



Ghosts of Solitude: Guido Gozzano, Reader of Petrarch. An Episode of the Twentieth-century Reception of *Rvf* 35

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Abstract: The essay offers a comparative analysis of Guido Gozzano's poem "Un'altra risorta," from the collection *I colloqui* (1911), and the Petrarchan sonnet "Solo e pensoso" (*Rvf* 35), of which Gozzano gives a modern and partially ironic rewriting. Sonnet 35, together with a constellation of elements drawn from other poems from the *Canzoniere* concerning the theme of love surviving the loss of beauty and the passing of time, gives to the modern poet the thematic and lexical frame to describe his condition of sceptical, disillusioned lover. Gozzano's poetry represents in this sense a significant episode of twentieth-century Petrarchism and the critical and problematic relationship of contemporary poetry with the language of literary tradition.

To do justice to the transformations that affect the various forms of literary language during the avant-garde period in the early twentieth century, to this day it is difficult to find a general formula more effective and appealing than that identified by Harold Rosenberg, "tradition of the new" ("tradizione del nuovo") (223-24). The dynamic contrast implied by a definition that describes the deconstruction and resemanticization of languages in the context of a comprehensive de-definition of art is well able to suggest the dual movement that we find in the evolution of twentieth-century poetry, from taxonomic maps of operative principles to "repertoires of re-usable tools" (Asor Rosa 213), tools we can reuse precisely because of their patent distance from and dissimilarity to their original context.

Inside observers early on focused their attention on this process of dismantling and reassembling these poetic codes, in which the normativity of a tradition identifiable as unified fails to appear. This is the case of Renato Serra, a man of letters of piercing critical acuity who lived in the early 1900s in Italy, a context that was only partly provincial and belated. Serra writes in the form of a chronicle, to all appearances disengaged, that seems to record the voices, faces, and works of "writing" Italy without aiming at either univocal syntheses or judgments. He traces a memorable portrait of a generation that looks back with a kind of "admiration affirmed and curiosity satisfied," thus bearing on its shoulders, in an atmosphere of inventory if not quite of liquidation, a "light" or non-coercive legacy (Serra 379).

The "lack of features typical of a 'school,' of imitations, of similarities," which complicates the formulation of judgments and the very possibility of sketching "an overall portrait," is born of a free, almost anarchical, "light" relationship to the normative poetics of tradition, with regard to which the critic, despite the abundance of "verse," has difficulty identifying authentic experiences of "poetry." Within a literary scene dominated by an

overabundance of ephemeral and dissipated literature transformed into a commodity that is read “and, what’s more, bought” (366)—and thus does not assuage the distrust of a critic in search of a difficult modern “classicism”—it is thus no accident that Serra sensed a unique authenticity of tone, a voice of true poetry, in the work of Guido Gozzano (1883-1916). Serra sees Gozzano as a real poet (setting aside a pretense which strikes him as little more than a pose, a limp and languid display of “ostentatious simplicity” and “refusal of literariness”), a poet in whom he perceives a “capable and subtle virtuoso of verbal effects,” a real “artist,” one of those “for whom words exist before everything else.”

What Serra perceives in Gozzano is the refined and profoundly literary nature of the poetic word, a word which achieves, refracted in different tones, the subversive imitation of the Italian lyric tradition—no mere prosaic reduction, but an ironic doubling in which high and low, trivial and sublime gain meaning from the unexpected juxtaposition with the voices of the *auctores*. Modest simplicity is thus a mask placed over the face, a “pretense” to which Gozzano lent himself “with ready ambiguity, finding himself in his readers’ illusion as in a mirror” (406-409).

