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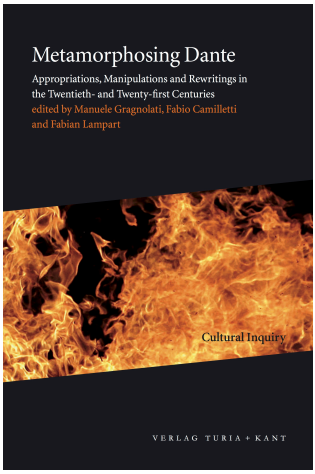

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TRISTAN KAY

‘Una modesta *Divina Commedià*’

Dante as Anti-Model in Cesare Pavese’s *La luna e i falò*

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ABSTRACT: In a 1949 letter, Cesare Pavese describes with great zeal the genesis of a new work — one he compares, albeit with a certain amount of irony, to Dante’s Commedia: / Io sono come un pazzo perché ho avuta una grande intuizione — quasi una mirabile visione (naturalmente di stalle, sudore, contadinotti, verderame e letame ecc.) su cui dovrei costruire una modesta Divina Commedia. Ci penso sopra, e tutti i giorni diminuisce la tensione — che alle visioni siano necessarie le Beatrici? Bah, si vedrà. / This embryonic project would quickly become the novel La luna e i falò, completed in less than two months and published shortly before Pavese’s suicide in 1950. On the surface, there would seem little reason to take seriously the analogy drawn by the author between La luna and the Commedia, for the novel in question contains no explicit references to the medieval poet. I shall argue in this essay, however, that the presence of Dante in La luna is both more pervasive and more significant than has previously been suggested. While critics have noted in passing several narrative and structural parallels between the two texts, which I detail in Section II, no attempt has been made to consider their wider significance in our understanding of Pavese’s novel. What follows is a reading of La luna which shows that the Commedia functions not simply as a formal model for Pavese, but, more importantly, as an ideological anti-model, in dialogue with which the author articulates his deeply pessimistic [...]

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This embryonic project would quickly become the novel *La luna e i falò*, completed in less than two months and published shortly before Pavese's suicide in 1950. On the surface, there would seem little reason to take seriously the analogy drawn by the author between *La luna* and the *Commedia*, for the novel in question contains no explicit references to the medieval poet. I shall argue in this essay, however, that the presence of Dante in *La luna* is both more pervasive and more significant than has previously been suggested. While critics have noted in passing several narrative and structural parallels between the two texts, which I detail in Section II, no attempt has been made to consider their wider significance in our understanding of Pavese's novel. What follows is a reading of *La luna* which shows that the *Commedia* functions not simply as a formal model for Pavese, but, more importantly, as an ideological anti-model, in dialogue with which the author articulates his deeply pessimistic understanding of the human condition.

I. 'DI CHE CARNE SONO FATTO?': THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN *LA LUNA E I FALÒ*

Pavese's last and most celebrated work is a manifestly autobiographical novel set in the Langhe, a rural region of Piedmont where the author

was born in 1908.[2] It is often seen as a summa of the stylistic and thematic features of Pavese's writing of the preceding two decades and the most mature and emblematic example of his thought and craft.[3] *La luna* concerns the return of the emigrant narrator-protagonist – known simply as Anguilla ('Eel') – to the village where he spent his inauspicious boyhood.[4] Abandoned by his mother as a baby, Anguilla was adopted by a local family in exchange for a monthly payment from a local orphanage. In due course, he carried out menial work at the Gaminella – the farm of his adopted family. Then, orphaned for a second time at the age of thirteen due to his foster-parents' poverty, he spent his adolescence working as a labourer at La Mora – home of the landowner sor Matteo and his three daughters, Irene, Silvia, and Santina. After military service in Genoa, Anguilla fled Italy to escape the attention of the fascists, following collusion with the partisans, and spent twenty years in America.

As well as a means of escaping the fascists, Anguilla's emigration was an attempt to broaden his horizons both materially and psychologically. But while America afforded him relative prosperity, it gradually instilled in him a new form of malaise ('una rabbia di non essere nessuno').[5] The new world emerged as a land where 'la gente era tutta bastarda' (*LF* 111), and Anguilla came to see his life there as desolate and meaningless.[6] His American alienation is brilliantly evoked in Chapter XI, as the narrator recalls an occasion when he found himself stranded in the vast expanse of the American desert. The train that blasts through the apocalyptic wilderness before him points to Anguilla's absolute lack of identification with his surroundings. It prompts an awakening, for he recognizes irrevocably that what he seeks is a sense of belonging and fulfilment that lies beyond the reach of the purely material wealth that America can provide.[7]

Important in understanding Anguilla's motivations in returning to the Langhe are his words on the novel's opening page:

> Chi può dire di che carne sono fatto? Ho girato abbastanza il mondo da sapere che tutte le carni sono buone e si equivalgono, ma è per questo che uno si stanca e cerca di mettere radici, di farsi terra e paese, perché la sua carne valga e duri qualcosa di piú che un comune giro di stagione. (*LF* 9)

Anguilla's return is motivated by needs more existential than sentimental or material.[8] His time in America leaves him feeling estrangement where he seeks belonging, and in returning to the Langhe he hopes to realize

the fullness of his own identity. It is telling that the first person of 'di che carne sono fatto' and 'ho girato abbastanza il mondo' segues into the impersonal, third-person 'uno' of 'uno si stanca e cerca di mettere radici', for at stake is not simply the plight of a singular character, but that of humankind.[9] Pavese's interest evidently goes considerably further than the 'regional' tenor of the novel might suggest.[10] Also significant is Anguilla's reference to the cycle of the seasons in expressing his hope that his life might amount to more than 'un comune giro di stagione'. A central theme in the novel is the tension between cyclical, 'natural' time and the 'irrational progression' of linear, human time.[11] This reflects a tension between the materialism and urban values of America and the primitive, rural culture of the *paese* – an opposition between *città* and *campagna* found in much of Pavese's work. In the Langhe, natural time prevails over historical time, while America is depicted as a man-made world entirely detached from the seasonal rhythms that define life in the Langhe.[12] Again, the train that howls through the desert – mechanical, emblematically 'linear' – serves as a splendid symbol of the novel's conception of America.

