sad village, by lights and songs.

\*

And the wind, from Grado or Trieste  
blows from the marshes in the Alps  
foothills and ravages the sad

voices at dinner, a purer  
throbbing, or in the buzz of the swamps  
a sadder cry, or a

darker sense of freshness in the wet  
desert of arable lands, of reed thickets,  
of woods around swamps.

They are tastes of that quiet and  
saddened world, ingenuously lost  
in a single summer, in a single old

winter—which is spread in this different  
world by an untrustworthy wind. Ah when  
a confused time is made clear again

nella memoria, nel vero tempo che sbanda  
per qualche istante, che sapore di morte...  
Non ne stupisco, se a questi istanti

di disfatta e di veggenza, mi portano  
anni consumati in una chiarezza  
che non muta il mondo, ma lo ascolta

nella sua vita, con inattiva ebbrezza...

\*

Felice te, a cui il vento primaverile  
sa di vita; se hai scelto un'unica vita  
e, insieme più adulto e giovanile

del tuo amico, sordo all'infinita  
stagione di cui così imbevuto vivi,  
sordo al Qualcosa che ti invita

a ritornare ai tristi, ai sorgivi  
sogni dell'esistenza—alla coscienza  
squisita che svela il mondo in brividi

non umani—credi nel mondo senza  
altra misura che l'umana storia:

in memory, in the true time that disperses  
for a few moments, that taste of death...  
It doesn't surprise me, if in these moments

of undoing and of second-sight, I am carried  
by years gone by to a clarity  
that doesn't change the world, but listens to it

in its life, in an idle intoxication...

\*

Happy you, for whom the spring wind  
knows of life; if you have chosen a single life  
and, at once more adult and youthful

than your friend, deaf to the infinite  
season in which you live so imbued  
deaf to the Something that invites you

to return to the sad, fountainous  
dreams of existence—to the exquisite  
knowledge that veils the world in unhuman

shudders—you believe in the world without  
any measure but human history:

nei colori in cui fiammeggia la presenza  
di un Friuli espresso in speranze e dolori  
d'uomini interi, se pur fatti da orale  
rozza esperienza uomini, se pur con cuori  
duri come le mani, e spinti a non parlare  
altra lingua che il troppo vivo dialetto,  
persi in albe e vespri a lavorare  
la loro vigna, il loro campetto,  
quasi non fosse loro, a festeggiare  
le lucenti domeniche col petto  
pieno del buio delle vecchie campane.

\*

E quale forza nel voler mutare  
il mondo—questo mondo perduto  
in malinconie, in allegrie pasquali,  
giocondamente vivo anche se muto!  
Quale forza nel vederne le sere  
e i mattini, chiusi nel rustico

in the colors which inflame the presence  
of a Friuli expressed in hopes and pains  
of whole men, even if made men  
by rude oral experience, with hearts  
hard as their hands, forced not to speak  
any language but the too alive dialect,  
lost in dawns and twilights working  
their vineyard, their little field,  
almost not theirs, to celebrate  
on radiant Sundays with breasts  
full of the darkness of the old bells.

\*

And what force in wanting to change  
the world—this world lost  
in melancholy, in joyous Easters,  
joyously alive even if silent!  
What strength in seeing in its evenings  
and mornings, enclosed in the rustic

lume, quasi sere e mattini di ère  
future, ardenti più di fede che d'affetto!  
È floridezza e gioia, questo volere

violentemente essere espresso  
che, in roventi vampe d'evidenza,  
gonfia di spazio ogni umile oggetto.

Ne avvampano le incolori biciclette  
di Cervignano, ammassate ai posteggi  
delle sagre, lungo i poveri muretti

scottati dal sole, o ai tarlati ormeggi  
dei traghetti sui turchini canali;  
ne avvampano le camicie di tela, i greggi

calzoni degli allegri manovali  
di Snia Viscosa, a file sugli asfalti  
dello stradone...

