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The Reception of Blake in Italy

Luisa Calè

Despite earlier Encyclopaedia entries, the first significant traces of Blake in Italy come through Dante via Germany. Ludwig Volkmann's study of Dante's iconography was translated from the German in 1898 and presented Blake as 'poet and painter, philosopher and spiritist' ('poeta e pittore, filosofo e spiritista'; Volkmann 1898, 85), suggesting his ability to communicate with spirits connecting corporeal and supernatural worlds.¹ In Blake's illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* Volkmann traces the characteristic of Blake's art as 'a series of revelations, in which the transcendental takes positive forms' ('una serie di rivelazioni, nelle quali il trascendentale prendeva forme positive', 1898, 85). The visionary character of his work is conveyed in a quotation from Richard Muther's history of painting, which documents 'the sensitive and almost unhealthy nature of the artist [...]. What he looked for and found in Dante was the world of Spirits' ('la natura sensitiva e quasi malaticcia dell'artista [...]. Ciò che egli cercò e vide in Dante è il mondo degli spiriti', Volkmann 1898, 85). Following a brief account of John Linnell's commission and Blake's work on Dante in 1825-26, Volkmann refers to seven copperplates from Dante engraved in the style of Marcantonio Raimondi, as published in reproduction by W. B. Yeats in *The Savoy* in 1896. For Volkmann, Blake's forms spell out his visionary approach: 'soft, as if from a dream, and confused they seem to appear from a sea of flames in the *Inferno*, and the dense, cloudy atmosphere of *Purgatorio*' ('molli, qual sogno, confuse appariscono spesso le scene che nell'*Inferno* sembrano sorgere momentaneamente da un mare di fiamme, nel *Purgatorio* da un'atmosfera densa,

¹ For a discussion of Volkmann in the German context, see Sibylle Erle's chapter.

nebulosa', 1898, 86). Summing up Blake's position in the field of art, Volkmann indicates that he was born 'from the school of a classical sculptor' and became 'the precursor of modern symbolism, the direct precursor of a Rossetti' ('Così vediamo in Inghilterra [...] nascere dalla scuola d'uno scultore classico, il precursore del simbolismo moderno, il predecessore diretto d'un Rossetti, 1898, 86). In Dante Volkmann identifies the ideal point of encounter between the two artists.

Blake's Dante designs have continued to hold an important place in the reception of Blake in Italy.² Volkmann's juxtaposition shaped the curatorial choices for the British contribution to the Mostra Nazionale Dantesca (National Dante exhibition), organized under the patronage of the President of the Republic to mark the celebrations for the 700th centenary of Dante's birth in 1965, which took place in a symbolic national *lieu de mémoire*, the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. T. S. Eliot is listed as representing England on the National Committee charged with planning the centenary celebrations (Parricchi 1965, 15). Nine Blake watercolours from the Birmingham City Art Gallery and fifteen paintings by Dante Gabriele Rossetti were hung in a room that - apart from 'the homage of nations such as England, Canada, Romania, Holland, Austria, Spain' - illustrated 'the Roman and Italian character of Dante' ('a eccezione delle pareti assegnate all'omaggio di nazioni come l'Inghilterra, il Canada, la Romania, l'Olanda, l'Austria, la Spagna - illustrano la *romanità* e l'*italianità* di Dante').³ Discussing the visual dimensions of Dante's writings and how his

² See Ulivi, in Parricchi (1965); Bellonzi (1970); Gizzi (1983); Pinsky (1988); Salvadori (1999); Gnappi (2005); Corti (2007).

³ Parricchi (1965, 303). The Blake works on display were 'I superbi che portano enormi macigni, *Purg.* X; 'La nave dell'amore'; *Par.* XXIV; 'L'angelo che ricorda', *Par.* XIX; *Purg.* XXVII; 'Battaglia dei diavoli', *Inf.* XII; 'Il cerchio dei dannati', *Inf.* V; 'Gerarchie

‘visibile parlare’ is translated in visual form on the occasion of the centenary exhibition, Ferruccio Ulivi (1912-2002) mentions the ‘introverted, obsessed, hyper- fantastical and oneiric Blake – the unbeatable exemplar of a lyrical approach to illustration, which anticipates and exceeds the most various experiments in unreal and surreal figurative art today’ (‘introverso, ossessionato, fantasticissimo, onirico Blake - insuperabile esempio di un carattere lirico-illustrativo che anticipa, e dà scacco, alle più diverse applicazioni sperimentali irrealistiche e surrealistiche della figurativa odierna’, Parricchi 1965, 185). The point is illustrated with an engraving of the whirlwind of passion, Blake’s representation of the condition of the lovers in Dante’s *Inferno*. A comprehensive exhibition of Blake’s illustrations for Dante’s *Commedia* was curated at the Casa di Dante in Abruzzo, Torre dei Passeri, by Corrado Gizzi in 1983, and received wide newspaper coverage. Blake’s 102 drawings and seven engravings are catalogued with short quotations from Dante’s *Commedia*, plot summaries by Gizzi and essays on the relationship between illuminated manuscripts and the aesthetic of *Marriage*, Blake’s visionary interpretation of Dante, and Blake’s disagreements with Dante in matters of theology, politics and justice.⁴ Renato Barilli (b. 1935) discusses Blake’s ‘Michelangelesque Titanism imprisoned in pseudo-naïve symmetries’ that hark back to the ‘taste of the Primitives’, a reference to

angeliche’, *Par.*; ‘La missione di Virgilio’, *Inf.* V. See ‘Catalogo’, in Parricchi (1965), nos 94-102, p. 314; on Rossetti, see nos 118-33, pp. 315-16.

⁴ The exhibits were loaned by the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; British Museum; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; National Gallery, Victoria, Melbourne; Royal Institute of Cornwall; Tate Gallery, London. (Gizzi 1983).

Venturi's analysis of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian painting ('Il titanismo michelangiolesco viene ingabbiato nelle simmetrie pseudoingenuae, nei bilanciamenti elementari proprio del 'gusto dei Primitivi', Gizzi 1983, 14; Venturi 1926). For Barilli, Blake's choice to discard the rules of perspective points to the choice made by Gauguin, Cézanne, the symbolists, fauves and expressionists a hundred years later. The Catalogue showcases scholars such as Barilli and Claudia Corti (b. 1946), who helped shape the reception of Blake in late twentieth-century Italy. In a later essay, Corti's draws on Gestalt theory to trace the serpentine formations in Blake's art, from the phallic connotations of the serpentine form in the circle of the lustful in *Inferno V* to the vitalistic, political and religious iconography of snakes and dragons (Corti 2007).

Cosmopolitan routes are also critical in establishing another early line of inquiry into Blake. In 1909 a copy of the 1797 edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* with Blake's illustrations was recorded in the collection of the bibliophile Count Giuseppe Primoli, son of Princess Carlotta Bonaparte, cousin of Napoleon III, and a key figure in French-Italian exchanges in the belle époque: the illustrations were reproduced in an article published in the art historical journal *Vita d'Arte* by Piero Misciattelli (1882-1937), an aristocrat who spent time at the turn of the century in Germany, France and England in order to complete his education. Misciattelli presents Blake as a 'primitive, rich and impulsive temperament, a heroic intellect, the soft and intact heart of a child: poet, philosopher, painter, dramatist, engraver; sage and visionary, such was William Blake' ('Temperamento di uomo primitivo ricco ed impetuoso, intelletto eroico, cuore dolce ed intatto di fanciullo: poeta, filosofo, pittore, drammaturgo, incisore: saggio e visionario; tale fu William Blake', 1909, 470). From Henry Crabb Robinson Misciattelli gathers anecdotes about Blake's visionary childhood: the first vision dates back to when Blake was four, when 'God pressed his brow against the window, and he started to see and tell strange things' ('Dio mise la fronte

del piccolo William contro la finestra, ed egli cominciò a vedere ed a raccontare cose strane’); then comes the more familiar story of his seeing ‘a tree full of angels with shining wings’ (1909, 470), followed by his encounter with the prophet Ezekiel.⁵ Such a visionary imagination is then consolidated by reading mystical works by Emanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme. Compared to the ‘sophisticated and moribund eighteenth century’, Blake seems to have been born not in London, ‘but in a desert’:

⁵ Misciattelli’s reference to Henry Crabb Robinson’s ‘giornale’ (‘newspaper’) may refer to Robinson’s ‘William Blake, Künstler, Dichter und religiöser Schwärmer’, *Vaterländisches Museum* (1810), 107-31; but the anecdotes are not to be found in Robinson’s piece, and the word ‘giornale’ is likely to be a mistranslation of the false friend ‘journal’. However, the anecdote does not feature in *The Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (1869) either. In Gilchrist’s account of the early visionary years Misciattelli’s second anecdote (the tree full of angels) is described as Blake’s first vision, occurring when he was eight or ten (1863, 7). Furthermore, Misciattelli distorts an anecdote recorded by Gilchrist later in his biography, when he reports Robinson’s reminiscences about Blake and Dante, including Catherine Blake mentioning ‘the first time you saw God was when you were four years old, and He put His head to the window, and set you screaming’ (Gilchrist 1863, 1: 342). While Robinson’s remark indicates that it was God’s face that appears on the other side of the window, Misciattelli suggests that the visions were caused by God pressing Blake’s brow against the window. Possibly an accident of translation, this shift changes the nature of the anecdote. On Robinson’s essay on Blake, see Junod (2012). I am grateful to Sibylle Erle for helping me trace this anecdote.

‘The world of imagination is the world of eternity’ he wrote, and indeed he grew in the world of *his* soul, peopled by dreams, marvellous ghosts, and dominated by celestial and satanic forces, by the unknown gods he believed in, such as Los, master of time; Enitharmon, goddess of space; Theotormon, the representative of fallen virility; Oothon, the personification of imprisoned femininity.⁶

Misciattelli is aware that Blake ‘carved his songs in metal and was their magnificent and inspired illustrator’ (‘egli stesso incidere nel metallo i suoi canti e n’era il magnifico illustratore’, 1909, 473), but gives no specifics about technique. Blake’s illustrations to *Night Thoughts* are ‘songs from an original poem consecrated to Time, Pain, Death, and the proud Soul winning over the body, and the spirit of Truth triumphant over the world’ (‘canti di un poema originale consacrato dal Blake al Tempo, al Dolore, alla Morte, all’Anima gloriosa vincitrice del corpo, allo spirito della Verità, trionfante sul mondo’, 1909, 479). Misciattelli appreciates Blake as a ‘heretic’, who rejects the style of Rubens and Reynolds; his freedom of expression is closer to the Primitives than the Pre-Raphaelites, who had explicitly tried to emulate them under the guidance of Dante Gabriele Rossetti (1909, 478, 480-81).

Measuring Blake against the Pre-Raphaelites continues in the art criticism of the early twentieth century. In his discussion of the taste for the Primitives Lionello Venturi

⁶ “‘The world of imagination is the world of eternity’ scrisse, e crebbe difatti nel mondo della *sua* anima, popolato di sogni, di fantasmi meravigliosi, dominato da forze celesti e sataniche, da ignoti dei ai quali credeva, come Los signore del tempo, come Enitharmon, dea dello spazio, Theotormon, il rappresentante della virilità decaduta. Oothon la personificazione della femminilità prigioniera’ (Misciattelli 1909, 478-79).

(1885-1961) deploras Blake as a ‘negative figure, a barbarian’ (‘egli è un negativo, un barbaro’) and denounces his abstract mystic spirituality for its lack of moral content and artistic sensibility. For Venturi, Blake mistakes dogmas for art and does not know how to draw after the classics or the Primitives (Venturi 1926, 188-89). In his book on the Pre-Raphaelites Lelio Luxardo discusses Blake as their precursor; he points out his ‘profound, mostly grotesque, frightening, and obscurely symbolic meaning’ (‘un profondo significato, per lo più grottesco e pauroso, oscuramente simbolico’) and celebrates the originality of terrifying compositions which are translated and contained in a ‘strictly orthodox academic idiom’ (‘stretto e ortodosso accademismo’, 1929, 16). Later in the century Blake takes on the character of the ‘Northern Michelangelo’ (Lelj 1938; Praz 1942b; Melchiori 1950).