In Pavesian terms, Anguilla's return is motivated by an attempt to understand his personal 'myths'. Myths, for Pavese, are the repeated experiences of childhood, which become an elemental aspect of our selves.[13] They are what forge our destinies, which we are powerless to escape ('ciò ch'è stato, sarà', writes Pavese in *Il mestiere di vivere*).[14] As discussed by Doug Thompson, Pavese believed the plenitude associated with childhood is ruptured by the emergence of the libido, 'making [the subject] dependent upon another without guaranteeing that such dependence would be answered'.[15] Pavese's own response to this problem would oscillate between resigned acceptance and the construction of 'a formula whereby that wholeness might be regained'.[16] This formula is the 'myth theory' that dominates much of his writing in the 1940s. Pavese came to see self-knowledge as the path to contentment and believed that this could be achieved through a fuller comprehension of his constitutive myths. Pavese's deeply autobiographical writing thus served a very particular purpose – what Thompson terms 'a rational programme for the mastery of self'.[17] In a passage from *Il mestiere di vivere* that will prove highly suggestive in the context of this study, Pavese describes how his writing works towards reconstructing the plenitude associated with his infancy through this 'clarification of his own myths' – an endeavour he sees as in some way Dantean:[18]

> l'opera è un simbolo dove tanto i personaggi che l'ambiente sono *mezzo* alla narrazione di una paraboletta, che è la radice ultima dell'ispirazione e dell'interesse –il "cammino dell'anima" della mia Div. Commedia.[19]

Like the author of the *Commedia*, therefore, Pavese believed that he could recover through his writing 'an "absolute" wholeness of self'.[20] In time, however, his efforts would be increasingly thwarted by an awareness of those aspects of our being which remain unpredictable and incomprehensible (what Pavese terms the *selvaggio*) and by a painful recognition of life's inherent contingency.

Anguilla's conviction at the novel's outset is that his time in America has severed him from his true identity – an identity that, in returning to the Langhe and 'clarifying' his 'myths', he might come to understand.[21] He locates the fullness of his identity in his memories of childhood, especially his time at La Mora (described by Wlassics as a '*locus amoenus* dell'infanzia').[22] His return ultimately brings not self-knowledge, however, but a more profound sense of estrangement. The journey unfolds in 1948, following the Italian Liberation.[23] The only remaining acquaintance from his youth is the Marxist Nuto, whom Anguilla had revered as a boy and who never left his *paese*. Nuto acts as Anguilla's guide in rediscovering the Langhe, gradually revealing the tragic, violent events that have blighted the region in the years of Anguilla's absence. Anguilla's adopted sisters Giulia and Angiolina have met premature deaths and the Gaminella is now run by the impoverished and brutal Valino. In the course of the novel, Valino burns down the Gaminella in a fit of rage, killing himself and his family, with only his crippled son Cinto managing to escape. Meanwhile, the bodies of both partisans and Germans wash up on the banks of the river Belbo, as the suppressed war slowly rears its ugly head. Most painful for Anguilla, however, are the tragic fates of the daughters of sor Matteo, over whom he had secretly agonized as an adolescent. For all their dreams of high society, Irene has ended up the victim of domestic violence while Silvia has died following a secret abortion. What remains elusive is the fate of Santina, the youngest of sor Matteo's daughters and the most idealized by the narrator. Only in the novel's closing pages is this information finally teased out of the reticent Nuto, as we learn that she had acted as a spy, first for the Germans, then for the Partisans. Nuto tells Anguilla in the closing lines that she was eventually murdered by the Partisans she betrayed, her body burned and buried since the temptation of necro-

philia would have been too great for some: 'Una donna come lei non si poteva coprirla di terra e lasciarla così. Faceva ancora gola a troppi' (*LF* 173).

Not only does Anguilla learn of the ravages of war and time, but his relationship to his boyhood landscape is also painfully altered. He re-encounters sounds, smells, and sights which evoke his childhood ('Stessi rumori, stesso vino, stesse facce di una volta', *LF* 14), but he now feels a curious detachment from them, a painful difference in the apparent stasis ('Era strano come tutto fosse cambiato eppure uguale', *LF* 36). Remembering local rituals concerning the moon and bonfires, Anguilla exclaims: 'Anche la storia della luna e dei falò la sapevo. Soltanto, m'ero accorto, che non sapevo più di saperla' (*LF* 53). In other words, the folklore and the rhythms of Piedmontese life remain lodged in his psyche, but the period of his life concomitant with them is finished and unattainable.[24] The signs evocative of his youth return, but they now ring hollow.

Key here is the opposition between cyclical and linear time. The fullness of identity experienced in youth, recognized too late, is lodged at the opposite end of the linear path of human time, attainable only through the inherently partial, insubstantial means of memory. Time slips away inexorably, while the subject longs for the unattainable repetition he observes in nature. The paradoxical problem faced by Anguilla is that, in order to identify the importance of his childhood myths, he had to leave the Langhe and break out of its restrictive rhythms; yet, in identifying the wellspring of his own identity from afar, he becomes imbued with an awareness that prevents him from reassimilating the mindset required to re-engage properly with his past ('non sapevo più di saperla').[25] The knowledge that Anguilla attains through leaving the *paese* shatters the potential idyll of his childhood, establishing an unbridgeable division between present and past – and therefore between Anguilla and wholeness.[26] Thus, knowledge becomes synonymous with disenchantment ('Io sapevo già tutto. Sapevo e piangevo', *LF* 77).

While the novel begins reflecting upon whether Anguilla belongs in the Langhe or in America, we ultimately realize that he belongs to neither place, that his alienation runs deeper.[27] This problem in not unique to the protagonist, as shown in the dovetailing fates of Anguilla and Nuto: where the former seeks to reconnect with the natural rhythms of the Langhe in order to discover his true identity, the latter seeks to 'rompere le stagioni' (*LF* 58), to break out of the restrictive coils of his

destiny. The importance of one's myths does not become apparent until one is separated from them, while succumbing to one's fate instils an acute sense of limitation and frustration, as affected Anguilla in the past and Nuto in the present. This is an existential pilgrimage, therefore, which does not bring fulfilment or belonging, but which instead confirms the protagonist's – and humankind's – tragic and inescapable destiny of mortality and solitude. *La luna* stages the failure of the theory of self-mastery in which both author and protagonist had placed their hope. Pavese's very conscious failure to do as Dante had done (his failure, that is, to realize through his writing the fullness of his own identity and to find a meaning beyond contingency) will underpin my reading of the novel.

II. *LA LUNA* AND *LA COMMEDIA*

Critics have traditionally paid little attention to Pavese's designation of his novel as 'una modesta *Divina Commedia*'. Recently, however, Stefano Giovanardi has argued that the author's reference to Dante 'potrebbe costituire qualcosa di più di una semplice battuta'.[28] He argues that the *Commedia* serves as 'un modello strutturale consapevolmente perseguito nella stesura del romanzo' and identifies three convincing points of contact between the two texts. The first of these is structural. *La luna* is divided into thirty-two short chapters, just one fewer than the number of cantos we find in the standard Dantean *cantica*. Moreover, just as Dante's cantos are far briefer than the twelve books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the critic notes that Pavese's chapters – always of just four or five pages – are of 'una lunghezza […] molto ridotta rispetto quella fissata dalla tradizione del genere [del romanzo]'.[29] A note in Pavese's diaries can, in fact, lend weight to Giovanardi's claim. The author writes in 1943 that 'La *poiesis* italiana ama le grandi strutture fatte di piccoli capitoletti'[30] – a description that could evidently apply to *La luna*. First among the few examples of this tendency that Pavese cites are, in fact, the 'brevi canti' of the *Commedia*. The second parallel between the two texts noted by Giovanardi, following an observation first made by Calvino,[31] is that the relationship between Nuto and Anguilla in Pavese's novel 'sembra riverberarsi in modo non superficiale [il rapporto] tra Virgilio e Dante'. Nuto is, like Virgil, 'la guida "sapiente" ma non omnisciente che accompagna in una peregrinazione di