Serra’s is an accurate insight, corroborated by the words that Gozzano addressed to his friend Salvator Gotta in 1916, on the eve of his death. These words shed light on the relationship of the poet to the Italian lyric tradition and its tutelary gods. “And among so much affirmation and undeserved praise (later discounted) I am proud of this: that hardly anybody recognized me; I am proud of having refined my subalpine Boeotian illiteracy thanks to the *Canzoniere* and the *Divina Commedia*” (quoted in Italian in Masoero 81).²

The horizon of Gozzano’s models appears then a plural space, in which the genetic connection with the poetry of D’Annunzio and Pascoli can be more thoroughly integrated and historicized in the light of a systematic return to the classic roots of Italian poetic language. Thus—Gozzano writes—“a poetry infected for years by Pascoli’s and D’Annunzio’s chlorosis” could be “restored by the desperate study of Dante and Petrarch, annotating, pondering, weighing the words needed for *his* [sic] palette” (Masoero 81).

Being modern by looking backward—the true aspiration of all classicism (Santagata 33-34)—underlies a poetic project that assumes the *Commedia* and perhaps even more the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the topic of this discussion, as a “book of poetic apprenticeship” (Guglielminetti 49), capable of restoring, and maybe even partly healing, a poet sick with the shame of poetry.

Not surprisingly, Carlo Calcaterra had anticipated that Gozzano’s work could be read as a chapter *sui generis* in the history of twentieth-century Petrarchism. Already in 1948 Calcaterra published an essay in *Studi petrarcheschi* that illustrated, through a painstaking comparison of the texts, some Petrarchan modes recognizable in the form of an almost verbatim citation in all of Gozzano’s works, but especially in *I colloqui* (Calcaterra 213). Calcaterra’s was the exact analytical insight of a refined philologist and informed reader, which has been broadly substantiated by research in the past 20 years. The late Marziano Guglielminetti deserves credit for this, as does the Turin school which, with Mariarosa Masoero, has supervised the organization, cataloguing, and editing of all of Gozzano’s

autographic work, mostly unpublished, which is now preserved at the *Centro studi per la letteratura italiana in Piemonte Guido Gozzano-Cesare Pavese*.

The existence among the papers of the Fondo Gozzano, next to a *Quaderno Dantesco*, of a *Quaderno Petrarchesco* in which Gozzano transcribes Petrarch's verses, (now verbatim and now modified, in a sort of personal anthology, a repertoire of citations) takes on the status of documentary evidence substantiated by the comparison with his copy of the *Canzoniere*. In it the young poet reads and carefully underlines hundreds of verses, transcribing them into his own notebook and sometimes using them as an exercise in true creative *aemulatio*.

The elements we now have at our disposal make up priceless documentation that we may scrutinize, as we have perhaps not yet fully done, to fully understand the logic inherent in Gozzano's use of Petrarch's language, which leads to a Petrarchism that is, as I noted earlier, *sui generis*. This Petrarchism is not assimilable to the general twentieth-century reappropriation of Petrarch, which consists of "a restoration of poetic language as an absolute means of personal knowledge and dialogue with the inner self" (Guglielminetti 49), though Guglielminetti seems to associate Gozzano with it. Instead, Gozzano's crepuscularism falls entirely into the defining literary event of the twentieth century, namely the crisis and revision of lyric language born of an experience of reduction and decentralization of the self, which, in the failed correspondence of psychological time to historical time, splits the self before "a bare and ephemeral present" (Lorenzini 13). For this reason crepuscular poetry well adopts the unresolved point of view of "perplexity," which on the one hand yields a gaze that lingers on "the phenomenal," the "detail," the "marginal," and on the other displays a self that is a mere mask, whose "irrelevance" can nevertheless see things as they are, returned at last to themselves, having tarnished their "enamel" and blighted their "decorative emphasis" (Lorenzini 13).

And thus it is likely that in Gozzano's case the retrieval of the literary word of Petrarch's lyric tradition is functional to an authenticity of diction perceived as a prerogative of the lyric language of early Italian poetry, along the lines of Saba's quest for an "honest poetry" (Saba 759) and later Montale's guise of a regained "everyday decency" (Montale 264). As Calcaterra emphasized, it was by means of this dual retrieval that Gozzano's Petrarchism, both "ideal" and "formal," hid, behind the virtuosity of a man of letters, the zest and interest for "a poetic language that seemed to him perfect and at the same time so simple and honed that it seemed almost spoken" (Calcaterra 222-23).

