ERRING IN POETRY:
THE ISSUE OF 'PRESENCE' IN THE
POETRY OF GIORGIO CAPRONI

Paolo Bartoloni

Sommario

Giorgio Caproni è ormai considerato uno dei più importanti poeti del Novecento italiano. Qui mi occupo soprattutto delle raccolte da Il congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso *fino al postumo* Res Amissa*, proponendo una lettura della poesia caproniana alla luce di concetti quali presenza, erranza e potenzialità. Mi pare che Caproni si interroghi in maniera esplicita e consapevole sul rapporto tra conoscenza e linguaggio poetico, e sulla graduale perdita di concreti riferimenti ermeneutici ed epistemologici. Il suo interrogarsi diventa una ricerca che lo porta a scoprire l'importanza dell'errare in uno spazio indefinibile ma, proprio per questo, intensamente ricco di potenzialità.*

Solitude and loneliness are two of the most emblematic themes crossing Caproni's work. In "Perch'io", the poem opening *Il seme del piangere*, we read: "...perch'io, che nella notte abito solo,/ anch'io, di notte, strusciando un cerino/ sul muro, accendo cauto una candela/ bianca nella mia mente – pro una vela/ timida nella tenebra, e il pennino/ strusciando che mi scricchiola, anch'io scrivo/ e riscrivo in silenzio e a lungo il pianto/ che mi bagna la mente..."[1] A similar image occurs in the opening poem to *Congedo del viaggiatore*

---

[1] Giorgio Caproni, *L'opera in versi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998: 185). All further references are to this edition.

cerimonioso & altre prosopopee, "In una notte d'un gelido 17 dicembre": "...l'uomo che di notte, solo,/ nel 'gelido dicembre'/ spinge il cancello e rientra/ -solo- nei suoi pensieri..." (241). The resemblance is in fact so strong as to make a statement about the continuity and consistency of Caproni's poetry almost banal and platitudinous. As many other critical readings have stressed and convincingly argued, the work of Giorgio Caproni is characterised by recurrent thematic preoccupations whose invariable return establishes an internal poetic dialogue, determining the inherent openness of his opus.[2] What interests me here, though, is not so much an enumeration of the many connections within Caproni's work as a discussion of one theme, that is the issue of "presence", whose fastidious and brilliant articulation makes, as I see it, the work of Caproni one of the most original, innovative and intriguing of last century.

In the two poems I quoted above, the image of solitude is accompanied, indeed sustained, by that of darkness. The "I" who speaks in "Perch'io" and the anonymous "He" "In una notte..." are not only alone but also immersed in a dark space which appears to enclose them, engendering a separation and isolation from another, undefined, zone. Yet here in this space, whose entrance, as "In una notte...", is protected by a gate, the self is necessarily on its own either already immersed in it, as in Perch'io", or about to regain access to it, as in "In una notte...". The idea of a movement "in" and "out" is not only explicitly marked by the actual opening of the gate, the trespassing across a threshold, but also by the suspension marks at the beginning and the end of the two poems. Those three dots testify to an invisible before and after, and yet present because graphically

---

2   Solitude and loneliness are by no means the only images defining Caproni's continuity. For instance, Luigi Surdich and Enrico Rovegno have emphasised the image of ice, *gelo*, as a recurring theme in the work of Caproni. See Luigi Surdich, "I racconti di Caproni", *Studi di filologia e letteratura*, no. 5, *Scrittori e riviste in Liguria fra '800 e '900* , Genova, 1980: 565-606; and Enrico Rovegno, "Leggendo *Res Amissa* di Caproni: il *gelo* e l'ultima caccia", *Studi di filologia e letteratura* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1997: 615-639).

