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The Posthumous Dimension of the Poetry of Vittorio Sereni and Giorgio Caproni

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

In 1936 Olga Franzoni, Caproni's girlfriend, dies of septicaemia. In 1943 Sereni is taken prisoner, thus beginning a two-year period of captivity. The impact of these episodes on Caproni's and Sereni's poetry has been thoroughly analysed, and to conceive of them as watersheds in the individual path of either poet thus comes as natural. However, what critics have less organically delved into is the possibility of considering these episodes as pivotal in shaping a more definite turning point, representing the moment from which Caproni's and Sereni's poetry becomes, in many respects, 'posthumous'. Building on Giulio Ferroni's idea of 'postumo', this study seeks to propose a critical lens through which to examine the *oeuvre* of both Sereni and Caproni. Through recourse to categories such as 'end' and 'after', I will explore the thematic implications of the nexus between poetry and experience for both Sereni and Caproni.

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Declaration of originality

I declare that the thesis does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for another degree.

I declare that the thesis represents my own work except where referenced to other.

List of abbreviations

Vittorio Sereni

P	*Poesie*, critical edn., ed. by Dante Isella, I Meridiani (Milano: Mondadori, 1995)
PP	*Poesie e prose*, ed. by Giulia Raboni (Milano: Mondadori, 2013)
Diario	*Diario d'Algeria* (1947)
Diario 65	*Diario d'Algeria* (1965)
Strumenti	*Gli strumenti umani* (1965)
Stella	*Stella variabile* (1981)

Giorgio Caproni

OV	*Opera in versi*, critical edn., ed. by Luca Zuliani, I Meridiani (Milano: Mondadori, 1998)
Passaggio	*Il passaggio d'Enea* (1956)
Seme	*Il seme del piangere* (1959)
Congedo	*Il congedo del cacciatore cerimonioso & altre prosopopee* (1965)
Muro	*Il muro della terra* (1975)
Franco	*Il franco cacciatore* (1982)
Conte	*Il conte di Kevenhüller* (1986)
Gelo	*Il gelo della mattina* (1952)
IA	*Il mondo ha bisogno di poeti: Interviste e Autocommenti*, ed. by Melissa Rota (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2014)

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1913 and 1912, Vittorio Sereni and Giorgio Caproni both belong, poetically, to what has been often defined as the 'terza generazione', to which Attilio Bertolucci (1911-2000) and Mario Luzi (1914-2005) also belong.[1] However, a distinction can be immediately made, between, on the one hand, Sereni, Caproni and Bertolucci, and Luzi on the other. The by now canonical line drawn by Mengaldo distinguishes, in fact, between 'poeti esistenziali' and 'poeti orfici':

> c'è da un lato la tendenza di chi si richiama a un filone *orfico-sapienziale* e attraverso la poesia intende affermare niente di meno che una *verità* in qualche modo trascendentale: diciamo appunto, Luzi e Zanzotto, l'attacco dei quali è infatti nell'ermetismo *strictu sensu* e a ritroso nella grande lirica primo-romantica da Coleridge a Holderlin. Dall'altro c'è quella di coloro che praticano invece una poesia *esistenziale*, e s'accontentano di partecipare un'*esperienza*: Bertolucci, Caproni, Sereni, con le loro ascendenze sabiane e la loro utilizzazione, in sintesi, antiermetica di Montale. La parola dei primi è necessariamente impositiva e quasi intimidatoria, quella dei secondi comunicativa e interrogativa […].[2]

Hinging upon the word 'experience', Mengaldo's distinction identifies a common ground between the poetry of Sereni and Caproni which is extraneous to other critical categorisations. Indeed, while Sereni has often been regarded as continuing a major lyrical tradition, Caproni has usually been grouped with a more peripheral 'linea antinovecentesca'.[3] In *Sulla poesia moderna*, Guido Mazzoni deploys the metaphor of the 'map' to mark out the literary space of modern poetry according to the role and solidity of the io, placing Sereni at the centre of the city (which is constituted by 'classicismo lirico moderno') and Caproni on the outskirts, within the 'periferie antiliriche'.[4] Any such categorisation presents, however, a certain degree of inaccuracy, as the boundaries between different groups of poets, between one tradition and the other, are inevitably moveable.[5] For this reason, the notion of experience may offer a more reliable framework.

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[1] See Anna Dolfi, *Terza generazione: Ermetismo e oltre* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1997).
[2] Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento: Nuova serie* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1987), pp. 20-21.
[3] Cf. Alberto Casadei, *Il Novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 81-84. For a reading of Sereni's poetry within the framework of lyricism, see Stefano Giovannuzzi, 'La persistenza della lirica: per una rilettura forte del Novecento' and 'Sereni fra *Gli strumenti umani* e *Stella variabile*: la condizione postuma della poesia', in *La persistenza della lirica. La poesia italiana da Pavese a Pasolini* (Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2012), pp. VII-XVIII and 123-140.
[4] Guido Mazzoni, *Sulla poesia moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 173-210.
[5] Ibid., p. 177. See also Paolo Giovannetti, *Modi della poesia italiana contemporanea: Forme e tecniche dal 1950 a oggi* (Bologna: Carocci, 2005), pp. 28-30.

A quick glance at some interviews given by Sereni and Caproni may help pinpoint references to the vital interplay of poetry and experience. 'Io non sono mai stato capace di conquistare una nuova consapevolezza, di aderire a una nuova posizione, per via intellettuale; mi è sempre stato necessario passare attraverso delle esperienze, restarne scottato', Sereni claims in 1962.[6] In 1989, Caproni likewise holds that 'se tanti attuali scrittori partoriscono opere sciape […] è appunto perché non hanno una forte esperienza di vita: non hanno, insomma, nulla di concreto da raccontare'.[7]

This interrelation between experience and poetry (what Wilhelm Dilthey has defined, in *Poetry and experience*, as *Erlebnis*) underpins the present study taken in its entirety.[8] In exploring the ways in which two specific experiences – namely imprisonment and grief – inform Sereni's and Caproni's poetry, respectively, this study seeks to propose a critical lens through which to examine the *oeuvre* of both. I will argue that the idea of 'posthumousness' put forward by Giulio Ferroni in *Dopo la fine, Per una letteratura possibile* provides a vantage point from which we can investigate the diachronic development of Sereni's and Caproni's poetry. Ferroni's conception of posthumousness has its root in the unconventional understanding of the 'end' as lasting beyond its normal limits. 'L'essere *dopo* del postumo', Ferroni argues, relates to 'un vivere che ha luogo al di là della persistenza delle sue radici originarie', opening up 'un oltre, una dimensione estrema, in cui nello stesso tempo qualcosa sopravvive'.[9] The present study posits that the experiences of imprisonment and grief represent the end after which this 'oltre' comes into being in Sereni's and Caproni's poetry. Great attention will be thus paid to any significant thematic strand which can be read in connection with the notions of 'end' and 'after'.

As indicated at the outset, the interweaving of poetry and experience is also the critical criterion by which Sereni's and Caproni's poetic works have been juxtaposed. While it is not easy to provide the term 'experience' with an exact definition, we may have recourse to the opposition stated by Mengaldo between, on the one hand, experience and existence, and

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[6] From an interview to *L'unità* in 1962, quoted in Guido Mazzoni, 'Verifica dei valori: Saggio *su Gli strumenti umani',* in *Allegoria*, 6.18 (1994) pp. 60-61. The word experience recurs, almost obsessively, also in another interview, this time with Alessandro Fo, see Vittorio Sereni, interviewed by Alessanfro Fo, *Una intervista a Vittorio Sereni*, first published in *Studi per Riccardo Ribuoli. Scritti di filologia, musicologia, storia* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1986), pp. 55-75, now available online on https://quattrocentoquattro.com/. (Part one: https://quattrocentoquattro.com/2013/02/05/intervista-a-vittorio-sereni-parte-prima/ part two: https://quattrocentoquattro.com/2013/02/05/intervista-di-alessandro-fo-a-vittorio-sereni-parte-seconda/) [accessed 1 October 2017]. Henceforth the quotes will be from the online version.

[7] Giorgio Caproni, *Il mondo ha bisogno di poeti*: *interviste e autocommenti* (henceforth *IA*), ed. by Melissa Rota (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2014), p. 410.

[8] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected works*, *Volume V*: *Poetry and Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[9] Giulio Ferroni, *Dopo la fine: per una letteratura possibile* (Roma: Donzelli, 2010), pp. 11-15.

on the other, truth and transcendence, in order to try to narrow down the scope of the notion of experience for the poetry of Sereni and Caproni.[10] We can thus argue that to ground one's poetry in experience implies, primarily, that poetry is not understood, as is the case for hermetic poets, as a means of sublimation, or of resolving reality's contradictions.[11] Poetry does not serve to provide a privileged and superior insight; it rather serves, to use an apt formula by Sereni, undoubtedly valid for Caproni too, to provide 'una figura all'esperienza'.[12] This outlook bears a significant consequence: inasmuch as experience represents something fleeting and essentially subjective, poetry cannot comply with any programmatic and *a priori* ideas. 'L'unica "linea di svolgimento" che vedo nei miei versi, è la stessa "linea della vita": il gusto sempre crescente, negli anni, per la chiarezza e l'incisività, per la "franchezza", e il sempre crescente orrore per i giochi puramente sintattici o concettuali, per l'astrazione dalla concreta realtà'.[13] Any poetics is therefore firmly rejected, as is paradigmatically shown by the extremely critical stance which both Sereni and Caproni take on Neo-Avantgarde.[14]

From a viewpoint which concerns the present study more directly, experience is the existential relation which the io has with the 'here and now', both on a physical and on a psychic level. It is the presence the subject manifests in the world as well as the understanding or the knowledge he or she has of the world. In this study, I am also concerned with how the coming about of posthumousness moulds the io's relation to his *hic et nunc*. While chapter 2 and 3 focus principally on reading the poetic treatment of imprisonment and grief through the lens of the posthumous categories of 'end' and 'after', chapter 4 is dedicated to examining the io's posture in relation to space and time in Sereni's and Caproni's mature poetry. Here, I shall explore how, in a context in which the io seems bereft of the possibility of experiencing the present, the two poets address the issue of the uninhabitability of the here (Caproni) and now (Sereni).

On a phenomenological level, experience is also the possibility the subject has of establishing relationships with objects. In this respect, the attention paid by Caproni and Sereni to 'cose' can be understood as indicative of an existential attitude which draws on

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[10] 'The word "experience" is one often used by philosophers, but seldom defined', Bertrand Russell writes in *History of western philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1946]), p. 725.
[11] Cf. Giovannetti, p. 17.
[12] Vittorio Sereni, interviewed by Alessanfro Fo, https://quattrocentoquattro.com/2013/02/05/intervista-di-alessandro-fo-a-vittorio-sereni-parte-seconda/, p. 6.
[13] Caproni, *IA*, p. 69.
[14] Cf. Sereni's letter (n. 92) to Luciano Anceschi, in Vittorio Sereni, *Carteggio con Luciano Anceschi*, *1935-1983*, ed. by Beatrice Carletti, intro. by Niva Lorenzini (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013), pp.211-213, and Caproni, *IA*, pp. 73, 77 and 91.

experience. It is no coincidence that Sereni himself regards this as a feature which distinguishes his poetry from that of 'ermetici': 'in loro [hermetic poets] sentivo una specie di misticismo nei confronti del fatto poetico stesso; cosa che io invece non ho mai sentito […]. In me, non so, c'era un maggiore attaccamento alle cose, agli aspetti della quotidianità […]. Diciamo che c'era un senso forse più concreto dell'esistenza di quanto non ci fosse in loro'.[15] Similarly, Caproni has often claimed to be suspicious of 'una poesia dove non si nota nemmeno un bicchiere o una stringa […]. Non perché il bicchiere o la stringa siano importanti in sé, più del cocchio o di altri dorati oggetti: ma appunto perché sono oggetti quotidiani e nostri.[16]

While it may account for the difference between existential and orphic poets, the determination of an object-oriented poetry may not suffice to single out Sereni and Caproni from Bertolucci, whose poetry also presents this underlying feature. We can instead seek to operate a distinction based on other criteria. The poetry of Bertolucci has consistently displayed a strong attachment to a familiar and circumscribed universe (which also implies, among other things, a strong tie to a precise and circumscribed landscape – the 'Appennino parmense').[17] It is Sereni himself who, apropos of *La capanna indiana*, writes of a kind of 'epopea domestica e agreste'.[18] The presence of this familiar universe is so vital to Bertolucci's work and, overall, so all-embracing as to push away from his poetry any collective and historical dimension.[19] Undoubtedly different from this, Sereni's and Caproni's paths: – Sereni's *Diario d'Algeria* (1947 and 1965) and Caproni's *Passaggio d'Enea* (1956); alongside Alfonso Gatto's *La storia delle vittime. Poesie della resistenza* (1966) – testify greatly to the fateful irruption of a historical and collective dimension (World War II) overwhelming the individual one. But perhaps more fundamental to drawing the distinction between Bertolucci, on the one hand, and Sereni and Caproni, on the other, is the

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[15] https://quattrocentoquattro.com/2013/02/05/intervista-a-vittorio-sereni-parte-prima/, pp. 10-11. 'Io in poesia sono per le "cose"', Sereni writes, 'non mi piace dire "io", preferisco dire "loro", Dante Isella, *Giornale di 'Frontiera'* (Milano: Archinto, 1991), p. 33, see also Fernando Camon, *Il mestiere di poeta* (Milano: Lerici, 1965), p. 133. It is worth noting that this object-oriented poetry is what, according to Luciano Anceschi, makes Sereni the leading figure of *Linea Lombarda*. See *Linea lombarda: Sei poeti. (Editi e inediti di Vittorio Sereni, Roberto Rebora, Giorgio Orelli, Nelo Risi, Renzo Modesti, Luciano Erba)*, ed. by Luciano Anceschi (Varese: Magenta, 1952), especially pp. 9-10.

[16] Caproni, *IA*, p. 69.

[17] Enrico Testa writes of 'un duplice teatro: il "vergine teatro / della mia proprietà", le campagne dell'Appennino parmense […] e il "teatro domestico" dei rapporti familiari"', adding that 'Bertolucci […] è anche tra i più sottili interpreti in poesia (debitore, in questo, forse delle analisi consegnateli sul tema dagli amati romanzieri inglesi) della contraddittoria trama d'affetti su cui si regge il microcosmo familiare.', in *Dopo la lirica: Poeti italiani 1960-2000*, ed. by Enrico Testa (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), p. 63.

[18] Vittorio Sereni, 'La capanna indiana', in *Poesie e prose* (Milano: Mondadori, 2013), p. 838.

[19] 'Il baricentro tematico è rappresentato dallo scorrere della vita quotidiana, dalla celebrazione della vita famigliare, dal ritratto delle persone più care. […]. Latita la presenza della storia collettiva', Alberto Casadei, Marco Santagata, *Manuale di letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Milano: Mondolibri, 2007), pp. 359-360.

greater overall impact that the latter two have had on poetic developments of the second half of the 20th century. Despite maintaining some important elements of continuity throughout its diachronic development, the poetry of Caproni and Sereni undergoes fundamental changes, especially from the 1960s onwards. It is precisely because of these changes that their poetry becomes so influential as to mark a turning point in the whole Italian poetic panorama. Indeed, according to Enrico Testa, the publication of *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso & altre prosopopee*, by Caproni, and *Gli strumenti umani*, by Sereni, both from 1965, represents 'un momento importante nella storia secondo-novecentesca della deflazione del soggetto e del suo rapporto con personaggi e figure diverse'.[20] It is a critical standpoint which is borne out by Maria Antonietta Grignani, who, still with regard to the stance assumed by the io after the turning point described by Testa, alludes to 'sostanziali convergenze' between Sereni and Caproni.[21] In effect, it is precisely around the weakening of the io that a thematic dimension gathers which in both the poets draws on negativity, and which includes aspects such as void and absence (to be conceived of differently from the idea of absence which is typical of *ermetici*); presence of the dead and of death itself; sense of displacement (which, as we shall see in the final chapter, is both temporal and spatial), and the awareness of the inadequacy of language. Furthermore, when placed on a diachronic line, the unfolding of their poetry shows a gradual devaluation of that very notion of experience on which their poetry itself rests. In this respect, the theme of journey can be seen to epitomise this devaluation, for both Sereni and Caproni seem to conceive of it as a means to depict the decline to which experience is subject. With particular regard to their mature works, the journey ends up coinciding with its antonym, stasis or the impossibility of travelling, thus highlighting the fading away of the formative part that an experience such as the journey carries.

In light of these shared characteristics, as well as of the critical observations which we have briefly touched on, it should come as no surprise that the bibliography on the two poets includes already one significant parallel study.[22] The book by Fabio Moliterni was published in 2002 and entitled *Poesia e Pensiero nell'opera di Giorgio Caproni and Vittorio Sereni*,

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[20] Enrico Testa, *Per interposta persona: Lingua e poesia nel secondo Novecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1999), p. 20.
[21] Maria Antonietta Grignani, *La costanza della ragione. Soggetto, oggetto e testaulità nella poesia italiana del Novecento* (Novara: Interlinea, 2002), pp. 112.
[22] Alongside the critical references already cited, allusions to the contiguity between the two poets are found in Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p.280; Paolo Zublena, *Caproni: la lingua, la morte*' (Milano: Edizioni del Verri, 2012), pp. 13-14. Maria Antonietta Grignani has provided a close reading based on the intertextuality between Sereni's poem *Paura seconda* and Caproni' s *Paura terza*, see 'Due paure: tra Sereni e Caproni', in *La costanza della ragione*, pp. 133-148. More recently, Elisa Donzelli too has referred to this very intertextuality, see 'Caproni e Sereni: oltre la bestia, la paura', in *Giorgio Caproni e gli altri: temi, percorsi e incontri nella poesia europea del Novecento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2016), pp. 178-213.

and its scope comprises the thematic range we have rapidly mentioned. Moliterni's study, on the one hand, testifies further to the possibility of examining the poetry of Sereni and Caproni simultaneously; on the other, it leaves room to delve further into the comparison, allowing for a different perspective. What should be stressed from the outset is that it is hardly possible to disagree with Moliterni's thematic choices. If the parallel is to involve Caproni and Sereni, the themes at stake are inevitably those broadly mentioned above, whatever perspective one may take.

One of the main levels of analysis by Moliterni concerns the category of time – 'la stratificata presenza del tempo nelle loro poesie', as the scholar puts it. Moliterni sees it as an inescapable feature of the poetry of both, for it is the temporal dimension that encapsulates 'tratti tematici ricorrenti che in entrambi ruotano sostanzialmente intorno a tre assi: la figura del "reduce", la *postumità*, la misura del tempo ferito che parte dal passato per gettare ancora le sue ombre nel reale; il sentimento complesso del presente, della crisi del *tempo*; il recupero del passato, tra la minaccia dell'*oblio* e la riappropriazione di una possibile dimensione temporale "autentica" (e della speranza in un futuro eventuale)'.[23] The present analysis holds that it is the nexus between the figure of the 'survivor' and the 'posthumous dimension' that can be taken as the key to a comparative analysis of the two poets. Even though this is also an important undercurrent of Moliterni's study we will argue that 'posthumousness' could be conceived of as a more wide-ranging frame against which to examine their poetry, especially when this is considered in its diachronic evolution. But what is referred to by 'posthumous'? What is it that can be defined as 'posthumous' in a poetic context? Although he stresses, quite rightly, that for both Sereni and Caproni the '*status* ontologico è quello del *reduce*, della *postumità*', Moliterni does not provide any insight into the meaning and scope of the term.[24] Those who are acquainted with the poetry of the 20th century are bound to have come across the notion. It has often been used by critics, both as far as the overall status of poetry is concerned, and in analysing single collections of poetry.[25] Moreover, instances of posthumous poetry may be seen to span the entire 20th century, from the well-known mood displayed by the crepuscular io (I am here thinking of paradigmatic lines such as Corazzini's 'Io non so, Dio mio, che morire', in *Desolazione del povero poeta sentimentale*, and Palazzeschi's 'qui vive / sepolto / un poeta', in *Postille*) to the emergence of the status of posthumous poet as it comes forth during the 1970s, especially after the publication of *Il*

[23] Fabio Moliterni, *Poesia e pensiero nell'opera di Giorgio Caproni e Vittorio Sereni* (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2002), pp. 164-165.
[24] Ibid., p. 141.
[25] See, for instance, some of the considerations made by Testa in the introduction to *Dopo la lirica*, pp. V-XXX.

pubblico della poesia, the much debated anthology compiled by Alfonso Berardinelli and Franco Cordelli (but here one may also recall Sanguineti's comically posthumous io 'più morto che vivo' in *Novissimum Testamentum*).[26] However, there has been a tendency to take the meaning of the term for granted. Chapter 1 will be thus dedicated to providing an insight into what posthumousness is and how it relates to the poetry of Caproni and Sereni.

As far as my methodology is concerned, I employ a variety of sources and borrow from a variety of disciplines (literary theory, philosophy, history, memory studies, etc.). Some of the terminology I adopt is borrowed from thinkers and scholars such as Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Reinhart Koselleck. This interdisciplinarity is mainly due to the wide spectrum of theoretical implications which notions such as 'end' and 'after' carry within themselves. There are, however, critical approaches with which I will engage throughout. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo's lifelong critical engagement with Sereni's work represents an unavoidable point of reference to the present study, and I will often refer to his analysis of themes such as time, memory, and repetition.[27] Regarding Caproni, I will often have recourse to the work of Luca Zuliani, who has brought to light a consistent body of unpublished texts, some of which allow us to provide new insight into the role of Olga (Caproni's girlfriend who died in 1936) within Caproni's poetry[28].

We now turn to Chapter 1, where we shall commence with an analysis of Ferroni's definition of posthumousness, and then proceed to provide an overview of how posthumousness has thus far been related principally to the later works by Sereni and Caproni. Our aim is to trace the coming about of posthumousness back to a previous poetic phase.

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[26] In his preface to the third reprint of *Il pubblico della poesia*, Paolo Febbraro states that 'il titolo del libro diceva che da allora i poeti non sarebbero stati autori, ma lettori di poesie', and that for Cordelli the book was 'un *coup de thèâtre* volto a suscitare l'apparizione scenografica del "poeta postumo"', in *Il pubblico della poesia*, ed. by Alfonso Berardinelli, Franco Cordelli (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2015 [1975]), pp. 21-25.

[27] Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni* (Torino: Aragno, 2013); cf. Sereni's own words in the interview with Fo: 'Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo […] ha saputo vedere proprio le ragioni, le ragioni personali, individuali, soggettive insomma, di quello che io faccio', https://quattrocentoquattro.com/2013/02/05/intervista-di-alessandro-fo-a-vittorio-sereni-parte-seconda/

[28] Luca Zuliani, *Il tremito nel vetro: Temi, stili e metrica in Giorgio Caproni* (Padova: Clueb, 2009).

CHAPTER I

The posthumous dimension of the poetry of Vittorio Sereni and Giorgio Caproni

In *Dopo la fine. Una letteratura possibile*, Giulio Ferroni provides a perceptive analysis of the posthumous quality of literature. Previously entitled *Dopo la fine. Sulla condizione postuma della letteratura*, the book ranges over the numerous connotations which the term posthumous can acquire in a literary context. From the ever-posthumous quality of writing as such – with its most basic function as testimony or bequest to be preserved after the author's death – to the ever-increasing presence of posthumousness in modern and contemporary literature, Ferroni generalises this aspect to our contemporary existence, in which we find ourselves all 'più o meno segnati da un nostro essere "dopo"'.[1] Indeed, it is this idea of 'essere dopo' which underpins much of Ferroni's analysis, and it is with its implications that the present analysis aims to engage.

What, then, does 'essere dopo' mean? Ferroni provides the following explanation:

> […] l'essere *dopo* del postumo, riferendosi comunque a un vivere che ha luogo al di là della persistenza delle sue radici originarie, si può concepire secondo punti di vista diversi: parlando dell'arte e della letteratura, *postumo* può riferirsi sia a chi stava in un prima e si trova a persistere vivo-morto in un dopo (al darsi postumo dello scrittore o dell'opera), sentito e rivissuto come lascito e resto di un prima, sia a chi sta in un dopo e si sente irrimediabilmente al di là di un prima che riconosce come essenziale e determinante; insomma possono essere chiamati *postumi* un autore, un'opera, un'intera tradizione, come può essere chiamato *postumo* un lettore, un pubblico, qualcuno che si rapporta a quegli oggetti postumi.[2]

The Latin sense of the adjective 'posthumous' used to refer to the 'last son', the one born after the father's death, and it therefore soon came to designate that fundamental and distinctive relation between a 'before' and an 'after' that is at stake in the excerpt quoted above.[3]

It must be noted that an almost identical relation informs the concept of *Afterness* proposed by Gerard Richter. In a book published in 2011, Richter defines *afterness* as a 'particular figure of modernity, that of following, coming after, having survived, outlived or succeeded something or someone'.[4] Building on Walter Benjamin's idea of *Nachleben*

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[1] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. IX. A previous edition was published by Einaudi in 1996. Regarding the inherent posthumousness of writing, one may also think about what Roland Barthes writes about the old figure of the author: 'the Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*', Roland Barthes, 'The death of the author', in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana press, 1977), p. 145.
[2] Ibid., p.11.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Gerard Richter, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia Universtiy Press 2011), p.2.

(which translates precisely as 'living on, living after, surviving, afterlife, or following'), Richter goes on to state that:

> to live *Nach* does not mean to emancipate oneself from what went before but, on the contrary, to be subterraneously determined by it to a greater or lesser degree.[5]

The proximity between a*fterness* and *postumo* is thus self-evident. Of great interest to our analysis is the fact that both concepts dispense with the usual understanding of 'before' and 'after', or 'end' and 'after', in favour of a surviving and persistent end whose traces remain active as well as visible.[6] Drawing precisely on this idea, our aim is to individuate thematic strands and poetic concerns of the poetry of Sereni and Caproni which are relatable to instances of 'end' and 'after'. Along with Ferroni, Richter thus provides our analysis with critical points of reference to which we shall have recourse when necessary. However, there are a few essential reasons for preferring, on a terminological level, the notion of posthumousness to that of afterness. Firstly, while Ritchter is generally concerned with matters of thought and aesthetics, Ferroni maintains his focus mainly on literature. Secondly, inasmuch as our objective is also to shed some light on the meaning and resonance of a term –'postumo' – which has been employed quite often, yet somehow hastily, within the poetic critical tradition, Ferroni's theoretical framework allows us to give 'postumo' more concrete and, to some degree, structural, implications. Finally, the idea of posthumousness forthrightly calls to mind that of death, which plays a fundamental role in Sereni and Caproni, both on an experiential and a poetic level. Indeed, for Ferroni, what greatly contributes to creating a posthumous dimension is, for instance, the presence of the dead, 'personaggi postumi' *par excellence*, alongside all the death-related aspects ('voci dall'aldilà, storie dell'oltretomba, fantasmi e spettri di vite passate'). And equally posthumous are those characters who 'scavano dentro il loro vivere una vita non più vita, attraversano un mondo a cui sono estranei, hanno perduto da sempre la scommessa con l'esistenza, parlano come dall'aldilà'; characters who are, one may say, emblematic of a 20th century Western literary trend.[7] With respect to this latter aspect, the estrangement experienced by characters or by authors themselves appears to be tied to a sense that existence – or experience itself – has

[5] Ibid., p. 10.
[6] Ibid., pp. 12-14.
[7] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. 56. As regards the Italian fiction, one may think of the figure of the 'inetto' from Italo Svevo's novels, as well as of some chronic 'indifferenti' from Alberto Moravia's works (Michele, from *Gli indifferenti*, and Dino from *La noia*, for instance). In the European context, it suffices to make a mention of the alienation from reality and existence experienced by some characters from Kafka's or Mann's novels, or by Antoine Roquentin from Sartre's *Nausea*.

undergone a sort of decline since the advent of the industrial revolution: the greater the bearing of mechanization and technology, the more frequently literature laments or expresses the unattainability of the realm of experience.[8] It is therefore no surprise that even what had been conceived of, for centuries, as the utmost experience – that is, the journey – loses its positive value, turning into its exact opposite, 'la negazione dell'esperienza':

> […] nel loro moltiplicarsi, i viaggi letterari contemporanei sono giunti a mostrare l'esaurirsi della stessa esperienza del viaggio, l'annullarsi di ogni sua possibile meta: a constatare come si sia perduta la vitalità conoscitiva sia dell'inoltrarsi entro le mappe del già dato sia della ricerca del nuovo.[9]

Death, the dead, deathlike characters and the negation of experience: for Ferroni, they all contribute to shaping a posthumous dimension.

Already from this brief outline given by the scholar, the scope which posthumousness opens up appears to encompass most of the themes with which the poetry of Caproni and Sereni is concerned. And the reason is not only to be found in the constant and essential role that the presence of the dead and of death plays in their work. It is Ferroni's final point about a denial of experience that that we can use to explore a further and decisive posthumous dimension in their poetry. We have already seen how the notion of experience lies at the root of the poetry of Sereni and Caproni, and we have also attempted to contextualise this notion in connection with the relationship which the io tries to establish with objects. As their poetry progresses, this relationship with 'cose' becomes more problematical, and so does that with the time they live in ('Non lo amo il mio tempo, non lo amo', Sereni writes in *Nel sonno*, V, l. 9, *Strumenti*). What is more and more often shown in their poems is a complete distrust of the possibility man has of gaining something from his being in the world ('Di noi, testimoni del mondo, / tutte andranno perdute / le nostre testimonianze. Le vere come le false. La realtà come l'arte', Caproni writes in *L'idrometra*, ll.1-5, from *Il muro della terra*).

The metalinguistic reflection in which both poets are engaged during their later poetry is both a formal and a thematic example of the complication of the relation with experience. What this reflection discloses is a lack of faith of language, a questioning of its capacity to reach the object it designates: language thus obstructs the relation between the io and the objects of the world, it comes to be felt as a deceptive 'maschera', to use a term dear to Giovanni Giudici.[10] The interdependence between distrust in language (and more generally,

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[8] Of course, there are some exceptions to this tendency, the most evident of which is represented by *Futurismo*.
[9] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. 95.
[10] Cf. *Rappresentazione di sé nell'atto di rappresentarsi colpevole e compiacente*, in *Il male dei creditori*: 'la lingua è una maschera, / maschera della maschera è la lingua straniera', Giovanni Giudici, *Poesie 1953-1990* vols.2 (Milano: Garzanti, 1994 [1991]), I, p. 353.

of the possibility of articulating a discourse) and the diminishing possibility of experiencing the world has been pointed out by Mengaldo:

> […] Se negli ultimi anni la naturale narratività e discorsività degli "esistenziali" appaiono in crisi, è anzitutto perché essi avvertono la crisi della nozione prima che le fonda, quella della possibilità stessa di un'esperienza […].[11]

It is a very similar relation to that suggested by Walter Benjamin in the essay *The storyteller*, published in 1936, where what is promptly introduced, at the start of the analysis, is a link between the devaluation of experience ('experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness') and the veterans of the First World War who 'returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience'.[12]

The ways in which experience appears to retreat from the realm of possibilities of the subject will become clearer by a close inspection of some texts. What can be further noticed here is that the expansion, in their later poetry, of themes such as the void, death and nothingness, as well as the tendency of poetry to acquire less realistic and more allegorical features, seems to be unavoidably linked to the disappearance of the levels of reality and experience. From the 1960s onwards Caproni's and Sereni's poetry will draw more and more on allegorical or dreamlike settings wherein the normal spatio-temporal coordinates are displaced. The consistency of the io weakens as his possibility of performing in the present 'here and now' diminishes considerably.

In what way does this discourse on the loss of experience relate to that on posthumousness? Inasmuch as the *raison d'être* of Caproni's and Sereni's poetry resides in the intention to communicate and deal with experience, the loss of this very possibility can be seen to disclose a dimension of 'essere dopo' – as if poetry itself, from a certain moment onwards, came 'after', were beyond what it is based on. Indeed, from a diachronic perspective, there is no denying that the more the poetry of Sereni and Caproni progresses, the more it gains posthumous elements. Even if one does not consider what has been thus far said about experience, there still remains a basic biological explanation for this. Ferroni suggests that critics should pay greater attention than they usually do to the writers' death, to the way they deal with death and to how they themselves imagine their own death.[13] Thus

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[11] Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento*, p. 20.
[12] Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations* (London: Plimco, 1999), p. 83.
[13] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p.23.

– to state the obvious –, the older an author becomes, the more likely he or she is to relate him or herself to death. If it is unquestionable that one's death is always in the future – always and perennially 'to be died', as the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch puts it –, it is also undeniable that this future looms larger as the years elapse.[14]

Furthermore, on a more general level, the decades spanning the second half of the twentieth century have heightened the awareness of 'essere dopo' in many respects, not least in the field of humanities. Macroscopically, one may think of the posthumous feature which is intrinsic to many theoretical orientations which emerge throughout this period. Nothing summarises this tendency better than Eric Hobsbawm's caustic introductory lines to his inspection of the social revolution that occurred during the second half of the century:

> some time in the third quarter of the century […] the keyword was the small preposition "after", generally used in its latinate form "post" as a prefix to any of the numerous terms which had, for some generations, been used to mark the mental territory of twentieth-century life. The world, or its relevant aspect, became post-industrial, post-imperial, post-modern, post-structuralist, post-Marxist, post-Gutenberg, or whatever. [15]

On a more specific level, with regard to the Italian poetry, it suffices to mention the programmatic title chosen by Enrico Testa for his anthology: *Dopo la lirica. Poeti italiani 1960-2000*. Never before the 1960s, the scholar argues in the introduction, had there been so profound a 'coscienza dell'esautorazione del valore trascendente della poesia e del suo statuto d'elezione e separatezza proprio della tradizione simbolista'.[16]

On these premises, it appears reasonable to begin with an account of how this posthumous dimension manifests itself in the later poetry of Sereni and Caproni. Critics have more easily and often reckoned with this aspect when confronted with the void which pervades particularly the later stages of their production. Even though, as will be shown subsequently, there is also the possibility of tracing the posthumous character of Sereni and Caproni further back in their poetry, for now the focus will be on this later phase, and on how critics have often considered the subject within the limited scope of the later collections.

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[14] 'Per tutti i viventi, ossia per tutti i mortali, invecchiare è infatti, nel corso degli anni, la forma che assume nell'al di qua un divenire inevitabilmente limitato dalla morte. L'invecchiamento non sarebbe forse una sorta di morte diluita, un istante continuato, ingrandito fino alle dimensioni dell'intervallo?', Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La morte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009), p. 179. The present analysis will return more at length to Jankélévitch's take on death in chapter 2.

[15] Eric Hobsbawm, 'The social revolution 1945-1990', in A*ge of extremes. The short twentieth century. 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), pp. 287-288.

[16] Testa, *Dopo la lirica*, p.VIII. See also Berardinelli, 'Effetti di deriva', in *Il pubblico della poesia*, p. 51: 'Il fenomeno letterario più interessante mi sembra perciò definibile come *tendenziale dissoluzione accelerata della figura socioculturale e ideologica dell'autore*'.

1.2) Sereni and Caproni as posthumous poets

It is not difficult to find critical claims about the appearance of posthumous characteristics in the later poetry of Sereni and Caproni. In the essay *Gli incontri con le ombre*, Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti sees *Stella variabile* (1981) unfold a twofold passage in the direction of a posthumous dimension. Firstly, 'la presenza dei morti viene a farsi più angosciosa e tragica, perché si trasforma nella presenza della morte'. Secondly, it is the presence of death itself that undergoes an ontological change. The adoption, by the io, of a 'sguardo tutto postumo sul mondo' results in the impracticability of experience, and even the experience of death is not given under its normal guise. Death no longer connotes a future dimension and becomes, for the critic, something that has already happened ('è come se l'esperienza della morte fosse già pienamente compiuta', he writes). The 'forma tutta postuma ormai della poesia' gives rise to a 'sguardo gettato su di se, le proprie esperienze, la natura, il mondo dalla condizione di quasi ombra ormai'.[17] A lyric such as *Il poggio* testifies to the scholar's claim:

> Quel che di qui si vede
> – mi sentite? – dal
> belvedere di non ritorno
> – ombre di campagne scale
> naturali e che rigoglio
> di acque che lampi che fiammate
> di colori che tavole imbandite –
> è quanto di voi di qui si vede
> e non sapete
> quanto più ci state.
> (*P* 257)

It is just one of the many texts from the collection in which the 'essere dopo' of the io coincides with the act of taking leave of life. The poem is structured around the contrasting relationship between the io and an undefined 'voi'. This contrast seems, in turn, to be built on a twofold difference: an attitudinal and a physical one (as suggested by the key verbs 'sapere' and 'stare', respectively). The first chasm is in terms of attitude: to the awareness the

[17] Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, 'Gli incontri con le ombre', in *La poesia di Vittorio Sereni: Atti del convegno* (Milano: Librex, 1995), pp. 88-89.

io has of all the listed pleasures corresponds the unawareness of 'voi'.[18] However, unlike 'voi', it is the io that is physically distant from reality, inhabiting an imaginary 'belvedere di non ritorno', in which, one may infer, being aware of 'rigoglio di acque' and 'fiammate di colori' does not seem enough to experience them. The second contrast is, thus, in terms of presence, with the io that is absent from the reality in which the others, however unaware, are located.

With regard to this latter aspect, deixis appears to play a seminal role. The repetition of the 'qui', in fact, tightly anchors the io to the 'belvedere di non ritorno', thereby strengthening both his belonging to an unreal setting and his distance from the real world. In *Martellata lentezza* too there seems to be a breakdown in the usual ways of having experience. The poem shows a disenchanted reconsideration of what used to be one of the cornerstones of Sereni's early poetry, namely the notion of 'event':

> A cose fatte pare
> di averlo saputo prima
> averlo vissuto già
> l'evento
> […]
> (*P* 243)

If one recalls lines 6-7 from *Terrazza* (*Frontiera*, 1941), which read: 'Siamo tutti sospesi / a un tacito evento questa sera', what becomes patent is the difference between two ideas of event, one positively projected into the future (*Terrazza*) and a very disillusioned one (*Martellata lentezza*). In *Frontiera* the event was sought, was waited for by the io, whose attitude was moulded by the attention paid to the physical world around him. As visible in the verses from *Terrazza*, the waiting for the event used to engender expectation (and Silvio Ramat has noted the nexus between the event – or 'la notizia', as he puts it – and expectation).[19] On the other hand, in *Martellata lentezza* the event is devalued, insofar as it no longer counts for any expectation it might give rise to, for any projection into the future. Precisely like death, the event has already happened, and having experienced it proves to be

[18] Given the relevance assigned to a 'non-knowledge', one inevitably recalls some of the lines (10-13) from *Un posto di vacanza*, *VI,* in *Stella Variabile*: '[…] Non sapevo, non so / niente di queste cose. Vorrebbe / conoscerle l'istinto solo standoci in mezzo, / vivendole, e non per svago: a questo patto solo.', in Vittorio Sereni, *P*, p. 232.

[19] 'L'attesa d'altro canto è qui una tensione più empirica che metafisica, è la passione minuta della notizia', Silvio Ramat, *Storia della poesia italiana del Novecento* (Palermo: Mursia, 1976), p. 478.

ineffectual, since it leaves the io bereft of any positive experiential gain. It is a disenchanted view on the world from the perspective of one who feels irrevocably 'after'.[20]

With regard to the position held by the io, Mengaldo too has pointed out how Sereni's last collection displays posthumous characteristics:

> […] il viandante del *Diario* e degli *Strumenti* si scopre ora un 'trapassante', e il tema là minacciosamente strisciante del viversi come un morto in *Stella variabile* si assolutizza senza remissione. Come formula decisiva del nichilismo dell'ultimo Sereni valga quella, così frequente, per cui le immagini, di ogni tipo, di sperpero, ristagno, falso movimento si cristallizzano finalmente nell'assoluto del negativo e del nulla.[21]

Mengaldo's remark matters not simply because it speaks of the posthumous quality which is inherent in the attitude of one who, in Ferroni's words, 'si trova a persistere vivo-morto in un dopo'. More importantly, it expresses the interdependence between a somehow posthumous state and the overwhelming expanding of nothingness and negativity. Indeed, it is not hard to find references to the void at almost any point in the collection. One of the best examples is *Altro posto di lavoro*, wherein the mutual dependence of the presence of the void and the absence of experience is so patent as to be readable on several levels:

> Non vorrai dirmi che tu
> sei tu o che io sono io.
> Altro di noi non c'è qui che lo specimen
> anzi l'imago perpetuantesi
> a vuoto –
> e acque ci contemplano e vetrate,
> ci pensano al futuro: capofitti nel poi,
> postille sempre più fioche
> multipli vaghi di noi quali saremo stati.
> (*P* 253)

The workplace wherein the action is set is home to the gradual disappearance of the subject. Instead of allowing the subject to find his essence as an individual, the workplace produces a sort of phantom of his, as the pair 'specimen' and 'imago' seems to suggest. Indeed, the 'imago', Bàrberi Squarotti explains, is 'l'ombra che rimane dopo la morte, e tutto il testo è in

[20] A more detailed reading of *Martellata lentezza* and *Terrazza* situated within the wider context of the changes undergone by the notion of 'event' is conducted in chapter 4.
[21] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 194-95.

rapporto con la visione ormai postuma delle cose che è di chi (in *Paura seconda*) sente nella via la morte che lo chiama per nome'.[22]

What has been hitherto said about the emergence of posthumousness in Sereni's last collection makes no claim to be an exhaustive recognition of the way in which this aspect runs through *Stella*. The aim, as mentioned above, is to give account of how critics have argued that this dimension constitutes a salient part specifically of the later poetry of Sereni. And as a final proof of this critical trend, allusion must be made to Stefano Giovannuzzi's study on 'la condizione postuma' of Sereni's poetry. Giovannuzzi's idea of posthumousness revolves around the presence, in *Strumenti* and *Stella*, of a panoply of linguistic loans, mainly drawn from Bertolucci and Montale (though not only from them), which would render Sereni's mature poetry a sort of receptacle for a substantial posthumous literary memory.[23] The present analysis will go back to *Stella* (and to Sereni's mature poetry in general) at a later point. However, an initial view appears to have been provided, and the chosen examples have made clear that to speak about posthumousness in the later poetry of Sereni is well established within the critical literature. The same applies to the later poetry of Giorgio Caproni.

From the perspective of a parallel with Sereni, perhaps one of the reasons why it seems easier to write about the emergence of a posthumous dimension in Caproni's later work is a mere quantitative one. If what is to be held as later poetry is the production stretching from the 1965 to the poets' death, what remains are just two collections by Sereni (*Strumenti* and Stella) and as many as five by Caproni (*Congedo*; *Muro*; *Il franco cacciatore*; *Il conte di Kevenhüller* and the posthumous *Res amissa*). Aside from bare quantitative valuations, one needs just to begin with *Congedo* in order to realise the extent to which posthumousness is a compelling aspect in the later Caproni. Similarly to Sereni – yet more explicitly –, the eponymous poem shows an io who is about to take leave:

[…]
  Congedo alla sapienza
e congedo all'amore.
Congedo anche alla religione.

[22] Bàrberi Squarotti, *Gli incontri con le ombre*, p. 88. 'Niente ha di spavento / la voce che chiama me / proprio me / dalla strada sotto casa / in un'ora di notte: / è un breve risveglio di vento, / una pioggia fuggiasca. / Nel dire il mio nome non enumera / i miei torti, non mi rinfaccia il passato. / Con dolcezza (Vittorio, / Vittorio) mi disarma, arma / contro me stesso me.', in *P*, 252.

[23] 'Negli *Strumenti umani*, e quindi in *Stella variabile*, la scrittura di Sereni elabora una compatta trama intertestuale, configurandosi come un bacino collettore della memoria letteraria', Giovannuzzi, *La persistenza della lirica*, p. 123.

Ormai sono a destinazione.

Ora che più forte sento
stridere il freno, vi lascio
davvero, amici. Addio.
[…]
(*OV* 245)

The initial title chosen for the collection was *L'uscio dei morti*, from which it can be inferred that what corresponded to 'taking leave of life' was 'approaching the dead'.[24] Indeed, the change of title notwithstanding, as can be deduced from a letter that Caproni wrote to Carlo Betocchi, to abandon life and encounter the dead are two sides of the same coin. The poem *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso*, Caproni writes, 'vuol essere soltanto il 'preludio' recitato (da un bravo attore, e con una certa enfasi) di un poemetto dove mi piacerebbe descrivere una mia calata nel limbo e un mio incontro con i morti, divenuto loro concittadino e fratello'.[25]

As indicated earlier, 1965 represents a watershed in the Italian poetic panorama, the reason being, to a great extent, the publication of *Congedo* and of *Strumenti*. For Caproni, the date does represent a sort of turning point for his entire *oeuvre* – or indeed, as it were, a point of no return. As Giovanni Raboni has noted, since 1965

> Caproni non ha fatto altro che 'congedarsi' dalla vita (con la sua ironia secca, 'cerimoniosa', terribile) dalla terra e dalla speranza, come se davvero fosse venuto per lui, poeta-viaggiatore, utente effimero e appassionato della vita, il momento di 'chiedere l'alt'.[26]

Of course, one feels entitled to take this collection as marking a watershed in Caproni's poetry owing to the nature of the following works, where Caproni pushes this 'essere dopo' dimension so far as to 'sentirsi', in Luigi Surdich's words, 'postumo al proprio essere postumo'.[27] It is a statement whose tautology is dispelled once it is seen in relation to the text it refers to, namely *Quattro appunti, 2.,* from *Res amissa*:

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[24] See Adele Dei, *Giorgio Caproni* (Milano: Mursia, 1992), p. 126.
[25] Letter dated '9 marzo 1961', in Giorgio Caproni, Carlo Betocchi, *Una poesia indimenticabile, lettere 1936-1986*, ed. by Daniele Santero (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2007), p. 210.
[26] Giovanni Raboni, 'Caproni o dell'esilio', in *La poesia che si fa: Cronaca e storia del Novecento poetico italiano 1959-2004* (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), p. 138. The final reference made by Raboni is to the refrain from *Versi*, *Stanze della funicolare* (1952), see *OV* 136-142.
[27] Luigi Surdich, *Giorgio Caproni: Un ritratto* (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1990), p. 139.

Sono già oltre la morte.

Oltre l'oltre.
Già oltre
(in queste mie estreme ore corte)
l'oltre dell'oltremorte…
(*OV* 765)

Not unlike what is undergone by the Serenian io in the 'belvedere di non ritorno', the io is here estranged from the scope of reality (and of experience). Just as in Sereni's poem, a pivotal role in performing this estrangement is played by deixis. The peculiarity of deictics resides in their being empty signs which are filled up with meaning only in reference to the context of the utterance, of the here and now of the moment of the speech act. Once deictics are placed in this context, a deictic field is established, by means of which utterances are related to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the act and moment of utterance. Deictics are, thus, 'indicators' through which the subject – the speaker – determines his or her presence and proximity/distance from other subjects or objects.[28]

With regard to the poems at issue, the obtrusive use of these linguistic elements (the repetition of first, second person pronouns and of 'qui', in Sereni; the use of 'già', 'oltre', and 'queste', in Caproni) is functional to anchoring the io to an intangible here and now. His presence within such a spatio-temporal grid thus coincides with an absence from reality.

To delve into the ways in which the idea of experience is overturned or negated in the later poetry of Caproni one just needs to have a look at how the theme of the journey is portrayed. In *Esperienza*, from *Muro* (1975), the annihilation of the notion of experience as such goes through the cancellation of any possible destination, which can be seen in agreement with Ferroni's idea of the negation of experience**:**

Tutti i luoghi che ho visto,
che ho visitato,
ora so – ne son certo:
non ci sono mai stato.

[28] For an overview of deixis and deicitcs see John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), II, pp. 636-718. For the study of deixis in Italian poetry see Enrico Testa, '"Sur la corde de la voix": Funzioni della deissi nel testo poetico', in *Linguistica, pragmatica e testo letterario*, ed. by Umberto Rapallo, (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1986), pp. 113-146. On Sereni's use of deictics, see also Francesca Southerdern, *Landscapes of desire in the poetry of Vittorio Sereni* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially pp.51-89. As for Caproni, see Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, pp. 79-109.

(*OV* 382)

It has already been seen how Luigi Surdich has discussed the theme of posthumousness in the later poetry of Caproni. The scholar has then further addressed the issue by drawing on what, in his opinion, is an attitudinal distinction between Caproni and Montale. Whereas, in fact, the latter embodies the figure of the 'survivor', the former, 'dimissionatosi dalla vita col gesto del congedo, è nella più autentica e radicale condizione di "postumo"'. These diverse stances result, among other things, in distinct attitudes towards the dead, whereby 'mentre per Montale c'è la facoltà fantastica della rottura della barriera tra al di qua e aldilà, Caproni si nega qualsiasi dialogo con i morti'.[29]

Not unlike Surdich and Raboni, other critics have written about the posthumous dimension which unfolds in the later poetry of Caproni, and we will take account of these critical views when necessary.[30] Overall, what is clear from this brief overview is that, just as in Sereni, a posthumous dimension does open up in the later poetry of Caproni too. More importantly, within the broader discourse of a parallel, the thematic scope opened up by the notion of posthumousness appears to be wide enough to encompass various thematic aspects of their poetry, thus supporting the central argument on which the present analysis is based, namely the use of posthumousness as a framework against which to investigate Caproni's and Sereni's poetry.

Nevertheless, from what has been thus far said, there arise some legitimate concerns. Firstly, one may object that, if the notion of posthumousnees is inherent in that of literature as such – as Ferroni claims –, its all-embracing scope is far too vague to be chosen as a discriminating category. Secondly, as pointed out earlier, from the 1960s on, it is more than just Caproni's and Sereni's poetry that carries posthumous traits; rather, it is an entire national – if not Western – literary panorama that seems to rest on a posthumous dimension.[31] Nonetheless, it is when we extend the analysis of their poetry back to the earlier collections, as well as to how these are affected by or relate to two seminal biographical events, that the analysis of the posthumous dimension becomes of great relevance: on the one hand, the imprisonment Sereni undergoes during the second world war; on the other, the grief endured by Caproni after the premature death of Olga Franzoni in 1936. The fact that these experiences mould their poetry no less than their lives is well known. The long-lasting

[29] Surdich, *Le idée e la poesia: Montale e Caproni* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1998), pp. 131-132.
[30] Cf. Mario Boselli, 'Giorgio Caproni poeta "postumo"', *in Per Giorgio Caproni,* ed. by Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1997), pp. 31-37. It is interesting to note that Mario Boselli too has resorted to a comparison with Montale to explain Caproni's posthumous condition.
[31] Cf. Hobsbawm's remark on page 7.

effects of the imprisonment on Sereni's poetry have become a sort of ubiquitous critical concern among scholars. Likewise, the bearing grief has had on Caproni's *oeuvre* has been more than once taken into consideration, and recently come to the fore again.[32] The objective of the following pages is to investigate how the shared posthumous characteristic of their later poetry becomes better-grounded once it is traced back to those lived experiences. The 'essere dopo' on which posthumousness resides in the later works would thus come 'after' a previous (different) condition of 'essere dopo'. By taking into account the impact that those existential experiences have on their poetry, we will attempt to determine how this posthumous dimension originates well in advance of the later poetry. In order to do so, we shall pay attention not just to the poetic production, but also to some of the works in prose. It is, in fact, in the latter that these episodes are more forthrightly addressed.

1.3) To the root of posthumousness: the 'essere dopo' of Sereni and Caproni

Among the aspects thus far outlined, there is the inescapable relation between posthumousness and death. It is, in fact, mainly through death – as the Latin etymology itself suggests – that the 'essere dopo' dimension reveals one of its fundamental properties. In the same way as Surdich and Boselli, Paolo Zublena resorts to a comparison with Montale in order to account for the stance which Caproni and Sereni take on the theme of death:

> [….] la lirica montaliana evita perlopiù di guardare in faccia il crudo fatto della morte, a parte l'anodina previsione di una narcosi universale in tanti testi del dopo-*Satura* […]. Ben altro è l'approccio della generazione successiva, di Sereni e Caproni in specie, che sembrano assumere – in modi distinti – sulle loro spalle tutta la necessità e l'impossibilità della morte, ma anche il levinassiano senso di responsabilità totale di fronte alla morte altrui, che viene assunta nell'io lirico (o nei tanti io lirici).[33]

There will be time to better comprehend the meaning of the 'impossibility of death', as well as to understand what Zublena refers to by 'sense of responsibility towards the other's death'.[34] What matters now is to analyse whether the scholar's comment may be of any relevance in establishing a connection between poetry and biographic experience both for Caproni and Sereni.

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[32] See, for instance, Biancamaria Frabotta, '"Lutto" della ripetizione e "malinconia" della differenza: il terzo libro di Giorgio Caproni', in *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 90.3 (1986), pp. 414-428. See also Anna Dolfi, *Caproni, la cosa perduta e la malinconia* (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2014), pp.7-25. See also Paolo Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, pp. 11-77, and Donzelli, *Giorgio Caproni*, pp.17-47.

[33] Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, pp.13-14.

[34] For the io's feeling of guilt about the dead, see Testa 'La colpa di chi resta. Poesia e strutture antropologiche', in, *Per interposta persona*, pp. 33-48., See also Gilda Policastro, 'Modalità poetiche del contatto-colloquio oltremondano: primi sondaggi, da Montale a Sereni', *Allegoria*, 45, (2003), 75-83.

Indeed Olga's death does put Caproni in front of the ineluctable event of death, and the reason for such a poetic posture on death can be sought, to a great extent, in the aftermath of that tragic event. Zublena sees, in fact, Caproni's perception of death being initially moulded by the personal experience of grief. Only at a later stage – from *Congedo* onwards – death appears to establish itself so permanently as a thematic concern that it disentangles itself from the original event. It is, however, the former stage that for now concerns us. In a letter dated 1937, Caproni confides all his consternation about the loss to Carlo Betocchi:

> Ah se potessi dire un giorno il mio amoroso sgomento, il mio lucente panico, il terrore calmo e meditato dello spazio e del vuoto. Forse tutto il mio mondo era legato a quella che se n'è andata. Forse su lei poggiava tutta la mia certezza. Ora che Lei è perita, finita, assente, impossibile mi è dire ciò che provo. Non volevo più fare poesie. Volevo perfino uccidere la poesia in me, giacché mi sgomenta il mio eccessivo sentimento […].[35]

Caproni will subsequently give voice poetically to his dismay at the loss. *Cronistoria*, published in 1943, is the collection which deals most with Olga's death. It is pervaded by the tragic remembrance the io has of her death ('Poco più su d'adolescenza ahi mite / findanzata così completamente / morta […]', *I*, ll. 1-2, *Sonetti dell'anniversario*), and by a present suffering which arises from the sheer fact of having undeservedly outlived her – as is readable in *Quale debole odore*:

> […]
>
> Trabocca
>
> nel mio cuore la piena
>
> dei tuoi giorni perduti,
>
> dei miei giorni vissuti
>
> senza spazio – con pena.
>
> […]
>
> (*OV* 68)

It is thus easy to find here an antecedent, an element that triggers the perception of death as it comes to be represented in the later poetry.

On the other hand, Sereni's biography does not present a comparable tragic personal episode. The perception of death does appear already in *Frontiera*, Sereni's first collection, published in 1941, and nonetheless, in Franco Fortini's words, it emerges as nothing more

[35] Giorgio Caproni, Carlo Betocchi, Letter dated '7 aprile 1937', p. 64.

than a 'brivido gentile sulle rive dei laghi lombardi'.[36] What can be found, however, is an event that may be for Sereni as compelling as the personal loss of Olga is for Caproni. This event is the imprisonment, which Sereni endures mainly in Northern Africa between 1943 and 1945. It is from *Il diario d'Algeria,* firstly published in 1947, that in Sereni's poetry death ceases to be a mere literary concern and becomes entangled with the personal experience of his imprisonment.

In *L'anno quarantatre*, a prose based on the recollection of the year in which he was taken prisoner in Trapani, Sereni highlights the persistent and unresolved nature of the event:

> Mi ci sono accanito dentro di me per anni, quasi si trattasse di un enigma di cui non venivo a capo, che la memoria riproponeva continuamente e che ammetteva soluzioni disparate e molteplici.[37]

That the imprisonment marks as important a watershed in Sereni's poetry as Olga's death does in Caproni's becomes evident once one considers the posture adopted by the io in *Diario d'Algeria*. The somehow impalpable death evoked from *Frontiera* turns here into something else, as it becomes the io's own death ('[…] io sono morto / alla guerra e alla pace' reads *Non sa più nulla e alto sulle ali*, ll.12-13), which is also, in the inaction of the imprisonment, that of all the prisoners:

> Non sanno d'essere morti
> i morti come noi,
> non hanno pace.
> […]
> (*P* 78)

This deathlike condition marks a turning point in Sereni's poetry. From now on Sereni is to look back on the imprisonment as the starting point, the ground zero from which he will irrevocably feel 'after'. It is a condition which acquires many facets, the most relevant of which is, in all likelihood, the theme of lateness. Guido Piovene has stressed how this theme gains a very personal connotation in Sereni:

> Che il tema di Sereni sia la pena dell'uomo d'oggi e la sua prigionia rotta da fughe effimere è certamente vero, ma può valere per molti altri poeti. Bisogna vedere che

[36] Franco Fortini, *Saggi italiani* (Milano: Garzanti, 1987), *vol. 1,* p. 127.
[37] Sereni, *L'anno quarantatre*, in *PP*, p. 631.