The autographic annotation "Turin, 9 June 1905," in the margin of sonnet 61 in Gozzano's own copy of the *Canzoniere*, is an indication that his reading of Petrarch, which represents an important chapter in the history of the twentieth-century reception of the *Canzoniere*, is no sporadic occurrence but a habit of long standing. We can deduce that the quest for new tones, which entails an effective removal of the most opaque residues of Gozzano's poetic apprenticeship as a reader of D'Annunzio (Guglielminetti and Masoero 169-70), not only begins well before the publication of *La via del rifugio* (1907), but also

must be tied to the discovery of the possibilities rooted in the language of the Italian literary tradition through the re-reading of its classics.

From this point of view it is significant that Gozzano read Petrarch's *Rime* in the memorable edition of 1899 by Giosuè Carducci and Severino Ferrari (Masoero 11), because Carducci's commentary is in itself an extraordinary event in the history of Petrarch reception and a formidable redefinition of the "Petrarch function" in the history of Italian poetry. Carducci's commentary presented itself as the historical memory of the commentary tradition, and in the stylistic analysis of the text echoes the later poets who have recognized themselves in the Petrarchan identity of the lyric code. This commentary can become a precious tool in the hands of a young writer who, inevitably, reads poems in search of his own individual voice.

To encounter Petrarch through Carducci means to understand, in the attention given to stylistic, rhetoric, and metric aspects, that a writer can tell the story of his or her own poetry through poetry itself and that the idea of a truly modern lyric ends up coinciding with the "museum of literature and its forms" (Finotti 271). And this without a doubt takes us back to Gozzano and to his way of being a poet.

Furthermore we must also bear in mind that, if that very commentary identified Leopardi as one of the strongest readers and most extraordinary interpreters of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Gozzano too looks to Leopardi as one of "his" poets (Masoero 29) and finds in Leopardi's verse the secret of a poetic word which is able to recapture, beyond every aestheticizing fiction, a true connection with things.

The marvelously "familiar" character that Leopardi as a reader of Petrarch identified in the "archaic" language of early Italian, in which the absolute simplicity of universal experience meets the "pellegrino" of poetry without any apparent contradiction (Trenti 152-53), perhaps provides us with a key that lets us more fully understand Gozzano's Petrarchism. In fact Gozzano uses literature as an ironic and tragic tool to demystify literature itself, like a kaleidoscope that refracts and calls into question its values and meanings, along with its codes and forms. And it is probably for this reason that his most challenging collection of poems opens with a direct reference to Petrarch.

Choosing "giovenile errore," a hemistich of the opening sonnet of the *Canzoniere*, as the title of the first section of *I colloqui* (1911), states *in limine* the poetic intention of a macrotext which, as a modern *canzoniere*, means to tell, through its component poems, the story of a life. In fact the book of poems identifies itself straightaway as a "libro di passato" and, as such, as the story of a "giovinezza," beautiful and betrayed as "un romanzo che non fu vissuto."

Gozzano's "giovenile errore," unlike Petrarch's, must be identified with the literary illness which estranges a man from himself, deprives him of experience, and condemns him to a life un-lived. Thus the self whose story is supposed to be told instead splits into the alienated image of the "mute brother" ("fratello muto") and the memorial act itself fails because memory, far from constituting after the fact the sense of a journey to which Petrarch's citation obviously refers—"A ciascun passo mi rivolsi indietro, / curioso di lui,

con occhi fissi / spiando il suo pensiero, or gaio or tetro”—no longer belongs to him. The subject can only chronicle the youth lived by the other, “la bella favola compita,” which does not coincide with the “favola breve” of an existence that makes sense only by virtue of its own frailty, but identifies itself with a fate of mere survival overshadowed by solitude and aridity: “Non vivo. Solo, gelido, in disparte / sorrido e guardo vivere me stesso” (“I do not live. Alone, icy, apart, I smile and watch myself live.”³).

