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An Endless End

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Journal

California Italian Studies, 8(1)

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Publication Date

2018

DOI

10.5070/C381042803

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An Endless End

Gian Maria Annovi

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

K. P. Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians"

The end of poetry seems to be always on its way. More have announced it in the past than evoke it today. And yet, the end of poetry never comes. One could argue that this endless end functions conceptually like waiting for the arrival of the barbarians in one of K. P. Cavafy's most celebrated poems. For the Greek poet, such a wait is the metaphor for an ever imminent potential destruction of what we are and can no longer bear to be. The invasion of the barbarians is thus an imaginary solution to a state of crisis or stagnation. It signals a traumatic change of paradigm, the imposition of a new form of life. At the same time, this barbaric invasion is a withstood revolution that exonerates people from their responsibilities. Waiting for the imminent end of one's civilization, like waiting for the end of poetry, provokes, in fact, a state of general paralysis. In Cavafy's poem, the Senate does not legislate, orators do not make their speeches anymore, people gather purposelessly in the squares. What is purpose, after all, when everything is doomed to be over soon? Why should critics write about something on the verge of extinction? Why should poets produce something that disappears?

Those who repeat the mantra of the end of poetry, even while counting the last poets on their fingers, do just the same: they encourage an attitude of passivity, of disengagement, and do not hold themselves responsible for the present and for what will come next. Nor do they propose actual alternatives to a situation of crisis. Just like the imaginary Hellenic society envisioned by Cavafy, poetry is indeed in a state of crisis, whose nature, however, is rather opaque. As an ancient form of writing, poetry lives seemingly undisturbed by the changes that have radically shaped the Western world, and Italy. More and more people write poetry, although not as many are actually poets, nor readers for that matter. Poetry's perceived crisis does not have quantitative reasons. It is instead a crisis of perception and representation of what poetry was, is, and can be. One thing is certain, however, poetry keeps happening. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, the author of a book of essays entitled *Résistance de la poésie*,¹ poetry "insists and resists—it resists everything to some extent."² Notwithstanding everything and everyone, it continues to evolve in new forms. Sometimes it may stumble, and even get lost, but each one of poetry's uncertain steps can still provoke telluric movements in its readers.

In 2015, when Mondadori appeared to have the intention to shut down one of Italy's most prestigious poetry series, *Lo Specchio*, some critics interpreted the event as one more sign of poetry's final destitution. Others saluted it as the physiological consequence of an almost certain

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Résistance de la poésie* (Bordeaux: William Blake, 1997).

² Jean-Luc Nancy, "Taking Account of Poetry," *Multiple Arts. The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 10–21, 15.

end.³ None of these, of course, were poets. The paradox, however, is that even if all publishers stopped publishing poetry books altogether, poetry would still not end. Like a resistant micro-form of life, which has inhabited the bed of the ocean for billions of years, it would simply transform itself, and adapt. Even in the absence of oxygen. There is no need, nonetheless, to summon apocalyptic future scenarios to prove this. Poets wrote clandestinely during dictatorships, while confined to an annex or a cell, in labor and extermination camps, in countries where their language was forbidden and their culture persecuted. All of this happened in the past, all of this happen today—poets have indeed spent more than one season in hell. One could think simply of Anna Akhmatova, who was banned from publishing anything for more than forty years under Stalin’s regime. She wrote anyway, risking imprisonment or deportation, and burnt her poems after she and her friends had memorized them.⁴ Poetry is not only in books; it is in people themselves.

Poets

An inverse attitude to this cantation of poetry’s end motivates the critical and poetic investigation on the “Ends of Poetry” to which we have dedicated this issue of *California Italian Studies*. As literary critics, writers, and educators, we must, today more than ever, maintain an active, engaged and responsible attitude toward one of the foundational objects of our discipline, and—let us not forget—of civilization.⁵ Like the Italian poets presented here, we do not believe that the end of poetry is coming, but rather that this perennially perceived danger of extinction, poetry’s endless end, is precisely what keeps regenerating it. It is another way of interpreting T. S. Eliot’s famous line, “in my end is my beginning.” Remarkably, even in Cavafy’s poem, the announced but unhappened arrival of the barbarians is exactly what produces the poem we are reading. The solution to the crisis is finally revealed to be not the barbarians’ destructiveness, but poetry itself—a historically determined linguistic cultural object through which simplicity becomes complexity and a deeper understanding of reality takes on an aesthetic configuration.

