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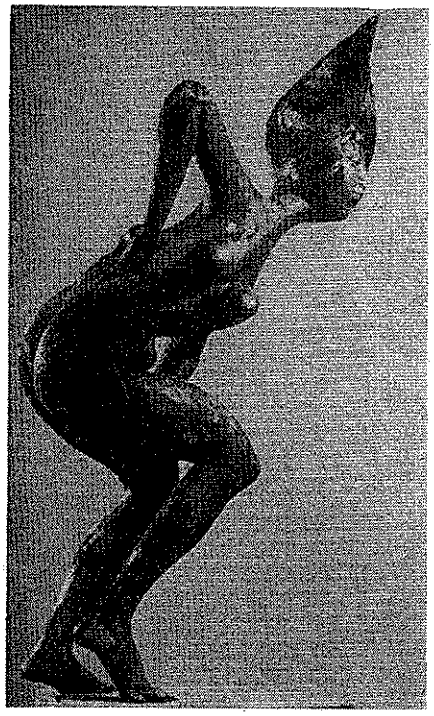
Pericle Fazzini, Sculptor

The human figure has taken pretty much of a beating in 20th century sculpture, especially if one considers that in the past sculptors were mainly interested in using the human form to glorify and to idealize the existence of man as hero and pet creature of God. In the search for new values quite a transformation has taken place. The Cubists and Futurists took the human figure apart, dissected and analysed it. It was completely ignored or else reconstructed by severe geometric principles by the Constructivists. Then, the Surrealists, with their theories of sub-conscious expression, metamorphosed the human figure and often retained only a suggestion of it in abstract organic forms.

More recently in sculpture combining constructivist and surrealist interests, the human figure (when there has been any interest in it as such) has gone through even further mutation to give form to the mainstream of creative ideas of our time. It is quite rare today to find a sculptor who works in direct reference to the human figure and at the same time has something meaningful to say. Most often figurative sculpture today is academic and reactionist, preoccupied merely with the superficialities of subject matter and without that concern for form basic to all great sculpture throughout history. Among the small amount of outstanding figurative sculpture produced in recent years, some of the most significant has been by Italian artists. One of these artists in the Roman sculptor, Pericle Fazzini.

The striking thing about Fazzini's sculpture is the freshness with which he again and again represents the human body. The figure for him is not a limitation but a means of sculptural expression with endless potentialities. His range of conception, execution, emotional tone, media, scale and subject reveals an artist of estimable breadth. His work is characterized by a flavor of the classic sculpture of Italy's past, especially the Etruscan, but this is not the result of self-conscious archaeological diggings. At the same time his sculpture speaks lively of the present, for Fazzini is not a reactionist to the contemporary trends in art. He is well aware of the modern movements and what they have meant in giving the artist greater freedom to express himself according to the demands of his temperament. Fazzini obtains that freedom through the human figure, just as other artists obtain it through abstract forms. He is a humanistic sculptor and for him direct reference to the human form is essential. "I still love the human figure," he has written, "because it is in myself and since I think it new as the mystery of the infinite and as varied as the clouds in the sky. Through the forms I discover in it, I believe in communicating to everyone else the expressions of the anxiety that each has within himself.



Dancer *Fig. 1*

"Even the figurative language has always been abstract and mysterious when it has become art. Reality is arranged and lyrically rendered abstract by that rhythm which forms that precise harmony, which gives to one who looks at it the sensation of being in perfect communion with it, yet remaining always itself.

"I want to be the ultimate figurative sculptor because I still have faith in succeeding to discover a new form. And I want the human figure to always be my limit, or better, my point of reference."[1]

Fazzini's sculpture is filled with a healthy vitality and an optimistic outlook on mankind. They are direct down-to-earth works, without erratic overtones. As one critic has put it, Fazzini is clearly a man of talent and does not have to be eccentric to prove it.[2]

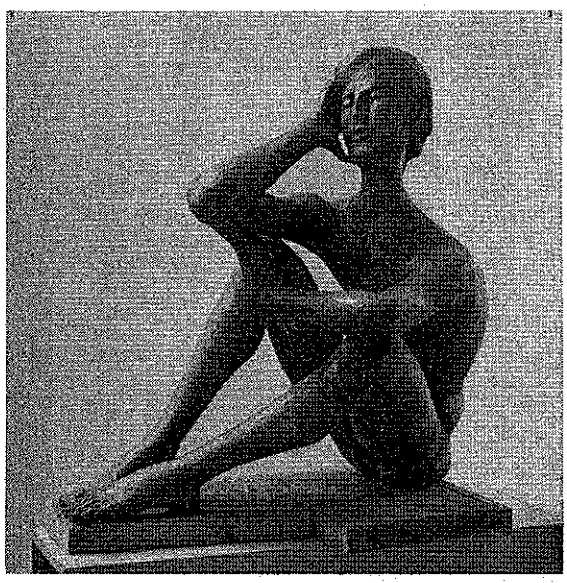
Dancer (Fig. 1) and *Seated Youth* (Fig. 2) typify his recent sculpture. One is an imposing study of the human body in action, the other the embodiment of classical calm. In both, the forms are characteristically built up into a strong organic unity, with a great concern for inter-relationships of mass and space, and with intended discordances of sharp angles and almost elegant distortions. The different parts are composed in a solid positiveness that gives them weight and substance. "I want to make a sculpture of weight," Fazzini has said, "masses pressed and superimposed one on the other form my ideal bodies."[3] In the exuberant *Dancer*, the movement of the figure is vividly conveyed by the delicately balanced pose, the swing of the breasts, the flying hair, and the almost awkward momentary gesture of the arched arm. Such an understanding of the effects of movement on the human body comes from years of constant observation and study of the figure in motion, at rest and in countless unposed positions. The result is one of immediacy and vivacity. It is quite likely that Fazzini would have agreed with the Futurist Umberto Boccioni when he said: "Today we cannot study a cadaver to create a living man in art – as one cannot study a still automobile to render it in action."[4]

Among the most impressive works of the artist are the small bronzes that he has been making since around 1942, concurrent to his large scale statements. These *bronzetti*, made first in wax and then cast in bronze, reveal with an amazing variety the wide range of his rich imagination. The informal little figures, single or in groups, sometimes small enough to be enclosed in the hand, seem to offer all possibilities of the human body in action. They represent youth or girls dancing or doing gymnastics. In the most natural way they wrestle, box, dive, do acrobatics (Fig. 3). There is never any repetition nor any signs of boredom of execution. Each is an ingenious formal invention, alive from every angle. Like his larger sculpture, they reveal an expert knowledge of anatomical stresses and balances. But, whereas his large-scale works are more broadly handled and more roundly stylized, these *bronzetti* represent the figure in greater detail and often in more intricate composition. Although in them many problems that would apply to larger works are doubtlessly resolved, these small bronzes are not sketches or models for larger projects. They are conceived as independent works existing for their own sake.

Drawing has always been the essential means by which Fazzini crystallizes and develops his ideas. He has always drawn assiduously. All of his researches and exper-

iments with the figure have first been carried out on paper, in drawing, before they have become stone, clay, plaster, wax or bronze. The apparent simplicity of his style is the summation and organization of his many analytical studies. He fills sketchbook after sketchbook with drawings for the pure enjoyment of drawing. From these sprout the concepts of his three-dimensional expression. Fazzini has received wide recognition as a draftsman as well as a sculptor. His drawings are expertly and often quickly rendered with a few deft lines that catch with veracity the model in momentary and natural attitudes. Some are done with the sharpness of a chisel cutting into wood, the expressionist forms seemingly hacked out. Others (see front cover) are quieter, more lyrical, with the strokes of the pen or brush almost tenderly containing the solid form of an arm or leg.

Marino Marini, Giacomo Manzù and Pericle Fazzini are generally grouped together by critics as the three major figurative sculptors in Italy today. Each is indebted to the work of Medardo Rosso, (1858-1928), the revolutionary at the beginning of the century who attacked the dead academic sculpture and passed on to the Italian artists of his time Rodin's great concern with volumes and voids. "One cannot deny that we are all Romantics," says Fazzini. "We are the sons of Medardo Rosso and of Rodin. We are searching for an image full of profound humanity, of thought, that would be absolute."[5] "I understand sculpture as harmony of lights and darks that pursue each other with rhythms: contrasts, reposes and volumes that delineate themselves in space, adhering perfectly to the mental image that I have within me."[6]



Seated Youth *Fig. 2*

Acrobats *Fig. 3*

Pericle Fazzini was born in 1913 in the little town of Grottamare on the Adriatic Coast. His father was a furniture maker, descendant of a line of skilled craftsmen. In his father's shop, the young Pericle received a thorough, apprentice-like training. He developed an understanding and respect for tools and materials, and acquired the discipline which a proficient artisan can impose upon the person he is training. Already, at the age of ten, he was helping his father carve decorations on the furniture. Also at an early age he began to draw and to model little figures and groups in clay. These early works, even if immature, revealed an artistic talent that particularly interested the poet Mario Rivosecchi, a friend of the family and at that time professor of Art History at the Accademia di Belle Arti at Rome. When Pericle was 16, the poet, along with an uncle, urged the father to send his son to Rome to study art. In 1929 Fazzini went to Rome where he has lived since.