On the model of an existential trajectory whose meaning lies in the encounter with love and with death and which entrusts to a book destined to perpetuate the memory the task of deciphering that meaning which is fulfilled only in a transcendent dimension, the modern poet retraces his own personal experience, handing to the reader the image of himself flattened within a present without depth, like that of a “survivor,” “reduce dall’Amore e dalla Morte / gli hanno mentito le due cose belle.” He has survived a love that he never fully experienced and a death which led him “to the edge” (“alle soglie”) and then rejected him. Likewise the slender “manoscritto” to which the poet’s personal history is consigned—“pochi giochi di sillaba e di rima”—does not guarantee that he will be remembered, and the very poetry, whose duration is denied—“Mah! Come un libro di rima, dilegua, passa, non dura!”—disproves, with Petrarch’s own words, the humanistic and Petrarchan dream of the triumph of literature over time.

We are confronted with a “double-bottomed” Petrarchism, as it were, one in which the direct citation, remodulated in a conversational cadence that plays with emphasis only to continually disprove it, appears functional to a thematic or ideological anti-Petrarchism that can be explored assuming time as the main theme, revisited in the light of a present whose dimension of tragedy has been denied. And in light of these preliminary observations we may consider the poem “Un’altra risorta,” of the third section of *I colloqui*, taking it as a significant moment in the twentieth-century reception of the memorable sonnet 35 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.

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“Un’altra risorta” is composed in the metrical scheme of *sesta rima*, in which the six hendecasyllables are connected by two rhymes arranged in various ways. It is one of the metrical schemes Gozzano loved and used most (Martelli 608-609); he took it from D’Annunzio’s *Chimera* and experimented with it already in the second version of *La Signorina Felicita*, though varying the scheme of the rhymes in a sort of free reinterpretation of the *forma* of the sonnet. “Un’altra risorta” was first published with the title “Novembre” in the review *La riviera ligure* in February 1910, and then again in 1911 with its definitive title; it creates a sort of diptych with the preceding poem “Una risorta,” in the section of *I colloqui* headed *Il reduce*.

The word *risorta*, in its meaning of the sudden appearance of a person after a long period of absence, is a *unicum* in our literary tradition (Battaglia 845-46) and sets us straightaway inside a story. Suggesting by lexical affinity the idea of a sortie and an ambush, it signals an epiphany, again of a woman, the same woman of the previous text, who unexpectedly joins her lover, a distracted *flâneur* who is aimlessly wandering the city streets. She catches up

with him and, strolling along, forces him into a conversation about the comparison of two destinies, against the backdrop of the ineluctable passage of time.

This poem was long ago identified as a paradigmatic text of Gozzano's Petrarchism (Guglielminetti 182-84). First, the event that is recounted is set explicitly within a Petrarchesque framework—"Penso al Petrarca che raggiunto fu / per via, da Laura, com'io son da Lei..."—and, along with "Totò Merùmeni," it is the only direct reference to Laura's poet. Second, and especially, it displays *in limine* an extensive citation—"poi l'ombra apparve, e la conobbi in terra .../ Tremante a guisa d'uom ch'aspetta guerra, / mi volsi e vidi..."—which leads us directly to sonnet 110 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, of which Gozzano's poem uses either half-lines or entire verses, within a coherent system of lexical variations and dislocations which is in great part as yet unexplored. In fact the repertoire of citations included in the *Quaderno Petrarchesco* offers a definite confirmation of a working method that must be recognized and reconstructed also for how it materializes concretely in the creative phase.

As a matter of fact, Gozzano's way of invoking the *Canzoniere* almost never takes the form of a "bi-univocal" correspondence, as it were, in which the second-degree word replicates in itself the voice of a single text. Instead, the direct citation seems embedded within a halo of multiple echoes or resonances, less explicit but no less urgent, almost a scattering of traces, a mosaic-like texture that refracts within the word of the text the multiple voices and places of its very model.

This is the case of "Un'altra risorta," a poem in which the unequivocal presence of sonnet 110 is placed, like a puzzle, within a narrative framework: an encounter not entirely expected, even if predictable and only partly desired, in a state of solitude which is willingly but vainly pursued—in fact, the state of sonnet 35, "Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi." We may identify, scattered in the text, lexical echoes that are precise one moment and appropriately reformulated the next (Barberi Squarotti 224).