Before addressing how poetry can still pursue this end and others, a few clarifying words should be said about the second part of this issue, in which we present a small choice of contemporary Italian poets belonging to different generations and manifesting a multiplicity of poetics. Our selection of forty poets does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of Italian poetic production today, nor to suggest a preference for, or prevalence of, a specific poetic orientation. This is not a militant or critical anthology, but rather a limited empirical attempt to sketch a necessarily incomplete outline of Italian poetry’s panorama today.⁶ The poets we selected are not simply original poetic voices in themselves; they also represent poetic trends, tendencies, and postures which include many individual variants. The list of names that could, and should, have been included in the following selection is painfully large. It is useless to even try to perform

³ The debate started with an interview by Nanni Delbecchi of Andrea Cortellessa (“Spengono i poeti perché sfuggono alla melassa,” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, July 9, 2015), which prompted a piqued and contemptuous article by Alfonso Berardinelli (“Avviso al Fatto: se la collana di poesie Mondadori chiude è perché non ci sono più poeti pubblicabili,” *il Foglio*, July 15, 2015), and subsequent responses by Paolo Febbraro, Davide Brullo, Gilda Policastro, and many others.

⁴ Cfr. Elaine Feinstein, *Anna of All the Russias: A Life of Anna Akhmatova* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

⁵ Martin Puchner argues convincingly for the foundational power of literature, and poetry in particular, in *The Written World. The Power of Stories to Shape People, History, Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2017).

⁶ For a discussion of recent anthologies of Italian poetry see the last chapter of Claudia Crocco, *La poesia italiana del Novecento. Il canone e le interpretazioni* (Rome: Carocci, 2015).

the customary reparative balancing act by dropping a few additional names. We apologize to the remarkable poets, some of whom are even colleagues and friends, who will resent their exclusion.

A few criteria, however, did shape our selection. First was the intention to depict, in a bell curve distribution pattern, six “generations” of poets born between the 1930s and the 1980s. Representatives from the extreme ends are few, in the first case because nature has operated its own careless selection, in the second because the value of the poets of the most recent generation, in particular those born in the 1990s, among whom there are also voices of migrant and new multi-ethnic poets, still needs some decantation to become clear to the shortsighted eyes of our American observatory. For the opposite reason, that is, on account of the excessively deforming proximity of our gaze, we have excluded Italian poets whose writing practice is based in the United States.⁷ Finally, we did not include poets who feature as critics in the first part of our volume. It is worth noticing, however, that not all the poets whom we invited to contribute responded to our call. To those who did, we asked for a maximum of three poems representative of their poetics and a short reflection on the end and ends of poetry.

Border

The initial reference to Cavafy’s “Waiting for the Barbarians” is not an arbitrary choice or a mere coup de theatre. Only after reading our poets’ reflections on poetry did a specific image, the image of the border (“confine”), produce an association with Cavafy’s lyric. “And some of our men just in from the border say / there are no barbarians any longer.”⁸ The “barbaric” is what is beyond the border, what needs to surpass and transgress a limit to become real and recognizable to our eyes. In a way, it is the border itself that creates and defines the barbarian. Poetry too is defined by borders, for instance, those of language. As Umberto Fiori notes later in this volume, “poetry is always finite [“finita”]... it comes to term with the limits, the borders of language.”⁹ The border is an identity-defining apparatus like the Derridian *shibboleth*, a separation of self and other which is also generated through language. For Jacques Derrida, in his eponymous essay on Paul Celan, the *shibboleth* speaks of the threshold, “of the crossing of the threshold, of that which permits one to pass or to cross, to transfer from one threshold to another: to translate.”¹⁰

Remarkably, the etymology of the word barbarian itself has to do with language, and the inability to understand and translate. The term was used in Ancient Greece for all non-Greek-speaking peoples. This was because the language they spoke sounded to Greeks like gibberish (the stammering sound “bar..bar...” allegedly originated the word *barbaros*, which is onomatopoeic). A similar difficulty of pronunciation involves the Hebrew word *shibboleth*. As Derrida explains, the term was used in *Judges* 12:4–6 by Jephthah in wartime, as a test for detecting fleeing foreigners at the borders, and in particular Ephraimites, who could not correctly pronounce the sound *shi* of *shibboleth*. One could say that the border—like poetry itself—is where language is