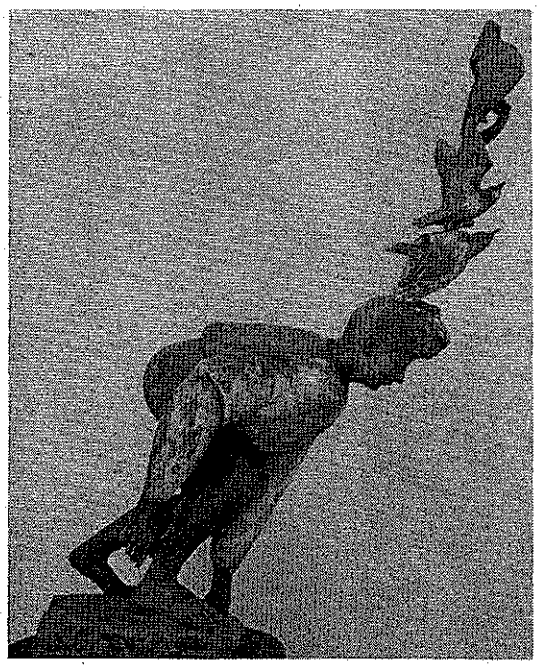
During his early period in Rome, Fazzini worked in sculpture on his own, sharing a small semi-cellar studio outside Porta San Giovanni with the painter Alberto Ziveri. Concurrently he attended classes in figure drawing at the Accademia di Belle Arti. He

spent much time at the zoological gardens, filling numerous sketchbooks with animal studies. The work of these first years was very illusionistic and consisted of a great number of portraits. He recalls that he was not satisfied with his efforts and that as soon as they were carried to completion he would destroy them. A factual description was not enough. He was becoming aware of the revolution established by Medardo Rosso, Arturo Martini, Boccioni and the Futurists. And too, there before his eyes were the impressive remains from the rich history of Italian sculpture from the time of the Etruscans onward.

In 1932 Fazzini won the competition for the Pensionato Artistico Nazionale. This grant provided sufficient funds and a large studio so that he could devote himself completely to his art. Here he dedicated himself entirely to his art, working intensely on portraits, figures, bas-reliefs. He continued to draw very much, filling innumerable sketchbooks with studies from life and with figures and compositions from fantasy.

In 1934 Fazzini showed in Paris along with Despiau, Bonnard and De Segonzac. The show was a success and his work received good reviews from major French critics. The following year he was invited to show at the second Quadriennale di Roma, winning the third sculpture prize. Success seemed to be following success, until 1935, when for some reason his grant was not renewed. He then had to move from the spacious studio to the Via Margutta, where he still works today. Despite financial difficulties his work continued unabated, and in 1938 a group of his sculpture was shown at the Venice Biennial. In 1940 his work was interrupted by military service. In 1947 he joined the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti* at the time of the group's first exhibition in Milan.

In recent years Fazzini has received increasingly wider recognition both in Italy and abroad. In 1949 his sculpture was first shown in the United States in the Museum of Modern Art's important exhibition, "Italian Art of the Twentieth Century." He has shown in a great number of major exhibitions and has won outstanding prizes. In 1950 he was awarded a first prize at the Venice Biennial. In 1951 he was honored with a retrospective exhibition at the Barberini Palace in Rome. In the same year he



Boy and Seagulls
1940
Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna

received a prize at the first Sao Paolo Biennial. He has also participated in the Antwerp Biennial of Sculpture. Since 1952 has has shown with great success at the Iolas Gallery in New York.

In Rome, as well as in the other Italian art centers, the artists are divided into two basic groups – the "abstract" and the "figurative." The differences between these two groups (themselves divided into smaller groups and cliques) are based not only on art theory but are associated with political, religious and social opinions in a much stronger way than they have ever been in the United States. Generally they stay apart from each other both socially and professionally. It is rare for an artist of one group to feel that he has much in common with artists of the other. Fazzini is one of the few artists in Rome whose work and personality are respected by both the *astratti* and the *figurativi*. This respect seems due to the integrity with which he has held to his objectives and ideals as an artist. He does not classify himself with any group, and he is himself respectful of artistic integrity, regardless of the artist's way of working. "In our artistic world," he wrote recently, "there is a place for all

tendencies and . . . I believe only in the quality of work, without prejudices for one tendency or the other."[7] "I believe only in creators of either side who have the ability of searching within themselves, and know how to reveal themselves poetically with serenity or with torment, always in a personal way.

" . . . Like each of us, I am the consequence of so many different civilizations, none of which has found restraint in my blood. Hence I feel myself a composite of pagan and Christian, of erotic and mystic. And my personality in sculpture is made up of all of this. I am a fragment that has nostalgia for clouds, for the birds, the trees and all things that exist primordially pure in everyday reality."[8]

"At the beginning of each undertaking I have always believed myself to be on the point of realizing my most beautiful work. At its completion, however, I have always been disappointed. And so in me remains the ideal of realizing my most beautiful sculpture. Who can say if I have already created this sculpture or shall ever do so? . . . I work trying to understand myself more and more, and if others also understand me I will be content. But it is not this desire that gives impulse to my work. In me there is the preoccupation of inventing and constructing forms, and I flatter myself in thinking that these contain something of life. For this reason I feel fulfilled only when I work within the realm of my ideal . . . I believe above all in my poetic visions. Perhaps we will rediscover sculpture in stones remaining in dried up river beds of remote times. In those worn stones there are extraordinary forms surviving battles with the water."[9]

EDWARD BRYANT
Curator
Wadsworth Atheneum

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[1] Romeo Lucchese, *Pericle Fazzini* (Rome, 1952), pp. 80-82.

[2] Henry McBride in *Art News,* Vol. 5, March 1952, p. 49.

[3] Lucchese, *op. cit.,* p. 70.

[4] Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura, scultura futuriste; dinamismo plastico* (Milan, 1914), p. 177.

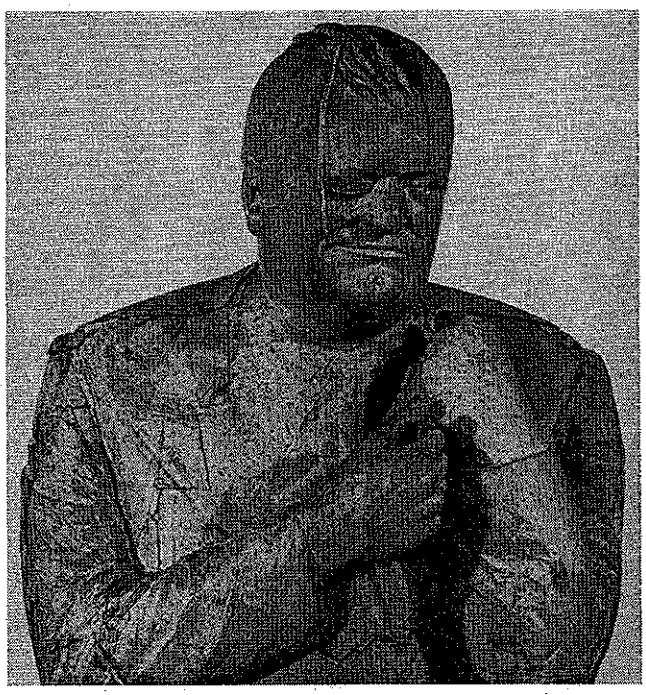
[5] Lucchese, *op. cit.,* p. 70.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 76.

[7] Statement by the artist in catalogue, *Quadriennale Nazionale d'Arte di Roma* (Rome, 1959), p. 148.

[8] Lucchese, *op. cit.,* p. 80.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 82.



Giuseppe Ungaretti, 1936
Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna

MARIO DELL'ARCO

Mario dell' Arco was born in 1905 in Rome. By profession – since the Muse provides scant nourishment to her devotees – he is an architect. He lives in Rome – if not in the Trastevere at least "across the Tiber" under Monte Mario. He has been writing verse in "romano" for many years and his works include *Taja ch'è rosso* (1946), *Tormarancio* (1950), *La peste a Roma* (1953) and *Ponte dell' angeli* (1955). He is co-editor with P. P. Pasolini of the rich and useful *Poesia dialettale del novecento* (1952. Giorgio Vigolo, in his introduction to *La peste a Roma*, stresses our poet's debt to G. G. Belli, the father of all contemporary "romanisti," and it is an indebtedness which Dell'Arco would cheerfully acknowledge. Yet he has brought his own individuality, his own subtle and distinctive contribution, into the well established tradition of Roman poetry. Poets, I think, are best explained or, to use a word from the pretentious jargon of today, "explicated," by themselves – and I believe the three samples herewith presented will illustrate the quality of Dell'Arco's work, and suggest, I hope, its range better than any lengthy commentary.