Let us compare the two texts in full (see Appendix for a translation of "Un'altra risorta"):

Solo, errando così come chi erra	Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi
senza meta, un po' triste, a passi stanchi,	Vo mesurando a passi tardi et lenti,
udivo un passo frettoloso ai fianchi;	Et gli occhi porto per fuggire intenti
poi l'ombra apparve, e la conobbi in terra....	Ove vestigio human l'arena stampi.
Tremante a guisa d'uom ch'aspetta guerra,	Altro schermo non trovo che mi scampi
mi volsi e vidi i suoi capelli: bianchi.	Dal manifesto accorger de le genti,
Ma fu l'incontro mesto, e non amaro.	perché negli atti d'alegrezza spenti
Proseguimmo tra l'oro delle acace	di fuor si legge com'io dentro avampi:
del Valentino, camminando a paro.	sí ch'io mi credo omai che monti et
Ella parlava, tenera, loquace,	piagge
del passato, di sé, della sua pace,	et fiumi et selve sappian di che tempre
del futuro, di me, del giorno chiaro.	sia la mia vita, ch'è celata altrui.
«Che bel Novembre! E' come una menzogna	
primaverile! E lei, compagno inerte,	Ma pur sí aspre vie né sí selvagge

se ne va solo per le vie deserte,
col trasognato viso di chi sogna....
Fare bisogna. Vivere bisogna
la bella vita dalle mille offerte».

«Le mille offerte....Oh! vana fantasia!
Solo in disparte dalla molta gente,
ritrovo i sogni e le mie fedi spente,
solo in disparte l'anima s'oblìa....
Vivo in campagna, con una prozia,
la madre inferma ed uno zio demente.

Sono felice. La mia vita è tanto
pari al mio sogno; il sogno che non varia:
vivere in una villa solitaria,
senza passato più, senza rimpianto:
appartenersi, meditare....Canto
l'esilio e la rinuncia volontaria».

«Ah! lasci la rinuncia che non dico,
lasci l'esilio a me, lasci l'oblío
a me che rassegnata già m'avvio
prigioniera del Tempo, del nemico....
Dove Lei sale c'è la luce, amico!
Dov'io scendo c'è l'ombra, amico mio!...»

Ed era lei che mi parlava, quella
che risorgeva dal passato eterno
sulle tepide soglie dell'inverno?...
La quarantina la faceva bella,
diversamente bella: una sorella
buona, dall'occhio tenero materno.

Tacevo, preso dalla grazia immensa
di quel profilo forte che m'adesca;
tra il cupo argento della chioma densa
ella appariva giovanile e fresca
come una deità settecentesca....

«Amico neghittoso, a che mai pensa?».

«Penso al Petrarca che raggiunto fu
per via, da Laura com'io son da Lei....»
Sorrise, rise scoprendo i bei
denti....«Che Laura in fior di gioventù!...
Irriverente!...Pensi invece ai miei
capelli grigi....Non mi tingo più.»
(Gozzano, *Tutte le poesie*)

cercar non so ch'Amor non venga
sempre
ragionando con meco, et io co llui.
(Petrarca, *Rvf*35)

Petrarch's synonymic dittology "Solo et pensoso" appears halved in the adjective "Solo" which however retains a highly evocative valence, both because of its metrical position and because it is scattered, like a primitive lexical and rhythmic cell, in the third and fourth strophes ("se ne va solo per le vie deserte"; "Solo in disparte dalla molta gente"; "solo in disparte l'anima s'oblia..."). The adjective "pensoso" is modified into "un po' triste," a *variatio* that complies with the criterion of prose-like paraphrase of the early text, in an anti-courtly reformulation that we see in other expressions as well: "a passi stanchi" instead of "a passi tardi e lenti," which eliminates the eurythmic duplication of the adjective, which is however reproduced as a more general syntactic move in the following line, "Ma fu l'incontro mesto e non amaro."

