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Quasimodo and the Spiritualization of
Cruelty, Saba's Uncanny *Shortcuts*,
Montale's Grotesque Imaginary: Complex
Genealogies of Italian Poetry on the Jewish
Genocide

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Abstract – The memory of anti-Jewish persecution intersected the work of prominent authors in Italian twentieth century poetry, often following oblique and unexpected trajectories that touch authors such as Montale, Sereni, Fortini, Pasolini, Saba, Levi, Quasimodo. This essay intends to probe a genealogical juncture in this poetic history, bringing into purview a series of poliperspectival models of poetic writing about the Shoah elaborated by Salvatore Quasimodo, Umberto Saba and Eugenio Montale in the early postwar years. If Quasimodo's *poesia civile* paved the way to a literary monumentalization of memory, such poetic configuration ultimately might be seen to hinge on what Friedrich Nietzsche critically termed a "spiritualization of cruelty." Thus it was progressively identified as a potential anti-model for Italian poetry dealing with the memory of the persecution – as a reading of Montale's treatment of this theme reveals. On the other hand, Saba condensed his afterthoughts about the "cannibalism" of racial persecution in *Scorciatoie e raccontini (Shortcuts and Very Short Stories)*: a book of *poèmes en prose* that possesses "the accent of poetry and the rigor of aphorism." These uncanny and ironical shortcuts raise corrosive doubts about the value attached to a purported monumental memory of the Shoah and bring to attention the existence of genealogical complexity in Italian poetic writing about the Jewish genocide that calls for adequate critical recognition.

Keywords – Shoah; Saba; Quasimodo; Spiritualization of Cruelty; Uncanny.

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1. Differential Memory

With just a short citation we can call to mind a well-known passage in Italian literature about the Jewish genocide: “Voi che vivete sicuri / Nelle vostre tiepide case . . . Considerate se questo è un uomo” (Levi, *Opere* 3; “You who live safe / in your warm houses . . . Consider if this is a man”; trans. by Stuart Woolf). *Shemà*, the poem opening *Se questo è un uomo*, condenses the most intimate core of Levi's testimony: the imperative to meditate what “man's presumption made of man in Auschwitz” (49). However, in sharp contrast with the quasi-religious tone of the poem, pervaded by a biblical “rhetoric of command” (Frye 232) the narrator's language adheres to a strict rejection of any emotional emphasis. The architecture of Levi's literary testimony pivots on a crucial counterpoint: the rational dimension of a narrative memory, aiming at an ideal of descriptive transparency and equanimity, coexists with a poetic prefiguration characterized by a violent and «parenthetic» tension, biblical admonitions and a “sacrament of language” (Segre, Moudarres). If compared to the therapeutic power of narrative writing (because “ibergekumene tsores iz gut tsu dertseyln,” “it is good to tell past troubles”)¹ poetry then represents the locus of articulation of a different psycho(traumatology) of memory. It generates an “asymmetrical symmetry” that infringes the critical myth of Levi's adamant rationality and opens an alternative dimension of memory. The polarities between rational and irrational seem to be overturned because, as Celan wrote in a renowned poem, “Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht”: “he who tells the shadow tells the truth” (Levi, *L'asimmetria e la vita*; Belpoliti; Celan, “Sprich auch du”; Mattioda 124-25).

Such a dualistic dimension, sensitive to the poliperspectivism of contrasting “inflexions” of memory corresponding to equally different “inflexions” of language, may offer a methodological framework useful to explore the “minor” field of Italian poetry about the Shoah (LaCapra; Deleuze and Guattari; Sodi 7). Limited in strictly quantitative terms, when compared to the parallel, overflowing production of testimonial narratives, this thread of poetic memory nonetheless intersects the work of significant writers in the Italian twentieth century. Besides Levi, who waited until the 1970s before collecting and publishing his poems (Levi, “L'osteria di Brema” and “Ad ora incerta”), the dissemination of themes and images relating to the Jewish genocide in postwar Italian poetry shows complex and multifaceted geometries. Its first anticipations can be traced in the work of Eugenio Montale, where a critique of Fascist barbarity and echoes of the persecution are diffused across a subterranean network of allusions spanning from texts such as “A Liuba che parte” up to “Il sogno del prigioniero,” the last “conclusionone provvisoria” attached to *La bufera e altro*. Immediately after the caesura of the war, the reality of the genocide received almost opposite treatments in the

¹ This Yiddish proverb appears in the opening epigraph of *Il Sistema periodico*.

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work of Salvatore Quasimodo and in the prose poems collected by Umberto Saba in *Scorciatoie e raccontini* – and this contribution will focus on such particular juncture. In later years, the disturbing memory of the persecution would resurface in the form of “flashes” and “sbregghi dell’esistenza” in *Gli strumenti umani* and *Stella variabile* by Vittorio Sereni. It would encounter a further turning point with the publication of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s “Monologo sugli ebrei,” a text published in 1963 in *L’Europa letteraria*. Forms and themes of this poetic production can vary greatly. However, suggesting a recollection of the past going beyond an aesthetics of descriptive realism, these texts articulate a verbalization of memory other than that proposed by the *effet de réel* of narrative prose.

Poetry expresses a verbalization of memory whose effects diverge from those achieved by a narrative rationalization of past experiences (Cavaglion). Considered then from this divergent perspective, the “minor” nature and the literary sophistication of lyric poetry about the Shoah possibly indicate a potential counter-memory of the genocide condensed in less visible zones of the Italian *champ littéraire*. It is not merely by chance, then, that one of the rare voices of protest raised against the racial legislation of 1938 came from the *trobar clus* of Montale’s *Occasioni*, encapsulated in the famous lines dedicated to Liuba Blumenthal (Hertz 14):²

Non il grillo ma il gatto
del focolare
or ti consiglia, splendido
lare della dispersa tua famiglia.
La casa che tu rechi
con te ravvolta, gabbia o cappelliera?,
sovrasta i ciechi tempi come il flutto
arca leggera – e basta al tuo riscatto. (*A Liuba che parte* 1-11)

Not the cricket / but the cat / at hearthside, many-splendored / lar of your scattered family /
counsels you now. / The House you carry, cage or hat- / box?, rides these blind days / the way
a light ark / rides out the flood - and is enough to save you. (Trans. by Jonathan Galassi)

In this text, published in 1939 and that possibly represents the point of origin of a (pre)history of Italian poetry about the Shoah, poetry configures a pole of resistance against a dominant collective ideology – or mythology. This resistential function may provide an additional thread to explore how, after the war, poetic transfigurations of the memory of persecution were destined to produce anything but linear trajectories.