> aspetto speciale assume in lui questo che è il tema collettivo della poesia contemporanea. Si personalizza subito nel tema del ritardo.[38]

The lateness Sereni is troubled by is of a historical nature: having missed the opportunity of actively fighting the war, as well as that of fighting as a partisan in the *Resistenza*, causes him to feel guilty about the lost possibility. Lateness thus becomes Sereni's own poetic condition, and very often in his following poetry the idea of 'ritardo' is a constant thematic concern. But it is precisely the experience of alienation from a historically determined reality suffered by the io in *Diario* (an io – still in Piovene's words – 'morto vivo senza pace, separato da tutto, nel tempo vuoto e inutile d'un campo di concentramento algerino') that lies at the root of any subsequent estrangements.[39]

Similarities and distinctions between Caproni and Sereni will be examined more thoroughly in the sections dedicated to each of them. What suffices to note here is that, overall, albeit through different itineraries, Caproni and Sereni seem to share an 'essere dopo' which precedes, as it were, the posthumousness of their later works. The posthumous dimension that is more easily noticeable in the later poetry finds its origin, its caesura in those two events, after which the 'essere dopo' dimension is irrevocably established in their texts. In order to prove our argument, let us examine two excerpts from the production in prose of both the poets. The texts both focus on the biographical events under consideration. The first one, by Caproni, is *Il gelo della mattina*, firstly published in 1949. It is an account of Olga's death given by Mariano, the protagonist (his name is a fictional feature of what is, otherwise, a completely autobiographical story):

> Mio Dio. Io sono un uomo che *dopo*, in guerra, ha visto e vissuto orrori che mai la bocca potrà ridire. Sono un uomo che *dopo*, fra tanti indicibili orrori, una mattina di sole asciutto in aprile, su questi medesimi sassi dell'Alta Val Trebbia, ha visto anche gli uomini che venivano accompagnati alla fucilazione tra l'erba verdissima (d'un verde quasi minerale) e il fiume scintillante di sole, e ha patito per loro. Perché mai allora io, dico un uomo sperduto come me, cui sono incanutiti molti capelli pensando che'era giusto che costoro […] venissero fucilati com'era giusta la pietà che ne provavo; perché mai, mio Dio, nemmeno dopo la Guerra e le fucilazioni, so dimenticare il profondo e oscuro senso di colpa che in me irragionevolmente cresce col tempo ripensando alla morte, in fondo così piccola in un mondo dove milioni di uomini si sono distrutti senza un filo di rimorso o pietà, ch'ora avanzava accanto a me in quella stanza verso il debole viso di Olga?[40]

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[38] Guido Piovene, 'L'appuntamento mancato', in Barile, *Sereni*, pp. 200-205 (p.200).
[39] Ibid.
[40] Giorgio Caproni, *Il gelo della mattina*, in *Racconti scritti per forza* (Milano: Garzanti, 2008), p. 80. Adele Dei points out that the 1949 version of the prose is much shorter than the final one, which appeared in 'Paragone' in 1952. See *Racconti*, pp. 396-397. The excerpt above and the ones that follow are quoted from this latest version as is published in *Racconti*.

The relevance of a precise 'dopo' is stressed via the comparison with the horrors of war, another fundamental episode in Caproni's biography, whose prominence within his work will be considered more at length in the next chapter. In fact, it is exactly the relation between these two events which will provide us with the background for part of the future analysis.

The second excerpt is taken from *Ventisei*, by Sereni, first published in 1970. The title refers to the years gone by since the imprisonment, of which the text is a re-evocation. Within the sensations arising from revisiting the Sicilian landscape (Sereni was taken prisoner near Trapani), a specific remembrance comes to the first-person narrator's mind. The episode referring to the imprisonment thus becomes entangled with a bitter realisation:

> A me ricorda qualcuno incontrato quei giorni. […] Mi era venuto davanti a chiedere una firma e un timbro per farsi esentare dal lavoro in città. Eravamo già nei giorni dell'emergenza. […] Mi riconoscevo in lui, ero dalla sua parte nell'atto stesso ('e noi, noi, che cosa siamo qui a fare?') di negargli con durezza il documento. Altri giorni sarebbero corsi, soffocanti, e avevamo cominciato a sapere lui e io, degradato a burocrate della guerra, che eravamo già nel dopo. Nel suo sudore, dietro la paura, il comune avvilimento. Dopo, a quella ed altre vite di burocrati del sud, non avrebbe dato alcun sollievo lo spostarsi altrove dell'emergenza, si sarebbero rigirati in altra frustrazione, piccoli problemi nuovi, nuove piccole miserie, muovendo la sera nel venticello della passeggiata lungo mare.[41]

The recollection is presented in a sort of clairvoyant tone: Sereni merges the sense of foreboding that he experienced during the imprisonment with the present awareness that the imprisonment represented a watershed in his life. From then onwards, the premonition of being already 'nel dopo' becomes a fact.

According to Ferroni the meaning of the adjective posthumous retains, in comparison with similar terms, 'un di più, un oltre, una dimensione estrema, in cui nello stesso tempo qualcosa sopravvive'. It designates an 'oltre' which, inasmuch as it entails 'una frattura, una spezzatura', leaves 'segni ulteriori di sé che vengono in vita dopo'.[42] We argue that these extra signs can be seen as residual elements of the original episodes, and it is precisely with these residual elements that Caproni's and Sereni's poetry too comes to be concerned. After Olga's death and the experience of imprisonment, Caproni and Sereni find themselves in the position of survivors. Not just because they outlive those experiences; but also because they survive in the condition of one who sees himself as posthumous; of one to whom the loss means something more than the loss of somebody or of an opportunity. It rather means to lose a part of one's own self, and to carry on living recognising the existence of a decisive moment after which a line has been irrevocably drawn. To recall Giorgio Agamben's words

[41] Sereni, *Ventisei*, in *PP*, pp. 742-43.
[42] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. 15.

about the 'ambiguous' definition of the verb 'to survive' may perhaps help us to underline the relevance of the watershed that is here at issue:

> Il termine 'sopravvivere' contiene un'ambiguità ineliminabile. Esso implica il rimando a qualcosa o a qualcuno, a cui si sopravvive. Il latino *supervivo*, come anche l'equivalente *superstes sum*, si costruiscono in questo senso col dativo, per indicare il 'rispetto a che' della sopravvivenza. Ma fin dall'inizio, riferito agli esseri umani, il verbo ammette una forma riflessiva, cioè l'idea singolare di un sopravvivere a se stessi e alla propria vita, in cui colui che sopravvive e ciò a cui sopravvive coincidono. Se Plinio può dire, così, di un personaggio pubblico, che 'era sopravvissuto per trent'anni alla sua gloria', in Apuleio troviamo già espressa l'idea di una vera e propria esistenza postuma, di una vita che vive sopravvivendo a se stessa. […] Ciò implica che, nell'uomo, la vita porta con sé una cesura, che può fare di ogni vivere un sopravvivere e di ogni sopravvivere un vivere.[43]

In conclusion, there have emerged two posthumous phases in the poetry of Sereni and Caproni: one, largely acknowledged by critics, which refers to their later poetry; another, which stems directly from biographical experiences, creating an 'essere dopo' dimension which anticipates the most critically studied one. The present analysis will now focus on the collections which exhibit the ways in which the caesura Agamben writes about is poetically marked.

[43] Giorgio Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: l'archivio e il testimone* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012 [1998]), pp. 123-124.

CHAPTER II

The Marking of the Caesura

There has been no lack of critical attention to the episodes of captivity and grief in Sereni's and Caproni's biography, respectively, and to their ensuing poetic repercussions.[1] To look at them through the lens of posthumousness provides us, however, with a vantage point from which we can ascertain, on the one hand, how Sereni and Caproni develop a poetically fruitful understanding of the 'end' since the early stage of their production; on the other, the extent to which, precisely following on from this understanding, we are entitled to read their poetry as 'coming after', namely as moulded, more or less subterraneously, by the end. This chapter explores the ways in which the main artistic (as well as existential) concerns arising through the experiences of captivity and grief can be read through recourse to these two categories – 'end' and 'after' – or indeed to what we can define as an 'end-after' framework.

There is no denying that the two experiences are, as such, quite dissimilar to one another. Caproni's grief concerns the most straightforward aspect of posthumousness, the one which relates to the basic fact of death and, as a direct consequence, to surviving someone's death. On the other hand, Sereni's imprisonment presents more complex and nuanced characteristics, for it implicates a different experience of death, one that, as will be shown, is internal to the io himself, and it thus relates to a sort of splitting of identity: the one who dies, in the African sands, is the self itself, and to survive thus means to survive one's own self. Another distinction regards the openness which each poet shows in their artistic engagement with these experiences. Whereas Sereni has always been straightforward about the enduring effects which captivity has on his poetry, Caproni's reaction to Olga's death, despite the space dedicated to it both in poetry and prose, reveals a less candid and more problematic attitude (in fact, Caproni decides, roughly from the 1950s onwards, to avoid explicit references to Olga).

Notwithstanding their uniqueness, the investigation into the artistic treatment of these biographical episodes proves these episodes to be equally archetypal in opening up a posthumous dimension. Indeed, for Caproni, Olga's death represents the initial step towards the deepening of a reflection on a theme – that of death – that his future poetry will

[1] For Caproni, see footnote 60 in chapter 1. For Sereni, see, to name but a few, Mengaldo, 'Note sul "Diario d'Algeria"' [1999], in *Per Vittorio Sereni* pp. 95-108; Francesca d'Alessandro, 'La guerra girata altrove', in *L'opera poetica di Vittorio Sereni* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), pp. 43-83; Niva Lorenzini and Stefano Colangelo, 'Sentimento dell'esclusione dal tempo: *Diario d'Algeria (1947)* di Vittorio Sereni, in *Poesia e Storia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2013), pp. 137-152.

obsessively delve into.[2] For Sereni, the imprisonment constitutes the first and foremost 'appuntamento mancato' of his biography, on account of which a specific seclusion from history will become, in his poetry, exclusion from various domains of temporality, as testified to by the insistence with which the theme of 'ritardo' is exhibited in his poetry (as discussed in chapter 1).

The need that both Sereni and Caproni manifest, subsequent to these events, to undertake a renewal of their poetry attests further to the momentous impact of these episodes. The fact that this process of renewal, which begins during the 1940s and comes to ripeness in the 1960s, coincides with crucial historical times, allows us to introduce another significant element of contiguity, as the historical background against which both Caproni and Sereni find themselves dealing with the meaning and consequences of these experiences is the same: the wartime period and its aftermath. Against a backdrop where the personal history of the individual tragically meets the more collective destiny of peoples and nations, the collections and other sources examined in this chapter significantly reveal the mutual permeation of individual and collective, personal and historical sphere.[3]

The caesura – Part I. Sereni's *Diario d'Algeria*

2.1) 'End' and 'after': the framework of our analysis

To take the experience of imprisonment in Northern Africa as the point from which 'l'essere *dopo*' of posthumousness emerges in Sereni's poetry implies that the analysis begins with *Diario d'Algeria*, as it is this collection which deals most openly and comprehensively with the poet's war experience. And the present chapter will indeed engage chiefly with *Diario*, while also considering some prose pieces as well as Sereni's more intimate reflections expressed in private correspondences. However, it must be clarified from the outset that Sereni's attitude towards his imprisonment is a highly idiosyncratic one, and if we maintain the focus on *Diario*, it is crucial not to overlook important connections both with *Frontiera* and *Strumenti*. In fact, the lasting effects of the experience in North Africa extends well beyond the boundaries of the period of war, and thereby those of *Diario* (which has, in itself, quite shifting boundaries, having been published twice, firstly in 1947 and subsequently in

[2] A comparative analysis of the theme of death in Caproni and Sereni is conducted by Moliterni, pp. 183-208.
[3] Cf. what Eric Hobsbawm, born in 1917, writes about the meaning of the past for his generation: 'the past is indestructible […] because public events are part of the texture of our lives. They are not merely markers in our private lives, but what has formed our lives, private and public', in *Age of extremes*, p. 4.

1965). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the experience of captivity between 1943 and 1945 was viewed, in the poet's own words, as a sort of enigma which 'la memoria riproponeva continuamente e che ammetteva soluzioni disparate e molteplici.'[4] These words are from 1963 – though published only posthumously, in the second edition of *Gli immediati dintorni primi e secondi*, in 1983 – and they thus attest to the long-lasting significance of the event, and to its bearing on the veteran Sereni. But they also give an inkling of the monopolising influence which this experience had on his identity as a poet. The persistence of what Mengaldo defines as the 'funzione *Diario* d'Algeria' can be seen at length in Sereni's meticulousness about the rearrangement, in the early 1960s, of his entire poetic corpus.[5] The overall process is of great relevance, as it tells of a general need for Sereni to assess the bearing and meaning of the experience of war on a poetic level, seeking to draw a line between a 'before' (which is also an 'end') and an 'after' that watershed event. It is precisely in relation to these two poles that we wish to place the study of *Diario*.

Undoubtedly, Sereni's poetic outlook and existential condition on his return from imprisonment is marked by a certain awareness of the end, which is based on the idea that a phase of his life and poetry had been irremediably brought to a close by the experience of imprisonment. On the other hand, the context in which all this occurs is that in which Sereni finds himself on his return, a context which, as such, presents itself as 'after' the imprisonment: as pointed out by Stefano Colangelo, Sereni's concern is 'che cosa fare, come agire *dopo*, al ritorno'.[6] Furthermore, the way in which *Diario* is structured, and the significant changes made between the first and the second edition, put some significant distance between the texts and the event they draw on, making *Diario* a diary which is, to a certain extent, literally written 'afterwards' (and this will become clear in section 2.4, where we will delve into the form of diary and the architecture of *Diario*).

Our examination can be loosely divided into two macro-parts: first, sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, in which we shall scrutinise the different ways in which existential and artistic concerns that emerged between Sereni's return and the publication of *Diario 65* can be seen to relate now to the 'end', now to the 'after' pole of our framework; secondly, sections 2.5 and 2.6, where the focus will be more closely on how the caesura is marked and on the subsequent 'dopo', the 'oltre' which it opens up.

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[4] See p. 29 above.

[5] Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio*, p. 107. In the case in point, Mengaldo alludes to some time-related undercurrents which, arisen with *DA*, persist well into *SV*. About the rearrangement of Sereni's poetic works, see the *apparato critico* by Dante Isella in Sereni, *P*, pp. 419-420 and pp. 471-480.

[6] Stefano Colangelo, 'Sereni. Dichiarazione del soldato', in *Il soggetto nella poesia del Novecento italiano* (Milano: Mondadori, 2009), p. 28. Colangelo specifies that this is a 'problema di tutti, emerso nel tempo condiviso da tutti' (ibid.). Yet, Sereni's experience presents, as will be shown in the following pages, a very idiosyncratic form of this collective problem.

2.2) Sereni's return: existential and poetic concerns

There is no doubt that every return from a life-changing experience is marked by its 'essere dopo', and Sereni's return from war is no exception. It is, on the other hand, less obvious that the period of readjustment which followed Sereni's return should result in an artistic crisis provoked by the realisation that a phase in the evolution of his personal poetics had somehow come to an end. In this respect, a brief account of the history of the publication of *Diario* presents an opportunity to introduce some of the poetic concerns faced by Sereni on his return.

Diario was published twice, first in 1947 (Vallecchi) and subsequently in 1965 (Mondadori), with some significant structural changes between the two editions. The most relevant of these are highlighted by Sereni in the endnotes to the 1965 edition:

> La prima edizione del *Diario d'Algeria* uscì a Firenze, dall'editore Vallecchi, nel 1947. Questa che ne ripropone parzialmente mutato l'antico disegno, ha omesso 'Vecchi versi a Proserpina', ascrivibili al tempo di *Frontiera* (in una ristampa anche solo ideale di quel primo libro), e 'Via Scarlatti' che ho voluto collocare in apertura a *Gli strumenti umani* (Torino, Einaudi, 1965). Una terza poesia, 'Pin-up girl', ritorna qui in un testo più breve […].
>
> Tutti i versi che compongono le due prime sezioni […] furono scritti nei miei due anni di prigionia, nell'ultima guerra (Algeria e Marocco Francese, '43-'45); così 'Diario bolognese' che, edita ne *Gli immediati dintorni*, viene inclusa solo ora. Di composizione posteriore al '47 e alla stampa del Vallecchi è invece 'Il male d'Africa' (ma la poesia che dà il titolo a tutto il gruppo compare già ne *Gli strumenti umani*; […]). Le singole date vanno però riferite, là dove sono indicate, alle occasioni e non alla stesura effettiva dei versi.[7]

The structure of the new edition thus yields up some poems to *Frontiera* – which was, in turn, actually republished in 1966 –[8] while gaining an entire new section, *Il male d'Africa*, whose eponymous and possibly most important lyric features also in *Strumenti*.

As emerges from the documentation provided by Dante Isella, it seems to have been Sereni's desire to revise his poetic corpus, and in 1960, he scheduled a 'piano generale di una ristampa di tutte le poesie non rifiutate', with the intention of adding to these some of the new poems which would later fit in *Strumenti*.[9] The plan should have resulted in the publication of a single book, but led instead to the almost simultaneous publication of the new edition of *Diario* and of *Strumenti*, in 1965. This highly productive period followed a

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[7] Sereni, *P*, pp. 418-19.
[8] Cf. Ibid., p. 282.
[9] Ibid., p. 471.

much more sterile one, during which the poet was largely inactive. The inactivity stemmed, to a great extent, from an existential discomfort at the present historical condition, for Sereni was struggling to find his place in a world which was forming as a result of seismic historical shifts in which he had played little or no part. In fact, during the war, imprisonment had not only kept Sereni sheltered from the harshness of the battlefield, but it had also prevented him from taking part in the Italian Resistance, thus rendering him unable to subsequently 'condividere, se non mentalmente, le speranze che la Liberazione aveva portato'.[10] As Sereni states in an interview, between 1946 and 1954-55 he had not 'più scritto un rigo'.[11] References to a 'humiliating' period of poetic inactivity are also found in his pieces in prose. In *Il silenzio creativo* – dated 1962 – Sereni writes:

> L'umiliazione del non farcela più. L'umiliazione del lamentarsene, dell'essere in angustie per questo, il brutto spettacolo che uno dà di sé quando si perde in angosciate confidenze su questo.
>
> Conosco uno scrittore che giunto all'età matura non fu più capace, per anni e anni, di scrivere un rigo. Qualche amico più paziente degli altri lo consolava rimproverandolo: di essere incontentabile, troppo severo verso se stesso. Che non scrivesse un rigo e che nemmeno ci provasse (salvo le rare volte che ci si provava come *di nascosto da se stesso*) era vero alla lettera; ma quelli non ci credevano.[12]

Behind the unidentified fictional writer is concealed the figure of the author himself, as the next page clarifies by showing the shift from the indefinite pronoun 'uno' to the first-person one, 'io'.[13] The interrelation between the war experience and the development of Sereni's poetics is even more apparent, as well as more openly discussed, in a letter addressed to Luciano Anceschi in 1952:

> Fin dai tempi dell'Università io ho chiesto troppe cose, direi persino troppe indicazioni esistenziali, alla poesia, al fatto di essere poeta: ho chiesto una figura umana, l'ho implicata, la poesia, nelle mie faccende di cuore […].
>
> L'errore, aggravato, l'ho ripetuto al mio ritorno dalla guerra. Tornavo in un mondo del quale non ero in grado di capire in fondo (ero stato lontano, come lo si può essere sotto le armi, due anni e altri due ero stato segregato) a che punto era mutato. Ed ecco che io domandavo *umanamente* di riprendere il mio posto, il mio posto *umano* tra gli altri, valendomi di una molto problematica memoria, buona memoria di mio lavoro, da parte degli altri. […] io mi sentivo, con quei pochi versi di prima, come una specie di

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[10] Bertolucci, Sereni, Zanzotto, Porta, Conte, Cucchi, *Sulla poesia: conversazioni nelle* scuole, ed. by G. Masini, B. Rivalta (Parma: Pratiche, 1981), cited in Barile, *Sereni*, p.41. Reflecting on his captivity in the interview with Fo, Sereni states: 'la prigionia è sempre prigionia, ma, non c'è dubbio, la prigionia con gli americani era uno stato "purgatoriale", "limbale"; insomma, molto diverso dalla prigionia con i tedeschi', Fo, *Intervista*.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Sereni, 'Il silenzio creativo', in *PP*, p. 625.

[13] Ibid., p. 626.

> moneta fuori corso. […] Poi uscì il 'Diario d'Algeria', in un'atmosfera tutt'altro che ideale. Gente che oggi, almeno a parole, mostra di farne alta stima, allora quasi non se ne accorse o rimase indifferente o in sospetto. […]
>
> Questi fatti non contano per sé stessi; ma ognuno di essi cadde su un terreno psichicamente esplosivo. […] Si tratta di basse passioni, lo so, ma torno ad insistere sul disagio su cui quei fatti incidevano, sul senso di sgomento che questi portavano nella mia vita, a conferma di una paventata inconsistenza, di un'aggravata impossibilità di muovermi con una fisionomia precisa in un mondo che non sentivo più mio e sempre più mi appariva crudele o assurdo.[14]

Here Sereni's avowal of all the disquiet endured since his return becomes deeply entangled with a kind of personal awareness, namely that of being poetically anachronistic (a sort of 'moneta fuori corso'). And indeed those verses from *Frontiera* ('quei pochi versi di prima') are said to belong to a 'before' which is felt as concluded. There is, however, one particular reference, in the letter, that catches the reader's eye and it is here worth analysing further. What does Sereni refer to when he writes that *Diario* came out, in 1947, 'in un'atmosfera tutt'altro che ideale'? On a superficial level, the letter refers to concerns principally related to the critical reception of the collection. Yet the matter is, possibly, a little more complex. In order to shed some light on the possible implications of Sereni's words, a brief excursus is necessary.

In the letter quoted above, Sereni is debating with Anceschi the existence of a possible *Linea lombarda*, after learning of Anceschi's intention to compile an anthology of 'poeti lombardi' (the anthology *Linea lombarda. Sei poeti* would, in fact, be published that very year).[15] Sereni argues against his own inclusion among the group of poets, and among the most compelling motivations for his position is his disappointment at 'vedersi qualificato come residente in una zona che da un pezzo si è abbandonata'. It was as if, Sereni goes on, 'qualcuno mi ancorasse a un molo che mi illudevo di aver lasciato da tempo'.[16] The reference is to the Milanese period (when Anceschi and Sereni were both university students and eager disciples of Antonio Banfi) and, more importantly, to Sereni's own poetic outlook during those years which preceded the publication of *Frontiera*, in 1941.[17] The letters dating back to the late 1930s and the early 1940s are, in this respect, extremely telling. Just as they reveal

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[14] Vittorio Sereni, *Carteggio con Luciano Anceschi. 1935-1983*, ed. by Beatrice Carletti (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013). The letter is the number 76 [April 1952] pp. 169-185.

[15] Ed. Luciano Anceschi, *Linea lombarda: sei poeti. (Editi e inediti di Vittorio Sereni, Roberto Rebora, Giorgio Orelli, Nelo Risi, Renzo Modesti, Luciano Erba)*, (Varese: Ed. Magenta, 1952).

[16] Sereni, *Carteggio con Luciano Anceschi*, p. 173. Despite his misgivings, Sereni would eventually feature in the anthology.

[17] The collection was published for the *Edizioni* di *Corrente* edited by Ernesto Treccani, within the poetry book series edited by Anceschi himself, cf. *P*, p. 281. For an overview of both the poetic and historical atmosphere of *Frontiera*, see Stefano Raimondi, *La frontiera di Vittorio Sereni: Una vicenda poetica* (Milano: Unicopli, 2000).

the fundamental role played by the zealous Anceschi in the gestation of *Frontiera*, the letters also show Sereni's dissatisfaction with most of the compositions. Whereas both Sereni and Anceschi agreed that *Frontiera* could be seen as an artistic testimony to a specific past which they had both shared, their attitudes towards the collection differed greatly. For Anceschi, the collection represented a necessary 'traccia' of a past that was worth remembering, to the point that he expresses his fondness for *Frontiera* even decades after the publication.[18] Sereni, on the contrary, displays a much more contradictory relation with the work, most notably because of that very bond with the past praised by Anceschi.[19] As early as 1940, just a few months before the publication of *Frontiera*, explaining the reasons why he finally decides to collect his poems, Sereni writes:

> so che comincia – e questa volta davvero – un periodo nuovo per me. È il periodo che mi dirà se io ero nato per questo o se non era piuttosto una "ambizione sbagliata". Resta il fatto che sarebbe un torto alla mia prima giovinezza, soffocare quelle voci che di volta in volta io ne ho ricavato. So anche che quello che farò sarà molto diverso – se lo farò. Ma intanto credo che la mia strada non sia più nella poesia, ma nella prosa. […] quelle cose che ti manderò io le considero ora d'un altro.[20]

Significantly, the poems which would eventually end up composing *Frontiera* ('quelle cose che ti manderò') are already considered to belong to 'un altro'. Even before its actual publication, the collection looked anachronistic to Sereni, for it was not in keeping with some new tendencies that were meant to prompt an important evolution in his own poetics.[21]

Once the context of the letters cited above is established, Sereni's reaction to Anceschi's proposal of the 1950s is hardly surprising. Sereni undoubtedly felt the risk that his return could have resulted into a further, rather unproductive, poetic return to the past, which would have prevented him from pursuing a different path that was felt as essential already a decade earlier, right before the time of the publication of *Frontiera*, a path that the events of war had diverted.

Furthermore, the brief excursus on the pre-war period appears to cast some light on why the first publication of *Diario* looked to Sereni, in 1952, as if it had occurred in an

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[18] See Sereni, *Carteggio con Anceschi*, letter I, dated 4 November 1940, p. 67, and letter LVII (1966), p. 256.

[19] Cf. Fulvio Papi's memory: 'nel periodo precedente la pubblicazione della raccolta di poesie *Frontiera* nelle edizioni di Corrente 1941, e per quasi un anno dopo, Vittorio Sereni fu perseguitato da dubbi, incertezze, perplessità relative alla validità di quei versi e alle ragioni di opportunità o di inopportunità che confliggevano quanto alla loro pubblicazione', Fulvio Papi, 'Esili miti lacustri', in *'Una futile passione'. Atti del convegno su Vittorio Sereni (Brescia, 10-11 febbraio 2003)*, ed. by Giuseppe Magurno, foreword by Dante Isella (Brescia: Grafo, 2007), p. 21.

[20] Sereni, *Carteggio con Anceschi*, letter 28, November 1940, pp. 68-69.

[21] Ibid., letter 32 (December 1940, pages 78-80), in which Sereni insists on the need to 'camminare per le nuove strade', which he felt more connected to prose than to poetry.

atmosphere that was 'tutt'altro che ideale'. Beside the poet's preoccupations about the work's critical reception, it seems highly plausible to read the reference to an inexpedient atmosphere as a reference to one which was not poetically mature for Sereni: by looking retrospectively at the double publication of *Diario*, and at the significant interpolations made in the second edition, it is clear that the new path Sereni refers to since the late 1930s had not been completely undertaken by 1947, the year of the first publication of *Diario*. As Sereni confides to Fortini in 1964: 'posso dire di aver chiuso solo adesso il Diario d'Algeria, dopo aver inserito cose (in prosa e in versi) di cui non disponevo al tempo della prima edizione'.[22]

In effect, as noted by Isella, on a stylistic level, *Diario* still held too strong a tie with the lyricism of *Frontiera*.[23] If we then consider that at the thematic core of *Diario* there was an event that had happened just a few years earlier, it becomes evident that too little time had elapsed from the decisive episode of the imprisonment for Sereni to understand completely the significance of an experience that was to haunt him for much longer. It is only with *Il male d'Africa*, the section added in 1965, that we finally witness Sereni's resolute endeavour both to undertake a new stylistic path and to clarify to himself the meaning of the war experience. On the one hand, in fact, the section fulfils the formal demand through the inclusion of prose passages, thus bringing to an end the period of lyricism which was typical of *Frontiera* and still pervasive of *Diario*.[24] On the other, it thematically addresses, via the retrospective look underlying the eponymous poem, the problem of 'dopo', trying to ascertain the real meaning and bearing of the Northern African experience and thus allowing of what Niccolò Scaffai defines as 'l'acquisizione *a posteriori* di una vicenda interna al soggetto lirico'.[25] Yet, as we shall see more in detail in sections 2.5 and 2.6, in line with the idea of a surviving 'end' which informs our posthumous framework, this process of understanding will not result in a complete and uncompromising dismissal of the experience.

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[22] Sereni, *P*, p. 545.

[23] Cf. Dante Isella, 'La lingua poetica di Sereni', in *La poesia di Vittorio Sereni, Atti del convegno*, 1985, pp. 21-32. Similarly, Mengaldo notes that 'Il Sereni di *Frontiera* e del primo *Diario d'Algeria* appariva, se altri mai, un poeta 'puro'', but not in the sense which the adjective had among 'ermetici'. See *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 285. Niccolò Scaffai sees the new edition of *Diario* as 'una vera e propria nuova versione', rather than as a simple 'ristampa', in *Il poeta e il suo libro: retorica e storia del libro nel Novecento* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2005), p. 81

[24] According to Stefano Giovanardi, in fact, it is in the 'edizione del 1965' that 'la struttura d'insieme risulta […] dalla sovrapposizione di un registro tendenzialmente narrativo e unitario al pullulare di cellule liriche irrelate che caratterizzava la prima edizione'. Stefano Giovanardi, 'Diario d'Algeria di Vittorio Sereni', in *Letteratura italiana,* ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Torino: Einaudi 1996) IV, *Il Novecento, II. La ricerca Letteraria,* 531-547. Cf. also Giovanni Raboni's idea of a 'poderosa liricizzazione' occurring with the publication in 1965, of both *Diario* and *Strumenti*, Giovanni Raboni, 'Introduzione' to Vittorio Sereni, *La tentazione della prosa* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), p. XIII.

[25] Scaffai, *Il poeta e il suo libro*, p. 81.

As a consequence, Sereni's future poetry will not cease to be, more or less subterraneously, permeated by its residues.

2.3) A diary written 'afterwards'

We have observed that, insofar as it poses the problem of 'dopo', it is Sereni's very condition as a veteran that implies a posthumous outlook. We can now read this condition not only as the problem of 'dopo', as Stefano Colangelo puts it, but also as one from the perspective of 'dopo', and we shall now attempt to outline this further by making a brief mention of the specificity of *Diario* as a diary.

Confronted with *Diario,* one inevitably recalls Ungaretti's *Porto sepolto* as its most famous antecedent. Yet, the reader is struck by the visible difference between the accuracy of the dates appended to each poem of *Il porto sepolto* – as if to retain the synchronicity of the writing with the event that had prompted it (and the collection was, after all, published in 1916, with World War I still ongoing) –, and the less systematic dates of *Diario*. Most likely referring to the endnote Sereni appended to the collection, Caproni was eager to note, in 1947, that 'del resto lo dichiara l'autore stesso che questo *Diario* è scritto dopo, cioè sulla memoria'.[26] It is, therefore, the paratextual system of the collection that tells of a sort of inherent 'essere dopo' of *Diario*, a feature that is emphasised in the second edition, where the conclusive poem, *L'otto settembre*, is followed by a double date spanning twenty years ('43/'63). This characteristic of *Diario*, alongside its connection with the Ungarettian model, has been noted on more than one occasion.[27] Nevertheless, we can delve a little further into the comparison by taking into consideration a less studied aspect of the parallel, namely the testimonial value which relates to the war diary. In order to do so, it may be useful to introduce an external source with which we shall engage again towards the end of the analysis, given its importance in the reading of Sereni's experience of imprisonment on the thematic level too.

In a commentary on Maurice Blanchot's *The Instant of my Death*, Jacques Derrida provides an insight into the statute of testimony. Blanchot's text was published in 1994, but the episode recounted dates back to World War II: a third-person narrator recounts how a

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[26] Giorgio Caproni, 'Diario d'Algeria', published in 1947 in *La Fiera Letteraria*, now collected in Giorgio Caproni, *La scatola nera* (Milano: Garzanti, 1995), p. 85. In effect, it is already in the endnote to the first edition of *Diario* that Sereni clarifies how the dates refer to the 'circostanze che originarono i versi e non al tempo dell'effettiva stesura'. See *P*, p. 417.

[27] See, in particular, Scaffai, *Il poeta e il suo libro*, pp. 77-82 and Giovanardi, 'Diario d'Algeria di Vittorio Sereni', pp. 531-547. Brief mention is also made by Colangelo, *Il soggetto*, p. 8.

'young man' (the narrator himself) survived his death sentence. In his commentary (entitled *Demeure*) Derrida focuses, among other things, on the modalities in which the witness, the survivor, places himself within the temporal aspect of testimony, namely the time elapsed between the event experienced and the testimony given. The fact that the narrator is writing about himself in the third person induces Derrida to reflect on the potential caesura that is created, within the same subject, between two selves, the one who has experienced the event he testifies to, and the self of the later act of testimony. 'Is there a witness', Derrida writes, 'who must not say this, in all conscience, namely: "At the moment of my attestation I am no longer the same as the witness who lived that and who remains irreplaceable?" The signature of the narrator is thus dated.'[28] Once more, a brief comparison between Ungaretti and Sereni may be here of some help. If we take what Derrida says to be applicable to all testimony, there follows that *Il porto sepolto* bespeaks Ungaretti's effort to reduce the distance between the selves as much as possible, by exactly referring each poem to the unique occasion from which inspiration was drawn (in some cases, there are two poems per day). On the contrary, *Diario* lays bare the contradiction which stems from Derrida's idea of testimony, making patent the chasm between two selves inevitably separated by a temporal gap as well as the posthumous quality of *Diario*.

It is only at the end of the analysis that it will be possible to assess all the relevance of what kind of experience 'that' – the imprisonment – represents to Sereni, and to what extent it can be truly defined as 'lived'. What can be anticipated here is that the micro-differences between Sereni and Ungaretti thus far noted appear to fall under a broader and surely more fundamental distinction, namely that between an author who finds himself actively involved amid the turmoil of the war, and one who is completely cut off from it.[29] Sereni's extraneousness to the 'real' war is the theme of the central and eponymous section of *Diario*, on which we shall dwell more at length in section 2.5. Brief mention must be made now of some other structural and thematic features of the collection.

2.4) Inside *Diario*. Structural and thematic features: the end of youth

The division of the collection into three sections – *La ragazza d'Atene*, *Diario d'Algeria*, *Il male d'Africa* – belongs to the second edition, on which we will focus here (*Diario* had

[28] Jacques Derrida, *Demeure*: *Fiction and testimony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 65.
[29] See Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 95.

four).[30] According to Mengaldo, the new structural arrangement emphasises the centrality of the eponymous section:

> […] la centralità concettuale e tematica della seconda sezione è subito indicata dalla sua centralità e dalla sua eccezionalità, topografica e formale; le altre due è come se la fiancheggiassero a modo di due ali, la prima a raccogliere più riccamente i suoi antefatti biografici e psicologici, la seconda il séguito di quegli antefatti – si badi bene […]. È da tutti i punti di vista una centralità, quella della sezione eponima, cercata e significativa (ed è infatti istituita nella seconda edizione).[31]

In effect, with the exception of *Il male d'Africa*, which is provided with the date 1958 and presents itself as a retrospective reading of the meaning and consequences of the experience of captivity some fifteen years after the event, all texts of the third section are referable back, thematically, either to the time which precedes the imprisonment or to the moments of the capture, and are thus in some contiguity with those from section one.[32]

The first section follows the itinerary of the soldier Sereni, as is clear from the title of the poems (*Periferia 1940, Diario Bolognese*, *Italiano in Grecia*), some of which bear also more specific topographic and temporal information (see, to name but a few, *Belgrado, Italiano in Grecia, Dimitrios, La ragazza d'Atene* and their respective appended dates), thereby anticipating a feature which will be typical of the central section (every poem of the central section is, in fact, annotated with dates and places of composition, except *Algeria*, the final text).

There seems to be a rather visible line of continuity between the underpinning motif of *Frontiera*, between what is, in Mengaldo's words, its 'struggente elegia della giovinezza al tramonto, e insieme della scomparsa di un epoca', and the opening section of *Diario*.[33] One needs just to consider a poem such as *Alla giovinezza* (*Frontiera*) to have a clearer understanding of Mengaldo's words:

> […]
> e da un'estate mortale
> – forse l'ultima tua –
> s'avventano rondini in volo
> perdutamente, come tu cammini
> verso un'aria fondissima, brumale.

[30] Cf. *P*, pp. 420-421.
[31] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 95-97.
[32] To have a clearer understanding of what the referents of each poem are see Sereni, *P*, pp. 453-468.
[33] Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003[1978]), p. 747.

[…]
(*P* 28)

We can detect a sense of impending threat, of an end that is fast approaching, encapsulated in the rich adjectivation ('ultima', 'fondissima', the rhyme 'mortale-brumale'), no less than in the marked position assigned to the adverb 'perdutamente', isolated between the beginning of the verse and a comma. The opening poem from *Diario*, *Periferia 1940*, discloses the theme of youth very similarly, for the verb 'spiccarsi' seems to draw on the same imagery of 'rondini in volo' of *Alla giovinezza*:

La giovinezza è tutta nella luce
d'una città al tramonto
dove straziato ed esule ogni suono
si spicca dal brusio.[34]
[…]
(*P* 59)

We can perhaps find a more telling continuity between this introductory poem and the following one, *Città di notte*.[35] The city, which stood for youth in *Periferia 1940*, becomes personified and directly addressed by the io:

[…]
e tu giri via con un volto
dietro ogni finestra – tu stessa
un volto, un volto solo
che per sempre si chiude.
(P 60)

[34] It is interesting to note that in a previous draft of *Alla giovinezza* the verb 'spiccare' was employed ('[…] sui piazzali animati di candore, / spiccano i passeri il volo, / verso un'aria fondissima, brumale'), see *P*, pp. 335-337. Cf. also Montale's 'osso' *Ciò che di me sapeste*: 'Se un'ombra scorgete, non è / un'ombra – ma quella io sono. / Potessi spiccarla da me, / offriverla in dono', in E. Montale, *Tutte le poesie* (Milano, Mondadori, 2011 [1984]), p. 36.
[35] The poem was initially inserted in *Poesie* (1942), which included *Frontiera* and a few other lyrics. See *P*, pp. 281-286.

In ‘per sempre si chiude’ youth is no longer fading, but eventually lost, abruptly interrupted first by the menace, and then by the actual outbreak of the war. We can observe that, within the collection taken as a whole, the idea of a lost youth is well integrated into a more comprehensive semantic scope of loss, which is intimated via specific lexical choices ranging from the persistent presence of the adjective ‘perduto’ to occurrences of the semantically related verb ‘mancare’ (‘azzurre di un mattino /**perduto**, di là da venire’, *Belgrado*, ll. 10-11; ‘di laghi di fronde dietro i passi / **perduti**’, *Italiano in Grecia*, ll. 14-15; ‘Ecco non puoi restare, sei **perduta** / nel fragore dell'ultimo viadotto’ and ‘oscuri scorci / d’un **perduto** soggiorno', *La ragazza d'Atene*, ll.15-16 and 21-22; ‘ma sepolcrale il canto d’una torma / tedesca alla forza **perduta**’, *Sola vera è l'estate*, ll. 11-12; ‘né fisarmonica geme / di **perdute** domeniche’, *E ancora in sogno di una tenda s’agita*, ll. 13-14; ‘chi va nella tetra mezzanotte / dei fiocchi veloci, chi l’ultimo / brindisi **manca** […]’, *Lassù dove di torre*, ll. 8-10; ‘Troppo il tempo ha tardato / per te d’essere detta / pena degli anni giovani […] Ma se tu **manchi** / e anche il cielo è vinto’, *Troppo il tempo ha tardato*, ll. 1-3 and 23-24 ; ‘tra gli ordini e i richiami / **mancavo**, morivo / sotto il peso delle armi’, *Frammenti di una sconfitta*, I, ll. 3-5).

One text, *Appunti da un sogno*, the penultimate of *Diario 65*, explicitly evokes the nexus between loss and youth, and it therefore seems to be worthy of more in-depth attention. The final part of the text, which is a prose piece, not only confirms the disappearance of youth from the horizon of the io, but it furthermore links the loss of youth to the lost war. Once more, these themes intersect via the occurrence of ‘perduta’:

È un soldato biondo, più giovane degli altri. Italiano, s’intende. Ma si direbbe piuttosto inglese. Per la sua biondezza? Per la piroetta di gioia? Solo adesso capisco veramente che è finita, che la guerra è perduta.
Quanti dispiaceri la gioventù (degli altri) ci darà d’ora in poi.[36]
(*P* 96-97)

[36] This connection features, however less explicitly, also in another prose piece. In *Una guerra non combattuta*, Sereni recounts a real encounter with Montale in 1942, in Firenze. When Montale sarcastically observes that Sereni is about to march in Cairo 'con le truppe vittoriose', and 'con che gusto, immagino…', Sereni reveals dissappointment at the fact that 'quell’augurio e quelle speranze non si fermassero nemmeno per un attimo a considerare il mio caso, la mia giovinezza, la mia vita.' Vittorio Sereni, *Una guerra non combattuta*, in appendix to *La tentazione della prosa*, p. 267. Here, there is no explicit reference to Montale, but the same episode is recounted elsewhere (*Ognuno riconosce i suoi*, ibid., pp. 90-91), where his name is, instead, openly mentioned.

The excerpt marks the culmination of the theme of loss, the importance of which, within *Diario 65*, is thus confirmed not only on a lexical, but also on a structural level, providing a degree of continuity from the beginning to (almost) the end of the collection. Of great relevance is also the deployment of the adverb 'poi' at the close of the text. Consistent with the postulates which inform the notion of posthumousness, here the 'end' is understood as disclosing an 'after' where the end itself will continue to finish, as it were. Indeed, reflected in the others' youth the io will see, from now on – 'd'ora in poi' – the untimely end of his own youth. As we shall see in the final section, it is precisely this syntagm ('d'ora in poi') that can be seen to encapsulate the significance of the experience of imprisonment for Sereni.

Insofar as it brings the theme of war to the fore for the first time in the present analysis, *Appunti da un sogno* directs the reader towards the central section of *Diario*, in which the experience of imprisonment is the substantial setting for all the poems. It is in exploring this section further that the we approach the core of Sereni's war experience.

2.5) The eponymous section: the io's posthumous declaration

Following a remark by Mengaldo that has, by now, achieved a high degree of consensus among critics, with the section *Diario d'Algeria* there occurs the substitution of one archetypical figure with another, namely that of 'viandante' which dominates the first section ('Presto sarò il viandante stupefatto / avventurato nel tempo nebbioso', *La ragazza d'Atene*, ll. 17-18) with that of 'prigioniero'.[37] It is, however, an evolution that presents itself rather under the guise of an involution, as it intimates a condition of stasis which follows upon one of movement. Hence, we can suggest that the underlying motif of loss which has been earlier explored from a lexical and structural perspective thus finds a thematic counterpart in the loss of movement, thereby engendering an impression of declining vitality, one of the many negative consequences of imprisonment.[38] According to Mengaldo, the most visible effect of imprisonment is exerted upon spatio-temporal coordinates, since 'in poche condizioni come la prigionia lo spazio, chiuso, spaesante e non valicabile, condiziona il tempo, rendendolo continuo, indifferenziato, non discreto'.[39] The upshot of such an alienating condition is legible, for instance, in *Sola vera è l'estate*:

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[37] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 187-188.

[38] Compare the variety of topographic indications present in the titles from the section *La ragazza d'Atene* with the repetitiveness of those appended to the poems from the section *Diario d'Algeria* to notice the shift at issue.

[39] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 55. For a more organic discourse on time in *Diario*, see Laura Neri, 'Le forme del tempo nel *Diario d'Algeria*', in *Vittorio Sereni: Un altro compleanno*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito (Milano: Ledizioni, 2014), pp. 115-127.

Solo vera è l'estate e questa sua
luce che vi livella.
[…]

Ora ogni fronda è muta
compatto il guscio d'oblio
perfetto il cerchio.
(*P* 79)

'Ogni eccedenza andata altrove', Sereni would go on to write in *Stella*.[40] And indeed this line seems to capture succinctly the overall tone of *Sola vera è l'estate e questa sua*. The condition of the io is given as a blunting of sense, the 'mute' branch indicating a lifeless state which was hinted at already in *Un improvviso vuoto del cuore*: 'un'ultima fronda sonora / su queste paludi del sonno / corse a volte da un sogno' (in which the alliterative sequence 'sonora/sonno/sogno' appears to us as a consummately coherent progression of the experience of succumbing to sleep).

Oblivion, blunting of senses: the condition of the io in *Diario d'Algeria* bears more and more resemblance to an inanimate, lifeless state. It is within this context that death makes its appearance, occurring as early as the opening poem ('E d'oblio / solo un'azzurra vena abbandona / tra due epoche morte dentro di noi', *Lassù dove di torre in torre*, ll. 15-17), and again further on in the section ('Non sanno d'essere morti / i morti come noi, / non hanno pace. / Ostinati ripetono la vita', *Non sanno d'essere morti*, ll. 1-4; 'tra gli ordini e i richiami / mancavo, morivo / sotto il peso delle armi', *Frammenti di una sconfitta*, I, ll. 3-5). In *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali*, it is the io who declares himself posthumous:

[…]
Ho risposto nel sonno: – È il vento,
Il vento che fa musiche bizzarre.
Ma se tu fossi davvero
il primo caduto bocconi sulla spiaggia normanna
prega tu se lo puoi, io sono morto

[40] Cf. *Fissità*, in *P*, p. 236.

alla guerra e alla pace.
Questa è la musica ora:
delle tende che sbattono sui pali.
Non è musica d'angeli, è la mia
sola musica e mi basta –.[41]
(*P* 76)

Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali has received more critical attention than any other texts of *Diario*. Among the first and most influential views there is Giacomo Debenedetti's idea of the poem as the place in which history finally enters Sereni's poetry.[42] And yet, Sereni's history was one 'quasi mormorata', in which the news of the most important event, the 'notizia del 25 aprile […] *cadde* e non *esplose*, […] s'insinuò pigramente' as the poet himself explains in *Gli immediati dintorni*.[43] Somewhat revising Debenedetti's statement, Giovanni Raboni has rightly observed that what enters Sereni's poetry, in *Diario*, is rather history as 'privazione-rifiuto degli eventi che contano e del loro significato, insomma come storia degli sconfitti'.[44] In other words, it seems possible to talk about history only on condition that history itself is taken as its own negative correlative: its absence, its negation, the distance it places between itself and the io precisely when it matters most to take part in it. It is in the light of this historical segregation that we wish to read the io's self-declaration of posthumousness from *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali*.

What does it mean to be dead to war and peace? If we regard it as a retrospective assertion (that is, from the perspective of a diary written 'afterwards'), we can suggest that it means to be dead to the present (of war) and to the future (of peace). This fundamental temporal undercurrent, which hinges upon a cause and effect relation (the io's exclusion from the future resulting from the segregation from a decisive historical present), seems to be confirmed by a later poem from *Stella* entitled *Esterno rivisto in sogno*. Re-emerging, quite significantly, alongside the theme of the end of youth, war and peace here appear as consequentially related:

Mai più – tritume di reggimenti –

[41] Cf. also ll. 7-8 of *Canzone lombarda*, from *Frontiera*: 'Ma quelle su uno svolto strette a sciami / un canto fanno d'angeli'.
[42] Giacomo Debenedetti, *Poesia italiana del Novecento*: *Quaderni inediti* (Milano: Garzanti, 1974), pp. 225-229.
[43] Sereni, *L'anno quaranticinque*, in *PP*, p. 646.
[44] Giovanni Raboni, 'Sereni: una vita prossima e lontana', in *La poesia che si fa. Cronaca e storia del Novecento poetico italiano 1959-2004*, ed. by Andrea Cortellessa (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), p. 172.

saremmo stati tanto uguali.

La spianata. Questa non è la pace.
Sarebbe invece stata
giostra di venti pascolo di echi
nient'altro che il vestibolo del tempo indifferente
comunemente detto fine della gioventù.
[…]
– Niente pace senza guerra – si sporge
uno tra le file degli andanti e venienti.
[…]
(*P* 216)

'Niente pace senza guerra', that is, no future (of peace) – or peaceful future – without the present, the utmost historical present of war. The io thus undergoes a temporal exclusion which, from (and because of) the present, extends as far as the future.

There is, however, also another essential undertone to this posthumous declaration, one which is more deeply embedded in the present temporality of imprisonment. Indeed, insofar as the two options of 'war' and 'peace' are not given as 'either…or' – as an *aut aut* – but rather as 'both…and', to be dead to war and peace also intimates a fundamental lack of choice. War and peace are, in fact, both unattainable: the io cannot fight when he is imprisoned, and more importantly, he cannot fight for peace as a partisan.[45] It is under this light that we can read Sereni's lament for a 'vitalità male impiegata e peggio spesa, ma pur sempre presente e disponibile, quanto più impossibilitata a incidere su una qualunque realtà, quanto più sprovvista di quelle occasioni e di quegli appigli che l'alimentarono in altri – nei prigionieri dei tedeschi, ad esempio – sotto forma di *resistenza*'. These words are taken from Sereni's 1949 review to Sergio Antonielli's *Il campo 29*, which Sereni regards as a literary testimony to the 'più remota e astratta prigionia di guerra cui combattente italiano sia mai stato sottoposto' (Antonielli was taken prisoner by the British army in Northern India and held in the cantonment of Yol). Undoubtedly, though, Sereni's remark can be read as a tailored self-comment, as he himself admits that 'se poi il lettore è di quelli che sono passati

[45] Stefano Giovanardi writes about 'una segregazione coatta che, se da una parte preservò la vita del poeta, dall'altra gli impedì di partecipare alla lotta di liberazione e di condividere tanto la catastrofe quanto la rinascita del suo paese', in 'Diario d'Algeria di Vittorio Sereni', p. 535.

attraverso un'analoga esperienza, non potrà non riconoscersi, e insieme ritrovare un'epoca, una piega mentale'.[46]

This condition of exclusion presented as lack of alternatives re-emerges in *Arie del '53-'55*, an oneiric prose text which almost paraphrases those famous lines from *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali*:

> Si è fatto troppo tardi. […]. Nemmeno oggi ci sarà la guerra. O la pace.[47]

In foregrounding the idea of lateness, these lines from *Arie del '53-'55* situate the present discourse on lack of choice within one about temporality. That any discussion on choice implies, of necessity, one on temporality, becomes clear if we have brief recourse to a text with which we will engage more thoroughly with regard to Caproni's poetry. The text is *La morte*, by Vladimir Jankélévitch, a voluminous study on the subject of death. Rapidly touching on the subject of choice, Jankélévitch claims that:

> la scelta, rimettendo in moto il tempo inceppato, fa riprendere il cammino della storia e dà all'anfibio umano i mezzi per continuare sulla sua strada […]. Fino a che può scegliere, la creatura non è confinata alla sua ultima estremità, quell'estremità che, per ciascun uomo, è la cessazione d'essere; dal momento che sceglie, dopo tutto, significa che non è ancora arrivato a giocare il tutto-o-nulla! Colui che sceglie ha fiducia e preserva, in attesa di sparire, la sua possibilità temporale.[48]

Especially noteworthy is that just as the absence of choice is tantamount to death, so its possibility implies the presence of a vital temporal essence. If we now read the posthumous declaration of *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali* through the lens of Jankélévitch, we can argue that it is precisely on account of a lack of choice (which, in its turn, subsumes a lack of temporality) that 'sono morto / alla guerra e alla pace' comes to be tantamount to 'not being'; or rather, to use a terminology which befits our analysis, to the end of the being – 'la cessazione dell'essere', in Jankélévitch's words.

Ultimately, the posthumous declaration of the io intimates two essential and interrelated temporal exclusions: from history and from choice. Within Sereni's poetry viewed in its diachronic development, this exclusion produces an essential break in the way in which the io relates, from now on, to time. Indeed, insofar as he is situated in the undifferentiated time of imprisonment precisely when it matters the most to be placed within

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[46] Sereni, *Il campo 29*, in *PP*, pp. 818-823.
[47] Sereni, *PP*, p. 598.
[48] Jankélévitch, p. 113. As is well-known, choice is keyword to much existential and phenomenological philosophy.

the seismic time of history, the io ceases to be able to establish a harmonious relation with time, the latter to be understood in both its sociological and psychological dimension ('non lo amo il mio tempo / non lo amo', *Nel sonno*, V, l. 9, *Strumenti*). We can thus argue that *Diario* marks the end of that 'intera agibilità dello spazio e del tempo', which, according to Gilberto Lonardi, used to be at disposal of the io of *Frontiera*.[49] In the later chapters I will explore further the consequences of such a watershed change. I now turn, however, to the analysis of *Il male d'Africa*, the emponymous text of the section added in 1965. It is a text of real importance which Sereni significantly defines, in a manner that is consistent with the terminology of our framework, as 'una specie di "Algeria revisited"'.[50]

2.6) The moment 'henceforth'

Il male d'Africa, divided into two parts, is presented as a sort of discussion between the io and Giansiro Ferrata, who is about to go to Algeria and to whom the composition is dedicated. The first part recounts Sereni's journey back from Oran to Italy, passing through Casablanca, while the more dialogic second part stands out as an attempt to clarify the meaning of that experience – to himself, rather than to the interlocutor. When the io is asked about 'Algeria', he confesses to all his incapacity to give a detailed account of it:

> […]
> e nessuna notizia d'Algeria.
> No, nessuna – rispondo. O appena qualche groppo
> convulso di ricordo: un giorno mai finito, sempre
> al tramonto […]
> (*P 94)*

The depiction of the African landscape calls to mind that from the prose piece *Una guerra non combattuta*, where 'il calore della giornata al tramonto era già oppressura e caldo d'Africa'.[51] On a more general level, it seems highly significant that the io is incapable of

[49] Gilberto Lonardi, 'Introduzione' to *Il grande amico: poesie 1935-1981*, ed. Gilberto Lonardi and Luca Lenzini (Milano: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 12. Analysing the 'forme del tempo in DA', Laura Neri argues that *Diario* presents us with a 'rapporto complicato e continuamente compromesso tra l'io e la fenomenologia dell'esistenza', in 'Le forme del tempo', in *Vittorio Sereni: Un altro compleanno*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito, pp. 116-119.
[50] See letter to Lanfranco Caretti, in 1962, *P*, pp. 466-467.
[51] *Una guerra non combattuta*, in *La tentazione della prosa*, p. 268. Similar depictions of a sundrenched African landscape are found, needless to say, in Ungaretti (cf. *Ricordo d'Affrica*: 'Il sole rapisce la città // Non

retaining anything more than a 'groppo / convulso di ricordo' from the North African experience, to the point that, just as he had delegated the 'tu' to pray in *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali*, he entrusts the addressee with the task that he himself is unable to fulfil: 'Portami tu notizie d'Algeria' (l. 88). The consequences of such an impotence have been highlighted by Mengaldo:

> Dunque il prigioniero d'Algeria non è in grado di parlare dell'Algeria, e la comprensione del senso di quell'esperienza è (illusoriamente?) delegata ad altri, mentre l'io, rammemorante o no, la conferma come inesistenza o 'sogno'[….] e come oscillazione fra appartenenza sfiorata e inappartenenza alla storia. In altre parole, ciò che lo scrivente chiede disperatamente all'interlocutore amico è il significato di un non-significato.[52]

We can expand on the critic's claim by analysing the text in a little more detail and exploring how it develops the problematic relationship which ties the io to his experience as a prisoner. The system of thematic and linguistic cross-references within the poem testifies to this experience whose meaning is unknown to the subject. Linguistically, the recollected experience is introduced and concluded by a noise, that of a pot: 'borbottìo della pentola familiare' (l. 7) and 'borbotta borbotta la pentola familiare' (l. 104). It is surely a way of undermining the io's speech (which is, in fact, defined as a 'ciarla', l. 64), but the noise also seems to contain an undertone of the general incomprehensibility underlying the poem as a whole. But the most indisputable admission of the difficulty in grasping the meaning of the experience is perhaps exemplified by that 'groppo convulso', which is also repeated, slightly altered, at the close of the poem ('questo groppo da sciogliere', l. 100). The persistence of the motif of incomprehensibility finds then a further attestation in the lines 59-63, to which the two occurrences of 'groppo' are linked via the common ground of 'throat': '*Tardi, troppo tardi alla festa* / - scherniva la turpe gola – / *troppo tardi!* e altro di più confuso / sul male appreso verbo / della bianca Casablanca'.[53] Moreover, and to conclude the analysis of the poem, these final lines are also the fulcrum of some thematic cross-references based upon the motif of 'ritardo', the other two occurrences being the previous 'un'anima attardata' (l. 4) and the following 'noi sempre in ritardo sulla guerra' (l. 93).

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si vede più // Neanche le tombe resistono molto', in *Vita d'un uomo, I, L'allegria*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1945), p. 20.

[52] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 107-108.

[53] We can perhaps find here a Montalian echo, either from *Dora Markus, II*, ('l'armonica guasta nell'ora / che abbuia, sempre più tardi'), in *Le occasioni,* or from *Lungomare,* ('Troppo tardi / se vuoi essere te stessa'), in *La bufera e altro*, in Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, pp. 131 and 198. It is worth noting that Sereni cites some lines from *Dora Markus* in the prose piece *Ognuno riconosce i suoi*, in *La tentazione della prosa* (pp. 90-91), now in *PP,* pp. 649-650.

Ultimately, the meaning of the experience of imprisonment is well encapsulated in this final poem. The retrospective analysis of the African experience consigns to the io a double, negative realisation: the imprisonment is read, on the one hand, as an experience that has no meaning; on the other, as lateness. It is the first realisation that leads, logically, to the latter, casting a long shadow on the future poetry, as highlighted, once again, by Mengaldo:

> […] se un motivo conduttore della poesia sereniana è anche come sappiamo quello dell'appuntamento mancato (specie negli *Strumenti umani*), non è incongruo dire che esso, nelle sue varie specificazioni biografiche, avrà pur sempre come archetipo e invito a ripetere il primo e più grande appuntamento mancato, quello con la Storia, di cui il *Diario* ci dice esaurientemente […]. Sicché ognuno di quegli appuntamenti mancati non lo sarà soltanto con questa o quella occasione dell'esistenza, ma con la Vita.[54]

But what is, precisely, an experience that has no meaning? Is there any such thing as an experience on which the subject cannot exert any authority as the only repository of what he has witnessed? 'L'esperienza ha il suo necessario correlato', Agamben argues, 'nell'autorità, cioè nella parola e nel racconto'.[55] It is this very authority that, we can hold, is negated in *Il male d'Africa*. And it is this lack of authority, this impossibility of getting any sense out of this experience, the difficulty in even talking about it, that turns what the io has lived into what we wish to define as an 'unexperienced experience.' To Mengaldo's words about the archetypal role of the 'appuntamento mancato' *par excellence* in shaping the theme of lateness in Sereni, we would like to juxtapose some of the considerations made by Derrida in *Demeure* which will allow us to give some more insight into the significance of *DA* in opening up a posthumous dimension. As mentioned earlier, Derrida analyses the original case of a fictional type of testimony (Blanchot's *The Instant of my Death*), in which the narrator and protagonist attempts to testify to his own death, a death which has nevertheless 'not taken place' (the protagonist, who is sentenced to death, manages to escape from his executioners). Towards the end of his analysis, Derrida recalls the very final lines of Blanchot's text:

> All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance.[56]

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[54] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 97-98. Cf. also Lorenzini and Colangelo: 'tipica di Sereni è la connotazione del viaggio come ritardo ormai irrecuperabile e perciò stesso avvertito come colpa', in *Poesia e Storia*, p. 150.