At the same time, the situation of meditative solitude immediately undergoes the unexpected interference of the "passo frettoloso ai fianchi," which is the modern and ordinary version of the undesired "vestigio human" and which emphasizes the antinomy between the early text and the modern one. Similarly, the brilliant and synthetic progressive form "vo mesurando" expands into the conversational and diffuse "errando così come chi erra / senza meta." Similarly "i più deserti campi" are transformed into "vie deserte," which render in a flatter and more denotative vocabulary, although still literarily characterized by the general layout of the verse—"se ne va solo per le vie deserte"—the modern situation of urban solitude expressed as a wandering which is not languid but only "inerte," or to quote Leopardi "neghittoso" (Leopardi 219).

The Petrarchan use of the multiplicative plural "genti," in which the lofty echo of the Latin lemma resounds, in order to express an aspiration to introspective solitude—"Altro schermo non trovo che mi scampi / dal manifesto accorger de le genti"—makes way for the prosaic and merely descriptive "Solo in disparte dalla molta gente." In this phrase the flight from the tittle-tattle of everyday life in search of a new authenticity—"ritrovo i sogni e le mie fedì spente, / solo in disparte l'anima s'oblia"—suggests yet again, carried by the rhyme and by the mechanisms of a "rhythmic memory" (Contini *Un'idea* 83-87) ("gente/spente"), a recognizable Petrarchan echo ("genti / perché negli atti d'alegrezza spenti").

The existential choice of aridity and indifference on the part of the modern lyric "I" ("Canto / l'esilio e la rinuncia volontaria..."), here an avowed alter ego of "Totò Merùmeni," is set in a neglected space of abandonment and bizarre marginality in which Petrarchan words of solitude, from "deserti campi" to the polysyndetic series of "monti et piagge / et fiumi et selve" are declined to a minor and merely referential key in "Vivo in campagna, con una prozia, / la madre inferma ed uno zio demente."

Moreover, in Gozzano's text we find both a revival and at the same time a radical transformation of the archetype's "narrative" situation. If in sonnet 35 the solitude that the subject seeks becomes an endless dialogue with love ("ch'Amor non venga sempre / ragionando con meco, et io co llui") in "Un'altra risorta" the conversation takes place with the woman who suddenly appears, "camminando a paro," to disrupt the dreamer's meditative idleness. Thus the synthetic efficacy of the personal pronouns, in the dual

figures of chiasmus and antithesis (“Amor—con meco / io—co llui”), extends into a *gradatio* which is only apparently digressive and introduces a disconsolate meditation on time—“Ella parlava, tenera, loquace, / del passato, di sé, della sua pace / del futuro, di me, del giorno chiaro”.

For this reason the situation of the modern poem is very different from that of sonnet 110, which yet serves as a model for it. In sonnet 110 Laura’s appearance still occurs as a divine epiphany that reveals itself in her greeting, through the radiance of her eyes, “più degna d’immortale stato.” In the *Colloqui*, instead, the rhythmical-prosodic norm operative in Petrarch’s original is disregarded, and, introduced by a linearly colloquial expression—“mi volsi e vidi i suoi capelli bianchi”—we find the image of a woman who appears literally “invasa dal tempo.”

Unlike Petrarch’s Laura, who faces a destiny of death but is the object of a love that coincides with the very life of her lover and, transfigured, prevails beyond the boundaries of human time, the woman in Gozzano’s poem survives the death of love and bears in herself the stigmata of time. Thus it is not death that celebrates, as in Petrarch, its own triumph over love and over the woman, but it is time that triumphs over a woman who survives her own aging. Hence the younger lover, sick with indifference and unable to love, rediscovers in the deathly certainty of a temporality beyond redemption a new possibility for a relationship, one in which an emotional dimension no longer the slave of sensuality transfigures the potential enemy into “una sorella / buona, dall’occhio tenero materno.”