2. *Poesia Civile* and Its Discontents

In their unwillingness to monumentalize the experience of the extermination, sensitive outputs of Italian poetic writing about the persecution would choose not to adopt that highly-refined and solemnly crafted language usually associated with the poetic ideal of *poesia civile*. Already in 1945, a sensitive reader such as Giacomo Debenedetti remarked how some of the most peculiar

² Liuba Blumenthal was Jewish, just like Dora Markus, Gertruden Frankl and Irma Brandeis. The only other leading personality in Italian literature who raised an open critique against the rising tide of persecution was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who embarked on a vehement dispute with Telesio Interlandi – newly appointed director of *La Difesa della razza* – about the supposed racial and cultural integrity of Italian art. The debate culminated in December 1938 with the publication of a special issue of Marinetti’s review *Artecrazia* devoted to the “Italianity of Art,” intended to debunk the “paroxysmal follies” of the “anti-Semitic campaign” (Talongo 259-60).

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developments in Italian postwar poetry were inclined to follow a significantly different path (probably destined to nourish what Luigi Baldacci later termed “poesia dell’antinovecento”):

Così è successo per Saba questo miracolo – insito nella sua natura profonda, da lui in nessun modo provocato – che mentre oggi si va cercando con furia polemica una «guarigione», e si rifabbricano con impazienza una forma e un contenuto alla poesia, magari chiedendoli alla cosiddetta “poesia civile”, sola igiene delle lettere oggi giorno – Saba può rimanere tranquillo al suo posto (Debenedetti, “Prefazione” to the *Canzoniere* viii).

So this miracle happened to Saba – a miracle that aroused from his most intimate nature, and that Saba did not provoke in any way: namely that, while poets are now furiously looking for a “healing,” impatiently refabricating a form and content for poetry asked perhaps to the so-called *poesia civile*, the only literary hygiene of these days, Saba can calmly remain at his place. (My trans.)

At the same time, while being a temporary guest in Debenedetti’s Roman house, Saba was engaged in the composition of *Scorciatoie e raccontini*:³ a slim book of prose that possesses «the accent of poetry and the rigor of aphorism», in which the author distilled his afterthoughts about the “cannibalism” of Mussolini’s regime and racial persecution (Saba, *Scorciatoie e raccontini*, shortcuts 76, 164).

After Levi’s *Shemà*, which served as poetical epigraph to the testimonial narrative of *Se questo è un uomo*, Saba’s “shortcuts” present another interesting “asymmetrical symmetry”:⁴ the onset of postwar Italian poetry about the Shoah occurs paradoxically with a prose book, written by a prominent Jewish Italian poet, that implicitly acknowledges – *more Adorniano* – the impossibility to write poetry about Auschwitz.⁵ To investigate the motivations lying behind this choice *not to* write poetry after Auschwitz – or to write a book where poetry negates itself and turns into prose – it can be useful to read *Scorciatoie* alongside with the most accomplished models of *poesia civile* produced in those same years by postwar Italian culture and committed to convey a memory of the persecution, that of Salvatore Quasimodo. This contrastive reading is intended to probe a critical doubt: namely the hypothesis that the *poesia civile* subtly critiqued by Debenedetti might have served to conceal, rather than unveil, a memory void, contributing to a literary endorsement of a potentially exculpatory self-representation about

³ The actual drafting of the book took place between the end of 1944 and the early months of 1945 in Debenedetti’s Roman house, where Saba found a temporary shelter following the liberation of Florence (Frantini 14). See also Debenedetti, “Intermezzo”: “Questo volume [*Scorciatoie e raccontini*] posso testimoniare di averlo visto nascere pagina dopo pagina nell’inverno ’44-’45: Saba me lo leggeva giorno per giorno, ne godeva come di un’ispirazione nuova e anche per lui sorprendente” (71; “I can testify to have seen the birth of this volume, page by page, in the winter of 1944-1945: Saba used to read it to me day by day, enjoying it as a new and, even for himself, surprising inspiration”; my translation)

⁴ It should also be noted that Levi and Saba corresponded briefly at the time. Their letters have been carefully analyzed by Andrea Rondini.

⁵ The reference is to the often quoted (and sometimes misinterpreted) sentence written in 1949 by Adorno and later included in *Prisms*: “Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben” (26; “Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today”). It should be noted that in his *Negative Dialectic* Adorno rectified this statement: “Das perennierende Leiden hat so viel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemarterte zu brüllen; darum mag falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben” (353; “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems”). For an informed discussion of “Adorno’s dictum” see also Hoffmann.

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Italy's involvement in the racial campaign. Its result coincided thus with a poetic monumentalization of the Shoah akin to the famous "plaque" in Via Mazzini, in the homonymous short-story by Giorgio Bassani ("Una lapide in Via Mazzini," in *Cinque storie ferraresi*): a poetic petrification of that past that simultaneously "exonerates the community from having to re-examine its own behavior and its changed position in the new post-war reality" (Kroba 210). From this standpoint, Quasimodo's poetry might be seen to represent an anti-model for Italian poetic production about the Shoah, while Montale's "Il sogno del prigioniero" acquires then a significantly different position, one in which a Dantean and grotesque language reveals to configure an alternative, (un)poetic and de-monumentalizing counter-writing of the *univers concentrationnaire*.

3. Poetics of Sublimation (and Acquittal): Quasimodo's Myths and Lyres, and a Poetic Counter-Writing by Montale

Fulfilling Debenedetti's expectations, in the aftermath of the war Salvatore Quasimodo insistently remarked the need "to reconstruct" the form and content of poetry, re-establishing literary codes able to sustain the crushing ethical burden of a totalitarian modernity:

Oggi poi, dopo due guerre nelle quali "l'eroe" è diventato un numero sterminato di morti, l'impegno del poeta è ancor più grave, perché deve "rifare" l'uomo, quest'uomo disperso sulla terra. . . . Per quelli che credono alla poesia come un gioco letterario . . . diciamo che il tempo della "speculazione" è finito. Rifare l'uomo, questo è l'impegno. (Quasimodo, *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia* 276)

Today, after two wars in which an immense number of victims has become "the hero", the engagement of the poet is even more difficult, because he has to "remake" man, this man abandoned on earth. . . . For those who believe to poetry as a literary game . . . we say that the time for "speculation" is over. To remake man, this is the engagement. (My trans.)