enunciated, the experience of being enclosed in the exclusive and total presence of the self. This is thus the movement from the experience of the self amongst others to the state of the self in its own presence. The main characteristic of this presence plunged into darkness is its metaphorical connotation which translates a matter-of-fact mental condition into a physical exploration of the enclosure which is tentatively studied by the senses, namely sight and hearing. In "Perch'io" it is almost inevitable to see poetry as the "candle" generating a dim light amid the deep darkness surrounding it. And it is poetry that tries to make some sense of this dark enclosure by engraving words on paper. We in fact do not see the words forming on the page, but only hear the distinctive noise of the quill scratching the paper. In "In una notte..." poetry is not so visible, less than the physical act of writing or, for that matter, than the light piercing the darkness. What however remains invisible and unattainable, and only partially explorable, is the shape and form of that which is cloaked by darkness, that is the space inhabited by the self which poetry, at least in "Perch'io", seeks to illuminate.

If poetry is the "candle" to which the "I" in "Perch'io" delegates the task of knowing, what is there to be known appears to be the mind. If this is correct, as the texts unambiguously state, one is led to believe that Caproni operates a further distinction, this time pertaining to the self. To the physical and objectified presence of the bodily self he opposes the absent (because irrepresentable and unspeakable) presence of the mental self. The notion of an "absent presence" sounds oxymoronic and contradictory, but only in the context of a language which can function only on the condition of the tangible existence of its reference. By contrast, it makes sense if we accept, as I believe Caproni does, the existence, and thus the presence, of what is unutterable, of what exists beyond, or perhaps within, language. Borrowing an Heideggerian term, this zone could be described, at least provisionally , as the realm of *Dasein*, that is of being before its fall

into the unauthentic language of others. [3] Or perhaps more appropriately, it is the space of interstitiality and potentiality[4] in which presence is decreed by its possibility rather than its actuality.

If the similarities between "Perch'io" and "In una notte..." are striking, the differences are also instructive. I have already alluded to the fact that "In una notte..." the knowledge-making function of poetry is not as obvious as in "Perch'io". What should be stressed is that the "I" of "Perch'io" turns into an "He" in "In una notte...". Not only is there no epistemological exploration performed by poetry, but there is no actual "I". The enclosure of the mind is now inhabited by an anonymous "He" who seems to rely only on listening to his "sospiri" for an apperception of the space within. What might this passage from the "I" to the "He" mean?[5]

Discussing Kafka's work in *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot says that: "The writer gives up saying 'I'. Kafka remarks, with surprise, with enchantment, that he has entered into literature as soon as he can substitute 'He' for 'I'."[6] Kafka's substitution is also

---

3 Heidegger discusses the notion of *Dasein* in his seminal book *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

4 On the notion of potentiality, see the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, and especially *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

5 A similar transition is at work in Ungaretti's "Il porto sepolto", to name only the most immediate example in Italian poetry. In Ungaretti's poem, the third person singular of the first stanza shifts to the first person singular of the second stanza. Yet, as I see it, the similarity is only apparent and quickly problematised by the actual trajectory of the shift. Whereas in Ungaretti's "Il porto sepolto" this passage is also the passage from the making of poetry to the results and effects that poetry has on the reader, in Caproni's poems the journey is not subjected to a return, and therefore to its interpretation from the tangibility of a "lit home" (the Ungarettian's return to light). Caproni's journey, either willingly or unwillingly, seems to be stuck in poetry, incapable of returning to the surface. If in fact the entrance into solitude and darkness is clearly narrativised, its expected return is not articulated.

6 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln; University of Nebraska Press, 1982: 26).

Caproni's. It is this passage from the "I" to the "He" that enables the writer to enter into a space which ultimately generates literature. The notion of the entrance is intriguing because it reconnects with Caproni's strong and fastidious emphasis on moving into something, into an inner space as the self embarks on the experience of narrating. It is no accident that "Perch'io" and "In una notte..." are epigraphs, positioned in a space in-between the actual collection of poetry and something before it. They are there arguably to signify a rite of passage and the necessary movement and initiation into the space of literature.