After a private press publication of ‘Tigre’ by the orientalist Emilio Teza (1831-1912; Teza 1906), interest in Blake’s writings developed in the 1910s with an essay published in the influential periodical *La Nuova Antologia* in 1911 by Maria Albani, who praises Blake for recovering simplicity against the academic norms of an age of convoluted artifice. Albani presents Catherine Blake as a friend, collaborator and custodian of his fantasies. She describes the use of impermeable liquid to protect the outlines of words and designs from the corrosive acid, comparing the resulting elements in relief to stereotypes (Albani 1911, 609). The article includes a translation of ‘Samson’ from *Poetical Sketches* (1911, 606-08; E 443-45), which she praises for ‘a mysticism that I would call epic’ (‘questo misticismo che chiamerei epico’, 608), the first four lines of *Auguries of Innocence* (1911, 608; E 490), but also the English original text of the robin red nest and skylark animal proverbs that follow (1911, 609; E 490, lines 5-6, 15-16), and of the whole text of ‘Infant Joy’ from *Songs of Innocence* (1911, 610; E 16), and translations of *Laughing Joy* (1911, 610; E 11) and *Thel* in their entirety (1911, 611-13; E 3-6), as well as a selection of proverbs from *Marriage* (1911, 614-15). Albani also mentions the prophetic

books of the 1790s, noting their difficulties despite the ‘loving study’ written by Swinburne, who also had an important role in the mediation of Blake in Italy.⁷ She discusses the ‘Whore of Babylon’ in the British Museum (Butlin 1981, #523), a series of four watercolours entitled *War in Chains (Guerra Incatenata)*, Butlin 1981, 70-76, #195), *The Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826, Butlin 1981, #550) and Dante watercolours, and Blake’s engraving of *Chaucer’s Canterbury Pilgrims* (Bindman 1978, #477; Butlin 1981, #654); but she makes no mention of *Four Zoas*, *Milton* or *Jerusalem*.

Academic dissemination of Blake’s work was inaugurated by James Joyce’s lecture on Blake, delivered in Italian to the Università Popolare Triestina in 1912 as part of a series of lectures on ‘Verismo ed Idealismo nella Letteratura Inglese (Daniele De Foe – William Blake)’ (‘Realism and idealism in English literature’). Joyce celebrates Blake’s visionary power: ‘Looking at Buckingham Palace, he sees with the eye of the mind the sigh of the hapless soldier running down the palace wall in the form of a drop of blood’ (1959, 215). He also captures Blake’s ability to translate such visionary experience into the materiality of the engraver’s imagination: ‘While he was still young and vigorous, remaking himself with these visions, he had the power to etch their image in a hammered verse or a sheet of copper, and these verbal or mental etchings often comprise [sic] an entire sociological system’ (Joyce 1959, 215).⁸ Joyce’s account of the ‘undisciplined and

⁷ Olivero (1914b, 10), and (1925b, 31); Praz (1930b, repr. 1976, 168); Swinburne (1992).

⁸ ‘guardando il palazzo di Buckingham vide coll’occhio della mente il sospiro del soldato infelice che cola giù dal muro della reggia nella forma d’una goccia di sangue. Mentre era ancora vigoroso e giovane sapeva e poteva, riavendosi da queste visioni, inciderne l’immagine in un verso martellato o nella lastra di rame: e tali incisioni in parole o in metallo riassumono spesso un intero sistema sociologico’ (Joyce 1977, 160).

visionary heresiarch' (1959, 216) emphasizes the plebeian dimension of the prophetic visions that Blake advocated for 'every honest man': 'We are amazed that the symbolic beings Los and Urizen and Vala and Tiriël and Enitharmon and the shades of Milton and Homer came from their ideal world to a poor London room, and no other incense greeted their coming than the smell of East Indian tea and eggs fried in lard' (1959, 218).⁹ In subsequent years critics have tended to overlook the levelling element of a visionary power that locates the 'threshold of the infinite' within a humble room, as Blake's visionary moments are seen more as personal anecdotes in the life of an artist, and greater emphasis is given to Blake's mysticism.

Blake is presented as the founder of European symbolism and his influence traced in the work of Rossetti, Swinburne and Yeats, as well as in contemporary poetry by Federico Olivero (1878-1955), professor of English literature at the University of Turin in 1913-14. Having read Blake in John Sampson's 1905 edition, Olivero presents an implicitly Nietzschean notion of the mystical poet and his 'cries of madness': 'Blake sings when overcome by the drunkenness of song, like a bird in the dew of dawn' ('Blake canta quando l'ebbrezza del canto l'assale, come un augello fra la rugiada dell'alba', 1914b, 5-6). Olivero's analysis traces the 'poetical sentiment that pervades his painting' from *Poetical Sketches* to *Four Zoas*: Blake's 'transcendental landscape [...] reflects the soul with all its faculties', but 'his allegorical style feels arid, and the aesthetic sense is offended

⁹'Eresiarca anarcoide e visionario'; 'dobbiamo meravigliarci perché gli esseri simbolici Los e Urizen e Vala e Tiriël ed Enitharmon e le ombre di Milton e d'Omero venissero dal loro mondo ideale in una povera camera londinese e che altro incenso non salutasse la loro venuta che l'odore di tè indiano e di uova fritte nello strutto?' (Joyce 1977, 161, 164). On the reception of Blake in Ireland, see Edward Larrissy's chapter.

by his long and utterly unappealing enumerations and the grotesque impression of the whole'.¹⁰ Olivero traces the 'tragic figurations', 'giant creatures, spectral apparitions' ('tragiche figurazioni', 'immagini di gigantesche creature') in Blake's designs, from the Dante illustrations to *Vala, Milton, Jerusalem, Europe* and *Urizen* (1914b, 13). In Blake's style Olivero detects Ossianic reminiscences, Biblical rhythms and the popular metrical structures of the ballad form. His analysis concludes with a translation of the poetic epistle Blake sent to Thomas Butts from Felpham on 2 October 1800 (E 712-13; Olivero 1914b, 20-21), followed by an examination of Blake's influence on the poetry of Christina Rossetti, Yeats, Arthur Symons, Charles Van Lerberghe and Rainer Maria Rilke (Olivero 1914b, 22-27).

The reception of Blake gained ground during the Fascist era in Italy (1922-43). Interest in race and genealogy motivates claims made about Blake's 'orgiastic imagination' by Edmondo Dodsworth (1877-1950) in his introduction to *Il Matrimonio del cielo e dell'inferno: Canti dell'innocenza e altri poemi* (The marriage of heaven and hell: Songs of innocence and other poems), published in 1923. This first book-length translation of Blake's 'most perfect metaphysical work' ('la sua opera metafisica più perfetta', Blake 1923, 10) came out in a philosophical series entitled *Cultura dell'anima* (Culture of the soul), whose first publication was Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in 1909. Dodsworth was the author of *Tristezza Mistica* (Mystic sadness), which was published by the Theosophic Library in Rome in 1911, and was close to Ezra Pound and the Fascist race theorist,

¹⁰ 'Il suo paesaggio trascendentale [...] rispecchia l'Anima con tutte le sue facoltà [...]. Da questo stile così strettamente allegorico deriva però una certa aridità; il senso estetico è urtato dalla lunga enumerazione senza alcun potere suggestivo, e dall'impressione grottesca dell'insieme' (Olivero 1914b, 11).

esoteric thinker and painter Julius Evola. Having gathered from Ellis and Yeats an account of Blake's Irish grandfather (Blake 1893, 1: 2), Dodsworth claimed that 'The Celtic race has always been fantastic, bent like no other to any breeze coming from the prestigious horizons of mystery' ('La razza celtica fu sempre fantastica, piegata come nessun'altra ad ogni soffio che spira dai prestigiosi orizzonti del mistero', Blake 1923, 5).¹¹ The political potential and polarity of Blake's work is presented through a parliamentary analogy:

Opinions oscillate from the extreme right of materialism, which barely tolerates conscience as an epiphenomenon of deified matter, to the extreme left, which reduces the entire material universe to the mere representation of the idea.

Fortunately we need not take sides in this grave debate, since our aim is not to discuss philosophy, but to try and understand Blake.

Blake is a mystic and to understand a mystic, whatever your beliefs, you will need to sign up, temporarily, to the 'parties of the left'.¹²

¹¹ Although Ellis and Yeats's claim about Blake's Irish ancestry was challenged by Sampson (1905, xxiv-v) and Symons (1907, 23-28), it was nonetheless taken up by Tomasi di Lampedusa (1926) and Gargaro (1935), whose anthology included Rossetti and Blake as a means to 'get to the sources of English symbolism' (vii).

¹² 'Le opinioni oscillano dall'estrema destra del materialismo che tollera appena la coscienza come epifenomeno della materia deificata, all'estrema sinistra che riduce l'intero universo materiale a una semplice rappresentazione dell'idea.

Fortunatamente non dobbiamo prendere posizione in questo grave dibattito, ch   nostro scopo   non gi  trattar di Filosofia, ma cercare di comprendere il Blake.

The parliamentary analogy helps Dodsworth drive the point home: Blake belongs to ‘the intransigent idealists and pantheist mystics of the extreme left’ (‘estrema sinistra degli Idealisti intransigenti e dei mistici panteisti’, Blake 1923, 18). However, Dodsworth’s political inflection of Blake’s ‘metaphysics’ speaks to the Fascist philosophy of the absolute spirit: in Blake’s ‘metaphysics’ he sees ‘the world’ identified with ‘pure conscience will thought’ (‘il mondo [...] è pura coscienza volontà pensiero’, Blake 1923, 16).¹³ Blake’s critique of the bounds of the horizon also suited Evola’s notion of ‘positive freedom [...] manifested in the power of the limit’ (Evola 1930). Read through the lens of Fascist materialism, it provided a metaphysics of good and evil that chimed with political appropriations of Nietzsche’s will to power.

The political philosophy of Heaven and Hell was also addressed in a lecture presented to the Philosophy Library in Florence and published in the *Bollettino Filosofico* (Philosophical bulletin) in 1924 by the British Fascist Harold Goad (1878-1956), Reader of Italian at the University of London and Director of the British Institute in Florence from 1922 to 1939. Goad presents Blake as ‘a mystic to whom life was perpetual illumination’,

Ora il Blake è un mistico e per intendere un mistico voi dovete, qualunque siano le vostre opinioni, iscrivervi temporaneamente ai “partiti di sinistra” (Blake 1923, 17).

¹³ An extract from Dodsworth’s translation of *Marriage* (containing plate 11), followed by the ‘Memorable Fancy’ dinner with Isaiah and Ezekiel, a translation of Ezra Pound’s ‘Istantanee’, and a two-page biographical notice appeared on 15 October 1932 in the ‘Supplemento Letterario’ of *Il Mare* (The sea), the literary organ of the circle gathered around Ezra Pound in Rapallo in the 1930s (reprinted by the Società Letteraria di Rapallo in *Il Mare Supplemento Letterario 1932-1933*, Rapallo 1999, 98-100).

shaped by supernatural hauntings of ‘majestic forms, grey and luminous, of a greater stature than man’. A poet rather than a philosopher, ‘his philosophy was hidden in a great myth in many books, ten tragedies, each as long as Macbeth, and seven epic poems as vast as the Iliad, and prophetic books of all lengths’.¹⁴ Yet ‘how can one look for a philosophical system in Blake, who denied the value of all systems?’ (‘Come cercare il sistema filosofico di Blake, il quale negava il valore dei sistemi tutti?’, Goad 1924, 3). Goad responds to the question by gathering a collection of aphorisms from Blake’s works in order to celebrate dynamism and the power of intuition against reasoning and doubt. Blake is not an analytical thinker: rather than synthesis, his dialectic of opposites produces energy. Evil is associated with inert matter and death; it is the negation of energy. In Goad’s argument, Blake’s *Marriage* exalts the vitalist possibilities of Fascist materialism and offers an alternative dialectic to the Hegelian matrix of Fascist philosophy. Having cast away Hegelian mind-forged manacles, Goad’s Blake becomes a Nietzschean poet-prophet for the new century:

Blake, says Symonds [sic], spoke the first word of the nineteenth century, when there was nobody to listen. His message was to emancipate material reality through the ‘shaping spirit of imagination’. His gospel is incarnated in all his designs [...]. He

¹⁴ ‘Fu un mistico la cui vita fu una perpetua illuminazione. La sua filosofia fu nascosta in un grande mito in moltissimi libri, in dieci tragedie, ciascuna lunga quanto la tragedia di Macbeth, e sette poemi epici, vasti come l’Iliade, e in libri profetici di tutte le lunghezze’ (Goad 1924, 1). This hyperbolic statement recalls the ‘immense number of verses composed on One Grand Theme Similar to Homers Iliad or Miltons Paradise Lost’; see William Blake to Thomas Butts, 25 April 1803 (E 728).

anticipated today's ideas to such a point that he was misunderstood for three generations. Now that his gospel is no longer madness to us, but divine illumination, it is time he should be known outside of his country [...] because he was [...] the prophet of the new age and of the future that's now approaching.¹⁵

Goad's choice to conclude his essay by quoting the opening words of Arthur Symonds's study of Blake (1907) emphasizes Blake's promise of prophetic energy for a new age. While Symonds immediately goes on to mention Nietzsche, Goad's own Nietzschean reading of Blake remains implicit.