[55] Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e storia: Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001
[1978]), p. 6. Agamben here draws on Walter Benjamin's well-known observations on the storyteller. See 'The storyteller', pp. 83-107.

[56] Blanchot, *The instant of my death*, p. 11.

Relating the survivor's statement to the actual event it refers to, Derrida writes about an 'unexperienced event' whose peculiarity lies in the fact that:

> […] at that actual instant, that is, that henceforth, starting from that stigmatic point, *from the stigma* of a verdict that condemned him to death without death being what ensued, there will be for him, for the young man, for his witness and for the author, a death without death and thus a life without a life.[57]

Derrida lays great stress, in the final pages of his analysis, on the relevance of the adverb 'henceforth' to the understanding of Blanchot's text.[58] Indeed, we can add this term to the semantic cluster of our 'end'-'after' framework, considering Sereni's imprisonment, its actual experience as well as its thematisation, as the moment 'henceforth' of his poetry, the moment from which, on the one hand, the Serenian io will be made more and more liable to take on actual posthumous postures ('Sono già morto e qui torno?', *Di passaggio*, l. 8, *Strumenti*). On the other, the moment from which, remnants, residues of the experience of imprisonment will subterraneously inform his poetry. I will address these concerns at length in the next chapters. It seems now apt to conclude the present investigation with a passage from *L'anno quarantacinque* – a prose piece which bears the date 1965 – as it foregrounds the lasting effects of the caesura we are here describing by framing them within an observation concerning choice:

> così quella prigionia, o quel suo particolare stato, ci lasciava il suo segno […] una riluttanza o piuttosto uno spasimo per ogni volta che si fosse trattato di scegliere, in qualunque senso e per qualunque partecipazione, anche la più normale e quotidiana, tra solitudine e partecipazione. E magari quelle cose mi fossero state chiare allora, magari avessi potuto dirle allora con la coscienza di oggi, magari non ci fosse stato bisogno di vent'anni per capirle e confessarle per iscritto come sto facendo adesso.[59]

Precisely like Derrida writes of Blanchot's death, the imprisonment is to be, in Sereni's poetry, 'henceforth always in abeyance'.

2.7) Conclusion

The imprisonment in Algeria is thus understood by the io as an 'unexperienced experience'. The present analysis, which set out with Agamben's claim ('la vita porta con se una cesura'),

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[57] Derrida, *Demeure*, p. 89.
[58] Ibid., p. 102.
[59] Sereni, *L'anno quaranticinque*, in *PP*, p. 649.

thus comes to the identification of an archetypal 'henceforth moment' within Sereni's poetry. We initially related the 'end-after' duality of our posthumous framework to Sereni's poetry as it emerges after his captivity. We have seen how this duality is useful for reading this particular phase of his poetry. On the one hand, in fact, *Diario 65* brings to an end an old poetics which coincided with the youthful years. Even on a thematic level the idea of end becomes entangled (already in *Diario*, but in a more cohesive way in *Diario 65*) with the disappearance of youth, whose untimely conclusion comes to coincide with the outbreak of war. Somehow in line with these end-related tendencies is also Sereni's belief that it is only with the section *Il male d'Africa* that the io finally comes close to grasping the meaning of the experience of war, thereby bringing to an end (at least superficially) that 'vicenda interna al soggetto' about which Scaffai rightly writes. On the other hand, *Diario* 65 has been identified as fundamental in marking the moment 'henceforth', that from which Sereni's poetry will become more and more posthumous in that it is given 'after' the imprisonment. This aspect has been initially related to the structural features of the collection: it is a diary that has been written 'afterwards', thus contravening the synchronicity of a typical war diary such as *Il porto sepolto*. This shows, on a structural level, the chasm between two selves, the one who experiences the event and the one who reflects, afterwards, on it, in order to understand its meaning. However, this meaning, which is difficult to grasp, is finally understood, in Mengaldo's words, as 'non-significato', or, as we suggested, as an 'unexperienced experience'. This is the most significant consequence of the imprisonment, for both the distinctive outlook of the io (which from now on will often 'viversi come morto') and some other important thematic features of the poetry to come (the 'appuntamento mancato', entangled with the 'ritardo', and, more generally, a compromised relation between the io and time) are all to be traced back to the experience of captivity, which 'inaugura una poetica dell'esclusione e della colpa, presente in tutta l'opera successiva'.[60] In chapter 3 we shall further delve into the way in which the imprisonment impinges on Sereni's future poetry by analysing the poetic element of 'ceneri', which can be seen as a significant residual image of that experience. First, however, let us consider the presence of a caesura in Caproni's poetry.

The caesura– Part II. Caproni and the years of grief

2.8) The theme of Death

[60] The idea of 'viversi come morto' is found in Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 194. The final quote is, instead, from Lorenzini and Colangelo, *Poesia e Storia*, p. 138.

In order to establish from the outset the main objective of the analysis, we shall begin by quoting the first of the two strophes of *Interludio*:

> E intanto ho conosciuto l'Erebo
> – l'inverno in una latteria.
> Ho conosciuto la mia
> Prosèrpina, che nella scialba
> veste lavava all'alba
> i nebbiosi bicchieri.
> […]
> (*OV* 135)

The poem, which mingles together underworld and terrestrial imagery by placing the mythological figure of Proserpine in an everyday dairy, belongs to *Passaggio*, published in 1956, and was previously included in the plaquette *Le stanze della funicolare*, from 1952.[61] What we would like to call attention to are two lexical elements, namely the adverb 'intanto' and the verb 'conoscere', conjugated in the *passato prossimo* (and the frequency with which 'Ho conosciuto' occurs – twice more in the second strophe – brings to mind some famous lines of Eliot's *The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*).[62] For a study of Caproni's poetry from the viewpoint of posthumousness, of its 'essere dopo', these elements are of the highest relevance, for they link the scene portrayed in the poem – posthumous as such – to a previous moment in time. Indeed the io speaks here, to quote Ferroni, from 'un oltre, una dimensione estrema', and both 'intanto' and 'ho conosciuto' relate this present 'oltre' to a previous phase, to an episode or a juncture which made Caproni know the 'Erebo' and become acquainted

[61] According to Mengaldo, with *Passaggio* Caproni's poetry sees a 'passaggio da una realtà già impregnata di mito a un mito che s'appoggia, anche ingannevolmente, alla realtà. […] gli slittamenti e mutui impregnamenti fra realtà (esistenza) e mito sono continui', Mengaldo, 'Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni', in Giorgio Caproni, *OV*, p. XXII.

[62] 'For I have known them all already, known them all / I have known the evenings, mornings, afternoon […] I have known the eyes already, known them all […] And I have known the arms already, known them all'. T.S.Eliot, *Collected poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963 [1936]), pp. 13-17. For some explicit and implicit cases of intertextuality within Caproni's poetry see Adele Dei, 'Le parole degli altri', in *Per Giorgio Caproni,* ed. by Giorgio Devoto e Stafano Verdino, pp. 55-67 (the scholar, however, makes no mention of *The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). See also Anna Dolfi, *Caproni, la cosa perduta e la malinconia*, pp. 47-67.

with death.[63] And it is precisely on this episode and on the ensuing knowledge (which *Interludio* seems to reflect) that the present chapter focuses.[64]

The episode at issue is the death of Olga Franzoni, in March 1936.[65] By analysing the relationship between Caproni and Olga, and by paying attention to the historical circumstances in which Caproni finds himself dealing with the loss, the following pages aim to define what sort of understanding of death the poet came to acquire and to what extent the 'knowledge' referred to in *Interludio* can be seen to derive from Olga's tragic destiny.[66] We will seek to read the scene from *Interludio* as clearly entangled with the experience of grief; an experience which constitutes an archetype in Caproni's subsequent engagement with death, a moment 'henceforth' which is as essential to his poetry as the imprisonment is to Sereni's.

In comparison with Sereni, the fact itself that the analysis on Caproni engages directly with death seems to make it easier to write about posthumousness. The employment of our 'end'-'after' framework to the poetry of Caproni thus seems to call for little or no explanation, the end coinciding with Olga's death and the after with the survivor's subsequent approach to loss. However, the way Caproni deals with grief presents, on a poetic level, some complications which are due to the immediate emergence of another female figure (his future wife Rosa Rettagliata – Rina, in most poems – whom he meets only one year after Olga's death) no less than to some subtle mechanisms which are typical of psychological responses to mourning.[67] As a result, the relationship Caproni bears with the figure of Olga is, in his poetry, very idiosyncratic, and this is a further aspect which our investigation will take into consideration.

In line with the analysis previously carried out on Sereni, we shall begin by providing the poetic and historic framework within which Caproni takes on the experience of grief, offering a general overview of the modalities in which he engages, on a poetic level, with

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[63] Cf. Ferroni, p.15.

[64] Within the general discourse that we are here about to develop, it is perhaps worth noting that the entry of the adverb 'intanto' in *Il Vocabolario Treccani* reads: 'preceduto da *e*, introduce di solito una constatazione amara, il riconoscimento di un fatto spiacevole'.

[65] See Adele Dei, 'Cronologia', in *OV*, p. LIV.

[66] Vittorio Coletti defines Olga's death as 'vero *punctum dolens* e di svolta biografica e poetica'. See 'L'avventura tragica della conoscenza', in *Giorgio Caproni: Lingua, stile, figure* (Quodlibet: Macerata, 2014), p. 27.

[67] A thorough analysis of the 'work of mourning' in Caproni's poetry has been carried out by Anna Dolfi, *Caproni, la cosa perduta e la malinconia*, pp. 7-25. For a detailed analysis of grief in Caproni's poetry see, Biancamaria Frabotta, 'Il secondo libro di Giorgio Caproni: la cronistoria di una colpa tra predestinazione e libertà', in *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 89, 2-3 (1985), 310-325. For the female presence in Caproni's poetry see Daniele Santero, '"Una fanciulla passatami a fianco": destini della donna in Caproni', in *Lettere italiane*, 1 (2005), pp. 87-111.

the figure of Olga. While framing our analysis within some fundamental critical contributions on the matter, we will soon introduce the work of Vladimir Jankélévitch, as his in-depth study of death will provide us with a different angle from which to look at Caproni's experience of grief. Drawing on Jankélévitch, we shall then proceed to outline the making of a posthumous trajectory which stretches from the 'effectivity' of death to a possible 'consciousness' or 'knowledge' of death.[68] It is by following this very route that it will be possible to highlight some poetic strands which are consistent with our 'end-after' framework. Finally, we will provide an overview of some formal elements which can be seen as residual of the experience of grief.

2.9) Grief and death between *Cronistoria* and *Il passaggio d'Enea*: Caproni and Olga

In chapter 1, I quoted an excerpt from the prose piece *Gelo*, where Caproni's anguish at the girl's death was plainly illustrated, and so was the awareness of having to live, from then on, an irremediably posthumous existence (cf. the emphasis which Caproni himself places on 'dopo'). In the passage, the poet compares the unfortunate repercussions of that individual loss to those of another tragic experience, that of war, which the poet also experienced in the first person, first as a soldier on the Western Front, then as a partisan 'al servizio d'una Divisione Garibaldina'.[69] The parallel between two seminal events in Caproni's biography is here extremely relevant, not so much in the sense that it establishes a sort of hierarchy between the two experiences, making one (that of grief) more influential than the other (that of war). The first vesion of *Gelo* was published in 1949, and from then onwards the experience of war would prove to leave just as profound a trace in Caproni's *oeuvre*. The juxtaposition of these two events matters, rather, because it provides the present chapter with the temporal coordinates and poetic boundaries of the analysis. The figure of Olga appears in Caproni's poetry mainly from the end of the 1930s until 1956, the year in which *Passaggio* was published. Her presence thus comes to be inevitably framed within the years of World War II and of its aftermath, and the overlap between an individual grief and a tragedy of a more collective nature is, of necessity, an important feature of the poetry of that lapse of time. However, on a superficial level, the cohabitation of these two tragedies is never completely balanced. *Cronistoria*, published in 1943, although laden with the bleak

[68] See Jankélévitch, *La morte*, pp. 3-32.
[69] Dei, 'Cronologia', in *OV*, p. LVI. For some autobiographical information about Caproni's experience as a *partigiano* see the notes by Adele Dei to *Racconti di guerra e partigiani*, in Giorgio Caproni, *Racconti*, pp. 401-418. See also *'Era così bello parlare': Conversazioni radiofoniche con Giorgio Caproni*, intro. by Luigi Surdich (Genova: Il Melangolo, 2004), pp. 159-216.

atmosphere of the period of war, stands out as the only collection which engages structurally with Olga, and her figure thus occupies centre stage. On the other hand, in *Passaggio*, the need to account for the ominous destiny of an entire generation whose disastrous condition is embodied by Aeneas, gradually overshadows the private sorrow, thereby suppressing Olga's remembrance already in the passage from the first to the second section.[70]

Nonetheless, the reading of the prose writings which Caproni wrote mainly during the period of composition of *Cronistoria* and , and the availability of some unpublished poems, have proved the remembrance of this ill-fated event to be crucial, allowing some scholars to re-evaluate Olga and to see her as a truly archetypal figure in the poet's long-lasting engagement with death. In this regard, some of the fundamental and most recent critical stances on the subjects have been given by Paolo Zublena and Luca Zuliani, and the present analysis will often refer to them, since they have convincingly proved that the presence of Olga in the poetry of Caproni goes well beyond the limits which the poet himself had established for her.[71] What this study will try to contribute to is, on the one hand, the corroboration of the idea that Olga represents an archetypal figure in the poet's engagement with death. On the other, it will delve into the repercussions that this idea has in opening a posthumous dimension, suggesting that just as Olga's fatal end represents the moment from which death enters and never leaves Caproni's poetry, so it constitutes the starting point from which his poetry becomes posthumous.

Zublena provides our analysis with an appropriate diachronic framework, as he divides 'la parabola caproniana' into two macro-phases:

> una prima, segnata dalla personale esperienza del lutto, il quale domina la percezione della morte nella sua dolorosissima evidenza; una seconda, *grosso modo* dal *Congedo* in poi [italics in original], in cui subentra in primo piano la meditazione diretta dell'impossibile evento della morte che si installa nel cuore stesso della poesia, spersonalizzando in parte il lutto ma insieme, si può dire, installandolo stabilmente nel soggetto come un'assenza originaria.[72]

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[70] Aeneas is depicted as having 'in spalla / un passato che crolla' and 'per la mano / ha ancora così gracile un futuro / da non reggirsi dritto' (*Il passaggio d'Enea*, *Versi*, stanza IV, ll. 4-5 and 7-9, *Passaggio*). For the significance of the figure of Aeneas in Caproni see, among others, Franco Contorbia, 'Caproni in Piazza Bandiera', in *Per Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino, pp. 215-230; Maurizio Bettini, 'Il passaggio di Enea di Giorgio Caproni', in *Semicerchio*, 16-17 (2002), pp. 53-57; and Ibid., Alessandro Fo, 'Ancora sulla presenza dei classici nella poesia italiana contemporanea', pp. 24-52.
About his own interpretation of Aeneas's myth, Caproni has also written a lot himself. See *OV* pp. 1261-1264 for bibliographical references to the most important articles. Concerning the title of the collection see, instead, Giorgio Caproni, Carlo Betocchi, *Una poesia indimenticabile*, from letter 56 onwards. The final title appears in the letter 87, 19 June 1956, p. 168.

[71] Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, and Luca Zuliani, *Il tremito nel vetro.*

[72] Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 14.

The mention of a 'meditazione diretta dell'impossibile evento della morte' intimates a vast and heterogeneous area of twentieth-century philosophical thought, the main objective of which has been the understanding of death.[73] Whereas Zublena draws extensively on Derrida's and Lévinas' works, we shall here have recourse to the more comprehensive insight into the theme of death provided by Vladimir Jankélévitch. The philosopher's work is rather substantial, and despite not being always organic (the book was published posthumously, transcribing seminar texts which Jankélévitch had given during the academic years 1957-58 and 1958-59 at the Sorbonne and had been broadcast by Radiosorbonne), it offers new incisive perspective on the theme.[74] Jankélévitch distinguishes between 'la morte in terza, in seconda' and 'in prima persona', introducing some polarisations which will be particularly relevant to the present analysis. 'Death in the first person' is understood as an event which no one can experience. One may here recall Wittgenstein's famous statement ('death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death') as well as Caproni's own lapidary *Riflessione dell'autobiografante*, from *Franco* ('Un conto lo dovrò pur fare. La morte. Ecco un'esperienza / che non potrò raccontare').[75] Focusing on the temporality which pertains to this non-experienceable event, Jankélévitch conceives 'death in the first person' as follows:

> La morte-propria […] è in ogni momento davanti a me […] e questo sino all'ultimo minuto dell'ultima ora; in qualunque istante il soggetto s'interroghi, foss'anche a pochi battiti di cuore dall'ultimo battito, la morte-propria è ancora *da morire.* La prima persona del singolare non può coniugare il verbo 'morire' se non al futuro; e inversamente, l'indicativo presente e l'indicativo passato si coniugano solo alla seconda e alla terza persona. […] Non esiste per me una morte veramente mia – o meglio: io muoio solo per gli altri, mai per me stesso, così come a mia volta io conosco solo la morte dell'altro, che l'altro in quanto tale non conosce.[76]

Precisely because it cannot be experienced, 'death in the first person' cannot be known either. A different relationship binds up the io with 'death in the second person', the you's death, as it were. And this death in the second person, as we will presently see, is the vehicle through which Caproni's 'I' experiences, still in Jankélévitch's terms, all the 'effectivity' of death.

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[73] For a brief historical account on the theme of death within the philosophical and literary context (thus exceeding the sole twentieth century), see Ullrich Haase and William Large, *Maurice Blanchot* (London: Routledge, 2001), in particular chapters 3 and 4, pp. 37-66. See also Enrica Lisciani Petrini, 'Perché noi siamo solo la buccia e la foglia…', intro. to Jankélévitch, *La morte*, pp. IX-XXXVI.
[74] Cf. Ibid.. p. XXXV. The book was translated in Italian only in 2009, while there is no English translation.
[75] *OV*, p. 1058. The quote by Ludwig Wittgenstein is taken from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.4311, New Tork: the Humanities Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 147.
[76] Jankélévitch, *La morte*, p. 29.

In March 1936, Olga Franzoni dies of septicaemia. She and her mother had just joined Caproni in Loco di Rovegno – a small municipality in Val Trebbia – in whose primary school he was teaching. A few months after Olga's death, Caproni publishes his first collection, *Come un'allegoria*. The simultaneity of the unfortunate event and the publication accounts for the lack of references to the episode: Caproni was just able to append a few epigraphic lines to the work ('All'umiltà sorridente / della mia piccola OLGA FRANZONI, / amata e disperatamente / perduta, / queste "sue" umili cose. (7 marzo '36 – XIV)').[77] One more reference to her is instead found in *Ballo a Fontanigorda* (1938), whose last poem is entitled *Ad Olga Franzoni*.[78] A further lyric likewise dealing with the girl's death – *Immagine* – was initially included, but definitively expunged with the publication, in 1956, of *Passaggio*, when Caproni decided to rearrange his poetic corpus. This rethink gives the opportunity to delve a little more into Caproni's attitude towards bereavement.

As mentioned earlier, after the phase of personal grief which pertains to *Cronistoria*, and the lamentation of Olga's death, *Passaggio* adds a collective dimension of sorrow which, while initially superimposing onto the individual tragedy, eventually ends up eclipsing the more intimate dimension. The endnote to *Passaggio* is, in this respect, extremely explicative: the years of war, described by Caproni as of 'bianca e quasi forsennata disperazione', and those of its aftermath, called for a poetic change of tone, one that could testify to an 'intima dissoluzione non tanto della *sua* privata persona' but of 'un'intera generazione di uomini'.[79]

This intention is at the root of the rejection of some poems which, written during the early 1950s, still contain explicit references to Olga. In effect, at the end of the 1940s, Caproni refuses to publish any poem dealing with her loss. Nevertheless, it is precisely along the trajectory *Cronistoria-Passaggio* that the abandonment of Olga's remembrance emerges as accomplished merely on a superficial level, for the shift from an individually connoted grief to the 'dissolution of an entire generation' reveals, on a deeper level, the extent to which Olga's figure retains its archetypal value in opening up a posthumous dimension. This is not to say that the change from one collection to the other is minimal, but that it ends up being influenced by the figure of Olga to a greater degree than it externally appears. Indeed, according to Zuliani, one of the peculiarities of *Passaggio* resides in what he defines a process of 'derealizzazione', namely a transfiguration of biographic elements through which,

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[77] See *OV*, p. 1058.

[78] An analysis of this poem has been carried out by Antonio Girardi, '"Ad Olga Franzoni (in memoria)' di Giorgio Capron*i"*, in *Come leggere la poesia italiana del Novecento. Saba – Ungaretti – Montale – Sereni – Caproni – Zanzotto*, edit. by Stefano Carrai and Francesco Zambon (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1997), pp. 97-116.

[79] The note appeared only in 1968, with the publication of *'Il Terzo libro' e altre cose* (Einaudi). See *OV* pp. 1308-1310.

notably in the mature works, 'i temi delle prime raccolte ritornano ironizzati, decontestualizzati e rarefatti'.[80] For Zuliani, it is the figure of Olga that is more than anything else affected by and included in this process, whose aim is to reject the re-emergence of biographical references that could be directly referred to her.[81] Partly building on Zuliani's idea of 'derealizzazione', we shall seek to trace the knowledge of Erebo which the io claims to have gained in *Interludio* back to the experience of grief. Exploring the temporal distinctions on which, according to Jankélévitch, the (im)possibility of relating onself to death is grounded, we shall first investigate how Caproni addresses the you's death and then analyse to what extent it becomes conceivable for the io to acquire a consequentially posthumous knowledge of death. Thus, the caesura at issue in this chapter comes to be situated precisely between the two poles constituting our posthumous framework: the 'end' and the 'after', that is, the death of the *tu*, and the posthumous knowledge of the io.

Let us begin with the end, focussing on the figure of Olga as it is presented in *Cronistoria*, the collection which places at its centre the girl's death. It must be noted that, owing to significant cross-references between sections of this collection and *Passaggio*, the analysis will, when necessary, range freely between one and the other.

2.10) *Cronistoria*: 'the death of the *tu*'

> Un conflitto, una situazione di shock personale, una malattia, un'anomalia nelle previsioni del vivere costringono a ripensare il proprio stato e le proprie proiezioni nel futuro, ma anche il rapporto tra l''io' e il 'tu'.[82]

In the introduction to his *Il soggetto nella poesia del Novecento italiano*, Stefano Colangelo presents thus the 'problema del tempo', namely of the io's textual attitude in relation to time. Exploring one sonnet from *Cronistoria* and an excerpt from *Gelo*, this section concentrates on the temporal relation which is established between the io and death owing to what Jankélévitch defines as 'death in the second person'.

Cronistoria was published in 1943, and consisted of two sections entitled *E lo spazio era un fuoco* and *Anniversario,* this latter to be renamed *Sonetti dell'Anniversario* with the 1989 edition of *Poesie 1932-1986*.[83] Of the two sections it is precisely in *Sonetti*

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[80] Luca Zuliani, *Il tremito nel vetro*, p. 15.
[81] Ibid., p. 21.
[82] Colangelo, *Il soggetto*, p. 7.
[83] *E lo spazio era un fuoco* seems to be an explicit allusion to the proemial lyric of Montale's *Le occasioni*, '*Pareva facile giuoco / mutare in nulla lo spazio / che m'era aperto, in un tedio / malcerto il certo tuo fuoco*', in E. Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, p.111. For an approach to the relationship between Montale and Caproni see *Le*

dell'anniversario that the dead girl is more obsessively addressed (although her name is never explicitly mentioned). The metrical form of the sonnet is, in itself, noteworthy, since it will be used again later in *I lamenti*, included in the first section of *Passaggio*.[84] Caproni thus establishes an evident formal continuity between the two series of sonnets, one which is substantiated also on the semantic plane by dint of the widespread presence, in both series, of the word 'lutto' (and the semantic kinship can indeed be extended as far as to encompass the whole first section of *Passaggio*, entitled *Gli anni tedeschi*).[85] Yet, despite this continuity, we can note a fundamental divergence due to the different connotation which grief is given now in *Sonetti*, now in *I lamenti*: the *Sonetti* unequivocally assign an individual connotation to it. A third of the eighteen sonnets from *Sonetti* present an occurrence of the word 'lutto': 'Ora nel **lutto** in cui rovini / giorno per giorno', *II*, ll. 4-5; 'il mio **lutto**' *V*, l. 13; 'nel **lutto** senza fine', *VII*, l. 3; 'un **lutto** d'innocenza / chiusa', *XI*, ll. 10-11; 'nodo di **lutto**', *XIII*, l. 7; 'più tenero **lutto**', *XVIII*, l. 7. Overall, it is the whole semantic scope of these sonnets which draws extensively on grief and death, as it shines through every single lyric (see, for instance, syntagmas such as 'umano dolore', *II*, l. 5; 'morte plenaria', *III*, l. 14; 'tenue sepoltura', *IX*, l. 1; or the title of the opening poem of the first edition of *Cronistoria*, *La mia fronte che semina di tombe!*, which explicitly refers to grief via the metonymy of the tomb).[86] The indisputable reference to Olga is provided by the title of the section itself, which inevitably directs all the grievous occurrences to the unfortunate event, whose anniversary is described, in the sonnet *XV,* as 'di pena!'.[87]

We can take the sonnet *V* as an ideal specimen of the anguished intimate dimension of grief which underlies the entire section:

Il tuo viso che brucia nella sera
senza rossore, l'aroma dell'aria
alta dei tuoi paesi alla frontiera

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idée e la poesia: Montale e Caproni (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1998). Surdich, however, makes it clear that there is 'nessun rapporto di dipendenza, beninteso' (p. 102), even when Caproni and Montale seem to share many thematic concerns, (such as those related to war, the absence of God and the particular attention given by both to music and to the negative force of language.)

[84] Luca Zuliani notes how 'questa raccolta [*Cronistoria*], il "secondo libro" di Caproni, segna una maturazione decisiva nella sua poesia, in particolare attraverso i sonetti, scritti in gran parte nell'estate del '42', *OV*, p. 1099.

[85] About the metrical form, in the endnote to *Il 'Terzo libro' e altre* cose Caproni explains how 'piccole appendici o digressioni a parte', during the bleak years from 1943 to 1954, the 'disperata tensione metrica' was sought with the intention of finding a sort of '*tetto* all'intima dissoluzione non tanto della mia privata persona, ma di tutto un mondo di istituzioni e di miti sopravvissuti ma ormai sbugiardati', *OV*, p.1309.

[86] See *OV*, *Poesie disperse e inedite*, *OV*, p. 947. In this section, we find many other explicit references to grief (see, for instance, sonnets such as *II*, *Ultima epigrafe*, and *In memoria*).

[87] Paolo Zoboli notes how '*Cronistoria* è, per eccellenza, il libro di Olga', Paolo Zoboli, 'Verso l'isola del Pianto (Su un sonetto dell'anniversario)', in *Per Giorgio Caproni*, edit. By Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino, pp. 201-213.

d'est mi riporta, ed una solitaria
storia, dove tua madre ancora spera,
defunta, una tua voce. Da quell'aria
dura di neve che una primavera
disperata non ruppe più, non varia
nei tuoi occhi in ardore (or che aprile
scalda le selci, e della gioventù
alza l'affanno) la vampa sottile
della tua ferrea iride ove più
fermi il mio lutto, e alla mia giovanile
morte dài una speranza – un passo: tu.
(*OV* 95)

Zuliani has analysed at length how the system of cross-references of most of the lyrics of *Cronistoria* and *Passaggio* entails a large number of allusions (more oblique in the case of the latter) to Olga's death as described in *Gelo*. The sonnet above, unlike other texts, does not contain elements and images (such as the 'bicchiere', the 'tremito' and the 'alba') which are so emblematically linked to the figure of Olga. The text is, nonetheless, unmistakably explicit: the presence of the mother (described in *Gelo* as a woman with 'i capelli sfatti');[88] the insistence on possessives and personal pronouns ('mio', 'tuo', 'tua', 'tuoi','mia','tu'); all these elements are representative of a distinctive private dimension of sorrow.

The ambiguity of the final lines is dispersed if we consider that the episode refers to a moment of Olga's illness when she seems to recover, to the point that she is able to walk again (we shall return to this in section 2.12). Of great relevance to the present analysis is that in these lines there occurs a sort of *transfert* whereby death is shifted from the *tu* to the io ('mia giovanile / morte'). Commenting on the poem, Alessandro Baldacci notes that 'defunti possono […] immaginarsi il poeta e la madre della fidanzata poiché entrambi hanno fatto esperienza della morte nel volto agonizzante di Olga'.[89] We can expand on Baldacci's claim by engaging once again with Jankélévitch's thought, according to which the distinction between death in the first and in the second person is eminently temporal:

> La morte al futuro è l'ambito privilegiato della prima persona […]. Se la coscienza anteriore può essere la coscienza propria, la coscienza contemporanea non può essere

[88] Caproni, *Gelo*, in *Racconti*, p. 71.
[89] Alessandro Baldacci, *Giorgio Caproni: L'inquietudine in versi* (Firenze: France Cesati Editore), 2016, p.48.

> che la tua…oppure la mia per te; se la prima persona è competente 'prima', la seconda (tu per me, ma anche io per te) è competente *durante* il fatto: […] mentre il Tu è ghermito nel turbine della propria morte, bisogna pure che il testimone dell'evento sia l'essere più vicino; quel testimone sarò dunque io, io che do del tu al morente.[90]

It is thus through 'death in the second person' that a caesura obtrudes upon the io and his normal temporal relation with death. As a result, death is no longer always projected into the future, as the io enters that posthumous realm which pertains to survivors:

> la nascita è l'estremo preterito e il più antico passato della nostra vita, così come la morte è l'estremo futuro e l'avvenire sempre a venire e il non-ancora (*Nondum*) costantemente sospeso davanti a noi. La morte-propria (la morte di qualcuno per questo stesso qualcuno) è anzi il futuro che non sarà mai passato, tranne che per i sopravvissuti, e nemmeno presente, tranne che per i testimoni.[91]

Here, Jankélévitch seems to allude to two different phases pertaining to 'death in the second person', one which relates to the present temporality of witnessing one's death and another which refers to the past temporality of surviving one's death. Interestingly, we find these two moments perfectly arranged on a chronological line in *Gelo*, Caproni's 'bruciante confessione' about Olga's illness and death.[92] Let us dwell on one of the final moments of this confession, when it appears as though the first person narrator wished, by mentally uttering the words 'Muori, e la faccia esanime', to inflict death on Olga by means of a perverse performative act:

> […] nello stesso istante in cui un lago di lacrime lo sentivo invadermi caldissimo gli occhi, io come mai, guardandola così madida e perduta sul cuscino […] io dentro di me, ubriacato o impietrito Dio sa da cosa, mi misi a scandire scostato questi versi nello stesso istante con la più appassionata volontà di soffocarne il rigurgito?
> "*Sparsa le trecce morbide…"*
> Li ricominciavo caparbiamente da capo fermandomi ogni volta alla parola "aspetto" dove la memoria non mi scorreva più […]
> Fin quando dandomi un terrore che spezzò alfine ogni pensiero, quasi con esultanza la mia perversa mente ritrovò limpide queste parole:
> "*Muori, e la faccia esanime…*"
> Mio Dio. Io sono un uomo che *dopo*, in guerra ha visto e sofferto orrori che mai la bocca potrà ridire. Sono un uomo che *dopo*, fra tanti indicibili orrori, […] ha visto anche gli uomini che venivano accompagnati alla fucilazione tra l'erba verdissima […]. Perché mai allora io […] perché mai, mio Dio, nemmeno dopo la Guerra e le fucilazioni, so dimenticare il profondo e oscuro senso di colpa che in me irragionevolmente cresce col tempo ripensando alla morte […] ch'ora avanzava accanto a me in quella stanza verso il debole viso di Olga?[93]

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[90] Jankélévitch, *La morte*, p. 31.
[91] Ibid., p. 176.
[92] Caproni, *Gelo*, in *Racconti*, p. 80.
[93] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

The protagonist is here re-evoking the words with which, in Manzoni's *Adelchi*, the chorus ratifies Ermengalda's death (and the citation is repeated, and completed, once again in the next page of *Gelo*: '*Muori, e la faccia esanime…Muori! muori! muori!*').[94] Of great relevance is the proximity between Manzoni's citation which springs to the protagonist's mind – as if to remind him that death was taking place and he himself was witnessing it – and the following words regarding the opening up of a 'dopo', the same with which we began our investigation into Caproni's posthumous poetry in Chapter 1. Here, the significance of having experienced Olga's death is framed precisely between the two poles which constitute our posthumous framework: the 'end' and the 'after'. The understanding of the temporal relation which the io establishes with death through 'death in the second person' thus emerges as an essential precondition for any posthumous 'knowledge' and 'consciousness' the io might acquire.

2.11) 'Lutto' as a twofold end

If we now place the analysis thus far carried out against the 'end'-'after' framework we adopted for the study of Sereni's poetry, we would notice a sort of disproportion. Inasmuch as we are here dealing with grief, what is at issue is a quite straightforward case of 'essere dopo'. The notion of a possible consciousness or knowledge of death relies on a type of understanding – that held by the survivor – which is, in its nature, retrospective: 'la coscienza ulteriore o postuma è, per forza, seconda o terza persona', Jankélévitch observes.[95] In other words, an inherent dimension of 'essere dopo' is attached to it. Unlike the analysis of Sereni's poetry, in the case of Caproni the event of death has made it unnecessary to dwell on the meaning of the end. Nevertheless, in Caproni's poetry, the personal experience of grief soon assumes wider meanings. Accordingly, it is the meaning and understanding which the poet has of the end that broadens, and Olga's death thus becomes the prefiguration of a more collective, generational end. We argue that it is possible to delineate the trajectory of this evolution by following the entanglement between the semantic field of 'lutto' and that of 'youth'.

[94] See Vittorio Coletti, *L'avventura triste della conoscenza*, in *Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena, p. 36.
[95] Jankélévitch, *La morte*, p. 31. Ibid., p. 31.

Looking back at sonnet *V*, the recurrence of youth is found twice, first as a noun, then as an adjective employed in the almost oxymoronic syntagma 'giovanile / morte'. The abundance of occurrences of the term 'youth' is very conspicuous in the collection, both in the first section and in *Sonetti*.[96] What is worth noticing is that, rather than counterbalancing the ominous presence of 'lutto', youth is very often paired either with it, or, more generally, with inauspicious terms still falling under the scope of grief (as is shown, after all, by 'giovanile morte' itself, or by 'Alzata la brace nera / di gioventù' from *L'abito che accende i selci*, ll. 9-10, in *E lo spazio era un fuoco*). The reason for the presence of a youth that is ill-fatedly connoted derives, at least in the first place, from unmistakably personal circumstances. It is, in fact, Olga's very death which occurred too prematurely, as the incipit of the first sonnet laments:

> Poco più su d'adoloscenza ahi mite
> fidanzata così completamente
> morta […]
> (*OV* 91)

Subsequent to the untimely end of Olga is, however, the realisation of a more general destiny that had soon come to an end. It is the destiny of an entire generation, which, as Caproni himself observes:

> nata nella Guerra e quasi interamente coperta – *per* la Guerra – dai muraglioni ciechi della dittatura, nello sfacelo dell'ultimo conflitto mondiale, già in anticipo presentito e patito senza la possibilità o la capacità, se non in extremis, d'una ribellione attiva, doveva veder conclusa la propria (ironia d'un Inno che voleva essere di vita) *giovinezza*.'[97]

In order to find a direct poetic correlation between Olga's untimely death and the early end of a generational youth, we can here draw on *Le biciclette*, a text which belongs to *Gli anni tedeschi*, but it is not part of the series of sonnets. According to Adele Dei, in the text 'si segue una sorta di autobiografia, ma insieme si designano le vicende di un'intera generazione

[96] See, in *E lo spazio era un fuoco*, to name but a few, 'la tua giovane faccia' (*Metti il disco e ripeti*, ll. 9-10); 'dieci stendardi / di gioventù' (*Pisa piena di sonno*, ll. 7-8); 'uno sfarzo / di giovinezza al tuo petto / arde carboni' (*Tu che ai valzer d'un tempo*, ll. 8-9).
[97] *OV*, p. 1309.

che, defraudata dalla dittatura e dagli "anni tedeschi", ha concluso senza soccorso né riparo la giovinezza'.[98]

Throughout the eight stanzas of the ballad, the end of a generational period which 'il cuore / un tempo disse giovinezza' (I, ll. 6-7), mingles with the intimacy of Alcina's fate ('storia anch'essa conclusa', II, l. 15), the Ariostean sorceress under whose guise Olga is depicted.[99] The loss of youth is stated via the refrain which, with little variations, concludes every stanza from I to VII ('né v'è soccorso al tempo ormai diviso'). But perhaps more important is the explicit association, made in stanza VI, between Alcina's death and the outbreak of war, here announced by one of the recurrent elements of Caproni's poetry to come, 'Il giornale':

> […] E certo è Alcina
> morta, se il cuore balza ai solitari
> passeggeri, cui lungo la banchina
> dove appena son scesi, dal giornale
> umido ancora di guazza esce il grido
> ch'è scoppiata la guerra – che scompare
> dal mondo la pietà, ultimo asilo
> agli affanni dei deboli. E se il viso
> trascorre un altro fremito, non più
> può sgorgare una lacrima: ciò fu,
> né v'è soccorso al tempo ormai diviso.
> (*OV* 129-130)

Here the system of cross-references which pervades part of *Cronistoria* and the whole *Passaggio* is visibly at work, in that the 'viso' and 'affanni', already present in sonnet *V,* are here found again.[100] In particular, the 'viso' on which 'non più / può sgorgare una lacrima' calls back to mind Olga's expiring 'viso che brucia nella sera / senza rossore' of sonnet *V*. The rich rhyme between 'viso' and 'diviso', then, incorporates the individual fate of Alcina-Olga into that of a generation whose destiny has been sundered ('diviso') by the historical caesura of war. On the whole, insofar as Alcina's fate is here superimposed on that of an

[98] Dei, *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 72. Anna Dolfi argues that 'la giovinezza/innocenza, inglobante le pure immagini femminili', is to be identified with the *res amissa*, 'la cosa non conosciuta e perduta'. See Dolfi, *Caproni*: *la cosa perduta e la malinconia*, p. 17.
[99] See *OV* pp. 1128-1131.
[100] For cross-references internal to *I lamenti* see L. Surdich, *'I lamenti' in forma di sonetto*, in *Genova a Giorgio Caproni*, edited by Giorgio Devoto e Stefano Verdino, Genova, San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1982, pp. 55-75.

entire collectivity, Olga's untimely end comes to be read as a figure of a more collective end, as the prefiguration of the end of a generational period which was, just as untimely, brought to a close by the horrors of the war (and note the coincidence of semantic and formal end in the penultimate *endecasillabo tronco*). It is an overlap of individual and personal dimension which is retrospectively highlighted by Caproni himself during a series of interviews, now collected in *Era così bello parlare*:

> Be', credo che per qualsiasi uomo la guerra abbia significato questo impatto improvviso con la storia […]questa guerra, questo impatto con la guerra io penso che sia venuto in precedenza all'impatto vero e proprio, tant'è vero Oreste Macrì [*sic*], che fu mio critico nei primissimi anni, potrei dire, Trenta, già aveva sentito nei *Sonetti dell'anniversario* che questo lutto apparentemente privato per la morte di questa ragazza, viceversa implicava un presentimento di un lutto ben maggiore che stava all'orizzonte di tutti noi.[101]

From the point of view of a parallel between Sereni and Caproni, we can observe that whereas for the former it was the word 'perduto' which activated the semantic scope of the end (the loss of youth being intertwined with the loss of war, perceived not only as historically lost, but, more importantly, as not participated in, as 'appuntamento mancato'), for Caproni the keyword is 'lutto', which comprises the end of the 'fanciulla completamente morta' as well as a generational end symbolised by the 'tempo ormai diviso'. Moreover, notwithstanding the irreducible singularity of each experience (for Sereni, for instance, there is no redemption, not even 'in extremis', to use Caproni's words quoted on page 67), we can notice that the years of war and of its aftermath mark a fundamental watershed in the consciousness that both Sereni and Caproni have of the sense of the end. Although this may hold true for many other authors who, after World War II, found themselves having to engage with a world which presented itself as completely altered, it must be noted that, for Sereni and Caproni, this consciousness comes into being owing to more personally connoted episodes, namely imprisonment and grief.

In *Le biciclette*, Olga's figure is already transfigured in Alcina, in keeping with that process of 'derealizzazione' mentioned by Zuliani. The poem, published in 1947 in *La fiera letteraria,* is the last one in which somewhat of an identifiable reference to Olga is found.[102] The text is placed at the close of *Gli anni tedeschi* (it is followed only by the sonnet *Notte*),

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[101] *'Era così bello parlare',* pp. 159-160. One straightforward connection between Olga and war is also found in *Gelo*, where Mariano remembers a conversation with Olga before she became gravely ill. The protagonist's mind is distracted by 'tutto il pensiero sgomentato dalla guerra che stava per scoppiare su noi (per quanti anni, da quanti anni è stata per scoppiare su noi la guerra?)'. *Gelo*, p. 78.

[102] But even the figure of Euridice, in *Versi* from *Il passaggio* is very likely to be a transfiguration of Olga (see *OV*, p. 1263).

the section of *Passaggio* where the presence of the tragedy of war progressively overcomes Olga's remembrance. Nonetheless, by studying some prose pieces, we can shed further light on the long-standing presence of the female figure, testifying to the relevance Olga has in transforming the experience of 'death' into a possible 'knowledge' of death.

2.12) 'Effectivity' and 'knowledge' of death

Olga is at the centre of the first narrative works by Caproni, which date back, probably, to the years from 1937 to 1939.[103] Very often the reading of works in prose casts light on the meaning of some of the otherwise obscure poetic imagery employed, and in general on the overall bleak tone of the sonnets from both *I sonetti* and *I lamenti*.[104] As it stands, the somewhat unexpected positive ending of the sonnet *V* ('fermi il mio lutto, e alla mia giovanile / morte dài una speranza – un passo: tu') is, for instance, rather enigmatic. We can throw some light on the meaning and referent of those lines by taking a look at *Chiaro di luna*, a narrative approach to Olga's death (published in 1939 in the magazine *Augustea*) which, according to Adele Dei, is 'il primo spunto' for *Gelo*.[105] It thus becomes clear how the episode at issue in sonnet *V* refers to a specific moment in Olga's illness in which, notwithstanding the infirmity ('Erano in tempi in cui tu malata di quel disperante male sconosciuto alla bonomia del medico di paese'), she appears to revive:

> […] ecco io non ti dico con quale tremito udii […] te che scendevi le scale col suono di quel tuo passo ch'ora non so più ricordare senza acutissima pena: ché ormai perduto per sempre, e senza rimedio, è il peso dolce che ad esso donava realtà.
> […]
> Oh troppe volte mi sono domandato perché, nei nostri giovanili colloqui, che pure erano allegri come si conviene a giovani onesti, io d'un tratto sentissi fra me e te interposto quel presagio di morte precoce!
> […] Vero è che quella volta esso era giustificato da un motivo concreto: io più non presentivo, bensì sapevo che tu saresti finita; con precisione matematica lo sapevo, benché non rinunziassi a sperare, e coscientemente mi illudessi, per quel tuo ultimo e non mai accaduto gesto d'amore, che ciò non dovesse avvenire. Dopotutto avevi infatti ancora respiro, anzi mi eri venuta incontro con le tue forze che da tanti giorni non ti sorreggevano più; e non era dunque quello un segno di risveglio, l'indice non illusorio della tua aderenza alla vita? [106]

[103] Cf. Dei, *Nota al testo* in *Racconti*, p. 377.
[104] For Coletti, 'la prosa, narrativa e saggistica, di Caproni anticipa singolarmente, fin dagli anni quaranta, gli esiti più maturi della poesia', Vittorio Coletti, 'L'avventura triste della conoscenza', in *Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena, p. 35. On Caproni's prose, see Michela Baldini, *Giorgio Caproni narratore* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2009).
[105] Dei, *Nota al testo* to *Racconti*, p. 398.
[106] The short story is fully quoted on pp. 398-399.

The excerpt above constitutes the end of the piece in prose, which thus maintains, similarly to the sonnet, a certain degree of ambiguity, oscillating between the precognition of a death to come, and a sort of wilful hopefulness. This ambiguity is placed, however, within a broader narratological context from which Olga's death clearly emerges as having already occurred (her step is described as 'perduto per sempre' and the night which is being recounted is, as stated elsewhere in the text, the 'notte ultima'). The first-person narrator lays great stress on the verb 'sapere', employed twice, one of which with extreme emphasis ('con precisione matematica'). Despite being presented as a foreboding sensation, it seems difficult to dispense with the idea that, three years after Olga's death, this 'sapere' might subsume, rather, a posthumous and retrospective realisation. As Jankélévitch explains, it is through the experience of grief, through its 'effectivity', that the io elevates a purely speculative knowledge to a 'sapere vissuto':

> Che cosa ha imparato, in fondo, questo soggetto in lutto nuovamente iniziato alla verità immemoriale? Non ha appreso niente di nuovo, e tuttavia ha senza dubbio compreso qualcosa […]. Non ha imparato niente, ma chi può negare il valore insostituibile della sua esperienza? […] Prendere coscienza della serietà della morte significa innanzitutto passare dal sapere astratto e puramente teorico all'evento effettivo. D'altra parte, non si dice forse 'realizzare'? […] nell'esperienza del lutto o della malattia si compie la promozione del nostro sapere all'effettività. Apprendere sapendo già e in anticipo ciò che si apprende, è di colpo sapere di un sapere vissuto, di una gnosi concreta e densa di emozione, aderente intensamente e appassionatamente a ciò che prima si sapeva senza comprenderlo […][107]

It must be noted that Jankélévitch assigns a sort of archetypal role, within 'la morte in seconda persona', to 'la morte del padre e della madre', as this is 'per ogni uomo il passaggio dal mediato all'immediato'.[108] This clarification is indeed necessary, since Enrico Testa has recently called attention to the different function which Olga and Annina (Caproni's mother, to whom *Il seme del piangere*, published in 1959, is dedicated, died in 1950) would have in Caproni's apprehension of death. Testa draws on Roland Barthes' *Mourning diary* so as to state that 'la differenza tra la morte di Olga e quella di Annina è che la seconda "chiama" indefettibilmente la propria', leading the io to the 'accettazione del lutto originario'.[109] As a result, following on from Testa's analysis, one might assume that it is only from *Seme* that the io would take on an unequivocally posthumous outlook. Yet, the scenario depicted in *Interludio*, which was written, together with *Gelo*, at the end of the 1940s, bespeaks

[107] Jankélévitch, *La morte*, pp. 13-14.
[108] Ibid., p. 27.
[109] Testa, 'Con gli occhi di Annina. La morte della distinzione', in *Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena, p. 52.

unmistakable posthumous characteristics whose roots can be more easily associated with Olga's death[110]. This contention is borne out by the analysis of some formal features of Caproni's poetry. As will be seen more at length in the final section, drawing on Zuliani's idea of 'derealizzazione', the figure of Olga is at the root of some of Caproni's long-lasting imagery which, however transfigured and altered from the original matrix, appears to originate in the recollection of the night/dawn in which Olga died. Among the most enduring poetic elements of this imagery are the 'alba' and the 'bicchiere', both present in *Interludio*. Moreover, together with other elements, both 'alba' and 'bicchiere' (this time alongside its unsettling 'tremito',) will form the underworld scenario of *Ad portam inferi*, the poem of *Seme* which is Testa's starting point. Thus, part of the imagery through which the 'Erebo' of *Interludio* is portrayed, as well as some traits which will be characteristic of the Erebus-like setting in which Annina's figure is placed, can be traced back to Olga, and find their own likely referent in sensations experienced during her illness.

In light of this, it seems more reasonable to embrace Zublena's viewpoint, according to which the process described by Testa occurs consequently to Olga's death. The beginning of this new phase in which 'il soggetto, rinunciando al lutto personale, si dispone all'accettazione del lutto originario – appreso e ogni volta ripetuto nella morte altrui – che anticipa, preludendola e già sempre presentificandola, la propria morte' is identified by Zublena with 'la grande allegoria delle *stanze della funicolare*'.[111] From the perspective of our discourse on the acquisition of the knowledge of death, the transition highlighted here by Zublena can be more pertinently read, still in Jankélévitch's words, as one from the personal 'tragedy' of grief to the subsequent thematisation of death as a 'problem'.[112] A transition which appears to be well intimated by the incipit of *Interludio*, in which what is at stake is the claiming of a 'sapere vissuto' of death on account of which there arises the possibility for the io to place himself in 'Erebo'. Ultimately, we believe it possible to mark out a trajectory which goes from experiencing the 'effectivity' of death to 'problematising' death (mainly as a poetic subject) by means of a posthumous 'knowledge'.

The brief mention we made of the imagery which is at work in *Interludio* also shows how, in line with the idea of posthumousness, the 'end' (that is, the end of Olga) does not cease to inform, subterraenously, what comes 'after'. As far as this particular imagery is

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[110] See *OV* pp. 1145-1146. *Ad portam inferi* was instead written between 1958 and 1959 (see *OV*, pp. 1365-66).

[111] Zublena, *Giorgio Caproni*, pp. 38-40.

[112] 'La morte sotto questo aspetto è conosciuta "mortalmente", attraverso una conoscenza postuma e conseguente, la sola capace di assicurare all'uomo il tempo a disposizione per trasformare la tragedia in problema', Jankélévitch, *La morte*, p. 15.

concerned, some indicative examples can be provided by approaching *Passaggio*, the collection in which the presence of Olga is more and more dissimulated. 'In tutto il *Passaggio d'Enea* è chiara l'intenzione di non nominare Olga', Zuliani writes, and 'anche se la sua figura è spesso evocata tramite allusioni, i testi a lei esplicitamente dedicati in questi anni non furono recuperati o portati a compimento, oppure furono talvolta retrodatati'.[113] Nevertheless, in the same years 'la presenza di lei pare davvero incombere contro la volontà dell'autore', and the residues of this presence, rather than being definitively erased, are subtlety kept in a variable imagery.[114]

2.13) Olga's persistence: towards the residue

We shall now provide a brief insight into how Olga's persistence proves to be noticeable particularly on a formal level. In order to do so, we shall examine a couple of sonnets from *Passaggio*, so as to try to investigate better the ways in which the shift to a more collective dimension of grief occurs. Drawing on some of the conclusions reached by Zuliani, these pages set the scene for taking further the study of the persistence of Olga in the poetry of Caproni. We can regard this final section as an introduction to the next chapter, in which we shall single out one specific element of the Capronian imagery, one which we shall study as a symbolic residue left by the experience of grief.

A few months after the publication of *Cronistoria* (April 1943) Caproni took part in the Resistenza, fighting as a partisan in Val Trebbia. This historical climate shapes *Gli anni tedeschi*, mainly composed between 1943 and 1947.[115] Within the thematic constant of grief which ties *Cronistoria* to *Passaggio*, the sonnet *I* of *I lamenti* prepares, however, the ground for a differently shaped 'lutto':

Ahi i nomi per l'eterno abbandonati
sui sassi. Quale voce, quale cuore
è negli empiti lunghi - nei velati
soprassalti dei cani? Dalle gole
deserte, sugli spalti dilavati
dagli anni, un soffio tronca le parole
morte - sono nel sangue gli ululati

[113] Zuliani, 'Alba', in *Giorgio Caproni*, edit. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena, pp. 178-179.
[114] Ibid., p. 190.
[115] For the exact dates of composition of *I lamenti* see *OV* pp. 1132-1135.

miti che cercano invano un amore
fra le pietre dei monti. E questo è il lutto
dei figli? E chi si salverà dal vento
muto sui monti – da tanto distrutto
pianto, mentre nel petto lo sgomento
della vita più insorge?... Unico frutto,
oh i nomi senza palpito – oh il lamento.
(*OV* 115)

If one compares the keywords of both the series of sonnets, thoroughly looking at those lexical elements which constitute a traceable web of cross-references among the texts, some tangible differences can be noticed. As 'I nomi' takes here the place of 'll tuo nome' from *Sonetti* (see, for instance, *I*, *XVI* and *XVII*), so the 'mio lutto' from *Sonetti* yields up to 'lutto / dei figli', thereby broadening the circumscribed grief of *Cronistoria* into a more generational concern. 'In un'esperienza biografica, com'è quella di Caproni, limitata per quanto riguarda i fatti di grande risonanza', Surdich writes, 'il momento di maggiore emergenza di una realtà non privata e di impatto con la dimensione storica è costituito dall'avvenimento della guerra'. And it is precisely the section *I lamenti* that is 'scritta al cospetto della tragedia storica'.[116] Fifteen years before acknowledging the relevance of Oreste Macrì's observations about the co-existence of collective and private sphere in *Cronistoria*, Caproni had pointed out that

> Il peso d'una storia generale, opprimente l'esile storia privata che di quella s'imbeve, comincia a farsi più esplicito, mi pare, negli *Anni tedeschi* e nel gruppo delle *Stanze*. […] credo di poter dire […] che il 'tentativo' di 'una dimensione dell'uomo al vaglio della storia già avevo cominciato a compierlo in quelle mie cose.[117]

With the shift to a 'dimensione dell'uomo al vaglio della storia', Caproni decides to eliminate references to the previous personal phase of grief, as is also evident from what Zuliani writes about those texts that were either backdated or not published. However, the simplicity with which Olga seems to be dismissed after *Le biciclette*, has been firmly contradicted by Zuliani himself as well as by Zublena. The former, in particular, argues that the underlying *topos* of the collection, 'l'alba livida che costella le poesie e conclude i tre poemetti maggiori',

[116] Surdich, '"I lamenti" in forma di sonetto', in *Genova a Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Giorgio Devoto e Stefano Verdino, p. 55.
[117] Caproni, *IA*, p. 61.

represents a clear reference to the night (and the subsequent dawn) in which Olga died.[118] The deduction is made possible by comparing the narrative description of that night as it is contained in *Gelo*, with the more metaphorical nuances the image of 'alba' acquires throughout *Passaggio*, in particular in *Alba*, the introductory sonnet:

> Amore mio, nei vapori di un bar
> all'alba, amore mio che inverno
> lungo e che brivido attenderti! Qua
> dove il marmo nel sangue è gelo, e sa
> di rifresco anche l'occhio, ora nell'ermo
> rumore oltre la brina io quale tram,
> odo, che apre e richiude in eterno
> le deserte sue porte?... Amore, io ho fermo
> il polso: e se il bicchiere entro il fragore
> sottile ha un tremitìo tra i denti, è forse
> di tali ruote un'eco. Ma tu, amore,
> non dirmi, ora che in vece tua già il sole
> sgorga, non dirmi che da quelle porte
> qui, col tuo passo, già attendo la morte.
> (*OV* 111)

In the previous section, we have seen how the meaning of the sonnet *V* of *Sonetti* is better understood by resorting to a similar and less poetically consummate image from a prose piece, *Chiaro di luna*. Likewise, the sense of the dawn from *Alba*, alongside the connotation of one of its central objects – the trembling glass – is unveiled by the reading of *Gelo*. Indeed, in one of the tensest passages from this prose piece, Mariano recalls when Olga, who was lying ill in bed, asked him to get her a glass of water. As he held the glass up for Olga to drink, the glass 'tremava all'orlo fra i suoi denti', to the point that Olga exclaimed: 'Mamma mia. Non sei nemmeno buono a reggere un bicchiere'.[119] Zuliani convincingly deduces that in *Alba*

> questo rumore di vetro e ferro, che qui appare per la prima volta, ha una ragion d'essere che non è individuabile senza conoscere l'episodio narrato nel *Gelo della mattina*: il

[118] *OV*, pp. 1128.
[119] Caproni, *Gelo*, p. 76.

> bicchiere che trema fra i denti di Caproni non è un corollario, come potrebbe sembrare di primo acchitto. È il particolare bruciante al centro dell'immagine: da esso il rumore è nato, in una notte di molti anni prima. Ed è da questo sonetto che tale rumore pare diffondersi nelle poesie e nelle prose successive.[120]

The image appears in *Alba* for the first time, for the sonnet was published before the piece in prose (1948, in *La fiera letteraria*). Caproni thus 'prosegue un dialogo con la fidanzata morta nove anni prima, all'insaputa del lettore', and does so by transfiguring an element which stems from the remembrance and narration of Olga's death.[121] Indeed, in whatever fashion or context the trembling glass will subsequently occur (for it will keep occurring up to the mature collections), we can take this poetic object to be a 'residue' which, in Ferroni's words, leaves 'segni ulteriori di sé che vengono in vita dopo'.[122] Similarly, the other elements belonging to this 'costellazione di simboli' (dawn itself, bar, tram) will acquire different overtones throughout the rest of Caproni's oeuvre. [123] Their matrix is, however, one and the same.