conoscenza e riconoscimento il protagonista smarrito e confuso'.[32] The final Dantean element the critic identifies concerns the novel's depiction of its secondary characters. Just as Dante and Virgil's journey is based upon a series of short encounters with static characters, so Anguilla and Nuto's journey is made up of a 'schema [di] incontri [...] con personaggi che appaiono, rendono edotto il lettore sulla loro condizione e poi scompaiono'. Moreover, the authors' respective techniques of characterization display certain affinities. As is well known, the *Commedia*'s figural representation of its characters depicts them in what Auerbach terms their 'quintessence of character'[33] – that is, in a state that distils their earthly characteristics while retaining the historical dimension that distinguishes them from mere allegorical symbols. To take a well-worn example, Francesca da Rimini is both a 'symbol' of the sin she represents (Lust) and a three-dimensional, historically determined character. It is Giovanardi's view that Anguilla's encounters with *La luna*'s historicized secondary characters are similarly 'incontri che acquistano [...] uno statuto simbolico, in quanto rivelatori di una situazione psichica o storica emblematica'. Once again, Pavese's diaries can substantiate the idea that this aspect of the novel is in some way Dantean in inspiration. In an entry from 1939, the author perceptively distinguishes between what he terms the 'simbolo allegorico' and the 'immagine dantesca'.[34] While allegorical figures are 'sostituzioni che spogliano la realtà di ogni sangue e respiro', the 'immagine dantesca' manages to integrate the symbolic and the historical in a manner that proves highly suggestive for Pavese.[35]

The parallels between *La luna* and the *Commedia* outlined here are surely too striking, in light of Pavese's 1949 letter, to be coincidental. Giovanardi's study does not, however, consider Pavese's motivations for drawing upon Dante in this intriguing manner. My aim henceforth is to build upon his suggestions and to reveal how Pavese's dialogue with Dante has a depth and sophistication that make it much more than a mere structural homage.

III. STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE

The thirty-two chapters of *La luna e i falò* oscillate between the journey of the present and the elegiac memories that this journey evokes, punctuated by occasional flashbacks to Anguilla's time in America.[36] We

find little continuity between chapters and little narrative development within them. As Giovanardi writes, 'la narrazione pare svilupparsi per frammenti autonomi e contigui, tenuti insieme dal persistere dell'uso della prima persona'.[37] A structure of this kind was doubtless significant in Pavese's eyes. In a 1939 diary entry, he describes how his composition of short, fragmentary poems in the preceding years reflected a highly introspective outlook on the world, one lacking a unifying principle:

> Non è soltanto una similitudine il parallelo tra una vita di abbandono voluttuoso e il fare poesie isolate, piccole, una ogni tanto, senza responsabilità di insieme. Ciò abitua a vivere a scatti, senza sviluppo e senza principî.[38]

It was around the time of this comment that Pavese, following a series of personal crises,[39] sought to overcome his historical circumstances by reappraising his life through his writing, approaching it through the unifying prism of 'myth'. Such an operation was, in essence, an attempt to overcome lyric fragmentation. As I described in Section I, however, what we witness in *La luna* is, in effect, the failure of 'myth theory' to overcome Anguilla's inquietude. Thus, the fragmentary structure of the novel assumes an undeniable importance. Its lack of narrative cohesion consciously reflects Anguilla's failure to identify an overarching purpose in his search for meaning and fulfilment.[40]

If the fragmented 'capitoletti' of *La luna* allude in some way to Dante's *Commedia*, then it seems highly probable that, in using thirty-two chapters rather than thirty-three, Pavese departs from the Dantean model in order to draw attention to a tension, as well as a parallel, between the two works.[41] In stark contrast with *La luna*, the narrative progression of the *Commedia*, reinforced by the momentum of its *terza rima*, is unerringly linear, defined by a constancy of ascent and an unrelenting progression. Its overarching structure is established in the poem's very first lines, where we learn that at stake is a journey from the 'selva oscura' (*Inf.* I, 1) of moral crisis to the plenitude Dante purports to have found in heaven. Its individual cantos are invariably marked by growth and progress, by lessons learned and distance covered. Dante, like Pavese, saw isolated lyric poems as problematic – temporally static, incompatible with moral growth, inhabiting the very space of unfulfilment. Whether by splicing lyric poetry and narrative prose (in the *Vita nova*) or by integrating the lyric and the epic (in the *Commedia*), the Florentine invested considerable energy in overcoming the ideological

and narrative limitations that the lyric conventionally imposed, albeit without extirpating the desire and subjectivity which he believed to define poetry in the mother tongue.[42] It is interesting and significant that *La luna*, conversely, adopts the narrative form of the novel but imbues it with the kind of language and stasis characteristic of the lyric (Beccaria describes it as 'quasi un canzoniere in prosa diviso in canti').[43] The novel aspires to the sort of linear narrative, from confusion to understanding, that the *Commedia* exemplifies. Yet it is ultimately a failed *Commedia*, inasmuch as the wholeness and self-knowledge that it seeks prove elusive; its missing thirty-third chapter is a signpost to Anguilla's inability to find the Dantean plenitude he so desires, to the 'lack' that defines his existence. In this sense, the novel's chapters – static snapshots of consciousness, torn between past and present – are more accurately seen as analogous not to the *canti* of the *Commedia*, but to the *fragmenta* of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* – monuments to unfulfilled desire, themselves theorized in opposition to the plenitude that defined Dante's masterpiece. As a narrative work that fails to identify a narrative purpose, *La luna* remains inexorably 'lyric' in character.

IV. ANGUILLA AND DANTE-PILGRIM

Pavese described in 1944 the difficulty of creating an 'io' that might, like Dante's in the *Commedia*, be seen as representative of humankind: 'Arduo trasformare se stesso in *io dantesco*, simbolico, quando i propri problemi sono radicati a un'esperienza cosí individuale'.[44] What we find in *La luna e i falò*, however, is precisely an 'io dantesco' – one designed to mediate between the 'simbolico' and the 'individuale', founded in Pavese's personal history but able to articulate the author's broader understanding of the human condition. The transition from 'io' to 'uno' that we saw in the opening lines of Pavese's novel is, in fact, reminiscent of the transition from the 'universal' to the 'personal' found in the famous opening of the *Commedia* ('Nel mezzo del cammin di <u>nostra</u> vita / <u>mi ritrovai</u> per una selva oscura', *Inf.* I, 1–2), and points to the two works' shared attempts to integrate the subjective and the universal.