For Caproni the entrance into the enclosure of literature is also the entrance into the necessary solitude and silence enabling the right contemplation and concentration needed to spy on the invisibility and undecidibility of literature's object. This is perhaps reminiscent of the Brodskyan "alternative existence"[7], that is the conscious separation and distancing from reality. In this fractured space concentration and silence dominate. It is for instance here, within the folds of writing, that the Zeno of *Further Confessions of Zeno* (*Continuazioni*) can achieve the concentration (*raccoglimento*) that he aspires to in order to eschew the confusion of actual living.[8] And it is again the urge towards concentration that, following Blanchot's interpretation, leads Rilke to absolute silence: "My solitude" writes Rilke in a letter to countess Solms-Laubach in August 1907, "has finally encircled me and I am

---

7   Joseph Brodsky, *Less than One* (New York: Ferrar Straus Giroux, 1986: 123).

8   "L'unica parte importante della vita è il raccoglimento. Quando tutti lo somprenderanno con la chiarezza ch'io ho tutti scriveranno. La vita sarà letteraturizzata. Metà dell'umanità sarà dedicata a leggere e studiare quello che l'altra metà avrà annotato. E il raccoglimento occuperà il massimo tempo che così sarà sottratto alla vita orrida vera." Italo Svevo, *Romanzi* (Turin-Paris: Einaudi-Gallimard, 1993: 922). "The only part of life that matters is contemplation. When everybody understands that as clearly as I do, they will all start writing. Life will become literature. Half of humankind will devote itself to reading and studying what the other half has written. And contemplation will be the main business of the day, preserving it from the wretchedness of actual living." Italo Svevo, *Further Confessions of Zeno*, trans. Ben Johnson and P.N. Furbank (London; Secker & Warburg, 1969: 27).

inside my efforts just as the core is in the fruit."[9]   What we witness in Caproni, as well as in Svevo and Rilke, is a deliberate ritual of separation from quotidian reality whose purpose is to enter another space in which, by concentrating, they are able to "see", to "hear" better. This is the immersion into literature which becomes the only possible reality, the only concrete point of reference, the enclosure from within which an exploration of the self and its meanings is conducted.

Literature becomes thus the instrument, the tool, the tangible and concrete presence, the "candle", the "scratching quill", the silence, the compass used to approach its object. The difference is that in Caproni this object is the actual subject of poetry, the self who writes, the mind of modern and contemporary literature which has gradually become absent to itself. It is precisely the fusion between and the conflation of subject and object that characterise Caproni's writing, and most of modern and contemporary literature, and its problematisation and questioning of the presence of the subject within the space of literature. And it is again this very fusion that decrees the paradigmatic change from a literature with a concrete purpose and point of arrival to an erring and wandering literature. While in fact a literature that assumes as a given the presence and the distinction between its subject and object can embark on a secure process of possession and knowledge, a literature in which subject and object are osmotically con-fused has no tangible bearings. The mirror of modern and contemporary literature, to use a metaphor dear to Borges, no longer projects clear and pristine images simply because the image reflected is the result of the superimposition of subject and object. Here the observer, the self of literature, is reflected too. He is no longer separate from the object of literature; he is himself the object, an integral part of the inside which is observed and narrativised by language.

---

9   Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, cit.: 21.

It is in the light of the above discussion that the distinction between the "I" in "Perch'io" and the "He" in "In una notte..." has to be recontextualised in that the "I" of "Perch'io" is already in effect the "He", or more familiarly, the "You" ("Anima mia, leggera/va' a Livorno, ti prego./ E con la tua candela/ timida, di nottetempo/ fa' un giro; e, se n'hai il tempo,/ perlustra e scruta, e scrivi/ se per caso Anna Picchi/ è ancora viva tra i vivi."[10]) of poetry to whom the "I" delegates the task of reconnecting with his object. If the entrance into literature is similarly gained in *Il seme del piangere* and *Il congedo* through the passage from the "I" to the "He", the narrativisation of "presence" is radically different, marking, as I see it, a paradigmatic shift within Caproni's poetic discourse.