The reader who is somewhat familiar with verse in "romano" will note that the themes here touched on are somewhat different from the popular subjects of motherhood, local patriotism and facile pietism which recur so frequently in Italian dialect poetry. Indeed, this rather commonplace sentimentalism was inherent in Belli himself, though redeemed by other qualities, as was the element of broad satire, still the stock in trade of the great majority of dialectic poets.

Dell'Arco responds to the appeal of his city, of course, and the sentimental-cynical heart of the *popolo* is not unknown to him. But in its homespun language he has with increasing frequency chosen to express sensitive and highly personal, all but "hermetic," attitudes. This sophistication is reflected in the form of his work; he eschews the traditional sonnet and, recently, the octave. He is, in short, a twentieth century poet, tender, intellectual, at times playful, who chooses to express himself in the language of his city and within the terms of reference of the *popolo*. It is true that if you would enjoy to the full the substance of this poetry you must keep your mental eye firmly on St. Peter's or the Piazza Navona; at the same time Dell'Arco is by no means just another "poeta romano." His poetry is served in the old "chirichetto" but the wine has a new savor.

THOMAS G. BERGIN
Yale University

Annunciazione

Aperta come er fiore
sotto a la guazza, e l'angelo cammina
nell'iride turchina.

Ave Maria, sta insieme a te er Signore.

Aperta come un fiore e l'ape passa:
succhia er dorce, e je lassa
lo stocco dentro ar core.

Open like a flower –
and the angel coming down the rainbow –
after the shower.

Hail Mary, the Lord is with thee.

Open like a flower and the bee on the wing
sucks the sweet, passes on, leaving
in the heart the sting.

Cuppole

La cuppola è un pallone
ancorato sur tetto.
Chi è che l'ha gonfiato? L'architetto
e lo fa seccardino o buraccione
seconno er fiato che se trova in petto.
Abbotta le ganasse Borromini:
soffia, e sorteno tanti cuppolini;
ce mette dentro, un'ala de pormone
Micchelangiolo, e nasce er Cuppolone.

Cupola

A cupola is only a balloon
lashed to a rooftop. Who
blew it up? The architect and it comes out,
according to the breath he has to spare,
skinny and small or outsize stout.
He fills his cheeks and puffs, old Borromini,
and lots of 'em come out, all teeny-weeny;
Michelangelo takes a lungful of air,
and blows up the big one over Peter's Square.

Chi più de me ?

Chi più de me? Me sdraio in mezzo ar prato,
tra papaveri e bocche-de-leone
e me sento er padrone der creato.
Ma er celo è troppo limpido:
pesco una macedonia ner pacchetto
e fo nasce una nuvola,
così domani piove e resto a letto.

Who better than me ?

Who better than me? I stretch out on the ground
between the poppies and the snapdragons:
I'm lord of everything I see around.
That sky now; it's a bit too clean;
so out of the pack I fish a cigarette
and make me a cloud.
Tomorrow it'll rain; I'll stay in bed.

Mario dell'Arco
(Thomas G. Bergin)

Salvatore Quasimodo

There is little doubt that the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1959 to Salvatore Quasimodo will long be remembered as one of the truly memorable and controversial events of recent times, matched only by the international furor provoked by the 1958 Nobel award to the late Russian poet-novelist Boris Pasternak. Quite aside from the controversies it stirred, the 1959 award has a significance that transcends the recognition of a truly poetic voice in that it marks the first official awareness on the part of the international audience of the worth of creative Italian writing.

In Italy and elsewhere the announcement was received with a mixture of exaltation and regret, the latter caused by what seemed to many to have been an unjust neglect of the elder Giuseppe Ungaretti and Eugenio Montale. The press was quick to add its own share of confusion to an already unclear situation by presenting Quasimodo as a poet whose work is unaccessible to the greater part of his audience (as thought the same was not true the world over, as the case of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound sufficiently demonstrate) and hardly known outside of his native country. Finally, the wording of the citation itself, which singled out Quasimodo's post-war production which "expresses with classical fire the tragic feeling of our time," contained its own share of irony. For it is this particular part of Quasimodo's poetic work that is quite accessible to the general reader but which, strangely enough, has failed to win the admiration of his critics — most of who prefer the pre-war, hermetic verse of the Sicilian.

Current views on the poet could stand partial correction. Quasimodo has been translated into several languages (although the volume of his *Selected Writings* did not appear until several months after he had been awarded the Nobel) and Russian, Swedish and German translations have appeared during the last few years. As for his stature in his native country, only gross ignorance of the contemporary literary scene would lead anyone to claim that the poet is less than fully esteemed by critical opinion in Italy. The poets and critics who have written on him are too numerous to be listed here, but they include Eugenio Montale, Oreste Macrí, Sergio Solmi, Luciano Anceschi, Giuseppe de Robertis, Gianfranco Contini and, more recently, Francesco Flora. As early as 1943, barely a decade after he had begun publishing, his position in Italian poetry was deemed sufficiently important to warrant a monograph and an interesting chapter in a volume on "Hermeticism." In the post-war years additional volumes (of which Natale Tedesco's is the latest) on his poetic work were authored by young critics. Yet, such distinguished English critics as Sir Cecil M. Bowra and Herbert Read have obfuscated the picture first by maintaining that "not a single work of art of universal significance . . . nothing but bombast and vulgarity" had been produced in Fascist Italy, and then by presenting Quasimodo as a post-war poet, disregarding entirely the fact that by the beginning of the war he had already completed his first important (and, in the opinion of several qualified critics, the best) poetic period. The pages that follow are offered to those who wish to take the opportunity presented by recent events to become better acquainted with a generous poetic voice whose words have meant so much to so many in tragic and hopeless times.

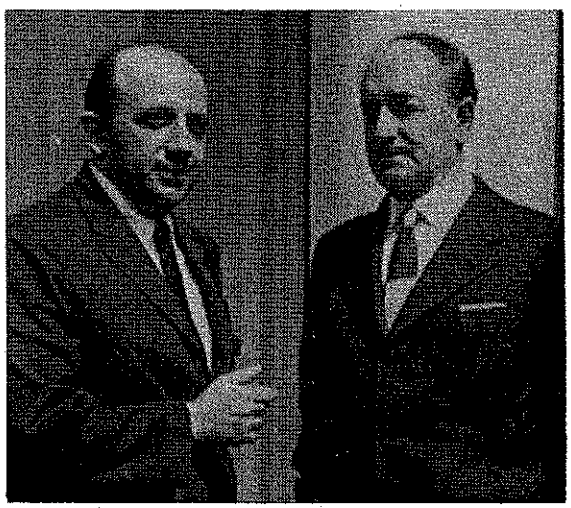
Salvatore Quasimodo was born in Modica, a town near Syracuse (Sicily) on August 20, 1901. His father was an employee of the State Railroad. In the words of the poet, "nel caldo feroce dela pianura di zolfo, trillava sempre il campanello che annunziava i radi treni. Imparai a leggere e a scrivere presto: e mi avvicinai ai poeti. Ancora non li capivo: ma d'essi m'è rimasta un'immagine immemoriale."

He began his formal education in the schools of nearby Gela. After the famous earthquake of Messina, in 1908, his father was transferred to that city. Quasimodo continued his education in Palermo, where

he enrolled in a technical school. His ambition was to become an engineer, as he was particularly attracted by mathematics. In 1918 he left Sicily for the "more civilized North" — thus continuing a tradition of other Sicilian intellectuals, like Verga, Capauna and Pirandello, who, blessed and cursed at the same time by their Sicilian birth, left the island for the more cosmopolitan air of the "continent." He took up residence in Rome where he continued his studies. It was there that he met Monsignor Rampolla del Tindaro who was responsible for persuading the young man to study closely and seriously the classical authors of antiquity in the original. Quasimodo's interest in his profession stopped there and then. For the next several years engineering was to be only a means to earn his livelihood. His friends wanted him to accept a position offered to him by a newspaper, but he refused, prefering to join the Ministry of Public Works which assigned him (another irony of his life!) to the southernmost city of Reggio Calabria.

He had written some poetry when he was still an adolescent and, although he had never stopped writing, he had given up the hope of ever being "published." In Reggio he again took up his pen, this time more seriously. He was twenty-seven then and his Sunday pastime consisted in crossing the Strait of Messina and spending the day on the island, with his friends Elio Vittorini, Pira, Glauco Natoli and Salvatore Pugliatti.