E il polverone del sole e della pula  
che ammassa e sfregola arancio e giallo  
in un cantone perso nell'arsura

tra smunti salici, come in un ballo  
domenicale, confinato sulle rive

lamp, almost the evenings and mornings of  
future eras, burning more with faith than feeling!  
It is prosperity and joy, this violent

desire to be expressed  
which, in red-hot flames of evidence,  
inflates every humble object with space.

The colorless bicycles of Cervignano  
flare up, parked in groups at the  
festivals, along the poor little walls

baked by the sun, or the worm-eaten moorings  
of the ferries on the deep blue canals;  
the linen shirts flare up there, the unbleached

trousers of the joyful laborers  
from Snia Viscosa, lined up on the asphalt  
highway...

And the cloud of dust of sun and chaff  
that gathers and sizzles orange and yellow  
in a corner lost in the sultriness

between emaciated willows, as in a Sunday  
dance, lining the banks

del Tagliamento, o tra le arse valli

delle bonifiche, o sulle risorgive  
latee di magri fusti: dove assordante  
la trebbia scuote col massiccio brivido

tettoie e stalle, in un ringhio osannante,  
impastato di luce, di sudore umano,  
del puzzo del vecchio e innocente branco

dei cavalli ammassati in un fulgore di rame...  
L'amore di Ruda, gridato dal rosso  
palco di povere casse, rimane

puro nella tua vita. E chi, scosso  
dalla paura di non essere abbastanza puro,  
aspira nel vento di primavera lo smosso

sapore della morte, invidia il tuo sicuro  
espanderti nei solenni, festanti colori  
dell'allegria presente, del sereno futuro.

(1955)

from *Le Ceneri di Gramsci (Gramsci's Ashes)* [Garzanti, 1957].

of the Tagliamento, or between burnt valleys

of reclaimed land, or in sap springing  
from slender trunks: where the deafening  
thresher shakes sheds and barns with

a massive shudder, in a snarl of hosannas,  
full of light, of human sweat,  
of the stink of the old and innocent herd

of horses grouped together in a glimmer of branches...  
The love at Ruda, screamed from the  
red stage of poor money-boxes, remains

pure in your life. And one, shaken  
by the fear of not being pure enough,  
aspires in the spring wind for the moving

taste of death, envies your sure  
expansion in the solemn, festive colors  
of the present joy, of the serene future.

(1955)

## PLAN OF FUTURE WORKS

Even today, in the melancholy physicality  
in which the nation busily forms a Government,  
and the Center-Left causes fragile linguists'

normative organs to bleed—winter  
bathes distant things in a dark light  
and barely lights the neighbourhoods, mauve and green

an exterior lost in the depth of the ages of Italy...  
with Piero's blue earth gushing out of unspeakable  
clear blues of Languedoc... if not of Sicilian

bluenesses of Origins... that here, in the raw  
appendices of the exquisite Centers, are green and mauve,  
mud and sky, lemons and roses... eyes of Federicos

with half its heart in search of rocky almond trees where  
the Arabian light falls, the other half in some valley  
pearled with fog: the Alps in the distance, insanely new...

I go mad! My entire life I have tried  
to express this dismay at Remembrance  
—which I already felt as a baby, on the Tagliamento,

or the Po, closer to the matrices—the circle  
of my isoglots—deaf, by habit  
to any private, infantile, uncertain

pre-expressivity, where the heart is naked.  
But I—trusting that before dying my thousand  
attempts might bear something to the judges—

in the age in which Italian is about to die  
lost in Anglo-saxon or Russian,  
return, naked, yes, and mad, to green April,

to the green April of the illustrious language  
(that never was, it never was!), high-Italian...  
to the Franco-Venetian *Verderbnis*, the pomp

of stocky populations in distant locales...  
to green April—with the modernity of  
Israel like an ulcer in the soul—