There is no doubt that, in the invocation of a woman both mother and sister, Pascoli has great influence and, even more so, Gozzano’s proximity to the D’Annunzio of “Poema paradisiaco” and of the novels as well (Sanguineti 51-60), models which are present in various ways in “Un’altra risorta.” We need only consider the original title “Novembre” which, describing a day of miraculous sun just before winter—“Che bel Novembre! E’ come una menzogna/ primavera!”—recalls the poem from *Myricae* about “l’estate fredda dei morti” (Pascoli 272), evoked in the most allusive and secretive texture of the rhymes. We might also recall the discursive modulation of the hendecasyllable, which in Gozzano is interrupted by punctuation and littered with suspensions and conventional interjections of dialogic interiority, in which Pascoli’s revolutionary metrics is easily recognizable (Contini *Varianti* 596-97).

D’Annunzio’s model in turn operates both in the portrayal of the female figure—in the seductive version of the refined companion who chats while strolling along the park boulevards, or in the more modest version of parental benevolence—and in the evocation, immediately denied, of the vital impulse (“Fare bisogna. Vivere bisogna / la bella vita dalle mille offerte”) in which the voice of the poet of “Maia” resounds recognizably.

Nonetheless, however evident the influence of a more recent poetic, we can yet state that even in the second part of the poem, less noticeably marked by Petrarchan borrowings, what counts the most on both a structural and a linguistic level is, again, *Il canzoniere*. *Il canzoniere* is set in the “first degree” narrative framework of the solitary walk and sets itself

up as the primary model and catalyzing element of modern invention for both the form of its content and the form of its expression.

In the characterization of a woman who is “diversamente bella,” with a “materno” look of “sorella buona,” capable of “adescare” (“luring”) in a new way those who look at her by virtue of a charm that does not hide the passing of the years, “Un’altra risorta” displays an originality of lexical choices vis-à-vis Gozzano’s poetry (Savoca 283), an originality attributable precisely to the palimpsest of references to other poems of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, prompted by the theme of the lover’s aging.

The encounter between Love and Chastity which Petrarch’s desire had prefigured—imagining an old age that, “cangiati i volti, et l’una et l’altra coma,” would at last have made possible a confidential conversation between the lovers—presents the modern poet with multiple possibilities for intertextual references which thread into the theme of physical transformation a new, more serene possibility of relationship. Thus imagining a more mature age, in Petrarch a projection of his desire in which beauty is finally dimmed by time, locks of greying hair (“e i cape’ d’oro fin farsi d’argento”) might belatedly appease passion by offering “il soccorso di tardi sospiri.” Gozzano, on the other hand, encounters the more humble and human reality of a woman who has outlived her own youth. It is her hair, “bianchi” or “grigi,” transfigured in a Petrarch-like manner into the “cupo argento della chioma densa,” that marks the distance between a literary archetype and a present neither sublime nor tragic.

It is again Petrarch’s poem which superimposes over the image of winter the existential image of old age and over the belied hypothesis of a weakening of desire the image of a different beauty that is still fascinating—“quel foco ch’i pensai che fosse spento / dal freddo tempo et da l’età men fresca, / fiamma e martir ne l’anima rinfresca. ... et tende lacci in sì diverse tempre, / che quanD’ò più speranza che il cor n’esca, / allor più nel bel viso mi rinvessa.” And it is again Petrarch’s poem that suggests to the modern poet a lexical texture which alludes to a different, however improbable, seduction: “Ed era lei che mi parlava, quella / che risorgeva dal passato eterno / sulle tepide soglie dell’inverno?... / La quarantina la faceva bella, diversamente bella ... Tacevo, preso dalla grazia immensa/ di quel profilo forte che m’adesca:/ tra il cupo argento della chioma densa/ ella appariva giovenile e fresca / come una deità settecentesca....”

The absence of irony is made possible by means of a fate that acknowledges not the tragedy of death, but only the honest, grey deterioration of old age. To mark the distance between Laura and the modern woman, who shows her age without embarrassment or sorrow, in the composed display of a middle-class and quotidian ordinariness—“non mi tingo più”—is however, once again, Petrarch’s phrasing. The dream of a passion at last tempered by the years—“et era giunto al loco / ove scende la vita ch’al fin cade”—and shattered by the woman’s death—“Morte ebbe invidia al mio felice stato / anzi a la speme; et feglisi a l’incontra / a mezza via come nemico armato”—works in Gozzano to describe the decline of an existence whose real enemy is Time—“prigioniera del Tempo, del nemico”—into whose “shadow” horizon the woman is fated to descend.