Beyond a rather naive formulation – to "remake" man was also one of the goals of Fascist and Nazi anthropological myths, and the expression itself is prone to evoke a hazardous teleology of the human – these programmatic statements included in a 1946 speech, *Poesia contemporanea*, tackled the issue of a post-Auschwitz poetry in terms radically antithetical to those advanced by Adorno a few years later (Adorno, *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* 26). The practical response to this new reconstructive engagement will find a thorough realization in Quasimodo's postwar and post-Hermeticist works, starting from collection of *Giorno dopo Giorno* (1947). The devastating image of the "urlo nero / della madre che andava incontro al figlio / crocifisso al palo del telegrafo" ("the black howl / of the mother advancing on her son / crucified on the telegraph pole"; trans. by Geoff Page and Loredana Nardi-Ford), included in "Alle fronde dei salici" clarifies, without hesitation, that "the time for speculation is over." Poetry cannot ignore the «immense number» of victims amassed to celebrate the disturbing splendor of twentieth-century dictatorships.

Along with the intense Christological metaphor, Quasimodo's text however reveals also an intertextual appropriation of Psalm 137, one of the most renowned passages in the Old Testament devoted to a recollection of suffering of the deported Jews of Israel:

Alle fronde dei salici, per voto,
anche le nostre cetre erano appese,
oscillavano lievi al triste vento. ("Alle fronde dei salici" 7-10)

On the branches of the willows, as a vow,

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also our lyres were hanging,
swinging softly in the dismal wind. (Trans. by Geoff Page and Loredana Nardi-Ford, with
some minor changes)

¹ Là, presso i fiumi di Babilonia,
sedevamo e piangevamo ricordandoci di Sion.

² Ai salici delle sponde avevamo appeso le nostre cetre.
Là ci chiedevano delle canzoni quelli che ci avevano deportati. (Psalm 137, Italian text)

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion / There on the willows
we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs.⁶

The goal of these intertextual overlappings can be easily decoded. The biblical reminiscence suggests a common destiny, a shared experience of suffering in which the remote *epos* of Jewish people might provide a metahistorical – or even mythical – background to illuminate the suffering of the present. Hardly a simple analogy, the connection established by Quasimodo is intended to evoke a compassion. The poem endorses a vision of the «quarantine of Israel»⁷ interpreted in the light of a relationality of suffering: the traumatic experience of a persecuted minority reflects *our* collective traumas and, by the same token, the suffering of an entire national community.

Quasimodo's appropriation of images and motives of Jewish suffering will reach its most complete expression in "Auschwitz," a text destined to play a crucial role in the shaping of Italy's poetic memory about the concentration camps. A prime example of literary work addressing the events of the extermination with a solemn poetic style, "Auschwitz" constitutes a paradigmatic product of the new *poesia civile* engaged in transmitting the memory of the Jewish genocide (Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture* 118-19). Originally published in 1954 – although the beginning of its composition can be dated back to a visit of the author to the Auschwitz-Birkenau site in 1948 – "Auschwitz" opens with a vision marked by the most recognizable elements of the *univers concentrationnaire*.

Laggiù, ad Auschwitz, lontano dalla Vistola,
amore, lungo la pianura nordica,
in un campo di morte: fredda, funebre,
la pioggia sulla ruggine dei pali
e i grovigli di ferro dei recinti. . . .

Da quell'inferno aperto da una scritta
bianca: "Il lavoro vi renderà liberi"
uscì continuo il fumo
di migliaia di donne spinte fuori
all'alba dai canili contro il muro
del tiro a segno o soffocate urlando
misericordia. . . ("Auschwitz" 1-5, 27-34)

There, at Auschwitz, far from the Vistula, / love, on the northern plain / in a field of death:
funereal, cold, / rain on the rusted poles, / and a tangle of steel fences. . . // From that hell
revealed by a white / inscription: 'Arbeit macht frei' / the smoke issued endlessly / of thousands

⁶ Besides Psalm 137, Quasimodo's lines might carry also an echo of Job 30-31: "E la mia cetera si è mutata in duolo / E il mio organo in voce di pianto" ("My lyre is tuned to mourning, and my pipe to the sound of wailing"; cf. Molinaro).

⁷ "Quarantena d'Israele" ("quarantine of Israel") is an expression used by Quasimodo in "Il mio paese è l'Italia," a poem included in *Il falso e vero verde*, published in 1956.

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of women thrust / from kennels at dawn to the wall / for target-practice, or stifled howling / for merciful water with skeletal / mouths under showers of gas. (All translations from “Auschwitz” are by Tony Kline.)

The poem condenses an emblematic collection of visual tropes and literary topoi derived from “the emerging post-1945 image bank” (Gordon *The Holocaust in Italian Culture* 119): the barbed wire, the opening gate with its defamatory epigraph, the image of skeletal victims pushed “under the gas showers” (lines 32-33), the “long tresses” of hair, the “infinite shadows of small shoes” (38-40). The concentrationary landscape is framed in a network of opposing semantic polarities of life and death, present and past, sound and silence. References to the extermination process and its material details – the camp gates, the gas chambers, the remnants of the victims – are at one time concrete and deeply symbolic. However, the solemn screen of a precious poetic expression, enriched by classical and literary reminiscences,⁸ intervenes to screen the direct exhibition of horror: the deeper is the abyss of suffering, the higher the rhetorical and aesthetic tension of literary representation. Bringing this dichotomy to its paroxysm, Quasimodo addresses the irrepresentability of the genocide through a poetics of sublimation, ultimately resorting to what Friedrich Nietzsche acutely defined as *spiritualization of cruelty* (Goebel 63-64).⁹ The depiction of a major historical negativity is reversed into an aesthetic catharsis, as the revelation of harrowing details of the camp intends to elicit, rather than disgust or repulsion, a sense of spiritual and psychological elevation. Such a transfiguration is explicitly evoked when the reader is invited to recognize the presences of “life” in a “death camp” (“E la vita è qui, / in ogni no che pare una certezza”; “And life is here, / in every ‘no’ that seems sure”; 14-15). Most importantly, “Auschwitz” calls for a sublimation of horror when a distressing event – the gassing of people and the incineration of their bodies – is turned into a poetic vision intended to exalt our ethical conscience. Quasimodo’s poetry thus unwittingly unveils thus the aesthetical paradoxes of any work of literature about the Shoah: how to extract poetic beauty from a death camp. It will be the unsustainability of this transmutation that, among other arguments, will urge Adorno to denounce the purported barbarity of poetry originating from the reality of genocide. The idea that literature might “reconstruct” the essence of man and spiritualize the catastrophes of histories also appears to be pervaded by what Leo Bersani acutely termed as a “culture of redemption”: an ideal of art conceived “as a corrective of life” that charges artistic representation with the task of rectifying an otherwise senseless reality (4).