Overall, *Alba* attests to both the importance of Olga's death and to its durable consequences on the poetry of Caproni, as it places the girl's death at the centre of a decisive and enduring imagery which will preserve the episode as archetypal. Furthermore, through the appearance of the tram, the sonnet inaugurates the seminal presence of a series of means of transport which, from *Passaggio* onwards, will function as vehicles for connecting the io with the underworld: the funicular, allegorical image of life, which terminates its journey at 'la soglia di quei magri bar / dove in Erebo è il passo' (*Stanze della funicolare*, *Versi*, stanza XII, ll. 4-5); the lift of 'Castelletto' which guides to heaven; the train that is both waited for by Annina *ad portam inferi* and taken by the 'viaggiatore cerimonioso' during his taking leave.[124]

2.14) Conclusion

In an approach comparable to that adopted with regard to Sereni, we have situated Caproni's experience of grief within the posthumous framework which informs the present study,

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[120] Zuliani, 'Alba', in *Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena, p. 185.
[121] Ibid., p. 180.
[122] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p.15.
[123] L. Zuliani, 'Alba', in *Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Davide Colussi and Paolo Zublena p.188.
[124] The tram from *Alba* is 'il primo dei molti mezzi di trasporto che in Caproni comunicano con l'aldilà', ibid,Ibid., p.187. As for the 'passo' mentioned in *Versi* of *Stanze della funicolare*, we can regard it as a perfect example of this process of 'derealizzazione', through which Olga's 'passo' (step) from *Chiaro di Luna* is transfigured into the metaphoric 'passo' (pass) that provides access to the underworld.

seeking to locate 'end' and 'after' related concerns which could account for the posthumus declaration of the io in *Interludio*. Through recourse to Jankélévitch's insight into the theme of death, we have shown how it is through 'death in the second person' that a temporal caesura obtrudes between the io and death whereby the latter is no longer always projected onto the future.

Exploring the way in which the 'death of the *tu*' is portrayed both in poetry and prose, we have come to read Olga's preamature death as prefiguring a generational end. In this respect, emphasis has been laid on how these two strands of the end intersect with each other via the common ground of youth, whose untimely finish also represented one of Sereni's concerns at the time of *Diario*. We have then proceeded to investigate how Olga's death intiates the io to a 'sapere vissuto' whereby it becomes possible for him to claim to have known the Erebo. The analysis of some imagery borrowed from *Gelo* and other prose accounts addressing Olga's death has enabled us to interweave the io's posthumous declaration from *Interludio* with having experienced 'death in the second person'. A more detailed scrutiny of some formal features has let Olga's residual presence shine through some recurring poetic elements. Precisely when studied in relation to the proses dedicated to her, these elements become laden with additional meaning, and the next section will delve further into one of these elements, aiming to prove its value as a residue of the experience of grief. An experience which Caproni himself, in *Gelo*, describes as truly a 'moment henceforth':

> Fissava con odio nei miei occhi i suoi duri occhi di smalto (uniche cose salde ormai nel suo corpo sfatto dai vapori febbrili) e da allora io col sangue gelato da quello sguardo e da quell'impossibile appello, in me sentii sorgere un pianto dal quale non ho potuto risollevarmi mai più.[125]

[125] Caproni, *Gelo*, p. 82.

CHAPTER III

The residue

Following on the caesura examined in the previous chapter, we now turn to the residual connotation that two specific poetic elements – 'ceneri' and 'deserto' – acquire in Sereni's and Caproni's poetry respectively. Ferroni lists the word 'residuo' within those falling under the scope of posthumousness, those with which 'inevitabilmente si imbatte chi intenda studiare la letteratura postuma'.[1] The idea of something that is 'residual' thus dovetails with the concept of posthumousness, encapsulating well the sense of an end which persists beyond its ordinary limits. Ferroni proceeds by general ideas, attempting to 'interrogare qualche momento e situazione della vita postuma della letteratura e della sua tradizione'.[2] The focus of his analysis is thus inevitably on the bigger picture, on the way in which literature as such can be seen to possess posthumous characteristics. Owing to the all-encompassing scope of the scholar's analysis, 'residuo' and cognate words receive no more than a mention in passing.[3]

Unlike Ferroni's analysis, in a study like the present one, where the long-lasting poetic implications of two pivotal experiences are situated against an 'end'-'after' framework, the evaluation of apparently minor elements can prove essential. Our contention is that the analysis of 'ceneri' and 'deserto', once conducted from the viewpoint of posthumousness, attests to the enduring effects of the turning points examined in chapter 2. Though taken occasionally into consideration by the existing scholarship, 'ceneri' and 'deserto' have never been brought into relation with the episodes of captivity and grief. Our objective will be precisely that of laying this connection bare.

An initial clarification about terminology must be here made. What are we to name the elements of 'ceneri' and 'deserto'? The term 'image' appears to be preferable to the rather cumbersome formula of 'poetic elements', especially if we briefly consider some attributes with which, within the field of humanities, 'image' has been invested. In his *Poetics*, the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey offers an inquiry into the 'poet's ownmost

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[1] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. 16.
[2] Ibid.
[3] The scholar in fact concedes that 'Il percorso semantico che da postumo conduce a questa selva di altri termini andrebbe naturalmente seguito con ben più puntuale analisi linguistica e semantica', Ibid. It is curious that the term 'residuo' does not figure in the 1996 edition (cf. Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*).

domain: lived experience [*das Erlebnis*] and its expression or recreation in the imagination'.[4] Dilthey argues that

> when a stimulus ceases, the excitation in the sensory organ can nevertheless continue. The perception then becomes an after-image. When this excitation of the sensory nerves no longer exsists, the content of perception can continue to exist as a representation or be reproduced as one.[5]

Inasmuch as they are part of a transformational process, these 'after-images' are subject to changes which 'never consist in the creation of new contents that have not been previously experienced, but rather in excluding particular contents or connections, intensifying or diminishing them, or in their completion, i.e., the addition of contents or connections drawn from experience'.[6]

Possibly grounded on a comparable conceptual framework is Henri Bersgon's notion of 'memory-image' (*image-souvenir*). Placed between the poles of 'pure memory' and 'perception', and acting as a *trait-d'union* between them, 'memory-images' materialises the persistence of the past within the present. According to Bergson, in fact, every new perception is imbued with memories, always mixed with details coming from our past experience:

> pure memories do not exist now as entities – they exist (timeless present) in the past, but they have causal effects now, in so far as they generate memory images, which are present phenomena. They live in their effects, as a man might be said to live in his children or achievements, and this is a reality which is manifest now and does not belong to either the future or the imaginary. The sense in which all our memories survive would be that it always might be that an experience we had in the past but have apparently forgotten should at some future time come to mind and contribute to perception. [7]

Both Dilthey's and Bergson's conceptions of image foreground the two qualities which, in our view, are essential to 'ceneri' and 'deserto', namely the residual and transformational ones. Arising from the interpenetration between an inner state of mind (simply put, one of disquiet and sorrow) and outer circumstances (captivity and grief), 'ceneri' and 'deserto' accrue additional metaphorical meanings along the trajectory of Sereni's and Caproni's poetry, as they inevitably end up interacting with new historical realites as well as new poetic concerns. Precisely because of this transformation, the undertones – always negative – with which these images become laden are not always easily associated with the episodes from which they originate (and indeed, the process of 'derealizzazione' we partially considered

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[4] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Poetry and experience*, p. 63.
[5] Ibid., p. 61.
[6] Ibid., p. 71.
[7] Alan Robert Lacey, *Bergson: The arguments of the philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 2005 [1989]), pp. 134-135.

in the previous chapter represents a perfect instance of this). Yet, a systematic examination of their occurrences brings to light a probable filiation from the experiences of imprisonment and grief which cannot be overlooked. However differently connoted from one collection to the other, what is ultimately condensed in these images is the residual persistence, in the present, of a specific past.

It should be noted, in passing, that 'ceneri' and 'deserto' are anything but rare poetic images, since they are indeed charged with a rich literary legacy. Whereas the image of 'ceneri' recalls, for instance, the Eliotian *Ash Wednesday*, or Montale's *Piccolo testamento* ('ma una storia non dura che nella cenere / e persistenza è solo l'estinzione', in *Le occasioni*), the presence of 'deserto' may take us as far back as Petrarca's *Canzoniere* and its *sonnet 35* (*Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi*). Even the joint presence of 'ceneri' and 'deserto' is not a rare poetic *topos* (at least within the Italian poetic tradition), as it is found in canonical texts such as Leopardi's *La ginestra* (stanza I, ll. 6-7; 17-19) and Manzoni's *Il cinque maggio* (stanza I, ll. 103-108). We shall thus make occasional references to this legacy as the analysis unfolds.

The residue – part I. Le ceneri

The 1957 edition of *Frammenti di una sconfitta* – a series of texts centred around Sereni's experience as a soldier and prisoner which will be subsequently included in *Diario 65* – is provided with the following endnote:

> […]
> Questi tardivi residui di un'esperienza ormai remota non solo nel tempo, non è che li ritenga particolarmente degni di un'edizione numerata. È vero in certo qual modo il contrario: un tentativo di dar corpo a un sottile disagio retrospettivo, quiete a certi spiriti vaganti e insoddisfatti, mi ha indotto a fissarli in questa sede. Ci sono momenti della nostra esistenza che non danno pace fino a quando restano informi e anche in questo, almeno in parte, è per me il significato dello scrivere versi.[8]

On the one hand, this excerpt shows the residual – that is, persistent – nature of the experience of imprisonment; on the other, it illuminates how poetic practice itself is understood by Sereni as residual, namely as a process which is vitally interrelated with settling old score with long-lasting and unresolved moments of his experience (and it is no coincidence that the poem *Il male d'Africa* was initially entitled *Vecchio conto con*

[8] *Frammenti di una sconfitta* is published alongside *Diario bolognese* (initially included in *Gli immediati dintorni*). Cf. Sereni, *P*, pp. 426-28.

l'Africa).[9] In this section we shall investigate one of the two implications elicited by Sereni's words above, exploring the ways in which the image of 'ceneri' retains traces of the experience of imprisonment.

Within the existing criticism on Sereni, allusions to notions implying an idea not unlike that of 'residuo' have been occasionally brought forward. Stefano Agosti has recently deepened his long-established psychoanalytic interpretation of Sereni's poetry, focussing on the fragmentary style of *Un posto di vacanza*, which he interprets as deriving from 'ciò che permane o, meglio, cio che *resta* (sottolineo questo termine) di un discorso andato in frantumi per *l'impossibilità – che gli è connaturata – di venire formulato*' (the italics are Agosti's). The impossible discourse, according to Agosti, is dream itself, which has no discursive linearity and whose linguistic account is therefore fitful.[10] Some years earlier, Guido Mazzoni had oscillated between the use of the term 'detrito' and 'residuo' to describe the process of epiphanies which plays a prominent part in *Strumenti*.[11] However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no systematic analysis of poetic elements conceived of as residues of the imprisonment (conversely, allusions to the general influence the experience has on the subsequent poetry are, as seen, so wide-spread as to have become almost a commonplace).

3.1) On the ambivalence of the element of 'ceneri'

> […]
> Che spero io più smarrito tra le cose.
> Troppe ceneri sparge attorno a sé la noia,
> la gioia quando c'è basta a sé sola.
> (*Poesie*, 119)

Originally entitled *Mercoledì delle Ceneri*, *Le ceneri* was possibly written in 1957.[12] We shall not embark, for now, upon a detailed analysis of the poem; we will argue, in fact, that the meaning of the poem is better unveiled by juxtaposing it with the subsequent one from S*trumenti*, *Le sei del mattino*, and we shall therefore postpone the simultaneous reading of both the poems to the end of the analysis, when the overall relevance of the presence of

[9] Ibid., p. 462.
[10] 'Si tratta insomma', the scholar goes on, 'come nel sogno, dei "resti", in senso tecnico (e precisamente, psicanalitico), di un '*discorso impossibile*'". Stefano Agosti, 'Incontro con la poesia di Sereni', in *Vittorio Sereni: Un altro compleanno*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito, p.22.
[11] Guido Mazzoni, 'Verifica dei valori: Saggio su 'Gli strumenti umani'', *Allegoria*, 6.18 (1994), pp. 45-81. See also *Forma e solitudine: un'idea della poesia contemporanea* (Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 2002).
[12] Vittorio Sereni, *P*, p. 528. The allusion to Eliot's *Ash Wendsday* was thus patent, as highlighted by Rodolfo Zucco in ''Le ceneri' di Vittorio Sereni', *Per leggere*, 2.3 (2002), pp. 83-97.

‘ceneri’ to Sereni’s work will have been assessed. For now, we shall simply make brief references to *Le ceneri* as we go along. What perhaps needs clarifying is that our choosing to name the residue ‘ceneri’ – thus using the plural – depends on the eponymous poem. Even though most of the occurrences are subject to grammatical variations (the singular ‘cenere’ is, in truth, much more frequent than the plural), we prefer to keep the plural of *Le ceneri*, whose presence in *Strumenti* has prompted our interest in the first place.

An initial consideration about ‘ceneri’ may be made on a rather general level. In itself, the image implies a twofold relation, one that can be established with respect to two moments in time, that is a past and a future one. Strictly connected with the past is the most straightforward connotation of ‘ceneri’, namely their representing what remains after somebody’s or something’s end, a residue which is there to prove that something has unequivocally come to an end. In this respect, within the duality ‘end’-‘after’, ashes are precisely what remain, as a trace, after the end – something which simply persists as a bequest, a reminder of what had generated them.[13]

However, ‘ceneri’ can also be looked at from a different standpoint. In this regard, their residual nature can prelude and herald a new beginning, thereby functioning as a thrust towards the future. The mythological figure of the Phoenix which is reborn from its own ashes is, in this case, self-explanatory, and Sereni himself draws on its resurgent image in a reading of Apollinaire's poetry:

> La poesia di Apollinaire non ha preferenze per il passato il presente e il futuro, li ama indiscriminatamente tutti e tre […] vive sotto il segno della mutevolezza e della simultaneità: il suo emblema è l’araba fenice, eros o energia che rinasce infallibilmente ogni volta dalle sue ceneri.[14]

The image thus retains a twofold residual essence. Always signifying what remains after the end, it relates, in one sense, to an inactive bequest of what ended; in another sense, to a a sort of regenerating remnant which, after the end, is still capable of bringing about a new start.

At this point, one may wonder whether there is any correlation between this ambivalent nature of ashes and the image of ‘ceneri’ in Sereni’s work. Within the existing

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[13] A good example are those final lines from Fortini’s *Se volessi un'altra volta...*, in the collection *Composita solvantur*, where the formal end of the poem coincides with the word ‘cenere’: 'Ecco scrivo, cari piccoli. Non ho tendine né osso / che non dica in nota acuta: “Più non posso”. / Grande fosforo imperiale, fanne cenere’. F. Fortini, *Tutte le poesie* (Milano: Mondadori, 2014), p. 560.

[14] *La stagione violenta*, in *Letture preliminari,* now in *PP*, p. 881. One may also recall the later Montale of *Ho tante fede in te*, from *Altri versi*: ‘Ho tanta fede che mi brucia; certo / chi mi vedrà dirà è un uomo di cenere / senz’accorgersi ch'era una rinascita’, in Montale, *Tutte le poesie,* p. 712.

critical litertature, Laura Barile's thorough analysis of the presence of joy entails some references to 'ceneri'. Indeed, for the scholar 'gioia' is an 'elemento multiforme e complesso', which ends up involving 'il suo rovescio noia o cenere'.[15] We can agree with Barile's stance, but her focus centred upon the positivity of joy leads to just as positive a reading of the element of 'ceneri', whose apparent negative quality is eventually reversed. In the framework drawn up by Barile, 'ceneri' often embody 'un possibile fermento del passato che germoglia nella rivisitazione, rifrangendosi in un futuro possibile che è "altro"'.[16] A similar conclusion is reached by Rodolfo Zucco, whose detailed analysis of *Le ceneri* results in the discovery of a 'presenza virtuale come positivo nel negativo', which is in keeping with that 'concezione sereniana per cui la "cenere" è pronta a "farsi movimento e luce"'.[17] It should be noted that both Zucco's and Barile's analyses rely greatly on, and are corroborated by, the role played by the term 'cenere' within *La spiaggia*, a poem which is strategically placed at the close of *Strumenti* and which appears to open significantly to a utopian future via the renowned prosopopeia of the dead who would 'speak again'.[18] In effect, Sereni's work itself is open to the reading suggested by the scholars in various circumstances, as demonstrated by this excerpt from *Il fantasma nerazzurro*, where the comparison between 'varietà dell'esistenza' and football avails itself of that potential with which 'ceneri' is tinged, thus recalling Sereni's previous words on Apollinaire's poetry:

> Non credo che esista un altro spettacolo sportivo capace, come questo, di offrire un riscontro alla varietà dell'esistenza […]. La passione che li accompagna muore nelle ceneri di un tardo pomeriggio domenicale e da queste, di domenica in domenica, non si sa come, risorge. [19]

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[15] Laura Barile, 'La presenza della gioia', in *'Una futile passione'. Atti del convegno su Vittorio Sereni, Brescia, 10-11 febbraio 2003* (Brescia: Grafo, 2007), pp. 47-71. Similar considerations are found in chapter II ('La gioia e la poetica dell'audacia: Appuntamento a ora insolita') of *Il passato che non passa. Le 'poetiche provvisorie' di Vittorio Sereni* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2004), pp. 41-71. The Serenian joy is also mentioned, though more in passing, by others: see, for instance, Franco Fortini, 'Ancora per Vittorio Sereni', in *Nuovi saggi italiani*, vol. 2 (Milano: Garzanti, 1987), pp. 185-207, especially pp. 197-207; Oreste Macrì, 'L'umanità di Sereni nelle poesie dal '45 al '65', in *La vita della parola. Da Betocchi a Tentori*, ed. by Anna Dolfi (Roma: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 615-641 and Andrea Zanzotto, ''Per Vittorio Sereni', in *Scritti sulla letteratura*, vol. 2, *Aure e disincanti nel Novecento letterario* (Milano: Mondadori, 1994), pp. 50-53.

[16] Barile, 'La presenza della gioia', in *'Una futile passione'. Atti del convegno ... febbraio 2003*, p. 56.

[17] Rodolfo Zucco, p. 97.

[18] 'I morti non è quel che di giorno / in giorno va sprecato, ma quelle / toppe d'inesistenza, calce o cenere / pronte a farsi movimento e luce. ¬ Non / dubitare, - m'investe della sua forza il mare - / parleranno', *La spiaggia*, in *P*, p. 184. See Barile, 'La presenza della gioia', in *'Una futile passione'. Atti del convegno ... febbraio 2003*, pp. 55-56.

[19] Sereni, *Il fantasma nerazzurro*, in *PP*, p. 641. See also *Negli anni di Luino*, Ibid., p. 676: 'Lo vedo risorgere nel suo nome, tremendo d'allegria, gli occhi spiritati e giulivi, dalle ceneri di tante domeniche del '24, '25, '26 e seguenti'.

Nevertheless, such a critical outlook runs the risk of overlooking the indelible negative value which lies at the root of the image. Mengaldo, for instance, does not consider the message of *La spiaggia* to be positive, as it presupposes the total exclusion of the living (including the io) from the future: 'i morti hanno cioè verso i vivi una funzione sostitutiva'.[20] From a broader standpoint, Guido Mazzoni has laid bare the conflicting coexistence of positive and negative elements which *Strumenti* is based on. Analysing the nature of 'intermittenze' or 'epifanie' within the collection, he maintains that

> Il loro primo risultato è innazitutto negativo. Come ha chiarito Benjamin parlando delle *correspondances* baudelairiane, le epifanie sono in primo luogo il detrito di una crisi. Ciò che collassa e si reduce ad un bagliore momentaneo è l'esperienza ricca e significativa, di cui l'intermittenza rappresenta il residuo o il simulacro in un'epoca che distrugge ogni forma di integrità personale. Se non considerassimo il conflitto implicito fra gli attimi significativi e il tempo morto che li circonda, non capiremmo la poesia matura di Sereni. […] la poesia di Sereni, quando la forma non tiene conto del conflitto fra la prosa della vita e gli attimi significativi, tende a scivolare nella tradizione del simbolismo; l'ambiguità, costitutiva del suo codice, fra le diverse sfumature della poetica epifanica non può essere risolta, ma solo disposta in diacronia. Negli *Strumenti umani* le intermittenze sono soprattutto i detriti di una crisi.[21]

And Sereni's own words, not by chance still from *Il fantasma nerazzurro*, come to testify perfectly to Mazzoni's reading:

> Ma il quadro non sarebbe completo se tralasciassi l'instantaneità con cui tutta questa febbre – almeno per quanto mi riguarda – si spegne per fare posto ad un amaro senso di vacuità e quasi di rimorso […][22]

Thus, if we are to concede that 'ceneri' hold a positive value which opens to the future, or that is always ready to light up into an epiphanic moment, we must not forget that such a positivity always takes the guise of a short-lived instant which counteracts a more wide-spread and pervasive negativity.[23]

To summarise, 'ceneri' seem to be oriented towards two directions, the past and the future. Their interpretation can be subject to a twofold reading, both because of the ontological state of 'ceneri' per se and on account of the value the element acquires within

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[20] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 182-183.
[21] Mazzoni, *Forma e solitudine,* pp. 173-174.
[22] *Il fantasma nerazzurro*, p. 641.
[23] According to Cipriani, 'Il tono dolente che costituisce la nota di fondo di quasi tutta l'opera sereniana, è attraversato da frequenti sussulti di vitalità che spesso ridonano la luce dell'ottimismo a un sentimento di disperazione esistenziale altrimenti troppo cupo, inserendolo nella sfera della progettualità. Ma i momenti corroboranti sono comunque legati a un passato riemerso per contrasto con una situazione presente dolorosa, quindi sono destinati a esaurire presto la loro azione benefica, aumentando invece il generale senso di depressione.', in *Il 'libro' della prosa*, p. 25.

the oppositional essence of Sereni's poetry taken as a whole.[24] However, as indicated at the outset, in attempting to unveil the tie between 'ceneri' and imprisonment, the following pages will inevitably privilege the dependence that the element has on the past captivity over its potential connected with a future beginning. Indeed, while some of the occurrences substantiate the reading of the element thus far proposed by the existing literature, most of them entail a negativity whose origin can be traced back to the caesura analysed in the previous chapter, especially once the 'ceneri' are brought into relation with some collateral aspects. Hence, unlike Barile, we shall not look at 'ceneri' as the 'rovescio della gioia'; and unlike Zucco, we shall not privilege their potential value in opening up a positive perspective over the future. Leaning more towards Mazzoni's standpoint, we shall rather analyse at length to what degree their presence represents an indelible residue of the experience of imprisonment and in what ways their traces persist and impinge on Sereni's mature works.[25] In order to get to the heart of the matter, namely to the correlation, on a textual level, between 'ceneri' and imprisonment, a prose piece will be initially analysed.

3.2) The image of 'ceneri' and the imagery of 'spegnimento' in the posthumousness of *Ventisei*

Were we to base our analysis exclusively on the occurrences of 'ceneri', we would neglect some minor, yet essential traits. There exist, in fact, some collateral aspects (themes, motifs and a specific imagery), all closely related to the image of 'ceneri', which perform just as important a residual role in Sereni's poetry. These aspects come jointly to the fore in *Ventisei*, a prose piece published in 1970 for the first time.[26]

To begin with a text which, thematically centered upon the experience of captivity, was published twenty-six years after Sereni was taken as a prisoner allows us to make a due clarification. To trace the presence of 'ceneri' as is mainly found in *Strumenti* back to the experience of imprisonment does not necessarily mean to determine a chronological line along which the image occurs first in the accounts of the imprisonment and then in *Strumenti*.

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[24] The contrasting and dialectical essence of Sereni's poetry is well-highlighted by Renato Nisticò, who points out that already in *Inverno* – the initial lyric from *Frontiera* –, 'si mette in luce il carattere intimamente contrastivo dell'idillio sereniano, già pronto a misurarsi col suo negativo; appunto perché il negativo […] è presente sin dagli esordi di questa espressione poetica', in *Nostalgia di presenze. La poesia di Sereni verso la prosa* (Lecce: Manni, 1998), p. 20.

[25] Needless to say, the present analysis shares Mazzoni's viewpoint but at the same time it inevitably dissociates itself from it, since it is the element of 'ceneri', and not the epiphanic moments, which will be considered in its residual value.

[26] The text was published again, with some changes, in the 1979 edition of *Stella* (Cf. *La tentazione*, pp. 448-452). In the present study, the excerpts are taken from the latter version.

Most of the prose pieces with which the present analysis engages are either later than or contemporary with most of the poems contained in *Strumenti*. The need to have recourse to Sereni's prose to seek possible clues about the relation between 'ceneri' and imprisonment arises from the frequency with which the image is found in *Strumenti*, and thus responds to the following questions: can this frequency be explained as a consequence of the 'unexperienced experience' which we examined in the previous chapter? Is there any correlation between this experience and the function performed by 'ceneri' in *Strumenti*? In other words, 'tracing back' needs be understood as 'tracing back thematically' to the accounts of the imprisonment (but not only to those, as will be shown), regardless of their publication dates.

We have already made a brief mention of *Ventisei*, when the reference to an excerpt of it at the end of chapter 1 permitted us to draw attention to the theme of 'essere dopo' in Sereni's *oeuvre*. In the excerpt cited, Sereni showed a retrospective awareness of the indelible trace that war had left on him and his fellow prisoners. We can now look into the text more at length, since it displays a rather complex system of relations which further testifies to its posthumous feature, within which the presence of 'ceneri' is to be situated. As for the diegetic level, the narration follows Sereni's return to Sicily twenty-six years after he was taken prisoner, in 1943:

> Infatti sono qui dopo tanti anni, quanti anni, l'ho voluto con tutte le mie forze. Ma è un'altra cosa. No, questo non lo credo. Non è un pellegrinaggio, caso mai una ricognizione.[27]

The narration thus rests on a posthumous structure, with the narrator who retraces, physically and mentally, the history of an episode that is long concluded, but whose aftermath still persists long after. Moreover, the existential 'ricognizione' does not involve only the diegesis, since it is carried out on a deeper textual level too, by means of the interpolation of excerpts belonging to *La sconfitta* – an unpublished text about Sereni's regiment's surrender to the allies which was written in the early 1950s, and from which Sereni extrapolated parts which would also be used for *La cattura, Sicilia '43* and, partially, *L'anno quarantatre*.[28]

[27] *Ventisei*, in *PP*, p. 741.
[28] See *La tentazione*, pp. 448-452 and 474-476.

It follows that both the plot of the narration and the inner intertextuality with *La sconfitta* tell of the transparent 'essere dopo' of *Ventisei*.[29] But perhaps more interesting is that, towards the end of the prose, these two planes are made explicitly to interweave:

> Non ci ero andato con intenzioni scrittorie, lo giuro. Caso mai per liberarmene. Ma càpita a chi scrive, o ha scritto qualche volta nella sua vita, di andare in giro con la coscienza o il ricordo di questo.
> […]
> Non ero dunque un rivisitante e basta, non uno che ci era stato e tornava, ma uno che per di più ne aveva scritto e sapeva fin troppo bene di averne scritto. A questo livello – di affetti, di memorie – le inadempienze amarezze dello scrivere non si differenziano per nulla dalle altre inadempienze amarezze fallimenti umani: vi si sommano invece, si intruppano con loro.[30]

The excerpt thus speaks of an 'essere dopo' that is experienced from a twofold perspective: that of the 'rivisitante' and that of the 'writer'. We can thus assert that both experience and writing overlap in their being posthumous. But why does Sereni write about 'inadempienze' and 'amarezze'? Besides the usual understatement which is characteristic of him (especially when it comes to his writing), the reason for this embitterment is to be found in the 'futuro inattuato' which surfaces obsessively throughout the pages of *Ventisei*. Indeed, the return to the places of imprisonment results in the disenchanted re-evocation of a future that could and should have been different: 'tra qui e il mare si era stabilito il consorzio, la comunità. Lo so che è solo un modo per dimostrare l'ipotesi, un'ipotesi irreale'.[31] A hypothesis that should have been directed 'nel solco di uno tra i futuri possibili – che è quanto ho cercato laggiù, mi pare di capire adesso, su quei pochi chilometri rivisitati'. Yet, despite the attempt, what Sereni searches for is not eventually found: 'lo sguardo non arriva oltre, non più in là di questi inizi di un futuro inattuato.'[32] The reference is explicitly to an unlikely destiny which could have been different to the one that led to the two years of captivity.

The idea of a 'futuro inattuato', which can be read as what has not come to light, or as something that failed to become what should have, that lacked a crucial development, is extremely relevant to the present analysis, with specific regard to the 'ceneri'. We argue, in fact, that traces, residues, of the constant underlying thought of a 'futuro inattuato' can be

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[29] It is a characteristic which is in keeping with the Serenian theme of 'ritorno', which is typical of other proses as well as of his poetry from *Strumenti* onwards. See Cipriani, 'Il ritorno', in *Il 'libro' della prosa*, pp 21-23.. For Peter Robinson, *Ventisei* is 'both a memoir of his [Sereni's] revisiting the sites of his surrender and a meditation on the relationship between those events and a life of writing', 'Introduction' to Vittorio Sereni, *The selected poetry and prose of Vittorio Sereni*, ed. by Peter Robinson (The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 3.
[30] Ibid., pp. 747-749.
[31] *Ventisei*, p. 743.
[32] Ibid., p. 744.

found at length in Sereni's poetry too, via the use of a certain poetic imagery which is based, especially from *Diario* onwards, on either an image of 'spegnimento' or on those depicting the abrupt arrest of a process of becoming. This imagery, which always relates to the depiction of something that ended untimely, can be seen as the poetic correlative of the 'futuro inattuato' mentioned in *Ventisei*, and inevitably recalls, in turn, the theme of 'appuntamento mancato' with history, on account of which Sereni sees himself as 'incompleto per sempre'.[33] The bearing and frequency of the imagery will be later analysed more in depth, but a couple of examples can be here provided. The opening lyric of the second and eponymous section of *Diario*, *Lassù dove di torre in torre* reads:

> […]
> È un'immagine nostra
> stravolta, non giunta
> alla luce […]
> (*P* 73)

As for *Strumenti*, in which this imagery is generally more wide-spread, one can think of iconic lines such as those from *Sopra un'immagine sepolcrale*:

> Il sorriso balordo che mi fermò tra le lapidi
> e le croci, nella piccola selva
> dei morti innocenti, delle vite
> appena accese e spente nel candore
> […]
> (*P* 168)

It is worth juxtaposing the lines of both poems with some of Sereni's own words. In an interview given to *Il Globo*, after having been asked about what he still retains from the experience of war, Sereni replies:

> Rimane un nodo non risolto, la vicenda personale mia e di altri che erano con me: come se dentro ci fossero ipotesi che non hanno avuto seguito. […] mi riferisco ai singoli destini, alle singole avventure individuali…[34]

[33] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 147.
[34] The interview is cited in *La tentazione*, p. 422.

The proximity of what we have defined as imagery of 'spegnimento' to the 'ipotesi che non hanno avuto seguito' – namely, the 'futuro inattuato' from Ventisei – is self-evident. This relation is thus the first of some essential facets which are brought to the fore by the prose piece. But how does this imagery relate to 'ceneri'?

Within the posthumous framework of *Ventisei*, where the reflections upon a 'futuro inattuato' is a constant, underlying motif, 'ceneri' make their appearance:

> Trovavo superfluo se non disonesto tornare a scrivere, produrre il doppione scritto di quei fatti […]. Per il resto certi ingredienti immutabili di quelle circostanze vissute – che prima li solcavano appena: il riflesso del glicine che presto dilagherà sui muri, lo splendore ambiguo tra le saline – li contraddicono e li annullano, né più né meno di quanto a suo tempo si spostasse, si dissociasse dallo stato di guerra il fuoco di artificio di una festa lontana espresso di notte da batterie troppo distanti all'orizzonte perché ne giungessero allarme e fragore. Se ne sono distolti, l'hanno scavalcata. Fermentando lungamente al sole, hanno formato il grumo di cenere e luce – il guardiano delle rovine, il mio-suo spettro diurno – che le condensa in una figura umana e le rifrange da sé.[35]

The extrapolation of the excerpt from the overall context does not facilitate the reading, which is also complicated by a series of syllepses.[36] Indeed the whole text would require a more detailed and focussed analysis, one which would take in greater account the metatextual level, whose meaningfulness is borne out by the many references the writer makes to both his previous written accounts of the captivity places and the desire, explicit in the ending, to write about them again.[37] Moreover, though possibly not the most opaque among Sereni's proses, *Ventisei* seems to be subject to a certain degree of obscurity which Stefano Cipriani has seen at work in Sereni's whole prose (on a stylistic level, for instance, Cipriani argues that Sereni seems to be able to 'elaborare solo una prosa con forti intenzioni di simbolismo, poco dinamica').[38]

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[35] *Ventisei*, *PP*, pp. 749-750.

[36] Massimo Grillandi writes about 'un pellegrinaggio, anche sintattico, anche lessicale, anche morfologico (la fitta rete degli ipotetici, degli anacoluti, le sapienti spezzature del discorso, la cauta scelta dei lemmi e la loro disposizione in ambiti strutturali nuovi)', in *Vittorio Sereni* (Firenze: Il castoro, 1972), p. 94.

[37] Maria Antonietta Grignani writes that 'il ritorno sul luogo della cattura durante la seconda guerra mondiale' turns into 'diagramma della voglia di scriverne ancora', in *Lavori in corso. Poesia, poetiche, metodi nel secondo Novecento* (Modena: Mucchi, 2007), p. 35. The procedure is typical of most of Sereni's proses: about *L'opzione* and *Il sabato tedesco*, Luca Lenzini notes that 'la storia narrata dal ciclo non è che la storia dell'io in rapporto alla scrittura', 'Le distanze della prosa: "Il sabato tedesco di Vittorio Sereni"', in *Interazioni. Tra poesia e romanzo: Gozzano, Giudici, Sereni, Bassani, Bertolucci* (Trento: Temi, 1998), p. 126. See also Marco Forti, 'Sereni narratore: 'l'opzione' e il 'sabato tedesco'', in *La poesia di Vittorio Sereni, Atti del convegno*, (Milano: Librex, 1985), pp. 47-58.

[38] Cipriani, *Il 'libro' della prosa*, p. 29. Cipriani carries out an interesting analysis of *Ventisei*, drawing a parallel between Sereni's piece and Søren Kierkegaard's *La ripetizione*. See the chapter *Con la pazienza di Giobbe*, pp. 159-176. About the complexity of Sereni's prose, Grignani claims that 'a parte *Gli immediati dintorni* […] tutti gli esemplari della prosa di Sereni non sono inquadrabili in codificazioni di genere storicamente determinato. Non si tratta di narrativa nel senso canonico del termine, non di prosa di fantasia o d'invenzione, neppure di dilatazioni rarefatte del giornale intimo', in *Lavori in corso*, p. 10.

Nonetheless, some preliminary considerations can be propounded. What can be inferred from the presence of 'ceneri' in *Ventisei*? Suffice it to point out that the setting in which they emerge is constituted by the two interrelated mainstays of the analysis we have thus far carried out: imprisonment and posthumousness. In this respect, what is highly indicative is the identity established between 'grumo di cenere e luce' and 'spettro', the latter being both the caretaker's and Sereni's. The identity, substantiated by 'mio-suo', had been already foreshadowed twice throughout *Ventisei*, once from the caretaker's perspective ('ha il sospetto infondato di avermi visto un'altra volta', p. 738), once from Sereni's ('A me ricorda qualcuno incontrato in quei giorni', p. 742). At the root of their identification is thus their having been both prisoners (the caretaker 'lavorava in Germania. Reclutato o prigioniero? Fa lo stesso, sempre inferno era', p. 738), an enduring feature which leaves so indelible a footprint as to render them always recognizable as former prisoners, always fixed 'nel dopo' (p.743). Indeed, the situation appears to confirm what Sereni had written – though in a more circumscribed reference to his fellow prisoners – in *L'anno quarantacinque*:

> Una volta, al tempo in cui si stava ancora sotto tende bucherellate, dissi ai miei compagni che certamente un giorno, entrando in un caffè, assistendo a una partita di calcio, eseguendo un qualunque atto della vita quotidiana e civile, sempre qualcosa di noi, un gesto, un modo di fare, un'esclamazione avrebbe reso riconoscibile in ognuno di noi la qualità di ex-prigioniero, *prisoner of war* di quella particolare prigionia, e che ognuno di noi l'avrebbe riconosciuta in altri a colpo sicuro.[39]

Insofar as that experience is what opens up the 'essere dopo' of posthumousness, it is no surprise that the narrator who undertakes the itinerary twenty-six years later presents himself as a spectre, a ghost, making Konstantinos Kavafis' lines his own ('…il tuo fantasma / ventisei anni ha valicato e giunge / ora per rimanere in questi versi').[40]

Moreover, within this very posthumous framework, there emerges, still in *Ventisei*, a specific insistence on a theme – that of 'futuro inattuato' – which we have suggested is bound up with a specific poetic imagery, that of 'spegnimento'. On a semantic level, the correlation between 'ceneri' and 'spegnimento' – the latter to be interpreted, from now on, as 'futuro inattuato', as non-development, or premature end – is quite palpable. What transpires from *Ventisei* is thus a noteworthy interlocking of 'ceneri' and 'spegnimento', opening up a potential key to the reading of 'ceneri' within Sereni's entire *oeuvre*. Finally, inasmuch it lays out the likely derivation of both elements from the experience of imprisonment, the text also induces us to investigate whether what we are dealing with is an isolated case in Sereni's

[39] *L'anno quarantacinque*, in *PP*, p. 644.
[40] Kavafis' lines (from the poem *Per rimanere – Comes to Reside* in the English translation by George Economou) are quoted first as an epigraph and then mentioned again at the close of the piece.

prose. Hence, before turning to poetry, it is worth taking into consideration other prose pieces which may be relevant to our study.

3.3) Still on 'ceneri' in prose

La cattura, published in 1963 and derived from the unpublished text *La sconfitta*, is a useful case in point:[41]

> Cinerea, a guardarla dalla barca, era l'acqua del porto. Andava prendendo il colore dell'afa, mezzogiorno essendo ormai vicino. Il colore delle macerie che riapparivano. E come infetta era quell'acqua che corpi gonfi e rosi tante volte, nei mesi passati, aveva sospinto un po' dovunque sulla costa.[42]

The scene described is that of the prisoners' shipping to Algeria. Here a further correlation between 'ceneri' (by means of the adjective 'cinerea') and the beginning of the imprisonment is found, with the chromatic value of the adjective standing as a correlative of a profoundly bleak outlook. What is worthy of a mention is that the analogy between 'cinerea' and 'macerie' appears to recall the juxtaposition of 'cenere' and 'rovine' from *Ventisei*, and that owing to this relation the adjective 'cinerea' does fill up with an extra-sense which exceeds the mere visual one.

In *L'anno quarantatre*, where the salient historical events of the year of the capture are recounted, Sereni firstly mentions once more the rubble ('le macerie di Trapani' after the bombing, p. 631) and subsequently, in describing some landscape features of Oran as it was being approached by boat, he writes that:

> Bisognava lasciare quella nave, che già si riaccostava alle banchine, tornare a terra dopo aver fatto fagotto. La città di Orano, le case grigie del porto anche più grigio erano davanti a noi. […] Una assurda speranza andava profilandosi in ognuno di noi. Quanto assurda lo sapeva forse solo il Mezzini da Monghidoro.
>
> Non so bene quanto sia durata. Fu il corso stesso di quel giorno a spegnerla in noi per gradi, prima che parlassero per noi i fatti o altre notizie.[43]

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[41] As documented in the *apparato critico* of *La tentazione*, *La sconfitta* was sent to the Taranto Prize in 1952. The piece was never published, but some of its parts were used to compose shorter prose pieces (*La cattura*, *Sicilia '43* and, partly, *L'anno quarantatre*). See *La tentazione*, pp. 436-37 and p. 474.
[42] Sereni, *PP*, p. 706.
[43] Ibid., p. 635.

It is not simply on account of a synonymic relation that 'grigio' can be drawn close to 'cinerea'; it is also the overall prisoner's state of mind that brings the two episodes together. Furthermore, this last excerpt, in eclipsing the unreasonable hope which runs through the prisoner's mind (Sereni and his fellow captives were still unsure about their destiny, and their hope rested on a slight possibility of being repatriated), has recourse to the verb 'spegnere', thereby providing a further evidence of the proximity of this imagery to the image of 'ceneri'.

It is perhaps worth dwelling a little on the relevance of these chromatic details, for in both the excerpts quoted the descriptive value is somehow laden with an additional sense, as if to suggest that what underlies the use of 'ceneri', when descriptively deployed in the context of the imprisonment, is a condition of profound anguish. In effect, the correspondence between chromatism and the subject's inner state of mind acquires significant resonance within Sereni's poetry taken as a whole. Renato Nisticò has paid great attention to the role played, in *Frontiera*, by chromatic occurrences that are landscape-related, and on how the io attempts to modify his surroundings, to subjugate it to his eye by establishing a correlation between the scene that is being observed and the colours chosen to represent it. Analysing *Frontiera* and, more specifically, the impending menace of the outbreak of war that looms larger as the collection unfolds, the scholar claims:

> È impossibile, comunque, non accogliere il valore di questi segni, divergenti dai cromatismi e dalla felicità sensoriale dei momenti di espressione della felicità originaria. Vi si notino l'addensamento dell'opacità in luogo della trasparenza di vetri e acque; e la proliferazione degli indicatori di minaccia, oscuramento, spegnersi, attenuarsi, affievolirsi, sparire, che si diffondono a discapito del colore entusiastico dell'idillio.[44]

Hence, following on Nisticò's claim, we can suggest that the bleakness inherent in the descriptive use of 'ceneri' is much more than a simple chromatic detail: what the adjective denotes via a visual feature is an inner state of mind that is reflected upon the landscape. This is further demonstrated by *L'anno quarantacinque*, which constitutes a sort of appendix to *L'anno quarantatre*. We report here the passage describing the end of the captivity, including those lines about choice which we have quoted in chapter 2, as they are instrumental in weaving the image of 'ceneri' into the wider spectrum of after-effects of the caesura:

> Così quando giunsero gli autocarri a caricarci, noi e bagaglio, per il porto di Casablanca e per le navi *Liberty* con destinazione Napoli finalmente, c'era ben poco di allegro nella

[44] Nisticò, *Nostalgia di presenze*, pp. 79-80.

> Colonna metallica che scendeva al mare dentro il riverbero e la cenere dell'estate africana, niente di troppo diverso da tanti spostamenti e trasferimenti passati. Fu uno strappo e doveva essere un epilogo; o almeno la premessa a una evoluzione, a uno sviluppo. Così quella prigionia, o quel particolare stato, ci lasciava il suo segno, non quello che avevo pronosticato scherzando sotto la tenda bucherellata, ma una riluttanza o piuttosto uno spasimo per ogni volta che si fosse trattato di scegliere, in qualunque senso e per qualunque operazione, anche la più normale e quotidiana, tra solitudine e partecipazione.[45]

The use of 'ceneri' (in the guise of nouns, or adjectives, within which 'grigio' is to be included) thus accompanies Sereni from the account of the capture (1943) to its posthumous recollection and 'ricognizione' (twenty-six years after), and insinuates itself in the gloomy remembrance of the moments preceding the repatriation ('c'era ben poco di allegro').

In conclusion, what we have outlined here is a web of correlations by means of which the idea of a 'futuro inattuato' is reflected in the imagery of 'spegnimento', which, in turn, includes, and makes great use of, the image of 'ceneri'. What is to be established in the subsequent pages is whether these characteristics are found in *Strumenti* too. This, we believe, is the right path towards the unveiling of the residual value of 'ceneri', the right perspective from which the element becomes conceivable as a clear 'sign' left by a specific experience.

3.4) 'Ceneri' in *Gli strumenti umani*

Among the lexical elements of *Strumenti*, that of 'ceneri' presents a relatively high frequency. Out of the fifty-two poems which make up the collection, the image occurs seven times in as many different poems (*Via scarlatti*, *Viaggio di andata e ritorno*, *Le ceneri*, *Corso Lodi*, *Il male d'Africa*, *La pietà ingiusta*, *La spiaggia*). Considering that Sereni's poetry does not present as organic a system of cross-references and recurring elements as some of Caproni's, the relatively marked occurrence of any term should be conceived as meaningful. If one then considers where some of these texts are placed within the structure of the collection, this image attains additional prominence. 'Ceneri' are in fact present both in the opening and final texts of a collection that can be, to all intents and purposes, regarded as a 'libro di poesia', namely, in Niccolò Scaffai's words, 'una raccolta di liriche composta dall'autore secondo criteri riconoscibili, in modo che l'accostamento dei singoli testi non

[45] *Ventisei*, *PP*, pp. 648-649.

risulti casuale ma, al contrario, adeguato a un progetto ideato dallo stesso autore in una fase generalmente successiva alla stesura delle varie liriche.'[46]

We shall take some of the lines from *Il male d'Africa* as a sort of *viaticum* for the analysis. The poem, already instrumental in our reading of Sereni's captivity as an 'unexperienced experience', represents an ideal specimen for the present discussion and the analysis will thus zoom in and out in order to delve into the clues provided by its lines:

> […] Rimbombava
> la eco tra i viadotti e ponti lungo
> un febbraio di fiori intempestivi
> […]
> E poi?
> Ho visto uomini stravolti
> nelle membra – o bidonville! –
> barracani gonfiarsi all'uragano
> altri petali accendersi - «*sono astri*
> *perenni*», «*no, sono fiori caduchi*», discorsi
> di cattività –
> farsi di estiva cenere,
> […]
> (*P* 92-95)

Il male d'Africa functions as an ideal connecting link between *Diario* and *Strumenti*, and at the basis of this there is more than the mere presence of the text in both collections. The poem features, in fact, a double backdrop, as the African setting merges with the urban context of Milano (it is the noise of the 'borbottìo' (ll. 7-9) of the pot that sets off the recollection of the return from Africa).[47] This is a significant aspect in that the passage from one collection to the other sees a noticeable change, in terms of scenery, from the pervasive

[46] Niccolò Scaffai, *Il poeta e il suo* libro, p. 1. For the study and relevance of the macrostucture in the Italian poetry panorama, see Enrico Testa, *Il libro di poesia. Tipologie e analisi macrotestuali* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983). For some important considerations regarding the role of *Via Scarlatti* and *La spiaggia* within *Strumenti*, see, apart from Testa, Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 57-58 and pp.179-80.

[47] 'Borbottìo' is also found at the end of *Ventisei*: 'Ma perché nel momento in cui, versi di Kavafis aiutando, andava stabilendosi la pace, è insorta o meglio mi è tornata – dapprima in forma di grido trattenuto e prima ancora come mugolìo, borbottìo, vibrazione inesistente – la voglia di scrivere?', *PP*, p. 750. The Milano of *Il male d'Africa* is described as 'periferica e desolante', by Georgia Fioroni, in her commented edition of *Frontiera. Diario d'Algeria* (Parma: Guanda/Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 2013), p. 386.

presence of the places of captivity in *Diario* to the prevalence of the city in *Strumenti*. With regard to *Via Scarlatti*, the first lyric of *Strumenti* initially destined for the second edition of *Diario*, Laura Barile has noted that

> È a Milano che si rivolge il poeta nel secondo dopoguerra al ritorno dai campi algerini – città vagheggiata che si presenta ora con un segno cambiato, negativo, dopo la cesura della guerra, della prigionia e della assenza da sé e dalla Storia […][48]

And indeed most of the occurrences of 'ceneri' are found in relation to an urban context. Does this imply that the internalised dark view over the Northern African or Sicilian setting is displaced or adapted to the contemporary urban landscape of the aftermath of war? This is what we shall verify.

Aside from the interior setting of *Le ceneri*, in two circumstances the identification between 'ceneri' and city relates to Milano, where Sereni moves with his wife and daughter in the aftermath of war. 'Ceneri' are thus found in *Via Scarlatti*, (the address is that of Sereni's parents' house,where he moved with his wife in 1945):[49]

> […]
> Non lunga tra due golfi di clamore
> va, tutta case, la via;
> […]
> Adesso dentro lei par sempre sera.
> Oltre anche più s'abbuia,
> È cenere e fumo la via.
> Ma i volti i volti non so dire:
> Ombra più ombra di fatica e d'ira.
> […]
> (*P* 103)

and in *Corso Lodi*:

> […]

[48] Barile, 'Gli scrittori di un poeta. Sereni lettore di romanzi', in *Vittorio Sereni. Un altro compleanno*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito, p. 262.

[49] See *P*, p. CXIII.

E una volta di più illudendomi
Che fosse sul serio per l'ultima volta
Sul ponte che scavalca la nebbia della città
Dove l'anno si strugge in brace e cenere
io lo seguii.
(*P* 150)

What is interesting to note is that, akin to some of the proses analysed, the use of 'cenere' appears to be functional to emphasising the inharmonious relationship between the io and the landscape, that is, in *Strumenti*, the city. In *Via Scarlatti* the nexus between 'cenere e fumo', which relates to the city via the metonymy of the street, is placed between two images of darkening ('oltre anche più s'abbuia' and 'ombra più ombra'), thereby augmenting a feeling of unintelligibility ('ma i volti i volti non so dire'). In *Corso Lodi*, 'cenere' is part of a line which incorporates a temporal image within the spatial scene of Milano.[50] The polysemic value of the verb 'struggere', alongside the presence of fog, seems to draw once more an image of unease between the io and the city (and Scaffai has observed that whereas in *L'alibi e il beneficio* the fog is, as it were, beneficial, in all the other poems its presence is 'una manifestazione decisamente purgatoriale').[51] Be it coupled with 'fumo' – as in *Via Scarlatti* –, or framed within the foggy context of *Corso Lodi*, 'ceneri' appears to be thus a sign of an unsettled present condition which reflects upon the city, the main setting of the collection. This interpretation seems to be corroborated by the proximity between *Corso Lodi* and *Graziano*, a prose piece from *La tentazione*. To a certain extent the prose represents the narrative development – if somewhat transfigured – of some of the cues from the poem. In addition to the presence of a 'nebbia traditora' and the idea of 'accomiata*rsi* dall'anno nel suo ultimo giorno' (p. 776), the text contains one more proof which confirms the idea that the disquiet underlying the relation between the io and the places of captivity is transferred, in *Strumenti*, to the urban landscape:

> È un'altra giornata smorta e greve. Ti ascolto parlare in una luce gessosa che via via incenerisce aumentando un mio vecchio malessere.[52]

[50] According to Mengaldo, 'cenere' is among a series of 'parole-immagini' which, 'come indicano l'opacizzarsi dello spazio, così alludono a quello della coscienza temporale'. Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 48.
[51] Niccoló Scaffai, *Il lavoro del poeta. Montale, Sereni, Caproni* (Roma: Carrocci, 2015), p. 183.
[52] Sereni, *Graziano*, in *PP*, pp. 776-780.

Thus, similarly to the chromatic occurrences referring to the places of captivity, the frequent and geographically defined occurrences of 'ceneri' within the city go well beyond being a mere visual datum. Giovanni Raboni writes that:

> soprattutto a partire dagli *Strumenti umani* Milano, la città, viene a rappresentare il luogo al tempo stesso effettivo e simbolico delle contraddizioni dolorosa, del disagio, del malessere, della mortificazione dell'umano e del distacco dall'umano.[53]

Indeed, if we retrace the occurrences of 'ceneri' examined thus far, we will notice more than a hint of this malaise in each poem or text, and more importantly, that this condition seems to be encapsulated, to a high degree, precisely in the image of 'ceneri'. It is a present state which, at least in the immediate aftermath of war, may perhaps reflect concrete material features of the landscape itself (in a letter to Saba from 1951, Sereni significantly writes about a 'tempo polveroso di cose in rovina, di cose che volevano nascere e subito morivano').[54] But more significantly, just as the cinereous water from *l'anno quarantatre* represented a sign of an internal malaise, in the new urban setting 'ceneri' connote a more fundamental undercurrent of disquiet which is the subject's own, standing for a present condition that is reflected onto – rather than being imposed by – the city:

> un confronto ossia una insofferenza rabbiosa si va sostituendo all'euforia con cui in un'epoca trascorsa alcuni spiriti guardavano alla città in crescita, alla città proiettata verso il futuro. E vale la pena di notare che le immagini più attendibili della realtà cittadina, qualunque essa sia, ci vengono dallo scarto, dal rapporto difficile di diffidenze, d'incompatibilità tra quella e l'animo di chi la rappresenta.[55]

This reading would also justify the presence of 'ceneri' within an urban context unlike Milano. In *La pietà ingiusta*, a poem entirely structured around the memory of the Nazi crimes and the complex relation that ties the io to that very memory, it is Frankfurt that is defined as 'una città di cenere'. Whereas there is no denying that the powerful metaphor is primarily an allusion to the tragedy of the Shoah (as the cross-reference with the paronomastic 'nubi d'anime/esalanti-esulanti da camini' clarifies), it is nonetheless extremely relevant that 'cenere', in keeping with the previous occurrences, is once more

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[53] Giovanni Raboni, 'Sereni a Milano', in *Per Vittorio Sereni. Convegno di poeti, Luino 25-26 maggio 1991* (Milano: Scheiwiller, 1991), p. 46. It is well known that Raboni's poetry features an even more pervasive presence of the Milanese urban setting. Affinities in the way Sereni and Raboni (as well as others) depict the city of Milano have been pointed out by Mengaldo, who, in addressing Fortini, writes: 'e quanta Milano sconvolta e spettrale c'è in te, in Sereni, in Raboni e così via, fino a Loi'. See Mengaldo, *Lettera a Franco Fortini sulla sua poesia*, in *La tradizione del Novecento. Nuova Serie*, p. 389.

[54] The letter to Saba is cited in *P*, p. 555.

[55] *La città* (dated 1975), in *PP*, p. 664. A similar observation, this time more specifically referred to Milano, is found in *Intermezzo capitalistico*, ibid., p. 872.

placed within a context where the io feels rather ill at ease (and in this respect, the title per se is extremely telling):

> […]
> ah le dotte manipolazioni di cui furono capaci,
> matasse, matassine innocue, oro a scaglie
> da coprirne un deserto di sale, nubi d'anime
> esalanti-esulanti da camini
> con la piena dolcezza di stormi d'autunno
> altre anche meno visibili spezzate da una raffica in un'ora di notte –
>
> è una questione d'occhi fermi sul cammello che passa
> e ripassa per la cruna in piena libertà –
> e con tocchi di porpora una città
> d'inverno, una città di cenere si propaga
> dentro una lente di mitezza.[56]
> […]
> (*P* 174-175)

This further juxtaposition of 'ceneri' with the urban landscape allows us to draw some initial conclusions. We contend that within the new present in which Sereni finds himself at his return – 'il difficile e tormentato dopoguerra del reduce d'Algeria', in Lanfranco Caretti's words –, which spans the years from 1945 to 1965, namely the years of the reconstruction, of the economic boom and of the rise of neocapitalism, the presence of 'ceneri' encapsulates well the overall atmosphere of the collection, whose underlying motif has been perfectly summarised by Niccolò Scaffai as one of

> mancata sintonia fra il tempo (nella doppia accezione: cronologico ed epocale) e l'esperienza, sia questa individuale (nel *Grande amico*: 'Non pareva il mattino nato ad altro?' v.10), generazionale (*Quei bambini che giocano*: 'Ma la distorsione del tempo/ il corso della vita deviato su false piste / l'emoraggia dei giorni / dal varco del corrotto intendimento', vv.4-7), storica (*Il male d'Africa*: 'di noi sempre in ritardo sulla guerra',

[56] *Il sabato tedesco*, thematically linked to *La pietà ingiusta*, and containing some visible cross-references, features one more descriptive occurrence of 'ceneri': 'Il riflesso filtrato dalle tende fonde in un'unica nube, isolandoli, il biondo cenere di lui e lo splendore cupreo di lei.', *PP*, p. 761. The text was first published in 1980, together with *L'opzione* (already published in 1964), for the publisher Il Saggiatore. Cf. Lenzini, *Le distanze della prosa*, p. 111.

> v.93) o più immediatamente idiosincratica (*Nel sonno*, v: 'Non lo amo il mio, tempo non lo amo', v.9).[57]

Against the backdrop suggested by the scholar, one can read the 'ceneri' from *Via Scarlatti* and *Corso Lodi* as related to an individual, personal disquiet, while *La pietà ingiusta* would highlight a more historically-connoted uneasiness. All in all, and to put it in wider terms, the impact that the 'ceneri'-city nexus has in *Strumenti* matters the most insofar as it stages an unequivocal disharmony between the io and his *hic et nunc*.[58]

Now, it has been noticed that at the beginning of the 1960s, Sereni's poetry sees a fundamental renewal, whose most significant effects can be seen, within *Strumenti*, in the last section – *Apparizioni o incontri*. According to Mazzoni the renewal coincides, poetically and stylistically, with the enhancement of the technique of epiphany, whereas Laura Barile claims that 'la grande novità della maturità di Sereni' consists in 'la crescita e la scoperta, nella rammemorazione del passato, di un libero e attivo potenziale di futuro'.[59] In order to provide a concrete example of the way in which this new poetics operates, in line with the present analysis and in connection with the function performed by 'ceneri' with respect to this 'libero e attivo potenziale di futuro', we can have recourse to one more prose piece, *Il sabato tedesco*. In confirmation of what we stated about the city (that is, its being the setting onto which the io's discomfort is reflected), Sereni establishes an equation between Frankfurt, which is at the centre of the prose piece, and Milano:

> Non per questo mi attraeva, non perché ferma al remoto, non perché supponessi di ritrovarvi qualcosa di perduto. Di non avuto, semmai. Non speranze inattuate, progetti delusi, intenzioni andate a vuoto; ma un frusciare di fermentazioni, il fascio di cartelli indicatori divaricante strade percorribili tuttora, diramante itinerari tuttora ignoti. Come se di lì, dal punto arretrato nascosto in noi stessi e riflesso a intermittenze nelle luci della città notturna, in questo o in quel senso o in quell'altro ancora qualcosa dovesse incominciare. Le cento nostre vite possibili ronzanti in questo alveare saltuario. Il futuro che mai è stato. I cento futuri del passato.
> Non per niente l'hanno fatta gemella, questa città, all'altra in cui passo la vita.[60]

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[57] Scaffai, *Il lavoro del poeta*, p. 142. Lanfranco Caretti's quote is taken from the well-known essay ''Il perpetuo 'presente' di Sereni', in *Antichi e moderni. Studi di letteratura italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), p. 463 (published already in 1966 in *Strumenti critici*). A shortened version of the essay features in *P*, pp. XLIV-LI.