The notion of an 'io dantesco' in *La luna* is not, however, resticted to this area, for there are other important parallels between Pavese's and Dante's protagonists. The motif of the journey, central to Pavese's

novel, has prompted several critics to see Anguilla, not incorrectly, as a descendant of the 'Ulysses of the Dantesque tradition',[45] one whose incessant wandering points to an insatiable longing.[46] To be sure, the terms used to describe the narrator's voyaging clearly evoke a restless Ulyssean *Wanderlust* ('Ho girato abbastanza il mondo', *LF* 9; 'Di donne ne ho conosciute andando per il mondo, di bionde e di brune', *LF* 115), while Pavese's diaries from the same period include suggestive references to the Homeric figure.[47] Considering *La luna* in terms of its engagement with Dante, however, we can just as easily see its narrator-protagonist as a modern heir to the *Commedia*'s everyman. Like Dante-pilgrim, Anguilla sought fulfilment in the ephemeral, but was left unfulfilled and estranged from his true sense of identity. (Anguilla believes this identity is located in the Langhe; for Dante, evidently, it is located in God.) Finding himself in the wilderness (the 'selva oscura' for Dante, the American desert for Anguilla), each reaches the midpoint of his life in spiritual crisis. What we find in both cases is a straying followed by a return. In this sense, both figures differ decisively from Dante's Ulysses, himself defined by an 'ardore' which could not be extinguished by the bonds of familial or conjugal love (see *Inf.* XXVI, 94–97). Anguilla, by contrast, declares his wandering days altogether over. He is a repented Ulysses who locates the possibility of fulfilment not in further roving, but in a return to his 'spiritual' homeland, and he is in this sense undoubtedly Dantean in his aspirations.

However, just as the structural parallels between the two works prompted us to reflect upon the ideological dissonance between them, so the ostensible affinities between Anguilla and Dante-pilgrim ultimately lead us to consider the two characters' inherent differences. Anguilla seeks to conform to the Dantean archetype of straying and return, but – deprived of the salvific apparatus at work in Dante's poem – he cannot find the plenitude he seeks. Key here is the notion of exile, which is handled in a contrasting manner in the two texts. The *Commedia* is, among many other things, a means of coming to terms with the pain of the author's banishment from his native Florence. As Dante learns that Florence is to close its gates to him, he comes to appreciate the limited importance of his earthly vicissitudes in the context of eternal life, to recognize that man's true 'exile' is not only spiritual but, thanks to Christ's resurrection, surmountable. In this regard, Anguilla's journey constitutes the negative image of Dante's: Anguilla is able to overcome his 'physical' exile, successfully returning to his homeland from

America, yet the possibility of overcoming temporal exile is counterbalanced by an unshakeable ontological anxiety. In other words, whereas in Dante the pain of worldly exile is negated by the possibility of returning to the celestial *patria* and the concomitant acquisition of spiritual satiety, the possibility of physical return in Pavese is undermined by a sense of alienation which cannot be overcome through the means of homecoming. Again, the archetype of the *Commedia* looms beneath the surface of Pavese's narrative and brings to light the manner in which Anguilla's implicitly 'Dantean' aspirations – his desire, that is, to find 'wholeness' – grind against the harshest, most implacable reality.

This opposition between archetype and reality is probed elsewhere in the novel. In Chapter XXIX, Anguilla recalls reading some of Irene's beloved 'romanzi':

> L'inverno prima, L'Emilia mi aveva prestato qualcuno dei romanzi d'Irene, che una ragazza di Canelli prestava a loro. [...] E lessi questi romanzi vicino al fuoco, per imparare. Dicevano di ragazze che avevano dei tutori, delle zie, dei nemici che le tenevano chiuse in belle ville con un giardino, dove c'erano cameriere che portavano biglietti, che davano veleni, che rubavano testamenti. Poi arrivava un bell'uomo che le baciava, un uomo a cavallo, e di notte la ragazza si sentiva soffocare, usciva nel giardino, la portavano via, si svegliava l'indomani in una cascina di boscaioli, dove il bell'uomo veniva a salvarla. [...] Io mi accorsi che quelle storie le sapevo già da un pezzo, le aveva raccontate in Gaminella la Virgilia a me e alla Giulia. (*LF* 153)

The narrative described by Anguilla appears banal. Yet it is significant in that, like the *Commedia*, it offers an example of a narrative journey from want to fulfilment, from suffering to 'salvation' ('il bell'uomo veniva a salvarla'). It is no coincidence that the same chapter ends with a pithy account of Irene's tragic fate (she ends up 'a Nizza in una stanza dove Arturo la batteva', *LF* 156), as Pavese underscores the opposition between fairytale and reality. It is the hope that we mistakenly invest in applying such a narrative model to our own existence, Pavese implies, that makes the inherent impossibility of achieving plenitude all the more tragic. Just as Irene, a latter-day Francesca da Rimini, hopelessly apes the heroines of her 'romanzi' in seeking fulfilment through love,[48] Anguilla attempts to find redemption by implicitly emulating Dante himself – a doomed endeavour in a world without salvation.

V. NUTO AND VIRGIL

The Virgilian resonance of Anguilla's guide Nuto takes on a greater significance in light of our analysis hitherto. It is easy to see why critics have seen the relationship between these two characters as redolent of that between Dante and his first guide. Anguilla had idolized the older Nuto as a boy, just as Dante had revered the ancient poet. Like Virgil, Nuto is at first presented by Anguilla as omniscient ('Nuto è Nuto e sa meglio di me quel che è giusto', *LF* 28), appeasing Anguilla's doubts and leading him through the surrounding landscape. In both cases, however, the authority of the sagacious guide slowly unravels. Nuto is incapable of providing answers which might lift Anguilla's malaise, as his inherent limitations – like those of Dante's pagan *maestro* – are gradually exposed.

For all these parallels, however, there are again notable tensions between the two figures. While Virgil is ultimately shown to be flawed, he is nonetheless consummate in his function as a 'fonte' of eloquence and philosophical wisdom. By contrast, Nuto, as Calvino puts it, is 'una figura che più chiusa e taciturna ed evasiva non si potrebbe immaginare'.[49] His reticence might be explained simply in terms of his reluctance to divulge the true horrors of the recent war. Yet it also points to his inability to provide answers to Anguilla's more profound questions. Though he is able to unveil (albeit diffidently) the historical events that have occurred in the Langhe during Anguilla's absence, Nuto is wholly restricted to the novel's temporal and political dimension, unable to assuage Pavese's existential disquiet. Thus, his defining trait as a Virgilian figure is that he is never supplanted by a Beatrice – by a guide, that is, whose counsel can go beyond the realm of the worldly and rational. In other words, the limited range of Nuto's 'sapienza popolare'[50] – akin to the 'veduta corta' (*Par.* XIX, 81) of earthly wisdom that Dante is able to surpass through revelation – is not augmented by a higher order of knowledge. While Virgil's inability to provide answers that go beyond the realm of the rational is ultimately negated by the descent of Beatrice into Eden and Dante's concomitant salvation, Nuto's authority as a guide ultimately dwindles into nothingness, and the 'salvation' and knowledge sought by Anguilla prove altogether elusive.