Sealing this redemption of history mediated by poetry is again a mechanism of imaginative identification, alluded to in the concluding lines of the text. Some of the most emblematic traces of the extermination evoked in “Auschwitz” – the piles of hair, the numberless shoes and other traces of the past existence of the victims – are transfigured into tokens of a symbolic and affective investment. Transformed into “relics / of a time of wisdom,” they are imbued with empathic recognition or, one might say, of a sort of fetishistic reverence:

Restano lunghe trecce chiuse in urne
di vetro ancora strette da amuleti
e ombre infinite di piccole scarpe

⁸ See in particular lines 24-26, where the poem exhibits a reference to the classical myth of Alpheus ad Arethusa: “Come subito / si mutò in fumo d’ombra / il caro corpo d’Alfeo e d’Aretusa!”

⁹ Cf. Nietzsche’s aphorism 229 in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Almost everything we call ‘high culture’ is based on the spiritualization and deepening of cruelty. The ‘wild animal’ has not been killed off at all; it is alive and well, it has just become divine. Cruelty is what constitutes the painful sensuality of tragedy. And what pleases us in so-called tragic pity as well as in everything sublime, up to the highest and most delicate metaphysical tremblings, derives its sweetness exclusively from the intervening component of cruelty.”

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e di sciarpe d'ebrei: sono reliquie
d'un tempo di saggezza, e di sapienza
dell'uomo che si fa misura d'armi,
sono i miti, le nostre metamorfosi. ("Auschwitz" 39-45)

Long tresses rest enclosed in urns / of glass still crowded with amulets, / and infinite shadows
of little shoes, / and Jewish shawls: they are the relics / of a time of wisdom, of the wisdom / of
men who make weapons the measure, / they are the myths, our metamorphoses.

However, a hidden link relates the metaphoric construction underlying this final image of "Auschwitz" – "sono i miti, le *nostre* metamorfosi" – with the poetic inflection evoked in the conclusion of "Alle fronde dei salici": "Alle fronde dei salici, per voto, / anche le *nostre* cetre erano appese" (my emphasis). Like a Spitzerian click this *our* unveils a whole conceptual constellation (Spitzer). Faced with the necessity to reconstruct, if not man, at least a collective memory for new post-Fascist Italy, Quasimodo's *poesia civile* attempts to elicit a mechanism of imaginary identification with the victims of the persecution. The implicit message underlying these poems evokes an ethics of compassion and com-participation: the experience of racial persecution is incorporated within a collective experience and becomes part of the new, anti-Fascist Italian national *epos*. It becomes part of *our* suffering.

At the same time, though, this incorporation of the experience of genocide within Italy's collective memory is also inclined to promote a silent mechanism of acquittal. The emphasis on a retrospective com-participation, and even identification, with the victims of the persecution inevitably results in the obliteration of any sense of guilt, as well as of Italy's co-responsibilities in the implementation of racial persecution policies. This glaring absence invites reflection on the role played by high literature in the constitution of a new, post-Fascist and subtly self-absolutive national memory, as well as about the meanings associated with the experience of anti-Jewish persecution within this tacitly exculpatory narrative. Seen from this standpoint, Quasimodo's poetry seems thus to be linked, albeit unintentionally, to a wider process of "removal" of the experience of Italian anti-Semitism from the postwar memory landscape destined to play a key role in the construction of Italian postwar collective memory (Focardi, "Alle origini di una grande rimozione" and *Il bravo italiano e il cattivo tedesco*; Focardi and Klinkhammer; Schwarz). In this sense, writing poetry after Auschwitz really seems to entail pushing that event back to a poetic – or even mythical – past: a poetic and redemptive monumentalization of suffering intended to distance the disturbing memory of events that have to be contemplated from a safe distance.

Interestingly enough, this pattern of a poetic monumentalization will be largely avoided by further developments of Italian poetic writing about the Shoah. When in 1954 Quasimodo published "Auschwitz," Eugenio Montale was contemporaneously engaged in the composition of "Il sogno del prigioniero," the last "conclusione provvisoria" included in *La bufera e altro*. "Il sogno del prigioniero" conjures up an equally hellish vision of a Nazi (or alternative Stalinist) *univers concentrationnaire*. The poem presents extremely tangible references to iconic elements of the camp – the crematory ovens, for instance. However, the expressive texture of this text addresses the camp reality employing a completely different stylistic framework, most likely inspired by the "rime aspre e chioce" ("sour and harsh rimes") of the lowest circles of Dante's *Inferno* (cf. *Inf.* XXXII.1):

Albe e notti qui variano per pochi segni.

Il zigzag degli storni sui battifredi
nei giorni di battaglia, mie sole ali,
un filo d'aria polare
l'occhio del capo guardia dallo spioncino,

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crac di noci schiacciate, un oleoso
sfrigolio dalle cave, girarrosti
veri o supposti. . . .

.....
La purga dura da sempre, senza un perché.
Dicono che chi abiura e sottoscrive
può salvarsi da questo sterminio d'oche;
che chi obiurga se stesso, ma tradisce
e vende carne d'altri, afferra il mestolo
anzi che terminare nel pâté
destinato agl'Iddii pestilenziali.