In 1929, following the example of Vittorini, Quasimodo left the South once again and settled in Milan. He visited Florence regularly, for that city was the cultural seat of the nation, where the most alive writers and poets lived and met, and where the important "little magazines" were published. It was there that Quasimodo met and became part of the group of *Solaria*: Montale, Manzini, Loria, Bonsanti, Vieri Nannetti. One day, as the train was pulling out of the station, headed for Milan, Quasimodo handed three sheets of paper to Bonsanti: they were his first poems earmarked for publication. The issue of *Solaria* that appeared a few weeks later carried the first samples of a genuinely new poetic voice. The editors and readers received those poems quite favorably and a volume of verses was subsequently commissioned by the subsidiary publishing house, "Solaria." It appeared a few months later, with the title *Acque e terre* ("Waters and Land"), a collection of the best compositions the poet had written between 1920 and 1929.



Sergio Pacifici and Salvatore Quasimodo

The book opened the first period of Quasimodo's poetry, one which lasted until 1942 and that takes its place in the general stream dubbed by the critic Fancesco Flora "hermetic." The tone of Quasimodo's early poetry is subdued; the metaphors used strange; the language he employs at times obscure. The principal force of such poetry is understatement, thanks primarily to a linguistic texture not studded with numerous adjectives. Its rhyme structure is freer and less committed to "repeat" the classical twelve-syllable verse. Its motifs are no longer religious or patriotic (though Quasimodo is, for all his dedicated opposition to religious authority quite religious). The poet's efforts were bent, from his earliest lyrics, to finding a language that could be poetic without being either subservient to the tradition or rhetorical, a language which, through its being sensitively handled, might gain new dignity and meaning. In a brilliant essay written in 1938 by Oreste Macrí (a critical piece that is a real landmark in the understanding of our poet) one finds the following observation: "the word of Quasimodo is at the basis of the poet's technique, the beginning of a conscious worth, the final desideratum, the cathartic meaning in which the entire current of inspiration and pathos is brought to a focus. In the

problem of the word the new character of our poetry has become defined: a movement of poetic fancy, anti-romantic, controlled, geometrical, eschewing the external, the fact, the pre-ordained." It may be accurate to state here that Quasimodo was by no means the first to give a new emphasis to the written word. It should be readily conceded, however, that it was he who brought what was aptly termed "the poetic of the word" to some extreme positions.

The reader coming into contact with the poetry of *Acque e terre* is invariably struck not merely by the delicacy of the images, the quiet, unassuming melody of its verse, but by the suggestive attempt to recreate the illusion of ancient art of communication: communication suggested and heard, as the words "sound," "voice" and "speech" indicate. It is always a continuous source of amazement and aesthetic joy to read the poet and witness how words themselves, subtly employed, become through sheer magic poetic power light, and yet profound images:

> Desiderio delle tue mani chiare
> nella penombra della fiamma:
> sapevano di rovere e di rose;
> di morte. Antico inverno.
>
> Cercavano il miglio gli uccelli
> ed erano súbito di neve;
> cosí le parole.
> Un po' di sole, una raggera d'angelo,
> e poi la nebbia; e gli alberi
> e noi fatti d'aria al mattino.
>
> *(Antico inverno)*

> The desire of your hands transparent
> in the penumbra of the flame:
> they smelled of oak and roses;
> of death. Ancient winter.
>
> The birds were looking for millet
> and they were suddenly of snow;
> so with your words:
> a little sun, an angel's halo,
> and then the mist; and the trees
> and us made of air at morning.
>
> *(Ancient Winter)*

Slowly the poet was beginning to move in a direction opposite to that followed by his predecessors who lived, as he perceived, in an era far too different from his own. For such a reason, he earnestly studied the various poetics of the tradition only to reject, not out of an emotional impulse but out of a secret wish to "improve" the tradition, those theories that had been formulated in the past, the various theories that presented themselves fully equipped with rhyme schemes and with lists of "occasions" deemed worthy of poetry. Thus, in an essay published in the review *Letteratura* (1939) in a special issue devoted to the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, Quasimodo made his position unmistakably clear. His particular opposition to the poet from Pescara was not to be interpreted as an expression of a lack of love for an artist whose contribution to poetry could never be denied, but as an indication of a personal belief in a different, individual search for an expressive instrument. It is in this light that *Acque e terre* is essential to a finer appreciation of the Sicilian poet, as his first organized attempt, to put it in almost military terms, to write a poetry based on different concepts: poetry, that is, far less committed to the articulation of traditional motifs than to a restoration of language through serious recreation of a personal condition in itself reflective of a contemporary-timeless situation. A first reading of the poems of *Acque e terre* may thus give the impression, unless read with less than a naive superficiality, that we are faced once again by subtle, unusual mature evocations of the poet's birthplace, which becomes immortalized by the poet's powerful images. A closer reading dispels such a notion. Quasimodo makes use of the elements of Nature and of his native Sicily to recreate for himself and for us the condition of anguish that in his first period of creativity is the prevailing theme of his work. When the compositions are especially felicitous, then the result, from the artistic point of view, can hardly escape the reader. It is a compelling synthesis of Life that is contained in the often quoted three-line poem "Ed è súbito sera:" ("And at once it's evening")

> Ognuno sta solo sul cuore della terra
> trafitto da un raggio di sole:
> ed è súbito sera.

Each alone on the heart of the earth,
impaled upon a ray of sun:
and suddenly it's evening.

Quasimodo, though intensely aware of the fact that the world he lived in had been stripped of much of its meaning, and was tottering upon the brink of destruction, aspired nonetheless to an ideal condition of peace and serenity. His ultimate goal, as in the case of his elder Ungaretti, was to achieve the "land of innocence," or better still "the promised land." Quasimodo's Garden of Eden, as it has frequently been said, is idealized in a Sicily half-land, half-water, drunk with the scent of the oranges, the lemons and eucalyptus, stunned by the heat, home of a glorious civilization whose remains are eternal reminders of a time that is no more. Expressive of this particular feeling is the beautiful poem "Vento a Tindari" ("Wind at Tindari").

Tindari, mite ti so
fra larghi colli pensile sull'acque

Tindari, I know you mild
among broad hills, above the waters

Much has been made of this extraordinary poem, certainly one of Quasimodo's finest. Its superb musical rhythm is achieved by the subtle disposition of words and images. "Onda di suoni e amore" (waves of sounds and love) — sounds are followed and preceded by movement, if only of a figurative sort: "e ti chini in cuore" ("and bend into my heart"); "Salgo vertici aerei precipizi" ("I climb peaks, airy precipes"). It is a sweet climbing and a sweet, but more mellow, descending: "Tindari, serena torna" ("Tindari, serene, return.") Quasimodo is, indeed, a poet who is best enjoyed when read aloud, in contrast with Eugenio Montale who is, at least for this reader, more rewarding when read silently. "Vento a Tindari" also illustrates the dramatic conflict between what is and what the poet would like life to be, symbolized by the antithesis between North and South — a recurring theme with the Sicilian who insists on the bitterness of his "exile" ("aspro è l'esilio") and speaks of the bitter bread he is earning by his work in the Northern regions of Italy (Milan) "amaro pane a rompere." Again and again, in ways too many indeed for me to list here, the South captivates his imagination. An interesting and sensitive anthology of his "southern" pieces could be usefully compiled, and in such a collection "Strada di Agrigentum" and the "Lamento per il Sud" would soon appear as among the most moving lyrics of our time. Quasimodo's compassion for his people, like that of all southerners, soon sharpened his concern with mankind in general — mankind striving to achieve what seems to be denied to it: peace, bread, love.

The poetry produced after *Acque e terre* belongs not only to a "moment" already defined but arise out of a particular inspiration. Such is the case of *Oboe sommerso* ("Sunken Oboe"), published in 1932 and defined by Vittorini as the book in which the poet "succeeds in defining the sense of aquatic and vegetable decay;" and such is the case, too, of *Odore di Eucalyptus* ("Scent of Eucalyptus"), *Erato e Apollion* ("Aerato and Apollyon") 1936, and of his collection titled *Poesie* ("Poems") published in 1938 and representing the first critical anthology and the ideal yardstick to measure the trajectory of the poet and his achievement.

Oboe sommerso, for example, strives to make alive, with greater clarity and depth, the sense of suffering, the feeling of loneliness that had already become poetic matter in the earlier compositions. The poem that gives the title to the collection is, in this sense, a conscious effort to confess and restate the poet's isolation:

Avara pena, tarda il tuo dono
in questa mia ora
di sospirati abbandoni.

Un òboe gelido risillaba
gioia di foglie perenni,
non mie, e smemora;
in me si fa sera:
l'acqua tramonta
sulle mie mani erbose.

Ali oscillano in fioco cielo,
làbili: il cuore trasmigra
ed io son gerbido,
e i giorni una maceria.

Miser pain, delay your gift
in this my hour
of longed-for abandons.

Chill, again an oboe utters
joy of everlasting leaves,
not mine, and disremembers;

in me, evening falls:
the water sets
on my grassy hands.

In a dim sky, fleeting
wings sway; the heart migrates
and I am fallow

and the days, rubble.