VI. SANTA AND BEATRICE

As it becomes apparent that Anguilla will not find the wholeness he seeks simply by returning to his childhood *paese*, he increasingly places his hope in the figure of Santina, who belongs to the period of his life – his time at La Mora – in which he continues to glimpse some form of salvation. It is the mystery surrounding Santina, ever more idealized by the narrator, that lends the second half of the novel its impetus.

The hope that Anguilla places in Santina is, in essence, the hope that he might manage to attain some form of redemption through love. Pavese's prevailing conception of love was a pessimistic and – at worst – misogynistic one, and the author's own tormented amorous experiences were frequently reformulated in his writing.[51] He saw love as a highly destructive force, one which exposed our most shameful weaknesses and insecurities ('Non ci si uccide per amore di *una* donna. Ci si uccide perché un amore, qualunque amore, ci rivela nella nostra nudità, miseria, inermità, nulla').[52] Yet for all that he appeared to disdain it, Pavese found love difficult to renounce, and his failed relationship with the American actress Constance Dowling prompted the terminal downturn in his emotional state.[53] He writes candidly in 1940 that:

> La miglior difesa contro un amore è ripetersi, fino al *bourrage*, che questa passione è una sciocchezza, che non vale la candela, ecc. Ma tendenza di amore è proprio di illuderci che si tratti di un grande avvenimento, e la sua bellezza sta proprio nella continua coscienza che qualcosa di straordinario, di inaudito, ci va accadendo.[54]

This opposition between what Pavese regards as the idealization of love and its pernicious reality is explored at various points in the novel. While its characters see love as a path to fulfilment, it invariably emerges as a source of burgeoning frustration, especially in those parts of the novel dealing with La Mora. Pavese encourages us to draw an analogy between Silvia's and Irene's futile longing to be accepted by the upper echelons of society and Anguilla's own silent worship of the girls themselves,[55] as the barriers between social classes become a figure for the inviolable dividing line between desiring subjects and the possibility of fulfilment. Remembering having watched Silvia and Irene pass, Anguilla states: 'io dalla vigna le guardavo come si guarda due pesche troppo alte sul ramo' (*LF* 94) – an image that encapsulates the notion of desire in the novel *tout court*, whereby one is tantalized only to be

frustrated. It is through Santina, however, that Anguilla reflects most profoundly on this subject. The hope Anguilla places in the potential recuperation of the idealized Santina points to a wrongheaded, unrealistic, and deeply Pavesian expectation of what love might potentially bring him.[56] And in this aspect of the novel, too, I believe Pavese draws upon Dante, constructing Santina as an (anti–)Beatrician figure.

This analogy (and opposition) comes to light in the novel's closing stages, as Anguilla learns of Santina's fate. Nuto recounts her assassination at the summit of an enormous hill adjacent to the Gaminella. As several critics have noted, this hill comes to carry a strong symbolic charge in the novel, as the unexplored place where hope continues to thrive.[57] In some notes contemporaneous with the composition of *La luna*, Pavese writes: 'Salire sulla vetta è un modo di sfuggire alla storia, di tornare davanti all'archetipo'.[58] In a Dantean context, too, the mountain – and the summit in particular – signifies a plenitude beyond the vagaries of history and worldly suffering. In the opening lines of the *Inferno*, the bewildered Dante finds hope in the sight of the 'colle' (*Inf.* I, 13) before him, later described as the 'dilettoso monte' (*Inf.* I, 77). At the summit of this very mountain will be Eden, redemption, and Beatrice.

These parallels between Pavese's *collina* and Dante's Mount Purgatory are, I believe, far from coincidental. When Nuto leads Anguilla to the summit of the hill in which Anguilla had invested his loosely defined hope – the site, in a Dantean context, of reunion – he can only show Anguilla where Santa was killed and her body burned. The *collina* is thus demystified and the hope placed in redemption through Santina extinguished. In the figure of Beatrice, Dante provided perhaps the most emblematic example of love as a transcendent and redemptive force. Santina is, by contrast, a consummate anti-Beatrice: a paragon of beauty who arouses a desire never to be fulfilled. Moreover, interpreting her function in a Dantean key reinforces Nuto's significance as a Virgilian figure. His role is ultimately to lead Anguilla to Santina, just as Virgil's role was to lead Dante to Beatrice. Yet the transition from one figure to the next – the moment in the *Commedia* emblematic of the pilgrim's salvation – never occurs in Pavese's novel.

Certain critics have argued that the burning of Santina's body ought to be understood in a 'positive' key. Recalling a passage earlier in the novel which described the peasants' belief in the regenerative function of fire,[59] they suggest that the assassination might be seen as a redemptive

sacrifice of the old Italy for the sake of the new.[60] It seems to me greatly problematic, however, that the prevailing message of Santina's death might be an optimistic one. For if her 'sacrifice' in some way points to a political silver lining, it surely remains symptomatic, if not emblematic, of a consuming ontological cloud.[61] The ultimate absence of Santina – exposed as mortal, morally ambiguous, duplicitous – points to the final absence of salvation in this modern *Divina Commedia*. Her name thus carries a cruel irony: while Beatrice's appellation reflects her salvific role in Dante's poem, the double agent Santa ('the holy one') encapsulates the moral chaos of Anguilla's world.

The relationship between these two canonical Italian texts emerges as a paradigmatic example of the tensions between the modern and the premodern that this volume of essays seeks to probe. The spectre of Dante that haunts *La luna e i falò* is the spectre of the absolute – the spectre of the salvation, fulfilment, and meaning that the modern everyman Anguilla is unable to locate. The certitudes once provided by religion have evaporated in a world of profound moral confusion, and the only certainty Anguilla identifies is that of mortality. The *Commedia*'s watertight theological worldview provides the perfect counterpoint in this painful journey of realization. While for Dante personal crisis offered an opportunity to behold human existence in a wider-reaching sense, transcending the pain of historical contingency, for Anguilla – as for Pavese – the chaos of the 'selva selvaggia' (*Inf.* I, 5) emerges not as a temporary condition, but as life itself.

NOTES

1 Letter to Adolfo and Eugenia Ruata, 17 July 1949, in Cesare Pavese, *Lettere 1945–1950*, ed. by Italo Calvino (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. 399. Giovanardi notes the contradiction between the 'mirabile visione' described here and Pavese's claim elsewhere that the novel's genesis was an extremely protracted one: '*La luna* è il libro che mi portavo dentro da più tempo.' Letter to Aldo Camerino, 30 May 1950, in ibid., p. 532. See Stefano Giovanardi, '*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', in *Letteratura italiana: Le Opere*, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), IV/2, pp. 631–46 (p. 632). As well as the explicit reference to the *Commedia*, the expression 'mirabile visione' alludes to Dante's *Vita nova* ('appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione', *VN* XLII, 1).