.....
ho annusato nel vento il bruciaticcio
dei buccellati dai forni. . . (“Il sogno del prigioniero” lines 1-7, 11-17, 24-25)

Here few signs distinguish dawns from nights. // The zigzag of the starlings over the watchtowers / on battle days, my only wings, / a thread of polar air, / the head guard's eye at the peephole, / nuts cracking, fatty crackling / in the basements, roastings / real or imagined. . . .
// The purge goes on as before, no reason given. / They say that he who recants and enlists / can survive this slaughtering of geese; / that he who upbraids himself, but betrays and sells / his fellow's hide grabs the ladle by the handle / instead of ending up in the pate / destined for the pestilential Gods. . . . // I've smelled the scent of burning on the wind / from the cakes in the ovens. . . . (Trans. by Jonathan Galassi)

“Crac di noci schiacciate,” “oleoso sfrigolio,” “sterminio d'oche,” “pâté,” “il bruciaticcio / dei buccellati dai forni” (the *buccellati* are traditional sweets from Sicily). “Il sogno del prigioniero” alludes to some of the most disturbing elements of concentrationary imaginary: the extermination process, the smell of burned flesh, the completely unmotivated nature of the persecution (“La purga dura da sempre, senza un perché”). Though clearly referring to the hell of the concentration camp, Montale’s poetic depiction adopts stylistic coordinates that are antithetical to those employed by Quasimodo. “Il sogno del prigioniero” carefully avoids any spiritualization of suffering, relying instead on a harsh and defamiliarizing expressive tone, intended to echo the perturbing atmosphere of the Lager in the same phonic and metaphoric texture of its lines. Far from incorporating the modes of a high and detached *poesia civile*, the poem touches on the upsetting memory of the camp through an anti-lyric (and subtly anti-Quasimodian) grotesque imagery and it consciously employs a disturbing and Dantesque “comic” language. This choice to approach the themes of the persecution in strictly anti-lyric terms, namely through a poetry that “corrodes” its very foundations, can perhaps find a significant precedent in the work of the most notable Italian Jewish poet of the time, Umberto Saba.

4. Majdanek’s Inexpiability and Saba’s Uncanny *Shortcuts*

Subverting the reconstructive ideal invoked by Quasimodo, an oppressive vision of the unredeemable ruins of the past occupies a central position in the poems gathered in the brief section “1944” of Saba’s *Canzoniere*, expressly dedicated to the experience of the war. The inability to get rid of the debris of history through an imaginary act of poetic compensation surfaces in a striking way in one of the most renowned texts of the author, “Teatro degli Artigianelli”:

Falce martello e la stella d'Italia
ornano nuovi la sala. Ma quanto

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dolore per quel segno su quel muro!
Entra, sorretto dalle grucce, il Prologo.
Saluta al pugno; dice sue parole
perché le donne ridano e i fanciulli
che affollano la povera platea.
Dice, timido ancora, dell'idea
che gli animali affratella; chiude: «E adesso
faccio come i tedeschi: mi ritiro». (“Teatro degli Artigianelli” lines 1-10)

Hammer and sickle and Italy's star / ornate the hall now. But how much / suffering for that
sign on that wall! / The Prologue, sustained by crutches, walks in, / he greets with his fist, tells
his words / so that women and children / that crowd the poor stalls might laugh. / He speaks,
still with shyness, of the idea / that makes the animals brothers, then concludes: “And now / I
do like the Germans: I retreat.” (All translations from Saba's texts are mine.)

However, these apparently playful verses are surrounded by a landscape of complete
destruction alluded to in an upsetting final image:

Questo è il Teatro degli Artigianelli,
quale lo vide il poeta nel mille
novecentoquarantaquattro, un giorno
di Settembre, che a tratti
rombava ancora il cannone, e Firenze
taceva, assorta nelle sue rovine. (“Teatro degli Artigianelli” 17-22)

This is the Artigianelli theater, / when the poet saw it in nineteen / forty-four, one day / of
September / when at times / the cannon still rumbled / and Florence / kept silent, engrossed
in its ruins.

“Teatro degli Artigianelli” reiterates a symbology of ruins elsewhere diffused in the
Canzoniere and elsewhere in Italian postwar poetry – Saba's Florence echoes or instance the
“dead city” at the center of Quasimodo's “Agosto 1943,” a poem inspired by the destruction
of Milan. “Ruins of the past” appear as well in *Io Avevo*, another Saba's poem dedicated to a
recollection of the experience of the war:

Guardo nel cielo le nuvole passare,
biancheggiare lo spicchio della luna,

Palazzo Pitti di fronte. E mi volgo
Vane antiche domande. . . .
Che ci faccio adesso
Che sono vecchio, che tutto s'innova,
che il passato è macerie, che alla prova
impari mi trovai di spaventose
vicende? (“Avevo” lines 4-12)

I watch the clouds passing in the sky, / the whitening of a slice of moon, / Palazzo Pitti before
me. And I brood over / vane ancient questions. . . . What I do now / that I am old, now that
everything becomes new / now that the past is ruins / now that I have to face the / unfair trial
of frightening events?

These physical ruins, however, reflect the ruins of a «survived» and shattered humanity,
establishing a metaphorical link between material and existential destruction. This connection

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is brought to light in “Vecchio camino,” another text dedicated to the liberation/destruction of Florence:

Vecchio camino che dai tetti sporgi
.....
Quasi inutile fatto oggi alle nuove
scoperte – sempre più raro un saluto
di fumo mandi a quel cielo – se ammutolo
volentieri fra gli uomini, a te parlo
volentieri che, pur tacendo, ascolti.
Vecchio sei come me, sopravvissuto. (“Vecchio camino” lines 1, 24-29)

Old chimney that protrudes out of the rooftops. . . . // Made nearly useless for the new /
discoveries – rarer and rarer your greeting / of smoke reaches that sky – if gladly I / become
mute among men, gladly I talk / to you that, though silent, listens to me. / You are old, like me
– a survivor.