Sicily is the central image in the poems of *Sunken Oboe*, Sicily as a suggestive island not only because of its quality of dream and myth that, after all, are the central qualities of Quasimodo's own sensibility, but because, as someone recently suggested, it is so much like an Eden, the "mysterious place buried in the heart, into which the poet has miraculously succeeded in injecting new life." Sicily is the place that evokes sweet memories of childhood, the years and sentiments every poet, at one time or another, strives to recapture. Youth, for the poet, just like water, the sky, the air, the sun and the wind, symbolizes the freedom of that uncorrupted part of our lives which, for him and for so many of us, represents at once the "real" point of departure and the "ideal" point of return: "In my beginning is my end."

While thematically the various volumes published after *Acque e terre* contain few substantial innovations, linguistically they show a development worth noticing. One can hardly refrain from pointing out at this point (and T. S. Eliot is our constant reminder) how the poet *is* very much concerned with "the preservation and restoration of the beauty of language," and how he is committed to "help language develop to be just as subtle and precise in the more complicated conditions and for the changing purposes of modern life as it was for a simpler age." Quasimodo's diction readily accepts archaic words, freely borrowed from old Italian texts, and uses them in a contemporary context to create what he once termed, in one of his poems, "makeshift images." Archaic words, so employed, give a linguistic timelessness, a sense of a tradition that would otherwise not exist.

Time, meanwhile, was passing slowly for the poet: 1932, 1933, 1934 . . . new books, slim collections of lyrics. They did not, it is true, partake of the emptiness and futility prevailing in the socio-political climate of those tragic years. To the contemporary reader, exposed to those poems *here* and *now*, they transmit an electrical feeling of expectation, of anxiety, as though the wire of human existence, already stretched to its utmost, were about to snap. It was in the mid-thirties that Quasimodo undertook an important activity that soon began yielding its own fruits. I am referring to his study and eventual translations of the Latin and Greek classics. In many ways, indeed, his translations enabled him to achieve a truly personal voice. Like T. S. Eliot (studying and translating from Dante, Laforgue) or Ezra Pound (translating from the texts of Provençal and Italian literature and from the Chinese), Quasimodo's renditions of some of the masterpieces of classical civilization sharpened and perfected his own poetic idiom. Faced by a poetry, metrically, thematically and linguistically, far different from his own the poet measured his own ability as a craftsman and an artist by how successfully he could enliven old texts in Italian. His translations, by common consensus, have proved to be masterful recreations imbued with a personal fire that makes them particularly meaningful, despite their antiquity, to the modern reader.

Quasimodo's "second" poetic period begins with the slim volume *Giorno dopo giorno* ("Day After Day"), published in 1947 and accompanied by a perceptive testimonial written by Carlo Bo. The poetry of this period differs in tone, content and style from earlier verses. Linguistically, it is a good deal easier, to the point indeed that some critics spoke of a degeneration of Quasimodo's language. The poet employed the language of everyday use, willingly and purposely sacrificing a diction he felt to be inconsistent with themes that are more "dramatic," heavier and realistic. For another thing, this segment of the Sicilian's poetry deals consistently with real life, real issues, real people. Such a change, under-

gone by several Italian writers and artists, was brought about by the war. The visions of the water, the sky, the passing of time, the world of antiquity – still and secure – give way to a more concrete world of utterances, searchings, questions. The poet becomes at this point less concerned with the written word as such in order to focus on the word that will enable him to engage in a vibrant dialogue with the people. His dialogue is of the "engaged" variety, and displays a formidable concern with the fate of mankind and that of the individual living in a world of perennial, increasingly more serious crises.

A reading of Quasimodo's critical essays of this period would prove to be quite instructive and would certainly illuminate his drastic (or seemingly so) change from a position of "retreat" into one of participation: "The poet, in so far as he is a man, participates in the formation of a society, indeed he is a necessary individuality in this formation." These words were followed by a calmer observation: "The poet cannot console anyone, cannot accustom man to the idea of death, cannot decrease his physical suffering, cannot promise an Eden, nor a milder Hell." "Today, after two wars in which the hero has become an immense number of dead people, the poet's commitment is still more serious, because he must 'remake' man . . . "

Looking back in time, Quasimodo wrote in 1947 in a poem titled "Alle fronde dei salici" ("On the Branches of the Willows"):

> E come potevamo noi cantare
> con il piede straniero sopra il cuore?
>
> And how could we sing
> with the alien foot upon our heart?

Yet, one remembers, he has indeed "sung" some of his sweetest and memorable songs. But the experience of the war, the socio-political problems of the post-war period, the remembrance of the blood and of death and misery of the last catastrophic war could not leave the poet untouched. Since 1945 Quasimodo has become involved in a polemical debate with his critics and has often (and quite brilliantly, one adds) justified his poetics by projecting his work and that of his contemporaries in the context of universal and contemporary letters. "We are witnessing [he wrote in the "Discourse on Poetry" appended to his volume *Il falso e vero verde*] the growth of a social poetry, that addresses itself to various aggregates of human society . . . the poetry of the new generation, which we shall call social in the sense indicated above, aspires to dialogue rather than monologue. The new poetry may become dramatic or epic (in a modern sense) but not, I repeat, gnomic or sociological. Civil poetry, one knows, is beset by deep traps, and sometimes has toyed with 'aestheticisms' . . . the new generation is truly *engagé* in every sense of the literary field. The new 'contents' are heavy at times, but the content is conditioned by the course of history. The poet knows today that he cannot write idylls or horoscopes." History, the social conditions of the people, the yearning of people everwhere – these have been made, once again, worthy poetic subjects by Quasimodo. At the same time, however, one is struck by how the production of the post-war years is a strange mixture of poems seemingly inspired by bygone themes (and as such they "repeat" the moods of the first, hermetic period) and poems of the "second" manner, socially and politically conscious. The latter yields a large share of haunting compositions, inspired by timely occasions and events: the slaughter of a handful of Partisans, the launching of a new moon, a letter to an "enemy poet." It is fitting that in such poetry the recurring words should be war, tears, blood, sirens, death and the dead, rifles and rifleshots, dust, fear, iron, more iron – still more blood. One poem, titled "Colore di pioggia e di ferro" ("Colors of Rain and Iron") closes with the stark question:

> E dimmi, uomo spaccato sulla croce,
> e tu dalle mani grosse di sangue,
> come risponderò a quelli che domandano?
> Ora, ora: prima che altro silenzio
> entri negli occhi, prima che altro vento
> salga e altra ruggine fiorisca.
>
> And tell me, man cleft upon the cross,
> and you with hands thick with blood,
> how shall I answer those that ask?
> Now, now: before another wind does rise,
> another stillness fill the eyes, before
> another rust flourishes.

The personal poetry of the first period has clearly been superseded by an intense poetry that sings not of the anguish and sorrow of man, but the sorrow and anguish of Mankind. Sir Cecil M. Bowra, in an essay to which I have referred earlier, summarized the new situation correctly when he wrote that "Quasimodo's poetry was born in these years of agony and reflects his attempt to master circumstances by understanding them in their full significance for the imagination as well as for the intellect." For once, one is tempted to say, here is true poetry, poetry that succeeds in being understood before it can communicate.

In Italy, unfortunately, the later Quasimodo has enjoyed little favor with the critics: it is hoped that the recent award of the Nobel Prize may force them to read Quasimodo's post-war production again, and as carefully as they once read his hermetic verse. It is hard to imagine how they could fail to be moved by "Al padre" and "Lettera alla madre" — two of the most touching and human compositions that have been written in modern days. Let them reread, too "Visibile, invisibile" and the other lyrics of the post-war volumes. They will be struck by his simplicity, his power, his restraint.

An unpredictable poet, Salvatore Quasimodo is, unlike his elder Giuseppe Ungaretti and Eugenio Montale, (who have long time ago "completed" their self-definition) far from having written the work that will consign him, so to speak, to posterity. An alive and productive poet, Quasimodo is going through an important phase of his career out of which, I predict, he will emerge as one of the most enduring poets of our century. An extremely courageous man is he, for he possesses an unshakable faith in the power of poetry. In a discourse delivered before the Swedish Academy, and again at Yale University, he declared: "The loyalty of poetry becomes clear in a presence that is beyond justice and beyond the intention of death. The politician wants man to be able to *die* with courage; the poet wants man to *live* with courage." Unafraid to renew himself, he has dared to make use of polemical themes and unorthodox forms without regard to how the critics may interpret them. He has employed a classical, limpid and sensitive idiom to confront the social themes of our time. In a tradition-ridden society he has spoken boldly of a new conception of poetry and of the poet's ideal and *new* responsibility. However one might disagree with his *prise de position,* with his intellectual stand, one cannot but admire him. A poet of the highest integrity, Quasimodo has made his readers, the men of his own era and those who will read him in the future, still more conscious of our condition, the tragic condition that is man's. He has spoken with firmness and kindness to people the world over about life with words that are beautiful but also replete with meanings.