According to Mario Praz (1896-1982), *Marriage* was the most important of Blake's Prophetic Books. He translated it in its entirety in *Poeti Inglesi dell'Ottocento* ('English Poets of the Eighteenth Century', 1925). Praz's interest in English literature dates to his Florentine period, influenced by the Anglo-Italian circle gathered around the British

¹⁵ 'Blake, dice Symonds, disse la prima parola del secolo XIX quando non c'era nessuno per ascoltarla. Il suo messaggio fu l'emancipazione della realtà materiale, dello spirito formatore, dell'immaginazione. Il suo evangelo è incarnato in tutti i suoi disegni [...]. Egli anticipò tanto le idee odierne, che rimase incompreso per tre generazioni. Ora che il suo evangelo non è più per noi una follia, ma una divina illuminazione, è tempo che sia conosciuto anche fuori del suo paese [...] perchè egli fu [...] profeta dell'epoca nuova e dell'avvenire che ora s'avvicina' (Goad 1924, 5). Compare Symonds: 'When Blake spoke the first word of the nineteenth century there was no one to hear it, and now that his message, the message of emancipation from reality through the 'shaping spirit of imagination,' has penetrated the world, and is slowly remaking it, few are conscious of the first utterer, in modern times, of the message with which all are familiar' (1907, 1).

Institute in Florence. Edmund Gosse defined him as ‘a great Swinburnian’.¹⁶ Praz started translating English poets before moving to England, where he held posts in Italian literature at Liverpool (1923-31) and Manchester (1932-34), before returning to Italy to take up the first Chair in English Literature at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’ (1934-66), which had been instituted by the neo-idealist Fascist philosopher and Secretary of State for Education Giovanni Gentile. In Praz’s view Blake stands for ‘the absolute lack of faith in reason as the principle of organization for the senses’ (‘la sfiducia assoluta nella ragione concepita come organizzazione delle percezioni dei sensi’, 1925, 51): ‘In rejecting the sensible world, Blake does not see things as they appear, but as types, eternal ideas that are more real than things in themselves: they are not lambs, but The Lamb; they are not tigers, but The Tiger. These prototypes appear to the eye in great relief; their massive and unassailable solidity is manifested in the vigorous outlines of his designs’.¹⁷ In ‘Blake Occultista’ (‘Occultist Blake’, 1930) Praz argued that the work of Auguste Viatte and Denis Saurat had opened the door to ‘a promising darkness, which resonates with different languages, and horrible tongues. Voices of prophets, mystics, magicians, and sorcerers:

¹⁶ Edmund Gosse to Dr Sim, 17 November 1923 (Gosse 1931, 472).

¹⁷ ‘Negando il mondo sensibile, il Blake non vede le cose quali appaiono, ma in esse vede solo i tipi, le idee eterne, più reali delle cose stesse: non gli agnelli, ma l’Agnello, non le tigri, ma la Tigre. Questi prototipi si presentano al suo occhio con un risalto particolare, con una solidità massiccia e inespugnabile, che si traduce in vigore di linee nei suoi disegni’ (Praz 1925, 52).

nothing other than the secret door of occultism'.¹⁸ The acoustic world facing those who open the door of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* (*Inf.* III, 24-26) suited Praz's demonic genealogy. Following Swinburne and Gide, Praz looked back to the materialism of D'Holbach's *Système de la nature* (*The System of Nature*, 1770) in order to read Blake through De Sade and Nietzsche. Praz associated Blake's claim, in *Marriage*, that 'Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy' (*MHH* 3; E 34) with De Sade as part of a dark, Swinburnian Romantic tradition (repr. Praz 1937b, 177) articulated in *La Morte, La Carne e il Diavolo nella letteratura romantica* ('Death, Flesh and the Devil in Romantic Literature'), first published in 1930.¹⁹

While Praz was elaborating his French reading of Blake in England, the hermetic poet Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), the most influential translator of Blake in Italy, came to Blake through the cosmopolitan world of early twentieth-century Paris, where he was part of Futurist and Surrealist circles in the 1910s and engaged in the literary debates in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (*New French review*) in the 1920s. Ungaretti's acquaintance with the work of Blake probably started with the gift of an 1899 'Midget Series' edition in 32° of *Songs of Innocence* with illustrations by Celia Levetus, which he received from his wife, Jeanne Dupoix, possibly on the occasion of their marriage in 1920.²⁰ The first published evidence of Ungaretti's thirty-year engagement with Blake is

¹⁸ 'L'uscio s'è aperto su una promettente tenebra risonante di diverse lingue, orribili favelle. Voci di profeti, di mistici, di maghi, di stregoni: né più né meno che la porta segreta dell'occultismo' (repr. Praz 1937b, 175).

¹⁹ See Praz (1930b); repr. (1976a), 168 and Praz (1931). A connection with De Sade was also made in the Catholic Encyclopaedia entry on Blake (Mei 1949, 1714).

²⁰ Ungaretti (1989), fig. 151 and p. 138.

documented in a reference to *Marriage* in a 1925 essay on André Gide.²¹ Gide's French translation of *Marriage* (Blake 1922) had appeared in *NRF* in 1922;²² a copy of Soupault's translation of *Songs of Innocence* (Blake 1926), which appeared in *NRF* in May 1926, is in Ungaretti's archive.²³ In the same year Ungaretti contributed to *NRF* an essay on

²¹ 'We've seen Gide suffer from the lack of harmony between society and the individual, but we haven't said that he was intolerant towards society. We will through him the first stone if, not knowing how to resign himself to eat locusts only, having tried to separate good from eavel, he has worked out, with the Blake of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that "man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses" down here? Has he not always tried to ennoble life? Let's be grateful to him for endowing the domain of desire with such vaste expanse' ('S'è visto Gide soffrire della disarmonia tra società e individuo; non s'è detto che fosse intollerante verso la società. Gli butteremo la prima pietra se, non sapendo rassegnarsi a nutrirsi solo di locuste, provatosi a separare bene da male, s'è riaccorto, col Blake del *Matrimonio del Cielo e dell'Inferno*, "che l'uomo non ha un corpo distinto dalla sua anima, che ciò che si chiama corpo è una parte dell'anima, svelata dai cinque sensi, quaggiù"? non ha sempre cercato di nobilitare la vita? Siamogli grati di avere dato vastità al dominio del desiderio', Ungaretti (1925); repr. Ungaretti (1974), 99; and E 34 for the quotation from *Marriage*). The text does not coincide with Dodsworth's 1923 translation.

²² On Gide, Soupault and the early reception of Blake in France, see Gilles Soubigou and Yann Tholoniati's chapter.

²³ On Ungaretti's access to Soupault's French translation, see Ungaretti (2010), 1321-325. Ungaretti refers to Soupault's Blake in a letter to Raffaele Carrieri, 14 November 1945 (Cavallo 1978, 173).

innocence and memory, where he discusses Leopardi and Mallarmé: ‘although I will not be as irresponsible as to set Leopardi in conversation with Mallarmé, I do not doubt that placing their names next to one another sums up the nineteenth-century’s contribution to poetry: a yearning for innocence that cannot be fulfilled’.²⁴

A further cosmopolitan network connecting Parisian to Roman cultural circles emerged through Ungaretti’s collaboration with the cosmopolitan modernist magazine *Commerce*, founded by the American heiress Marguerite Chapin, Princess Caetani. While Ungaretti acted as a consultant and translator of Italian literature for the magazine, the other side of the exchange can be seen in a letter from the late 1920s, where Ungaretti asks to borrow books from the Princess’s library, including Blake, for a work of criticism that sums up his view on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature.²⁵ In Ungaretti’s ‘Idee e lettere della Francia d’oggi’ (‘Ideas and Literature of France Today’, 1930), Blake is included in a European lineage of modern poetry: ‘Blake, Hölderlin, Leopardi, and Lautréamont are the poets most discussed in postwar Europe’ (‘Insieme a Leopardi,

²⁴ ‘Non commetterò l’impudenza di mettere a tu per tu il Leopardi e il Mallarmé [...] ma non dubito che, avvicinando i due nomi, possa riassumersi il contributo dell’ottocento alla poesia: una speranza inappagabile d’innocenza’ (Ungaretti 1926, repr. 1974, 133).

²⁵ Ungaretti to Andrea Caffi (n. d.) but after 1928, see Fondazione Camillo Caetani (2012, 59). The Caetani library includes Swinburne’s *William Blake* (1868), the second edition of Gilchrist’s *Life of Blake* (1880), Archibald G. B. Russell’s *The Engravings of William Blake* (1912), and John Sampson’s 1921 edition of Blake’s works. The Caetani Princes had married English women for two generations before Marguerite Chapin joined the family. In the nineteenth century the Caetani salon hosted Stendhal, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Scott, Longfellow, Mommsen, Taine and Liszt.

Hölderlin e Lautréamont sono i poeti che si studiano di più'), although Ungaretti feels uncomfortable in shutting them up into 'the prisonhouse of Literature' ('nella prigione della letteratura', Ungaretti 1974, 237, 239).

The European nineteenth-century canon envisaged by Ungaretti is key to his work as a translator. In 1930 he turned Leopardi into French for *NRF* and in the same year published a selection from Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, as well as 'The Tyger', in *Il Tevere* (The Tiber), where again he discusses Blake in relation to the three other founding figures of European poetry (Blake 1930).²⁶ The poet and art critic Leonardo Sinisgalli recalled how Blake featured among the books circulating in the Roman school group gathered around the artist Scipione in the early 1930s: 'At that time [Lautréamont's] *Songs of Maldoror* circulated among friends and Ungaretti brought the second volume of Blake's prophetic writings, those *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* that one of the young men had given him in exchange for a year's run of *Commerce*'.²⁷ A widening diachronic

²⁶ Ungaretti's text includes translations of 'Lo Zufolaro' ('The flute player' ['Introduction']), 'Il Bimbetto Nero' ('The Little Black Boy'), 'Il Fiore' ('The Blossom'), 'Il Bimbetto sperso' ('The Little Boy Lost'), 'La divina immagine' ('The Divine Image'), 'Canzone ridente' ('Laughing Song'), 'la tigre' ('The Tyger').

²⁷ 'A quel tempo i canti di Maldoror passavano per le mani degli amici e Ungaretti portava in giro il secondo volume degli scritti profetici di Blake, quei "*Canti dell'innocenza e dell'esperienza*" che uno di quei ragazzi aveva dato in cambio al maestro per un'annata di "*Commerce*"' (Sinisgalli 1936, 6). Sinisgalli later referred to Blake in a short piece on Francis Bacon: 'Bacon admired Blake, but did not want to write the Songs of Innocence; rather, he shared the concerns expressed by Baudelaire about human hopes more than a hundred years ago. Scipione also suffered the tortures of a tormenting God' ('Bacon che

European canon emerges three years later in ‘Saggi di Traduzioni Poetiche’ (Experiments in poetical translation), which Ungaretti published in the ‘Diorama Letterario’ (‘Literary Diorama’) of *La Gazzetta del Popolo* (The people’s gazette, Ungaretti 1933), where ‘The Tyger’ appears alongside a poem by the Spanish poet Gongora (Ungaretti 1933, 3).²⁸ This unlikely juxtaposition sheds new light on Ungaretti’s view of translation as a poetic laboratory in which he could test technical difficulties, as he claimed in *Traduzioni* (Translations, 1936; repr. Ungaretti 2010, 19), a volume which expanded the comparative frame of Ungaretti’s experiments by including work from St-John Perse, Gongora, Esenin and Jean Paulhan. *Traduzioni* appeared as part of Quaderni di Novissima, a series that planned ‘to give a sense of the singular energy of Italian literature in the first third of the Fascist Century’.²⁹ For Ungaretti, who had signed the Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals in 1925, this energy is produced by a distinctly cosmopolitan effort to reimagine the possibilities of poetry through translation.³⁰

ammirava Blake non ha voluto scrivere i Canti dell’Innocenza; piuttosto ha voluto sottoscrivere le reserve che più di cento anni fa Baudelaire maturava sulle speranze dell’uomo. Anche Scipione soffrì nella sua anima le torture di un dio carnefice’, Sinisgalli 1967, 132).

²⁸Ungaretti describes the juxtaposition as ‘antipodi’ (‘antipodes’) in a letter to Alessandro Parronchi, dated 20 October 1946 (1992, 58).

²⁹‘La collana si propone di dare un’idea della forza veramente singolare della letteratura italiana del primo terzo del secolo fascista’ (from a 1933 Prospectus, qtd in Iannaccone 2006).