2 While ultimately raised in nearby Turin, Pavese returned to the Langhe every summer during his youth. For Pavese's biography, see Davide Lajolo, '*Il vizio*

assurdo': Storia di Cesare Pavese (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1960); Bona Alterrocca, *Pavese dopo un quarto di secolo* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1975). Thompson writes that Pavese 'created no main character in any of his novels who was not a fairly obvious manifestation of his own problematical self'. Doug Thompson, *Cesare Pavese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 12.

3 Harry Davis describes the novel as 'a coordinated synthesis of themes, techniques and language first appearing in his earlier poetry and narrative. [...] Of all [Pavese's] works, *La luna e i falò* most closely combines his critical theory and his creative practice.' Harry Davis, '*La luna e i falò*: What Kind of Ripeness?', *Italian Studies*, 39 (1984), pp. 79–90 (p. 88). Giovanardi sees it as 'un punto d'arrivo, quasi la realizzazione della sua poetica più compiuta' (p. 632). Pavese himself dubs *La luna* 'il vero libro'. Letter to Davide Lajolo, 15 May 1950, in *Lettere 1945–1950*, p. 524.

4 Numerous critics have noted the affinities between the return described here and Pavese's early poem 'Mari del sud'. The name 'Anguilla' is widely seen as symbolic. Moloney writes that 'Since European eels cross and re-cross the Atlantic several times in the course of their lives, the name can be seen as having a prophetic or emblematic value, anticipating his destiny, with which he will have to come to terms'. Brian Moloney, 'Ontology and History in *La luna e i falò*', in *Onde di questo mare: Reconsidering Pavese*, ed. by Rossella Riccobono and Doug Thompson (Leicester: Troubador, 2002), pp. 111–20 (p. 113). Of the significance of Anguilla's namelessness, Duncan states that 'The name he seeks would transcend the present and function as a signifier bringing together past and present to bestow something which is essential and atemporal'. Derek Duncan, 'Naming the Narrator in *La luna e i falò*', *Modern Language Review*, 86 (1991), pp. 592–601 (p. 593).

5 Cesare Pavese, *La luna e i falò* (hereafter *LF*), with an introduction by Gian Luigi Beccaria (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 138.

6 See Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, p. 240: 'What he gradually comes to realize is that America is synonymous with rootlessness and alienation, and that even the native Americans themselves are as much victims of a deep-seated restlessness and alienation as were the immigrants, of whatever origin.' See also Duncan, 'Naming the Narrator', p. 597: 'America becomes the symbol of absolute alienation, whereas Gaminella and La Mora are refigured as the sites of an original plenitude.'

7 The train's bright headlight, says Thompson, 'does not fulfil its apparent promise of the hope which Anguilla has invested in it. It comes as the ultimate negation of its humanity, its light illuminating only momentarily, spreading fear, something false, ephemeral, vulgar in the extreme' (*Cesare Pavese*, p. 240). For Kibler, it is 'an ironic materialization of the distant whistle of the trains which had enticed the young Anguilla to leave his native land'. Louis Kibler, 'Patterns of Time in Pavese's *La luna e i falò*', *Forum Italicum*, 12 (1978), pp. 339–50 (p. 344).

8 As Van der Bossche writes, Anguilla does not seek 'origini familiari', but 'la propria identità in termini di esperienze fondamentali che hanno determinato la sua traettoria esistenziale'. Bert van der Bossche, *'Nulla è veramente accaduto': Strategie discorsive del mito nell'opera di Cesare Pavese* (Florence: Cesati, 2001), p. 400. This existential problem is evidently shared with other characters in the novel. Comparing himself to Valino, the new proprietor of the Gaminella, Anguilla states: 'Io per il mondo, lui per le colline, avevamo girato girato, senza mai poter dire "Questi son i miei beni. Su questa trave invecchierò. Morirò in questa stanza."' (*LF* 31).

9 As Freccero puts it, the novel's 'central problem is the problem of all men'. John Freccero, 'Mythos and Logos: The Moon and the Bonfires', *Italian Quarterly*, 4.16 (Winter 1961), pp. 3–16 (p. 5). And Van der Bossche: 'Anguilla non si limita a rintracciare i momenti chiave del proprio destino individuale, ma si sforza d'inquadrare tale parabola esistenziale in una formazione identitaria sopraindividuale, interpretando la propria vita alla luce di un destino umano collettivo' (*Strategie discorsive*, p. 406).

10 On the incorporation of dialectal features in the novel's prose, see Beccaria, pp. xiv–xxiii; Antonio Catalfamo, 'Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza": Per una nuova lettura de *La luna e i falò*', in *Cesare Pavese: Tra 'destino' e 'speranza': Nuova rassegna di saggi internazionali di critica pavesiana*, ed. by Antonio Catalfamo (Santo Stefano Belbo: I Quaderni del Centro Pavesiano, 2002), pp. 19–45 (pp. 39–45); Van der Bossche, *Strategie discorsive*, pp. 403–04.

11 Freccero, 'Mythos and Logos', p. 5. Thompson writes: '*La luna e i falò* posits two different orders of time: the cyclic, that is, mythical time of the natural world, and the linear time of history, arbitrarily superimposed by man, leaving no root in the essential, enduring reality of the earth' (*Cesare Pavese*, p. 233).

12 On this opposition, see Van der Bossche, *Strategie discorsive*, p. 408.

13 As Thompson puts it, the 'repeated experiences of childhood become something more than memory, something in the blood' (*Cesare Pavese*, p. 228).

14 Cesare Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere 1935–1950* (hereafter *MV*), ed. by Marziano Guglielminetti and Laura Nay (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 59 (26 November 1938). Destiny, for Pavese, is 'Ciò che pare libertà e invece si chiarisce poi paradigmatico, ferreo, prefissato', *MV*, p. 387 (10 January 1950). It is thus that the unchanging patterns and rhythms of the Langhe create what amount to human archetypes: Cinto, the crippled boy who now lives at the Gaminella, re-embodies Anguilla himself ('[Cinto] avrà avuto dieci anni, e vederlo su quell'aia era come vedere me stesso', *LF* 32), in thrall to the older Piola just as Anguilla was in thrall to Nuto ('Il Piola era il suo Nuto', *LF* 49), while his father Valino re-embodies Anguilla's adopted father, the previous proprietor of the Gaminella. As Catalfamo notes, 'la "ciclicità" è "in peius": Valino è ancor più povero di Padrino [...]; Cinto assoma alla povertà di Anguilla la malattia fisica e l'incomprensione familiare' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 30). For this reason, Van der Bossche distinguishes between the 'cyclical' time of nature and the 'spiral' time of humanity (*Strategie discorsive*, p. 408, n. 175).