Not an optimist in any sense of the word, Quasimodo has never despaired. He has sought with words that are the very tools of the poet to be not an orator, nor a literary despot but a "workman of dreams." With all the intellectual resources at his disposal he has sought to illuminate for himself and for all of us the meaning of life and of man's condition in the universe. Discreetly, but convincingly, he has taught us to be a little stronger and a little braver, to be above the pettiness of everyday life and to rise above the cruelty of man. He has rebelled against tyranny and death, against wars and man's destructive impulses, teaching us, in his own superb way, *to be* ourselves and never ask either "grace" or "confusion."

SERGIO PACIFICI
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Salvatore Quasimodo's poetry has recently been published in a single volume, bearing the title *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 1960). A generous selection of his pre- and post World War II verse may be read in *The Selected Writings of Salvatore Quasimodo,* translated by Allen Mandelbaum (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, N.Y. 1960) from which the translations appearing in the present context were taken with the exception of "Ancient Winter" which was taken from *The Promised Land and Other Poems* (Vanni, N.Y., 1957).

A POEM *By Carlo Betocchi*

Translated by I. L. Salomon

Vetri

Sei vetri della finestra
nell'angolo della stanza
sono la strada maestra
d'ogni nuvola che avanza.

Io, dal mio angolo pigro
tendo insidiosi agguati,
dai poveri tetti emigro
verso quei correnti prati.

Non sono prati, son lenti
sogni: sogni non è vero,
sono fuggitivi armenti:
e nemmen questo è piu vero.

Vedi quell'azzurro. Cielo
è il cielo, bambino mio;
con la nuvola, nel cielo,
va la volontà d'Iddio.

Fumo che te ne vai solo,
spensierato, liberamente,
dal focolare del duolo
al cielo: prendimi la mente.

Sei vetri della finestra
nell'angolo della stanza
sono la strada maestra
della celeste abbondanza.

Windows

Six panes of the window
in a corner of the room
are the highway for
each cloud that goes by.

I from my slothful corner
set insidious snares;
from poor roofs I migrate
toward those flowing fields.

They are not fields; they're slowed
dreams: dreams, not that at all;
fugitive droves of sheep:
not even this is true.

Look at that dome of blue.
Sky is sky, my little boy;
with that cloud above
goes the will of God.

Smoke, when you go off
thoughtless, free alone,
skyward from hearth's grief:
take my mind along.

Six panes of the window
in a corner of the room
are the highway for
divine abundance.

REVIEWS

Fontamara, By Ignazio Silone. Translated from the Italian by Harvey Fergusson II. Foreword by Malcolm Cowley. Atheneum Publishers, N.Y.

In 1944, Ignazio Silone found himself back in the Italy from which he had fled to Switzerland in 1930. At the same time, he found himself back in the ranks of the Italian Socialists from which – with Gramsci and Togliatti – he had dramatically departed in 1921 to help form "the Communist Party of Italy." It was not altogether surprising that he soon found himself back at work re-writing the first of his novels, *Fontamara,* which had been begun in 1930 and published a couple of years later. He showed, perhaps, some of the sadness attributed to the hero of a still later story: "The sadness of one who set out to go very far and ends up by finding himself back where he began. Didn't they teach you at school that the world is round?" The mark of Silone's wisdom is that he knows the answer to the question implied is: yes, and no. And the difference between the first and second version of *Fontamara* is, in part, Silone's estimate of the world's roundedness, in narrative terms.

The second version appeared in Italy in 1949. In America, its English translation was taken on by a young recruit of the Foreign Service (at that moment, on loan to the military). It can be said that the State Department exhibited no alarm at one of its members translating a book by a "known former communist." But it should be added that the faint, equivocal communist aspects of the original (a certain emphasis and selection of material detail, an occasional mode of dialectic) had, in the revision, completed their initial tendency. They had, that is, now yielded completely to the interior force of a story; they had been entirely dissipated by the power of a moving, funny, brutal and tragic image of human experience.

Silone remarks in his prefatory note that he "painted the picture all over again from top to bottom, using the old canvas and frame." Even the old introduction has been revised, pruned here and elaborated there; and by an intelligent stroke of composition, it has now been made an integral part of the text, and hence of the story there contained. Silone's changes throughout aim in two opposite directions: those directions between which the literary art has traditionally resided. On the one hand, there is a concern for the universal quality of the persons and situations dealt with, for the timeless and placeless nature of events occurring in remote corners of Fascist Italy during the late nineteen-twenties ("All poor farmers are alike in every country . . . whether they are called fellahs, coolies, peons, muzhiks or *cafoni,* they form their own nation"). On the other hand, there is the effort to render more visible and real the particularities of the tale. This Silone achieves partly by thinning out the ragged array of peasant characters with their indistinguishable faces and unrememberable names; by deleting incident, anecdote or allusion when not directly relevant to a more vigorously shaped narrative. And he achieves it partly by thickening the characterization and careers of the persons who, after the thinning, show forth with greater resolution.

Fontamara itself is located with more visual precision, and its public face is delineated; this time we know what the book's hero, Berardo Viola, looks like: "very tall and sturdy . . . his neck was short and bull-like and his head square, but he had very gentle eyes" (in short, the type of the Silone hero). It is indeed Berardo whose artistic being is thickened the most; he emerges gradually, as he did before, from the un-

charted squalor of the Fontamara peasant community; but he emerges into a much fuller realization, with a full set of gestures, motives and responses, caught up in a more distinctly ritualistic action. That is to say that, by a familiar paradox of art, Berardo's greater concrete individuality lends a much more far-ranging significance to his final self-sacrifice. Elvira, too, his betrothed, comes further into focus and into being, both physically and psychologically; and Silone has added an addly Graham-Greenian account of her own self-sacrifice and death that quietly balances Berardo's.

The narrative lines are thus at once solider and more radiant than before; though one misses some of the lumpish roughness, the unhewn and groping quality that gave the original its air of being a potent phenomenon of nature; just as one might miss the short and elementary narrative rhythms that have been partly absorbed into the longer, more conventional paragraphs of *Fontamara II*. But those qualities have been smoothed away not only by a superior narrative art, but also by the pervasive presence at all moments of a pre-eminently poetic consciousness. As the peasant family — father, mother and son — tells its story, the language and tonality of each member are subtly informed by a sort of binding poetic reality. What now gets itself expressed is not a political dilemma, a historic cruelty, a technique of treachery, a cause to be fought for. What gets expressed is the *story* in all that. The events and persons shape themselves in terms of their appeal to a creative, a poetic, a story-telling imagination; and in so doing, they enlarge towards the archetypal. Silone's deepest impulse, I think, has always been essentially poetic; and as that impulse now takes control of the account of the Fontamara, disasters, the story suggests how far Silone has travelled in his understanding of human affairs, and it shows that his journey has not, after all, been circular.

Mr. Fergusson's translation cannot be compared with that of Michael Wharf, since Mr. Fergusson has rendered what in many ways is a different piece of fiction. His translation seems to me entirely admirable; he has got the whole of *Fontamara* inside the English idiom — none of the actual Italian sticks out or is undigested — while leaving the mood and movement of the new version intact. I have found only one slip, which it would be laborious to communicate, it has to do with the arithmetic of the famous division of the Fontamara stream, and it is as though Mr. Fergusson, just once, had himself been beguiled by the tricky Don Circonstanza. But this translation succeeds in what must have been a severe and subtle task: to arrive at a precise equivalent of the literary awareness and sophistication Silone has reached, without pushing beyond it to the point Silone does not want to reach — the point where the poetic style becomes merely stylish. One hopes (and urges) that Mr. Fergusson might now embark on a rendering of the no less thoroughly recast version of *Bread and Wine*.

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Fausto and Anna. By Carlo Cassola. Pantheon Books, 1960.

Carlo Cassola has confirmed his dedication to literary art as well as his affection for a work which Giuseppe de Robertis has called "il suo vero *romanzo*" by this publication of a revised *Fausto e Anna* six years after its first appearance. Many of the same characters, as well as the villages, towns and countryside of the Tuscan Maremma region which are depicted in his short stories reappear in this novel, brought together in new relationships and in the wider, unified frame of reference which only a longer work can provide. More importantly, as De Robertis has suggested above, this work is *Cassola's* novel, in that it was the first production of sufficient magnitude to express the totality of an ethical and moral experience. *Fausto e Anna,* thus, has a climatic function for the first period of Cassola's literary art, which is undoubtedly responsible for his decision to revise and republish it.