[58] Cf. also Francesca Southerdern's observation about the role of deixis in *Strumenti*: 'the increasingly uninhabitable nature of space in *Strumenti* is both an expression of the poet's disorientation in a dramatically altered social and poetical environment (the machine age and industrial boom in the 1950s) and a sign of the extraneous qualities of his poetic subject – its inability to inhabit its textual realm as it had done before', *Landscapes of desire*, p. 74.

[59] See Mazzoni, *Verifica dei valori*, p. 56 and subsequent, and Barile, *Il passato che non passa,* p. 180.

[60] *Il sabato tedesco*, in *PP*, p. 774.

The equation between the two cities is structured around their share of potential. It is a potential not unlike the one that Barile and Zucco see as condensed in the image of 'ceneri' itself.[61] Nonetheless, *Il sabato tedesco* – this time right at the beginning –, provides a pivotal clarification about the role played by 'ceneri' within the system of epiphanies:

> Ma è piuttosto l'estate che mi ha inseguito incalzandomi di giorno in giorno e di paesaggio in paesaggio con una folata di foglie silenziose e invisibili da ovest a est poi da est a sud, da sud a sud-est, dal tiepido al meno tiepido e infine, con un grande balzo, in una planata nel caldo ancora pieno ai limiti della canicola – e… *Ti ricordi quel giorno che un'ape cadde nel fuoco. Era te lo ricordi la fine dell'estate*…Certe voci risalite da lontano mi hanno scortato in viaggio; o meglio, mi hanno tirato la corsa, quasi fosse in quelle la forza propulsiva del viaggio stesso. Pausate e ritmiche, non troppo diverse da uno scambio di battute da una finestra all'altra colte su una strada solitaria. Voci così s'insediano nella memoria, animano un momento dell'esistenza e lo fissano, e magari ne alimentano il successivo, né si potrebbe supporre loro un destino migliore o diverso. Cenere tutto il resto che le riguardi, se non, in queste ore, il loro aderire e fondersi con l'aria di questa città orientale, in se abbastanza neutra […][62]

The excerpt could not be more explicit in stating the opposition between 'voci' and 'cenere', between the welcome exception and the bleak normality, thus substantiating, in Mazzoni's words, the 'conflitto implicito fra gli attimi significativi e il tempo morto che li circonda'.[63] Within this conflict, we maintain that the element of 'ceneri' represents well this 'tempo morto', embodying both all that remains of and precedes any of these epiphanic moments, constituting the main poetic correlative of a present condition that is of disharmony and uneasiness (or, in Scaffai's terms, of 'mancata sintonia tra il tempo e l'esperienza'). But the 'tempo morto' *par excellence* for Sereni was that of captivity, that of the 'girone grigio' (*Non sanno d'essere morti*, l. 7), where the io declared himself 'morto / alla guerra e alla pace' (*Non sa più nulla, è alto sulle ali*, ll. 12-13). Scaffai has correctly suggested that in *Strumenti* '"la cenere" e il "fumo", le "mura smozzicate delle case dissestate" sono il correlativo ineludibile della guerra'.[64] We argue that this correlative does not present itself solely as a residue left by the war, but that it rather is, on a deeper level, the residue of Sereni's own

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[61] After having quoted the passage from *Il fantasma nerazzurro* that we have cited, Barile writes that 'è sempre il movimento di sprofondamento e riemersione, fioritura, che connota questa importante variante della gioia', *Il passato che non passa*, p. 58

[62] *Il sabato tedesco*, p. 752.

[63] Grignani clarifies that the voices Sereni refers to, in italics, are those from Apollinaire's *Le voyageur*, which were translated by Sereni (see Vittorio Sereni, *Il musicante di Saint-Merry* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981)), *Le sponde della prosa di Sereni*, p. 40. In *Strumenti*, an opposition similar to that stated in *Il sabato tedesco* is found in *Viaggio di andata e ritorno,* ll. 4-10: 'Mi resta una città prossima al sonno / di prima primavera. / O fuoco che ora tu sei / dileguante, o ceneri confuse / di campagna che annotta e si sfa, / o strido che sgretola l'aria / e divide il mio cuore'. Commenting on the poem, Isella and Martignoni write precisely about 'un duplice movimento tematico: fiammata di passione e spento grigiore quotidiano, autenticità di un momento d'eccezione e falsità di un'esistenza ripetitiva', in Vittorio Sereni, *Poesie. Un'antologia per la scuola*, ed. by Dante Isella and Clelia Martignoni (Luino: Nastro & Nastro, 1993), pp. 62-63.

[64] Scaffai, *Il lavoro del poeta*, p. 144.

war, of that peculiar 'unexperienced experience' which initiates the 'essere dopo' of his poetry. And the analysis of the imagery of 'spegnimento' carried out more closely on a poetic level may bear out our claim.

3.5) The imagery of 'spegnimento' in *Gli strumenti umani*

In the analysis of *Ventisei*, emphasis has been laid on the theme of an unrealised future which underlies the mental and physical revisitation of the places where the prisoner was held in captivity. The theme resurfaces often in Sereni's prose, as proved by *Il sabato tedesco*. Whereas the prose pieces openly exhibit how this theme depends on the experience of imprisonment, poetry evokes this interrealtion by deploying a specific imagery, which we have defined as 'spegnimento'. Our contention is that this imagery, insofar as it occurs frequently and is informed by the archetypal experience of the imprisonment, can be understood as having a significant residual essence. Indeed, such is its frequency in *Strumenti* that one could embark upon a thorough scrutiny of the occurrences of the verb 'spegnere' alone**.** However, since the images employed to intimate this theme go beyond the simple use of the verb, our analysis will rather provide a variety of compelling examples.

At the beginning of the investigation into the presence of 'ceneri' in *Strumenti* we suggested that *Il male d'Africa* would represent a paradigmatic case with regard to the present study. If we return to the poem, we notice that the imagery of 'spegnimento' is completely conflated with the term 'cenere':

> […]
> barracani gonfiarsi all'uragano
> altri petali accendersi – «*sono astri*
> *perenni*», «*no, sono fiori caduchi*», discorsi
> di cattività –
> farsi di estiva cenere
> […]
> (*P* 93)

In a sense, the presence of 'cenere' comes also to elucidate the meaning of those 'fiori intempestivi' of some lines before ('rimbombava / la eco tra viadotti e ponti lungo / un febbrario di fiori intempestivi', ll. 21-23): the blossoming of the flowers appears untimely because of the risk they run of being subject to a premature end, just like the fleeting petals

which light up and immediately incinerate.[65] The overall view provides a sense of an unfulfilled development, of an untimely abortion of the future, very much in tune with the motif of 'futuro inattuato'. It is a failure of the natural evolution along the line of continuity which ties the past to the present and the present to the future, one which is perfectly described by Sereni himself while writing about Primo Levi's *La tregua*:

> [...] il modo particolare della suggestione esercitata sul lettore induce irresistibilmente a pensare a tutte le strade brutalmente interrotte, a tutte le potenzialità non espresse, alla destinazione imposta a tutte quelle vite che dovevano diversamente fiorire ed espandersi.[66]

Rather than being a mere critical observation, Sereni's own words appear, instead, as a tailored self-comment. Just as Levi induces him to think about untimely ends, unexpressed potentalities, and withering lives, Sereni's own words on Levi urge us to think about *Il male d'Africa* and, more specifically, of its untimely flowers and petals which do not expand, but are reduced to ashes instead.

The reasons for selecting *Il male d'Africa* as an ideal specimen thus begin to become clearer: not only does the poem illustrate the extent to which the image of 'ceneri' is embedded in the imagery of 'spegnimento'; it also shows the protean nature of the latter, which here takes the semblance of a withering process. Indeed, images of withering are widespread in Sereni's poetry and we can regard them as no less than other guises under which the 'spegnimento' appears. A perfect case in point is *L'equivoco*, where the idea of 'spegnimento' is intimated by the verb 'sfiorire' so as to provide an overall sense of precariousness and untimeliness which calls to mind *Il male d'Africa* as well as Sereni's take on Levi's book:

> […]
> e si smarriva su quelle
> amare e dolci allèe di primavera.
> Fu il lento barlume che a volte
> vedemmo lambire il confine dei visi
> e, nato appena, in povertà sfiorire.
>
> (*P* 112)

[65] Cf. Montale's *Stanze*, in *Le occasioni*: 'In te m'appare un'ultima corolla / di cenere leggera che non dura / ma sfioccata precipita. […]', in Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, p. 170.
[66] *Ritorno dalla notte*, in *Letture preliminari*, *PP*, p. 878.

The extra sense of untimeliness which is here conveyed by the adverb 'appena' draws these lines very close to the 'vite / appena accese e spente nel candore' from *Sopra un'immagine sepolcrale*, which we have mentioned earlier and in which the imagery is fully at work.[67] Commenting on *L'equivoco* and extending the claim to *Strumenti* as a whole, Mengaldo has suggested that 'la realtà è vista come il dominio delle esperienze sempre lambite, sfiorate, mai messe a segno'.[68] And indeed we can observe that the imagery represents the poetic correlative of a reality which is seen as the realm of unfulfilled experiences. In our view, this cannot but imply that reality is seen as reproducing over and over again the archetypal experience on account of which Sereni came 'just' in fleeting contact with history and did not see his future fulfilled as it should have. The reality of *Strumenti* thus bears yet again resemblance to that of *Diario*, to that very reality which Sereni experienced, in Silvio Ramat's words, from the uncomfortable position of 'chi sta *nella* guerra ma, al contempo, se ne ravvisa estraniato, *fuori* del suo ritmo; fasciato dalla snervante protezione di una prigionia che sempre rammenta, a lui che la sopporta, lo stato di guerra che l'ha originata, ma che, insieme, segrega l'io dal corso spaventoso, però vivo, degli eventi d'armi'? [69] The imagery of 'spegnimento' thus reveals its lineage from the experience of captivity.

If we now proceed to examine other examples of this imagery we will notice that its deployment is, not by chance, functionally linked to other thematic strands which we have seen to arise in direct connection with the experience of imprisonment. In analysing the implications of the caesura for Sereni's poetry, we situated the theme of the end of youth against the more comprehensive 'end'-'after' framework. If we look back on *Diario*, the only other occurrence of 'ceneri', aside from *Il male d'Africa*, is found in *Troppo il tempo ha tardato*, a poem that is thematically structured around a dialogue with a personified fading youth.[70] 'Ceneri' is here deployed has an adjective in the syntagm 'cinerea estate' (thus reversing the 'estiva cenere' from *Il male d'Africa*), and its occurrence is essential to drawing one more picture of 'spegnimento':

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[67] Note also the fleeting quality of 'barlume' from *L'equivoco* and 'candore' from *Sopra un'immagine sepolcrale*, semantically close via the common ground of a dim light.

[68] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 145. For Peter Robinson, *L'equivoco* 'closes with a memory of his imprisonment in which such an attraction to life has seemed both to dazzle and to delude', intro. to *The selected poetry and prose of Vittorio Sereni*, p. 18.

[69] Ramat, *Storia della poesia italiana del Novecento*, p. 564

[70] See Fioroni's comment in Sereni, *Frontiera. Diario d'Algeria*, pp. 345-351. About the stanza containing the lines quoted, she writes: 'esprime il sentimento di caducità mediante una serie di eventi forse riconducibili al periodo iniziale della tragedia bellica, ed emblematici del progressivo spegnersi di un periodo dell'esistenza', this period being 'la giovinezza sfiorente punta dal presagio del conflitto'.

> […] Sorridevo
> agli amici, svanivano
> essi, svaniva
> in tristezza la curva d'un viale.
> Dietro ruote fuggite
> smorzava i papaveri sui prati
> una cinerea estate.
> […]
> (*P* 82)

The fading away of the summer coincides with the withering of the poppies. It is not just the motion of the wheels which conveys the sense of a season that is disappearing, as it is the use of 'cinerea' too which augments the sense of an end by performing a double action of 'spegnimento', firstly on summer (that is, by defining it as 'cinerous'), and secondly, on the poppies, since their withering is hastened by this very cinerous quality of summer.[71] Overall, both the end of the summer and of the poppies are seasonal images which stand for the generational end of youth, and the poem thus exhibits the importance that the entanglement between 'ceneri', withering and 'spegnimento' assumes in intimating this particular sense of end (and perhaps the idea of 'spegnimento', intrinsic in 'cinerea' as well as in the meaning of 'smorzava', is also phonetically echoed through the fricatives of both the polyptoton 'svanivano/svaniva' and of 'smorzava' itself).

It is in light of these associations that we can now cogently read the short-lived destiny to which the petals of *Il male d'Africa* are subject as standing for that of the io himself, for it is on account of what we have named an 'unexperienced experience' that Sereni sees himself wither:

> … ma di notte si facevano brutti sogni di guerra, di gioventù che sfioriva nel deserto, di anni irreparabili, di morte prematura e violenta.[72]

It is worth noting, in passing, that some Leopardian images from *Canti* may offer an antecedent to the imagery of 'spegnimento'. Together with the omnipresent metaphor of youth which is 'nel fior degli anni estinta', (whose Serenian 'sfiorire' is the perfect counterpart), one may simply think of *Le ricordanze*, where Nerina's premature death is

[71] About 'ceneri' Zucco notes that 'rimane costante l'implicazione in nessi metaforici che coinvolgono immagini della combustione, della luminosità e del colore (rosso)', *'Le ceneri' di Vittorio Sereni*, p. 89.
[72] *Una guerra non combattuta*, in *La tentazione*, p. 271.

lamented as the extinguishing of youth ('quella vaga stagion, se il suo buon tempo, / se giovanezza, ahi giovanezza, è spenta?', ll. 134-135; 'la gioia ti splendea, splendea negli occhi / quel confidente immaginar, quel lume / di gioventù, quando spegneali il fato', ll. 155-157).[73]

On the whole, the presence of the imagery of 'spegnimento' within *Strumenti* substantiates the idea of 'futuro inattuato' by constantly intimating a sense of untimeliness which can acquire various undertones. Whether they refer to reality as the realm of unrealised experiences, or to the generational end of youth, these undertones, which always implicate disharmony, are all traceable back to the archetypal 'unexprienced experience' of Algeria.

There is a final poem we now call attention to, as it encapsulates the main thematic concerns we have thus far expressed and it thus helps us draw some conclusions. The poem is *Gli squali*, and it provides one more element associated with the imagery of 'spegnimento':

> Di noi che cosa fugge sul filo della corrente?
> Oh, di una storia che non ebbe seguito
> stracci di luce, smorti volti, sperse
> lampàre che un attimo ravviva
> e lo sbrecciato cappello di paglia
> che questa ultima estate ci abbandona.
> […]
> (*P* 116)

There is possibly no more enlightening line than 'una storia che non ebbe seguito' to prove the relevance of the idea of 'futuro inattuato' to Sereni's poetry. Moreover, by stating an evident chasm between a potential which lies unexpressed (in abeyance, to recall Blanchot's

[73] Cited from Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. by Giovanni Getto and Edoardo Sanguineti (Milano: Mursia, 1977). The line 'nel fior degli anni estinta' is from *Consalvo* (l. 26); but the entire collection is laden with similar images (see, for instance, 'Perivi, o tenerella. E non vedevi / il fior degli anni tuoi', from *A Silvia*, ll. 42-43, or 'Lo strinse la sciaura, e in ghiaccio è volto / nel fior degli anni', from *La vita solitaria*, ll. 42-43). Paolo Baldan lists 'fiorire' (but not 'sfiorire') among a series of lexical units which Sereni might have inherited from Gozzano, on whom Sereni wrote his university disseration, see Paolo Baldan, 'Gozzano petit maître di Sereni (lo 'scalpore' di una tesi)', in *Guido Gozzano. I Giorni, le Opere* (Firenze: Olschki, 1985), p. 58. An explicit case of intertextuality with Leopardi is in *Una visita in fabbrica* (IV, ll. 14-17), where Sereni borrows from *A Silvia*: 'Salta su / il più buono e il più inerme, cita: / *E di me si spendea la miglior parte* / tra spasso e proteste degli altri – *ma va là* – scatenati'). It is worth mentioning that the very same line is borrowed, and deliberately altered, by Giovanni Giudici too, in the final quatrain of *Se sia opportuno trasferirsi in campagna*, in *La vita in versi*: 'Qui di me si perdeva la miglior parte, / che maledice e spacca la noce tra i denti, / e a quel minuscolo crac ancora prossima spera', in Giudici, *Poesie*, pp. 49-52.

text: ‘stracci di luce, smorti volti, sperse / lampàre’) and the instant which is repository of the epiphany (‘che un attimo ravviva’), the poem takes us back to a duality pointed out earlier in the analysis, namely that between the ‘attimo’ and ‘tempo morto’. Thus, precisely like the image of ‘ceneri’ – with which it is directly intertwined –, the imagery of ‘spegnimento’ intimates the constant presence of ‘tempo morto’. The way in which this imagery is activated differs from poem to poem, but it displays in different ways processes of ‘spegnimento’ and non-development (or non-becoming), of withering and untimeliness, all of which can be traced back to the caesura and to its implications in terms of ‘futuro inattuato’.

3.6) *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino*

Le ceneri

Che aspetto io qui girandomi per casa
che s'alzi un qualche vento
di novità a muovermi la penna
e m'apra a una speranza?

Nasce invece una pena senza pianto
né oggetto, che una luce
per sé di verità da sé presume
– e appena è un bianco giorno e mite di
fine inverno].

Che spero io più smarrito tra le cose.
Troppe ceneri sparge attorno a sé la noia,
la gioia quando c'è basta a sé sola.
(*P* 119)

Le sei del mattino

Tutto, si sa, la morte dissigilla.
E infatti, tornavo,
Malchiusa era la porta
Appena accostato il battente.
E spento infatti ero da poco,
disfatto in poche ore.
Ma quello vidi che certo
non vedono i defunti:
la casa visitata dalla mia fresca morte,
solo un poco smarrita
calda ancora di me che più non ero,
spezzata la sbarra
inane il chiavistello
e grande un'aria e popolosa attorno
a me piccino nella morte,
i corsi l'uno dopo l'altro desti
di Milano dentro tutto quel vento.
(*P* 120)

Through the parallel reading of *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino* we will explore, in this final section, an example of how the interrelation between the image of 'ceneri' and the imagery of 'spegnimento' can prove essential to portraying the posthumousness of the io.

At the core of *Le ceneri* there lies a situation of aimlessness, which hinges upon two lexical pairs: 'aspetto'-'spero', and 'noia'-'gioia' (the latter a sort of *topos* within the Italian poetic tradition).[74] Neither does the waiting seem to open convincingly to hope, nor does boredom seem likely to be overcome by joy. As the poem unfolds, in fact, hope eventually fades away, with the 'vento di novità' yielding to 'troppe ceneri'. Once again, 'ceneri' here

[74] See, to name but a few, Leopardi's *Il sabato del villaggio* ('pien di speme e di gioia: / diman tristezza e noia'); Cardarelli's *Carattere* ('e brevi gioie, / e noie e disgrazie'); Penna's *Esco dal mio lavoro* ('Ma al cancello / hanno posto gli dèi per la mia gioia / un fanciullo che giuoca con la noia'). In Luzi's *Toccata* we find instead the cohabitation of 'noia' and 'cenere'. The overall lifeless atmosphere of the poem bears some resemblance to *Le ceneri* ('Ecco aprile, la noia, la quete della stuoia […] questa aliena presenza della vita / nel vano delle porte / nei fiumi tenui di cenere / nel tuo passo echeggiato dalle volte').

embody well the 'tempo morto' in which the io is imprisoned; but they are also functional to depiciting a situation which retains explicit metapoetic undercurrents (the 'vento' should come to 'muover*e* la penna'), thus embodying the sterility of the poetic vein.[75]

Le sei del mattino presents a vivid vision the io has of his own death. The io is here divided into two selves, the dead and the posthumous one, with the initial lines possibly alluding to the circumstances under which the wake takes place, as suggested by the door leaf which is left ajar ('appena accostato il battente').[76] The imagery of 'spegnimento', well condensed in the line 'e spento infatti ero da poco', indicates here no less than the extinguishing of the io.

It is interesting to notice that the two poems taken together suggest a diachronic sequence of image and imagery: firstly, the uneasiness underlain by 'ceneri' and their attendant (purposeless) waiting; subsequently, the posthumousness of the io as intimated by the 'spegnimento'. A question thus arises: is it possible to establish a relation between *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino* whereby the process of 'spegnimento' from the latter could be understood as consequential to the presence of the 'ceneri' in the former? In other words, is the posthumousness of *Le sei del mattino* connected, in any ways, with the 'tempo morto' elicited in *Le ceneri*?

About *Le sei del mattino*, written just a few months after *Le ceneri*, Lenzini writes that 'anche qui si ha un ritorno: l'ultimo della serie, che riporta allo scenario d'esordio (*Via Scarlatti*); e anche qui il ritorno è fonte di una scoperta di ordine negativo – l'io trova se stesso morto'.[77] Lenzini places *Le sei del mattino* alongside *Via Scarlatti* because of their common household setting. Likewise, we can link *Le sei del mattino* to *Le ceneri*, as both poems are in fact set at home ('casa'). The presence of the interior also implies (implicitly in *Le ceneri*, explicitly in *Le sei del mattino*) that of the urban context – and we have already seen at length how the city constantly intimates, in S*trumenti*, undertones of malaise. Perhaps more importantly, the two poems share a few significant lexical units: 'vento', 'appena' and 'smarrito/a'. In *Le sei del mattino*, 'vento' represents an actual atmospheric agent ('dentro tutto quel vento', with 'tutto' circularly recalling the incipit) which contributes to creating a sequence of images flowing in a cinematic way (imagining the camera panning from the inside of the house to the outside of Milano streets, by which we have the impression that

[75] 'Che *Le ceneri* parli di una situazione di impotenza creativa è chiaro fin dall'apparizione dello strumento della scrittura al v. 3', Zucco, ''Le ceneri' di Vittorio Sereni', p. 87.
[76] Cf. Lenzini's comment in Sereni, *Il grande amico*, p. 219: 'è consuetudine che la porta dell'abitazione del defunto venga lasciata aperta'. See also Isella and Martignoni in Sereni, *Poesie. Un'antologia per la scuola*, p. 70.
[77] Lenzini in Sereni, *Il grande amico*, p. 219. According to the critical edition edited by Isella, *Le ceneri* was composed in March 1957 and *Le sei del mattino* between May and June of the same year. See *P*, p. 528-29.

the stronger the wind, the smaller the io). In *Le ceneri* 'vento' holds a more figurative connotation instead, referring to the lack of poetic creativity ('Che aspetto io qui…che s'alzi un qualche vento di novità'). 'Appena' is an adverb which we have already encountered throughout the analysis. Not unlike 'vento', its meaning varies from one poem to the other: while in *Le sei del mattino*, 'appena' bears the meaning of 'hardly' (the equivalent of 'a malapena'), in *Le ceneri* it accrues some extra significance owing to the alliteration with both 'penna' and 'pena', thereby heightening the discomfort that is tied to the lack of poetic inspiration.[78]

Mindful of these significant cross-references, we can initially observe that the idea of return which underlies *Le sei del mattino* is also understandable on another level: insofar as it echoes some seminal lexical units from *Le ceneri*, the poem presents itself also as a formal return to the text which proceeds it in the collection. Within *Strumenti*, it is not uncommon to encounter mutual relations (on both a thematic and a formal level) between pairs of poems: it is a structural pattern which is particularly noticeable in the first section, *Uno sguardo di Rimando* (to which both poems belong), and comes as one of the features of collections of poetry which are coherently structured as macrotexts. It must be noted that owing to these types of relations, it is the first text of the pair which benefits greatly from the parallel reading. As Yury Lotman notes:

> The belletristic construct is also protracted in space; it requires a constant return, it would seem, to the text which has already fulfilled its informational role. It requires its comparison with subsequent texts. In the process of such comparison, the old text is revealed anew, manifesting formerly hidden semantic content. The principle of return is a universal structural principle of the poetic work. [79]

Building on this principle, as well as taking adavantage of the title of this first section of *Strumenti*, our idea of 'ritorno' from *Le sei del mattino* to *Le ceneri* can thus be conceived as *Uno sguardo di rimando*: after all, what we are doing here is precisely casting a second eye at *Le ceneri* after having examined *Le sei del mattino*. In doing so, we are able to notice some consequentiality between the *explicit* of *Le ceneri* and the *incipit* of *Le sei del mattino*.

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[78] Giovannuzzi notes an explicit intertextuality between the 'malchiusa era la porta' and the Montalean 'D'alti Eldoradi /malchiuse porte!' of *Corno inglese*, in *Ossi di seppia*. See Giovannuzzi, *La persistenza della lirica*, p. 87. As for *Le ceneri*, the idea of 'una pena senza pianto / né oggetto' seems to recall the Sartrian nausea, defined as 'an abstract change without object', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 12.

[79] Yury Lotman, *Analysis of the poetic text*, ed. & trans. by D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1976), p. 36.

Analysing the metrical form of *Le ceneri*, Rodolfo Zucco has drawn attention to its 'struttura para-sonettistica' (a sonnet without the final tercet), pointing out the implications of the lack of the final strophe:

> quel bianco sulla pagina, dove i tre versi dovrebbero comparire e non compaiono, si potrà interpretare come il corrispettivo formale di quella disperazione di senso che tutta la lirica esprime, icona metrica di una 'toppa d'inesistenza' (il 'vuoto' di una redazione superata) e insieme di realizzazione futura: nella concezione sereniana per cui la 'cenere' è pronta a 'a farsi movimento e luce'.[80]

While we can agree on the meaning suggested by the metrical form, we hold that the proximity of a poem such as *Le sei del mattino* to *Le ceneri* tends to contravene any openings to the future: the void which is signified by the missing tercet comes to be filled up, through the incipit of *Le sei del mattino*, with nothing less than the io's death. Our contention seems to be sustained on a formal level too, given that, just as *Le ceneri* lacks the final tercet, *Le sei del mattino* is made of seventeen lines, precisely three more than a sonnet. And it is precisely by dwelling on the attributes which death is assigned in this latter poem that there emerges the essence of the relation between the two texts. In *Le sei del mattino*, the use of the imagery of 'spegnimento' is useful for describing a death that has recently occurred ('e spento infatti ero da poco'). The insistence on this temporal facet is stressed also elsewhere in the poem, as both 'fresca morte' and 'calda ancora' show. It is also the reiterated reference to this temporality that disposes us to look back on the preceeding image of 'ceneri'. And indubitably, once *Le ceneri* is reappraised in light of the recent death at stake in *Le sei del mattino*, the void left by the missing tercet can be understood as symbolising the annihilation of the io.

The purposeless waiting sustained by the io in *Le ceneri* is no less than another facet of the 'tempo morto' which we have seen besiege him throughout our analysis, a present state which ends up representing a renewed form of captivity.[81] Significantly, this 'tempo morto' has, on this occasion, produced the io's own ashes, murdered him, as it were. Which is why, if we really are to talk about an opening to the future, about the potential retained by 'ceneri', the only way we have to do it is in Stefano Giovannuzzi's words: 'se il reale e il vivente sono irrapresentabili nel discorso poetico, la morte garantisce l'unica via d'accesso al poetabile'.[82] It is, thus, a clear opening to posthumousness.

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[80] Rodolfo Zucco in ''Le ceneri' di Vittorio Sereni', p. 89.
[81] Cf. Ginevra Bompiani's *L'attesa*: 'chi aspetta, o chi si annoia, è sempre in prigione. La sua cella si chiama: il presente'. *L'attesa* (Milano: et al./Edizioni, 2011), p. 35.
[82] Giovannuzzi, *La persistenza della lirica*, p. 102.

3.7) Conclusion

After having read Sereni's 'unexperienced experience' against the 'end'-'after' framework, we moved on to the analysis of the image of 'ceneri', arguing that it represented an ideal residue, a perfect specimen which corroborates that dialectic of continuity and discontinuity which is essential to the present study (where, in other words, something ends and yet survives at the same time). We have expounded the explicit undercurrent of disharmony which accompanies the presence of 'ceneri', both in the narrative pieces referring to the period of captivity and in the new urban setting from *Strumenti*. With great regard to some of the texts from this collection, we have argued that the inharmoniousness intimated by the image tallies with the dissonant relation established between the io and his *hic et nunc*, namely the city and its 'tempo morto'. Delving further into this negative relation, we extended our analysis to a specific imagery, which we have defined as 'spegnimento', and within which the image of 'ceneri' can, in turn, be included. Indeed, in eliciting disharmony and an obiquituous sense of untimeliness, both image and imagery materialise the after-effects of the experience of captivity, constantly projecting onto the present the thought of a non-linear or unrealised development, of something that fails to become what it should (the 'futuro inattuato' from *Ventisei*). The present is thus understood yet again as the realm of unfulfilled experiences.

The implications of this lasting end have then been further foregrounded via the parallel close reading of *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino*, where the interconnection between 'ceneri' and 'spegnimento' is functional to opening up to posthumousness. Just as they are those of the 'tempo morto' and of the 'futuro inattuato', 'ceneri' are also those of the io, whose previous state of 'morto / alla guerra e alla pace', becomes, eventually, an actual post-mortem one.

The residue – Part II. Il deserto

In an approach comparable with that adopted with regard to Sereni's poetry, we shall now explore a specific image which, in Caproni's work, can be seen as an ideal residue left by the experience of grief. The image at issue is 'deserto', which appears irregularly throughout his *oeuvre*. It is significantly present in *Alba* and *I lamenti*, *I* – two texts which have been selected on the basis of their relevance to revealing the posthumousness of Caproni's poetry.

As noted by Damiano Sinfonico, who has produced a brief essay on the history of 'deserto' in Caproni's work, the peculiarity of the image resides in an apparent contradiction: on the one hand, when considered against the intricate web of cross-references at work in most collections, it occurs relatively rarely; on the other, almost all of these occurrences seem to be deployed strategically, leading the word to accrue additional meaning.[83] *Muro* exemplifies well this dual tendency. The analysis of the collection conducted by Enrico Testa for the first time draws critical attention to the systematic function of 'deserto', which is identified as the main 'isotopia spaziale'. In other words, all the spatial references within the collection can be seen as different facets of a 'sola dominante spaziale: il deserto'.[84] Among those scholars who have dedicated some attention to this image is also Daniela Baroncini, whose *Caproni e la poesia del nulla* briefly considers the metapoetic nuances with which 'deserto' may be laden, drawing a parallel between the metalinguistic reflection on the poetic word carried out by Caproni in his mature works and some of Edmond Jabès's ideas contained in *From the desert to the book*. Against this framework, Baroncini sees the image substantiate the 'idea di una parola desertificata', of a word that approaches silence.[85]

Overall, with the exception of that of Sinfonico, in the studies mentioned above the analysis of 'deserto' has been entirely limited to Caproni's mature works. More importantly, none of these studies considers that the poet's concern with the image may derive from his particular understanding of the caesura which we have examined. The present analysis will thus aim to trace the reasons for the presence of the image back to the artistic transposition of Olga's death, as it is our contention that 'deserto' retains, throughout subsequent phases of Caproni's poetry, undertones which first arise in relation to this episode. In doing so, we shall resort once more – particularly at the close of the analysis – to some unpublished texts which have been brought to light by Luca Zuliani.

For our examination taken as a whole, the *Leitmotiv* will be the relation between 'deserto' and solitude. One may argue that the idea of solitude is intrinsic to the meaning of 'deserto' (as is suggested by its own etymology, which refers to a place that has been abandoned). Nevertheless, the overtones of solitude elicited by the image within Caproni's

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[83] Damiano Sinfonico, 'Deserto. Storia di un'immagine nella poesia di Caproni', in *Giorgio Caproni. Parole chiave per un poeta*, ed. by Luigi Surdich and Stefano Verdino, special issue of *Nuova Corrente*, 149 (Genova: Interlinea, 2012), pp. 21-30

[84] Testa, *Libro di poesia: Tipologie e analisi macrotestuali*, p. 61. The term 'isotopy' was introduced, within the semiotic field, by A. J. Greimas. For a brief overview of the concept, see Segre, Cesare, 'Testo letterario, interpretazione, storia: linee concettuali e categorie critiche', in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Torino: Einaudi, 1985), IV: *L'interpretazione*, pp. 21-140, in particular pp. 42-44.

[85] Daniela Baronicini, *Caproni e la poesia del nulla* (Pisa: Pacini editore, 2002), see in particular pp. 201-208. Giuseppe de Marco too alludes to the importance of 'deserto' in *Caproni poeta dell'antagonismo e altre occasioni esegetiche novecentesche* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 2004), pp. 122-160.

oeuvre are always different, and significantly carved out of the historical and existential circumstances in which each work takes shape. It is by examining at length these overtones that we can bring to light that twofold essence – residual and transformational – of which this image, precisely like that of 'ceneri', partakes.

Insofar as this image is more recurring in the mature poetry, we shall begin by dwelling at length on the later stage of Caproni's *oeuvre*, where the image does not appear in conspicuous relation to the figure of Olga. After having examined in detail the role played by 'deserto' in the metaphysical and distinctly allegorical atmosphere of this poetic phase, we shall turn to the poetry of the 1940s and 1950s, where the image features in connection with that doubly connoted phase of grief which we have scrutinised in the previous chapter. Proceeding backwards helps us draw a parabola by dint of which 'deserto' can be seen to substantiate a triple connoted idea of solitude, referring, in the later works, to the isolation of man in the emergent mass society of 1960s and 1970s, in the preceding phase to the solitude of a generation of men amid the turmoil of war, and arriving ultimately at its zero point, which coincides with the particular sense of abandonment felt by the io in relation to Olga's death. Once this final nexus is unveiled, the bearing of the image in Caproni's mature poetry will have to be reconsidered as residual of the experience of grief.

3.8) 'Deserto' in Caproni's mature poetry. An overview

The analysis of 'deserto' in this section is almost entirely based on *Muro*, the collection which, published in 1975, is widely acknowledged to inaugurate Caproni's mature poetic phase.[86] It is in *Muro* that the image bears more structural weight than anywhere else. Considering that the few more occurrences present in subsequent collections do not provide the image with any additional meaning, it seems possible to extend our observations to Caproni's mature poetry taken in its entirety.[87]

Muro is Caproni's only collection which features a literary citation as an the epigraph, a fact that is, per se, worthy of attention. The thematic centre of the quote is represented precisely by the word 'deserto':

Siamo in un deserto,

[86] 'Con qualche approssimazione si può considerare che *Il muro della terra* inizia la terza, e ultima, stagione di Caproni', Mengaldo writes in 'Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni', p. XXX. See also Stefano Verdino, 'Il grande Caproni', in *Omaggio a Giorgio Caproni*, *Resine,* 47 (1991), pp. 53-70.

[87] Other occurrences of 'deserto' are found in *Determinazione*, from *Franco*; in *Di un luogo preciso, descritto per enumerazione*, from *Conte*; and in *Di domenica sera*, from *Erba francese*.

e volete lettere da noi?

(Annibal Caro)

(*OV* 275)

Already at the outset, the reader is thus invited to verify not simply the frequency with which the word occurs, but also its potentially broader thematic scope. Indeed, according to Testa 'l'epigrafe-citazione da Annibal Caro definisce subito lo spazio dominante del macrotesto', for it has 'una funzione cataforica', by means of which all the following occurrences related to a spatial dimension are liable to refer back to desert.[88] The comprehensive analysis conducted by Testa provides a fundamental insight into the value of both the word and the idea of 'deserto' within the collection. However, unlike Testa, who considers the role of the image in functional relation to the collection taken as a poetic macrotext, we will explore the precise qualities of 'deserto' which lend it to the representation of a residue. A focal point of our analysis is thus a comment by Caproni himself in response to a question on the use of Annibal Caro's words:

> Uno dei centri del libro vorrebbe essere anche la solitudine dell'uomo d'oggi nella società tecnologica, di fronte agli interrogativi… E quanto alla mia resa, la mia *chamade* è leggermente aggressiva, cioè vorrebbe essere una condanna…Quest'uomo solo, chiuso nella sua stanza a parlare ai morti…Non è che io parli coi morti passati, purtroppo io intendevo dire coi vivi che sono morti, che non intendono più certe cose…quindi io mi trovo solo…non sono più della tribù.[89]

And indeed *Muro* teems with images of absence connoting a kind of depopulation, within which the io experiences a stark sense of solitude, as shown in the following text, *Lasciando Loco*. Perhaps we can detect some slight irony in the fact that this deserted place (the 'locus')

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[88] See *Il libro di poesia*, pp. 79-80. Commenting on the epigraph of *Muro*, Giuseppe De Marco argues that, alongside encapsulating the essence of the collection, 'sta a significare anche la *condizione* della poesia che scava questo deserto', in Giuseppe De Marco, 'Caproni poeta dell'antagonismo', in *Caproni poeta dell'antagonismo*, pp. 137-138. A further quote from Annibal Caro, likewise used as an epigraph, is found in *Pasqua di resurrezione,* from *Conte*: *'Piove e siamo all'osteria, / e in una terra come questa /dove non abbiamo né che fare / ne che vedere'*. In a video interview with Enzo Siciliano (1975), Caproni declares: 'amo molto citare, e leggermente anche plagiare', *IA*, p. 111. For a more detailed analysis of intertextuality concerning Caproni's work, see Adele Dei, 'Le parole degli altri: citazioni, proverbi, aforismi', pp. 55-67. Conte too cointains an epigraph, signed by Aleso Leucasio; it is, however, Caproni's own pseudonym as a member of the Accademia dell'Arcadia, see *OV*, p. 1629.

[89] Caproni, *Settimo giorno* [1975], *IA*, pp. 107-108. But Caproni insists on this several times (see, for instance, *IA*, p. 78). The excerpt from the interview contains explicit allusions to three poems from *Muro*: *Dedizione* (*J'ai mis bas les armes. / J'ai amené les voiles. / J'ai bassé pavillon. / Que me reste-t-il, sinon / battre la chamade?*); *Condizione* ('Un uomo solo, / chiuso nella sua stanza. / Con tutte le sue ragioni. / Tutti i suoi torti. / Solo in una stanza vuota, / a parlare. Ai morti.'), and *Cabaletta dello stregone benevolo* ('Non chieder più. / Nulla per te qui resta. / Non sei della tribù. / Hai sbagliato foresta.').

is called 'Loco'. The reference is to Loco di Rovegno, where Caproni spent many years of his life, and yet the lack of concrete contextual references extends the idea of abandonment beyond the geographical boundaries of the actual place:[90]

Sono partiti tutti.
Hanno spento la luce,
chiuso la porta, e tutti
(tutti) se ne sono andati
uno dopo l'altro.

Soli,
sono rimasti gli alberi
e il ponte, l'acqua
che canta ancora e i tavoli
della locanda ancora
ingombri – il deserto,
la lampadina a carbone
lasciata accesa nel sole
sopra il deserto.

E io,
io allora qui,
io cosa rimango a fare,
qui dove perfino Dio
se n'è andato di chiesa
[…]
e ormai
– di tanti – non c'è più nessuno
col quale amorosamente
poter altercare?
(*OV* 347)

[90] Cf. Caproni, *L'ultimo borgo. Poesie (1932-1978)*, ed. by Giovanni Raboni (Milano: Rizzoli, 1980), p. 157. On Caproni's irony, see Anna Marra, 'Ironia. L'origine: le parole, le cose, il tempo', in 'Giorgio Caproni. Parole chiave per un poeta', ed. by Luigi Surdich and Stefano Verdino, pp. 121-131.

Divided into three strophes, this *canzonetta* provides some keys to verifying the validity of Caproni's own words quoted above.[91] The first and the third strophes put on display the opposition between 'tutti' and 'io'. Both the indefinite and personal pronoun are repeated three times, thus establishing a contrast between those who left and the isolation of the io. As for the word 'deserto', it seems significant that it is positioned in the central strophe, as if to emphasize the focal point of the action, the spatial coordinate in which the io stands in all his solitude, after 'tutti' have departed. Furthermore, that between 'tutti' and 'io' is not the only noteworthy numerical correspondence in the poem, given that 'deserto' – repeated twice in the central strophe – is echoed by the double repetition of 'qui' in the third strophe, thus clearly corroborating the presentness of the desert, its here and now. The closing lines, in their disillusionment, recall the leave-taking of the 'viaggiatore cerimonioso', whose gratefulness to his addressees and friends was also due to the possibility of 'altercare'.[92] In the desolate scenery of *Lasciando Loco* (and, precisely because of this desolation, one may recall Ungaretti's *San Martino del Carso*), the lack of people with whom 'poter altercare' is a hallmark of solitude.[93] And it is precisely this condition which is substantiated by *Il murato*, by means of a further occurrence of 'deserto': [94]

"M'avete fucilato
la bocca," disse. "Ho tanto
amato (idest cercato
amore) ch'ora
io mi trovo murato
in questa torre. Fuori,

[91] Caproni makes clear, on many an occasion, the use he makes of this metrical form: 'È una forma di canzonetta indurita. Se uno la legge scorrevolmente, è sempre una canzonetta; non la canzonetta del Cavalcanti (eccetto nel *Seme del piangere*), ma la canzone dei primitivi, dei poeti delle origini, una canzone ancora dura, come nella scuola siciliana, come nei primi toscani, o in Giacomino Pugliese'. *Un poeta in cerca dell'anima*, *IA*, p. 215. Caproni insists on this also in other interviews. See, Ibid., pp. 170-171 and p. 183.

[92] See *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso*, ll. 58-67: 'Dicevo, ch'era bello stare / insieme. Chiacchierare. / Abbiamo avuto qualche / diverbio, è naturale. / Ci siamo – ed è normale / anche questo – odiati / su più di un punto, e frenati / soltanto per cortesia. Ma, cos'importa. / Sia come sia, torno / a dirvi, e di cuore, grazie / per l'ottima compagnia.' See also, in *Muro*, from *Parole (dopo l'esodo) dell'ultimo della Moglia*, ll. 45-52: 'Certo / (è il vento degli anni ch'entra / nella mente e ne turba / le foglie) a volte / il cuore mi balza in gola se penso / a quant'ho perso. A tutta / la gaia consorteria / di ieri. Agli abbracci. Agli schiaffi'.

[93] As for the the importance of the geographic place of Loco di Rovegno in Caproni's biography see, for instance, the letter to Betocchi, dated 18th of August 1954. Giorgio Caproni, Carlo Betocchi, *Una poesia indimenticabile. Lettere 1936-1986*, pp. 138-139.

[94] It may be worth noticing that the term 'murato', alongside recalling explicitly the Dantesque title of the collection, is found in two poems by Ungaretti (*Inno alla morte* and *La pietà*) to which Caproni declares himself to be strongly attached. Caproni mentions them in an interview on Ungaretti, now available in *Il mondo ha bisogno di poeti*, pp. 308-310. Cf. also what Caproni says during the radio show *Antologia*: 'c'è quell'*Inno alla morte*, per esempio. Per conto mio, è un piccolo...è un capolavoro, insomma', *Era così bello parlare,* p. 206.

è il deserto del sole
e delle ortiche – il gelo
abbagliato del giorno
sul ghiacciaio. Dentro,
rimato tutt'intero
col mio egoismo, il forno
cieco del mio sgomentato,
illacrimato altruismo."
(*OV* 341)

More explicitly than in *Lasciando Loco*, where it seems to comprise, though rather ambiguously, interior and exterior (the 'locanda' and its surrounding), here 'deserto' is presented as the outside, the 'fuori'. Nevertheless, within the oppositional pattern which runs through the whole poem ('amato/cercato amore'; 'fuori'/'dentro'; 'egoismo'/'altruismo', 'deserto'/'gelo'), there emerges a sort of complementary relation between the two pivotal contrasting poles, 'egoismo' and 'altruismo'. The two terms, which should also draw a line between a psychic inside and outside (a more 'internal' or 'external' disposition), end up coinciding ('rimato tutt'intero'), thus allowing us to see the desert expand and overflow into the inside. Against the general indistinctness substantiated by the expanding of the desert, every opposition seems to fall away.

To summarise, both in *Lasciando Loco* and *Il murato*, 'deserto' connotes an abandoned space where the loneliness of the io meets with the absence of the other. On the surface of this forsaken space there emerges a rift between the other (the outside) and the subject (the inside), one which substantiates a visible state of incommunicability ('nessuno / col quale amorosamente / poter altercare' and "M'avete fucilato / la bocca"').

The condition of solitude elicited by the presence of 'deserto' throughout the collection is then further corroborated by some other recurring lexical features, namely indefinite pronouns. *Muro* abounds, in fact, with this specific category of grammatical elements. We can hold the distinctive pattern of *Lasciando Loco*, in which the opposition between 'tutti' and 'nessuno' is only apparent (not unlike 'egoismo-altruismo' from *Il murato*), as paradigmatic of a more general trend. In effect, the contrast between 'tutti' and 'nessuno' is, as it were, a spurious one, for both pronouns connote, in the text, a state of abandonment: despite its grammatical positivity, 'tutti' refers to a totality which is absent, which has left, and on account of which 'nessuno' has remained. The same function is performed by 'tutto' in the poem of that title, where what follows the destruction caused by a non-specified

subject ('Hanno bruciato tutto. / La chiesa. La scuola. / Il municipio.¬ Tutto.', ll. 1-3) is depopulation ('La gente / non sai più dove sia', ll. 12-13). The indefinite pronoun is then once more quoted in the text, significantly isolated, thus not only indicating, emphatically, what has been burnt (namely, everything), but also stressing, antiphrastically, what is left (nothing). It is, in other words, 'tutto' that turns into 'niente', the desert expanding when and where everything is no longer. [95]

This brief investigation into the function of the indefinite pronouns within *Muro* appears to validate the pivotal role of 'deserto', proving that its presence can be felt well beyond the number of its lexical occurrences. Against a deserted framework, with the io exiled from communicability, it appears as though the action were literally performed by the many 'nessuno' populating the collection.[96] This thematic and stylistic expansion of the desert produces some notable effects on the io, the most remarkable of which regards the relation between him and experience. Indeed, in *Muro*, experience comes to be defined negatively, for it coincides with its impossibility (as stated in *Esperienza)*:

Tutti i luoghi che ho visto,
che ho visitato,
ora so – ne son certo:
non ci sono mai stato.
(*OV* 382)

We can see the spectre of the desert cropping up in this quatrain too, since the places in which, despite having visited them, the io has never been, are just other facets of 'deserto', which is itself space of mirages as well as of blunt sameness, where everything is so identical as to extinguish the discerning value of experience.[97] And to seal this idea there comes *L'idrometra*, in which 'deserto' deletes and submerges human traces, to the point of annihilating not only the io's personal experience, but the whole human history:

Di noi, testimoni del mondo,
tutte andranno perdute

[95] Giovanni Raboni comments on the poem thus: 'scena di desolazione assoluta, che può essere, nello stesso tempo, la descrizione realistica di una paese distrutto per rappresaglia durante la guerra e quella di una metafisica "terra bruciata"'. Caproni, *L'ultimo borgo. Poesie (1932-1978)*, p. 150.
[96] To quote but a few examples: 'Nessuno ¬ potè udirne il lamento', ll. 8-9 ; *Ovatta*; 'Nessuno s'era affacciato / (nemmeno io) alla finestra.', *Compleanno*, ll. 7-8; 'Sapevo che non ci sarebbe stato / nessuno ad aspettarmi', *Palo*, ll. 1-2.
[97] Giulio Ferroni writes that 'si è perduta ogni appartenenza dell'io ai luoghi attraversati, ogni possibilità di riconoscerli e farli propri', *Dopo la fine,* p. 103.

le nostre testimonianze.
Le vere come le false.
La realtà come l'arte.

Il mondo delle sembianze
e della storia, egualmente
porteremo con noi
in fondo all'acqua, incerta
e lucida, il cui velo nero
nessun idrometra più
pattinerà – nessuna
libellula sorvolerà
nel deserto, intero.
(*OV* 291)

Commenting on the last line, Sinfonico suggests that 'la rima a distanza di quattro versi con il "velo nero" dell'acqua che sommergerà tutto il mondo fittizio ed effimero costruito dall'uomo, salda una relazione ferrea tra un elemento che sommergendo fa scomparire ogni cosa e il deserto in cui nessuna cosa si manifesta.'[98] We can add that once more the presence of 'deserto' is countersigned by the employment of indefinites, this time utilised as adjectives ('nessun idrometra' and 'nessuna libellula').[99] Within the 'end'-'after' framework which sustains the present study, the 'deserto' of *L'idrometra* comes to represent the setting of the end, the guise under which the space manifests itself 'after' the disappearance of man and of all his testimonies.[100]

In conclusion, while superficially denoting an internal sensation of solitude (perceived by the subject) set against the external desolation of abandoned settings, 'deserto' comes to represent, in one sense, the space where the io endures incommunicability with the other; in another sense, the scenery for the end of experience, the space in which, in Mengaldo's

[98] Sinfonico, *Deserto. Storia di un'immagine nella poesia di Caproni*, p. 26.
[99] The relation between 'nessuno' and 'deserto' is also in *Determinazione*, from *Franco*, a poem which we shall take into consideration later in the chapter.
[100] Cf. Davide Colussi, 'Complessità sintattica del medio Caproni', in *Giorgio Caproni. Lingua, stile, figure*, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2014), pp. 97-112 (especially pp. 111-112). Sereni too has commented on this poem, but it seems difficult to embrace wholeheartedly his viewpoint, according to which, through that 'velo nero […] un'esistenza ulteriore nasce dall'inesistenza.' Vittorio Sereni, 'Giorgio Caproni', in *PP*, pp. 1064-1073. A close-reading of the poem is provided by Giorgio Bertone, 'L'Idrometra', in *Letture caproniane. Per i vent'anni dalla morte di Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Daniela Carrea (Genova: Provincia di Genova, 2010), pp. 50-67.

words, 'l'esperienza, cioè appunto il rifare ciò che si è già fatto, è in realtà un rifare il mai fatto, è cioè il nulla sia in entrata che in uscita'.[101] But as we have seen in the reading of *Il male d'Africa*, 'l'esperienza ha il suo necessario correlato, nell'autorità, cioè nella parola e nel racconto'.[102] Loss of experience and incommunicability are thus crucially tied to one another, emerging as mutually interdependent concerns.

3.9) 'La morte della distinzione': the desert of mass society

We shall now try to place these main thematic strands elicited by 'deserto' within a defined critical framework. In 2014 Enrico Testa proposed a formula for the reading of Caproni's mature poetry, namely that of 'morte della distinzione', on account of which 'soggetto, spazio, tempo vanno incontro ad una dissoluzione'. This 'morte della distinzione' entails the development of techniques such as 'logica paradossale della reversibilità, responsabile di un continuo scambio di ruoli e funzioni tra attanti diversi'; 'la negazione della determinazione spaziale'; the 'evanescenza della storia' as well as, for obvious reasons, the disappearance of experience from the horizon of the io.[103] As is visible, almost all of these features take us back to 'deserto', and we can thus argue that the image provides this 'morte della distinzione' with an appropriate backdrop, for some of the concerns listed by Testa take place within the space of the desert and are, in turn, substantiated by the desert.[104] Perhaps this death of distinction can be historically situated, leaving poetry momentarily aside and focusing briefly on the social context of the years in which *Muro* was written and published. We shall thus place the idea of 'morte della distinzione' within some of the wider concerns which, largely debated throughout the 1960s and 1970s, address the sociocultural changes which the Western world was undergoing in keeping with the development of mass society.

Within the Italian context, it is Pier Paolo Pasolini who coins the prominent formula of 'mutazione antropologica', which is to be extremely influential during the following decades. For Pasolini, the most alarming effect of this mutation is a dismal conformity,

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[101] Mengaldo, *Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni,* p. XXXIII.
[102] Agamben, *Infanzia e storia*, p. 6.
[103] Testa, 'Con gli occhi di Annina. La morte della distinzione', pp. 45-46. This formula is borrowed from Caproni's own poetry (see *Controcanto*, in *Conte*, ll. 13-14: 'La morte della distinzione. / Del falso. ¬ Del vero').
[104] In his interdisciplinary study of the desert both as a physical and mental landscape, David Jasper dedicates a chapter to the 'disorientation of the desert, where the experience of time and space is also radically deconstructed'. *The Sacred Desert. Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 18.

which is due to the fact that 'Il potere ha deciso che noi siamo tutti uguali'. As a result, 'mai la diversità è stata una colpa così spaventosa come in questo periodo di intolleranza'. Following on this realisation of homogenization, Pasolini is led to conceive 'la società dei consumi' as 'il nuovo fascismo'.[105] What is also worthy of mention, as it is in a way beneficial to our analysis, is Pasolini's insistence on the impossibility of distinguishing fascists from non-fascists, a specific (and quite well known) example which, in the articles published in the 1970s, emerges as indicative of a more collective trend of homogenization and effacement of the individual.[106] Precisely in a recollection of Pasolini himself, talking about certain Roman places which have inspired some of the poems comprised in *Muro* (*Via Pio Foà I* and *Via Pio Foà II*), Caproni too touches upon the same subject:

> Io conoscevo bene questi posti, Pasolini abitava da queste parti, lo andavo spesso a trovare, passeggiavamo insieme. Ma erano molto diversi, avevano un carattere popolare, se non plebeo. Poi tutti hanno fatto i quattrini chissà come, hanno la macchina, casa al Circeo. Ma non si sa più cosa siano: non sono né proletari né borghesi. Vivono in un quartiere residenziale gonfi e sazi. Mi dà un senso di solitudine terribile non poter agganciare questa gente: ma insomma, chi siete? Mi sgomenta questo non sapere le loro origini.[107]

The proximity to Pasolini's remark is conspicuous: the discomfort addressed by Caproni stems from a sort of unintelligibility of the changing reality, giving rise to a sensation of solitude and incommunicability which recalls that experienced, on a poetic level, by the io of *Il murato*.[108] In a different interview, while commenting on the same social issue, Caproni, once more in consonance with Pasolini's reflections (note the comparison between fascism and mass society as well as the emphasis on the depersonalisation of the io), employs the desert as a metaphor of present solitude:

> Mai l'uomo si è sentito così solo come durante la dittatura fascista o, peggio ancora, come oggi, in questa pesante società massificata, che mira a distruggere l'individuo per trasformarlo soltanto in un consumatore. Già ai suoi tempi Kierkegaard scriveva:

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[105] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* (Milano: Garzanti, 2001 [1975]). See, in particular the articles from 1974, 'Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia'; 'Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo'; 'Limitatezza della storia e immensità del mondo contadino'; 'Ampiamento del "bozzetto" sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia'; pp. 39-64.

[106] Within the overall discourse on the effacement of the individual and obliteration of differences, see also the insightful observations made by Jean Baudrillard, who distinguishes between 'different' and 'differential', in *The consumer society* (London: SAGE, 1998 [1970]), pp. 87-98.

[107] *In via Pio Foà con candore e con sgomento*, in *IA* pp. 206-207. Here one really cannot help but recall Giovanni Giudici's *Il benessere*: 'Quanti hanno avuto ciò che non avevano: / un lavoro, una casa – ma poi / che l'ebbero ottenuto vi si chiusero. / Ancora per poco sarò con voi', in *La vita in versi*, *Poesie*, I, 1965, p. 48.

[108] Simona Morando suggests 'di saggiare più profondamente le relazioni in verso e in prosa tra Pasolini e Caproni, proprio in relazione allo sguardo sul mondo e sulla storia', in *Indignazione.* Le Anarchiche *di* Res amissa, in *Giorgio Caproni. Parole chiave per un poeta'*, ed. by Luigi Surdich and Stefano Verdino, p. 93.

> ‘Pare che si tema che l'Io sia una specie di tirannia e che per questo ogni Io debba essere livellato.’ Parole, a distanza di ben oltre un secolo, di una terrificante attualità, cui è impossibile non aggiungere con un brivido – quasi contemporanee – le altre di Leopardi, profetizzanti un’“età delle macchine” […]
> Il poeta reagisce a tanta solitudine (il popoloso deserto che chiamano Parigi, si potrebbe dire con Violetta) col proprio stoicismo, cioè spogliandosi d'ogni illusoria speranza impostale dall’esterno, e solo in questo senso con un’assoluta disperazione. In questo ritrovamento della persona, a vantaggio soprattutto degli altri, sta la sua allegria, intesa nel significato più nobile.[109]

Indeed the solitude elicited by ‘deserto’ is understood as historically connoted. The image thus emerges as a figure of the present time, taking it upon itself to signify a space teeming with illusory presences (the many ‘nessuno’ which we have seen populate *Muro*), where communicability between the io and the other is hampered and subjectivity effaced.

Moreover, insofar as they explicitly refer to the need for the poet to react, Caproni’s closing words from the interview quoted above raise an important question: what shape does the response entrusted to the poet – his ‘stoicism’ – take? Now, one of the radical features which distinguish our Western society from other societal forms (be it the earlier Western ones, or others) is to have been successful in accomplishing a lifestyle which dispenses with God. Guido Mazzoni, in *I destini generali* – a recently published (2015) essay which seeks to examine the sociocultural origins of what he defines as a paralysing present condition of ‘disagio’ – points out that:

> […] il godimento modellato come forma-consumo, sul consumo come relazione col mondo, presuppone […] un’immanenza assoluta, essendo il culmine del progetto che distingue l'Occidente da tutte le altre società, costruire una convivenza senza Dio.[110]

Mazzoni’s words are useful to introduce a salient concern which we have yet to touch upon, namely the religious tension which Caproni’s later collections are steeped in. Building around an antagonistic relation between the io and God, this tension, which is partly anticipated in *Congedo*, gathers consistent momentum precisely in *Muro*. Somehow in line with the societal accomplishment to which Mazzoni refers, Caproni’s God emerges as a predominantly absent figure. In this respect, ‘deserto’ can be seen, superficially, as a figure

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[109] Caproni, *Intervista su Ungaretti*, 3/12/1985/, in *IA*, p.310. ‘Popoloso deserto’ recalls some lines recited by Violetta in Giuseppe Verdi’s *La traviata* (See *IA*, p. 486). As for ‘disperazione’ and ‘allegria’, Caproni, on the occasion of a conference on Ungaretti, confesses that : ‘è stato lui [Ungaretti] ad insegnarmi che l’uomo è solo, e che è proprio nella disperazione (nel deserto della disperazione) che nasce l'allegria del poeta’. *A proposito di un… furto!*, in *Ungaretti e la cultura romana*, in *IA,* pp. 225-277.