15 Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, p. 262. This paragraph is indebted to the final chapter (pp. 261–70) of Thompson's study.
16 Ibid., p. 262.
17 Ibid., p. 269.
18 Ibid., p. 270.
19 *MV*, p. 164 (4 December 1939).
20 Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, p. 270.
21 'In Pavese's final view what is most valid is that which reflects our deepest – which is to say our earliest – selves' (ibid., p. 224).
22 'La Mora diventa […] oggetto di struggente nostalgia, di astratta attesa che la mette nel fulcro di desideri e di rimembranze'. Tibor Wlassics, *Pavese falso e vero: Vita, poetica, narrativa* (Turin: Centro Studi Piemontesi, 1987), p. 192.
23 For all *La luna*'s ontological concerns, it is also a novel very consciously situated in a particular moment of Italian history. Pavese himself attached considerable importance to the novel's political dimension, describing *La luna* as a 'post-Resistance' novel. See *MV*, p. 375 (17 November 1949). The political dimension of the text, seen by some critics as obstructive to the novel's central purpose, has received increased critical attention. See, for example, Catalfamo, 'Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"'; Moloney, 'Ontology and History'. As Catalfamo remarks, Anguilla's return is 'alla ricerca non solo della propria identità, ma anche della "verità storica"' (p. 22).
24 As Davis puts it, 'The melancholy arises when sameness is marred by difference and the recoverable cannot bring with it the irrecoverable' ('*La luna e i falò*: What Kind of Ripeness?', p. 84).
25 Freccero writes that, for Pavese, 'things are not really understood until they are seen for a second time', and yet 'To leave the *paese* is to learn what it means and to shatter its power' ('Mythos and Logos', p. 6). There are clear affinities between Anguilla's plight and the following 1949 diary entry: 'Strano momento in cui (tredici o dodici anni) ti staccavi dal paese, intravedevi il mondo, partivi sulle fantasie e non sapevi che cominciava un lungo viaggio che, attraverso città avventure nomi rapimenti mondi ignoti, ti avrebbe ricondotto a scoprire come ricco di tutto quell'avvenire proprio quel momento del distacco – il momento in cui eri più paese che mondo –, a riguardare indietro. E' perché il mondo l'avvenire ora l'hai dentro come passato, come esperienza, come tecnica, e il perenne e ricco mistero si ritrova essere quel tu infantile che non hai fatto in tempo a possedere. Tutto è nell'infanzia, anche il fascino che sarà avvenire, che soltanto allora si sente come un urto meraviglioso.' *MV*, p. 364 (13 February 1949).
26 'The privileged position occupied by childhood in the narrator's discourse is due to the idyllic dimension it possesses as the realm of "non sapere"' (Duncan, 'Naming the Narrator', p. 600).
27 'Sia che l'uomo ritorni definitivamente, sia che riparta, l'unico è il suo destino: la legge di natura lo condanna alla solitudine' (Catalfamo, 'Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 33).

28 Giovanardi, '*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 641. The quotations from Giovanardi that follow all come from this source. He also discusses *La luna*'s links to several Ottocento and Novecento texts (pp. 642–43).

29 Ibid., p. 641. Similarly, Catalfamo writes: 'Significativamente [il romanzo] consta di trentadue capitoli, che richiamano, nel numero e nella brevità, i canti della *Divina Commedia* dantesca' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 19). Catalfamo considers the analogy between the two texts in terms of the places they occupy in their authors' respective oeuvres: 'Questo richiamo non ci pare casuale: come Dante, che interrompe il *Convivio* e il *De vulgari eloquentia*, per dedicare tutte le proprie energie alla *Commedia*, Pavese si attende da *La luna e i falò* la consacrazione letteraria' (ibid. p. 19).

30 Pavese continues: 'Per questo [la *poiesis* italiana] è poco narrativa (dove si richiede lunga distensione sgorgant: romanzo russo, romanzo francese) e molto cerebrale e argomentante. E' la negazione del naturalismo, che comincerà infatti con l'informe distesa della narrativa inglese (Defoe)', *MV*, p. 267 (2 November 1943).

31 See Italo Calvino, 'Pavese e i sacrifici umani', *Revue des études italiennes*, 12 (1966), pp. 107–10 (p. 109).

32 Giovanardi, '*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 641.

33 Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 146.

34 See *MV*, p. 165 (10 December 1939).

35 Catalfamo similarly suggests that Dante acts as an important precedent for Pavese's 'realismo simbolico' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 19).

36 Biasin contrasts 'the present with its cruel, critical awareness, its rational and practical logic' and 'the past with its tender, irrational myths, its melancholy elegy'. Gian-Paolo Biasin, *The Smile of the Gods: A Thematic Study of Cesare Pavese's Works*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 239. On the novel's complex temporal structure, see Kibler, 'Patterns of Time'; Bert Van der Bossche, 'La temporalità ne *La luna e i falò*', *Critica letteraria*, 18 (1989), no. 4, pp. 721–38.

37 Giovanardi, '*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 634.

38 *MV*, pp. 33–34 (20 April 1936).

39 I refer foremost to Pavese's eight-month incarceration in 1935. During his confinement his beloved Tina Pizzardo would marry another man, leading Pavese into crisis.

40 Thompson writes that 'the very digressiveness of the novel, its fits and starts, makes it difficult to pin down and hold the meaning for long enough to be sure where it is leading', and that the structure of the novel 'is a function of the search whose object is never fully known to the narrator or to the reader until the end is reached' (Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, p. 225).

41 Giovanardi states that Pavese uses this number of chapters 'quasi a voler insieme indicare e appena dissimulare un'analogia' ('*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 641), but offers no explanation as to why he might do so.

42 See Manuele Gragnolati, '*Inferno* V', in *Lectura Dantis Bononiensis*, ed. by Emilio Pasquini (Bologna: Accademia delle Scienze, forthcoming); Tristan Kay, 'Dante's Ambivalence towards the Lustful', in *Dante and the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. by John C. Barnes (Dublin: Four Courts Press, forthcoming), and 'Redefining the "matera amorosa": Dante's *Vita nova* and Guittone's Anti-Courtly "Canzoniere"', *The Italianist*, 29 (2009), 369–99; and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Dante's Sexual Solecisms: Gender and Genre in the *Commedia*', in *The New Medievalism*, ed. by Kevin Brownlee, Marina Brownlee, and Stephen Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 201–25.