where I, a Jew, offended by piety  
find again an apprentice's cruel freshness,

in the developments of the other (funereal) half

of life... I become a Catholic again, a nationalist,  
Romanesque; in my researches for "BLASPHEMY"  
or "THE DIVINE MIMESIS"—and, ah mystical

philology! in the days of the wine harvest  
I am joyous as one sewing seeds,  
fervently working with mixtures of incompatible

materials, magmas without an amalgam, when  
life is an April lemon or rose.  
*Shit!* To try and explain matters

of language without inferring  
political concomitances! linguistic  
unity without reasons of vile

interests, without the insensibility  
of a class that could care less about choosing  
a literary jargon! Professors of cacca,

neo or paleo patriots, prickheads  
with so much science, who from the 12th to 14th  
Century see only heads functioning

with other heads... Enough: blind love  
of mine! I will train you in translinguistic  
researches, and oppose a text with a Veto,

and three texts with three Saints, and a literary  
circle with kitchen traditions, border disputes:  
and in the year of the discovery of an homologous

text, from amanuenses of the Paduan language,  
by whatever stupidity or vanity, I will research  
what the painters did, from farm to farm

in the sublime-green light of the lands of the Po...  
but especially what the ruling class  
wanted: something, I don't know what.

I will put next to it a monstrous work, coeval  
with the Anti-works, lettered number 22, in the new style,  
an old figurativity in the flanks of the new siege.

But delusion is needed. Only a noble broth  
of mixed inspirations demystifies,  
if chaos miraculously arrives at

a plastic clarity, let us say, of Romanesque  
griffins—haunches, necks, backs

swollen up like bread, of grey stone that codifies

plain Reality. Be quiet, be quiet,  
any voice of Officialdom, whichever you are.  
One must delude. Jump on coals

like ridiculous roasted martyrs: the way  
of Truth also passes through the most horrendous  
places of aestheticism, of hysteria,

of mad erudite redoings. Splendid,  
for reasons other than romantic-nationalistic,  
days of the first sales,

the first contracts! If I still have enough heart  
I will also write a "PASSIONAL HISTORY  
OF ITALIAN POETRY", after which an as yet empty

"DEATH OF POETRY" (though for me, full of  
youthful glory, it is still April,  
I am full of lemons and roses...) In that "HISTORY"

(written in octaves, for irony) "I will despise and terrify"  
every preceding systematization, and, under the primary sign  
of Marx, and that, following,

of Freud, I will re-establish new hierarchies in the Reign  
of poetic loves: and with my humble talent  
will oppose literary existence with

the notion of the Existing Unexpressed, without  
which every thing is a mystery:  
so that there never was, even recently, a clear

consciousness of the classes that divide the world,  
stylistic mastery was always commanded by what  
it could not say (or know): but it was there.

A dialectical game sunken in the deep, oh  
yes!, to reconstruct stileme by stileme,  
because in every word written in the Bel Paese where the No

sounds, opposed to style was that unpossessed  
Sema, the language of a people  
still having to be a class, a problem

known and resolved only in dreams. Hoarse  
from long silence I will then burn in "ANOTHER MONOLOGUE"  
impotent rage against the crazy tombed

world of Dallas, with a flight  
of two verses for Kennedy, and a rhymed chorus

of seventy times seventy (thousand) verses, for Chorus

and Orchestra, with seventy thousand violins and a loudspeaker,  
(a record of Bach), "BRECHTIAN QUOTATION"  
OR "SONGS OF DESECRATION", which would be polylinguistic

molasses or monolithic tangle: in which will seem vain  
ALL OF HISTORY AS THE WORK OF CRAZY MEN.  
ADOLFA GIUSEPPA CRAZY CRAZY THE AMERICAN ELITE

IDEOLOGY CRAZY CRAZY THE CHURCHES  
CRAZY THE CHAMPIONS OF IDEOLOGIES AND CHURCHES  
WHO BLACKMAIL THE GOOD STUPID NORMAL CRAZIES

REVOLUTIONARIES FULL OF BOURGEOIS MODERATION  
WHO SIMPLY CONTINUE TO BE DEPOSITARIES  
OF THE MORALISTIC BLACKMAIL OF MAN. Having

lit, then, these expressionistic candles at the altars  
of Sex, I will return to Religion.  
And will write for dauntless Moravia, a "PASOLINARIA

ON THE WAYS TO BE A POET", with the relation  
between sign and thing—and finally  
will reveal my true passion.