⁷ Cfr. Luigi Fontanella and Paolo Valesio, eds., *Poesaggio: Poeti italiani d’America* (Quinto di Treviso: Pagus Edizioni, 1993); Luigi Bonaffini and Joseph Perricone, eds., *Poets of the Italian Diaspora: A Bilingual Anthology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); and Gianni Scalia, ed., “Poeti italiani negli States,” *In forma di parole*, monographic special issue, XXX/4 (2010).

⁸ C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19.

⁹ If not otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth. For Paul Celan,” in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 3–74, 33.

tested and breaks, and where identity is negotiated. It is a space of in-definition and potential danger. The “unequivocal danger sign” that poetry—according to Andrea Inglese—“lets emerge” includes the risk of exposing oneself to the other.

For Mariangela Guàtteri too, who—like Inglese, Alessandro Broggi, Marco Giovenale and Fabio Teti within these pages—is closely associated with the poetic groups GAMMM and Ex.It, dedicated to heterogeneous experimental writing(s) (“scritture di ricerca”) and visual and wordless open semantic forms of writing (“oggetti non identificabili”), poetry is a radical identity-defining limit, a “critical gaze that touches the border between human and anti-human.” In her writing practice, Guàtteri translates this idea into extremely ambiguous corporeal images that she contrasts with her “naked concrete” language, devoid of immediate emotion. The touch of poetry’s critical gaze, nonetheless, can also affect, move, and touch us. Giuliana Bruno recalls that, “as Greek etymology tells us, haptic means ‘able to come into contact with.’”¹¹ The touch of poetry thus constitutes a reciprocal contact between other and us. It allows us to interface with other lives that can touch us and affect us. This notion of critical touching could perhaps provide a way out of the stale, reductionist, and unproductive separation of poetry into lyric and anti-lyric, which still plagues the surviving Italian critical debate, as if time had not passed.

We can find an example of this critical touch in what Franco Buffoni, author of verses that combine emotional civic tension and hyper-denotative language, calls his “poesia di confine” [“border poetry”]. In his “Tecniche di indagine criminale” [“Criminal Investigation Techniques,”], for example, the poet directs our gaze to the frozen body of a prehistoric man, Oetzi, found in an Alpine glacier on the border between Italy and Austria.¹² The corpse, dissected by inquisitive Austrian and Italian scientists, becomes an embodiment of poetry itself, a cognitive space where language, history, and sexual identity are painfully negotiated:

Dicono che forse eri bandito,
E a Monaco si lavora
Sui parassiti che ti portavi addosso,
E che nel retto ritenevi sperma:
Sei a Münster
E nei laboratori IBM di Magonza
Per le analisi di chimica organica.
Ti rivedo col triangolo rosa
Dietro il filo spinato.

[They say that you might have been a bandit,
And in Munich they are working
On the parasites you were carrying yourself,
And that you had retained sperm in your rectum:
You are in Münster
And the laboratories of IBM in Mainz
For organic chemistry analysis.

¹¹ Giuliana Bruno, “Motion and Emotion: Film and Haptic Space,” *Revista Eco-Pós* 13/2 (2010): 16–36, 30.

¹² Brenda Fowler, *Iceman: Uncovering the Life and Times of a Prehistoric Man Found in an Alpine Glacier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

I see you again with a pink triangle
Behind the barbed wire.]¹³

For Buffoni too, poetry is a specific type of gaze, one that is able to connect reality and human experience in ways that transcend time and space. In this sense, just like Oetzi's frozen body, poetry is always on-the-border. And it is because of its peculiar liminal location that poetry can connect humans to what is most fragile and endangered, being fragile and endangered itself. "On the thresholds," writes Eugenio De Signoribus as if confirming this idea, "the minor ones remain / dispersed and desperate" ["Sulle soglie restano i minori, / dispersi e disperati"].