In *Il seme del piangere* the "He" or "you" of poetry is the concrete, grounding and paradigmatic presence through which a narrativisation and presentation of literature's object is achieved. What has already happened here, though, which is in turn a prefiguration of the shift to come, is the decentring of the self. Already in *Il seme* the present self no longer gazes on its object. Something else does it in its place: poetry. The self takes itself out of presence by blinding itself, by refusing itself the capacity to see and therefore know. Its place, though, is taken by a definable agent whose eyes see and explore, know and possess what is outside them; that is, the object of their analysis. The act of watching, of directing the gaze outward reintroduces the distinction between subject and object, reinstating the epistemological assumption based on the existence of a rationally describable separation between the observing *hermeneus* and the unstructured but knowable, because speakable, other. In this context knowledge, or perhaps, following Agamben's distinction between poetry and philosophy[11], possession of literature's object is still possible, but only

---

10 Giorgio Caproni, "Preghiera", *Il seme del piangere*, cit.: 191.

11 "La poesia possiede il suo oggetto senza conoscerlo, e la filosofia lo conosce senza possederlo." Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale*

within the enclosure of literature; within that physical space, the *stantia*, that the poet erects around himself to reach the necessary stage of concentration and contemplation. That is why the blinding of the actual self is vital because, as Caproni seems to understand well, the image projected through the eyes of literature must remain and be enjoyed in the space of literature. As soon as this image is taken out for the enjoyment of the ordinary eyes it vanishes.

Concentration is obviously the preparation for writing, the necessary stage through which the mind will, if not actually see, imagine the unimaginable. Jean-François Lyotard has defined modern art as that which puts forwards the representation of the unrepresentable.[12] To put it simply, modern art is that which attempts to render the invisible visible, that which represents the non-existent. But this is not an existence that can be represented in the reality of day-to-day phenomena which, obviously, does not have, indeed cannot have, the means to make present what is absent. This is an existence that can only be evoked within a different and separate zone in which the senses and the mind bring about a language which goes beyond the referential stringency of everyday usage. This is the space of literature in which the author begins an exploration of a self which is only potential, and of a simply possible landscape, of a dark area which is illuminated as one proceeds to imagine it and which disappears once again into darkness as one tries to take it into the world of referentiality and visibility.

(Turin: Einaudi, 1977: xiii). "Poetry possesses its object without knowing it while philosophy knows its object without possessing it." Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993: xvii).

12 Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Benninghton and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984: 78).

While the poetry of Orpheus, with its power grounded in a beauty that can change death into life, can transform the inconceivable and incomprehensible void of death into the tangibility of life, it can also annul it if it forgets, even for a moment, that the visibility and tangibility of what is absent, can only be (*sussistere*) within the precinct of literature. As Orpheus turns around to behold the figure of Eurydice, to observe once again the body that he desires so much, he betrays both his poetry and his lover. In choosing to privilege the actual sight of Eurydice over the poetic evocation of her, he also chooses to renounce poetry in place of reality, to trade the representation of invisibility performed by his poetic eyes for the visibility of reality caught through his real eyes. In other words, he exits the space of literature, and in so doing he also relinquishes the possibility of beholding the invisible. Eurydice cannot exist within the space of actual senses. To force this equates with sending her back to the dead. "The blindness," remarks Adriana Cavarero in commenting on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, "therefore seems to indicate not so much – or not only – the physical invisibility of narrated things, but rather the exigency that the narrator *not see* he or she whose story he tells."[13]

Caproni understood this well when he conceived a collection of poems, *Il seme del piangere*, to give visibility, and thus life within the space of literature, to his dead mother. And yet, the female figure that crosses Caproni's poems is not actually his mother but rather the girl before motherhood, a person who for the poet exists only on the stage of poetry, in a time of no time where the non-existent suddenly appears. Further, she is a person whom the actual Caproni cannot turn his gaze on simply because he cannot see her insofar as she is not known to him. As I have stressed, her invisibility to the actual Caproni

---

13 Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (London: Routledge, 2000: 99).

is stressed by the insistent separation between Caproni himself and his poetry, where only his poetry is able to connect and establish a dialogue with the girl Annina.