[110] Guido Mazzoni, *I destini generali* (Roma: Laterza, 2015), p. 45. Unsurprisingly, Mazzoni sets out his analysis by alluding to Pasolini’s ‘mutazione antropologica’, and goes on to elect 1972 (the year in which *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Deleuze and Guattari is published and Jacques Lacan delivers his discourse on psychoanalysis at the University of Milan) as a pivotal date for the understanding of the cultural turn.

of a religious void, as the space which has been fled by God. Already manifest in *Lasciando Loco*, this connotation of 'deserto' returns in *Determinazione*, a poem from *Franco* where God figures as a vanished 'lui':

> […]
> Lo avremmo
> pugnalato, lui
> […]
> Lo abbiamo
> lasciato passare diritto
> davanti a noi.
> E solo
> quand'è scomparso, il deserto
> ci è apparso chiaro.
> […]
> (*OV* 402)

Especially noteworthy is the way in which Caproni addresses this religious void. Indeed, the io does not content himself with signalling the absence of God. Rather, he constantly questions it, undertaking a pursuit that is as ceaseless as fruitless: the more the io seeks God, the more the latter is nowhere to be found; equally, the more God is absent the more the io feels the need to seek him. Essentially, what the io seems to call into question through this search is precisely the uncritical and unchallenging acceptance of God's absence.[111] Unlike what is imposed by a society which, as Herbert Marcuse puts it in *One-Dimensional-Man*, demonstrates, deceptively, 'that solitude, the very condition which sustained the individual against and beyond his society has become technically impossible' and that 'the old metaphysical problems are illusory problems', Caproni's io engages in an unremitting search for God which, however doomed to failure, ultimately represents his only *raison d'être*.[112] Indeed, we can agree with Giorgio Bertone in claiming that 'Caproni parte dal confronto e dalla sfida al Dio assente, al dio nascosto in nessun dove per fondare il valore della resistenza dell'essere umano, della continua diatriba con l'Assente'.[113] Against this backdrop, we posit

[111] Cf. *Lo stravolto,* p. 326: '"Piaccia o non piaccia!"/ disse. "Ma se Dio fa tanto," / disse, "di non esistere, io, / quant'è vero Iddio, a Dio / io Gli spacco la Faccia."
[112] Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 2001[1964]), p. 75. Cf. Giovanni Giudici's *Dal suo punto di vista*, in *La vita in versi*: 'L'anima, il bene e il male, vecchie storie…',in *Poesie*, I, p. 23.
[113] Bertone, *L'idrometra*, p.60.

that 'deserto' does more than simply represent the space where God is no longer. Inasmuch as it is a space of unchanging sameness, 'deserto' comes to connote, on the one hand, the 'where' in which God's 'presenza dell'assenza' is constantly re-materialised. [114] On the other, the stage onto which the io can enact his resistance (his stoicism) by committing himself to a ceaseless quest for a *deus absconditus*; a 'where' which, however always empty, needs be constantly scoured. *Indicazione* from *Franco*, a poem in which the addresser is God himself, substantiates well this twofold connotation:

> – Smettetela di tormentarvi.
> Se volete incontrarmi,
> cercatemi dove non mi trovo.
>
> Non so indicarvi altro luogo.
> (*OV* 406)

Ultimately, inasmuch as it engages in an obstinate metaphysical tension whose aim is not to consign isolation to the background but to place it in the foreground, Caproni's poetry exhibits its defiant reaction to the effacement of the individual. In 1952 Montale claims, rather despondently, that 'l'uomo, in quanto essere individuato, individuo empirico, è fatalmente solo', coming to the conclusion that 'anche domani le voci più importanti saranno quelle degli artisti che faranno sentire, attraverso la loro voce isolata, un'eco del fatale isolamento di ognuno di noi.'[115] Validating Montale's prediction, but at the same time showing more commitment, in 1979 Caproni states that:

> La società in cui viviamo minaccia la distruzione, come da più parti è già stato detto, del privato (*dell'io*), per ridurre l'individuo a semplice numero di una somma di consumatori destinata ad alimentare una macchina economica […] che trae a sé tutto il profitto, e pieno scapito di ogni libertà interiore. Ora, poesia significa in primo luogo libertà. Libertà di disobbedienza di fronte ad ogni forma di sopraffazione o, peggio, di massificazione. E il poeta – grande o piccolo che sia – è il più deciso oppositore, per sua propria natura, a un siffatto sistema. È il più strenuo difensore della singolarità […].[116]

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[114] It is Caproni himself who argues that 'l'assenza di Dio non è totale, dal momento che l'uomo sente dentro di sé – inquietante – la presenza dell'assenza', in *IA*, p. 252.
[115] Eugenio Montale, *La solitudine dell'artista*, in *Auto da* fé, (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), pp. 46-49.
[116] Caproni, *Poesia. Un bene rifugio nell'età del* consumismo, in *IA*, p. 140. But see also *Solo la poesia può ridare vita alla parola*: 'La lingua è morta perché è morta la parola. La civiltà contemporanea è deserto, è solitudine, è presenza di assenze, è folla di fantasmi. Solo la poesia può ridare la vita alla parola è all'uomo, perché la poesia è linguaggio', in *IA*, p. 116.

According to Marcuse, the true 'magic power' of art is the 'power of negation', as art 'can speak its own language only as long as images are alive which refuse and refute the established order'.[117] In our view, 'deserto' discharges also this antagonistic function in Caproni's mature works, is an image as Marcuse conceives it:

> La mia poesia ha sempre indicato certezza: stoica certezza. Pochi hanno saputo leggerla in questa direzione. Afferma per negazioni. La dedizione (in senso militare di resa) sulla quale insiste il mio più recente *mézigue*, ha anch'essa sapore oppositivo, se non proprio aggressivo.[118]

To summarise, within Caproni's mature poetry, 'deserto' appears to foreground the manifold overtones intimated by 'morte della distinzione'. In situating this latter thematic concern within the sociocultural developments of the 1960s and 1970s, we have come to conceive 'deserto' as a figure of the present, as a sort of poetic counterpart of the flattening out of reality to only one dimension.[119] The image thus serves the purpose of addressing, in Montale's supercilious words, 'la massificazione dell'individuo, il *bourrage* dei cervelli, l'appiattimento del singolo nella massicciata del collettivo'.[120] It is in such a 'popoloso deserto' that the io endures solitude and incommunicability. Yet, as we have seen at the close of our investigation, this image also proves functional to staging the io's own reaction to such a perilous condition. In this capacity, 'deserto' embodies a space run by a strenuous metaphysical tension, where God is absent and yet constantly sought. [121]

These are the main undercurrents elicited by the presence of 'deserto' within the mature works. However, the history of the image within Caproni's poetry dates further back, involving a different shade of solitude, as it arises from other historical circumstances.

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[117] Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*, p. 65. More recently, Antonio Scurati has highlighted that 'lo scrittore, se vuole sopravvivere pur divenendo altro da ciò che era stato in passato, deve continuare ad essere il veleno del proprio ambiente sociale', *La letteratura dell'inesperienza. Scrivere romanzi al tempo della televisione* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006), p. 76.
[118] Caproni, *IA*, p. 95.
[119] The allusion is to Marcuse's claim: 'There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere, and in all forms', *One-Dimensional-Man*, p. 13.
[120] Eugenio Montale, *Odradek* (1959), in *Auto da fé*, p. 108. On Montale's disillusionment during the years of his later poetry see Eanna Ó Ceallacháin, *Eugenio Montale. The poetry of the Later Years* (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), pp. 1-18.
[121] Cf. Alfredo Giuliani about *Muro*: 'a livello ideologico […] non è interessante che un poeta sia religioso o ateo, ma può diventare molto interessante che sia religiosamente ateo'. In *IA*, p. 467.

3.10) The desert of war

The overall picture that has thus far emerged shows rather clearly the metaphysical facet of Caproni's poetry. Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti notes that from *Congedo*, 'il discorso fisico ed esistenziale del Caproni dell'anteguerra diviene un discorso nudamente metafisico: non siamo più *come* in un'allegoria, ma dentro l'allegoria, che però non può condurre a nessuna conoscenza ed esperienza che non sia quella della perdita'.[122] The image of 'deserto' too participates in this overall tendency, for it contributes to shaping rather impalpable settings and atmospheres. There is, however, another phase of Caproni's poetry – an earlier one which corresponds, poetically, to *Passaggio*, and historically, to the Second World War and its immediate aftermath – which presents just as many relevant occurrences of the word 'deserto' (six, two of which as a noun and four as an adjective).[123]

In Caproni's poetry 'la guerra è l'evento per eccellenza', Luigi Surdich notes, 'l'evento assoluto, l'evento fondativo'.[124] We have already seen, in the previous chapter, how, precisely in *Passaggio*, this event includes and absorbs the other seminal event of Caproni's biography, namely Olga's death. The extent to which the historical background of war impinges on the general tone of the collection has been examined at length too. The opening poem *Alba* has been one of the focuses of our attention, due to the fundamental part it plays in relation to the turning point we have called caesura. The fact that, similarly to *Muro*, the first occurrence of the word 'deserto' is found in the opening text is already indicative of a potential relevant role of the image within the collection (even though the current position of the poem was established only in 1968).[125] The word is here used as an adjective to qualify the emptiness of the tram (through a hypallage, 'deserto' is in agreement with 'porte', rather than with 'tram': 'ora nell'ermo / rumore oltre la brina io quale tram / odo, che apre e richiude in eterno / le deserte sue porte?'). The overall idea is thus one of abandonment (once more, 'deserto' recalls its etymological sense of a place that has been abandoned). In a manner similar to *Il murato*, though less explicitly, outer and inner dimensions are interwoven, since the noise of the tram is echoed between the teeth of the awaiting io ('e se il bicchiere entro il fragore / sottile ha un tremitìo tra i denti, è forse / di tali ruote un'eco.'). Yet, the rather circumscribed setting of *Alba* does not show plainly enough the degree to which the general dramatic tone arises from historical circumstances. If we are to verify to what degree the

[122] Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, 'Poesia e teologia: l'ultimo Caproni', in *Genova a Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1982), pp. 131-146 (p. 138).
[123] The occurrences are in *Alba*, *I Lamenti* (I, II, XI), 1944, and in stanza II from *Versi*, *Stanze della funicolare*, in *Il passaggio d'Enea*.
[124] Surdich, *Le idee e la poesia*, p. 154.
[125] See *OV*, pp. 1124-1132.

contextual presence of the war is embedded in the image of 'deserto', we must thus look elsewhere. The first quatrain of *I lamenti*, *II* is an appropriate case in point:

> La voce chi l'ha soffocata o amore
> morto – quale deserto ha imposto il vento
> sui picchi, dove il lupo nel dolore
> d'un giorno ha eterno pascolo? […]
> (*OV* 116)

Within Caproni's poetry taken as a whole, the series of sonnets from *Passaggio* is critically acknowledged to belong, together with the sonnets from *Cronistoria,* to his most expressionist phase.[126] In *I lamenti*, *II*, 'deserto' denotes an exterior landscape which has its possible real counterpart in the Ligurian Appennines of Val Trebbia, where Caproni fought during the resistance.[127] Adele Dei notes how it is precisely during the years of *Cronistoria* and *Passaggio* that the element of wind begins to acquire a sinister connotation in Caproni's *oeuvre*: 'il vento allontana e dissolve nella labilità i segni del presente e dell'esistenza: i nomi, le canzoni; diventa esso stesso un'invisibile tomba'.[128] In a prose piece entitled *Il labirinto*, firstly published in 1946 and regarded by the author as the first-ever account of the Italian Resistance, 'vento' takes on this ruinous overtone precisely insofar as it is interrelated to the dramatic events of war.[129] We can single out two excerpts. The first one describes dawn as the odious time of the executions. Here, 'vento' contributes to providing an expressionistic image of the drying up of the condemned person's life:

> L'alba mi è sempre stata odiosa, e anche quand'ero a casa, dovendomi alzare all'alba per un viaggio o altro, tutto il giorno poi ne soffrivo allo stomaco. È l'ora bianca delle fucilazioni, quando si dice al condannato: 'Vieni, il plotone ti aspetta'. E nel petto del condannato nasce come un gran vento vorticoso che squassa e non trova direzione; egli chiede istantaneamente una sigaretta e gli tremano le dita e ancora aspetta, non si sa che cosa aspetti. È un vento pesante come una montagna, un'intera montagna d'angoscia che crolla mentre le ossa rimangono prosciugate e aride, e il sangue diventa una polvere che se ne va.[130]

The second excerpt is even more explicit in associating wind and war, as Caproni establishes an ominous identity between 'vento' and 'evento':

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[126] Cf. Pasolini, *Passione e ideologia* (Milano: Garzanti, 1996 [1960]), pp. 466-468.
[127] Cf. for instance, *Era così bello parlare*, p. 161.
[128] Adelde Dei, *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 39.
[129] Cf. *AI*, pp. 256-257.
[130] Caproni, *Il labirinto*, in *Racconti*, p. 150.

> Nessuno tuttavia pareva sentire come me la morte che si andava organizzando, il grande evento, il grande vento nel petto d'una ragazza: la morte.[131]

Il labirinto narrates the story of a female spy sentenced to death during the turbulent years of the Resistance. Even though the 'grande evento' here refers primarily to the girl's looming destiny, the reference to a more collective and ever-impending death is nonetheless inevitable, with the paronomasia 'evento-vento' signalling the fatefully overlap between collective and individual destiny.

In light of this, we can read the 'deserto' from *I lamenti, II* as 'imposed' by a wind which is expressly that of war, of the utmost event. In so doing, we begin to lay bare an interdependence – that between 'deserto' and war – which is verifiable by means of other relevant cross-references. The sonnet *1944*, first published on *La Fiera Letteraria* in 1947, is a useful example. As Caproni states in an interview to *Antologia*, the poem is roughly based on the motif of the executions narrated in *Il labirinto*.[132] Here, 'deserto' is subtly interwoven with the newspaper which brings the news of war, an element which is to be, from now on, always ill-fatedly connoted in Caproni's poetry:[133]

> […] Sulla faccia
> punge già il foglio del primo giornale
> col suo afrore di piombo – immensa un'acqua
> passa deserta nel sangue a chi muove
> a un muro, e già a una scarica una latta
> ha un sussulto fra i cocci. O amore, amore
> che disastro è nell'alba! […]
> (*OV* 126)

[131] Ibid., pp. 158-159.
[132] See *OV*, 1140.
[133] In this poem the newspaper, though negatively connoted, does not allude explicitly to war. The tie is, nonetheless, visible elsewhere in the collection (Cf. *Strascico*, ll. 12-14: 'Un madore / di brina, ora il giornale dove i primi / crimini urlano copre, e il tuo cuore'; *Le biciclette,* VI, ll. 6-11, where the newspaper brings the news of the outbreak of war: 'E certo è Alcina / morta, se il cuore balza ai solitari / passeggeri, cui lungo la banchina / dove appena scesi, dal giornale / umido ancora di guazza esce il grido / ch'è scoppiata la guerra'). See also, very iconically, *Scalo dei fiorentini* from *Congedo*, ll. 63-67: 'Passava un carabiniere. / Io guardavo per terra. / Una buccia. Un giornale / ingiallito. Una parola / già logora: "…La guerra…"'; and *Dopo la notizia* in *Muro*, ll. 1-3: 'Il vento…È rimasto il vento. Un vento lasco, raso terra, e il foglio / (*quel* foglio di giornale) […]').

We can note a masterfully consummate relation between 'primo giornale' and 'acqua deserta', between the presence of war and its dreadful effects. It is a relation which hinges upon the polysemy of the word 'piombo', which here denotes not only the main component of type metals, with which newspapers are printed, but also the material of the bullets (here implied by the 'scarica' of the execution).

Morevoer, we can observe how the image of 'immensa un'acqua / passa deserta nel sangue' recalls the final line of *Il labirinto* in which 'le ossa rimangono prosciugate e aride e il sangue diventa una polvere che se ne va'. The short-circuit generated in *1944* by the juxtaposition between 'acqua' and 'deserta' tallies with the explicit description, in *Il labirinto*, of the 'drying up' of the vital fluids of the condemned person's life. Ultimately, both the prose excerpt and the poem provide a very expressionistic depiction of the fading away of the condemned person's life.

Thus, we can argue that through the interaction with two lexical elements – 'vento' and 'giornale' – whose semantic load is overly negative, the image of 'deserto' comes to take on ominous undertones. Moreover, precisely because both 'vento' and 'giornale' are greatly embedded in a specific historical context, 'deserto' too comes to be historically bound to the Second World War, emerging, once again, as a negatively connoted figure of the present.

As seen with regard to the mature poetry, to interpret the image as synchronous with its time calls for a similar interpretation of the dimension of solitude which the image subsumes. Though at times in a subtler way than in the mature poetry, the occurrences so far considered do confirm the inextricable nexus between 'deserto' and solitude. Perhaps we can take advantage of the question Caproni himself poses in the second lament to develop further our discussion: with 'quale deserto' are we here dealing? What is the nature of the solitude elicited by 'deserto' at the time of *Passaggio d'Enea*? Against the backdrop of 'anni di bianca e quasi forsennata disperazione', this condition of solitude finds its poetic embodiment in the mythical figure of Aeneas, to whose loneliness the poet compares his own:[134]

Nel pulsare del tuo Enea
solo nella catastrofe,
[…] che scampo
può mai esserti il mare (la falena

[134] Endnote to *Il 'Terzo libro' e altre cose* [1968], in *OV*, p. 1309.

verde dei fari bianchi) se con lui
senti di soprassalto che nel punto,
d'estrema solitudine, sei giunto
più esatto e incerto dei nostri anni bui?
(*OV* 155-156)

Not only do these lines establish an identity between the condition of the Virgilian hero and that of the io ('tuo Enea'); the state of 'extreme solitude' is also subsequently extended to a whole collectivity, as the bleak years are said to be 'nostri'. Aeneas's condition can thus personify the solitude of the io insofar as this very solitude is conceived as that of an entire generation:

> In quel povero Enea vidi chiaro il simbolo dell'uomo della mia generazione, solo in piena guerra a cercar di sostenere sulle spalle un passato (una tradizione) crollante da tutte le parti, e a cercar di portare a salvamento un futuro ancora così incerto da non reggersi ritto, più bisognoso di guida che capace di far guida.[135]

In the antithesis which describes Aneas' solitude as 'esatta' as well as 'incerta', we can read despair for an unavoidable present condition (the exactness of the present solitude) as well as disconcerting uncertainty about an unforeseeable future. In comparison with the solitude experienced by the io within mass society, where depersonalisation jeopardises the subjectivity of man – that is, of every man –, the solitude at stake at the time of *Passaggio* clearly relates to a more determined group, namely that generation of men whose destiny is taken up entirely by war, by the 'evento' *par excellence*.[136]

To conclude our scrutiny dedicated to the image of 'deserto' in the context of war, we shall briefly dwell on *I Lamenti, I*, a sonnet inspired by the sight of partisans' dead bodies.[137] Here 'deserto' plays on the polysemic value of the word 'gola', thus describing not only a

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[135] Caproni's words are quoted from Franco Contorbia, 'Caproni in piazza Bandiera', in *Per Giorgio Caproni*, ed. by Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino p. 220. Contorbia's essay is useful for reconstructing the salient phases of Caproni's personal interpretation of the myth of Aeneas as it comes out from the many articles the poet published on the subject over more than a decade. See also *IA*, p. 95: 'Il mio Enea è quello del monumentino di Piazza Bandiera, a Genova: la piazza più bombardata. Ho visto in lui l'immagine dell'uomo di oggi (o meglio degli anni Cinquanta) solo a dover sostenere un passato decrepito e un avvenire ancora incerto sulle proprie gambe'.

[136] Drawing a parallel between the atmosphere of *Gli anni tedeschi* and that of *Acciaio* (a section from *Muro* which re-evokes loosely the atrocities of the partisan war), Caproni explains that 'mentre prima [*Gli anni tedeschi*] si trattava di una guerra, diciamo così, determinata tra un gruppo italiani contro tedeschi, [...] in quest'altra [*Acciaio*] è l'idea della guerra proprio come guerra, in certo senso un'idea universale, non più particolare, legata ai particolari eventi', in *Era così bello parlare*, pp. 172-173. For a comparison between the two sections see Surdich, *Le idee e la poesia*, pp. 149-179.

[137] 'Il primo [sonnet] racconta proprio l'effetto che mi fece vedere questi cadaveri nell'obitorio, i primi partigiani caduti in combattimento', Caproni clarifies in *Era così belo parlare*, p. 162.

landscape detail, but also depicting a stark picture where the lack of voice of the dead tells of lives ended untimely ('gole-deserte'; 'parole-morte'). The dead are 'abbandonati' to the desert of death, as the paronomasia 'deserte-morte' seems to suggest:

> Ahi i nomi per l'eterno abbandonati
> sui sassi. Quale voce, quale cuore
> è negli empiti lunghi – nei velati
> soprassalti dei cani? Dalle gole
> deserte, sugli spalti dilavati
> dagli anni, un soffio tronca le parole
> morte […]
> (*OV* 115)

This sonnet proves instrumental in bringing together the main concerns elicited by the image of 'deserto' within this phase of Caproni's poetry. In order to cast light on the inauspicious relation between the image and war, we began our examination by taking advantage of the tie that binds wind and war (the equation of 'vento' with 'evento'), suggesting that the 'deserto' from *I lamenti, II* could be seen to have been literally imposed by the wind of war. In *I lamenti, I* the juxtaposition of 'gole deserte' and 'soffio' almost takes us back to our starting point, for the 'soffio' which blows from the 'gole deserte' provides another iconic image of the connection between the sinister wind of war and 'deserto'. More significantly, if we look closely at both the sonnets, we notice that the two occurrences of 'deserto' participate in the representation of a scene which is enveloped in a deadly silencing of the voice. We can thus argue that the incommunicability which informs 'deserto' in the mature poetry can be seen as developing from this earlier phase of silenced voices. Indeed, what catches the eye is the proximity between "M'avete fucilato / la bocca" (*Il murato*), and both 'la voce chi l'ha soffocata o amore / morto' (*I lamenti*, *I*) and 'le parole morte' (*I lamenti*, *II*).

As for the dominant overtone intimated by 'deserto' – that of solitude –, we have drawn attention to a similar process of filiation, suggesting that the solitude endured by man within mass society can be seen to be preceded by that suffered by a generation of men 'nata nella guerra e quasi interamente coperta – *per* la guerra – dai muraglioni ciechi della dittatura'.[138] Measured against the one from the mature poetry, the solitude in this earlier phase is clearly

[138] See endnote to *Il 'Terzo libro' e altre cose*, in *OV*, p. 1309. Needless to say, 'nata nella guerra' because these men were born during World War I.

connoted as being more circumstantial. This seems to be substantiated by the fact that, unlike the pronounced abstraction of the later collections, where the 'morte della distinzione' intimated the disappearance of spatio-temporal referents, the space of 'deserto' from *Passaggio* can be more readily associated with a real geographical referent, be it that of the stony inland Liguria where Caproni fought during the Resistance or of 'marciapiedi deserti' of the urban Genova (*Stanze della funicolare*, *Versi*, stanza II, l. 10).[139]

Ultimately, through the inspection of the function of 'deserto' in this earlier stage of Caproni's poetry, there begins to emerge that residual essence which we have suggested is inherent in this image. However differently connoted, both the overtone of solitude and of incommunicability intimated by 'deserto' in the mature poetry seem to find an antecedent in that of the 40s and 50s. At the same time however, these are also the years in which Caproni attempts to give artistic shape to what is, together with war, the most important episode of his biography: the loss of Olga. It is this event which will provide the focus for our final section on the potential archetypal nature of the image of 'deserto'.

3.11) 'Nel deserto della notte'. The desert and Olga

Some of the poems we have thus far surveyed display a seemingly curious coexistence, the word 'deserto' being placed in close proximity to some belonging to the semantic field of coldness: 'gelo' and 'brina'. We have encountered this coexistence in *Alba*, where all the three elements occur ('Qua/ dove il marmo nel sangue è gelo […] ora nell'ermo / rumore oltre la brina io quale tram / odo che apre e richiude in eterno / le deserte sue porte?') and *Il murato*. Similar patterns also typify the remaining occurrences of 'deserto' in *Passaggio* ('A un sonno / plumbeo più che millenni, immenso muore / nel deserto di brina un passo […]', *XI, I lamenti*, ll. 5-7; 'è d'improvviso / l'alba che sa di rifresco dai cocci / e dai rifiuti gelidi, e sul viso / scopre pei finestrini umidi un'urbe / cui i marciapiedi deserti […]', *Versi*, *Stanze della funicolare*, ll. 6-10). There is no denying that the elementary reason behind this tendency is poetry's own nature as a 'complexly constructed meaning'. According to Yury Lotman, in fact, 'words, sentences, and utterances, which in the grammatical structure are found in different positions which are devoid of similar characteristics, and, consequently, are non-comparable, prove in the artistic structure to be in positions of identity and antithesis

[139] As we have alluded to earlier in the chapter, the high level of abstraction and the lack of clear spatio-temporal referents of the text such as *Lasciando Loco* leads us to think that, despite the reference to Loco di Rovegno, *Loco* may stand for an undefined 'locus', for any kind of place. This is a doubt which is less likely to cross our mind regarding the poems of *Il passaggio* (see, for instance, *Litania*: 'Genova dell'entroterra, / *sassi rossi, la guerra*', ll. 143-44).

and, consequently, comparable and contrastable. This reveals in them unexpected new semantic content impossible outside of poetry'.[140] However, our contention is that there is a more cogent explanation for the proximity between 'gelo' (and kindred terms like 'brina') and 'deserto', one that has at its heart the episode of Olga's death. While laying this connection bare, we shall also illustrate in what way this episode may be considered as the point of departure of the relation between 'deserto' and solitude.

The word 'gelo' brings us back, inevitably, to *Gelo*, which Caproni begins to write in 1948.[141] This text, which has been already taken into account numerous times in the previous chapters, does not contain any explicit reference to 'deserto' (though in one of the most dramatic scenes of the short story, Olga is described as having a 'bocca inaridita', thus loosely recalling the line 'un'acqua passa / deserta nel sangue' from *1944*, the excerpt 'le ossa rimangono prosciugate e aride, e il sangue diventa una polvere che se ne va' from *il labirinto*, as well as the relation between 'bocca fucilata' and 'deserto' from *Il murato*).[142] But prose is not the only means through which Caproni attempts, in those years, to engage on an artistic level with the tragic event. 'Deserto' significantly reappears in a seminal unpublished text entitled *La porta*, which is the poetic transposition of the episode narrated in *Gelo*. The text was most likely drafted between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, and the word 'deserto' features prominently both in the initial and final draft.[143] The first part of the final draft reads as follows:

Io di notte quali colpi
odo penetrantemente
nel mio petto ostinati,
mentre preme la mia mente
come un monte lo sgomento
di tanti anni affollati?

Nel deserto della notte
che dilava ogni facciata
muta e ogni imposta chiusa,
ah so bene che arrossata

[140] Lotman, *Analysis of the poetic text*, p. 35.
[141] See *Racconti*, p. 397.
[142] Ibid., p. 79.
[143] Cf. *OV*, pp. 1129-30 and *Il tremito nel vetro*, pp. 65-71 and 76-77 (the excerpt quoted here is taken from the latter). Zuliani suggests that the fact itself that the poem was never published is a sign of 'una impossibilità di fare poesia su un tema troppo personale e doloroso', Ibid.

nocca disperatamente
odo a una porta chiusa!

Odo in una lontananza
quale solo può la luna
fingere, sul selciato
che il silenzio bianco aduna
delle stelle cui la brina
l'occhio pure ha ghiacciato
[…]
dove un passo ancora dura
sulle selci a fare immenso
l'uomo che solitario

cresce mentre così poco
peso ha nell'accesa folla
quando il giorno risplende;
[…]

The motif of the 'colpi' is to be traced back to the 'oscuri colpi' with which *Gelo* opens the recollection of the tragic event. Whereas in the poem the referent of 'colpi' oscillates from the io's heartbeat to the knocks at his bedroom door, in the narrative they are those of the steps of a female character, Elisa, who is approaching the protagonist's bedroom. The girl urges Mariano – the male protagonist and first-person narrator – to rush towards Olga's bedroom.[144] As for *La porta*, the first strophe stages a condition of nocturnal restlessness which unsettles the io (note the question posed), while the second introduces a recollection in response to the question posed (the deductive 'Ah so bene'). Before considering more closely the function of 'deserto', it may be useful to quote an extract from *Gelo* so as to elucidate some elliptical passages of the poem:

> Così ogni notte a un certo punto, fossero pure sonate le due come nella notte ultima in cui avevo udito Elisa salire per le scale (anzi proprio in quell'ora quando la mente, tornata lucida, aveva del tutto dissipato l'allegria passeggera del vino), io folto di cattivi presentimenti, dovevo scendere dal letto per ritrovarmi, nel cristallino gelo

[144] 'Elisa era venuta a chiamarmi alle due di notte. Ero del tutto sveglio, allorché udendo gli oscuri colpi dei suoi passi su per la scala di legno, ancor prima che le sue nocche avessero raggiunto la porta avevo detto: "Vengo!", *Gelo*, in *Racconti*, p. 68.

> dell'aria, sulla mulatteria che m'avvicinava alla casa di Olga. Né davvero so ridire l'ansia con cui percorrevo quel breve tratto sassoso, tra il sibilo pungente degli ortotteri e il suono asciutto delle stoppie di mèliga, fino a ritrovarmi sulla piana aperta dove di solito sostavo per frenare, nel gelo luminescente intorno alla casa senza più colori, i battiti del cuore.
> Dolce compagna la luna, sebbene tanto lontana, ora perché mai la luna, mentr'ero certo che Olga moriva, grondava invece in me una così profonda quiete? [145]

The intertextuality between the two texts is palpable. The excerpt also provides an exact temporal reference (two o'clock in the morning) which must be borne in mind. On the whole, the prose passage provides important cues for the clarification of the role of 'deserto' in *La porta*. In view of the description from *Gelo* we can in fact assert that the second strophe of the poem brings back the memory of those nights in which the io, headed to Olga's house, would find himself in the 'cristallino gelo dell'aria'. In the poem the two distinct temporal references (the night in which the recollection takes place and the recollected ones) are entwined in such a way that it is not easy to claim to which one that 'deserto della notte' refers: is it the unsettled night of the first strophe, where the io shows his apprehensiveness, or the remote one ('odo in una lontananza') of the recollection? It is through recourse to *Gelo* that we are able to observe the derivation of 'deserto della notte / che dilava ogni facciata muta / e ogni imposta chiusa' from the image of a nocturnal 'gelo luminescente intorno alle case senza più colori.' Moreover, what emerges as crystal-clear, in the poem, is the correspondence between 'deserto della notte' and 'uomo solitario'. Indeed, within the history of Caproni's poetry, we seem to touch here the origin of the nexus which has accompanied the present analysis throughout, for 'deserto' elicits a specific sensation of solitude which is firmly anchored to the remembrance of Olga.

In another unpublished poem based on the same tragic matter (a poem provisionally entitled *Frammento* and dated 1953), the nexus recurs once again, significantly placed within the same coordinates as *Gelo* (it is two o'clock in the morning and the moon is shining). The text is part of a series of unpublished poems which Zuliani calls 'notturni', in which the recurring *topos* of 'chi nella notte abita solo' provides a 'trasparente immagine di Caproni mentre, come di consueto, la poesia impegna le sue ore notturne'[146]:

> ……..
> …. Ed io che nella notte abito solo
> […]

[145] Ibid., pp. 69-70.
[146] See *OV*, pp. 1321-1330. Cf. *A me*, one of Caproni's unpublished poems: 'Forse so cosa sia / in cielo (soli) vivere: / dev'essere come scrivere / (la notte) una poesia', Ibid., p. 987.

Se, d'improvviso, in un nero portone
Sento una chiave che fruga, di poi
Un passo che s'estingue mentre suona
l'orologio le due, oh nell'insonnia
che spinta, e che altra Genova di mare
e di salsedine umida, bagna
come il lubrico selciato dei vichi
a piombo le mie vene! A una campagna
D'alghe e di jodio, gelosa di lumi
Pallidi e panni penduli
[...] una luna
Fredda come una lira sulla tempia
D'alluminio, che luce spande viva
E allucinante, nel suo bianco amianto
Che il deserto ricorda! In un ossario
muto […]
(*OV* 1327-28)

In a manner almost identical to *La porta*, *Frammento* shows very clearly how an initial condition of solitude merges, through the aid of the presence of the moon, with the accurate recollection or thought of the night in which Olga died ('mentre suona / l'orologio le due'), from which Caproni borrows – if we consider *Gelo* as the hypotext – the motif of the steps at night-time. Within the development of the poem, the presence of a moon that is said to be as cold as aluminium 'ricorda' the presence of 'deserto'. But what 'deserto'? It is precisely the 'deserto della notte' mentioned in *La porta*, recalling a sensation of solitude which, readable between the lines of *Gelo*, refers to that particular one experienced in connection with Olga's death.

Thus, through the parallel reading of *La porta* and *Frammento* we are able to lay bare the tie which binds the image of 'deserto' to an archetypal sensation of solitude. Moreover, the comparison of the two poems brings to the fore the concurrence of 'deserto' and those lexical elements belonging to the semantic field of coldness ('brina' and 'ghiacciato' in *La porta*; 'fredda' and, to an extent, 'alluminio', in *Frammento*), thus recalling once again the frosty atmosphere of *Gelo*. In doing so, there emerges another primary relation, namely that

between 'deserto' and an imagery which, originally employed in relation to the experience of grief, is to persist, residually, in Caproni's subsequent poetry.

About *Il murato*, Sinfonico argues that 'il deserto viene ribaltato nel suo opposto: non il luogo del caldo, dei miraggi, bensì il "ghiacciaio".[147] We contend that it is by pinpointing this primary tie which binds 'deserto' to 'gelo' that we better comprehend the returning convergence of these terms. If we then consider that the whiff of speechlessness implied in both *La porta* (cf. 'facciata muta' and 'silenzio bianco') and *Frammento* (cf. 'ossario / muto') can be seen to anticipate both the deadly silent desert of *Passaggio* and the desert of incommunicability sweeping through the mature poetry, the reasons for considering this as an image with an enduring residual value become well-grounded.

In conclusion, inasmuch as it contains, *in nuce*, the essential overtones which are to develop at later poetic stages, the image of 'deserto' as it emerges in relation to the experience of grief proves archetypal. The trajectory of 'derealizzazione' indicated by Zuliani (whereby the obliteration of explicit references to Olga results in the transfiguration and decontextualisation of themes and motifs of the earlier collections) appears now coherently reversed in our retrospective itinerary: from the metaphysical and global 'deserto' of *Muro*, going through the historical and geographically more connoted one from *Passaggio*, to the night-time 'deserto' of the narrative and poetic accounts of Olga's death.

3.12) Conclusion

Great attention has been initially dedicated to the many overtones with which the image of 'deserto' is charged in Caproni's mature poetry, framing the analysis in the sociocultural context of mass society. We have taken the resonance that the element gains in this phase of Caproni's poetry as a sort of pretext to pose an implicit question which we can now explicitly rephrase: to what extent is 'deserto' embedded in the rest of his poetry? We have thus seen how the connotations of solitude and incommunicability intimated by the image in the mature poetry can be traced further back. From the solitude of man within mass society, going through that suffered by a generation of men during wartime (and embodied in the figure of Aeneas), to the more individually connoted sensation of solitude experienced by the io in relation to Olga's death, the image of 'deserto' shows its rootedness in Caproni's imagery. Caproni's concern with the image in his mature poetry does not arise from nowhere. It is to an early stage of his work that the overall negative connotation taken up by

[147] Sinfonico, *Deserto. Storia di un'immagine nella poesia di Caproni*, p. 27.

‘deserto’ needs be traced back. It is in connection with Olga’s death that ‘deserto’ first arises as an image of solitude, and its subsequent manifestations can be thus seen as residual of the experience of grief. Zuliani maintains that the accounts of the young woman’s death ‘sono i luoghi dove, oltre l’alba, sono riunite anche le immagini notturne del *Passaggio d'Enea*: l’immenso plenilunio, i sassi, la brina e il ghiaccio, i passi che risuonano nel buio, i treni in distanza, il latrato dei cani’.[148] We argue that ‘deserto’ too needs to be added to this inventory, especially considering the resonance this image is to acquire in the ensuing poetry, going well beyond *Passaggio*. It is at this early stage of Caproni’s poetry that the image undertakes a semantic journey which will subsequently lend it to intimate, first, the solitude of a generation of men during the havoc of war; second, that of the man bereft of subjectivity within mass society.

[148] Zuliani, *Il tremito nel vetro*, p. 115.

CHAPTER IV

A new relation between the io and time and space

Before setting out the objectives of this new chapter, let us summarise briefly some of the key points of the present analysis. By delving into the impact that two essential biographical experiences such as imprisonment and grief have had on Sereni's and Caproni's work, respectively, we have identified, in chapter 2, a posthumous phase of their poetry which precedes the later and more critically acknowledged posthumous phase. Due to the far-reaching poetic consequences of these experiences, we have sought to identify a line which separates a 'before' – taking the form of an 'end' – and an 'after', a line along which there occurs a 'caesura' which makes their poetry readable, on several levels, as posthumous. We have thus placed some of the thematic and formal concerns of the poetry which flanks and follows these experiences (which we have also named, using a definition of Derrida's, 'moments henceforth') within the 'end'-'after' framework of our study. Subsequently, we have provided, in chapter 3, an insight into the residual value of two poetic images, namely 'ceneri' and 'deserto', in Sereni and Caproni, respectively. In exploring the recurrence of these images, as well as the relevant functions they acquire chiefly in the mature poetry, we have outlined their possible history, arguing that the inherent negativity with which they are laden stems from their being related to the caesura described in chapter 2.

To a certain degree, chapter 3 puts forward a sort of connecting link between the posthumous phase which we have identified and discussed, and the second posthumous phase, whose analysis constitutes the core of this new chapter. Critics have frequently noted how, in the poetry of Sereni and Caproni, the posthumous stance assumed by the io in this second phase is particularly conspicuous in texts where the relation between the io and his *hic et nunc* seems to be compromised.[1] Indeed, with increasing frequency in Sereni's and Caproni's mature poetry the spatio-temporal coordinates designate a grid which the io finds difficult to inhabit, and often his voice would appear to come from a place which is located outside, if not beyond, reality (see, for instance, Sereni's *Altro posto di lavoro* from Stella, and Caproni's *Quattro appunti*, from *Res amissa*). Partially drawing on this tendency within existing criticism, this chapter shall also concentrate on the io's 'postura', paying greater attention to how the subject experiences and relates to space and time.[2] However, this focus

[1] See 1.2 in the present study.
[2] I borrow the term 'postura' from Damiano Frasca, 'Declinazioni dell'io da Mario Luzi ad Amelia Rosselli', in *Costruzioni e decostruzioni dell'io Lirico nella poesia italiana da Soffici a Sanguineti*, edited by Damiano

will be mantained by drawing a subtle and yet fundamental distinction concerning the function performed by time in Sereni and by space in Caproni. We are aware of the inextricable tie between the two coordinates; we do not intend, in fact, to dispense with space while analysing time in Sereni's poetry, nor with time while dealing with space in Caproni's.[3] Nevertheless, we argue that just as Sereni's poetry appears to have a prominent temporal essence, so a spatial quality seems to relate best to Caproni's. Within the existing scholarship, Stefano Colangelo's study of the io in 20th century Italian poetry implies a distinction such as this. Classifying the poetic subject according to the relation he/she establishes with space, time or language, Colangelo examines Sereni's io through his relation with the category of time, and Caproni's through his relation with that of space.[4] Colangelo examines specific collections of poetry by Sereni and Caproni (*Diario d'Algeria* and *Conte*, respectively). The present study, however, will extend the exploration of time and space into other phases of their poetry. Our main objective is to outline a trajectory which helps us understand how, in the wake of the caesura analysed in chapter 2, time and space come to be experienced posthumously by the io. For this reason, we shall also take into account some earlier works, where time and space-related concerns are more positively connoted.

For the present study as a whole, such a distinction bears two significant implications. On the one hand, it allows us to establish a line of continuity with the previous chapter, in that, just as the image of 'ceneri' and the imagery of 'spegnimento' which abound in Sereni's poetry are easily read from a temporal viewpoint, so the spatial essence of Caproni's poetry is more intuitively associated with the image of 'deserto'. On the other hand, in ascertaining to what extent Sereni's poetry is imbued with temporal nuances and Caproni's is 'malata di spazio' (to use the poet's own words, though taken slightly out of context), this distinction enables us to cast light on the different ways which Sereni and Caproni have of addressing the same issue, namely that of the uninhabitability of the here and now.[5]

Frasca, Caroline Lüderssen and Christine Ott (Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2015), pp. 101-117. The term has also been used by Grignani, who oscillates between the use of 'posizione' and 'postura', *La costanza*, pp. 109-132.

[3] See, for instance, Giorgio Agamben's *Infanzia e storia*, p. 96: 'Poiché la mente umana ha l'esperienza del tempo ma non ne ha la rappresentazione, essa si rappresenta necessariamente il tempo attraverso immagini spaziali'. See also Bakhtin's defintion of 'chronotope': 'we will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature', in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

[4] Colangelo, *Il soggetto*, pp. 1-21.

[5] 'Ora di Livorno ho un'immagine che appartiene alla geografia e alla mitologia della mia infanzia. […] esisterà sempre, finché esisto io, questa città malate di spazio nella mia mente […]', Caproni, *IA*, pp.33-34.

Time and space – Part I. Sereni

We have already indicated how time is ubiquitously involved in Sereni's poetry. Most of the themes analysed at length by critics – those of the dream, lateness, memory and the idea of return – are by their nature framed by time. Indeed, it seems possible to concur wholeheartedly with Stefano Cipriani's viewpoint when he states that 'tutto in Sereni riconduce ad una speculazione sul tempo'.[6] Alongside Cipriani's study of Sereni's prose, other significant contributions regarding the relevance of time to Sereni's *oeuvre* are: Lanfranco Caretti's *Il perpetuo presente di Sereni*; Laura Barile's *Il passato che non passa* (above all, the final chapter, *Il passato che non passa: storia e memoria*); *Tempo e memoria in Sereni* by Mengaldo, who contends that Sereni's poetry 'brulica di temi o parole-temi che possono considerarsi equivalenti o metafore o armonici spaziali di fenomeni temporali, e soprattutto memoriali.'[7] With the exception of Caretti, the themes of memory and return constitute the point of departure of all these studies. In particular, Barile and Cipriani lay great stress on how, in Sereni's mature poetry, these two thematic strands contribute to the reassessment of the past. The past thus comes to be understood by Sereni as a temporal dimension in which the io can discover a 'libero e attivo potenziale di futuro'.[8] Rather than considering the future as a collateral aspect in subordinate relation to memory and the idea of return, the present study will explore the relation between the io and the future as it develops along the trajectory of Sereni's poetry taken as a whole. Analysing the different ways in which the io relates to the future, we will bring to light the gradual emergence of a posthumous relation between the io and time, with the future turning soon from a potentially inhabitable and available temporal dimension to an uninhabitable and unavailable one.

We shall begin by assessing the significance of the idea of waiting in *Frontiera*. Its centrality within Sereni's earlier poetry has been pointed out by Ramat, according to whom 'assenza attesa e memoria', the three thematic nuclei of Ermetismo, are amalgamated, in Sereni, in a way which differs from that of the hermetic poets. Building on Ramat's observations, we shall take the discussion on the idea of waiting further, introducing a distinction drawn by the German historian Reinhard Koselleck – one between 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation'. It is through these two categories that we shall initially follow the development of the relation between the io and the future. It will soon

[6] Cipriani, *Il 'libro' della prosa*, p. 13.
[7] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 47.
[8] See Barile, *Il passato che non passa*, p. 180.

become clear how, along the trajectory from *Frontiera* to *Stella*, the idea of waiting takes on more negative connotations, and we will further expand on this tendency by drawing on some insightful observations culled from Ginevra Bompiani's *L'attesa*.

It is within this perspective that we too shall dwell on the use of memory. In effect, from *Strumenti* on, the theme of memory becomes more pervasive, lending an innovative and more complex dimension to Sereni's poetry which contributes to shaping a new relation between the io and time. Through recourse to some of Paul Ricoeur's theses on the multi-layered temporality of memory we shall evaluate how its normal past temporality may interlace with the future, giving rise to the possibility of interpreting the past in a new and different light. However, contrarily to Barile and Cipriani, we will argue that the burden of the past weighs too heavily on the Serenian io, who can read the past only through the lenses of negative categories such as 'guilt' and 'debt'. As a result, the io becomes incapable of envisaging an inhabitable future in which he can exert his agency. Finally, we shall explore the temporal essence of 'gioia' and 'festa', two thematic concerns which supposedly represent the only gateways to a positive experience of time.

4.1) *Frontiera* and the horizon of expectation

In the final pages of *Il sabato tedesco*, a prose piece published in 1980, the narrator/protagonist of the story is reproached by an off-screen voice. The rebuke concerns a specific attitude of the io:

> 'Sei ridotto male', interviene a questo punto la voce fuori campo di un qualche Agostino laico 'sei ridotto male tu che a sbalzi e singhiozzo passi la vita in attesa di quegli stati certamente precari e di quei salti di qualità che non sono affatto tali, visto che lasciano le cose come stanno; […] e invece sbandi di giorno in giorno […] affondi nell'indifferenza e addirittura in una cecità agghiacciante.[9]

These words come to heighten the sense of impotence and immobility to which the narrator himself alludes earlier in the text.[10] Our aim is to trace the phenomenon of waiting back to its earlier occurrences in Sereni's *oeuvre*, so as to assess the changes to which this attitude is subject. As we shall see, the turning point is represented by the caesura we analysed in chapter 2, as it is between *Diario* and *Strumenti* that waiting acquires irreversibly negative connotations.

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[9] Sereni, *Il sabato tedesco*, in *PP*, p. 768.

[10] '*Ancora non le ho parlato di certe voci pausate e ritmiche che di tanto in tanto mi tirano via o con cui mi sforzo di inseguire brani del mio vissuto. Sono scappatoie alla fissità che da qualche tempo mi ha preso.*', Ibid. The italics are Sereni's.

We shall begin with a survey of some poems from *Frontiera*, where waiting emerges for the first time as a significant attribute of the io, but with noticeably different characteristics to *Il sabato tedesco*. Among the poems from Sereni's debut collection, we can single out *Terrazza*:

Improvvisa ci coglie la sera.
Più non sai
dove il lago finisca;
un murmure soltanto
sfiora la nostra vita
sotto una pensile terrazza.

Siamo tutti sospesi
a un tacito evento questa sera
entro un raggio di torpediniera
che ci scruta poi gira se ne va.
(*P* 32)

The text is emblematic of an underlying motif of *Frontiera*, according to which the io's attitude is openly dedicated to registering the surrounding reality.[11] The incipit opens with a scene of surprise, for the subject is caught by the sudden arrival of the evening. The actual description of the waiting remains outside the boundaries of the text, but it is nonetheless implied by the idea of surprise with which the text opens (and we will soon explore at greater length the vital relationship between waiting and surprise). A clear state of expectation is instead at the core of the second strophe, which hinges on the 'tacito evento', possibly corresponding to the brisk movement of the torpedo boat. We can thus conclude that in both strophes, waiting emerges as a fundamental psychological state, a predisposition of the io who thus projects himself towards the future. Before considering other texts from *Frontiera*, it is useful at this point to introduce two gnosiological categories which will be of significance for our analysis, namely those of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of

[11] On this phenomenological attitude of the io, framed within Sereni's prose and poetic production, see Andrea Cortellessa, 'La vita segreta delle cose: Sereni, la fenomenologia e "un certo Proust"', in *Il Verri*, 34 (2007), pp. 30-44. See, in particular, p. 39: 'la "strategia dell'attesa" di Sereni […] è una strategia della passività. Il soggetto si pone, si espone anzi, in una condizione di estrema attenzione; si lascia interrogare dagli oggetti; si fa ricettore *passivo*'. See also Fulvio Papi, 'La non-poetica di Vittorio Sereni', in *La parola incantata e altri saggi di filosofia dell'arte* (Milano: Guerini, 1992), pp. 83-185.

expectation', formulated by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck.[12] Primarily intended for 'the treatment of historical time', Koselleck recognises the inherent anthropological nature of such categories.[13] According to Koselleck, the space of experience bears a fundamental temporal relation with the past, whilst the horizon of expectation is related to the future. The former assembles past experiences 'into a totality, within which many layers of earlier times are simultaneously present'; on the other hand, the horizon of expectation 'is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen'.[14] However, despite the essential temporal difference between space and horizon – which we can plainly read as one between experience gained and yet to be gained – it is 'the tension between experience and expectation which, in ever-changing patterns, brings about new resolutions'. There thus emerges a dialectical relationship between experience and expectation, the friction between the two poles being fundamental to bringing about new experiences. One of the guises under which a new experience is bound to cross the horizon of expectation is surprise: 'when they are fulfilled, expectations that are founded upon experience may no longer involve any degree of surprise. Only the unexpected has the power to surprise, and this surprise involves a new experience. The penetration of the horizon of expectation, therefore, is creative of new experience'.[15] We can further enrich this theoretical framework by drawing on some observations by Ginevra Bompiani with regard to the interconnection between waiting and surprise. Just like Koselleck, Bompiani gives some useful insights into the experiential value of the notion of surprise, as she pinpoints, in modern literature, an important turning point marked by Surrealism. Bompiani conceives this watershed as a shift from one theoretical pairing, 'attesa e compimento', to another, 'attesa e sorpresa'. With the advent of Surrealism, the latter pairing replaces the former: 'la sorpresa diventa il punto di congiunzione fra lo spazio e il tempo surrealista, è la chiave dell'ispirazione poetica e l'accesso all'esperienza'.[16]

To what extent does all this help us read *Frontiera*? Inasmuch as he adopts a future-oriented attitude, this chapter argues that the io of *Frontiera* has at his disposal the possibility of building a horizon of expectation potentially open to surprise. We are not necessarily interested in the causal relationship between the horizon of expectation and surprise, nor in the number of times the io is positively struck by surprise. Sereni's poetry does not subscribe to the same tenets of Surrealism, and already in *Frontiera* any opening to positivity is

[12] Reinhardt Koselleck, '"Space of Experience" and "Horizon of Expectation": Two Historical Category', in *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Massachusetts: The MIT, 1985), pp. 267-288.
[13] Ibid., p. 270.
[14] Ibid., p.273.
[15] Ibid., p.275.
[16] Ginevra Bompiani, *L'attesa* (Milano: *et al.*/Edizioni, 2011), p. 8.

counterbalanced by the menace of its immediate closure. We are instead interested in the possibility of recognising the io as fundamentally predisposed towards a state of waiting, and consequentially, capable of engaging with a future temporality. Returning to *Terrazza*, we see that the poem is explicitly based on this predisposition towards waiting, since the 'noi' of the second strophe is clearly dependent ('sospesi', l. 6) on the happening of an imminent event. Moreover, as we have already indicated, the first strophe too bespeaks the implicit importance of waiting, since the sudden surprise described in the first line (note, together with 'improvvisa', the verb 'cogliere') involves the implicit presence of a horizon of expectation. The significance of both waiting and surprise is then proved by the simultaneous presence, in line 7, of what caused the initial surprise ('sera') and what waiting subsequently depends on ('tacito evento'). On a more general level, we can even conceive of the very physical space of *Terrazza* as a horizon of expectation, one which is shot through with the possibility of the happening of a future event. A similar mechanism is at work in other poems too. In *Nebbia*, for instance, an initial atmosphere of subdued expectation (elicited, once more, by the adjective 'sospeso') leads, at the closure of the poem, to an epiphany, as the sun appears:

> Qui il traffico oscilla
> Sospeso alla luce
> dei semafori quieti.
> […]
> S'illumina a uno svolto un effimero sole,
> Un cespo di mimose
> Nella bianchissima nebbia.
> (*P* 18)

Not unlike the physical place of *Terrazza*, we can regard the fog as a *Frontiera*, as the horizon of expectation which sets the scene for the occurrence of the event, here represented by the ephemeral flare of the sun/mimosa, an image which emerges as strongly reminiscent of Montale's *I limoni*.[17]

[17] Of course, we refer to the epiphanic appearences of the lemons at the close of the poem (ll. 43-49): 'Quando un giorno da un malchiuso portone / tra gli alberi di una corte /ci si mostrano i gialli dei limoni; / e il gelo del cuore si sfa, / e in petto scrosciano / le loro canzoni / le trombe d'oro della solarità', in *Tutte le poesie*, pp. 11-12.

Though from a slightly different perspective, Silvio Ramat too has read the idea of *Frontiera* as temporally connoted, regarding it as the line dividing future and past, the line past which the envisaged event becomes the remembered one:

> Il confine, la frontiera, è anche la linea immaginaria, però certa, oltre cui l'evento si perde […]; sicché su questa linea, ch'è pur linea di separazione fra l'attesa della cosa e virtuale memoria del suo passaggio consumato, s'accentra un'attenzione specifica, l'attenzione di Sereni'[18]

Recalling the tenets of the earlier poetics of the hermetics, Ramat argues that in *Frontiera* the waiting is subordinated to memory, thus also impying that the future temporality pertaining to the waiting matters mainly insofar as it produces memory:

> Sereni […] imposta il suo discorso fino dalla prima parola, dal primo segno immaginario, in una prospettiva nella quale ha valore e resiste soltanto ciò che, transitato, si configura in termini di memoria: ecco la sua concisa ma lampante diacronicità […]. Assenza e attesa, i punti essenziali nella trama teorico-inventiva del primo ermetismo, fluiscono per Sereni in funzione della memoria: *sono* funzioni della memoria.[19]

If one bears in mind the importance which memory goes on to acquire in Sereni's mature poetry, Ramat's observations are highly pertinent.[20] The reference to memory may seem to contradict what we have thus far argued regarding the future-oriented stance adopted by the io. Yet, in the more general context of Sereni's *oeuvre*, we argue that it is crucial to consider the inextricable sequentiality which, in *Frontiera*, ties waiting to memory: it is the waiting which engenders memory, and memory is consequential to the forming of a horizon of expectation through which the event is allowed to pass. This is visible in a poem such as *Le mani*, where memory is activated by the foreboding of a future loss:

> Queste tue mani a difesa di te:
> mi fanno sera sul viso.
> Quando lente le schiudi, là davanti
> la città è quell'arco di fuoco.
> Sul sonno futuro
> saranno persiane rigate di sole
> e avrò perso per sempre

[18] Silvio Ramat, *Storia della poesia italiana del Novecento*, p. 471.
[19] Ibid, p. 477.
[20] Cf. Section 4 of this chapter.

quel sapore di terra e di vento
quando le riprenderai.
(*P* 11)

We thus lay great stress on the fact that in *Frontiera* memory is still the end which is sought by dint of waiting. From *Strumenti* onwards, the temporal sequence is somehow reversed, and it is memory which is solicited to open up to the future. Within our theoretical framework, this implies a radical change of paradigm in the building of the horizon of expectation.

4.2) *Gli strumenti umani* and *Stella variabile*: the receding horizon of expectation

We will only briefly touch on *Diario* and the bearing which the imprisonment has on the way the io experiences time.[21] We have seen, in Chapter 2, how to be 'morto alla guerra e alla pace' (in *Non sa più nulla è alto sulle ali*) implies, among other things, a lack of agency, which results in an exclusion from both the present as the time of the history in the making, and the future, which stems from that very historical present. Within the enclosed space of the concentration camp, the horizon of expectation of the io recedes, for the present state of imprisonment demotes the io's attitude to a state of idle recollection of the past, as is noticeable in *Spesso per viottoli tortuosi*:

ma già un anno è passato,
è appena un sogno:
siamo tutti sommessi a ricordarlo.
(*P* 81)

A new horizon of expectation does come to the fore in S*trumenti*. The final line of *Via Scarlatti* – 'e qui ti aspetto' – is to be likened to the state of mind of the veteran, whose return from the imprisonment is, for obvious reasons, laden with psychological expectation, as was already manifest in *Il male d'Africa*, with the io being seized by 'un'ansia / una fretta d'arrivare' (ll. 51-52). Yet, one soon notices that the temporal conditions of waiting differ consistently from those of *Frontiera*, for the io's expectation does not point towards the

[21] For some focused observations into the temporality of *Diario* see Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp.37-62 and Laura Neri, 'Le forme del tempo in Diario d'Algeria', in *Un altro compleanno*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito pp. 115-127.

future, but rather towards the past. The return from imprisonment thus takes the form of a return to the geographical and poetic past of the io, to those places of *Frontiera* where the horizon of experience was initially formed. However, as we can read in *Ritorno*, through this return the io cannot but realise that a lacuna has now arisen between him and those places:

> Sul lago le vele facevano un bianco e compatto poema
> ma pari più non gli era il mio respiro
> e non era più un lago ma un attonito
> specchio di me una lacuna del cuore.
> (*P* 108)

The rationale behind the attempt to re-establish a somewhat harmonic relation with the past is the same that we have seen at work in *Ventisei*: the io aims to redeem a past which ended prematurely, providing it with a future which never had time to unfold. Sereni himself makes this clear:

> Il senso di una vicenda interrotta mi accompagnò per anni, fu la causa taciuta di certi guasti che si produssero in me. Un istinto incorreggibile mi indusse a riprodurre momenti, a reimmettermi in situazioni trascorse al fine di dar loro un seguito, sentirmi vivo rifugiandomi in quello dal buio della lontananza e della guerra. Era invece un disco rotto che s'impunta sulla propria incrinatura e oggi mi è facile dire che si trattava di un automatismo perverso, quanto meno deviante. Perché facilmente una forma di presunta fedeltà alla propria immaginazione si pietrifica nell'inerzia, in una stortura, in un vizio vero e proprio. Ne ebbi la prova al primo ritorno sul posto dopo quel lungo intervallo. E qui non posso non citare me stesso: *Sul lago le vele facevano [ecc.]*[22]

The inertia here cited clearly recalls that state of 'fissità' – mentioned in *Il sabato tedesco* – with which we began our analysis. Were we to seek, in *Strumenti***,** a poetic counterpart of this mood, we would undoubtedly find it in the 'noia' of *Le ceneri,* where hope (the psychological state corresponding to future expectation) is said to be vain, giving rise to a sterile temporal immobility. Whereas in *Frontiera* the io could still place trust in the coming about of surprise, now the waiting has turned into boredom. In order to shed some light on the vacuity of this new state of waiting, we can draw, once more, on Ginevra Bompiani's work:

[22] Sereni, *La tentazione della prosa*, p. 498.