Poetry feeds on the endless and necessary dialectic of other and self. I am not thinking of obvious questions such as the relationship between subject and object, between poetry, prose, and other artistic forms of expression. I am thinking of a relational model. If we set out to look for poetry's function today, as if it were a single thing, we will never find anything. Poetry does not make things—it creates relationships, it proposes a model to connect different human beings where language alone fails. Maybe it is by providing this profound model of identity and alterity's coexistence that poetry can return to be a friend to more people. Not a barbarian, but a friend as Aristoteles conceived of it: a "heteros autos," an otherness which is also self. According to Giorgio Agamben, in the Aristotelian notion of friend we don't find an "I" and a "you," but *another* self: "The friend is not another I, but an otherness immanent in selfness, a becoming other of the self. At the point at which I perceive my existence as pleasant, my perception is traversed by a concurrent perception that dislocates it and deports it towards the friend, towards the other self."¹⁴ Agamben touches on something that seems to apply to poetry as well, because through poetry we can actually recognize the commonality among others and ourselves. Poetry is one of the ways in which humans recognize themselves as human while recognizing at the same time the humanity of others.

Fragility

It is perhaps because poetry is "besieged by its own end"—as Milo De Angelis proposes—that "it is infinitely fragile." De Angelis, who has been teaching literature to maximum security inmates for decades, presents us with a lesson on fragility in his own poetry, where he transposes the darkest sides of reality through a powerfully dense language. The subjects of two of his three poems are indeed those who have chosen "to have nothing," who have "entered terribleness / and have walked on the border of rain gutters." Poetry's ability to establish a connection with what is most vulnerable inside and outside of us originates in its own vulnerable constitution. Poetry's own existence today, as in any time of poverty, is therefore one of the deepest affirmations of an alternative or minor form of existence. As a subject always on the extreme border of the collective unconscious, almost unheard and unaided, rooted in the belief in the possibility of meaningful human expression in the engulfment of chatter, poetry teaches us that allowing oneself to be fragile, vulnerable, and even traumatized is a condition in which to understand that any other is also my other, and thus the responsibility of all. This can explain why, according to data from the NEA's 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), poetry readership in America is the highest it has ever been in the last fifteen years, and the increase in readership is especially

¹³Franco Buffoni, *The Shadow of Mount Rosa*, tr. Franco Buffoni (New York: Gradiva Publications, 2002).

¹⁴ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, "The Friend," in *What Is an Apparatus?*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25–38, 34.

high among women, racial and sexual minorities, and adults with only some college education.¹⁵ As Guido Mazzoni notes, poetry is “able to give words to tribes” when their voice is taken away. As something that is ever in-between, something that is “always separated,” “absentee and witness” at the same time, as Renata Morresi writes from her hometown devastated by an earthquake, poetry imposes an experience of human proximity on its readers, like the homosexual behind the camp’s fencing in Buffoni’s poem. Not only is poetry “a limit, a separation, and a border,” a “con-fine,” as Fabrizio Falconi suggests, emphasizing the composite etymology of the Italian word (literally, “with-end”); it is also something that brings entities together *on* the margin: “con-fine,” understood not simply as implicated in the end (“with-end”), but in the sense of the Latin preposition *cum*, meaning “together with.” Mario Villalta expresses this particular experience of togetherness in separation that poetry facilitates in his poem from the unpublished collection *Il scappamorte*: “più di tutto il resto il vicino / che senti piangere dall’altra parte / del muro, dall’altra parte del mondo?” [“more than anything else your neighbor / whom you hear crying on the other side of the wall / on the other side of the world?”].

Conceived of in these terms, as a communal space of separation and proximity, poetry is a paradoxical border, one that guarantees the absence of borders, its end an endless deferral of the border as impassable limit. Poetry is a confine that prevents confinement and produces connections. Precisely for this reason, poetry is still able to speak to our present, to a time of vulgar nationalistic resurgence in which the border is increasingly conceived of as a dividing line, a wall, and not a point of contact. Like the Great Wall of the Chinese Empire, erected to keep out the barbaric invaders from the Mongolian desert, other walls are rising and other deserts are crossed today. This can explain Antonella Anedda’s determination when she writes that poetry’s end is indeed to oppose walls and borders (“opporsi ai muri: nessun con-fine”). It is by affirming and accepting the diversity of things, even of those we do not understand or love, that we can orient ourselves in the present, and shape our identity in a reality that grows more complicated by the day.