It is the novel of a generation, presenting the ambitions, hopes, frustrations and failures of provincial youth from the early Thirties through the war. While the disillusionment and vitiation of youth is a commoner theme among contemporary novelists, in Italy and elsewhere, than innocence, *Fausto e Anna,* in spite of its elegaic sadness, is permeated with a freshness and

unsophistication heightened by the implicit contrast with a society in ferment. Symbolic and significant is the limited, accessory role of the older generations which lack the vitality even to arouse resistance and revolt. Cassola's young people must find their way to maturity unaided. Perhaps what I call their innocence should be termed a total lack of cynicism, evidenced in a simplicity and directness of response to life which remind the reader often of the great Russian writers. Cassola has eschewed the superficial and the accidental in life to concentrate on "essence," the process involving him in a profound distillation of experience such as we find in poetry. He achieves this "essentiality" without literary pretense, by means of a nudity and immediacy of style which may deceive the careless or unalert reader.

In *Fausto and Anna* Cassola returns the novel to a path it followed so successfully in the nineteenth century, the narration of an *éducation sentimentale,* the portrayal of an *artiste manqué,* with Flaubertian overtones, but minus the indispensable element in post-Romantic sensibility, irony. There is another important difference: the slenderness and unpretentiousness of Cassola's narrative, which reflect the extraordinary reserve and essential humility of his artistic temperament. The Resistance theme gives this novel documentary significance which is secondary, however, to its providing the background for the sentimental and moral growth of the hero, Fausto Errera, a young professor who joins the Partigiani in the Tuscan mountains in 1944. The first half of the story recounts the adolescent loves of Fausto and Anna Mannoni, the pretty daughter of a minor provincial official, and it hardly prepares us for the change of direction and emphasis which occurs in Part Two. A structural symmetry in the pattern of the work is revealed, however, as it unfolds: a futile striving for self-realization destroys Fausto's chance for happiness with Anna and furnishes the climax for the first part of the novel; the hero's Partisan experience, after Anna's marriage to a more typical young Italian, Miro, offers him finally the basis for coming to terms with life, the self-confidence and courage he has always needed. It is the story's discreet and perhaps solitary irony that the resurgence of Fausto and Anna's love for each other, with its seemingly illimitable promise, is doomed, in spite of the brief idyllic happiness the swelling tide of the Resistance is able to offer them.

A noteworthy quality of the best contemporary Italian fiction is the skill and sensitivity with which the political theme has been universalized and made to serve a deeper, more artistically conceived portraiture of individuals and societies. Pavese's political sympathies, for example, are generalized and sublimated in his narratives to the point that one can never detect a political "intrusion." Cassola, too, has risen above "politics" by stopping only to extract from the political experience what it contributes to the enrichment of personality. Unlike many who have utilized the Resistance in literature, Cassola has not attempted an idealization. Fausto joins the Partigiani not because of political idealism, but because he feels the necessity of participation to satisfy a personal, rather than a social need. His political innocence (he is almost the only non-Communist or non-Socialist in the band) develops, with the broadening of his experience and knowledge of men, into a rejection of partisanship and politics. He emerges from the Resistance with a distrust of systems and any form of dogmatism, reinforced in his generous humanity, his hatred of man's violence to the dignity of other men. The maturing of this outlook in Fausto has even suggested a similarity in this novel, noted by De Robertis, to the design and spirit of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago.*

Italo Calvino recently called attention to a recurring theme in the fiction of both Cassola and Giorgio Bassani; "the melancholy of a provincial life that has closed in again about existence after the great moment of truth represented by the Resistance." (*Italian Quarterly,* Spring-Summer, 1960, p. 8.) In the *Fausto e Anna* of 1958 Cassola has reversed the formula by introducing the epic of the Resistance only after the elegaic narrative of youthful love in provincial Tuscany. While it may be possible to draw a more pessimistic conclusion, in line with Calvino's observation above, I prefer to discern a thread, however slender, of optimism, based on the portrait of Fausto as it emerges from the final pages of the book. The bloodshed, violence and cruelty of Partisan warfare do not attenuate the sense of solidarity and brotherhood it also provides. To the degree that Fausto's subsequent life will benefit from this enrich-

ment, we may accept this as an affirmation by Cassola. We can look more rewardingly to the story of Anna for a clearer confirmation of the fundamental sadness of Cassola's fiction. Her provincial girlhood, which alternatively provides simple joys and solitary boredom, must terminate eventually in the necessity of making difficult choices. A reasonably happy marriage with the charming but egotistical Miro leaves her hungering for a sense of identity and for spiritual fulfillment, satisfactions possible with the mature Fausto, but now unattainable.

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The Complete Poems of Michelangelo, translated by Joseph Tusiani, New York, The Noonday Press, 1960.

The Roman Sonnets of Gioacchino Belli, translated by Harold Norse. Preface by William Carlos Williams, introduction by Alberto Moravia. Highlands, Jonathan Williams, 1960.

Of Mr. Tusiani's labor of love, I can only say that it is certainly not lost – either on me or on the more competent devotees of poetry, who are so numerous in the English-speaking world. It is a joy to peruse his book, the first complete English edition of Michelangelo's *Rime,* for it shows the accurate hand of the scholar guided by the poetical sensibility without which an undertaking of this kind would be doomed to utter faiilure. Mr. Tusiani's thoughtful notes and the concise Introduction are great help. Besides furnishing the amazing editorial history of Buonarroti's poems, whose text was made finally available with total reliability by a nineteenth-century German scholar, Karl Frey, the introductory pages claim our attention for their lucid critical comment. Mr. Tusiani's flair as an interpreter and evaluator shows to great advantage when he explodes the literary prejudice that placed Michelangelo as poet within the thick ranks of Renaissance Petrarchists (not that his achievement as man of letters was unrecognized, of course.)

According to Joseph Tusiani, there is much more to Michelangelo's verse than the Petrarchan influence which nobody, in Renaissance Europe, could escape or just do without: there is the dramatic, rugged style which often disdains the polished surfaces of canonic Petrarchism, the mark of the leonine sculptor who wrestled with the fire of his own soul just as with the marble to be chiselled into struggling *Captives.* Because of this spiritual and stylistic ruggedness (not be be confused with lack of form) Mr. Tusiani sees the "Dantean" affinity as deeper than the Petrarchan one, and he also makes the point that Michelangelo's treatment of the verbal medium foreshadows Shakespeare. I would like to add that the wiry use of metaphor and the tenseness of language point to the best of John Donne. It is not clear what Mr. Tusiani has in mind when he states that Michelangelo was "the greatest lyrical poet of the Renaissance" – does he limit this claim to Italy (in which case it is indisputable) or does he include all of Europe in the range of comparison? For in the latter case rival claims might be staked with some justification. But I see no invidiousness in the statement; Mr. Tusiani loves too well and too wisely to stoop to cultural chauvinism, and I for one am prepared to admit that poems like *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto* or *Sì come per levar, Donna, si pone* or *Costei pur si delibra* are unsurpassed throughout Renaissance Europe.

I am not entirely convinced by Mr. Tusiani's argument that the sculptural ruggedness of Michelangelo's Italian could not be profitably attempted in an English rendering, but this is not to say that the translations here offered fall short of a high literary standard. Mr. Tusiani has avowedly chosen the way of decorum and smoothness, thereby sacrificing at least some of the original text's vehemence to the exigencies of metric regularity. His (English) decorum, however, is far from hollow, and there is little or no arbitrariness in his rephrasings. Archaistic staleness is also definitely avoided, and as a consequence we have a chance to hear Michelangelo as a pretty "contemporary" voice in Tusiani's versions. In the toll exacted by his fidelity to metrical pattern, I would include the rendition of Poem No. 147's end line as "To take us, opened its arms on a cross and bled," for the corresponding Italian makes no mention of bleeding and stresses merely the open-

ing of Christ's arms (on the cross) for an embrace, after life's storm: *c'aperse a prender noi 'n croce le braccia.*

In Poem No. 84, whose transparent density and hardness are inimitable, the present translator has struggled intelligently not to fail with dishonor. I object to his " . . . one sees,/Concealed in the hard marble . . . ,/The living figure one has to bring forth" for *Sì come per levar, Donna, si pone/in pietra alpestra e dura/una viva figura,* despite the cleverness of this solution and the understanding it evinces. Tusiani here has given us a clever paraphrase instead of the verbal monolith *si pone,* whereby Michelangelo expresses chiefly the act of physical creation, the "putting" an image in stone, rather than the mere "seeing" it in the mind's eye before execution. Michelangelo has strengthened the verb *porre* (to put, to place) to the point where it means "to make" without losing any of its specific weight.