> La noia è un'attesa senza fiducia. […] L'attesa del nostro tempo […] annuncia la caduta dell'attesa nella noia, l'impossibilità del compimento. […] Risorgendo dalle ceneri della noia, l'attesa non potrà più compiersi […] potrà soltanto essere sorpresa […].[23]

Once again, Bompiani's words highlight the necessity of surprise for any positive outcome of waiting. But if we now return to the parallel reading of *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino* which we conducted in the previous chapter, we note that the io can only be surprised by death. What is reborn from the ashes of boredom is, in fact, the posthumous io of *Le sei del mattino*. We can thus maintain that the only horizon of expectation available to the subject is one which constructs the future as posthumous. It is a tendency which is to be further exacerbated in *Stella*, in which, according to Mengaldo, Sereni compounds 'quegli aspetti negativi o propriamente nulli del decorso temporale e del suo riflesso psichico che già gli SU avevano potentemente enucleato'.[24]

A poem like *Martellata lentezza* helps us ascertain the implication of Mengaldo's words for the relation between the io and the future which is at heart of the present discussion. Earlier in the chapter we have put emphasis on how, in *Frontiera*, the io's proclivity for reaching out to the future was tied to the expectation of an impending event. This predisposition could take the guises of different psychological states, all of which inherently dependent on the future (suspension, waiting, foreboding). In *Martellata lentezza* these temporal premises are reversed altogether, as the event comes to be presented as almost already experienced:

> A cose fatte pare
> di averlo saputo prima
> averlo vissuto già
> l'evento
> mentre ti precipitava addosso
> quei tonfi da conto alla rovescia
> quei clamori
> esplosi nelle caverne del sangue.
> […]
> (*P 243)*

[23] Bompiani, pp. 36-37.
[24] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 60.

Undoubtedly, here, the forceful register ('precipitava'; 'tonfi'; 'clamori esplosi') calls attention to the intensity which accompanies the approaching of the event. Nevertheless, the io observes it from a posthumous standpoint, as he locates himself 'oltre' the event, just as Caproni's io places himself, in *Res amissa*, 'oltre la morte'.[25] Waiting itself thus comes to be demoted, as it no longer matters for what it can herald, but only in terms of what it has not brought about. If, in *Frontiera*, the event was what set the wheels of expectation in motion, here the event is experienced posthumously, and consequently deprived of its coefficient of surprise.

One of the major consequences produced by this negative relation between the io and time regards the way in which the future is envisaged. We will look at this facet of Sereni's mature poetry more at length in the next sections. For now, we shall simply advance some preliminary observations. If we take a panoramic look at both *Strumenti* and *Stella***,** we note that the receding of the horizon of expectation ties in with the impossibility for the io of foreseeing a habitable future. The io is often excluded from the future, and on many occasions this exclusion is staged via an antagonism with future generations. A perfect case in point of this tendency is found in *Metropoli*, from *Strumenti*, where the opposition between 'i dottorini di Oxford' and 'il vecchio fighter' resolves into the chasm between those for whom the world is destined and those who, like the old fighter (with whom the io identifies himself), are excluded from the future.

The spatial image of the metropolis thus proves to be one of those 'parole-temi' which we can regard, after Mengaldo, as 'equivalenti o metafore o armonici spaziali di fenomeni temporali'**:**

Altri poi vengono: altri, di altro tipo.
[…]
dottorini di Oxford.

Guarda invece il vecchio fighter sul quadrato
[…]
la finta saputa a memoria
la danza in scioltezza che gli dura col fiato
purché resti dinamite da spendere

[25] Cf. *Quattro appunti, 2.*: 'Sono già oltre la morte. // Oltre l'oltre. // Già oltre / (in queste mie estreme ore corte) // l'oltre dell'oltremorte'.

ma sapere che è a vuoto, che ogni volta la posta
non è già più la stessa
e allora il gioco non ci riguarda più,
le città etichette di valigie fiammelle di necropoli.
(*P* 178)

Falling into the same category is the distinction which appears in the prose piece *L'Opzione*, where the portrait of the io is contrasted with that of the 'aristocrati', whose strongly future-oriented posture and capability of always being a step ahead of the rest inevitably clashes with the proverbial lateness of the Serenian io:

> Hanno la vocazione del futuro, qualche volta può parere snobismo, uno snobismo del futuro […] Loro, gli aristocrati, sempre un passo avanti, sempre in anticipo di qualche attimo o di qualche anno.[26]

Luca Lenzini justly notes that what lies at the root of this contrast is a different way of engaging with the future:

> Da una parte, gli aristocrati-esperti, che possono prevedere il futuro (tradurre i 'segnali') con sovrana capacità di divinazione, dall'altra il passeggero-letterato, che compie le sue operazioni ermeneutiche solipsisticamente, in perenne perplessità, e alla fine in modo inconcludente. Questa opposizione – ecco il punto – riguarda il rapporto con il Tempo: i primi si basano sullo *spazio-tempo*, oggettivo, l'altro esclusivamente sul tempo soggettivo. […] […] il tempo degli aristocrati […] può disporre del futuro in quanto esso non è che l'estensione del presente e del passato.[27]

In contrast with the proclivity of the 'aristocrati' to read and manipulate time as they wish, the io's time becomes, in *Festival* (from *Stella*), as narrow as a corridor in which it is only possible to cycle backwards:

I tempi da quanto
tempo stanno dandoci torto?
Eccolo sempre più angusto
sempre più stipato di vetrine con
fiale brevetti manichini ortopedici
rtichette adesive il corridoio

[26] Sereni, *Il sabato tedesco*, in *PP*, p. 726. It is not clear who these 'aristocrati' are. According to Cipriani, behind their masks there hide 'i volti di ex aguzzini nazisti', Cipriani, *Il 'libro' della prosa*, p. 116.
[27] Lenzini, Le distanze della prosa, p. 123.

– e in questo la volata
au ralenti dove i nati per perdere
si contendono
la maglia dei fuori tempo massimo
pedalando all'indietro
lungo un muro di nausea
quelli che erano – o parevano –
arrivati di slancio.
(*P* 215)

Temporal disharmony is intimated here via a movement which contradicts the sequential progression unfolding along the timeline: rushing forward (that is, towards the future) turns into cycling backwards, and ultimately, the projection is no longer oriented towards the future, but rather towards the past.[28] As Mengaldo notes, in *Stella*

> il nichilismo del poeta, giunto allo stadio terminale, finisce per distruggere né più né meno che l'articolazione del tempo, e la speranza in un futuro diverso dal presente che risarcisca almeno i venturi, se non più noi stessi […].[29]

Mengaldo goes on to point out that *Stella* stages 'la ritrazione del futuro nel passato'.[30] And indeed this tallies with the receding of the horizon of expectation which we have described. As we have seen by recalling the parallel reading of *Le ceneri* and *Le sei del mattino*, waiting, which was the mood through which the io, in *Frontiera*, could project himself towards the future, now can open only onto a future of posthumousness. It is against this posthumous background that the uninhabitability of the future gains more ground, to the point that it becomes a pervasive concern of Sereni's mature poetry. We shall now situate this concern within the increasing resonance acquired by the motif of memory.

4.3) The future of memory and the category of 'guilt' and 'debt'

Thus far, we have had recourse to Koselleck's notion of 'horizon of expectation' in eliciting a change in the relation between the io and time: from an initial projection towards the future

[28] The poem seems to echo that 'senso / di sé sempre in regresso sul lavoro' of *Una visita in fabbrica*, stanza V, ll. 1-2, in *Strumenti*.
[29] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni* p. 62.
[30] Ibid. Similarly, Gilberto Lonardi writes about 'il rovesciarsi del tempo', *Introduzione* to Sereni, *Il grande amico*, p. 11.

(*Frontiera*), the io gradually sees his horizon recede into the past. To better understand this modification, we have focused on the trajectory of the notion of the event and the idea of waiting, which, in themselves, underlie the receding of the horizon. We now turn our attention to a different type of horizon, one which refers to memory, as memory is indeed, in Sereni's mature poetry, one of the most fundamental undercurrents of the ever-increasing presence of the past. In order to address the presence of memory without abandoning the main focus of our analysis – how the io engages with the future – we shall take into consideration some observations by Paul Ricoeur, who has provided instrumental contributions to memory studies, advocating, in particular, a re-evaluation of the relation between memory and the future. Ricoeur's theories do more than allow us to account for the multi-layered temporality of memory in Sereni's mature poetry. Inasmuch as they revolve around psychological and ethical matters such as forgetting and forgiveness, guilt and debt, – with which *Strumenti* and *Stella* are fraught –, Ricoeur's ideas also help us verify how the past weighs heavily on the Serenian io, who is, accordingly, bereft of the possibility of envisaging an inhabitable future.

In *Memory, history, forgetting*, Ricoeur frames his notion of 'horizon' between the two converging spheres of forgetting and forgiveness:

> Forgetting and forgiveness, separately and together, designate the horizon of our entire investigation. Separately, inasmuch as they each belong to a distinct problematic: for forgetting, the problematic of memory and faithfulness to the past; for forgiveness, guilt and reconciliation with the past. Together, inasmuch as their respective itineraries intersect at a place that is not a place and which is best indicated by the term "horizon": Horizon of a memory appeased, even of a happy forgetting.[31]

Undoubtedly, at the time of the gestation of *Strumenti* (1945-1965), the relation with memory and the past became a momentous concern in the entire Italian literary context.
Indeed, during these years spannnig the immediate aftermath of WWII and the ascent of Neocapitalism, there arise two different but consequentially related urges: firstly, that of 'documentare e esprimere' the experience of war and Resistance; secondly, that of reassessing, in retrospect, that very urge, reconsidering the texts produced during the aftermath of war as born out of and inseparable from a unique historical atmosphere.[32] Calvino's relation to *I sentieri dei nidi di ragno* – his debut novel – is, in this respect,

[31] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 412.
[32] For an overview of the desire of 'esprimere' and 'documentare' placed within the context of war memoirs see Andrea Battistini, 'Documentare' ed 'esprimere': la memorialistica di Guerra, in *Sondaggi sul Novecento* (Cesena: Il Ponte Vecchio, 2003), pp. 137-153.

paradigmatic. First published in 1947, the book was subsequently reprinted in 1964, when it was accompanied by the well-known introduction in which the author tries, among other things, to come to terms with a long-lasting 'disagio' stemming from the uncomfortable tie which the book holds with the past experience of the Resistance.[33] More closely related to the problematics of forgetting, guilt, and forgiveness is Primo Levi's refusal to provide any ethical verdict on the members of the Sonderkommando – 'i corvi del crematorio', as he defines them –, suggesting that, under such unprecedented cirmcustances, judgement be suspended.[34] Though published in 1986, a year before Levi's suicide, the book clearly represents the culmination of an abiding engagement with preserving and understanding the memory of the concentration camps whose origin is to be traced back to 1947, the year in which *Se questo è un uomo* was first published by Francesco De Silva.

On his return from captivity, Sereni is confronted with the issue of the past mainly in terms of faithfulness and hoped-for reconciliation. It suffices to go back to the poet's own words about *Un ritorno* to see the delicate overlap between these two levels: on the one hand, there is 'la presunta fedeltà alla propria immaginazione', whose attendant implications, already pointed out by the poet himself, have been additionally delved into by Mengaldo, who has made a compelling case for the interdependence, in Sereni's poetry, of faithfulness to the past and the theme of repetition.[35] On the other hand, as is also evident from Sereni's words about *Un ritorno* quoted above, the need to provide the past with a 'seguito' bespeaks a more profound urge, namely that which pushes the io to attempt to reconcile himself with a past whose constant re-emergence is very often accompanied by thoughts of guilt and images of disharmony.[36]

In his introduction to Ricoeur's *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*, Remo Bodei notes that the objective of most of Ricoeur's studies on memory is to provide an untroubled way of taking leave of the burden of the past, so as to be able to engage actively with the

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[33] 'Questo romanzo è il primo che ho scritto. Che effetto mi fa rileggerlo adesso? (Ora ho trovato il punto: questo rimorso. È di qui che devo cominciare la prefazione). Il disagio che per tanto tempo questo libro mi ha dato in parte si è attutito, in parte resta: è il rapporto con qualcosa di più grande di me, con emozioni che hanno conivolto tutti i miei contemporanei, e tragedie, e slanci generosi e geniali, e oscuri drammi di coscienza.' Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), p. 12.

[34] Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007 [1986]). See in particular chapter II, *'La zona grigia'*, pp. 24-52.

[35] See Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 43: 'in Sereni quello della memoria ha anzitutto uno stretto rapporto con la *fedeltà* […] Da ciò è breve il passo all'elemento tematico, inavisivo in Sereni, della *ripetizione*, che copre l'intero arco della sua scrittura'.

[36] Cf. the epigraph on which a brief passage from *Gli immediati dintorni*, dated 1963, is based: 'IL PÂSATO MI CASTIGA / IL PRESENTE NON MI PIACE / L' ÂVENIRE MI SPAVENTA / MDCLXVIII', in *PP*, p. 637.

present and regain agency for the future.[37] That the horizon Ricoeur writes about relies greatly on the reappraisal of the relevance of the future to memory is made clear in a passage from *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*. According to the philosopher, who draws also on Koselleck, memory is not just the trace or stamp of the past, but rather belongs to an extended temporality encompassing both the present and the future:

> Si affaccia così un compito nuovo, quello di inserire la memoria nel movimento di scambio con l'attesa del futuro e la presenza del presente, e di chiedersi come ci serviamo della nostra memoria rispetto all'oggi e al domani.[38]

There thus transpires the fluid essence of memory, an aspect which is also recognized by Sereni, who distinguishes memory from the more sterile 'ricordo' in a critical piece entitled *Il lavoro del poeta* and published in 1982 in 'Incognita':

> […] si potrebbe istituire un parallelo […] tra il ricordo, come fatto statico e ripetitivo e la memoria come elemento dinamico, luogo di confronto tra il vissuto e la sua ripercussione secondo un processo che ha come meta o miraggio una sorta di alta fedeltà ai moti interiori. [39]

Above all, it is in poetry that memory becomes a crossroads of temporal tensions spanning past and future. Both in *Gli squali* and in *Un posto di vacanza* (section III), memory reaches out towards the future by means of the intrinsically future-oriented nature of desire:

> […]
> Le nostre estati, lo vedi,
> memoria che ancora hai desideri:
> in te l'arco si tende dalla marina
> ma non vola la punta più al mio cuore.
> (*P* 116)
>
> È il teatro di sempre, è la guerra di sempre.
> Fabbrica desideri la memoria,
> poi è lasciata sola a dissanguarsi

[37] See Remo Bodei's *L'arcipelago e gli abissi*, introduction to Paul Ricoeur, *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), pp. VII-XV. This book is not the Italian edition of *Memory, history, forgetting* (Cf. *La memoria, la storia, l'oblio* [Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2003]). To the best of our knowledge, there is no English edition.
[38] Ricoeur, *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*, p. 23.
[39] Sereni, *Il lavoro di poeta,* in *PP*, p. 1128.

su questi specchi multipli.
(*P* 228)

The destiny assigned to memory in both poems is the same: it is as though Sereni acknowledged memory's pretension towards the future, but saw the effort as abortive.[40] *Gli squali*, in particular, recalls the unproductive attempt made by the io both in *Un ritorno* and in *Ventisei* to provide the past with a 'seguito' (and as we have seen in chapter 3, *Gli squali* is tied to *Ventisei* also by the sharing of the imagery of 'spegnimento' which is meant to substantiate the idea of 'futuro inattuato').[41] More importantly, a closer look at the poems in question allows us to observe the occurrence of that very change of perspective which we alluded to while analysing the relation between the idea of waiting and memory in *Frontiera*. It is no longer a projection towards the future which engenders memory, but it is, rather, memory as such which takes on the faculty of being future-oriented. Very much in comparable terms with Sereni's endeavour to give a future to the past – encapsulated, in these two poems, by a desiring memory – Ricoeur writes, that 'l'incompiuto del passato può […] nutrire contenuti ricchi di aspettative'.[42] It is a possibility which gains in practicability once we cease to conceive the past as unalterable and we begin to consider 'il ripercuotersi del futuro sul passato':

> Se i fatti sono incancellabili, se non si può disfare ciò che è stato fatto […] gli eventi del passato possono essere interpretati in modo diverso, il carico morale legato al rapporto di colpa verso il passato può venire appesantito oppure alleggerito, a seconda che l'accusa imprigioni il colpevole nel sentimento doloroso dell'irreversibile, o che invece il perdono apra la prospettiva di una liberazione dalla colpa, il che equivale a una conversione di senso dell'evento. Si può considerare questo fenomeno di reinterpretazione, sia sul piano morale sia su quello del semplice racconto, come un caso di azione retroattiva della orientazione del futuro sull' 'apprensione' del passato.[43]

Liberation from guilt thus represents only one side of the coin of memory, the other being the inextinguishable burden which the past bears over the future by means of guilt and debt:

> […] la rappresentazione del passato influenza quella del futuro. Ho in mente qui la categoria della colpa o del debito […]. La colpa è il fardello che il passato fa pesare sul

[40] Cf. also Sereni's claim on memory as something 'che è in stretta connessione col desiderio e, per altro verso, con una particolare forma di presagio che di un fatto vissuto fa, appunto, un oggetto di memoria', in *P*, p. 518.
[41] Cf. lines 1-6: 'Di noi che cosa fugge sul filo della corrente? / Oh, di una storia che non ebbe un seguito / stracci di luce, smorti volti, sperse / lampàre che un attimo ravviva / e lo sbrecciato cappello di paglia / che questa ultima estate ci abbandona.'
[42] Ricoeur, *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*, p.44.
[43] Ibid., p.41.

futuro. È questo fardello che il perdono vorrebbe alleggerire ma all'inizio questo fardello pesa: ed è sul futuro che pesa. Il debito obbliga.[44]

In effect, in S*trumenti*, the theme of memory emerges in a context in which the burden of guilt and debt increases exponentially. Indeed, we argue that it is through recourse to these two 'categories' that we can evaluate the extent to which the past casts too long a shadow over the present to allow for any reconciliation (and, as a consequence, any possibility of envisaging a habitable future). We can pinpoint this interplay between guilt and debt in a few essential poems. In *Il male d'Africa* (collected both in *Diario* and in S*trumenti*), the relevance of debt can be inferred by the presence of its antonym: credit. The io is here reproached by the tu (Sereni's friend Giansiro Ferrata, who was about to set out on a journey to Algeria) for not feeling, as he should have,

> […]in credito
> sull'anagrafe di almeno dieci anni…
> (*P* 92)

In *Nel sonno* (*Strumenti*) the io is portrayed as both lacking harmony with his social time and guilty:

> Non lo amo il mio tempo, non lo amo.
> L'Italia dormirà con me.
> In un giardino d'Emilia o Lombardia
> sempre c'è uno come me
> in sospetti e pensieri di colpa
> […]
> (*P* 145)

But it is poetic practice itself which comes to be defined as an ineffectual means of releasing oneself from an ever-regenerating debt, as is clearly stated in *I versi*:

> Se ne scrivono ancora.
> […]
> Se ne scrivono solo in negativo

[44] Ibid., p.36.

dentro un nero di anni
come pagando un fastidioso debito
che era vecchio di anni.
No, non è più felice l'esercizio.
Ridono alcuni: tu scrivevi per l'Arte.
Nemmeno io volevo questo che volevo ben altro.
Si fanno versi per scrollare un peso
e passare al seguente. Ma c'è sempre
qualche peso di troppo, non c'è mai
alcun verso che basti
se domani tu stesso te ne scordi.
(*P* 149)

I versi holds an important metapoetic function within *Strumenti*, as it provides explicit information about Sereni's idea of poetry. Sereni initially conceives of the text, first published in 1960, as a 'poesia semiseria' which is the result of 'la stizza polemica di uno che a un certo punto si sente frastornato dal chiasso delle succursali ideologiche'.[45] The allusion is here clearly to the wave of poetic experimentalism which started developing in the late 1950s, with the publication of the first issues of magazines such as 'Officina' and 'Il verri'. The poets gathering around 'Officina' advocated a new form of lyricism, one which could engage with the social concerns arisen in the new industrialised society. On the other hand, the poets gathering around 'Il verri' (who will eventually form the 'Gruppo 63') pursued, by dint of the deconstruction of syntax and language, a more radical disintegration of the lyrical io intended to reflect the depersonalisation endured by the subject in mass society. In keeping with Sereni's refusal to embrace any ready-made poetics or ideology to which to subordinate poetry, *I versi* complies to none of the dictates just mentioned: not only is the style visibly plain and classical, the poem is also steeped in a very subjective idea of poetry. More important to our analysis is the presence of the word 'debito'. In a poem laden with essential metapoetic undercurrents, this leads us to believe that the significance of debt goes beyond the boundaries of this single poem, illuminating a hallmark of Sereni's mature poetry: the repetition of the past which comes to obstruct the relation between the io and the future. In effect, in the text, the future ('domani') emerges as the time in which the past will repeat itself in the shape of an unpaid debt.

[45] Sereni, *P*, p. 584.

That this repetition of the past is so obtrusive as to compromise the relation with the future becomes clear in a poem such as *Quei bambini che giocano*, where an unspecified guilt is extended to the entire generation to which the io belongs. The poem stages an exclusion from the future, showing how it will be impossible, for future generations, to forgive the io and his peers. Not unlike *L'Opzione* and *Metropoli*, an opposition is here stated, between those for whom the future world is destined, and the culpable ones, whose guilt will not be excused:

> un giorno perdoneranno
> se presto ci togliamo di mezzo.
> Perdoneranno un giorno.
> Ma la distorsione del tempo
> il corso della vita deviato su false piste
> l'emorragia dei giorni
> dal varco del corrotto intendimento:
> questo no, non lo perdoneranno.
> Non si perdona a una donna un amore bugiardo,
> l'ameno paesaggio d'acque e foglie
> che si squarcia svelando
> radici putrefatte, melma nera.
> "*D'amore non esistono peccati*,
> s'infuriava un poeta ai tardi anni,
> *esistono soltanto peccati contro l'amore*".
> E questi no, non li perdoneranno.
> (*P* 135)

The above lapidary lines about love are Saba's, as Mengaldo clarifies.[46] *Quei bambini che giocano* is not the only poem in which the incompatibility between the present and the future (and their respective inhabitants) hinges on the theme of love. Saba's remorseless verdict can be drawn in close proximity with the closing lines of *Volendam* (the third section of the poem entitled *Dall'Olanda*, in *Strumenti*). Here, a Dutch tour guide peremptorily warns the io that love is not within his range, as it belongs to a future which the io and his peers will not inhabit:

[46] See Sereni, *Il grande amico*, p. 224.

L'amore è di dopo, è dei figli
Ed è più grande. Impara.
(*P* 172)

These two poems clearly show how the burden of the past weighs heavily not only on the io, but on an entire generation. Mengaldo rightly observes that in *Strumenti* 'per la prima volta il tempo sereniano non è solo un tempo interiore, ma è anche un tempo storico: e di esso – come è notissimo – Sereni celebra un fallimento che è pure, e di necessità, il suo proprio fallimento'.[47] Ultimately, what emerges through this interplay of individual and collective dimension is that there can be no forgiveness awaiting the io, nor his peers, but rather condemnation by future generations, which are often depicted as avengers, as the only ones for whom love will still be possible.[48] It is to them and only them that the future is destined. The ideal trajectory which, according to Ricoeur, goes from guilt to forgiveness thus proves to be beyond Sereni's horizon. The burden of guilt and debt does not allow of any 'riconversione dell'evento', of any 'memory appeased' as is testified to by *La malattia dell'olmo*, one of the final poems from *Stella*, where memory is described as a tedious thorn from which the io wishes, in vain, to be freed:

[…]
Vienmi vicino, parlami, tenerezza,
– dico voltandomi a una
vita fino a ieri a me prossima
oggi così lontana – scaccia
da me questo spino molesto,
la memoria:
non si sfama mai.
(*P* 254)

[47] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, p. 59.
[48] Cf. Mengaldo's reading of *La spiaggia*, according to which it is inappropriate to believe that 'il futuro parlare dei morti conterrà la voce del vivo e dei vivi' – as the end of the poem appears to suggest. Rather, 'i morti hanno […] verso il vivo e i vivi funzione sostitutiva', *Per Vittorio Sereni,* pp. 182-183.

4.4) The suspension of time: 'gioia' and 'festa'

This chapter has thus far presented us with a rather compromised relationship between the io and his time, the latter having to be understood both in its social and psychological dimensions. At the root of this is the caesura we have examined in chapter 2. As noted by Giovannuzzi, with the experience of imprisonment 'la storia ha subito una frattura irreparabile e da quel momento il tempo non può scorrere più.'[49] This notwithstanding, there is one thematic facet of Sereni's mature poetry which appears to provide an escape route from the negativity with which time is experienced: the presence of 'gioia' and/or 'festa'. In this final section we shall examine the singular temporality which seems to relate to these two 'states' (Sereni himself defines them thus, as we shall presently see), and we shall argue that their positive essence depends on their bringing about a sort of suspension of time. Moreover, due to the metapoetic overtones with which they are imbued, the investigation into 'gioia' and 'festa' will also enable us to provide some insight into Sereni's own understanding of poetry and poetic practice.

Our analysis now comes full circle, as we focus on a rather long passage from *Il sabato tedesco* which is the continuation of the one we cited in the first section. Following on Agostino's reproach, the narrator strives to rebut the accusation:

> È che se parliamo di sbalzi e singhiozzo le cose intorno a noi si svolgono in modo non meno sussultorio e si ha un bel cavarne un disegno tutto coerente e chiaro, sarà sempre un disegno in negativo. Non mi farò, non ti farò il torto, Agostino, di mentire affermando che soffro essenzialmente di questo, preoccupato come sono dei miei cali di tensione e della qualità del respiro. Ma dimmi allora quando e dove nel mondo tale qualità si manifesta in modo davvero lampante e soprattutto continuo, se non sia invece rintracciabile tra i barlumi di qualche solitudine eccitata che se appena si elettrizza tende a farsi accogliente, accomunante solidale; che reclama presenze e convivenze o anche solo le immagina, sicché una battuta, uno scoppio d'allegria, uno sguardo d'intesa, una stretta di mano agiscono sulla casualità e la trasformano in necessità ed evidenza, aprono cunicoli, camminamenti, vie d'accesso dall'euforia alla gioia: tanto che se qualcuno, che abbia condiviso con noi quei barlumi, mostra di averli dimenticati o di considerarli insignificanti, questo ci sembra un tradimento e se ne esce umiliati come di un abbaglio che è stato soltanto nostro. Momenti, indizi di uno stato cui si vorrebbe dare un nome, se tutti i nomi disponibili – convivio, simposio, assemblea, comunità, riunione… - non ne dicessero l'improbabilità col loro suono di abuso. Non rimane che questo: la festa. Perché, anche se non coglie nel segno, all'istantaneità che rinfocola la vita unisce la propria precarietà, il presagio della propria fine.'[50]

Opening with an idea of 'un disegno in negativo' which recalls the poet's resigned viewpoint from *I versi*, where poetry itself was conceived as possible only if written 'in negativo' (l.

[49] Giovannuzzi, *La persistenza della lirica*, pp. 99-100.
[50] Sereni, *Il sabato tedesco*, pp.768-69.

5), the excerpt above shows the close tie between 'gioia' and 'festa', the former apparently related to a more individual sphere and the latter seemingly more wide-ranging and inclusive. Of great relevance is the lexicon here employed by Sereni, as it allows us to elicit essential information on the nature of these thematic concerns. Indeed, we can single out two main semantic strands, the first of these – partly reminiscent of a Montalean lexicon – relates to what we can approximately define as a semantic field of flickering ('barlume', 'elettrizza', 'abbaglio'), which signals the transience of the state at issue. In this regard, the closing lines contain two key explicative words: 'istantaneità' and 'precarietà'. The presence of a vocabulary which alludes to different states of flickering light thus indicates the temporality of 'gioia' and 'festa', a temporality which belongs to the instantaneousness of the epiphany. It follows that, if 'gioia' and 'festa' are to provide an antidote to a negatively connoted state of unproductive waiting, they must conform to the ephemeral, to the temporality of the instant. The second noticeable semantic strand refers to the connecting, unifying nature of the two elements in question. Once more, a quick glance at Sereni's lexicon leaves the reader in no doubt, as the words employed to describe these two states are: 'accogliente', 'accomunante', 'solidale'. 'Gioia' and 'festa' are thus not simply ephemeral, but also moments of communion. Better still, it is within the ephemeral instant of these two states that a moment of communion can occur.[51]

Though less emphatically, these two characteristics already underlies the description of joy in *Appuntamento a ora insolita*, which gives the title to the third section of *Strumenti*. Often interpreted as the poet's muse, joy is here personified in order to participate in a halting dialogue with the poet.[52] According to Dante Isella and Clelia Martignoni, the dialogue addresses the issue of the relation between 'pubblico' and 'privato', that is between engagement and a more lyrical (and perhaps subjective/individualistic) idea of poetry. First published in 1961, the poem is thus largely shaped by the cultural atmosphere of the 1960s, when ideological debates were the order of the day, as manifested in journals such as 'Menabò' (see, in particular, issue 4, 'Industria e letteratura', 1961) and 'Questo e Altro', founded in 1962 by Sereni himself, Dante Isella, Niccolò Gallo, and Geno Pampaloni.[53] In particular, from the 1950s, Sereni finds in Franco Fortini a tenacious correspondent with

[51] Hitherto we shall use 'gioia' and 'festa' interchangeably, mostly referring to either one or the other depending on which term is mentioned in the texts under scrutiny.
[52] Cf. *Poesie. Un'antologia per la scuola*, pp. 78-81; *Il grande* amico, pp. 226-28. See also Laura Barile, 'La presenza della gioia', in *'Una futile passione'. Atti del convegno*... pp. 47-71.
[53] On 'Questo e Altro' see Sereni's letter to Fortini from 20-21 of April 1963, in Vittorio Sereni, *Scritture private con Fortini e Giudici* (Bocca di Magra: Edizione Capannina, 1995), pp. 24-32.

whom to exchange heated opinions regarding the nexus between ideology and poetry.[54] In view of both these contextual factors and the fertile intellectual relationship between Sereni and Fortini, we shall carry out a parallel reading between Sereni's *Appuntamento a ora insolita* and Fortini's *La gioia avvenire*, as it is our contention that the nature of Serenian joy (in particular, its temporal essence) is better understood when compared with Fortini's.[55]

Let us begin by examining the first part of *Appuntamento a ora insolita* (ll.1-17):

La città – mi dico – dove l'ombra
Quasi più deliziosa è della luce
Come sfavilla tutta nuova al mattino
"…asciuga il temporale di stanotte" – ride
la mia gioia tornata accanto a me
dopo un breve distacco.
"Asciuga al sole le sue contraddizioni"
– torvo, già sul punto di cedere, ribatto.
Ma la forma l'immagine il sembiante
– d'angelo avrei detto in altri tempi –
risorto accanto a me nella vetrina:
"Caro – mi dileggia apertamente – caro,
con quella faccia di vacanza. E pensi
alla città socialista?".
Ha vinto. E già mi sciolgo: "Non
Arriverò a vederla" le rispondo.
(Non saremo
più insieme, dovrei dire). […]
(*P* 140)

This first part of the dialogue foregrounds a rift between the io and his joy. The city, which constitutes the setting of the poem, is also the bone of contention between the two protagonists: joy's somewhat sneering tone is counterpoised by the more austere one of the io, who underlines the contradictory shining of the city. Luca Lenzini holds that line 7 is a 'frase rifatta sul modulo di formule della pubblicistica hegeliano-marxista, ricorrenti nelle

[54] On the relationship between Sereni and Fortini, see Luca Lenzini, 'Due destini. Sul carteggio Sereni-Fortini', in *Un altro compleanno*, edit. by Edoardo Esposito, pp. 299-315.
[55] As we shall soon see, Fortini might have been the referent of some of the lines from *Appuntamento*.

discussioni politiche degli anni Sessanta'. He goes on to suggest that '*asciuga* sostituisce "rimuove" o espressione analoga che indichi la mancata soluzione dei conflitti economico sociali (quelli che spetterebbe di eliminare alla *città socialista*)'.[56] Against the backdrop of this inharmonious relation between the io and the city (whose characteristics we have examined in chapter 3 on 'ceneri'), joy is thus addressed by the io (ll.17-38):

> […] "Ma è giusto
> fai bene a non badarmi se dico queste cose,
> se le dico per odio di qualcuno
> o rabbia per qualcosa. Ma credi all'altra
> cosa che si fa strada in me di tanto in tanto
> che in sé le altre include e le fa splendide,
> rara come questa mattina di settembre…
> giusto di te tra me e me parlavo:
> della gioia".
> Mi prende sottobraccio.
> "Non è vero che è rara – mi correggo – c'è,
> la si porta come una ferita
> per le strade abbaglianti. È
> quest'ora di settembre in me repressa
> per tutto un anno, è la volpe rubata che il ragazzo
> celava sotto i panni e il fianco gli straziava,
> un'arma che si reca con abuso, fuori
> dal breve sogno di una vacanza.
> Potrei
> con questa uccidere, con la sola gioia…"
>
> Ma dove sei, dove ti sei mai persa?
>
> "È a questo che penso se qualcuno
> mi parla di rivoluzione"
> dico alla vetrina ritornata deserta.
> (*P* 140-41)

[56] Sereni, *Il grande amico*, p. 227.

In line with its depiction from *Il sabato tedesco*, joy emerges as luminous and connecting ('che in sé le altre include e le fa splendide', l.22) as well as temporally ephemeral, this latter aspect being elicited by the movement of appearance and disappearance which runs through the first part of the text (cf. 'tornata accanto a me'; 'dopo un breve distacco'; 'risorto accanto a me'), a movement which eventually results in the disappearance of joy itself.

Particularly noteworthy here is the presence of the word 'rivoluzione', which, placed within an overall pugnacious tone, clearly refers back to the ridiculed expectation of a utopian 'città socialista' (l.14). Interestingly, we encounter the coexistence of 'gioia' and 'rivoluzione' also in Fortini's *La gioia avvenire*. Originally situated at the close of *Foglio di via* (Fortini's debut collection from 1946), the poem subsequently features as the introductory text of *Poesia e errore* (1969):

Potrebbe essere un fiume grandissimo
Una cavalcata di scalpiti un tumulto un furore
Una rabbia strappata uno stelo sbranato
Un urlo altissimo

Ma anche una minuscola erba per i ritorni
Il crollo d'una pigna bruciata nella fiamma
Una mano che sfiora al passaggio
O l'indecisione fissando senza vedere

Qualcosa comunque che non possiamo perdere
Anche se ogni altra cosa è perduta
E che perpetuamente celebreremo
Perché ogni cosa nasce da quella soltanto

Ma prima di giungervi
Prima la miseria profonda come la lebbra
E le maledizioni imbrogliate e la vera morte
Tu che credi dimenticare vanitoso
O mascherato di rivoluzione
La scuola della gioia è piena di pianto e sangue
Ma anche di eternità

E dalle bocche sparite dei santi
Come le siepi del marzo brillano le verità

We can frame the main distinction between *La gioia avvenire* and *Appuntamento a ora insolita* within a temporal perspective. Fortini's joy is projected into the future, conceived of as certain in the future. The 'miseria profonda' (l. 14) which needs be endured in the present emerges as a necessary temporary viaticum to the future eternity of joy. From the point of view of a parallel with *Appuntamento a ora insolita*, it seems highly relevant that, while in *La gioia avvenire*, the rhyme between 'eternità' and 'verità' illuminates the future presence of joy precisely at the end of the poem, the closing lines of *Appuntamento a ora insolita* mark instead, through the 'vetrina deserta', the disappearance of joy from the horizon of the io. It is my contention that what lies at the root of this fundamental temporal discrepancy is a different understanding of the idea of 'rivoluzione'. In agreement with Fortini's poetics and steadfast ideological convictions, the idea of joy cannot be disentangled from that of revolution: joy is, in fact, the future reward for the sorrowful path of revolution (which here must be followed by the *tu* 'mascherato di rivoluzione'). Giovannuzzi correctly observes how in Fortini 'la poesia trovi spazio solo all'interno di una laboriosissima impalcatura di giustificazioni ideologiche, garantita da una prospettiva rivoluzionaria e soprattutto da una visione escatologica'.[57] By contrast, Sereni employs the word 'rivoluzione' antiphrastically, that is, he mentions it so as to deny it, as if to oppose his idea of joy to the more common and political notion of revolution.[58] I would argue that the meaning of this antiphrastic use of the word 'rivoluzione' is better grasped if we interweave the observations we have made about the ephemeral and unifying essence of joy with a distinction suggested by the scholar Furio Jesi between 'rivoluzione' and 'rivolta'. In the essay entitled *Lettura del* Bateau Ivre *di Rimbaud*, Jesi argues that

> La parola *rivoluzione* designa correttamente tutto il complesso di azioni a lunga e a breve scadenza che sono compiute da chi è cosciente di voler mutare *nel tempo storico* una situazione politica, sociale, economica […] Ogni *rivolta* si può invece descrivere come una sospensione del tempo storico. […] L'istante della rivolta determina la fulminea autorealizzazione e oggettivazione di sé quale parte di una collettività. […] Tutti sperimentano l'epifania dei medesimi simboli: lo spazio individuale di ciascuno, dominato dai propri simboli personali, il rifugio dal tempo storico che ciascuno ritrova nella propria simbologia e nella propria mitologia individuali, si ampliano e divengono

[57] Giovannuzzi, *La persistenza della lirica*, pp. 142-143.
[58] In our opinion, Fortini is indeed the addressee of these lines, the referent of 'qualcuno' of both line 19 and 37.

> lo spazio simbolico comune a un'intera collettività, il rifugio dal tempo storico in cui un'intera collettività trova scampo.[59]

Inasmuch as they understand the distinction between revolution and revolt as one between two different temporal dimensions, Jesi's words cast light on the irreducible distance separating Fortini's and Sereni's idea of joy. It is within historical time, the time within which revolution must occur, that Fortini's joy will make its appearance. On the other hand, it is within the ahistorical and suspended time of the revolt that Sereni's joy takes place. Within the framework sustaining the present chapter, we can read this distance also in terms of possibility/impossibility of envisaging a destiny *of* and *for* joy. Whereas Fortini's joy is oriented towards the future, or indeed, it *is* the future ('qualcosa […] che perpetuamente celebreremo'; and note how the only future tense of the text interacts with the adverb 'perpetuamente'), Sereni's joy is epiphanic and instantaneous, and thus destined to a premature end (what is quintessential to it is 'il presagio della propria fine', as we read in the description of 'festa' from *Il sabato tedesco*). In conclusion, drawing on his own words on the work of the painter Franco Francese, we may contend that Sereni does not conceive of 'una gioia in atto, o un destino di gioia'; joy's manifestations intimate, rather, a sort of 'balzo disperato verso una gioia originaria, primordiale e irrecuperabile'.[60]

At this point, it may be useful to situate the analysis of 'gioia' and 'festa' against the backdrop of a more general discussion about poetic practice. As indicated previously, the 'gioia' of *Appuntamento a ora insolita* personifies the poet's muse. Isella and Martignoni argue that 'l'identificazione tra arte, poesia e vocazione alla gioia' is essential to the understanding of the text.[61] This identification becomes even more cogent if we consider: firstly, that similarly to the 'disegno in negativo' from *Il sabato tedesco,* the images used to describe 'gioia' in *Appuntamento a ora insolita* are also images 'in negativo' (the time in September repressed all year; the fox the boy stole and hid; a weapon recklessly carried), thus calling back to mind the idea of poetry as written 'solo in negativo' of *I versi*. Secondly, that the association between 'gioia' and poetry/inspiration was also at the heart of *Le ceneri*, a text imbued with metapoetic undertones, where the absence of 'gioia' indicated precisely the lack of poetic inspiration. On the basis of this identification, we can regard poetry itself

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[59] Furio Jesi, 'Lettura del Bateau Ivre di Rimbaud', in *Il tempo della festa*, edit. by Andrea Cavalletti (Roma: Nottetempo, 2013), pp. 43-44.

[60] Sereni, *Da natura a emozione da emozione a natura*, *Presentazione a Franco Francese* (Milano: Galleria Toninelli), in *PP*, p. 1202.

[61] *Poesie*, *un'antologia per la scuola*, pp. 78-79. See also Barile, *La presenza della gioia*, in *Una futile passione*, p.68: 'la gioia viene indicata come una cosa "altra" […] coinvolgendo e travolgendo anche l'odio e la rabbia nella sua dimensione altra: che è quella dell'arte.'

as something 'rebellious' and unifying (the 'altra cosa' which, in *Appuntamento a ora insolita*, is opposed to the politically and historically connoted idea of 'rivoluzione').[62] It is here that the discourse on 'gioia' and 'festa' becomes strictly interwoven with one on the essence of writing poetry and its attendant sociocultural function. To illustrate the implications of this entanglement, a parallel between Sereni and Fortini proves once again enlightening.

According to Mengaldo, Fortini's urge is to 'verificare la propria storia individuale "dal punto di vista della storia universale": questo, e non è poco, è il compito finale che Fortini assegna alla sua poesia'.[63] Poetry thus becomes invested with a projective sense which hinges on a conception of the present as 'attesa del futuro: un presente aperto alla speranza, utopico in senso ebraico-cristiano e in senso politico'.[64] The implications of such a stance on poetic practice have been highlighted by Sereni himself in a 1980 critical piece on Fortini entitled *Un destino*: [65]

> c'è in Fortini un 'come se' che contraddice la convinzione, da me normalmente condivisa, secondo la quale 'la poesia non muta nulla'.
> E infatti Fortini scrive *come se* ci fossero orecchi per ascoltare, come se le parole che si scrivono, appunto, agissero per una irrinunciabile volontà di comunicazione verso i destinatari invisibili e anonimi, magari futuri.[66]

Here the allusion is to Fortini's poem *Traducendo Brecht* (in *Una volta per sempre*, 1963), whose final lines are emblematic of Fortini's dogged conviction for the momentous social function of writing poetry:

> […] La poesia
> non muta nulla. Nulla è sicuro, ma scrivi.[67]

It is worth measuring these lines against those from Sereni's *I versi*. In Fortini, the exhortation to write comes to counteract the previous statement on poetry's impotence. To write thus becomes the poet's ethical responsibility, towards the present and towards the

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[62] Cf. Lenzini, *Il grande amico*, p.227: 'l.18 *queste cose*: si riferisce […] a una sfera di discorso propriamente politica che l'io avverte come falsa o comunque estranea (proprio in qualità di poeta), e di cui si può appropriare, con senso di colpa, solo sull'onda di reazioni emotive (vv. 19-20).'
[63] Mengaldo, 'Per la poesia di Franco Fortini', in *La tradizione del Novecento: Prima serie* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), pp. 411-425, (p. 414).
[64] Lorenzini and Colangelo, *Poesia e storia*, pp. 181-182.
[65] The title of the piece alludes to Fortini's *A Vittorio Sereni, in Questo muro*. 'Come ci siamo allontanati. / Che cosa tetra e bella. / Una volta mi dicesti che ero un destino. Ma siamo due destini. Uno condanna l'altro. Uno giustifica l'altro. Ma chi sarà a condannare / o a giustificare / noi due?' in Fortini, *Tutte le poesie*, p. 342.
[66] Sereni, *PP,* p. 1092.
[67] Fortini, *Tutte le poesie*, p. 238.

future. On the other hand, *I versi* draw a somewhat opposite trajectory: from the initial recognition that 'se ne scrivono ancora' (l. 1), to the bitter conclusion that poetry is impotent, since it is the poet himself who will soon forget its conducive (here, 'liberating') function ('non c'è mai / alcun verso che basti / se domani tu stesso te ne scordi').[68] Ultimately, if Fortini concludes with a doubly connoted exhortation, namely to write *in* the future (to continue to write) and *for* the future, Sereni ends on a somewhat bleak note of resignation about the future inadequacy of writing.

These divergent attitudes towards poetic practice also reflect distant perspectives on the future cultural destiny of poetry. Addressing the issue of its waning readership in an article from 1975 entitled *Poesia per chi?*, Sereni first draws attention to a specific poetic inclination (with which Fortini's *modus operandi* complies):

> Occorre dire che a partire da un certo punto in poi c'è stato e c'è tuttora in una parte di quanti scrivono versi, anche limitatamente a certi aspetti della loro esperienza di vita pubblica, l'impulso a mutare con la loro opera qualcosa della realtà circostante. In altri ancora tale impulso diventa giustificazione, l'unica concepibile come contributo alla lotta di classe, dell'opera stessa.[69]

Then, reluctant to see these approaches as fruitful, he concludes thus:

> A quella che vedo come tendenza profonda della poesia – diciamo: dell'operare in versi – mi pare corrisponda oggi la sua massima carenza; *non tanto nella facoltà di comunicare quanto piuttosto in quella di accomunare*. Sottolineo questa proposizione. Che cosa oscuramente vuole se non questo un poeta, uno scrittore in versi, nel tendere a un uditorio invisibile, a una folla inesistente che tuttavia egli non può non supporre esistente e presente? […] forza accomunante che sembra essere sfuggita per sempre alla poesia. Forza accomunante: cioè la capacità di raccogliere altri, e se stessi con altri, attorno a qualcosa – e che sopravvive all'interno del lavoro di ognuno come bisogno o ricerca o nostalgia di presenze senza cui quel lavoro non si darebbe o sarebbe bruciato all'origine.[70]

If we place the words above in a chronological context, we can see how the idea of poetry as something possessing the faculty of 'accomunare', on the one hand, comes after and follows faithfully that of 'gioia' of *Appuntamento a ora insolita* ('l'altra cosa che si fa strada in me di tanto in tanto / che in sé le altre include e le fa splendide'). On the other, it anticipates

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[68] On *I versi*'s last line cf. Edoardo Esposito, *Lettura della poesia di Vittorio Sereni*, (Milano-Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2015), p. 83: 'particolarmente difficile l'interpretazione dell'ultimo verso […] non se ne ricava un senso certo, almeno dal punto di vista grammaticale, e forse quello implicito potrebbe essere: se tu stesso dimentichi che la poesia ha questo potere e può servire appunto a superare, scrollandolo, il peso sempre opprimente della realtà; se perdi dunque la fiducia che la tua parola possa avere senso e funzione in questa realtà'.
[69] Sereni, *P*, p. 1121.
[70] Ibid., pp. 1125-26.

that of 'festa' from *Il sabato tedesco* ('rintracciabile tra i barlumi di qualche solitudine eccitata che se appena si elettrizza tende a farsi accogliente, accomunante solidale; che reclama presenze e convivenze o anche solo le immagina'). But in our opinion the words above do more than just confirm the identification between 'festa'/'gioia' and poetry based on their unifying faculty. In the same year as Montale's address to the Swedish academy on the occasion of his Nobel prize – significantly entitled *È ancora possibile la poesia?* – Sereni's words also warn of poetry's perilous state, about the end of what he conceives as the *raison d'être* of poetic practice.[71]

Earlier we pointed out that the discourse on 'gioia' and 'festa' was interlaced with one regarding both the nature of writing poetry and its role within society. Indeed, here the discourse on 'gioia' and 'festa' has become fused with the discourse on poetry's own essence and cultural status. On poetry's difficulty of surviving, and, as a result, of inhabiting the future. The pervasive sense of 'end', the focal point of this investigation into the temporality of 'gioia' and 'festa' – now foreshadowed (as in *Il sabato tedesco*), now fulfilled (as in Sereni's words on Francese) –, here becomes a hallmark of poetry itself.

4.5) Conclusion

Unlike those critical approaches based on the significance of the theme of memory for the experience and perception of time in Sereni's mature poetry, this chapter has focused on the presence of the future. More specifically, we have explored how the io engages with the future. The reference to the category of 'horizon of expectation', as well as to the notions of waiting and surprise, has helped us follow the trajectory along which the io relates himself to the future. From the future-oriented outlook of *Frontiera*, where the possibility of building a horizon of expectation subsumes that of gaining new experience, the io soon experiences a change of paradigm, whereby waiting becomes bereft of the capacity to bring about new experiences. Indeed, in *Strumenti*, the only 'horizon of expectation' at the disposal of the io is one which sees the future as posthumous. This change of paradigm is also founded on the increasing presence of memory in Sereni's mature poetry. We have thus turned our attention to a different notion of 'horizon', that of a 'horizon of a memory appeased' proposed by Paul Ricoeur. Even though, as Ricoeur points out, it is possible to accomplish a re-evaluation of past events by considering the influence which the future may have on memory itself, we

[71] It is worth noting that Montale had initially considered a different title: 'Avevo pensato di dare al mio breve discorso questo titolo: potrà sopravvivere la poesia nell'universo delle comunicazioni di massa?', Eugenio Montale, 'È ancora possibile la poesia?', in *Sulla poesia* (Milano: Mondadori, 1975), p. 9.

have argued that the past casts too long a shadow over the present to enable the Serenian io to envisage a horizon such as that hoped for by Ricoeur. In order to show how the ideal trajectory suggested by the French scholar (one which goes from guilt to forgiveness) goes unaccomplished, we have had recourse to two new categories, those of guilt and debt. Drawing on them, we have shown that the burden of the past weighs heavily on both the io and his generation. As a result, the future is often depicted as 'vindictive' and uninhabitable.

The final section has been dedicated to the themes of 'gioia' and 'festa'. Following on Sereni's own words, we have defined them as 'states', whose peculiarity, we have argued, lies in their bringing about a suspension of historical and objective time. Clearly opposed to the notion of 'rivoluzione', which falls into historical time, 'gioia' and 'festa' seem to have much more in common with the idea of 'revolt' as understood by Furio Jesi. By neutralising the normal perception of time and fostering communion between the io and the other, 'gioia' and 'festa' present themselves as the only possible corrective to a negative experience of time. Yet, their ephemeral and ahistorical essence betrays, once again, a complicated relation between the io and time. Through a parallel with Fortini's *La gioia avvenire*, we have contended that Sereni's joy is never to come ('avvenire'); rather, it is unretrievable ('irrecuperabile'), always already gone. Such an understanding of joy bears great resemblance to Caproni's *Res amissa*, namely a 'dono' which is no sooner given to us than we have already forgotten it: 'Non ne scorgo più segno. / Più traccia. […] / L'ho troppo gelosamente / (irrecuperabilmente) riposta.' (ll. 18-19 and 27-28).[72] Consistent with the terminology which sustains the present study, we can thus suggest that the io is situated always 'after', 'beyond' joy.

Lastly, building on the identification between joy and poetry, we have related the idea of end, which is quintessential to 'gioia' and 'festa', to Sereni's concern over the disappearance of poetry's own bedrock. In this respect, Sereni's individual apprehension is to be situated within the broader cultural backdrop of the 1970s, when the conviction that art had reached somewhat of a momentous end was fast-growing. This conviction is well encapsulated in the following remark by Franco Cordelli, who, alongside Franco Berardinelli, edited the anthology *Il pubblico della poesia*, published in 1975 (thus, the same year as Montale's *È ancora possibile la poesia?* and Sereni's *Poesia per chi?*). In a personal note to the 2004 edition, Cordelli writes:

> Nel 1975 già sapevo che la letteratura, come l'avevo vissuta, assorbita e assimilata negli anni di formazione, era un puro relitto della Storia. Più volte ho indicato nel 1970 l'anno (simbolico) della fine: l'anno dei suicidi di Mishima (morte del romanzo), di Celan

[72] Caproni, *OV*, p. 777.

> (morte della poesia), di Adamov (morte del teatro). Quel tipo di conoscenza non implicava ovviamente la credenza che non si sarebbe più scritto, né che non si sarebbe più dovuto scrivere. Pensavo che era finito un certo modo di scrivere, un certo tipo di rapporto con la letteratura, e della letteratura con il pubblico. Ancora non si sapeva che questo modo era ciò che si chiama il Moderno.[73]

Time and space – Part II. Caproni

4.6) From *Come un'allegoria* to *Il congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso*: an initial overview of space

In this first section, we shall attempt to provide a brief overview of some nuances of space in Caproni, dwelling on how its presence and use evolve throughout the collections up to the 1960s. It is, overall, a descriptive section, which is nonetheless essential to establishing the way in which Caproni's poetry engages with space and, indirectly, with time.

We can perhaps begin by noting that in presenting Caproni's first collection, *Come un'allegoria* (1936), Aldo Capasso was keen to acknowledge the strong physicality underlying its texts:

> Egli [Caproni] è un uomo per cui il mondo esterno esiste. Egli prende la penna quando lo ha toccato un fatto plastico, naturale o comunque esteriore: un paesaggio, una festa borghigiana, un gruppo di saltimbanchi, l'atmosfera di un luogo e di un'ora determinatissimi.[74]

The poem *Borgoratti* (a Genoese suburb), which features also the key words of the title of the collection, possibly epitomises best this attitude:

> Anche le prime vampe fiorite
> ai balconi di questo paese,
> labile memoria ormai
> dimentica la sera.
>
> Come un'allegoria,
> una fanciulla appare
> sulla porta dell'osteria.

[73] *Il pubblico della poesia*, pp. 41-42.
[74] Quoted in *OV*, p. 1057.

Alle sue spalle è un vociare
confuso d'uomini – e l'aspro
odore del vino.
(*OV* 17)

The vividness of the scene is obtained through the permeation of one sense into the other: sight (the 'vampe fiorite'; the young girl appearing at the door), hearing ('vociare / confuso d'uomini'), sense of smell and taste (combined in the synaesthesia 'aspro / odore del vino'), all blend in together to form a distinctive physical image. However, perceptions are subject to an underlying transience ('labile memoria ormai'), and the concreteness of reality is eventually counterbalanced by the misleading essence of the 'fanciulla', who manifests herself 'come un'allegoria'. At this early stage of Caproni's poetry, space and time are in equal measure functional to expressing that 'gusto fisico della vita, ombreggiat*o* da un vivo senso della labilità delle cose', which Caproni himself sees at the heart of his poetic inspiration.[75] Overall, the presence of places and toponyms is indispensable to creating a vivid and realistic universe, on which time, in turn, exerts its erosive power. This tendency extends, with little or no variations, up to Caproni's third collection, entitled *Finzioni* (1941). Although it is premature, at this stage, to talk about a possible functional difference in treating time and space, we shall at least note, in passing, that the second work – *Ballo a Fontanigorda* (1938) – is explicitly spatially connoted. 'L'attenzione andrà indirizzata', as Surdich observes, 'alla proposta, fin dal titolo, di una indicazione topografica'. [76]

An initial turning point is brought about by *Cronistoria* (1943). One is struck by the overarching presence of toponyms, most of which are urban. If Caproni is to be considered 'un poeta della città', as stated by Calvino, we can possibly trace back to *Cronistoria* the onset of this feature.[77] As far as our analysis of space within Caproni's *oeuvre* is concerned, two observations must be made. On the one hand, the nature of the space of *Cronistoria* is, at least superficially, still extremely physical and concrete. It is a trait which stands out even more strongly if one considers the fundamental change which will take place between 1960s

[75] Caproni, in *IA*, pp.66-73. Cf. also the interview with Francesco Palmieri, *Due domande a Giorgio Caproni*: 'presenza o evidenza, nella scrittura di un poeta, degli oggetti fisici che lo circondano e lo completano oltre che dei fatti, dei problemi e dei conflitti dell' *hic et nunc* in cui il poeta è immerso […] già si possono scorgere nei primissimi versi di *Come un'allegoria (1932-35)*, anche se li si tratta di un reale ancor più pertinente alla natura che alla società', Ibid., p.61.
[76] Luigi Surdich, *Giorgio Caproni: Un ritratto* (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1990), p. 33.
[77] Cf. Calvino's observations in Giorgio Caproni, *Tutte le poesie* (Milano: Garzanti, 1999), p. 805. *Cronistoria* also marks the beginning of a complex relationship between the io and Rome, the city where Caproni moved in 1938. About this, see 'Caproni e Roma. La città del disamore*',* in Donzelli, *Giorgio Caproni e gli altri*, pp. 48-63.

and 1970s, whereby what is highly physical turns into something exceedingly metaphysical, as we have partially seen while examining the image of 'deserto'. On the other hand, the predominant presence of space leaves one to wonder whether there are any major consequences on the way time is represented and perceived by the io. Silvio Ramat has observed that, despite what the title seems to suggest, time in this collection lacks a linear and diachronic evolution, and there thus results something of an ahistoricity. More importantly, Ramat notes how it is precisely by means of a particular and persistent 'percezione dello "spazio"' that the poetry from *Cronistoria* emerges as 'indifferente ai tempi'**.** The conflicting qualities of the two coordinates are thus pointed out:

> la stessa memoria, la memoria dell' "assente", che è il tema attivante nel corpo di *Cronistoria* e resiste fino ai *Sonetti dell'Anniversario* […] risulta orientata solo attraverso uno spazio tangibile nei suoi luoghi sicuri: sicuri i luoghi, non i tempi.[78]

The way in which this interrelation is to develop throughout Caproni's poetry will be discussed at length in the next pages. In short, *Cronistoria* seems to showcase, *in nuce*, one of the most significance features of Caproni's mature poetry, namely a troubled relation between the io and time which is effectively expressed on a spatial level.