³⁰ Ungaretti’s relationship with Fascism is testified by Mussolini’s preface to his collection *Il porto sepolto* in 1923. In 1959 the Nobel committee decided not to award its prize for

Blake's 'miracle of the word' ('miracolo della parola') involves an 'invaluable exercise' ('impareggiabile esercizio') in poetic practice; his Songs become a 'source of new technical difficulties to overcome' ('fonte di nuove difficoltà tecniche da superare', Ungaretti 2010, 19).³¹ Consider Ungaretti's versions of 'The Little Black Boy':

White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black as if bereav'd of light. (SI 9: 3-4; E 9)

Il bimbo inglese è bianco come un angioio,
Ma sono nero,

literature to Ungaretti, the 'greatest poet of the Fascist era', but chose Quasimodo instead as a figure who could rehabilitate Italy coming out of the war ('Nobel' 2009).

³¹ 'I faced the Songs of Innocence by William Blake as a way to react to myself at a time when I felt too engulfed in questions to do with technique. It was naïve. In art sentiment can never be separated from intelligence and even translating, which, as everyone knows, is an unrivalled exercise for a writer trying to find his way – even translating Blake's Songs was for me the source of new technical problems to overcome' ('Affrontai i "Canti d'Innocenza" di William Blake, "l'ispirato" se mai ce ne fu uno, per reagire a me stesso in un periodo nel quale mi pareva d'essermi troppo ingolfato in problemi di tecnica. Era ingenuità. In arte il sentimento non saprà mai separarsi dall'intelligenza, e anche il tradurre, che, come tutti sanno, è per uno scrittore che voglia farsi la mano, impareggiabile esercizio – anche il tradurre canti di Blake fu per me fonte di nuove difficoltà tecniche da superare' (Ungaretti 1936; repr. Ungaretti 2010, 19). This text constitutes the nucleus of the 'Discorsetto del Traduttore' published in *Visioni di William Blake* (Blake 1965).

Come se mi mancasse luce. (Blake 1930)

Il bimbo inglese è bianco come un angioio,

Ma sono nero,

Come se non avessi luce. (Ungaretti 1936; repr. Ungaretti 2010, 58)

Come un angioio, il bimbo inglese è bianco,

Ma, come senza luce, sono nero. (Ungaretti 1963; Blake 1965, 39)

Translation functions as a poetic laboratory: through prosodic exercises in the archaeology of verse, Ungaretti decomposes the line, carving out ‘a space around single words’, ‘that blank that “translates” the disquiet that Blake produces with his meaning’, as Agostino Lombardo has argued (‘creare uno spazio intorno alle singole parole’, ‘quel vuoto che “traduce” lo sgomento che Blake ottiene soprattutto col senso’, 1995, 292-93). While the earlier versions show the impact of Mallarmé, a ‘miracle of the word’ produced by the *mise en page*, the most recent recomposes the line in a closer adherence to Blake’s rhythms. Rendering Blake’s lines is part of a desire to be freed from received forms, or what Blake called ‘the modern bondage of Rhyming’ (*J* 3: 18; *E* 145).

In ‘Discorsetto del Traduttore’ (Translator’s note) Ungaretti describes his work on ‘Blake’s miracle’ as something ‘that had long been driven by a technical experience, which aimed, through a breathless search for the lost ways of tradition’, to retrieve an original expressive innocence’ (‘il miracolo di Blake [...] era stato a lungo sollecitato da un’esperienza tecnica tesa, ricercando affannosamente vie smarrite della tradizione, verso il recupero dell’originale innocenza espressiva’, Blake 1965, 13). The desire to capture a rural musical tradition expresses itself in the myth of the origin of writing that Blake

articulates through the ‘piping songs of pleasant glee’ in the ‘Introduction’ to *Songs of Innocence*. In turning Blake’s reference to rural and popular genres into ‘ritornelli’ and ‘arie’ (‘refrains’ and ‘arias’, Blake 1930), Ungaretti loses some of Blake’s popular connotations, tones down his popular idiom and marks out the distinction between art and popular culture.³² While Misciattelli had carefully reproduced the anaphora with which Blake signals the agency of the first person (‘and I made.../ and I stain’d.../ and I wrote...’, *SI* 4: 17-19; E 7; Misciattelli 1909, 472), Ungaretti opts instead for a more numinous scene of writing, and limits the subject’s intervention to the manufacture of the lyrical pen. His switch from the active to the passive voice reflects the postlapsarian effects of the scene of writing through the reaction of a mysterious agency:

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain’d the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear. (*SI* 4: 17-20; E 7).

Ne feci una penna rurale,
E fu turbata l’acqua chiara,
Furono scritti i motivi felici,
Nell’udirli ogni bimbo gioisce. (Blake 1930 and 1936; repr. Ungaretti 2010, 58)

³² Violante Picon comments on the rustic apocope ‘zufolá’ (‘piper’), as well as the use of a popular Tuscan idiom in Ungaretti’s translation of ‘The Little Boy lost’ (1998, 90).

The ‘disquiet’ produced by the staining of water in the ‘Introduction’ to *Songs of Innocence*, is further developed in the apocalyptic strains of ‘The Tyger’ and ‘The Creation of the Sexes’ from *Milton*, in which the setting ‘among indefinite Druid rocks and snows of doubt and reasoning’ is translated as ‘Fra rocce Druidiche indefinite e nevi di dubbio e di dialettica’ (Ungaretti 1936; repr. Ungaretti 2010, 65) Turning Blake’s ‘reasoning’ into ‘dialectic’, Ungaretti appropriates Blake’s Enlightenment myth of creation.

An experimental short fictional literary biography entitled *William Blake* was published in 1938 by the art critic Caterina Lelj (1913-2004), who was born in Rome but lived most of her life in Milan. Playing with metalepsis, Lelj’s fictional biography blurs the threshold between author and work by turning Blake into a character in his own inventions, thus developing Dodsworth’s idea that Blake’s art is ‘the chronicle’ of his visions (Blake 1923, 25). The first stanza of ‘A Cradle Song’ from the *Notebook*, quoted as an epigraph, introduces the commonplace of sleep and offers Lelj the opportunity to construct a Platonic myth in which Blake features as an angel exiled from heaven. On the threshold of the sky he meets an Ariostesque magician riding a hippogryph, who directs him to earth and the figure of Swedenborg. Another poem in the Pickering MS, ‘Auguries of Innocence’, inspires Lelj’s image of Blake falling ‘like a grain of sand’ (‘come un granello di sabbia’, Lelj 1938 [n. p.]; *AI*: 1; E 490) before he takes residence on earth as a child, overlooked by inhabitants of the clouds. Here Lelj’s *mise en scène* brings Blake’s illuminated decorations to the eyes of the reader. His visions of trees full of angels could have come from Gilchrist or Misciattelli (Gilchrist 1863, 1: 7; Misciattelli 1909, 471). Lelj turns Blake’s works into a series of encounters with their key characters: in the fireplace he sees the ‘nebulous voice of Eleanor [...] and the voice of Gwin, king of Norway’ (‘la voce nebbiosa di Eleanor [...] e la voce di Gwin, re di Norvegia’, Lelj 1938 [n. p.]). He accompanies Tiriël in the land of peace to die at Heva’s feet. Next appears Thel speaking with lilies, clouds, worms, and

‘Blake knew her secret’. From the voice of his mother reading the Bible Lelj moves on to the poet dining with Ezekiel and Isaiah, drawing on ‘A Memorable Fancy’ in *Marriage* (*MHH* 12; E 38). Then Lelj’s writing animates the apocalyptic landscape of Blake’s New Testament imagination:

He came down with the procession from the Calvary. The trees in the woods were trodden like blades of grass by the apostles’ steps. The sky, lowering down to keep vigil on the dead body, made the earth plunge and echoed the ancient crying of Byzantine Maries, who sustained by northern pain bent their necks and supported their chins with their hands.³³

Lelj’s text evokes elements from Blake’s Biblical pictures: for example, *The Body of Christ Borne to the Tomb* (Butlin 1981, #426) may have inspired the procession and the Maries, who hold their hands below their chins in prayer. The Italian Primitives and the Byzantines crowd to the *sacra rappresentazione* to see the dead body of Christ, but Blake is then whisked off by Michelangelo to witness the creation of Adam and Eve in what appears to be his Biblical education. When ‘the angel of the hurricane illuminated the neighing horse of death’ (‘L’angelo dell’uragano illuminò il cavallo nitrente della morte’, Lelj 1938 [n. p.]), and its knight’s trajectory is made to include Siegfried, Michelangelo becomes a critic of Blake’s works and objects to such ‘romantic fancies’ (‘romantiche

³³ ‘Scese con la processione dal Calvario. Gli alberi dei boschi erano calpestati com’erba dal passo degli apostoli; il cielo calandosi a vegliare il cadavere, sprofondava la superficie della terra; ed echeggiava il pianto antico delle Marie bizantine, che sostenuto da un dolore nordico, curvava il collo e reggeva il mento con le mani’ (Lelj 1938 [n. p.]).

fantasticherie', Lelj 1938 [n. p.]). Later the scene turns to Naomi and Ruth, the subject of one of the Biblical paintings listed by Blake in his *Descriptive Catalogue* (E 549). Lelj's detailed description of the contrast between the flowing and static folds of their clothing suggests a direct encounter with the artwork. Her writing produces pictorial tableaux by supplementing Blake's writings, drawing on the *Descriptive Catalogue* and Gilchrist's descriptions. A theatrical transition mediates *Visions*: 'A voice sweetened the hinges of the door: Oothoon had arrived' ('Una voce addolcì i cardini della porta, era entrata Oothoon', Lelj 1938 [n. p.]). Lelj's account brings to view the work's frontispiece, suggesting an awareness of the designs: 'at the hand of Theotormon, whom she loved, they were chained back to back to the rock', which is an image described by Gilchrist (1863, 1:108). *Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah* (Butlin 1981, #299 and 300), *The Entombment* (Butlin 1981, #498), and the frontispiece to *Visions* were among the works on view, as originals or in photographic reproduction, at an exhibition, *Aquarelles de Turner/Oeuvres de Blake*, organized by the Association Franco-Britannique Art et Tourisme at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris from mid-January to mid-February 1937.³⁴ The visual imagination that shapes Lelj's method of life writing is illuminated by a later work: *I Fiori di Vincent* (Vincent's flowers) begins thus: 'At the Van Gogh display in the 1937 Paris Exhibition, I found a dream from childhood [...] when it came to me, I welcomed it like the silent old

³⁴ The exhibition catalogue features other works evoked by Lelj: *The Body of Christ Borne to the Tomb* (p. 8 no. 11; Butlin 1981, #426); a reproduction of *The Spiritual form of Nelson* (p. 8 no 29; Butlin 1981, #649); a portrait of Catherine Blake traced on the back of Hayley's *Ballads* (p. 6 no 16). For the background to the 1937 exhibition, see Gilles Soubigou and Yann Tholoniati's chapter.

companion, full of colours'.³⁵ This shows Lelj's practice of translating painting into life writing. In *William Blake* scenes from the artworks and the writings merge in a shared biographical space with anecdotes from various sources, such as when Blake and his wife 'naked, like Adam and Eve, found themselves under the trees in the garden, reading Milton's Paradise' ('Nudi, come Adamo ed Eva, si ritrovarono sotto gli alberi del giardino, leggendo il Paradiso di Milton', Lelj 1938 [n. p.]). Throughout the piece Catherine Blake is called 'Ketty', the affectionate name by which Caterina Lelj was known to her friends.³⁶ The homonym here sparks a further game of metalepsis, an experiment in life writing where the twentieth-century critic assumes the third-person identity of Blake's wife. The piece ends by following Blake in his last figurative adventures and a moving death-bed scene, which seals this process of identification by making Caterina-Ketty-Catherine one of Blake's 'emanations'. After animating Job's suffering and entering a light hell without form, Blake meets barely perceptible shapes including a youth he decides to call Dante, and follows him as far as his strength allows: 'There he placed his head on the pillow, made Ketty hear the song of the Creator, drew her face and portrayed her emanation. When she was on her own, looking at it, she asked: who has left me?'.³⁷ Lelj's writing turns art

³⁵ 'Alla mostra di Van Gogh nel 1937 a Parigi, nell'Esposizione Internazionale, ritrovai un sogno dell'infanzia [...] quando veniva da me lo accoglievo come il vecchio compagno silenzioso pieno di colori' (Lelj 1945 [n. p.]).

³⁶ I am grateful to Nicoletta Pallini Clemente for this detail and for her support in researching her friend Caterina Lelj.

³⁷ 'Là poggiò il capo sul cuscino, fece sentire a Ketty il canto del Creatore, disegnò il volto e ritrasse l'emanazione di lei. Quando fu sola, guardandola, ella chiedeva: chi mi ha lasciato?' (Lelj 1938 [n. p.]).

into visionary theatre where historical and fictional characters materialise in the form of a series of apparitions.