In *Il seme del piangere*, in which the agent and the actor is the third and second person singular of poetry and not the "I" of the author, Caproni cannot turn himself around because he is not there, because he has consciously taken himself out to enable the unrepresentable to be represented. The effacement of the "I" is forced upon the author because the space of literature, and *Il seme del piangere* is a striking example, is denied to the actual author and to his knowing gaze. In it are hosted only poetry and the unknowable which, through the poetic language, comes to be imaginable and representable.

After *Il seme del piangere*, and from *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso* onward, the subject who gazes becomes gradually invisible and undecidable like his object. Here there are no concrete tangible eyes observing something else, but rather ambiguous and incommensurable eyes that wander in an incomprehensible space (" 'Confine', diceva il cartello./ Cercai la dogana. Non c'era./ Non vidi, dietro il cancello,/ ombra di terra straniera."[14] ; "Piangeva,/ quasi. S'era/ coperta la faccia./ Si premeva gli occhi./ Aveva/ perso completamente,/ con la speranza, ogni traccia."[15]) in which their own image is confused with many other images and where vision is not actually seeing but rather discovering through creation ("Cosa volete ch'io chieda./ Lasciatemi nel mio buio./ solo questo./ Ch'io veda"[16]). Writing becomes "the interminable, the incessant."[17] In the end it is its

---

14 Giorgio Caproni, "Falsa indicazione", *Il muro della terra*, cit.: 281.

15 Giorgio Caproni, "Il cercatore", *Ibid*.: 323.

16 Giorgio Caproni, "Istanza del medesimo", *Ibid*.: 324.

17 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, cit.: 26.

inherent incompleteness that turns contemporary literature from a refracting mirror into an instrument of exploration, discovering new possible territories through the creative process. This is an aesthetic search that is no longer interested merely in offering a beautiful and pleasing representation of the outside. It is also, if not primarily, entering a hermeneutic journey whose purpose is not clearly known and, as we shall see, "knowable" ("Tutti i luoghi che ho visto,/ che ho visitato,/ ora so – ne son certo:/ non ci sono mai stato"[18]; "Se non dovessi tornare,/ sappiate che non sono mai/ partito./ Il mio viaggiare/ è stato tutto un restare/ qua, dove non fui mai"[19]).

"We have to continuously invent ourselves", says the Italian philosopher Aldo Gargani, "in order to discover what we are"[20]. This means that the modern Orpheus cannot, even if he wanted, pretend that the object of his desire is removed from him. His gaze, even the poetic gaze, can no longer rely on the presupposition that knowledge, truth, aesthetic satisfaction is attained by exploring what lies outside. For him the object/subject separation is unavailable (*impraticabile*), and with it the mourning for the lost object is also problematised ("Così di rado l'ho visto/ e, sempre, così di sfuggita./ Una volta, o m'è parso,/ fu in uno dei più bui/ cantoni d'un bar, al porto./ Ma ero io, era lui?/ C'era un fumo./ Una folla./ A stento, potei scorgerne il volto/ fisso sulla sua birra svogliata./ Teneva la mano posata/ sul tavolo, e piano/ piano batteva le dita/ sul marmo – quelle sue dita/ più lunghe, pareva, e più magre/ di tutta la sua intera vita./ Provai a chiamarlo. Alzai/ anche un braccio./ Ma il chiasso./ La radio così alta./ Cercai,/ a urtoni, d'aprirmi

18 Giorgio Caproni, "Esperienza", *Il muro della terra*, cit.: 382.

19 Giorgio Caproni, "Biglietto lasciato prima di non andar via, *Il franco cacciatore*, cit.: 427.

20 "Perché per quanto possa sembrare paradossale, per *scoprire* cosa siamo e che ne sarà di noi, dobbiamo continuare a *inventarci*." Aldo Gargani, *Il filtro creativo* (Bari: Laterza, 1999: 201).

un passo/ tra la calca, ma lui/ (od ero io?) lui/ già s'era alzato: sparito,/ senza che io lo avessi incrociato./ Mi misi, muto, a sedere/ al suo posto, e – vuoto -/ guardai a lungo il bicchiere/ sporco ancora di schiuma:/ le bollicine che ad una/ ad una (come nella mia mente/ le idée) esplodevano/ finendo – vuote – in niente./ Restai lì non so quanto./ Mi scosse la ragazza del banco,/ e alzai il capo. Ordinai./ Poi, anch'io mi eclissai"[21]) .