Saba’s poetry lacks any presumption of achieving a “reconstructive” redemption of the past, but rather acknowledges the inexorably “survived” nature of postwar (and post-Auschwitz) literature. However, though written by a Jewish writer who lived clandestinely during the war years, the poems of the *Canzoniere* substantially avoid explicit references to the genocide. Such absence does not imply an erasure of the notion of “what at Auschwitz, man’s audacity has made of man.” Rather the image of the camps, apparently obliterated from the domain of poetic imagination, looms oppressively on that particular form of anti-lyric *contro canto* that pervades *Scorciatoie e raccontini*. Published initially in the journal *La Nuova Europa* directed by Luigi Salvatorelli in the spring of 1945 (fig. 1), Saba’s shortcuts were gathered in a volume the following year. Reporting and poetically appropriating an opinion of his friend Antonio Piccone Stella, Saba defines them as:

brevi componimenti in prosa, di taglio scorciato ed incisivo, che hanno l’accento della poesia e il rigore dell’aforisma. E quasi – disse [Piccone Stella] – un genere nuovo, certo tutto suo, che egli [Saba] chiama SCORCIATOIE, perché, in modi rapidi ed ellittici arrivano a conclusioni lontane e spesso sorprendenti. (Shortcut 164)

Brief, incisive and foreshortened prose compositions, that have the accent of poetry and the rigor of aphorism. It is almost – [Piccone Stella] said – a new genre, one that belongs only to its author, that he [Saba] calls SHORTCUTS, because, in rapid and elliptic ways, they reach faraway and often surprising conclusions.

These sharp *poèmes en prose* define a point of condensation expressing what lyric language could not otherwise articulate: having been left out of the *Canzoniere*, the memory of the persecution and its explicit references to Majdanek, Hitler, Goebbels and anti-Semitic hatred re-emerge in a collection of aphorisms that possess the “accent of poetry.” *Scorciatoie* thus seems to suggest Saba’s awareness about the impossibility of producing a representation of the genocide hinged on the traditional codes of poetic imagination: post-Auschwitz poetry can only negate its poetic nature (or, in Adorno’s terms, it has to “corrode the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today”; Adorno, *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* 26). At the same time, this impossibility to transfigure the gas chambers into poetical beauty invites reflection about a deeper “inexpiability,” relative to the irremediable historical fracture determined by the genocide. In other terms, Saba is perfectly conscious that no literary stylization, no matter how full of *lacrime e sangue*, can approximate the human experience of

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Fig. 1. Umberto Saba, “Alcune Scorciatoie” (*La Nuova Europa*, 18 March 1945).

persecution. A rhetoric of tragic lyricism would rather result in an unwanted parody of suffering, as the author subtly acknowledges in this sharp metaliterary “shortcut”:

MARIO SPINELLA mi telefonò per sapere se poteva venire, quella sera, a trovarmi. Aveva – disse – qualcosa da dirmi a proposito di SCORCIATOIE. Gli voglio bene (fu assai bravo nel periodo clandestino) e poi speravo una lode. Gli dissi di venir subito.

Venne, infatti, subito. Aveva da dirmi che né lui, né i suoi compagni (giovani comunisti) sapevano che farsene di SCORCIATOIE. Sono – mi spiegò – piccole cose felici, nate dalla felicità (Forse voleva dire dalla liberazione). CAMPO DI EBREI¹⁰ di Giacomo Debenedetti, quello sì che gli piaceva; in quello sì che si sentivano veramente *lacrime e sangue*.

Forse aveva ragione Spinella. Maidanec è inespiable. (Shortcut 87; emphasis in the original)

MARIO SPINELLA phoned me to know whether he might come to visit me on that evening. He had – he said – something to tell me about SHORTCUTS. I am fond of him (he was very good during the clandestine period) and after all I was hoping to receive a praise. I told him to come soon. He came, in fact, soon. He wanted to tell me that neither he or his friends (young Communists) knew what to do with SHORTCUTS. They are – he explained me – little happy things, born out of happiness (maybe he meant to say born out of the liberation). JEWISH CAMP by Giacomo Debenedetti, that was what he really liked, there you could truly feel *tears and blood*. Maybe Spinella was right. Majdanec is inexpiable.

Scorciatoie is a response to the necessity of elaborating a language to address the *inexpiable* rupture of the genocide. Refusing any lyric stylization of suffering, in Saba’s vision poetry after (or about) Auschwitz effectively becomes impossible. It is in consideration of this linguistic and poetic impossibility that the fundamental overturning that lies at the core of *Shortcuts* acquires its clarity. The prose of *Scorciatoie* becomes the negative symbol of an impossible poeticization of the Shoah, while a corrosive and defamiliarizing irony provides the only rhetorical framework to verbalize a suffering that overcomes any capacity of mourning. Because the apparently “playful” or “paradoxical” appearance of (some) *Shortcuts* simply construes a rhetorical screen intended to convey far more upsetting contents:

¹⁰ *Campo di ebrei* was a review of Jean Jacques Bernard’s book *Le camp de la mort lente*, published by Debenedetti in *La Nuova Europa*, no. 13, 1 April 1945 (now reprinted in *Saggi* 1597-1605).

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Lettore mio, non t'inganni l'apparenza a volte paradossale, a volte perfino scherzosa (?) di (alcune) SCORCIATOIE. Nascono tutte da dieci e più esperienze di vita, d'arte e di dolore.

Sono, oltre il resto, reduci, in qualche modo, da Majdanek. (Shortcut 49)

Dear reader, do not be deceived by the sometimes paradoxical, sometime even playful (?) appearance of (some) SHORTCUTS. They are all born out of ten and more experiences of life, art, and pain. Moreover they survived, somehow, Majdanek.

Saba's irony aims at deconstructing some of the founding mythologemes of Europe's totalitarian experience, undermining at the same time the consolatory belief that the end of the war also resulted in an eradication of the death impulse pervading the violence of modern civilization and warfare.¹¹ Among the numerous examples of this humor *Scorciatoie* presents thus an unprecedented close portrait of Hitler, "God of Germans," depicted as a neurotic patient surrounded by the most unusual therapists – Goethe, Freud and Saba himself:

DIO DEI TEDESCHI (ritratto eseguito nel 1933) Con quei baffetti sotto il naso, e quella smorfia facciale, come fiutasse sempre... un cattivo odore. E lo fiuta infatti. Non gli viene – come egli crede – dall'esterno (da comunisti, ebrei, polacchi ed altri popoli slavi, intellettuali di destra e di sinistra, francesi degeneri, e via discorrendo... fino a comprendere il mondo abitato) ma solo da lui, dal suo di dentro. È una malattia, ma una brutta malattia; ed anche – allo stato attuale della scienza – inguaribile. Si chiama paranoia.