43 Beccaria, introduction to *LF*, p. vi. Similarly, Giovanardi writes: 'non più "poesia-racconto" [a reference to the form of Pavese's early poems], bensì "racconto-poesia", o insomma poema in prosa che finalmente darebbe forma a quel "nuovo canzoniere" già presentito dall'autore nel 1940 e mai realizzato' ('*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 635). On the novel's 'lyricism', see ibid., pp. 634–35; Davis, '*La luna e i falò*: What Kind of Ripeness?', pp. 82–83. Pavese remarks in his diaries how Italian narrative has largely struggled to detach itself from its lyric heritage: '[gli] iniziatori del romanzo italiano […] [sono stati] anzitutto dei lirici – Alfieri, Leopardi, Foscolo […] E il primo romanzo riuscito – *I promessi Sposi* – è la maturità di un grande lirico. Ciò deve aver lasciato tracce nel nostro ideale narrativo'. Pavese, *MV*, p. 280 (15 May 1944).

44 *MV*, p. 281 (27 May 1944).

45 Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, p. 223.

46 Catalfamo writes: 'Come un novello Odisseo, parte, ritorna e poi riparte senza sosta, senza raggiungere un equilibrio esistenziale' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 37). See also Manuel Barriuso Andino, 'Cesare Pavese tra la luna e i falò', in *Ritorno all'uomo: Saggi internazionali di critica pavesiana*, ed. by Antonio Catalfamo (Santo Stefano Belbo: I Quaderni del Centro Pavesiano, 2001), pp. 43-54 (p. 46); Moloney, 'Ontology and History', p. 115; Thompson, *Cesare Pavese*, pp. 223–24.

47 Pavese says that the modern author should 'partire dall'umile uomo comune e a poco a poco dargli il senso di un Ulisse', *MV*, p. 373 (23 August 1949).

48 For an important reading of *Inferno* V emphasizing Francesca's passive acceptance of a destructive model of desire through the mediation of literature, see René Girard, 'The Mimetic Desire of Paolo and Francesca', in *'To Double Business Bound': Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 1–8.

49 Calvino, 'Pavese e i sacrifici umani', p. 109.

50 Barriuso Andino, 'Cesare Pavese tra la luna e i falò', p. 52.

51 On desire as a source of frustration in Pavese, see Manuele Gragnolati, 'Lo scrittore, l'amore e la morte: Per una lettura leopardiana dei *Dialoghi con Leucò*', *Testo*, 52 (2006), pp. 59–75. On women in Pavese's work, see Francesca Gibson, 'Pavese's Women', in *Onde di questo mare*, ed. by Riccobono and Thompson, pp. 71–80; Analisa Saccà, 'Pavese al femminile: Alcune considerazioni sulla donna nella vita e nelle opere di Cesare Pavese', in *Un viaggio mitico: Pavese 'intertestuale': Alla ricerca di se stesso e dell'eticità della storia*, ed. by Antonio

Catalfamo (Santo Stefano Belbo: I Quaderni del Centro Pavesiano, 2006), pp. 157–75.

52 *MV*, p. 394 (26 May 1950).

53 This is documented in the striking series of poems written for Dowling, 'Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi'. Shortly before his suicide, Pavese wrote 'Non ho più nulla da desiderare su questa terra, tranne quella cosa che quindici anni di fallimenti ormai escludono': *MV*, p. 400 (17 August 1950). Saccà states that 'Mentre l'adulazione, la superficialità, l'infedeltà delle donne da lui conosciute lo amareggiano, il bisogno dell'amore di una donna lo spinge sempre a cercarla e a illudersi' ('Pavese al femminile', p. 160).

54 *MV*, p. 202 (30 September 1940).

55 'Per Irene e Silvia essere ben trattate dalla vecchia, ricevute, festeggiate era come per me dare un'occhiata dal terrazzo nella stanza del pianoforte' (*LF* 118); 'Credo che Lugli fosse per [Silvia] quello che lei e sua sorella sarebbero potute essere per me – quello che poi fu per me Genova o l'America' (*LF* 406). For Catalfamo, Siliva and Irene show 'l'imperscrutabilità del cuore femminile' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 37). Moloney suggests that they constitute 'an austere comment by Pavese on the Italietta which took no interest in anything serious and was guilty of allowing Fascism to take power' ('Ontology and History', p. 115).

56 'Questo ideale femminile irrealizzabile e realizzato solo nella scrittura esisteva solo come impossibile desiderio, quasi a diventare desiderio del desiderio' (Saccà, 'Pavese al femminile', p. 159).

57 Anguilla states: 'rimuginavo che doveva esserci qualcosa lassú, sui pianori, dietro le canne e le ultime cascine sperdute' (*LF* 48). On the significance of the *collina*, see Amo Marzio Mutterle, 'L'ultima passegiata', in *I fioretti del diavolo: Nuovi studi su Cesare Pavese* (Turin: Edizioni dell'Ordo, 2003), pp. 129–47; Beccaria, introduction to *LF,* p. ix; Van der Boscche, *Strategie discorsive*, p. 411. The *collina* is a Pavesian symbol *par excellence*, from the early collection of poems *Lavorare Stanca* to the novel *La casa in collina*. On the symbolic use of landscape more generally in Pavese's work, see Giovanna Romanelli, 'Pavese e l'altrove impossibile', in *Ritorno all'uomo*, ed. by Catalfamo, pp. 67–85.

58 Cited in Beccaria, introduction to *LF*, p. ix.

59 See *LF* 51.

60 Thompson sees in Santina's death a possible redemptive meaning 'in that it signals the destruction of the old Italy – both Fascist and pre-Fascist – from the ashes of which will rise the new, more equitable society for which so many of the partisans fought and died' (*Cesare Pavese*, p. 240). Barriuso Andino sees it as an 'allegoria della fine che la resistenza aveva previsto per la borghesia' (p. 51). Freccero sees Santina's death as 'a necessary sacrifice of the old order for the sake of the new. […] In death her name lost the diminutive and became Santa – and the Partisans who killed her at the moment of her maturity loved her deeply' ('Mythos and Logos', p. 10). See also Mutterle, 'L'ultima passeggiata', pp. 145–47.

61 Other critics offer similarly 'pessimistic' interpretations of the episode. Duncan writes that the deaths of Valino and Santa 'can be read as representing the destruction of the iniquitous share-cropping system and the fall of the fascist régime, but such an interpretation, insisting on Nuto's hopes for a brighter future, ignore the cost to the individual' ('Naming the Narrator', p. 597). Catalfamo states that 'Con Santina muore tragicamente il ricordo più casto coltivato da Anguilla, spezzando, nel contempo, ogni possibilità d'intesa con l'altro sesso' ('Cesare Pavese tra "destino" e "speranza"', p. 36). Giovanardi argues that 'Da rito propiziatorio di fertilità e di vita, il falò si è trasformato in segno di morte e di violenza ineluttabile' ('*La luna e i falò* di Cesare Pavese', p. 638). Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo writes that 'Non per nulla il finale è tragico, dirigendo decisamente verso il nulla, di cui il consumarsi del corpo della ragazza è simbolo'. 'La morte di Santa', in *Il Novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), pp. 326–30 (p. 326).

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