Which is frantic (or not chosen) (or dying) life  
—and therefore, again, poetry:  
*neither the sign or the existing thing matter,*

there it is. If man were a Monotype in the Subtopia  
of a world no longer having linguistic capitals,  
and the word's every means of hearing and telling

thus disappeared, mystic ties would still  
bind him to things, and what things  
are, no longer fixed in sad

contexts, the word would always be new, overflowing  
with joyous pragmatic truths—no more instrumentality,  
a toil translated into lemons, into roses...

but forever and alone, light, as is the reality  
of things when they are in memory  
on the verge of being named, and still

full of their physical glory.  
If then I should find I had cancer, and die,  
I would consider it a victory

for that reality of things. Filial pity for the world  
gone, what sense is there in still going on?

Ah, to stand no longer in the taste of salt  
of the world of others (petty-bourgeois, literary)  
with a whiskey glass in hand and a face of shit,  
—which it would only displease me not to represent  
exactly as it is—before man is lost for me  
in “THE DIVINE MIMESIS”, a work, if there ever was one,  
to do, and, by my agony, so green,  
so green, of the green of a time, of *my youth*,  
in the faded old world of my soul...  
But no, but no, it is April, I am  
fresher than a lad in love  
for the first time... I will quickly set down, in epistolary  
tone, with glosses and parentheses, a storm  
of “significant motifs”, “etceteras”, coats of arms,  
quotations, and especially allusions  
(infinitely self-exhortative, and disproportions  
of particulars before the whole), the  
first parodistic *terzina* become a magmatic page  
of Canto I, hurrying to complete the first half of it

there in the archaic, bombastic Hell  
(romanesque, like the center of our cities  
by now forever sold out to the suburbs)

a passage on the Hell of the neocapitalist  
age is inserted, for new types  
of sins (excesses of Rationality

and Irrationality) integrated with the old ones.  
And there you will see, in an edifice of delicious cement,  
recognizing friends and enemies there,

under the directional signs of the “INCREMENTAL WORK  
OF INFERNAL PUNISHMENTS”, A: THE OVER-CONTINENT: C  
(Bellonci’s drawing room), the Vulgar (a reception

at the Quirinale Palace), Cynics (a meeting of journalists  
from the Corriere della Sera and such): and then:  
the Weak, the Ambiguous, the Fearful (these ones individualists,

in their homes); B: THE INCONTINENT, ZONE ONE:  
excess of Rigor (bourgeois socialists, little  
moderates who believe themselves to be little heroes,

just by the heroic choice of a good flag), excess  
of Remorse (Soldati, Piovene); excess of Servility

(infinite masses unregistered, unnamed, unsexed):

ZONE TWO: Reasoners (Landolfi) people seated  
alone in their toilets; the Irrational  
(the entire international avant-garde which goes

from the Endoliterary [De Gaulle] to the  
Teutonic or Italic vestals of Pound;  
the Rational (Moravia, rare bird, and his

wings of a neo-gothic Commitment)  
Oh, blindness of love!  
I saw it on two humble cheeks,

in two puppy eyes: it was love,  
because a smile, it was a baby girl  
who ran in her heart to the sun—

in the blindness of her love—straight, and poor,  
with a little raggedy dress,  
under an enormous aqueduct, on a muddy

bank, between tarred shacks,  
—that ran, the baby girl, in the heart  
of the sun, straight, with her pupils drawn

by the blindness of a single, humble love,  
towards another baby creature  
who ran toward her, in the sun

of the shacks where she was mother, she—shabby  
in her coat of rags,  
and she ran, a creature towards a little creature,

with her smile accomplice, moved together  
with the other by a same love.  
They ran one toward the other with eyes connected

by that simultaneous smile in the sun.