“Laura in fior di gioventù” and her younger friend—a modern, skeptical, disillusioned Francesco—have both been betrayed by Love and by Death. True children of “tempo nostro,” they are destined neither for greatness nor for heroism, nor for the tragedy to which the sublime of literature was able to give voice. However, on that very literature and the miraculous authenticity of tones of which it was capable in the words of its classics, the modern poet still lives, if only to proclaim his own “esilio” and irremediable distance from it.

In fact, it is no accident that Guido Gozzano’s *Quaderno Petrarchesco* ends, after having excerpted the verses of the “canzone alla Vergine,” with the modern poet’s voice, which opposes to the existential trajectory of the *Canzoniere’s* poet the diversity without redemption of his own fate: “ma il fanciullo che è in me non puoi ferirlo / lo ferisci / il tuo profumo: la malinconia” (Guglielminetti and Masoero 210). On the other hand, a poetry that originates as the voice of a Self that wishes “no longer to be myself” (“più essere io”) and alienates itself in the image of the Other—“e già mi sento lui”—cannot fail to perceive the fascination, or the curse, of a literary tradition whose profound dynamics is, to quote Harold Bloom, to reopen old works to our new sufferings, if it is true that literature, when it becomes a metaphor of itself, dwells in the “desire of being elsewhere” (Bloom 9-10).

Appendix: Another Woman Reborn

Walking alone, like one who drifts around
aimlessly, and a little sad and tired,
I heard a hurried footstep on my right;
I recognised the shadow on the ground...
I shook like one expecting war; I turned
and, looking at her hair, saw it was white.

The meeting was a mournful one, not bitter.
We walked among the gold of the acacias,
crossing the Valentino close together.
She was discussing, tender and loquacious,
the past, herself, how times were now propitious,
the future, me, the brilliance of the weather.

“A beautiful November! Telling lies,
pretending to be spring! Yet listlessly
along these empty paths you take your way,
your face abstracted by your reveries...
Really you ought to act. You ought to seize
the thousand chances life presents today.”

“The thousand chances... Futile fantasy!
Only abstracted from the vulgar herd
can I revive some dreams that I thought dead,
only relaxed when not in company...”

Outside the town a great-aunt lives with me,
a mother who is sick, an uncle, mad.

I'm happy now. My life is made to fit
that dream which knows no shade of alteration:
to have a villa, living in seclusion;
by now without a past, without regret;
to be one's own man; think... I celebrate
exile and voluntary renunciation."

"Renounce renunciation with no name,
and leave both exile and oblivion
to me; resignedly I travel on,
the captive of our enemy, of Time...
You rise, my friend, towards a distant gleam!
I drop into a place whence light has gone!"

And she who talked to me was one who rose
out of the everlasting past! I found her
just on the tepid threshold of the winter!...
She was more beautiful by forty years,
with different beauty, sisterly, her eyes
tending to motherly and very tender.

I did not speak a word; I was spellbound:
that powerful profile still bewitches me;
her abundant hair was silver-shaded, and
she still looked young and fresh; she seemed to be
some goddess of the eighteenth century...
"Whatever are you thinking, lazy friend?"

"Of Petrarch overtaken on the road
by Laura, as I am by you..." And then
she smiled and laughed and showed her very fine
white teeth... "So I am Laura in the pride
of youth?... You're mocking me!... This hair of mine
is grey, you're thinking, now it isn't dyed."

(Gozzano, *Colloquies and Selected Letters*, 82-83; ellipses in original)

¹ Translated by Diana Gasbarri.

² Masoero cites S. Gotta, *Guido Gozzano*, «Amicizia», agosto 1966, p. 10.

³ Nichols' translation (*Colloquies and Selected Letters* 24): "Now I do not live. / Only, frozen and set apart, in him / I have to smile to see myself alive."

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