Blake's esoteric and mystical possibilities are emphasized in an anonymous translation of *Jerusalem* published in 1943 under the title *Gerusalemme: l'Emanazione del Gigante Albione* (Jerusalem: The emanation of the giant Albion) published by Fratelli Bocca in Milan in the *Breviari Mistici* series ('Mystical Breviaries'), which had been inaugurated by Angelus Silesius's *Il Viandante Cherubico* (The cherubic wanderer, 1942), followed by Theresa of Avila, Hermes Trismegistus's *Poimandres*, a selection of Luther's works. After Blake's *Jerusalem* the series went on to publish texts by Jacob Boehme, Emanuel Swedenborg, Paracelsus, as well as oriental writings. The anonymous translator follows the text published by Max Plowman in *The Poems and Prophecies of William Blake* (1927), which reproduces the text of the British Museum's copy A.³⁸ The introduction compares Blake's inspiration to that of Dante, Hölderlin, Goethe and Leopardi, while his mystical, religious and aphoristic power is likened to that of the Rigveda, the Bhagavadgîtâ, Al Ghazâli, Eckhart and Silesius (Blake 1943, 6). Further, drawing on Albert Béguin's *L'âme romantique et le rêve* ('Romantic soul and the dream', 1937), the writer compares Blake's prophetic notion of the poet as demiurge to Franz Bader and Novalis (Blake 1943, 22). Blake's account of the fall into division is read

³⁸ Most Blake editors have followed copy D (Harvard), which was more accessible on account of the 1877 facsimile. On the differences between copies of *Jerusalem*, see De Luca (1983). Marcello Pagnini's negative remarks about what he takes as 'unexplainable cuts' in the 1943 edition (Blake 1994b, 1: 23) are no doubt due to the fact that he was reading *Jerusalem* in the alternative order of copy D, with the help of Erdman's reconstructions of the deleted plates.

through Dante's *Inferno*: to render the 'glowing eyes' of the spectre of Los (*J* 8: 22; E 151) the translator opts for 'occhi di bragia' ('ashen eyes'), the key attribute Dante chooses to identify the infernal ferryman, 'Caron dimonio, con occhi di bragia' ('Charon, demon, with ashen eyes'), who transports the souls of the dead across Acheron into Hell (Blake 1943, 52; *Inf.* III, 106-08). The introduction suggests that Blake's awareness of gods as powers within the human mind rather than alienated personifications invite parallels with Nietzsche, while it also relates the poet's intuitions about sexual drives and the dynamics of consciousness to the emerging science of psychology and the work of G. C. Jung (Blake 1943, 25, 27). The introduction sums up Blake's contemporaneity as 'a Psychologist who believed in dreams, a criminologist convinced of the futility of punishment, a pacifist who understood the reasons of war' ('uno psicologo che credeva nei sogni, un criminalista convinto della futilità della pena; un pacifista che comprendeva le ragioni della Guerra', Blake 1943, 27). Given that the volume dates from 1943, the final year of Italy's involvement in World War II, this reference to war activates the contemporary resonances of Blake's prophetic poem. From the apocalyptic energy of war to the elegiac strains that voice its costs and losses, Blake's ambivalent account of Albion recasts the Fascist rhetoric of 'perfidious Albion' in a moment of transition.

In April 1945, as World War II was about to end, Blake's *Marriage* was symbolically reborn from its ashes as the first volume in the Phoenix series published by Novissima, with a print run of 300 copies. Each edition included two copies of the same work published in the original language, one printed on precious Fabriano Miliaflex paper, the other on ordinary paper. In his editorial preface, Giorgio de Fonseca celebrates Blake's 'reversal of all values' ('capovolgendo radicalmente tutti i valori', Blake 1945, 10). He explains his choice to publish Blake's 'sibylline leaves' ('queste sibillyne leaves' [sic], Blake 1945, 10) as the first volume in the series because he believes that they can bring

about that renewal of energy that shaped Novissima's publishing initiatives throughout the century, since their 'flame devours eighteenth-century classicism' ('la fiamma che divora il classicismo settecentesco', Blake 1945, 11).

Post-war encounters with Blake have followed different disciplinary trajectories. Reflection on the philosophy of forms and the specificity of poetic thinking takes on an ontological dimension in the philosophical poetics of Leone Vivante (1887-1970). After a period spent in England between 1940 and 1944, Vivante published a series of essays on the internal necessity of poetry as a genuine creative activity in the journal *Poesia* (1945-1948), founded by Enrico Falqui. These were subsequently collected in one volume in 1947 with a preface by T. S. Eliot. Much in the vein of Coleridge's critique of fancy and Eliot's concerns about the dissociation of sensibility, Vivante discusses the risk that Blake's symbolic mysticism might involve 'superadditions of abstract conceptions' rather than 'the self-dependent, self-witnessing truth of form' (1963, 86; 'cose irrigidite a cui si sovrappongono concetti astratti [...], non integralmente vissute ed attuate, le quali mancano della indipendente verità della forma, che in certo modo rende testimonianza di sé stessa', 1947, 136). This concern with the potential abstraction of Blake's personifications, earlier articulated in art-historical contexts, here acquires a distinctly poetical, indeed Coleridgean dimension, since 'the imagination must be identified with the principle of thought itself' (1963, 88; 'L'immaginazione, infatti si deve identificare essenzialmente col principio stesso del pensiero', 1947, 138). In 'The Tyger' Vivante celebrates the work of 'symmetry' as opposed to "'mechanism", or "organism", or frame"' (1963, 96; "'struttura", o "compagine"', 1947, 151): 'the word "symmetry" [...] is related both to the physiological and the mental, and, as it were, bridges over them' (1963, 95; 'la parola "simmetria" [...] si riferisce tanto all'elemento fisiologico quanto a quello psichico, e per così dire li scavalca', 1947, 151). While any of these words would involve a loss of

beauty or truth in the poem, in its ‘etymological closeness to “synthesis”’, symmetry ‘succeeds in eliciting an original value of embodied *potency* and of *unity-in-the-many*’ (1963, 95-96; ‘etimologicamente ravvicinabile a “sintesi”, evoca un originario valore d’incorporata *potenza* e d’unità nel molteplice’, 1947, 151). Reading Blake through Coleridge, and possibly Benedetto Croce, Vivante privileges Blake’s identification of ‘imagination with form’ and Swinburne’s idea of the imagination as ‘that body of Truth eternal’ (1963, 306; ‘l’immaginazione è “il corpo vero dell’eterno” di cui parla Swinburne’, 1947, 493). The tension between organic form and dialectic has shaped a number of readings of Blake in philosophical hermeneutics, poetics and ontology, where post-war investigations have sought to uncouple Blake’s desire to break through the boundaries from Fascist inflections of the Nietzschean will to power. Lines of enquiry have tended to find communitarian psychic utopias in Blake’s ‘visionary forms dramatic’, whether sourced through gnosis and the hermetic tradition (Givone 1978), or negative dialectics and the subversive power of critique inherent in Blake’s aphoristic mode.

Blake’s place in the post-war art scene is captured by *Le Tre Arti* (The three arts, 1945-46), a monthly dedicated to poetry, painting and sculpture edited by the poet and critic Raffaele Carrieri. In November 1945 Falqui commented on the emerging genre of the illustrated poetry book; as an example he cited Ungaretti being illustrated by great artists of the Roman school, and he announced that his Blake would be illustrated by Felicita Frai (1909-2010).³⁹ Born in Prague, Frai was taught painting techniques by Achille Funi in Ferrara, then by Giorgio De Chirico in Milan, and was much admired by Carrieri and other key figures within the Roman school. She rose to prominence thanks to a solo exhibition in 1942, followed in 1943 by the publication of her lithographs, with an introductory essay by

³⁹ Falqui (1945, 2); work on the edition is mentioned again in Ungaretti (1946, 4).

De Chirico. However, Frai's work is very far from Ungaretti's predilection for abstraction: her main pictorial subject is *'filles en fleur'* ('young girls in bloom'), suggesting influences from Fragonard to Renoir and the salons of Degas and Lautrec.⁴⁰ The implausible juxtaposition of poet and painter may be among the reasons why Frai's Ungaretti failed to see the light. In 'Blake tradotto da Ungaretti' (Blake translated by Ungaretti, 1946), Ungaretti compared Blake to Rimbaud, published poems translated from the Rossetti and Pickering MSs, with a reproduction of the title page to *Songs of Experience*, and suggested adding a biographical note to be summarised from the work of Philippe Soupault.⁴¹ Ungaretti's choice of texts emphasizes Blake's brevity, in which he sees the germ of the nineteenth-century opera libretto.⁴²

A review of the Paris exhibition sponsored by the British Council in 1947 by Giulia Veronesi (1906-1973) concentrated on the immensity of Blake's world. Following Gide, she argues that it drives away mundane viewers: 'perhaps they are frightened by that great Biblical God who breathes within it, "Sea of Time & Space"' ('forse mette paura quel gran Dio biblico che dentro vi respira, "oceano di tempo e di spazio"', 1947, 68, quoting *M* 15:39 and 46; E 110). The illustration facing the text, captioned 'Giobbe confessa la sua presunzione a Dio, che gli risponde dal turbine' ('Job Confessing his Presumption to God

⁴⁰ Carrieri (1963) includes a critical anthology with catalogue essays from Frai's 1942 exhibition and De Chirico's essay for the 1943 publication of her lithographs.

⁴¹ Giuseppe Ungaretti to Raffaele Carrieri, 14 November 1945, in Cavallo (1978, 173); see also Violante Picon (1998, 259).

⁴² 'Attorno a me il mio Spettro notte e giorno', 'Perché era Cupido un ragazzo', 'Il Viaggiatore Mentale' (Ungaretti 1946, 4; 'My Spectre around me night & day', E 475; 'Why was Cupid a boy', E 479; 'The Mental Traveller', E 483-86).

who answers from the Whirlwind', Butlin 1981, #461), expresses the sublime Biblical idiom that earned Blake the title of 'Michelangelo nordico' ('Northern Michelangelo', Praz 1942b; Melchiori 1950 and 1960). Most of the review focuses on the religious power of Blake's art: 'The Bible is for Blake a book of visions' ('La Bibbia è per Blake un libro di visioni', Veronesi 1947, 68). Yet Blake's forms can also take on 'a pure linear undulation that provides the first suggestion of the Pre-Raphaelites' inauguration of *Art Nouveau* a century later'.⁴³

Eugenio Montale's choice to translate 'To the Muses' from *Poetical Sketches* marks a post-war investigation of loss through a series of questions for a world emptied of inspiration. While Blake imagines 'the chambers of the sun that now/ from ancient melody have ceased' (*PS* 3-4; E 417), Montale's melody is asleep. While Blake half reproaches the muses for abandoning the old bards ('how have you left the ancient love/ that bards of old enjoyed in you', *PS* 13-14; E 417), Montale asks where they have left 'the old fire, which delighted other bards' ('dove avete lasciato il vecchio fuoco,/ delizia d'altri bardi', Montale 1948, 45). While Blake challenges classical inspiration, Montale inflects the poet's alienation from tradition as he revisits the theme of the empty rooms of memory, which he had powerfully expressed in 'La Casa dei Doganieri' (The custom officers' house, 1930). The elegiac topos of the *ubi sunt* acquires powerful post-war echoes in Montale's 1948 translation.

A different, religious French strand of Blake criticism is evident in *Lo sposalizio del cielo e dell'inferno* (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), a parallel French and English edition of *Marriage* published in 1951, the French version by Henri Daniel-Rops (1901-

⁴³ 'una pura ondulazione lineare che sarà il primo suggerimento, un secolo più tardi, all'inaugurazione del "liberty" dei preraffaeliti' (Veronesi 1947, 68).

1965). The volume included three of his essays (translated into Italian) in which he urges the reader to go beyond a banal Satanism and read Blake's metaphysics of hell for its moral aims. For Daniel-Rops Blake provides 'an apocalypse for our time' ('un'apocalisse per i nostri tempi'), which can respond to Rimbaud's announcement of 'the time of the assassins' ('il tempo degli assassini', Blake 1951, 114) and the apocalyptic strains of the age of terror announced by Fustel de Coulanges. Against a post-war awareness of concentration camps, ruined cities and atomic bombs, Blake expresses an affirmation of supernatural truth and Christian theology, which Daniel-Rops holds up as an antidote to Nietzsche's death of God (Blake 1951, 113-15, 133-35).⁴⁴

An apocalyptic Blake for our time returns in Ungaretti's 1965 poetry collection *Apocalissi e sedici traduzioni* (Apocalypses and sixteen translations), a deluxe edition of 150 copies, with two 'Concetti Spaziali' ('Spatial Concepts') by the artist Lucio Fontana. These are blank pages traversed by slight pencil markings and perforated by holes, which articulate the title's modern apocalypse. The first is used to mark the transition from four compositions by Ungaretti to his translations; the second is inserted in the middle of the Blake section. The translations start with Lucretius, followed by Shakespeare and Gongora, Blake's 'Il bimbetto nero' ('The Little Black Boy', E 9) and 'Udii' ('I heard an Angel Singing', E 470). At this point Fontana's second 'Spatial Concept' appears, producing an apocalyptic caesura between the angel song and devilish curse of 'Udii' and the fury of 'Ebbero timore' ('I fear'd the fury of my wind', E 467), sealed by the final vision of 'In un'ombra di mirto' ('In a myrtle shade', E 469). Ungaretti's choice to abbreviate the titles of the poems translated from Blake's *Notebook*, then called 'The Rossetti Manuscript',

⁴⁴ For Daniel-Rops and the French context, see the chapter written by Gilles Soubigou and Yann Tholoniati.

conveys a sense of narrative, in which each represents an emotional turn in a series of visions to mark an apocalyptic crescendo. The collection ends with Mallarmé's 'Cantique de Saint Jean' and Rimbaud's 'Honte' and 'A une raison' (Ungaretti 1965).