Oh Marx—all is gold—oh Freud—all  
is love—oh Proust—all is memory—  
oh Einstein—all is the end—oh Chaplin—all

is man—oh Kafka—all is terror—  
oh population of my brothers and sisters—  
oh country—oh for what insures identity—

oh peace that allows for wild sorrow—  
oh brand of infancy! Oh destiny of gold  
constructed on eros and on death, like

a distraction—and its thousand pretexts  
laughter, philosophy! To have illusions (love)  
makes a difference, but in a consecrated circle

of irreplaceable texts. I return in my heart to Israel,  
suffering for her sons-brothers the nostalgia  
for romance Europe, provençal, its splendour

slightly faded but full of atrocious poetry  
of bourgeois capitals on rivers or seas...  
Negative standard of love. The true way

for one who would be in delusion. Which equalizes  
everybody, like the dead:  
but places again in discussion the sacred

texts of the circles. Ergo, waiting for a new Great Jew  
to bring a new ALL IS  
—to which the de-whored world would turn—

we must delude, in our little... Ha!  
we must abandon our fine little place in the sun  
(and you Jews should abandon Israel!

because the blindness of love  
reduces inventions to institutions,

to re-invent them then only with the heart;

and indeed nations combine in the conspiracy  
of silence of a mother and daughter in the sun  
—persecuting, right? oppositions...)

As for me, I too tend toward such a love (rage),  
the religion of an elegiac son,  
who wants at all costs to honor himself.

Nor is it exhausted in the thicket  
of life past and to come: it wants  
to reduce everything to its order of a lily.

Enough, you have to laugh. Oh dark  
twistings that lead to a "destiny of opposition"!  
But there is no other alternative for my future works.

"PURE OPPOSITION", "POPE JOHN", OR "THE PASSION  
(OR ARCHIVES) OF THE SIXTIES", may it be  
the organ where I deposit, in a semi-private

vision, such future works of mine, it seems  
a path without alternatives, for me or for  
the writings of the inexperienced ones deputed into

a commitment—a small group that wants to know: almost  
for the choice of *seme*, seeds. The opposition of one who  
can't *be loved by anyone, and no one can love*, and who

therefore places his love like a pre-established  
no, the exercise of political duty  
like the exercise of reason.

In the end, ah I know it,

never, in my poorly reduced passion,  
never was I such a corpse as now  
taking my *tabulae presentiae* in hand—

if our reality is real—  
panting behind destinies of structures,  
—by delay, by delay, by the deadly

procrastination of a previous epoch—  
or sorrowfully anticipating the end  
of the world like an impossible cessation—

I assert a destructive need  
for allied minorities. Come back, Jews,  
to the dawns of this Prehistory,

which smiles on the majority like Reality:

the loss of humanity and cultural reconstitution  
of the new man—say the connoisseurs.

And in fact this is the gist of it:  
in the atmosphere of a small nation,  
in this case, Italy—one is faced

with a false dilemma between Revolution and  
an Entity called the Left-Center—with the  
blushes of Linguists... The new course of reality

is thus admitted and accepted. Come back,  
Jews, to contradict it, with the four  
cats that have finally clarified

their destiny: Power goes toward  
the future, and Opposition follows it, in a triumphant  
action, power within power.

For he who is a crucifix for his tormenting rationality,  
wasted by puritanism, all that makes sense  
is an aristocratic, and yes, unpopular opposition.

The Revolution is no more than a feeling.

(November-December 1963)