Passaggio (1956) and *Seme* (1959) are both highly spatially marked, given the tie they hold with the two cities of the poet, Genova and Livorno, respectively (and the two can go as far as to merge with one another, as in *Litania*: 'Genova di Livorno, / *partenza senza ritorno'*, ll. 175-76). Genova lies at the heart of *Passaggio*: it is from the monument to Aeneas located in 'piazza Bandiera' that Caproni took inspiration for the idea which underlies the collection; it is from some of the Genoese urban landmarks that texts such as *Le stanze della funicolare* and *L'ascensore* draw their images. It is, finally, along Genova's 'marciapiedi deserti' that Aeneas endures his 'estrema solitudine' (*Il passaggio d'Enea*, *Versi*). If the vivid and thorough depiction of the urban space is a trait which allows us to pull the Genova of *Passaggio* close to the Livorno of *Seme*, the way in which the io locates himself in them is not quite the same. In effect, the Genova from *Passaggio*, however allegorically depicted, retains a temporal dimension which coincides with the io's historical present: that is, with the years of war and its aftermath. The time of this space is, unequivocally, the present time of the empirical io. On the contrary, Livorno's time is the past, but a particular type of past, one which is unknown to the io, as Caproni narrates also

[78] Ramat, *Storia della poesia italiana del Novecento*, pp. 340-342. See also Dei, *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 35: 'i luoghi servono da àncora, da accumulatori di tempo: ne conservano le tracce'.

Annina's youth. It is, thus, so far away a past as to coincide with the io's non-existence.[79] It is Caproni himself who acknowledges that the figure of his mother 'appartiene più alla leggenda che alla storia', and the io meets her only at the threshold of the underworld, where time is deprived of its natural flow and suspended in eternity: 'l'orologio: è fermo', as we read in *Ad portam inferi*.[80]

And indeed, it is precisely between *Seme* and *Congedo* that there begins to be outlined a fundamental change in the way in which space and time are perceived. If one compares *Ad portam inferi* to *Toba*, the closing poem of *Congedo*, conspicuous similarities will be noticed between the manner in which Annina, in the former, and the io, in the latter poem, interact with their spatio-temporal contexts. In *Ad portam inferi*, the figure of Annina suffers from the consequences of being located at the threshold of a surreal world (the underworld, as it were). The stability of her subjective perception of time and space gradually wanes, as she is depicted as confused ('il cervello /di nuovo le si confonde /smarrito', ll .61-63), unable to distinguish between her husband and her son ('Nemmeno sa distinguere bene, / ormai, tra marito e figlio', ll. 96-97), and with a fallacious memory which tries, helplessly, to remember (ll. 86-95). The clock itself has stopped, indicating the interruption of the natural flow of time ('Guarda l'orologio: è fermo', l. 120). The underworld fog which awaits her ('la nebbia del suo domani', l. 129) thus becomes an image of her own lack of mental consistency.

Let us now take a look at *Toba*:

Sono tornato là
dove non si può tornare.
Tutto è come fu. C'è il mare
[…] e ancora
verde c'è l'Orologio, fermo
– con Giano – sulla stessa ora.
[…]
C'è ancora
(là, dietro San Martino:
ma quasi non si legge più)
il tabellone di ferro

[79] 'Converrà osservare che la condizione della vita di Annina è la non vita del figlio, al quale intanto è consentito pensarla giovane e desiderabile in quanto sia disposto a regredire al di là dell'infanzia e ad accettare la propria inesistenza', Fausto Curi, 'Le contraddizioni del malinconico. Per una rilettura di Giorgio Caproni', Fausto Curi, *Gli stati d'animo del corpo: Studi sulla letteratura italiana dell'Otto e Novecento* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2005), p. 154.
[80] Caproni, *Era così bello parlare*, p. 45.

arrugginito, con su:
SCUOLE ELEMENTARI
PIER MARIA CANEVARI.
(*OV* 265)

Here we notice that what used to be Annina's condition now affects more directly the io. We can in fact suggest that, just as Annina was unable to distinguish between her son and her husband, and, in general, to grasp the surrounding material reality, so the io strives to read the signs, as it were, since the realities which make up the 'where' of *Toba* begin to lose considerably in materiality.[81] But what is more relevant to our analysis is that, precisely as in *Ad portam inferi*, the clock has stopped, and the presence of a 'where' which is detached from the present *hic et nunc* of the io is once again signalled by the annihilation of time, an aspect on which Caproni's later poetry will insist more and more regularly.

With *Seme* and *Congedo* we end our preliminary overview of space in Caproni's poetry up to *Congedo*. Following the constant progression from physical to abstract and dreamlike settings, we have outlined how it is through the spatial coordinate that Caproni addresses the issue of a troubled relation between the io and time. By and large, *Seme* and *Congedo* prepare the ground for a qualitative alteration of space which is to emerge more noticeably in *Muro*. Owing to this alteration, space will become uninhabitable for the io.

According to Mengaldo, *Passaggio* marks a transition, in Caproni's poetry, from an idea of space as '*paesaggio*' to one as '*ambiente'*.[82] This would seem to imply a distinction not unlike the one which, in human geography, regards 'landscape' – as a where to be looked at, to be outside of – and 'place' – as a where to be experienced and inside of.[83] We argue instead that the essential transformation in experiencing space which is partly anticipated by *Seme* and *Congedo* goes in the opposite direction to that implied by Mengaldo. The next section will be dedicated to examining the essence of this transformation, placing great stress on the impact that this has in bringing to light a problem of the 'where'.

[81] Caproni attended the Genova elementary school 'Pier Maria Canevari' from 1922, and we can thus read the 'there' where nobody can go back as an allusion to his Genoese childhood, along the lines of what the poet himself states about *Il gibbone*, the poem which precedes *Toba*. Cf. the endnote to *Congedo*, in *OV*, pp.271-272.
[82] Mengaldo, *Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni*, p. XX.
[83] Cf. Tim Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 8-11. We will return to a similar terminological distinction in the next pages.

4.7) From places to space: the problem of the 'where' in Caproni's mature poetry

The definitive break of the experiential relation which ties the io to the surrounding space occurs more comprehensively in *Muro*. To have an idea of what we mean by 'experiential relation', one simply needs to look at *Il becolino*, from *Seme*, and the importance that this small cargo vessel, whose memory surfaces back from Caproni's Livornese childhood, has for the io:

> I becolini, nella Livorno della mia infanzia, erano lunghe imbarcazioni da carico, più eleganti dei navicelli e dei gozzi, nere di catrame […][84]

We have cited these lines to prove that Livorno's topography emerges as a familiar and existentially meaningful environment for the io. In a way, this spatial relation represents the only vehicle through which the io is allowed to go back in time to Annina's childhood, experiencing a temporal displacement whereby he recedes to a moment in time which precedes his own birth. Indeed, it is through an identification with a familiar space that a temporal distance is bypassed.[85]

A profound spatial change takes place with *Muro*. By adopting some terminological distinctions borrowed from human geography, in this section we shall argue that whereas up to *Seme* (and, to some extent, *Congedo*) one is still entitled to talk about the presence of places, rather than sheer space, with *Muro* the passage from 'place' to 'space' becomes definitive and irreversible. As far as physical space is concerned, the most noticeable change brought about by *Muro* regards the reduced presence of urban settings, which were previously predominant. The city does not disappear altogether (nor will it in the next collections), but its presence diminishes conspicuously and is, overall, qualitatively reduced to an uninhabitable/hostile space (cf. *Via Pio Foà I* and *Via Pio Foà II*, *Arpeggio* and *Parole (dopo l'esodo) dell'ultimo della Moglia*). It does not come as a surprise then that, in recalling Calvino's statement quoted earlier, Caproni notes how:

> Fino al *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso*, e in parte anche ne *Il muro della terra*, ho sempre tratto dalla città (Livorno e, soprattutto, Genova: e, di scorcio, anche Roma e Parigi ecc.) il fondo della scena e le mie metafore. Poi, con l'avvento della

[84] This explanatory note features in the endnote to the collection, in *OV*, p. 235.
[85] Raboni writes about a '*trasnfert* da tempo spazio', since in *Seme* we are confronted with 'una distanza temporale che Caproni vive come se fosse spaziale, cioè come se fosse ipotizzabile (sebbene, certo, non realizzabile) percorrerla nel senso inverso', in *La poesia che si fa*, p. 134.

> motorizzazione di massa – e l'avvento di una società, se società può dirsi, di massa – la città si è trasformata per me in un "popoloso deserto", come, per Violetta, Parigi nella *Traviata* (ossia un luogo invivibile, dove la personalità rimane schiacciata dal numero), e sempre più di frequente ho preso a soggiornare sui monti, al margine delle foreste.[86]

More generally, alongside the diminishing presence of the city there goes the rising presence of immaterial settings. Though identifiable with those of Val Trebbia dear to Caproni's poetry since its beginnings, the large number of villages and desolated spaces which feature in *ll muro* do not possess those physical traits which would render them convincingly realistic; they rather become more and more imaginary and dreamlike. A prime example of the degree to which existing geographical places can be deprived of their real consistency is *Toponimi*, in which urban toponyms from Livorno coexist, almost naturally, with invented ones.[87] It is precisely against this backdrop of dematerialisation of space that Caproni's poetry begins to pose what we shall define as a problem of the 'where'. In order to illuminate one of the fundamental undertones of this, we shall first take into consideration *Ritorno*, which features the presence of an undefined and rather metaphysically connoted 'where', in which antinomies meet:

> Sono tornato là
> dove non ero mai stato.
> Nulla, da come non fu, è mutato.
> Sul tavolo (sull'incerato
> a quadretti) ammezzato
> ho trovato il bicchiere
> mai riempito. Tutto
> è ancora rimasto quale
> mai l'avevo lasciato.
> (*OV* 374)

We can better appreciate the extent to which this text (and, overall, *Muro*) brings about a new and more complex spatial problem, by comparing it with *Il gibbone*, an earlier poem from *Congedo*, in which the 'where' ('là') could still take the guise of an urban reality, one which is lamented as unreachable and lost:

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[86] Caproni, *IA*, pp. 335-337.
[87] On this poem see Adele Dei, 'Toponimi', in *Le carte incrociate: Sulla poesia di Giorgio Caproni* (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003) pp. 51-59.

[…]
Nell'ossa ho un'altra città
che mi strugge. È là.
L'ho perduta.
[…] Città
cui nulla, nemmeno la morte
– mai, – mi ricondurrà.
(*OV* 264)

In *Ritorno* instead, the 'where' is no longer unreachable, and the io can indeed return, rather paradoxically, where he has never been. What is at stake is thus a fundamental perspectival difference: in *Il gibbone*, the io laments the loss of a 'where' which is laden with a persistent and burning memory ('mi strugge'), a 'where' which appears to have had, for him, a significant experiential value. In the endnote to the collection, Caproni writes that 'Genova potrebbe esser l' "altra città" del *Gibbone*, una Genova vista di sera dalla Madonna del Monte. Ma potrebbe anche essere una chimerica città dell'anima, chissà'.[88] Be it one or the other, it is a 'where' with which the io is in an experiential relation, and its loss is thus all the more sorrowful. On the other hand, the 'where' of *Ritorno* emerges as an impersonal space which retains the traces of neither the presence nor the passage of the io ('tutto era rimasto quale mai l'avevo lasciato'). In *Esperienza*, which addresses this thematic concern explicitly and subtly, it is the very notion of experience which is summoned to prove the break-up of the relationship between the io and his places:

Tutti i luoghi che ho visto,
che ho visitato,
ora so – ne son certo:
non ci sono mai stato.[89]
(*OV* 382)

[88] Caproni, *OV*, p. 270. About this poem, see Caproni's letter to Betocchi, 30th of November 1964: 'Mi par d'essere un pesce fuor d'acqua – a Roma mi trovo sempre peggio. Tempo fa andai a Genova: salii di sera, al buio, fino alla Madonna del Monte. C'erano tanti lumi, sotto di me, tutti vivi. Forse la mia città dell'anima è quella. Ci ho scritto questi versi [*Il Gibbone*'s], che non sono nient'altro che versi, forse, ma che mi sono cari. Ci vorrei andare a morire. […]', Ibid., p.1528.

[89] Alfredo Giuliani notes how in *Muro*, the underpinning motif of 'esperienza del vuoto, del mancare dell'esperienza' is vehicled through 'immagini assolutamente prive di connotazione moderna. Le distanze sono calcolate in leghe, si va in diligenza, c'è il vetturale, c'è la lanterna, al massimo c'è una radio accesa in un bar fumoso, e il poeta non porta il cappotto ma il gabbano', in Caproni, *IA*, pp. 467-468.

What Caproni here posits is not the non-existence of the 'where' (which will be theorised at a later stage, in *Conte*), but rather, the impossibility of experiencing it. What is questioned is not the existence of those 'luoghi', but rather the io's presence in them. It is under this very light that we understand the meaning of what Caproni defines, in *L'ultimo borgo* (*Franco*) as 'luoghi non giurisdizionali':

> […]
> Un tratto
> ancora, poi la frontiera
> e l'altra terra: I luoghi
> non giurisdizionali.
> L'ora
> era tra l'ultima rondine
> e la prima nottola.
> […]
> (*OV* 437)

How else should we interpret these 'luoghi non giurisdizionali', if not that they are not subject to 'human jurisdiction', hence not meant for the io to inhabit? [90] We have thus gone from the idea of a 'where' which, however lamented as lost, could still be inhabited by the io, who related himself with it (up to *Il cogedo*), to a 'where' which the io cannot inhabit. Drawing on some notions of human geography, we can thus argue that the fundamental passage that is here at stake is one from being able to being unable to experience a 'where'. In *Place. A short introduction*, Tim Cresswell, expounding the theories of the geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, writes that 'the continuum which has place at one end and space at the other is simultaneously a continuum linking experience to abstraction.' In other words, the difference between place and space is tantamount to the difference between the ability and the inability to experience space in such a way as to turn it into a place: 'Tuan defined place through a comparison with space. He develops a sense of space as an open arena of action and movement while place is about stopping and resting and becoming involved.'[91] With the benefit of these observations, we can regard *Ritorno* and *Esperienza* as marking the turning point from which Caproni's poetry abandons the idea and sense of place for a more negative idea of space. The turning point from which not being able to return to a place of

[90] Cf. also Raboni's comment, in Caproni, *L'ultimo borgo*, pp. 179-180.
[91] Tim Cresswell, Place, pp. 20-21.

experience is superseded by being able to return to a space of non-experience. Within our posthumous theoretical framework, we can read this new stage of Caproni's poetry as coming 'after' the possibility for the io of inhabiting any 'where'. It is a spatial exile which impinges greatly on the presence and consistency of the io:

> Se non dovessi tornare,
> sappiate che non sono mai
> partito.
> Il mio viaggiare
> è stato tutto un restare
> qua, dove non fui mai.
> (*OV* 427)

Here, in *Biglietto lasciato prima di non andare via* (*Franco*) it is clear how the questioning of the 'where' and of its habitability also serves well the purpose of staging the weakening of the io (or indeed his very non-existence, given the ambivalence of 'non fui'). If, as described in *Esperienza*, the 'where' has never been visited by the io, it is no surprise that here we are confronted with a 'where' in whose spatial references (note the deictics 'qua' and 'dove') the io's own presence begins to vanish. One may call to mind the final strophe of Philip Larkin's *Places*, *Loved Ones*, in which the absence of places with which the io can identify himself results in the the io's own absence.[92] Indeed, poetry could hardly be more posthumous.

But does this problem of the 'where' have a temporal counterpart? Does time too undergo fundamental changes? The way in which Caproni addresses these issues is spatial, as it were. We now turn more comprehensively to *Franco* and *Conte*, whose space of the hunt does bear some resemblance with that 'open arena of action and movement' mentioned by Tuan.

4.8) The space (without time) of the hunt

In *Franco* and *Conte* the relevance of space deepens, as its function becomes more and more essential to addressing some of the main thematic concerns of Caproni's mature *oeuvre*.

[92] The final lines read: 'And wiser to keep away / From thinking you still might trace / Uncalled-for to this day / Your person, your place', Philip Larkin, *Collected poems*, (London: The Marvell Press and faber and faber, 2003), p. 46.

We shall start by taking into consideration the theme of hunt, which pulls the two collections close to one another. In effect, the hunt for God and that for 'una feroce Bestia di color cenericcio' (*Avviso*, p. 541) provide *Franco* and *Conte*, respectively, with a shared theme which unfolds against the backdrop of forests and woods. Even though they do not constitute the only spaces of the collections, as we shall presently see, forests and woods are the implicit referents to which the general theme of hunt inevitably – and constantly – refers (see, for instance *Antefatto*, *La caccia*, *La preda* in *Franco* and *L'ora* and *Tra parentesi* in *Conte*).[93] Aside from these observations concerning the superficial aspect of the hunting context, the true objective of this section is to prove that it is the idea of hunt itself as conceived by Caproni that bears fundamental spatial characteristics, which are, in their turn, functional to bringing back (with renewed insight) that sense of ahistorical time which initially appeared in *Cronistoria*.

We can perhaps start with *Geometria*, from *Franco*, as the poem suggests that not only does the hunt have its own spatial backdrop, but that it *is* also understood spatially:

L'importante è colpire
alle spalle.
Così si forma un cerchio
dove l'inseguito insegue
l'inseguitore.
Dove non si può più dire
(figure concomitanti
fra loro, e equidistanti)
chi sia il perseguitato
e chi il persecutore.
(*OV* 484)

By defining it in circular geometrical terms, the poem exemplifies the dynamics and conception of the hunt, that is to say an inconclusive and yet endless striving which leads to no outcome. Any capture, be it of god or of the Beast, is, in fact, impeded, because preys and hunters, as well as the realities they move in, are subject to constant processes of reversibility and interchangeability of roles. Everything and everyone is susceptible of

[93] On a thematic level, Caproni's last three collections (excluding the posthumous *Res Amissa*) are all characterised by spaces of action which, though flanked by others, emerge as dominant: the desert of *Muro*, the forest and woods of *Franco* and *Conte*.

becoming its and their opposite, and the overall tone of the collections borders on nonsense, as is evident, in *Franco*, from both God's gnomic *Indicazione* and *Errata corrige*, one of the io's declarations. We find, in each of these poems, what we have defined as a problem of the 'where':

> […]
> Se volete incontrarmi,
> cercatemi dove non mi trovo.
> […]
> (*OV* 406)
>
> ERRATA
>
> Non sai mai dove sei.
>
> CORRIGE
>
> Non sei mai dove sai.
> (*OV* 428)

It must be noted that at this stage of Caproni's poetry this problem becomes significantly entangled with another fundamental thematic concern, namely that of 'morte della distinzione', which we have partially dealt with in the previous chapter on the image of the desert. On a superficial level, we can read the forest and woods of the hunt as analogous to the desert of *Muro*, in that, precisely as the desert, these spaces tend to annihilate differences, thus facilitating that process of reversibility and loss of distinction. But perhaps more significantly, the spatial representation of the hunt which *Geometria* puts on stage also reveals the hunt's temporal essence. In order to understand this, we need look back briefly at some earlier poems. Ever since the 'tempo diviso' form *Le biciclette*, Caproni's poetry has displayed an explicit rift between the io and time, and in the mature poetry this rift has steadily widened, as testified to by some compelling examples from *Muro*. One may think of *Dopo la notizia*, in which what is left after depopulation is only the wind, 'là dove agostinianamente / più non cade tempo' (ll. 26-27); or of the prosopopoeia of *Parole (dopo l'esodo) dell'ultimo della Moglia*, who declares to be 'perso nel tempo. ¬ Fuori del tempo' (l. 27-29). Of particular relevance is *Ottone*, where the absence of time becomes curiously

entangled with the theme of hunt, the reference to ‘partita’ conveying the meaning both of ‘endgame’ and, through the mention of the pheasant, of ‘hunting expedition’ (‘partita di caccia’):

> […]
>
> È là,
> in quella conca dove
> (raro) il fagiano appare
> nel bosco, che ora
> vorrei finir la partita.
> Là dove la vita stagna
> (o sembra) senza
> spinta di tempo. Il tempo
> senza spinta di vita.
> (*OV* 378)

Since *Passaggio*, each of Caproni's collections seems to anticipate the main theme of the following one, and *Ottone*, one of the final texts of *Muro*, is no exception. The title refers to a village of the Val Trebbia, which, as is often the case in *Muro*, is transfigured into a somewhat fictitious and unreal toponym. What needs be noticed is that this 'where' ('là'), in which the final hunt should occur, is presented as either lacking time or containing a stagnating one. And it is precisely this temporal immobility which characterises the action of *Franco* and *Conte*, in that, if hunting is fruitless, if proceeding is equal to remaining (cf. *Apostrofe*), leaving to staying (cf. *Biglietto lasciato prima di non andare via*), chasing to being chased (cf. *Rivalsa* as well as *Il fagiano*), there follows that the circle of the hunt does not allow of qualitative distinctions between moments in time. Indeed, if there is no capture, there can be no before nor after the capture: any temporal distinction is annihilated, and time is simply represented by the geometrical, spatial shape of a circle. In other words, we argue that what is, in *Geometria*, the spatial representation of the hunt, is also the spatial representation of a time which has lost its flow and sequence. It is a conception of time which is profoundly ahistorical, and in order to elucidate this we shall draw on a passage of Agamben's essay *Tempo e storia*. Analysing 'la natura essenzialmente non-storica della concezione antica del tempo', Agamben writes that

> la concezione che del tempo ha l'antichità greco-romana è fondamentalmente circolare e continua. […] Come spiega un singolare passaggio dei *Problemi* di Aristotele, è impossibile dire, da questo punto di vista, se noi siamo posteriori o anteriori alla guerra di Troia: "[…]Se il seguito degli accadimenti è un cerchio, poiché il cerchio non ha propriamente né inizio né fine, noi non possiamo, a causa di una maggiore prossimità rispetto all'inizio, essere anteriori ad essi, né essi dirsi anteriori a noi"[94]

Now, it is not our aim to assess to what degree Caproni's idea of time borders on that of the ancient Greeks. Our purpose is to prove that the geometrical space of the hunt becomes essential to validating the theme of 'morte della distinzione' also on a temporal level.[95]

To summarise, we have seen how the hunt which takes place in Caproni's last collections has its own specific space. Superficially readable as the physical setting of forests and woods within which the hunt is staged, this space substantiates, on a deeper level, the fading away of the temporal coordinate. Indeed, the geometrical circle which characterises the space of the hunt is one within which time, in its sequential flow, is absent. Within our posthumous framework, this space can thus be read as eminently 'post-temporal'. On a broader level, the conception of a geometrical space of the hunt proves to be functional to substantiating the annihilation of distinctions. It is, however, only in one subsection of *Conte – Asparizioni* – that the 'morte della distinzione' is explicitly mentioned. As Caproni himself clarifies, the term *Asparizioni* is a neologism which encapsulates the idea of 'apparizione e sparizione insieme', an idea which appears as fundamentally temporal. Yet, space participates even more prominently than time in sustaining this idea. As we shall see in the next section, this is partly due to the need Caproni has to address the problem of the 'where' from a new particular perspective, that of language.

4.9) The space (without time) of 'Asparizioni' and the 'where' of language

The idea of *Asparizioni* as it emerges in *Conte* is not new to Caproni's poetry. A poem by the same name of *Asparizione* features already in *Franco*. It is worth noting that the idea, in itself, figures immediately as spatially marked in this earlier poem:

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[94] Agamben, *Infanzia e storia*, pp. 96-97.

[95] Incidentally, Caproni's mature poetry teems with declaration of non-existence of history itself. A perfect example is *Corollario*, from *Conte*, which carries to extremes a concept already expressed in *L'idrometra*: Leone o Drago che sia / il fatto poco importa. / La Storia è testimonianza morta. / E vale quanto una fantasia' (OV, p. 562). Cf. also Montale's nihilistic vision in *La storia*, from *Satura*: 'La storia non è prodotta / da chi la pensa e neppure / da chi l'ignora. […] La storia non è magistra / di niente che ci riguardi', in *Tutte le poesie*, p. 323.

In una via di Lima.

O di qui.
Non importa.

In sogno forse.
In eco.

Nel battito già perdutamente
dissolto di una porta.
(*OV* 407)

In fact, throughout the section *Asparizioni* in *Conte*, we see the emergence of a distinctive proliferation of the adverb 'dove' which signals that the problem of the 'where' is here taken to new depth. In a rather consummate way, Caproni is able to expand on the thematic strands which were only alluded to in the poem from *Franco*: the 'where' of a Lima street thus expands so as to take in a heterogeneous array of cities (*L'ubicazione*); the 'where' of the dream is now given a pair of consecutive intertwined poems (*Ipotesi* and *Deduzione*); finally, the rather inscrutable idea of a 'where' as a door which constituted the final couplet of *Asparizione* acquires, in this new section, new and pervasive undertones. As we shall see towards the end, the poetic image of the 'door' is directly linked to the problem of the 'where' as language.

As far as this section goes, notwithstanding the plethora of spaces, we immediately notice that to identify a 'where' which relates to a real spatial referent is a difficult task. The dematerialisation which we have thus far expounded, by which places become spaces where time loses its sequence and experience becomes impossible, finds, in *Asparizioni*, its definitive accomplishment, to the point that the sense of the spatial coordinate itself begins to be questioned. What is relevant is that its questioning is markedly thematised, as testified to by *L'ubicazione*, a poem in which the list of toponyms finally yields, at the close, to the resigned observation that any 'where' is as good as another:

[…]
(Non conta
L'ubicazione.
il luogo

di stanza – sempre –
è pura immaginazione.)
(*OV* 612)

The reader may be led to see in this final line a possible defence of the poetic imagination. In fact, as subsequently stated by *Versi controversi*, to claim that the place is 'pura immaginazione' is equal to saying that there is no real 'where'. Or better, that the only possible 'where' is 'nessun luogo':

[…]
A un passo da dove?...
Il *dove*
non esiste?...

Esiste
– fra la palpebra e il monte –
tutta quest'erba felice
di nessun luogo…

Tutto
questo inesistente mare
così presente…

Godilo…

Godilo e non lo cercare
se non vuoi perderlo…
[…]
Negalo, se lo vuoi trovare…

Inventalo…
Non lo nominare…[96]

[96] In passing, we can note that the poem may be reminiscent of Zanzotto's *Gnessulógo*, a text of *Il galateo in bosco* (1978) where the 'verde / di radura tipicamente montelliana' (the historical site of the Montello hill, which constitutes the main backdrop of the collection) turns into a derooted 'nessunluogo' ('Ed è così che ti

(*OV* 621-22)

If we set aside momentarily the main thematic concern raised by these lines, namely the idea of a 'where' which has a problematic relation with language and the act of naming, we can briefly reflect on the essence of the phenomenon of 'asparizioni'. Within the section taken as a whole, we can consider the annihilation of the where as the final stop on a thematic journey which proves once more the functionality of space in laying out a negative relation between the io and time. In effect, what lies at the core of the phenomenon of 'asparizioni' is largely a negative temporal essence, for their occurrence does not last long enough to turn into an appearance, or into a meaningful manifestation: what they lack is the possibility of maturing into a kind of kairotic moment, one of enlightenment for the io, thus recalling the instantaneous and short-lived essence of the Serenian joy. The poem *Un niente* is quintessential of this temporality which is reduced to an ineffective 'guizzo'. Here, the 'asparizione' comes to the same thing as nothing:

[…]
Spariscono
nel medesimo istante
(un guizzo) dell'apparizione…
[…]

Di tutto l'avvenimento, in mente
appena

(a pena)
un niente.
(*OV* 605-06)

In order to shed some further light on the interrelation between this temporal 'niente' and space, let us examine a passage from Henri Bergson's *Time and free will. An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. Drawing a line between the space of the external world of objects and the inward life of the io (his/her *durée*), Bergson explains that

senti nessunluogo, gnessulógo'). Andrea Zanzotto, *Le poesie e prose scelte*, Milano, Mondadori, 2000 [1999], p. 554. See also the endnote to *Il Galateo in bosco*, pp. 643-650.

> c'è uno spazio reale, senza durata, ma in cui certi fenomeni appaiono e scompaiono simultaneamente ai nostri stati di coscienza. C'è una durata reale, i cui momenti eterogenei si compenetrano, ma ciascun momento della quale può essere avvicinato a uno stato contemporaneo del mondo esterno e, per l'effetto di questo stesso avvicinamento, separato dagli altri momenti. [97]

Hence, we can suggest that the space of 'asparizioni' is one which is devoid of *durée*. Not unlike the geometrical idea of the hunt, which substantiates, spatially, the negative essence of time, the many 'wheres' featuring in this section of *Conte* provide the spatial stage for the 'asparizioni' to take place. In a space without duration, such as the 'where' of *Conte*, there can be no distinction between one moment and the other, no time for the io to perceive anything more than nothing, or to prevent the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of 'asparizioni'.

It is in this space that the process of 'morte della distinzione' (*Controcanto*) is brought to definitive completion; it is within this space that the io undergoes, in Enrico Testa's words, that 'processo di disappropriazione e di inappartenenza' which 'giunge a coinvolgere nella sua frana rovinosa anche la facoltà – organo o principio interiore – per eccellenza destinata a differenziare, discernere, identificare' (the organ Testa refers to is the brain). [98] However, were we to identify the irreducible faculty through which any preliminary distinction is made, we would equally have no difficulty in indicating language. 'Non potrebbe esistere pensiero senza linguaggio', Émile Benveniste writes, 'il linugaggio riproduce il mondo ma sottomettendolo alla propria organizzazione'.[99] Giorgio Agamben has investigated at length the relation between language and experience, chiefly in texts such as *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia* and *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*. Retracing much of the Western metaphysical tradition and drawing extensively on Benveniste's studies on linguistics, Agamben examines the idea of language as 'origine' and 'luogo proprio' of the subject.[100] What pertains to this 'luogo' is an inherent negativity, given that, by experiencing language for the first time during infancy, the subject becomes originally and irremediably divided.[101] In entering language, man is, in fact, exiled from an original and natural 'lingua', which keeps on pertaining to animals instead

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[97] Giovanni Fornero and Salvatore Tassinari, 'Bergson e il bergsonismo', in *Le filosofie del Novecento*, 2 vols (Milano: Mondadori), I, p. 197.
[98] Testa, 'Con gli occhi di Annina', in *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 47. The idea of 'disappropriazione' was initially brought to the fore by Agamben in his 1991 introduction to *Res Amissa*, entitled *Disappropriata maniera*, now in Agamben, *Categorie italiane: Studi di poetica e letteratura* (Roma : Laterza, 2010) pp. 82-95.
[99] Émile Benveniste, *Problemi di linguistica generale* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2010 [1971]), p. 35.
[100] Agamben, *Infanzia e storia*, p. 42.
[101] *Il linguaggio e la morte: un seminario sul luogo della negatività* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008 [1982]).

The significance of Agamben's thought for Caproni's later works has been explored in several scholarly contributions.[102] This critical approach is partly justified by the friendship between Agamben and Caproni which, began in the early 1980s, resulted in a fertile intellectual relationship, as proved by the mutual references contained in each other's texts.[103] Notwithstanding the existing contributions, it is my contention that new light on this relationship can be thrown by situating Agamben's stance on language as an 'expatriating where' within the overall discourse on uninhabitility and impossibility of experiencing the 'where' which is at the root of the present study. In doing so, we shall delve into the last – and possibly most important – facet of the problem of the 'where' in Caproni's mature poetry.

Caproni's reflection on language and its negativity begins already in the 1940s, and *Passaggio* (1956) marks the point in which a certain distrust of the word and language begins to emerge on a poetic level too. However, at that time, it is principally in his activity as an essayist that Caproni investigates this negativity, and it is only during the 1970s that this concern becomes poetically salient and all-pervading. Let us take a look at a couple of consecutive poems from *Franco* so as to read them against some of the insightful reflections by Agamben. First, *Le parole*:

Le parole. Già.
Dissolvono l'oggetto.

Come la nebbia gli alberi,
Il fiume: il traghetto.
(*OV* 460)

Then *Lo spatriato*:

Lo hanno portato via
dal luogo della sua lingua.
Lo hanno scaricato male
In terra straniera.
Ora, non sa più dove sia

[102] See, for instance, Alessandro Montani, 'Della citazione: Caproni legge Agamben', in *Studi novecenteschi*, issue 60, December 2000, pp.423-450, and Zublena, 'L'oggetto perduto tra silenzio della morte e fantasma della scrittura. Lettura di *Res amissa*', in *Giorgio Caproni*, pp.145-179.
[103] See 'Cronologia',in *OV, p. LXXIV*.

la sua tribù. È perduto.
Chiede. Brancola. Urla.

Peggio che se fosse muto.
(*OV* 461)

The two texts bespeak an exile which is experienced on a linguistic level. First, Caproni ascertains the negative power of words, mainly due to the deficient relationship which ties them to the objects they refer to. As is well-known, this is one of the tenets of twentieth-century history of literature and philosophy, but Caproni's precocious observations on this very concern must be duly acknowledged. Already in 1947, in an article published in *La fiera letteraria*, Caproni writes that

> la parola crea una realtà e che voler usare una parola per conoscere una cosa è come voler usare una cosa per conoscerne un'altra. Nel qual senso soprattutto come non comprendere il castigo della confusione delle lingue? Sta di fatto che Adamo, dando un valore conoscitivo al *verbum*, cioè inventando il linguaggio logico, si creò *nelle* parole i campi del suo *esilio* e della sua servitù – si perdette nella foresta delle parole (nella selva oscura) senza possibilità, forse, di risalire il dilettoso colle.[104]

Exile within the forest of words: Caproni could not have been more clairvoyant in foreseeing the development of his poetry. Whereas at the time when the article was published Caproni could still believe in a kind of dignity of poetic language which was unknown to communicational and logical language, by the time the two texts from *Franco* are published, poetic language itself has undergone a considerable devaluation for him.[105] It too is now prevented from establishing any valuable equivalence with the object – the reality – it names. In this respect, Caproni assigns to words the same negative power as Maurice Blanchot:

> A word may give me its meaning, but first suppresses it. For me to be able to say, "This woman," I must somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. The word gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being. The word is the absence of that being, its nothingness, what is left of it when it has lost being – the very fact that it does not exist.[106]

This mechanism surely suffices to explain what is at stake in *Le parole*, namely the negative relation which the subject establishes, by means of words, with the object being named. It

[104] Caproni, *La precisione dei vocaboli ossia la Babele,* in *La scatola nera*, p. 23.
[105] Cf. Ibid., *Il quadrato della verità*, pp. 18-20.
[106] Maurice Blanchot, *Literature and the right to death*, in *The work of fire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995), p. 322.

also helps understand the final lines from *Versi controversi* ('Negalo, se lo vuoi trovare… // Inventalo… ¬ …Non lo nominare'), where the existence of a place which is as close as it can be to nature is only made possible by shielding it from the negativity of nomination, by avoiding its entrance into the forest of language. But on the other hand, it seems inadequate to account for *Lo spatriato*, whose estrangement clearly alludes to something more inherent in the essence of the io. The exile, in fact, is not so much produced by the inauthentic relation between words and objects as it is by a hiatus internal to the subject, between him and his language. Indeed, in the time – more than 30 years – which separates the 1947 article of *La fiera* from the poems of *Franco*, Caproni's reflection on language has considerably deepened. I would argue that that the exile at issue in *Lo spatriato* is better understood when read in view of the opposition between 'linguaggio' and 'lingua' addressed by Agamben in *Infanzia e storia*. As stated above, Agamben explains that it is in the realm of language that man finds his own place. This original place is, however, a divisive one, since it is where man abandons a natural essence (the 'lingua' of the other animals) to enter a linguistic one:

> Non la lingua in generale […] caratterizza l'uomo fra gli altri esseri viventi, ma la scissione tra lingua e parola, fra semiotico e semantico (nel senso di Benveniste), fra sistema di segni e discorso. […] Gli animali non entrano nella lingua: sono sempre già in essa. L'uomo, invece, in quanto ha un'infanzia, in quanto non è sempre già parlante, scinde questa lingua una e si pone come colui che, per parlare, deve costituirsi come soggetto del linguaggio, deve dire *io*. Per questo se la lingua è veramente la natura dell'uomo – e natura, se ben si riflette, può solo significare lingua senza parola […] – allora la natura dell'uomo è scissa in modo originale, perché l'infanzia introduce in essa la discontinuità e la differenza tra lingua e discorso.
>
> Ed è su questa differenza, su questa discontinuità che trova il suo fondamento la storicità dell'essere umano. Solo perché c'è un'infanzia dell'uomo, solo perché il linguaggio non s'identifica con l'umano e c'è differenza fra lingua e discorso, fra semiotico e semantico, solo per questo c'è storia, solo per questo l'uomo è un essere storico. Poiché la pura lingua è, in sé, astorica, è, considerata assolutamente, natura, e non ha alcuna necessità di una storia.[107]

To abandon 'la lingua', which did not involve words, in order to enter 'linguaggio' amounts to entering a different realm: from then on, in fact, man's essence will be linguistic, and his/her subjectivity only that of the linguistic subject which says 'I'. It is a passage from a natural essence to a linguistic one, as Agamben explains.

If we now go back to *Le parole* and *Lo spatriato*, what we can read, in their sequence, is the expropriation of the subject from his 'lingua' carried out by 'le parole'. The subject is thus thrown out of the 'luogo della sua lingua'. As soon as he is within the 'where' of 'parole' the io is expatriated. Language thus comes to be perceived as a negative 'where' which the

[107] Agamben, *Infanzia e storia*, pp. 50-51.

subject is condemned to inhabit. This emerges openly also in *Conte*, where the figure at the centre of the collection – the 'Bestia' which is helplessly hunted – may take, among others, the guises of language.[108] Precisely because, as Agamben reminds us, we never find man without language, Caproni writes: 'La Bestia che cercate voi, / voi ci siete dentro' (*Saggia apostrofe a tutti i caccianti*, ll. 3-4). Precisely because language is 'the where' of man, *Riflessione* reads: '(La Bestia che bracchiamo, / è il luogo dove ci troviamo)' (ll. 5-6). Just as many other 'wheres' which we have analysed throughout, this too becomes uninhabitable. But this uninhabitability emerges as worse than any other, implying an expropriation which is internal to the io himself.

What, then, is the relation between language thus understood and 'asparizioni'? On one level, it is the word as such which engenders a sort of 'asparizione', one by which the appearance of the name is instantaneously followed by the disappearance of the very essence it is meant to reach, inasmuch as, to repeat Blanchot's words quoted earlier, 'it gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being'. In this respect, the final exhortation to not nominate the sea in *Versi controversi* is extremely telling. But on a deeper level, we can maintain that it is in the 'where' of language as we have described it that there takes place the archetypal 'asparizione', given that it is man's 'lingua' that sinks down and disappears. As Agamben once again explains, this time in *La fine del pensiero*:

> […]La voce umana non c'è. Non c'è una nostra voce che noi possiamo seguire alla traccia nel linguaggio, cogliere – nel punto in cui dilegua nei nomi, si scrive nelle lettere. […] La voce […] è stata, ma non è più, né mai potrà essere. Il linguaggio ha luogo nel non-luogo della voce.[109]

As the language Beast appears, human voice (here 'voce umana' stands for 'lingua') disappears, just like an 'asparizione'. Because language is like a Morgana mirage, it is a 'where' which plays tricks and makes everything and every 'where' disappear:

> […]
>
> Dove
>
> nessuna stanza o città

[108] See the interview *Il poeta dà la caccia alla Bestia nascosta*, edited by Luciano Luisi, in *IA*, p. 333. Asked about the symbolic meaning of the 'Bestia', Caproni responds: 'naturalmente vi sono diversi livelli di lettura, livelli più ardui, superiori. La Bestia è addirittura per me il linguaggio, la parola stessa, perché io ho visto sempre nella parola, nel nome, una negazione della cosa: il nome nasconde la cosa. Infatti, dico: 'Spara, spara, prima che la Bestia si nasconda nel suo nome'. Here Caproni loosely quotes from his poem *L'ora*: '[…] L'ora della Bestia…Prima / di nominarla, spara! // Spara prima che sparisca / nel suo nome.' (*OV*, p. 555).

[109] G. Agamben, *La fine del pensiero*, in *Il linguaggio e la morte*, p. 138. *La fine del pensiero* is dedicated to Caproni and features many echoes of the image of the Beast as it appears in *Conte*.

s'apre all'occhio, e non muove
– nel ristagno del vago –
ramo o pensiero una sola
parvenza…
[…]
La porta
morgana:
la Parola.
(*OV* 609-10)

With this final poem entitled *La porta*, the analysis of the section entitled *Asparizioni* comes full circle, with a better understanding of what the function of the door in the poem *Asparizione* may allude to. In this respect, we can agree with that Vittorio Coletti when he establishes an equation between the image of the door and words, as he writes:

> la figurazione della parola (cioè del suono articolato, sensato) anche come porta, passaggio senza esito, luogo in cui l'uomo dice e inghiotte le cose e da cui non può evadere se non per affacciarsi sul vuoto del senso, sul ritrarsi del linguaggio stesso, sull'indicibilità angosciata. [110]

The door is, in Caproni, the 'where' in which the archetypal 'asparizione' takes place, as well as the 'where' in which, by means of words, an 'asparizione' is always happening.

4.10) Conclusion

To complete this investigation into the polyvalence of space in Caproni's poetry, let us draw some conclusions and summarise our evaluation, on the one hand, of the nature of space, and on the other, of its relation with time. Initially functional to providing poetry with a physical, concrete backdrop, the presence of space soon becomes tinged with negativity, for it signals, from *Congedo* onwards, the loss of the possibility, for the io, of establishing meaningful experiential relations with the surroundings. Drawing on a terminological distinction which belongs to human geography, we have noted how, with *Muro*, Caproni's poetry states the irreversible passage from an idea of a habitable place to that of an uninhabitable space. Caproni's mature poetry is often critically read as a poetry of non-

[110] Coletti, *Dietro la parola: Miti e ossessioni del Novecento* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2000), p. 35.

experience, and we have already hinted at the inherent posthumousness which this interpretation implies.[111] If we place the reading of space we have here proposed against the backdrop of our posthumous framework, we may suggest that the loss of experience is here presented under the guise of uninhabitability: the io is irremediably placed 'beyond', 'after' the possibility of experiencing a place, within a space whose essence is the annihilation of time. And indeed the persisting and multi-layered presence of space within the mature poetry allows us to identify the emergence of a problem of the 'where', one which is functional, first and foremost, to conveying the lack of any fruitful relation between the io and time. The geometrical representation of space, the numerous spaces of 'asparizioni', all contribute to substantiating the negative essence which time acquires in this poetry, and space thus becomes an apt means for validating the concern of 'morte della distinzione'. As far as posthumousness is concerned, we can see this space as 'post-temporal', or, more loosely, as coming 'after' the possibility of establishing any qualitative temporal difference which would allow the io to survive the expansion of this thematic concern. Finally, we have proceeded to the study of language and of its divisive 'luogo'. The problem of the 'where' takes on its final and more complex connotation here. Following the regression from place to space, and from space to uninhabitability, we arrive at the linguistic exile and expropriation which the io experiences on account of the negative essence of language. We have first associated the negativity of the act of naming with that of 'asparizione', and then examined, drawing on some of Agamben's ideas, the 'where' of language as a place in which the archetypal 'asparizione' occurs. Even in this final regard, the framework on which our overall analysis is based proves to be useful, since the relation which Caproni's io establishes with language is readable as posthumous, that is 'after' the exile the io suffers from the place of language.

[111] Cf. Chapter 1. See also Ferroni's idea of 'il senso di una esperienza che è inevitabilmente de-esperienza', 'La caccia e la preda', in *Per Giorgio Caproni*, edit. by Giorgio Devoto and Stefano Verdino, p. 302.

CONCLUSION

The notions of 'end' and 'after' have provided us with a multi-faceted framework within which to explore the diachronic development of Sereni's and Caproni's poetry, both individually and in a comparative perspective. Whereas the existing comparative approaches to their poetry have often privileged the analysis of specific or circumscribed thematic strands, this study has considered the 'end' and the 'after' as two interrelated categories under which to subsume some essential concerns of Sereni's and Caproni's *oeuvre* as a whole. As we have seen, critics have engaged with the idea of posthumousness – and, at times, with the separate notions of 'end' and 'after' – principally when confronted with Sereni's and Caproni's mature poetry. The recent comparative analysis of the theme of 'paura' in Sereni and Caproni conducted by Elisa Donzelli exemplifies well this critical tendency, confining the investigation into the posthumous dimension of Sereni's and Caproni's poetry within the perimeter of their mature works:

> Nell'ultima fase della produzione in versi, in entrambi i casi la paura è invischiata con la dimensione della *fine*: dell'oltre in Sereni, addirittura dell' "Oltre l'oltre" in Caproni.[1]

The present study has shown that it is possible to trace the emergence of posthumousness back to an earlier poetic phase. To do so, we have sought to propose a reading of the earlier stages of Sereni's and Caproni's work through recourse to the notion of posthumousness put forward by Ferroni; thus, we have sought to situate the poetic transposition of two watershed events of Sereni's and Caproni's biographies – imprisonment and grief, respectively – within the two poles of 'end' and 'after'. There has emerged the coming about of an awareness, a sense of the 'end' which, for both Sereni and Caproni, develops from the interaction of the individual experiences of imprisonment and grief with the historical caesura represented by WWII. Among the various implications that this bears on the poets' production extending from the early 1940s to the 1950s are two notable aspects. First, on a formal level, while Sereni undertakes a renewal of his poetry whose aim is to bring to an end the period of lyricism which pervaded his poetry up to the first edition of *Diario*, Caproni seeks, in a 'disperata tensione metrica', a sort of '*tetto* all'intima dissoluzione non tanto della mia privata persona, ma di tutto un mondo d'istituzioni e di miti sopravvissuti ma ormai svuotati e sbugiardati', that is, he has recourse to poetic forms deeply rooted in the Italian

[1] Donzelli, *Giorgio Caproni*, p. 179.

poetic tradition (the sonnets and stanzas) in order to counteract, as it were, the collapse of an entire system of values caused by the tragedy of war.[2] Secondly, on a thematic level, the awareness of having met with an 'end', which is both individually and historically connoted, ushers in the posthumous postures of the io, as we have seen analysing Sereni's *Diario* and Caproni's poetry between *Cronistoria* and *Passaggio*.

To an extent, this research has also sought to investigate the applicability of the notion of posthumousness as a cohesive interpretative framework**.** Following on from Ferroni's suggestion to investigate more in depth the implications associated with the various terms which he sees as falling under the scope of posthumousness, our analysis has explored in depth the images of 'ceneri' in Sereni and of 'deserto' in Caproni as 'residues'.[3] Indeed, in our view, 'residue' lends itself better than any other term to connoting that semantically liminal threshold which links the idea of an enduring 'end' to that of an ensuing 'after'. This study has thus shown how the negative undercurrents pertaining to the images of 'ceneri' and 'deserto' in Sereni's and Caproni's mature poetry can be traced back to the artistic transposition of imprisonment and grief in a much earlier phase. This is not to suggest that the reader should understand these images as simply receptacles of cross-references and allusions to the episodes of imprisonment and grief; but rather, as preserving – undoubtedly more subterraneously in Caproni than in Sereni – negative undercurrents arising in relation to those episodes, undercurrents which then add to the rich layering of meaning in the contexts in which such images recur in the later years.

One of the risks which a study such as this runs is that of forcing the interdependence between the poet's biographical experiences and poetry, of propelling too immediate an identification of the poetic io with the empirical one. 'Nulla di più rozzo e meschino mi pare possa esservi che la manìa di pseudo-esegeti intenti a frugare la biografia di un poeta nella presunzione di cogliere più a fondo il senso della sua opera, quando corrono il rischio di travisarlo', Giudici warns in *Diffidare delle biografie*.[4] However, the biographical experiences of imprisonment and grief are so fruitfully and comprehensively translated, in transfigured forms, into poetic material, that they become unavoidable poetic concerns. Both Mengaldo and Testa have illuminated, from different perspectives, this significant interdependence between what we have called, after Dilthey, 'lived experience', and poetry. In his close reading of *La spiaggia*, Mengaldo notes how

[2] Caproni, *OV*, pp. 1308-1309.
[3] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p. 15.
[4] Giovanni Giudici, 'Diffidare delle biografie', in *Andare in Cina a piedi* (Milano: Ledizioni, 2017[1992]), p.110.

> nella lirica come categoria è in gioco un io ideale, formale che sublima l'essenza dell'io esistenziale, mentre Sereni (non da solo ma con particolare vigore e successo) confonde, abbassa l'io ideale all'io esistenziale. E questo stacco nient'altro significa in termini sociologici se non rottura con la propria classe. Si è spesso parlato di 'esistenzialismo' per Sereni. A me par che, fuori delle indicazioni sommarie di tipo ideologico o culturale, la verità dell'etichetta stia press'a poco in quello che ho detto.[5]

As far as Caproni is concerned, we can here have recourse to Testa's observations on the role which the figure of Annina would play in introducing the io to the 'orizzonte del lutto cronico'. Drawing on Roland Barthes' idea of a 'sapere-non sapere' which bears close resemblance to that of 'sapere vissuto' posited by Jankélévitch, Testa points out that

> quest'ultimo [the 'lutto cronico'] non è inquadrabile nelle coordinate di una conquista tutta mentale, di una vertiginosa discesa nell'astrattezza di rastremati concetti, di un viaggio nelle regioni siderali della ragione speculativa; ma è, il lutto originario, veicolato nell'essenziale nesso che lega esperienza e scrittura, da una vicenda personale e concreta, tanto tragica nella sua comune e condivisibile semplicità quanto vera nel suo esserci e permanere, differenziando, così, proprio per il suo fondo d'esperienza e di *vita*, la poesia caproniana da certi esiti troppo cerebralmente artefatti e troppo discorsivamente compiaciuti a cui talvolta, attratti dalla medesima tematica, alcuni suoi lettori vogliono ricondurla.[6]

Exploring the thematic implications of the nexus between experience and poetry is at the heart of our attempt to use posthumousness as a vantage point, through recourse to the categories of 'end' and 'after', as well as to the liminal notion of residue. One of the objectives of this thesis has been to construct both a clarification of and an insight into the meaning and presence of posthumousness in the poetry of Caproni and Sereni taken in its entirety. We can now maintain that, in doing so, we have also been able to shed some light on the meaning and implications of Mengaldo's notion of 'poesia esistenziale', that is that type of poetry which, as indicated at the outset of this study, 'si accontenta di partecipare un'*esperienza*'.[7]

We have also analysed how, in Sereni's and Caproni's mature poetry, time and space – the necessary preconditions for the taking place of experience – become impracticable coordinates, designating a grid which the io finds difficult to inhabit. Insofar as it is experience itself that becomes unattainable (that very experience which constitutes the bedrock of Sereni's and Caproni's poetry), it is as though their mature works opened up a posthumous dimension whereby poetry itself, from a certain moment onwards, came 'after', were beyond what it is based on. Moreover, we have sought to bring to light some significant differences between Sereni and Caproni. We have seen how both poets address the same

[5] Mengaldo, *Per Vittorio Sereni*, pp. 164-165.
[6] Testa, 'Con gli occhi di Annina', pp. 52-53.
[7] Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento. Nuova serie*, pp. 20-21.

issue – that of uninhabitability – by privileging different perspectives, and we have subsumed some thematic concerns with which both Sereni and Caproni engage under the macrocategories of time and space. Indeed, on the one hand, Sereni's obsession with memory and the past ('il passato che non passa', to use Barile's expression), with lateness and the unaccomplished future, bespeaks the prominent temporal substance of Sereni's poetry.[8] On the other, the spatial representations of themes such as the hunt and 'asparizioni', as well as the coming about of the 'where' of language, provide Caproni's mature poetry with a multi-layered spatial essence. Placed against the broader 20th century cultural context, this distinction may bear some significant implications. As Robert T. Tally Jr. explains, 'time seems to be the dominant theme in many modernist works of literature' and 'a modernist aesthetic seemed to enshrine temporality as the most important dimension'.[9] By contrast, after the Second World War, 'space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivalling if not overtaking time in the significance it was accorded by critics and theorists' and '"the spatial turn", as it has been called, was aided by a new aesthetic sensibility that came to be understood as postmodernism'.[10]

Among the foundations of literary modernism is the idea of a discontinuous and intermittent time which may open up to the short-lived moment of revelation, namely the epiphanic time. As we have shown, this is also the time which pertains to Sereni's poetry, the time of 'gioia' and 'festa' (and indeed Sereni writes in *Un posto di vacanza*, 'che sono io? Custode non di ore ma di attimi', IV, ll. 20-21). Within the Italian literary panorama, the use and applicability of the term 'modernismo' is still under debate.[11] Mazzoni was among the first scholars who employed it, classifying Montale's poetry as 'classicismo modernista'. The notion of modernism thus emerges as inextricable from the persistence of lyricism. Indeed, Mazzoni sees Sereni belong to a sort of 'classicismo lirico moderno' which develops the legacy of the poetry of Montale.[12]

In this respect, Caproni's path is undoubtedly different. As this study has shown, the recurring presence of space-related concerns in his mature poetry intimates, among other things, the absence of time; within the geometrically circular space of the hunt, there is no time for discontinuity, nor intermittences; in other words, there is no time for epiphanies.

Moreover, the pervasive presence of spaces from which the io feels estranged, as well as the many figures of expatriation inhabiting Caproni's mature poetry, may recall that

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[8] Cf. Barile, *Il passato che non passa*.
[9] Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (Routledge, 2013), p. 34.
[10] Ibid., p. 3.
[11] See, for instance, Romano Luperini, 'Modernismo e poesia italiana del Novecento', in *Allegoria*, 63, pp. 92-100.
[12] Guido Mazzoni, *Forma e solitudine* (Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 2002), pp. 187-189.

'alarming disjunction between the body and its built environment' which, according to Fredric Jameson, lies at the core of 'postmodern hyperspace'; a disjunction that 'can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma, which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global, multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves as individual subjects'.[13] Caproni's *Errata corrige* is emblematic in this respect 'ERRATA / Non sai mai dove sei. / CORRIGE / Non sei mai dove sai.' This is not to suggest a systematically postmodern reading of Caproni's poetry, but rather, to point out some irreducible differences between him and Sereni, who, on the other hand, cannot disentangle himself from a modernist (and lyrical) idea of poetry. Compared to Sereni, Caproni is, in many respects, 'beyond' modernity, or in the sense of the term we have been adopting consistently in this study, 'after' modernity.[14] This is also reflected in the io's textual posture. Even though it is difficult to consider his poetic io as fully detached from the empirical one, Caproni comes to discover, with the 'prosopopee' of the 1960s, 'come si possa parlare di sé senza dire io'.[15] On the other hand, as correctly noted once again by Mazzoni, Sereni's poetry of *Apparizioni o incontri* (the last section of *Strumenti*) 'affascina per la naturalezza, priva di schermi letterari e di censure dovute al rispetto di una forma precostitutita, con la quale il soggetto si esprime; per la distanza minima che separa l'autore reale dal personaggio che dice io'.[16]

In *Dopo la fine*, Ferroni dedicates some pages to drawing a distinction between posthumousness and postmodernism, arguing in favour of the former, which, in his view, enables a necessary continuity between modernity and tradition.[17] Ferroni has subsequently sought to find this continuity in a study of the poetry of Giudici and Zanzotto, *Gli ultimi poeti*.[18] From a slightly different perspective, we have sought to investigate the more cohesive employment of what we have defined as an 'end'-'after' framework for the poetry of Sereni and Caproni. Further research could explore other implications of the use of a framework such as this, both for deepening the study of Sereni and Caproni and for

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[13] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *The cultural turn* (London & New York: Verso, 1998), pp.15-16.

[14] Cf. Mengaldo, 'Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni', p. XXVIII: 'Caproni è dall'inizio e resterà un decostruttore'. Cf. also Agamben's idea according to which, Caproni's poetry marks the leave-taking of a fundamental trope of modern poetry, the 'ateologia', 'Disappropriata maniera', in *Categorie italiane*, pp. 85-86.

[15] Mengaldo, 'Per la poesia di Giorgio Caproni', p. XXIX.

[16] Mazzoni, 'Verifica dei valori', p. 68. Mazzoni will subsequently trace this tendency back to the birth of modern Poetry when 'Soggetto poetico e persona biografica, in altre parole, vengono a coincidere, annullando la distanza fra il personaggio che dice io e la persona che mette la propria firma sulla copertina del libro, sia quando il testo affronta temi civili, si quando esprime affetti privati', *Sulla poesia moderna*, p. 78.

[17] Ferroni, *Dopo la fine*, p.137.

[18] Ferroni, *Gli ultimi poeti: Giovanni Giudici e Andrea Zanzotto* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2013).

ascertaining the posthumous dimension of other poets' works. More investigation could be carried out on formal implications, for instance, investigating the interplay between the use of poetic closures (or indeed of the end of the single lines themselves, if we agree with the postulate that the *enjambement* is what distinguishes poetry from prose) and the poet's own understanding and awareness of the 'end'.[19] Another potentially fruitful angle of approach would be to explore the ways in which, from the second half of the 20th century, poets have addressed, especially in metapoetic texts, the perilous and yet ever-surviving state of poetry itself, within a sociocultural context where poetry has come to inhabit that liminal space between its own end and its posthumous survival. After all, as Sereni admits, 'se ne scrivono ancora'. In this thesis, however, by systematically reading the poetry of Sereni and Caproni through the lens of posthumounsess, we have contributed to the understanding of the meaning and implications of the relation between poetry and experience.

[19] Cf. Barbara Herrnstein Smith: *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and Giorgio Agamben, *La fine del poema*, in *Categorie italiane*, pp.138-144.

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