It is in this sense that the poetic shift referred to by Giorgio Agamben in *Stanzas* must be reconsidered. Agamben writes that:

> The inclusion of the phantasm and desire in language is the essential condition in order that poetry can be conceived as joi d'amor (joy of love, love's joy). Poetry is then properly joi d'amor because it is the stantia (chamber) in which the beatitude of love is celebrated. [...] In this way the poetic word was presented as the site where the fracture between desire and its unattainable object [...] is healed, and the mortal 'heroic' disease, through which love assumes the saturnine mask of melancholic delirium, celebrates its rescue and ennoblement. [...] Over the course of a poetic process whose emblematic temporal extremes are Petrarch and Mallarmé, this essential textual tension of Romance poetry will displace its centre from desire to mourning: Eros will yield to Thanatos its impossible love object so as to recover it, through a subtle and funereal strategy, as lost object, and the poem will become the site of an absence yet nonetheless draws from this absence its specific authority. [22]

---

21 Giorgio Caproni, "Andantino", *Il muro della terra*, cit.: 370.

22 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*, cit.: 128-129.

Clearly, this "authority" is the quintessential characteristic of modern literature which has transformed the invisibility and the absence of its object into an empowering tool for the search and the exploration of the invisible which, precisely because of its not-being-there, may be summoned to representation by literature. Yet this shift is not only characterised by the disappearance of the literature's object, but also from the exclusion of the "I" who gazes. This in turn determines a re-negotiation of what Agamben defines as mourning and, as an element or symptom of it, "melancholia". Melancholia is apparent in the subject who is still present to itself in the face of its absent object. As Agamben remarks, those who gaze "become melancholics because, wishing to imitate, they must retain the phantasms fixed in the intellect, so that afterward they can expressed them in the way they first saw them when present; and being their work, this occurs not only once, but continually. They keep their minds so much abstracted and separated from nature that consequently melancholy derives from it" (25). In a sense, it is perhaps melancholy that Orpheus wishes to combat by turning back to see the real Eurydice instead of continuing the representation of her phantasm on the mental screen of his poetry. But his is a futile attempt in that which does not exist cannot be lived apart from within the space of the literary "stantia" Agamben speaks of. While the room of poetry filled with the image of its object can certainly generate "an authentic amorous passion"(24), it also entices a feeling of melancholy and mourning. But as the subject too disappears out of view to enter the frame of literary representation as a potential image, as a phantasm, then the "amorous stantia", in which the subject meets the apparition of the object, is replaced by the "stantia" of total absence, by an empty room whose temporality and spatiality have to be renegotiated along the axis of a time of not time and a space of no space. "To write", Blanchot remarks, "is to surrender to the risk of time's absence." [23]   This is the interstitial room from which

---

23   Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, cit.: 33.

melancholia is banned by the push for a discovery through creation ("Mi piacciono i colpi a vuoto./ I soli che infallibilmente/ centrino ciò ch'enfaticamente/ viene chiamato ignoto" [24]; "...È certo/ che allora l'introvabile appare/ nel suo scomparire[25]).

The act of observing must somehow encompass and include the one who observes as well. It is on this simple paradigmatic premise that *Il franco cacciatore* and *Il Conte di Kevenhüller* are constructed. They are conceived on the understanding and realisation that the invisible which literature attempts to evoke and represent is also made by the self who writes. That is by the agency that up to the nineteenth century was taken as a given, commensurable presence from whose identity and wholeness the external was also imbued with clear meanings and tangible truths. By including the observer in the process of observing, the premise on which western knowledge was founded up to then crumbles. Vision, the sense upon which, at least in western culture, the understanding of the world has been entrusted, basing and constructing knowledge on the separation of subject and object, undergoes a dramatic revision and re-elaboration. The self still gazes, watches and observes, but no longer only the outside. Within his vision his own very face is also visible and, as such, summonable.