Rimbaud's inflection in Ungaretti's reading of Blake can be detected in *Visioni di William Blake*, the title of Ungaretti's 1965 volume of Blake translations.⁴⁵ This handsome volume, published in a prestigious series entitled 'Lo Specchio: i poeti del nostro tempo' ('The Mirror: Poets of our Time'), brings together more than thirty years of experiments. In addition to Ungaretti's favourite poems from *Songs of Innocence*, 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience*, and selections from the Rossetti MS (74-175) and 'The Smile' and 'The Mental Traveller' from the Pickering MS; *Marriage* is represented in full, with 'The Argument' translated by Ungaretti and the rest presumably by Mario Diacono, who intervened to expand the range of the volume, including excerpts from *The French Revolution, America, Europe, Four Zoas* (p. 109-10, FZ VIII, 521-76; E 384-85), *Milton* (extra plate 2: 6-36, E 96-97), and *Jerusalem* (J 69-71:19; E 223-25). The volume also goes some way towards fulfilling Ungaretti's desire not to dissociate the poet from the painter, artist, and engraver. Frontispieces and title pages of the illuminated books function as paratextual breaks to mark the partitions between collections. In the case of shorter excerpts, the translation faces the relevant plates or manuscript pages.⁴⁶ The volume ends

⁴⁵ Violante Picon has suggested that since Ungaretti's plan to publish a volume of Rimbaud translations came to nothing, his Blake volume could be seen to take its place (1998, 269-72).

⁴⁶ 'The Divine Image', 'Joseph of Arimathea', *America*, plates 2 and 14 (E 52, 56-58); *The Four Zoas*, 'Così grida Ahania' and 'L'agnello di dio ha squarciato il velo' ('Thus cries Ahania', 'The Lamb of God has rent the veil', pp. 109-110; E 384-85), 'I nudi' ('The

with a full set of *For the Sexes*,⁴⁷ and the seven engravings from Dante's *Inferno*. The changing world around Ungaretti's Blake over the decades is also captured in an essay entitled 'Per Allen Ginsberg', published in 1966: Ungaretti detects in the American Beat poet the biblical cadences of 'the Cathar Blake's *Prophetic Books*' ('Il Blake cataro dei *Libri profetici*'). For Ungaretti, Blake opens up hermetic possibilities in the Bible: 'Blake's Bible feels at home in eighteenth-century hermeticism' ('la Bibbia di Blake è di casa nell'ermetismo settecentesco'). This, in turn, explains the apocalyptic tones of Job and Isaiah that Ungaretti finds in Allen Ginsberg's writing (Ungaretti 1974, 718-19, 1424).

While Blake's words can spell out an apocalypse that finds its visual correlation in the sublime blanks and voids of Lucio Fontana's 'Spatial Concepts', the divorce of word and image in the reception of Blake also shapes alternative possibilities for some of his plates. For example, Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, reproduced from Geoffrey Keynes's copy, and surrounded with additional frames, are used in *Le Livre de Job* (1967), a French paraphrase composed from a collation of the texts of the Septuagint and the Vulgate by Pierre Pascal (1909-1990). A self-styled 'imitator of the Book of Job', Pascal was close to Action Française and an admirer of Charles Maurras, who encouraged him in

nudes', p. 112) and 'Fine del Sogno' ('End of the Dream', p. 139); *Jerusalem*, plates 70 and 76 (E 224).

⁴⁷ *For the Sexes* was taken to symbolise Blake's *oeuvre* by Italo Valent, Professor of Philosophical Hermeneutics in Venice, who chose 'Le Porte del Paradiso' as the title for his selection of Blake's works, which included *Poetical Sketches* and *Job* as well as *For the Sexes* (Blake 2004). He sourced the texts from Sampson's 1913 edition, using Keynes's 1927 edition for *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, and for *Job* Alfred Kazin's *The Portable Blake* (1976).

his attempt to renew the sacred traditions of classical poetry by way of paraphrases. *Le Livre de Job* was for Pascal a spiritual exercise at a time when he felt ‘constrained by the servitude and military weakness of the Republic’ (‘astreint aux servitudes et bassesses de la République’, Pascal 1967, 27). He completed the volume around 1932 and sent it to G. K. Chesterton, who had already introduced an edition of *The Book of Job* in 1916 and now agreed to write a preface for Pascal’s paraphrase. However, the publication of the volume was postponed for decades; when it finally came out ‘at a time of proscription and killings by the worst Jacobinism’ it became ‘a sort of testimonial for those who suffered for truth’ in an era of political adversity, which Pascal associated with the advent of the Republic, an example in his eyes of Dante’s whore of Babylon (‘à l’époque des proscriptions et des tueries de la pire Jacobinerie [...] une sorte de témoignage en l’honneur de tous ceux qui ont souffert pour la Vérité’, 1967, 27). An extract from *Le Livre de Job* was published in 1962 by *L’Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of the Vatican (Pascal 1967, 9). The whole text finally appeared in a monumental folio format, with Blake’s illustrations, in 1967 by Editions du Coeur Fidèle, which had already published Pascal’s version of The Book of Revelation, with reproductions of Dürer’s engravings, in 1963. Later, Blake’s Job reappeared as a body of illustrations for Massimo Bontempelli’s translation. After the publication of his translations from the Vulgate in 1947 and 1965, republished with the addition of Job in 1971, in 2009 Bontempelli’s translation of *Il Libro di Giobbe* (‘The Book of Job’) was reissued separately as an elegant volume with parallel Latin and Italian text and reproductions of Blake’s plates in 2009.⁴⁸

Blake’s ‘psychic space’ spells out a tradition of visionary revolt against the constraints of reason in both art-historical writings and musical recreations of the 1970s.

⁴⁸ ‘Nota di Marco Alessandrini’ (Bontempelli 2009).

While Giuliano Briganti (1918-1992) reads the mannerist contortions of Blake and Fuseli through the lens of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical categories (Briganti 1967, 1977),⁴⁹ an American psychological trajectory is explicit in *Love's Body* (1972), an experimental musical piece by Paolo Renosto (1935-1988) for mezzo soprano, voice, orchestra and magnetic tape, commissioned by the Italian Broadcasting Corporation (RAI) and produced in the Studio di Fonologia Musicale RAI in Milan, a facility for experiments in musical phonology established by the composer Luciano Berio in 1955. The title of this piece comes from Norman Brown's psychoanalytical study *Love's Body* (1966). Renosto quotes Brown's claim that 'there is only one political problem in our world today: the unification of mankind'; whether through psychoanalysis, Christianity, Freud, Pope John or Karl Marx, 'we are all members of one body' ('Oggi nel nostro mondo, c'è un solo problema politico: l'unificazione dell'umanità [...]. Siamo tutti membra di un solo corpo', Renosto 1974 [n. p.]). The composition sets to music Orc's confrontation with his emanation, 'the shadowy daughter of Urthona, the nameless female' ('la tenebrosa figlia di Urthona, la femmina senza nome'), from the 'Preludium' to *America*, drawing from Ungaretti's translation (Blake 1965, 281). In Renosto's words, 'Song is born in fragments or, rather, in particles of the lost unity; from the nude human voice to the voices of events separated from man, voices of a shattered nature, flying crystals, atoms of the primogenital divine form, sections of a single body'.⁵⁰ Renosto's fragmented version of the Preludium to

⁴⁹ In 'Painter Ordinary to the Devil', Praz argued against the tendency to read Blake through Fuseli and the Mannerist tradition (1953).

⁵⁰ 'Il suono nasce in frammenti ovvero particelle dell'unità perduta; dalla voce nuda umana alle voci degli eventi separati dall'uomo, voci di una natura in pezzi, cristalli

America is combined with quotations from Blake's *Jerusalem*, Augustine's *City of God*, and other sources. His composition won the prestigious Premio Italia in 1974.⁵¹

In two works published in 1977 Blake's words are supplemented with an alternative visual corpus that shows his potential to inspire artistic recreations. *Cielo e Inferno* ('Sky and Hell'), a parallel text of *Marriage*, was translated by Pasquale Maffeo (b. 1933) and illustrated with drawings and aquatints by Sandro Stenico. The drawings often take the form of a magnified detail to the left side of a page opening and the full composition on the right. Such is the case of the fool from 'Proverbs of Hell' (Blake 1977, 30-31), the little flower whose creation is the labour of ages (1977, 36-37) and the memorable fancy of 'the most terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption' ('le più mostruose forme di animali generati dalla corruzione', 1977, 54-55). Among the apocalyptic portents crowding Blake's sublime scene Stenico chooses to focus on a dragon's eyes in close-up to the left, in a landscape, with the addition of two heads on spikes to the right (1977, 54-56). This head motif provides a visual thread, which returns with animal forms replacing human figures when the Bible is revealed as 'a deep pit' ('un baratro profondo', 1977, 58-59). 'Antagonism [sic] is true friendship' ('antagonismo è vera amicizia', 1977, 62-63) is isolated as a single line on the page with another image of heads on spikes arranged in a semi-circle underneath the text; in the facing illustration, a marionette carrying a dog on a

volanti, atomi della primigenia forma divina, sezioni di un solo corpo' (Renosto 1974 [n. p.]

⁵¹ The RAI phonology studios have two recordings, one from ca. 1972 and one from 1974, as well as a recording for voice and magnetic tape entitled 'Omaggio a Blake' and dated 1974; see <http://fonologia.lim.di.unimi.it/brani.php?id_anagrafica=127> [accessed 21 November 2017].

leash and waving the other hand appears in the centre of the semi-circle as if to represent the antagonism of the figures on spikes turned to friendship. Two aquatints interrupt the textual continuum with a page opening inserted just after Blake has contrasted the infinite potential of the 'doors of perception' ('porte della percezione') with the limited vision of man closed up in himself, who can only 'see all things thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern' ('non vede se non per le strette fessure della sua caverna', Blake 1977, 44-45; E 39). The claustrophobic nature of this scene is conveyed by a diptych: to the left is a figure looking through the bars of a window, which suggests not only a prison but also, perhaps, the grids of Alberti's perspective; opposite, on the right-hand page, is a monstrous metamorphic headless female form with a feline monster coming out of her uterus and forming an arch that comes back to morph into the upper part of her body. Squared against a white background within a dark interior, this figure evokes Francis Bacon's experiments in pseudo-morphic figurations inscribed in boxes alluding to Muybridge's grids.⁵²

William Blake in Beulah: Saggio Visionario su un Poeta a Fumetti (William Blake in Beulah: A visionary cartoon essay on a poet, 1977) recreates and adapts extracts from *Jerusalem* (J 69: 14-15, 70: 19-20; E 223-24), *A Song of Liberty*, *The French Revolution* and 'The Mental Traveller'. The author, Corrado Costa (1929-1991), combined his practice as a lawyer known for defending Red Brigade terrorists and intervening in censorship cases with his activity as a cartoonist and poet associated with the neo-avantgarde experiments of the Gruppo 63. He was also the author of *Pseudo Baudelaire* (1964) and *Inferno Provvisorio* (Provisional hell, 1971). Through Blake's Beulah he spells out a radical sexual and political utopia: 'Poetic Experience is the destruction of narrative, of

⁵² For Francis Bacon and Blake's reception in Ireland, see Edward Larrissy's chapter.

political practice, of the French revolution, of all we have imagined'.⁵³ Yet poetry itself produces “mind-forged manacles”: the imagination shackles us, ankles and wrists, to the image the more it purports to free us'.⁵⁴ Through the medium of a 'visionary cartoon essay' ('saggio visionario'), Costa attempts to release what the Futurists called 'parole in libertà': 'There is no point in bringing significations to these picnics of words: the reader can stay home. On the other hand the writer, the poet burns the common sense of political events'.⁵⁵ Costa adapts Ungaretti's translations and re-segments the verse units so as to turn them into graphic novel captions. His play with fonts and sizes emulates avant-garde experiments with typography and page layouts in visual and concrete poetry. By relating Blake's words to the visual imaginary that they evoke, Costa's image-text experiments subvert the language of comics and make full use of the virtual potential of the blanks opening up within and between comic panels. Rejecting single vision, his forms morph in size, refuse to fit the frame, break through the limits imposed by comic panels and disrupt their attempt to construct homogeneous spatial continuities. Vertiginous changes in scale mark the energy of Costa's Blakean scenes.