What, however, is the opposite of a border or confine? Certainly not an endlessness in which differences disappear, for it is precisely from difference—also in the sense of linguistic *différance*—that poetry originates. Once again T. S. Eliot’s lines come to our aid. Poetry, as the kind of border we have defined, which does not confine and does not restrict one’s freedom, is precisely the liminal space of osmotic compresence in which something begins where something else ends, and something ends where something else begins, so that beginning and end coincide continuously. In Maurizio Cucchi’s words “mentre tutto / entro il confine è compresente” [“while within the border / everything is compresent”]. We can think of poetry as the marathon runner in Carlo Bordini’s “Assenza” [“Absence”]—an agent finding meaning only through a continuous act of self-creation. The runners are such only so long as they run. Their identity collapses and their end is exhausted when they reach the finish line. Once the run is over and the end has been reached, they re-enter the “digressive stuttering” that Anedda calls life. In a similar way, to reach its ends poetry must continuously make itself. Poetry as *poiein* is in fact etymologically “to make.” This is why Nancy can claim that “the poem is what’s made by making itself.”¹⁶ An Italian poet who has interpreted this theme with extraordinary finesse and wondrous linguistic parsimony is Patrizia

¹⁵ Sunil Iyengar, “Taking Note: Poetry Reading Is Up—Federal Survey Results” June 7 2018, <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2018/taking-note-poetry-reading-%E2%80%94federal-survey-results> (accessed on February 1, 2019).

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Making Poetry,” *Multiple Arts. The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3–9, 8.

Cavalli. Although she did not respond to our invitation, we find illumination in the poem that gave the title to her now classic 1974 book *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*:

Qualcuno mi ha detto
che certo le mie poesie
non cambieranno il mondo.

Io rispondo che certo sí
le mie poesie
non cambieranno il mondo.

[Someone told me
of course my poems
won't change the world.

I say yes of course
my poems
won't change the world.]¹⁷

Rhetorically, this apparently linear short poem, almost haiku-like, shows us nothing more than a tautology. The two triplets that form the two stanzas of the poem, its beginning and its end, seem indeed to coincide. With a few exceptions. On the one hand, “someone” becomes “I,” as if confirming poetry’s constitutive dialectic of self and alterity. On the other, Cavalli adds an explicit affirmation (“yes”) to the negative statement forming the core of the poem (“my poem / won’t change the world”). It is in this averment that we find the sagacious meaning of Cavalli’s poem, which is not so much a declaration of modesty, but an affirmation of poetry itself. In fact, what Cavalli does is to write a poem in spite of the fact that it won’t affect the world. Like Cavafy in “Waiting for the Barbarians,” Cavalli responds to a statement that seems to call for resignation and passivity with poetic writing itself, suggesting that the poet must ignore the requests of our post-industrial, neo-liberal order governed by utility. Why, then, should one write poems knowing that this won’t change the world? Why should one repeat a gesture with no end? Because it can change something for those who write the poem, and for those who read it. The ends of poetry concern people, not things.

Depth

This issue of *California Italian Studies* is motivated by a need to understand where and how poetry continues to find its ends, its reasons and validation in a society that has reduced it, as Gian Mario Villalta and Luigi Socci put it, to a diminished and opaque form of itself—to the poetic. The question is not whether humans can live without poetry. The majority of people certainly can, and without much remorse, for in the court of public opinion poetry has been “useless and completely

¹⁷ Patrizia Cavalli, *My Poems Wont Change the World: Selected Poems*, tr. Gini Alhadeff et al., ed. Gini Alhadeff, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 5–6.

out of date” at least since the time of Rimbaud.¹⁸ The “hatred of poetry,” to quote Bataille, is not a recent phenomenon.¹⁹ The question is how people live without poetry, and what is missing in their experience as human beings. If poetry has no necessity, what does it add to the lives of people who read and value it? Famously, for Leopardi, poetry “adds a thread to the very brief fabric of our life. It refreshes us so to speak, and it increases our vitality.”²⁰ Only a happy few still understand what Leopardi meant. Yet how many understand quantum physics, molecular genetics, or computer engineering? How many read about, appreciate, or practice these disciplines? A minority. Sometimes a minority who, as in the case of computer engineers, have incredible power over our existence, more than the power of Gramsci’s original organic intellectuals. Would anyone claim that these disciplines are irrelevant to our culture? One could argue that they can, in fact, produce life-changing discoveries or ideas. That they can in fact “change the world.” And they do. It is undeniable. Poetry cannot directly affect socio-economic development, but it can indeed influence the development of people’s minds.