SE AVESSI DOVUTO avvicinare quel Dio, lo avrei fatto – paura fisica a parte – con lo stato d'animo del medico che si avvicina al letto di una grande ammalato.

FREUD non gli avrebbe detto nulla. Ma – se proprio avesse dovuto parlare – avrebbe detto (io penso): Antisemitismo. . . Piacciono gli uomini; ma non *quelli* uomini.

GOETHE gli avrebbe detto (io penso): Lascia stare gli ebrei. Trattati bene, portano prosperità; male, sfortuna. (Shortcuts 101-04)

GOD OF THE GERMANS (portrait realized in 1933) With those little mustaches under the nose, and that facial grimace, as if he smelled all the time... a bad smell. And he smells that in fact. It does not come – as he believes – from the outside (from Communists, Jews, Poles and other Slavic people, right-wing and left-wing intellectuals and so forth... up to include the entire inhabited world) but only from his person, from the inside. It is an illness, but really a bad illness lacking – to this date – of any cure. It is called paranoia.

IF I HAD to get closer to that God, I would have done that – physical fear excepted – with the state of mind of the doctor who gets closer to the bed of a severely sick person.

FREUD would have told nothing. But – if he had to speak – he would have said (I think): Anti-Semitism. . . One likes men, but not *those* to be men.

GOETHE would have said (I think): Leave alone the Jews. If treated well, they bring prosperity; if treated bad, misfortune.

¹¹ Despite the evident analogies between Saba's psychoanalytic interests and Freud's theory about "discontent of civilization" (*Unbehagen in der Kultur*), it should be noted that the first Italian translation of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontent* was published by Joachim Flescher in 1949, therefore after the composition of *Shortcuts*. However, in those same years Flescher corresponded with Saba. Their correspondence was published in 1991.

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It should be noted that a similar portrait will be reserved as well for Mussolini (shortcuts 105-07). The use of irony and humor is intended to sterilize any possible pathetic emphasis, preventing exactly that spiritualization of cruelty that Nietzsche had acutely diagnosed in his aphorisms in *Beyond Good and Evil*. At the same time, as reminded by Wayne Booth in a significant study – *A Rhetoric of Irony* – irony defines a complex rhetorical strategy fraught with deep ethical implications. Levi himself would resort to the force of critical penetration of irony and to its capacity of breaking down stereotypes and consolidated opinions. To this purpose, Robert Gordon has pointed out how the opening sentence of *Se questo è un uomo* presents an apparently incomprehensible – and bitterly auto-ironical – reference to Levi’s “fortune” of “[h]aving been deported to Auschwitz in 1944.” This curiously odd remark is soon followed by an upsetting commentary: “that is, after the German government, given the growing scarcity of manpower, had determined to increase the life span of prisoners to be eliminated” (Levi, *Opere* 5, my trans.; Gordon, “Per mia fortuna’: Irony and Ethics in Primo Levi”). A careful use of irony entails an only apparent attenuation in the telling of painful experiences. The laughter it elicits is anything but consolatory.

At a deeper level, however, this corrosive irony signals the inability to comprehend – in the etymological sense of “containing” – the magnitude of events too intense for the representational capabilities of literature. Through an inversion of the polarities between a comic and tragic attitude, Saba’s *scrittura sopravvissuta* invites reflection about impossibility of re-enacting and re-presenting an experience of suffering going beyond our capacity of understanding. Irony, in this context, highlights a “limit of the knowable” (Gordon, “Per mia fortuna’: Irony and Ethics in Primo Levi” 339), highlighting a *Diskrepanzphilosophie* mindful of the hiatus that separates our imaginative capacities and the destructive potentials of modern civilization (Anders). Saba is perfectly aware that, faced with the total destruction of war, even the *factio* of literature can generate nothing but a pale confused “dream” of reality:

A QUELLI che credono ancora che Adolfo Hitler (l'uomo che non poté amare) abbia *almeno* amata la Germania, racconto qui qual è stato *veramente* suo sogno.

Ridurre la Germania un mucchio di macerie; e, fra nuvole di gas asfissianti, rimproverando ai tedeschi di averlo – per colpa degli ebrei – tradito, salire EGLI al cielo, in una specie di apoteosi, circondato dal fiore delle sue più giovani e fedeli SS.

Questo sogno egli lo ha sognato così profondamente (credendo – oh, in piena buona fede! – di sognarne un altro) che si può dire egli abbia vinta – almeno in parte – la SUA guerra. (Shortcut 7)

For those who still believe that Adolf Hitler (the man who could never love) had loved *at least* Germany, I shall tell here what *truly* his dream was. To reduce Germany to a pile of rubble and, among clouds of asphyxiating gases, reproaching the Germans for having – because of the Jews – betrayed him, to ascend (HE HIMSELF) to the sky, in a sort of apotheosis, surrounded by the flower of his youngest and most faithful SS. He dreamed this dream so deeply (though he believed – oh, with all his heart! – he was dreaming another dream) that one can say that he won – at least in part – his war.

Besides the evident references to a psychoanalytic language, the “dream” alluded to in this shortcut marks an epistemological inadequacy. Such is the entity of annihilation that it can be perceived only within a defamiliarizing and oneiric framework. This dream, however, takes on the features of a Christological apotheosis (“salire EGLI al cielo”) with a paradoxical juxtaposition that calls for further interpretation. Saba’s shortcut suggests how, after the catastrophe of the war, any apotheosis depicted on a church fresco or organized on the stage of a political rally cannot be prevented from evoking, with uncomfortable parallelisms, *that* apotheosis. The link between these apparently disconnected events is represented by the eschatological aspiration incorporated in any political theology or, in other words, in a “sacralization of politics” (Gentile). Fostering unexpected and troubling connections, the

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textual fabric of *Scorciatoie* proves to be pervaded by what Freud defined as the “uncanny,” a feeling of uneasiness and “frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 219). The Freudian analogy is further echoed in a successive shortcut:

L'ARTE nasce attraverso la forma; vive, e muore, per il contenuto. Il verso «Nel ciel dell'umiltate ov'è Maria»¹² non ci dice più oggi quello che ci avrebbe detto seicento anni fa. Eppure il verso è sempre lo stesso. Ma – per tacere del resto – anche l'azzurra parola cielo ha, dopo che lo solcano aeroplani e ne piovono bombe, un altro significato. Crea altre associazioni. (Shortcut 11)

Art is born out of form; it lives, and dies, for the content. The verse “In the heaven of humility where Mary is” cannot express today what it used to express six hundred years ago. Yet, the verse is always the same. But – to avoid mentioning other things – even the azure word ‘heaven’ has, after that airplanes cross it and drops bombs like it would be rain, another meaning. It creates other associations.