Italian semiotics of the 1970s, with its mix of Russian formalism, Saussurean linguistics and semiology, informed readings of Blake in the 1970s and 1980s. Claudia

⁵³ 'L'ESPERIENZA poetica è la distruzione del racconto, della pratica politica, della rivoluzione francese, di tutto ciò che ci siamo immaginati' (Costa 1977 [n. p.]).

⁵⁴ “La poesia ha legato con catene la specie umana” l'immaginazione ci lega caviglie e polsi all'immagine in più che vuole liberarci' (Costa 1977 [n. p.]; E 27).

⁵⁵ 'A questi picnic di parole è inutile portare significati. Il lettore può stare a casa. – D'altra parte lo scrittore, il poeta, brucia il senso comune della vicenda POLITICA che gli tocca attraversare' (Costa 1977 [n. p.]).

Corti's *William Blake: Testo e Sistema* (William Blake: Text and system, 1980) combines Northrop Frye's approach in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), which was translated into Italian in 1976, with linguistics and semiology in close readings that reconstruct the poet's literary system. Blake's claim, in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, that 'the productions of our youth and of our/ mature age are equal in all essential points' (DC 65-66; E 550), guides Corti's decision to focus on *Poetical Sketches* in order to unlock the 'deep structures' of Blake's poetry ('strutture profonde', 1980, 9). Corti's terminology draws on generative grammar in an attempt to identify mythologemes embryonically latent in Blake's first poetic collection and track their transformations within his symbolic-mythical sphere. She argues that Blake's compact semiotic universe is comparable to Mozart's: 'he never finds without looking, but looks only for what he knows he can find' ('anche Blake, come Mozart, è uno che non trova mai senza cercare, ma cerca solo ciò che sa di poter trovare', Corti 1980, 189). By contrast, a deconstructive attention to textual instability shapes the semiotic approach to Blake adopted by Carla Locatelli (b. 1949). Blake's 'disquieting polysemy' ('inquieta polisemia', Locatelli 1981, 7) emphasizes dialectical tensions, disturbing remainders and transgressions of linear semantics. Blake's 'attempt to restore language to its innocent state' involves the 'impossibility of hierarchical stratifications', the 'semantic autonomy' of competing levels of signification,⁵⁶ against the production of global sense at the expense of "'plural" complexity' ('complessità "plurale"'). In Locatelli's reading, 'The

⁵⁶ 'In Blake il tentativo di riportare al linguaggio la sua innocenza si realizza come impossibilità di una stratificazione gerarchica che organizzi corrispondenze tra livelli di realtà. [...] Così ognuno di essi è semanticamente autonomo e costituisce un circolo comunicativo completo anche se, ovviamente parziale, rispetto alla globalità dell'enunciato' (Locatelli 1981, 8).

Ecchoing Green' reveals the continuous return of what is semantically unresolved, disrupts stereotypical segmentations of experience and defamiliarises the everyday: 'the poem disrupts the lexical and syntactic crystallisations that convey a simple world view and a linear organisation of perception' ('la poesia è rottura delle cristallizzazioni lessicali e sintattiche che veicolano una visione del mondo semplice, organizzando linearmente la percezione', 1981, 14).

Comparative work on myth is another key aspect of Italian approaches to Blake. *William Blake: Mito e Linguaggio* (William Blake: Myth and language, 1983) is the outcome of a conference on *Blake, Poet and Painter* organized in conjunction with a touring photographic exhibition arranged by the British Council and hosted by the Italo-British Association in Bologna in March 1982. Focusing on parallelism, symmetry, grammar and rhyming structure, Roman Jakobson argues for the poet-painter's 'plastic verbal geometry' ('plastica geometria verbale', Jakobson 1983, in Franci 1983b, 190). Paola Colaiacomo theorizes the metapoetic function of deviations from the rhyme scheme as the signal of 'an act of writing within writing' ('una scrittura nella scrittura'), in which its impossible relationship with an unmediated voice is part of a Derridean play of deferral, (Colaiacomo 1983, in Franci 1983b, 75-76). Stefania d'Ottavi analyses the epic function and metapoetic aspects of naming, their multiple origins, metamorphic forms and polysemic possibilities (D'Ottavi 1983, in Franci 1983b). The philosopher Sergio Givone (b. 1944), who devoted a monograph to Blake's relationship with the gnostic and hermetic tradition (Givone 1978), discusses Ernst Bloch's radical utopian Blake and Thomas Altizer's dialectical inversion as a medium for apocalypse, although he challenges Altizer's reading of Blake's through Hegel's dialectic, as well as the possibility of

reconciling apocalyptic and utopian categories.⁵⁷ For Givone thinking through the negative means ‘pushing the concept beyond itself, in the word that names the immeasurable and ungraspable, in the image subjected to uncontainable pressures, in a vision of evil as an apocalyptic “satanic depth”’(‘spingere il concetto al di là di sé, nella parola che nomina lo smisurato e l’imprendibile, nell’immagine sottoposta a incontenibili pressioni, nella vision del male come apocalittica “profondita satanica”’, Givone 1983, in Franci 1983b, 152). Instead of reading Blake as a philosopher of modernity, Gianni Scalia (b. 1928) presents him as a philosopher of reversals, whose mental fight has the prophetic power to disclose the other side of modernity and withstand its course (Scalia 1983, in Franci 1983b).

Mitologie della ragione: Letterature e miti dal Romanticismo al Moderno

(Mythologies of reason: Literatures and myths from romanticism to modernity, Cometa 1989) takes its moves from the German idealist programme and the desire for a new mythology of modernity. Paola Colaiacomo’s contribution the volume adopts the title of an essay by Blake’s friend George Cumberland, entitled *Thoughts on outline* (1796), to consider Blake’s relationship to myth through the notion of line as the boundary of forms. If to see is to become - ‘as the eye such the object’ (E 645) – and the act of looking identifies the witness with the victim, composition requires breaking up the continuity between the image and the natural object. Blake’s desire to free himself from the ontological primacy of the natural object complicates what Paul de Man has called the ‘intentional structure of the Romantic image’ (de Man 1984). For Colaiacomo the classical myth of metamorphosis fixes the human figure in the immobility of stone. Reading Blake in conjunction with Giacomo Leopardi’s ‘Alla Primavera o delle favole antiche’ (‘Of

⁵⁷ On Bloch’s utopian Marxist Blake and Altizer’s radical theology, see also (Corti 2002b, 91-99, 101-02).

spring and ancient fables', 1823), Colaiacomo finds the conditions for an alternative figurative system in the 'empty rooms of Olympus' ('vote son le stanze d'Olimpo', Leopardi in Colaiacomo 1989, 176). The absence of the classical Gods is critical to the invention of a new mythology for modernity. The dialectic of myth is key to romantic poetics. In 'Blake Agonistes', Colaiacomo reflects on the cultural work of iconography 'in the interval between verbal and visual discourse' ('nell'intervallo fra i due discorsi, il verbale e il visivo', 1990; repr. 1993a, 112): if antiquity circulates in the form of *pathos formulae*, Blake's opposition between classical memory and inspiration is part of a contradictory impulse to expel and at the same time reintegrate the figures of myth. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's contrast between symbol and allegory, Colaiacomo reads in *TheL* the tension between *physis* and myth. The Greek word for nature is here reinterpreted to identify the tension between the individual and the species along the lines of the distinction between body natural and body politic in theories and practices of political representation. In this reading of *TheL*, *physis* marks the cyclical metamorphosis that dissolves the individual into her natural identity as a specimen of the species; myth, in turn, enables her to endure as a figure, a metamorphosis that fixes nature into form, captured in poetical metaphor or sculptural group.

Blake's place in discussions of Romanticism and the philosophical origins of modernity is examined in an article by Renato Barilli in a special issue of *Rivista d'Estetica* (Journal of aesthetics, 1989) on art and technology. Barilli combines art history with aesthetics and the semiology of culture in order to analyse the dialectic of opposites in Blake as a chemical relationship between energy and entropy. Perhaps inspired by Rudolph Arnheim's *Entropy and Art* (1971), which was translated into Italian in 1974 and was also important to Locatelli's essay, Barilli reads entropy in relation to the bipolar tension found in the electrical and magnetic phenomena in an age of machines. In *Urizen* Barilli sees

energy and entropy take on a metapsychological inflection: Blake's critique of modern reason can be read as a denunciation of the superego's role as an agent of repression of the sexual drive. In this reading Blake shapes a way of thinking that leads to Freud and Marcuse, but Barilli is keen to foreground opposite tendencies in Blake's work. Barilli had previously worked on Blake's challenge to Alberti's perspective and the typographical conventions imposed by the Gutenberg revolution as expressing a desire to return to the Primitives and the aesthetic of the illuminated manuscript (Barilli 1983a, in Gizzi 1983), but his anti-perspectival stance also articulates the symbolic form of the electromagnetic world of physics, which is often associated with Cézanne (Barilli 1983b, in Franci 1983b, 136, 129). A careful reader of physics in the phenomenology of painting, Barilli analyses the tension between claustrophobic concentrations of matter and the ethereal emptied figures in Blake's compositions. Blake's dialectical relationship with the artistic manifestations of modern physics is part of his anti-modern resistance to a 'technetronic age' that dissolves forms into uniform and exchangeable aggregates of sensation, be they the graphic units of stipple engraving, or Lockean and Humean empiricism;⁵⁸ hence the difficulty of articulating Blake's place in a genealogy of modernity (Barilli 1989, 10; Barilli 1996, 127-28). On the other hand, Blake's modernity is an active field in the early 1990s, as attested by a conference on the Romantic legacy from Blake to modernism, held in Bari in 1991, with a subsequent volume of essays (Cerutti 1993), and a translation of Yeats's essays on Blake and the imagination (Yeats 1992). Blake and Yeats also feature in

⁵⁸ On Blake, Descartes and the Vortex, see Corti (1995a). Corti explores Blake's relationship to theories of vision, colour and empiricism in a series of essays written in the 1990s and collected in Corti (2002b).

Carla Pomaré's *La vision e la voce: percorsi paralleli dai romantici ai moderni* ('Vision and Voice: Parallel Paths from the Romantics to the Moderns', 1993).⁵⁹

While Ungaretti had produced a 'hermetic Blake' that privileged the gnomic brevity of the shorter poems, a more extensive corpus of Blake's writings was offered to Italian readers with the publication of the prophetic books translated by the poet Roberto Sanesi (1930-2001) in 1980 (Blake 1980). However, the form of the illuminated book was not reproduced until the mid-1990s. Until that point the material form and the visual aesthetics of Blake's illuminated books had been captured in glimpses through book covers and occasional single plates. The reconstruction of the visual as well as verbal corpus of Blake's 'Visionary forms dramatic' (*J* 98: 28; *E* 257) had to wait for the translation of Blake's *Jerusalem* published in 1994 by Marcello Pagnini (1921-2010), a professor of English Literature at the University of Florence and a key figure in Italian semiotics. Pagnini's monumental two-volume edition comes with a rich apparatus of footnotes and a complete colour facsimile of copy E photographically reproduced by permission of the Yale Center for British Art, the Blake Trust and Tate. In restoring the poem's illuminated book format and seeking to render the form of Blake's lines, Pagnini introduces Blake's prophetic book through an account of the relief etching process that draws on S. W. Hayter (Blake 1994b, 2: 5) and relate this gravure technique to the medieval aesthetic of illuminated manuscripts. Working on the narrative sequences that compose the poem, Pagnini draws attention to its dramatic structure, the centrality of dialogue and the position of the poet as spectator and commentator (Blake 1994b, 2: 19). Unlike the 1943 prose translation of *Jerusalem*, Pagnini's tries to recreate Blake's line units. His word choices, however, often reveal his debt to the earlier translation, including the Dantesque 'occhi di

⁵⁹ For a philological approach to Yeats's Blake, see Antonielli (2009).

bragia' seen in the 'glowing eyes' of the Spectre of Los. Verbal signs of changing times can be detected in the different treatment of Blake's meditation on 'self-annihilation' and 'selfhood':

Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life! (*J* 5: 22; E 147)

Annichila in me il Sé e sii tu tutta la mia vita. (Blake 1943, 43)

Annulla in me l'Egoità; sii tu tutta la mia vita. (Blake 1994b, 2: 35)

So spoke the Spectre to Albion. He is the Great Selfhood

Satan. Worshipd as a God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth. (*J* 29: 17; E 175)

Così parlò ad Albione lo spettro. Il grande egoismo, Satana, adorato come un dio dai potenti della terra. (Blake 1943, 116)

Così parlò lo Spettro ad Albione. Egli è Satana,

La Grande Egoità, Adorato come Dio dai Potenti della Terra. (Blake 1994b, 2: 113)

The choice of 'Il Sé' ('the Selfhood') and 'egoismo' ('selfishness') in 1943 suggests that Blake is being read through psychological debates on the psyche. Translating *Jerusalem* in the early 1990s Pagnini opts for 'egoità' ('selfhood'; see also Blake 2007, 76), a term employed to translate the German phrase 'Ichheit', which is found in texts by Jacob Boehme (from whom Blake probably took it) Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Through the medium of Italian, Blake's words take on philosophical and psychoanalytical dimensions.