Poetry works on our deep being, and on our ability to pierce through the hard-grained surface that separates us from what is most profound. Poetry is at ease with the abyss, with the absolute depth of human condition, which trigger vertigo according to Büchner.²¹ In our age of infotainment, people seem to forget that, before any other aim, poetry provides an eminent education in deep reading. A reading that does not inform, but reveals instead the complexity of communication and human nature. As W. C. Williams argues, “It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there.”²² The space of proximity that poetry guarantees is not produced only by what poetry communicates, but also by the asynchronous, mutual touching of writing and reading. If this touching of writing and reading characterizes any textual encounter, very few encounters can produce the same level of intellectual, emotional, and even sensual intensity that poetry is able to produce. As Laura Pugno affirms, poetry operates on the “insaldatura” (“un-soldered joint”) of mind and body, on the border the brings them together: “chiudi la parola / nella mano, contro il palmo / sempre caldo e secco, / senti il tremito, / sei tu” [“hold the word / in your hand, against the palm / always warm and dry / feel the tremor / it’s you”].

Poetry’s ability to create contact and to reveal the most diverse shades of internal and external reality is something that the digital apprehension of the world, as an eminent form of rationalization and simplification of human interaction, is unable—and utterly uninterested—to replicate, for the advancement itself of digital technology is propelled by a constant illusion of simplicity and usefulness. But how many levels of human interaction and communication are erased or minimized when everything is just a “click” away? The fact that digital communication codes the different forms of human apprehension of the world (words, images, sounds, movements...) into sequences

¹⁸ Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pecuchet with The Dictionary of Received Ideas* (London-New York: Penguin, 1976). Quoted in Donald Hall, “Death to the Death of Poetry,” in *Breakfast Served Any Time All Day: Essays on Poetry New and Selected* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 7–14, 8.

¹⁹ Marie-Christine Lala, “The Hatred of Poetry in Georges Bataille’s Writing and Thought,” in *Bataille. Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 105–116.

²⁰ Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, eds. Michael Caesar and Franco D’Intino (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 2012.

²¹ “Every men is an abyss, when you look down you get dizzy,” Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, tr. Nicholas Rudall (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 33.

²² William Carlos Williams, *Asphodel: That Greeny Flower and Other Love Poems*, ed. Herbert Liebowitz (New York: New Directions, 1994), 19.

of zeros and ones seems also a representation of the binary, black and white form of thought that governs the life of the large majority of people today.

What then happens to poetry when it is produced and diffused in the digital space? There are at least three different positions among poets and critics on this issues. On the one hand, some argue that the vastness of the web and the uncontrolled proliferation and diffusion of poetry that it fosters bring all texts to the same level, in a false process of poetic democratization that produces bad, mainstream poetry unaware of itself and poetic history. On the opposite spectrum, critics and poets who belong to more recent generations see in the web the opportunity for a poetic renaissance, capable of bypassing the obstacles of the languishing poetic publishing industry and the corporate interests of the professed lobby of poets. This position presents several tangential points of contact with the larger populist attitude that governs today's international political arena, the most visceral feelings of which include a sense of frustration toward any system or figure coming between single and individual expressions, and resentment towards anyone who is perceived as part of an elitist and thus inherently corrupt system. Paradoxically, for opposite reasons, both these positions nourish the idea of poetry's end—the first by considering the digital horizon as a barbaric dysregulation and even destruction of poetry as we have always known it, the second by wittingly promoting the role of outsiders and destroyers of an obsolete way of “administering” the land of poetry. A third and more moderate position is represented by those who propose to consider new media as an occasion to reconceive, diffuse, and write poetry in the modern age without dismantling or rejecting its past. This amounts to a phenomenological project of integration that recognizes poetry as a medium, which—as Gabriele Frasca reminds us—is not undermined by the advent of new forms of communication, but rather changes and stratifies itself at each encounter with the new. To use Stefano Dal Bianco's image, poetry, like the Egyptian pyramids, presents “monuments that preserve knowledge.” Even so, none of these positions explicitly addresses the question of poetry's ends in the age of technology.