After the war, even the innocent purity of heaven acquired a troubling connotation, it evokes quite different – and uncanny – “associations.” Far from being consolatory, the irony of *Scorciatoie* reveals itself to be fraught with perturbing nuances: shortening – or, as Saba puts it, *scorciando*¹³ – the distance between two points, these (un)poetic illuminations create uneasy juxtapositions and perspectives that are *too* close. This poignant rhetoric of irony generates worrying hidden symmetries between the distressing and traumatic memory of totalitarianism and a familiar, and only apparently reassuring, existential post-war landscape. This defamiliarizing perspective deeply permeates the texture of the aphorisms:

LIBRI GIALLI. Ogni arte (ogni attività) ha, per un lungo periodo, il suo «clima», nel quale solo attinge la perfezione. Il bel canto è italiano, il cinematografo americano, il romanzo poliziesco inglese. Si basa su una disposizione di legge che non permette, in Inghilterra, l'arresto di un indiziato se non si abbia, sulla sua colpevolezza, una «prova sufficiente a convincere una giuria». . . . Il nazismo – immenso romanzo giallo (ripeto: tutto in un'epoca si tiene) – ebbe davanti a sé, prima che gli inglesi si decidessero a intervenire, e a far intervenire gli altri, tutto il tempo che gli occorreva. (Shortcut 40)

GLI STRILLI acutissimi dei bimbi in cuna, o portati a prendere il sole da madri amorose, in carrozzella, ricordano, molto da vicino, i: Presto Francia! Presto Polonia! di Adolfo Hitler. (Shortcut 48)

RIMA OBBLIGATA. Dieci anni ancora di *fascismo*, *nazismo*, *razzismo* e si regrediva tutti (vero alla lettera) al *cannibalismo*. (Shortcut 76)

DETECTIVE STORIES. Every art (every activity) has, for a long period, its own «climate», in which it only can achieve perfection. The *bel canto* is Italian, cinema is American, the detective novel is English. It is based on a legal provision according to which, in England, it is not allowed arresting a suspect if, about his guilt, there is not “sufficient evidence to convince a jury.” . . . Nazism – an immense detective novel (I repeat: in a given era everything sticks together) – had all its time, before the Englishmen decided to intervene, and before they compelled others to intervene, it had all the time it needed.

¹² Cf. Dante, *Vita nova* XXXIV.

¹³ At this point it is clear that Saba's use of the term “scorciatoia” acquires a twofold meaning. The Italian “scorciare” can be translated as “to foreshorten,” evoking the visual content of a pictorial representation taken from an oblique and unusual viewpoint, but it also evokes the idea of shortening something (“accorciare,” “scorciatoia”). Saba's shortcuts then create a series of poetic *scorzi*, epiphanic visions glimpsed from a shortened, and therefore unusual, perspective.

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THE ACUTE CRIES of children in a cradle, or when their loving mothers bring them under the sunshine, remind, and very closely, the: Soon France! Soon Poland! of Adolf Hitler.

FORCED RIME. Still ten years of *fascism, Nazism, racism* and we would all regress (true to the letter) to *cannibalism*.

Each of these fragments of poetic prose construes parallelisms between apparently unrelated items: a “compulsory” poetic rhyme and racism, Nazism portrayed as an “immense detective story,” the cries of infants compared to Hitler’s political deliriums. These unusual metaphorical junctures frame the recollection of an anguishing experience within the context of postwar life and destabilize the vision of an only recently restored normality. It is within this uncanny framework that *Scorciatoie* outlines a disturbing psychoanalytical interpretation of exterminatory practices:

QUELLI, e sono molti, che credono, oggi ancora, che le guerre scoppiano per motivi economici, fanno come chi dicesse che i tedeschi hanno asfissati sei milioni e mezzo di ebrei allo scopo di cavarne concime. Li hanno asfissati per altri motivi (per qualche oscura reazione fisica, da birreria); una volta uccisi, ne hanno – e perché no? sfruttato i cadaveri a vantaggio del (nuovo) popolo eletto.

Le guerre si combattono perché l'uomo è un animale aggressivo; il più aggressivo, forse, della creazione. Egli sente che, se non estraverte la propria aggressività, questa gli si volta contro. (Shortcut 23; text amended according to Saba’s personal copy of *Scorciatoie*)¹⁴

Those, and they are many, who until today believe that wars break out because of economic reason, are like those who say that the Germans have asphyxiated six and a half million Jews in order to make compost out of them. They asphyxiated them for other reasons (for some obscure reason, one that could come up while in an alehouse); once killed they have – and why not? – exploited their corpses for the good of the (new) chosen people. Wars are fought because man is an aggressive animal: perhaps the most aggressive animal in the creation. And he feels that, if he does not extrovert his own aggressivity, this will turn back against him.

The death drive that brought about the “cannibalism” of the war has not been dissolved: it has been merely repressed.

These uncanny conjunctions between a traumatic past and a post-traumatic present are all the more significant if compared to the opposite poetics of monumentalization developed by Quasimodo. In Quasimodo’s poetry, a rhetoric of pathos was intended to project the violence of Auschwitz onto a metahistorical background. The memory of the genocide enters a sphere of poetic myth (“sono i nostri miti, le nostre metamorfosi”) and is simultaneously distanced from the ordinary experience of postwar experience. Saba’s *Scorciatoie* suggests an opposite perspective: it reminds the reader that the horror of war and racial extermination, far from belonging to a mythical past, is buried in the obscure and unconscious strata of ordinary life. It is also in this sense then that Majdanek reveals itself to be “inexpiabile.”

¹⁴ University of Pavia, Fondo Manoscritti, Fondo Saba, *Copia corretta e postillata di Scorciatoie e Raccontini*. The variation is the following: “cinque milioni e mezzo” → “sei milioni e mezzo.”

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