Blake's *Milton* was translated in 2002 by Roberto Sanesi, who had already translated the *Prophetic Books* in 1980 and Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1984. This parallel text edition includes twenty-four full-page recto-verso reproductions of plates facing the corresponding text. Of the full-plate illustrations the frontispiece is not reproduced and the rest follow the sequence of the New York Public Library copy C. In Sanesi's version, Blake's 'selfhood' requires a new vocabulary. Milton's descent into 'Self Annihilation' becomes 'annientamento del mio io' and 'Selfhood' becomes 'Egotismo': 'and I be siez'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood' / 'E mi afferri e mi dia in mano al mio stesso Egotismo' (*M* 14: 24; *E* 108; Blake 2002b, 57); 'the Selfhood of Deceit & False Forgiveness' / 'L'egotismo dell'Inganno & della Falsa Indulgenza' (*M* 16; *E* 807; Blake 2002b, 63). The Satanic principle of identity is conveyed by 'Individualità': 'I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One' / 'Io nella mia Individualità sono quel Satana: sono io quel Maligno!' (*M* 14: 30; *E* 108; Blake 2002b, 57). Later, 'I come to discover before Heav'n & Hell the Self righteousness' (*M* 38: 43; *E* 139) takes on a definitely psychoanalytic ring: 'Io vengo a scoprire di fronte al Cielo & all'Inferno l'egoismo del Sé' (Blake 2002b, 153). The move to 'Self Annihilation' is presented as 'Annullamento del Sé', and 'to put off Self & all I have' becomes 'A eliminare il Sé & tutto ciò che posseggo' (*M* 38: 49; *E* 139; Blake 2002b, 153); 'a Selfhood, which must be put off' becomes 'Egoismo' ('selfishness'), cleansing 'by Self-examination' is achieved by 'analizzando il Sé' (*M* 40: 37; *E* 142; Blake 2002b, 158, 161).

Four Zoas was the last of Blake's prophetic works to be translated. The Sicilian dramatherapist Salvo Pitruzzella first encountered the poem through a brief excerpt from Ungaretti's *Visioni* (Blake 1965), and read Blake through the mediation of Ginsberg, and subsequently reading further selections translated by Roberto Sanesi in 1984 (Pitruzzella 2013 74-75, 77). In *Jerusalem* he saw the break up of Albion into the Zoas as symbolizing

the psychic complexity of the individual, which can be reconciled by the imagination (Pitruzzella 2004, 68). Turning to *The Four Zoas*, he was dissatisfied with the translations published by Sanesi, and started to experiment with his own translations.⁶⁰ He began with Enion's Lamentation 'What is the Price of Experience' (FZ II: 11; E 325) and completed a full translation of *Four Zoas* - following Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson in the choice of Night VIIa over VIIb as the final Night VII (Blake 2007, 123; Wilkie and Johnson 1978) - in time for the 250th anniversary of Blake's birth. Pitruzzella approaches *Four Zoas* through poetic, psychoanalytic and performing arts traditions, from Rimbaud to Jung, Jakobson and the theatre of the oppressed. Reading *Four Zoas* as a 'dream of nine nights', Pitruzzella considers the dream form as an annihilation of the ego, which generates the world in the way that Vishnu's dream does in Indian myth (Blake 2007, 6). Drawing on Foster Damon's claim that *Four Zoas* marks the 'invention of the dream technique' (Damon 2013, 143), Wilkie and Johnson's exploration of the poem as a 'psychodrama' (Wilkie and Johnson 1978) and Paul Youngquist's suggestion that 'art becomes a kind of therapy' (Youngquist 1989, 15, 18), Pitruzzella applies the poem's dream structure to his drama practice. In 1997 he was a founding member of the cooperative The Song of Los, which brings together psychologists, pedagogues, music and dance therapists. His practice as a dramatherapist is inspired by Blake's fourfold vision (Pitruzzella 2008, 18), the need to 'open the doors of perception', and activate Blake's motto that 'energy is eternal delight' (Pitruzzella 2013, 80). According to Pitruzzella, 'in *The Four Zoas*, Blake feels the need to reinstate Energy into the primal battle between Imagination and Reason' (Pitruzzella 2013, 82). Using Blake's Zoas to think about the role of creativity in the

⁶⁰ Communication with the author, 15 December 2013. I am grateful to Salvo Pitruzzella for his translation and conversations about his encounter with Blake.

treatment of personality disorders, Pitruzzella developed a theory and practice of psychodrama. Pitruzzella's experiments draw on the poem's potential as a transformative 'prophetic workshop' (Rosso 1993), focusing on the challenge of linear rationality, narrative order and causality articulated by Donald Ault.⁶¹ Building on Umberto Eco's notion of the open text, Pitruzzella opens up the poem as a script for performance. Narration leads to *mise-en-scène*, casting and role-play (Blake 2007, 11-13). The centrality of the Zoas to Pitruzzella's drama therapy is spelt out in his book *The Mysterious Guest: An Inquiry on Creativity from Arts Therapy's Perspective* (2008, Eng. trans. 2009), which reproduces the frontispiece of Blake's *Jerusalem* on its cover.

Finally, an extract from the poetic epistle Blake sent to Butts (2 October 1800; E 713-14), entitled 'Vision of Light', was set to music by Victor Vertunni, with musical arrangements by Carlo Gizzi and performed in *L'Amor che move l'alte stelle* (Love that moves the high stars), an event that took place at the Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi Sahaja Yoga World Foundation in Chiappeti, Albera Ligure, on 1 May 2013. Vertunni's recreations of Blake date back to his musical accompaniments to *Songs of Innocence*, originally recorded in Italy in 2004, produced as a digital album by the Elfo Recording Studio in Tavernago in November 2011 and performed in the Late Shift at the National Portrait Gallery in 2012. With the Theatre of Eternal Values, Vertunni and Gizzi also collaborated on *William Blake's Divine Humanity*, a dramatization of the poet's life and work performed in London in 2007 to mark 250 years since the poet's birth. In *L'Amor che move l'alte stelle* Monia Giovannangeli, Vertunni, Lorenzo Tazzieri and Gizzi interpret the concluding line from the thirty-third canto of Dante's *Paradiso* through the lens of the

⁶¹ See Ault (1986). This is a line of argument also developed by Stefania d'Ottavi in her deconstructive reading of the poem's palimpsest (D'Ottavi 2001).

yogic chakras, the Pythagoric tradition of the music of the spheres, the Jungian notion of self-individuation and Blake's *Marriage*: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite' (*MHH* 14; E 39; Vertunni 2013b [n. p.]). The concert's Blakean spirit is emphasized by the choice of the flying figure from Blake's Shakespearean monotype *Pity* (Butlin 1981, #313) as a head vignette for the libretto. The evening included poetry, theatre and music performed by the Orchestra Bohème, a forty-piece orchestra including sitar and tabla, with a repertoire ranging from Beethoven's Coriolan overture and fifth piano concerto to classical Indian music, featuring lyrics by Blake, Shakespeare, Dante, Kabir and Shri Mataj Nirmala Devi. Conducted by Monia Giovannangeli, the performance was produced by the Theatre of Eternal Values, an international company that brings together artists from different national and cultural backgrounds in 'a single production in which eastern and western music, theatre and poetry are integrated' ('una produzione unica e nuova, in cui la musica orientale e occidentale, il teatro e la poesia sono stati integrati', Vertunni 2013b [n. p.]).

The intercultural dimension of this performance brings to light the convergence of East and West in the reception of Blake in Italy. Other examples include Roberto Rossi Testa, who translated not only *Songs* (Blake 2001) but also Kahlil Gibran and Tagore; and Brunilde Neroni, who wrote an introduction to Blake in 1994 and translated Tagore and Gandhi. Earlier, Emilio Teza, professor of Indo-European philology and a polyglot translator of works in many languages, had his version of Blake's 'The Tyger' privately

printed in 1906.⁶² Different attempts to frame Blake's 'fearful symmetry' offer a good opportunity to reflect on how the poet has been refracted in the medium of Italian:

What immortal hand or eye,

Dare frame thy feartful symmetry? (*SE* 42: 22-23; E 25)

Qual man, qual occhio, eterni, alla natura

Il bel corpo donâr che fa paura? (Teza in Blake 1906 [n. p.])

Che immortali occhi o mani

Ti foggiar le forme immani? (Praz 1925, 64)

Quale fu l'immortale mano o l'occhio

Ch'ebbe la forza di formare

La tua agghiacciante simmetria? (Ungaretti in Blake 1930; 1933; 1936; 1965, 67)

Quale mano, quale occhio immortale

La paurosa tua simmetria seppe foggiare? (Lutri 1967, 133)

Che mano immortale, che sguardo

Tramò la tua feroce simmetria? (Sanesi in Blake 1984, 275)

⁶² <<http://music.victorvertunni.com/>> [accessed 18 November 2015]. I am grateful to Victor Vertunni and Corrado Gizzi for providing me with digital copies of their Blake initiatives.

Quale mano o occhio immortale

Seppe forgiare la tua agghiacciante simmetria? (Parks in Blake 1985, 99)

The attempt to reproduce the rhyme for the eye brings ‘natura’ (‘nature’) to rhyme with ‘paura’ (‘fear’), ‘mani’ (‘hands’) with ‘forme immani’ (‘immense forms’); or it produces phonic divergence to testify to the impossibility of framing Blake’s ‘fearful symmetry’ within an Italian rhyme scheme. The choice of verb reflects on the act of poetic framing within a semantic field of poetics that encompasses putting into form (‘formare’, ‘foggiare’) and suggestions of plotting, which in Italian also combines narrative with suggestions of scheming and intriguing (‘tramare’). ‘Astonishing’ and ‘freezing’, ‘fearful’, ‘fierce’ (‘agghiacciante’, ‘paurosa’, ‘feroce’) - such are the phonic and semantic possibilities which the Italian language can contribute in the attempt to capture Blake’s ‘fearful symmetry’.

Blake in Italy is a cosmopolitan field that connects Italy to German and French scholarship and to a European exhibition scene carefully reported in Italian newspapers. Blake in Italy is usually, but not always, in Italian: witness the parallel text of *Marriage* with a French translation by Daniel-Rops (Blake 1951), edited by Emma Manacorda Lantermo, a French scholar who translated Soupault into Italian. Attention to Blake’s disciplinary mediations identifies continuing trajectories, starting with the early occult and mystical Blake- evident in *Jerusalem* appearing in a series entitled ‘Breviari Mistici’ in 1943, and Pitruzzella’s translation of *Four Zoas* in 2007 being published as part of ‘I Quaderni dell’Almagesto’ (Almagesto notebooks). Psychoanalysis offers Jungian and Freudian categories to the readers of *Jerusalem* in 1943, mediates Briganti’s art historical canon, Renosto’s musical recreation in the 1970s, and Pitruzzella’s visionary theatre and

art therapy in the twenty-first century. People active in the dissemination and recreation of Blake include Dante specialists; philosophers engaged in aesthetics, hermeneutics and phenomenology; English scholars, some of whom come to Blake through Joyce and Yeats (Cerutti, Pomaré, Antonielli); and experts in comparative literature, art historians and art critics. Blake's influence on twentieth-century poets is sometimes expressed through acts of translation (Ungaretti, Montale, Sanesi) and sometimes through critical writings (Caproni). Encounters with Blake foster experimental forms, from Leij's fictional biography to Renosto's musical phonology, Costa's visionary cartoon essay and Pitruzzella's psychodrama. Blake's celebration of energy and the need to open the doors of perception empowers divergent forms of political imagination, from the Fascist will to power to radical left revolutionary utopias. From Renosto's *Love's Body* to Vertunni's attempt to recapture the music of the spheres in an encounter between East and West, Blake's expanded sensory powers have inspired attempts to reconstitute the shared collective body of the public through 'Visionary forms dramatic' (*J* 98: 28; *E* 257).