The nature of poetry in the age of multimedia digital communication is a topic that deserves a specific investigation lying beyond the scopes of this volume. One thing, however, can be noticed. Digital technology appears to increment the dematerialization of language, bodies, and experience, producing consequences we are only beginning to understand and to study. In one of his poems, Vincenzo Ostuni addresses this issue focusing on the pixelated materiality of the Simoncini font on the computer screen. He describes how it changes as the font size progressively increases while words dissipate: “al tremila, tuttavia, ciascuna lettera non è più così liscia, ha la rugosa filigrana, il microprofilo dei calchi, dei gessi; /e dunque al diecimila non si vede più nulla, solo lampi di aste, teste vuote di em, di en” [“at three thousand percent, however, each letter is not as smooth, it has the rough filigree, the micro-profile of casts, or plasters; / and so at ten thousand one can't see anything anymore, just flashes of pipes, empty heads of Ms, of Ns”]. In “Nuvole, io” [“Clouds, I”], Antonella Anedda too reflects on the limits of the relationship between writing and technology:

Dunque riapro la finestra dello schermo
ritrovo il documento, esito davanti alla tastiera.
Salvo in una nube l'insalvabile.

[Then I reopen the window on the screen,
I find the document, I hesitate in front of the keyboard
I save in a cloud the unsalvageable.]

Technology is merely a tool, it is not what can save poetry from its end, nor can it replace poetry's radical difference within human forms of communication. Everything that we write with a computer or a phone is saved as a document in a normalizing process which somehow denies poetry's radical appeal for difference. Reinforcing this idea, in her poem entitled "Annales," Anedda discusses Tacitus's literary style in his eponymous book on the Roman wars: "la nudità dei fatti, / l'assenza o quasi di aggettivi, / il gerundio che evita inutili giri di parole" ["bare facts / almost complete absence of adjectives / the gerund that prevents useless periphrasis"]. Tacitus's language "says only what is necessary." It is the language of history. But "how—Anedda asks herself, and us—"can one say these wars otherwise?" In contrast with the descriptive language of history or the standardized language of computers, poetry does not record or save anything, its end is, in fact, to say things otherwise, to see them otherwise, to touch reality in another way.

Resistance

"A difficult, complex, and slow art like poetry can only appear as a niche of resistance and friction in the neoliberal era of the serial, of the instantaneous, and of compulsive enjoyment." This sense that poetry is currently living out a condition of resistance does not belong only to Massimo Gezzi; it is also shared by many other poets gathered in this volume. According to Elio Pecora, poetry is Ulyssean, possessing "the dark and throbbing blood of those who resist." For Laura Pugno, poetry is like the Leopardian broom flower, which "can resist anywhere," even "against the piles of trash" that Maurizio Cucchi evokes as a metaphor of Italy's present. It can resist against "abuse, convention, the subtraction of meaning"—Nanni Balestrini's main conviction since the publication of the groundbreaking anthology *I novissimi* (1961), of which he is the last remaining representative. We can thus assume that today's community of Italian poets does not have much in common with the citizens of Cavafy's poem from which we started. Without walls, resources, or any other arms than words, Italian poets are neither ready nor hopeful for an invasion. However, they know that if an end is near, so too is a new beginning. An image transmits the sense of this innate resistance of poetry. It is that of the *stlanik*, a Siberian pine tree, whose existence Fabio Pusterla discovered in a short story by Varlam Šalamov. "This little tree," writes Pusterla, "has the incredible capacity to anticipate the change of the seasons: before snow and ice knock on the forest's door, the *stlanik* bends down to the ground and lies there the entire winter. After several months, when everything seems to be still in the grip of ice, the *stlanik* rises mysteriously, because it feels the arrival of spring." Like this tiny tree, poetry is more necessary when it seems impossible. It sends us a message even when it looks defeated, a message of vitality and change. For Pusterla poetry resists "[b]order / after border," and like the bees buzzing around the erased words in the Emilio Isgrò's image that features on our cover, poets form the active community that guards language and its meaning, even when nothing, apparently is all that is left.