This shift implies that he who sings the invisible into visibility must sing not only the phantasm of the "other" but also his own phantasm. The poet, the narrator is the object of his own narration, and during this process of transition the conflation of subject and object is complete and definitive. The author is simultaneously one who writes and one who listens and reads what has been written. It is in this sense that one can interpret Blanchot's remarks that "whoever delves into verse dies"[26]. This is why a work, as Blanchot writes, "is a work only when

---

24 Giorgio Caproni, "L'abate", *Il conte di Kevenhüller*, cit.: 581.

25 Giorgio Caproni, "Passeggiata", *Ibid*: 617.

26 Maurice Balnchot, *The Space of Literature*, cit.: 38.

it becomes the intimacy shared by someone who writes it and someone who reads it, a space violently opened up by the contest between the power to speak and the power to hear" (37). But precisely because of this split, the very Blanchotian opposition between the "I" and the "He" is problematised and complicated. From what has been said before, it follows that the agency within literature is not only the "he" who listens but also the "(I)" to whom a representation is delegated. Yet this is a fluctuant "(I)", an "(I)" in the making, an invisible "(I)" that turn into visibility as he invents himself in the process of representation. It is an "(I)", borrowing a famous Heideggerian word, "underway" [27] . This subject/object errs between visibility and invisibility in a time which is not sequential and ordered, but rather interstitial and hybrid. It is the shift from "I" to "(I)" that, for instance, determines the reappearance of the first person singular in the poetry of Caproni after *Il seme del piangere*. What we witness in *Il congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso*, *Il muro della Terra*, *Il franco cacciatore* up to the posthumous *Res amissa* is an "(I)" who wanders between visibility and invisibility, articulating the contemporary preoccupation of a presence which is only potential. Agamben sees this lucidly when, in his preface to *Res Amissa*, he remarks that Caproni's poetic experience places itself "nel punto della reciproca disoggettivazione [della biografia e della psicologia dell'individuo]. E – in quel punto – esse si uniscono non immediatamente, ma in un medio. Questo medio è la lingua. Poeta è colui che nella parola genera la vita. La vita, che il poeta genera nella parola, è sottratta tanto al vissuto dell'individuo psicomatico che all'indicibilità biologica del genere." [28] Caproni himself could not be more explicit when he writes in "Versi controversi":

---

27 Heidegger discusses the notion of being "underway" in Lecture V of *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968: 169-170).

28 Giorgio Caproni, *Res Amissa*, Giorgio Agamben (ed.) (Milan: Garzanti, 1991; 15-16).

Tutto/ questo inesistente mare/ così presente.../ Godilo.../ Godilo e non lo cercare/ se non vuoi perderlo.../ Là,/ fra la palpebra e il monte./ Come l'erba/ Là in fronte/ a te, anche se non lo puoi arrivare.../ Negalo, se lo vuoi trovare.../ Inventalo.../ Non lo nominare.[29]

What is this if not an invitation to himself, the "(I)" of poetry, to avoid the gaze that attempts to translate the unsayable into a referential, tangibly real object? The "(I)" of Caproni is tempted to turn and nominate, but he knows, and he reminds himself, that turning means losing sight, dissipating an image that might be found by negating its very visibility. The desubjectivisation of the self of poetry is necessary to maintain the essential and elemental power of poetry which, in the words of Blanchot, is "the power to make things disappear, to make them appear as things that have vanished"[30]. To achieve this the actual "I" who writes cannot only produce a "He" who reads but also an "(I)" who narrates and writes in his place. This is the only possible way of evoking what is otherwise unattainable.

(University of Sydney)

---

29 Giorgio Caproni, *Il conte di Kevenhüller*, cit.: 621-622.

30 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, cit.: 43.