Another greatness of the original that gets lost in the quoted Englishing of these lines is that direct intimacy between two opposite words, *levar . . . si pone.* By *"taking away"* from the block of marble one *"puts there"* the living figure contemplated by the artificer's mind. Thus the negative meaning of *levare,* since the act of physical subtraction is instrumental to the creative process, dialectically inverts itself into the *"positive"* of *porre* — and this movement as such structures the whole poem, in whose second part it is repeated on the purely spiritual level, as a metaphor of the soul's purification and release. It will not escape the attentive reader how that pivotal verb *levare,* reappearing in the conclusion of the poem, concentrates in itself both the negative action of drawing the poet's soul away from the burden of carnal reluctance and the positive one of "making him free, light," of releasing him so that "en lui-même enfin l' éternité le change . . . " But I don't know that the difficulty could be solved in English, and anyway Mr. Tusiani has shown his rare responsivesness to that miraculous *levare* by rendering it with an excellent "bring forth" which does remain static throughout the poem, unlike its Italian counterpart, yet seizes an essential aspect of Michelangelo's aesthetic conception. Instead I think the central part of the poem comes very near to equalling the divine asperity of Michelangelo's text:

So does the involucre of our flesh
Hide from the trembling soul,
With its burden of skin, unworked,
rough, hard,
Deeds of both light and worth.

Likewise, I hope Mr. Tusiani will forgive my fastidiousness if I take exception to his rhyme-bound choice of the adjective "vain" in Line 6 of Poem No. 83, because that falsifies Michelangelo's definition of his cherished inspirer, Vittoria Colonna, as *Donna leggiadra, altera e diva.* No trace of vanity in her: the "evil" her poet at first ascribes to her is due, as he explains in the tercets of this marvelous sonnet, simply to his own inability to rise to her divine power. Behind "death-giving" Vittoria there is Dante's Beatrice, there is Cavalcanti's Vanna; Renaissance Platonism has provided the imaginative link.

My occasional quibbling is not meant to detract from the great merits of Mr. Tusiani's performance, which leap to the eye everywhere in these solicitous versions. The merits of Harold Norse are as different as Belli is from Michelangelo, and since the two Italian poets are really antipodal to each other, but each powerful in his way, it is a shock of delight to assay them together in their respective contemporary translations. While Tusiani has been able to include the whole Michelangelo canon in one slim volume, Norse, faced with a much richer harvest, had to limit himself to a selection of 46 of Belli's sonnets. The selection is pretty judicious, for it covers a wide gamut — not only the ferocious sarcastic note for which Belli is so famous, but also the more sanguine or airy ones, as in "Fine Weather" or "The Twenty-fifth of November."

Eleanor Clark, and more recently Thomas Bergin in the anthology *The Poem Itself,* have eloquently commented on the sturdy power of our Romanesque poet, who used a local dialect as Daumier handled the pencil and the brush. Moravia, as a fellow-townsman of Belli and as a writer comparably aware of the degradations and vitality that seethe in modern Rome, was very well qualified for the job of providing a prefatory essay *de resistance,* which is an admirable literary and historical portrait. Norse's authority for attempting to transplant Belli's

juicy idiom in the American speech is, in part, dear old William Carlos Williams, who can here make his plea for linguistic nativism in an excitingly international context. Belli used the living speech of his day and place, and managed to redeem its vulgarity by facing it whole, instead of shunning it; Norse could only hope to capture some spark of his vitality by resorting to the most uninhibited American slang. Four-letter words, local color, Catholic liturgy, social picture, Roman picturesqueness — all is fused in the melting-pot of a savage poetry which sustains comparison with the spirit of Rabelais and, from the viewpoint of dramatic characterization, with Chaucer himself.

Norse has not brought to his performance the long patience and dedication that Tusiani brought to his, but he has boldly struck out into the new land that appealed to his roaming spirit, and with remarkable success. Belli's earthy humor comes through to a large extent, though a bit impoverished, of course. The flavor of his Romanesque is unique; Norse's American slang is less colorful, less rich in shades, less rooted. While I admire Norse's literary versatility in thus appropriating such a highly inflected foreign voice without an adequate background, I cannot quite see why he had to pose, barechested and bearded, in a back-cover picture that blends the Pompeian with the beatnik. That is a bit too versatile for me.

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EVENTS

Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and Dallapiccola's *The Prisoner* at the New York City Center.

The evening of October 9th was a special event for all lovers of Italian culture on our eastern Atlantic seaboard. On that occasion, the City Center Opera Company of New York presented the oldest Italian opera of real greatness, Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, along with one of the most significant operas of our time, Dallapiccola's *Il Prigioniero*. No less a maestro than Leopold Stokowski was in the pit, and the distinguished French tenor, Gerard Souzay, took the part of Orfeo. As might be expected, Maestro Stokowski had prepared both scores with loving care using in the orchestra such ancient instruments as the harpsichord, organo di legno, regal, old trombones, recorders, etc. according to Monteverdi's directions. Possibly fearing that modern audiences would become impatient with the repetitions of the original score, Stokowski shortened the opera by cuts from 90 minutes to about 73. This enabled him to present the work without intermissions between the five acts, and we passed almost imperceptibly from the Prologue into the first act, the scene of Thrace to the River Styx, to the Palace of Pluto and back to Thrace. As theater this was commendable, but among the music lovers I found many who missed the omitted verses of La Musica's aria in the Prologue and Orfeo's "Vi ricordo, o boschi" in Act II.

Since *Orfeo* was designed for a relatively small room in the palace of the Duke of Mantua in 1607, the performers tended to understate the music both on stage and in the orchestra. This may have produced an effect of intimacy and charm for those in the front part of the theater, but the openings of certain arias and soft orchestral instruments like the recorders were difficult to hear in the balcony.

Donald Oenslager's costumes and scenery were excellent in both operas. In *Orfeo* we were literally transported to the late Renaissance with courtiers, shepherds, Gods and other personages in colorful array on the stage. Particularly striking were the black furies in Act III and the impressive figures of La Musica, Charon, Pluto and Proserpine. The "deus ex machina" device of Apollo's descent from the heavens and the ascent of Apollo and Orfeo at the end of the opera actually worked with a smoothness which would have delighted the great Torelli. Ballet and chorus action were introduced whenever the score suggests it, and the furies were alternately sinister and friendly.

The full impact of the evening struck us during the intermission when a spokesman for the company reminded us that in the audience were such distinguished representatives of Italy as: The Honorable Gaetano Martino, President of the Italian Delegation to the United Nations; Ambassador Egidio Ortona, Italian Representative to the United Nations; Ambassador Francesco Cavalletti, Member of the Italian U.N. Delegation; Mr. Ruggero Farace, Consul General of Italy in New York; and Professor Filippo Donini, Director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura of New York. The performances were being offered that evening in tribute to both the centenary of Italian unification and the important meetings taking place at the United Nations.

As if inspired by the significance of the occasion, Stokowski whipped his orchestra into a frenzy for the opening of Dallapiccola's *Prisoner* (sung in English). And what an appropriate work this was for the celebration! This score, produced in the tortured days at the end of World War II dwells on the subject of liberty. Although composing in the twelve-tone idiom, Dallapiccola displays the traditional Italian tendency to write beautiful melody in any style, and the Austrians who invented atonality might well learn from modern Italian composers how to make this method palatable to the listener. The curtain went up on a terrifying backdrop of death's heads, prison bars and tottering crosses.

The orchestration, reminiscent at times of Berg, included such tense sounds as the piano and percussion for terror and the vibraphone for nebulous atmosphere. Norman Treigle gave us a stirring portrayal of the tattered prisoner whose only solace during his torture is the comforting greeting of the jailer, "My brother." As deliverance comes to the prisoner and as he gropes his way to liberty with the assistance of the priests, the music becomes progressively more luminous. In fact, the score ends so quietly that many in the audience missed the symbolism of the ending and left the theater rather puzzled by the work as a whole.

We commend the City Center for producing both works which they knew would hardly become box office successes in their professional New York debuts. For the music lover, these treats are all too rare. It is to be hoped that other organizations like the Metropolitan will follow this example. There are works by Cavalli, Scarlatti, Cherubini, Riccardo Malipiero and others which we are still waiting to hear in this country.

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ITEMS: *Italian Language Institute, Summer 1960*

Teaching Italian in the "New Key" was the leitmotif, the alpha and omega of six weeks' intensive work at Central Connecticut State College, New Britain, last summer. Twenty-eight teachers of Italian from as far as California and Nevada — though mostly from the Northeast — underwent intensive training in the new approaches to language teaching under provisions of the National Defense Education Act. Professor Arthur M. Selvi of CCSC was the Institute's director.

Classes and seminars extended daily from 7:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. in an integrated program featuring contemporary Italian civilization studies, intensive audio-lingual training work in the field of linguistics and methodology, and work with model demonstration classes and language laboratory practice. Some of the seminars were devoted to the production of new audio-lingual instructional materials.

The Institute staff included visiting professors Paul Mankin and Joseph Siracusa (University of Illinois); Franca Lolli (Smith College); Robert Serafino (State of Connecticut Foreign Language Consultant); and Howard Garey (Yale).

Distinguished guest lecturers included Professors Filippo Donini, Sergio Pacifici, Elio Gianturco and the author, Giosè Rimanelli.

This was the first and only Institute for teachers of Italian sponsored so far under the National Defense Education Act. It is hoped that its success will result in an increased number of NDEA Italian institutes in the years ahead.