

Antike und Abendland

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Beiträge zum Verständnis der Griechen und Römer
und ihres Nachlebens

herausgegeben von

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ALBERTO COMPARINI

Iris, between Montale and Celan

I. IRIS

1° Nom d'une divinité de la mythologie grecque, qui était la messagère des dieux. Déployant son écharpe, elle produisait l'arc-en-ciel.

2° Nom propre de femme, dont les poètes se servent pour désigner une femme aimée et même quelque dame lorsqu'on veut taire le nom.

3° Petite planète.

R. Char, *Sur le franc-bord* (1953)¹

1. *Between History and Theory. Notes on Iris in the Twentieth Century*

In the history of twentieth-century Western poetry, the messenger of the gods and personification of the rainbow, Iris (Ἴρις, -ιδος)², holds a privileged position in the poetics of Eugenio Montale (1896–1981) and Paul Celan (1920–1970). Specifically, her presence plays a decisive role in the poems *Iride* (1943–1944)³ and *Sprachgitter* (1957)⁴, collected respectively in the books of poems *La bufera e altro* (1956) – as the first text of the fifth section (*Silvae*) – and in *Sprachgitter* (1959) – as the fourth text of the third section (III).⁵

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Andrea Capra and Sepp Gumbrecht for reading the manuscript, for their invaluable suggestions, and for their endless support; and to S., for her *Sprachgitter*.

² Cf. Hesiod, *Theog.*, 233–235.

³ In the absence of the manuscript of the poem, it is not possible to identify the dates of composition of *Iride* with any certainty. In the notes to the 1956 edition of the *La bufera e altro*, we read that the «*Silvae* (esclusa *Iride* che è del '46) sono state scritte tra il '44 e il '50». The statement is incorrect, because we know that *Iride* was first published on 7 April 1945 in the Barbèra edition of *Finisterre* (1945); moreover, the poem had its second printing in May 1945, following *Finisterre*, in the journal *Poesia*, a quarterly magazine edited by the Italian writer and intellectual Enrico Falqui (1901–1974), in which the date 1943–1944 is reported at the bottom of the poem in round brackets, which probably corresponds to the period of composition of the text. In the rich and diverse bibliography, in addition to the important essay by Siti 1983, 97–138, see the recent comments and contributions by Ott 2006, 205–219; Romolini 2012, 237–252; Comparini 2014, 67–147; Campeggiani-Scaffai 2019, 235–255.

⁴ Initially, Barbara Wiedemann had traced the poem to Celan's Viennese period and identified the dates of composition of the text (14 June 1957–8 October 1957; cf. Wiedemann 2018, 752–754). However, after the publication of Celan's letters (2019), it was revealed that *Sprachgitter* appears to have been composed in Paris between 1 and 2 May 1957 (Wiedemann 2019, 238). Furthermore, before being published in its final version in the eponymous collection of poems (1959), *Sprachgitter* was printed in the journal *Jahresring* in 1957. On *Sprachgitter*, see Bollack 1988; Homann 1999, 601–677; Birus 2005; Perloff 2006, 177–202; Räsänen 2006, 352–364; Tobias 2006, 19–22; Ryan 2012, 171–179.

⁵ In the ample Celanian *Forschung* in Italy – cf. D'Eredità-Miglio-Zimarri 2015 –, there are many studies dedicated to the relationship between Celan and the Italian poets of the twentieth century. On Andrea Zanzotto and Celan, see Waterhouse 1998 and Carrera 2004; on Eugenio Montale and Celan, Italiano 2009; on Vittorio Sereni and Celan, Richia 2012, Cordibella 2013. For a general overview of Celan's reception in Italy, see Borso 2020.

Compared to two close twentieth-century antecedents such as *Iris de la noche* (1923) by Antonio Machado (1875–1939) and *Iris by Night* (1936) by Robert Frost (1874–1963), we come across to different aesthetic receptions, cultural frameworks, and textual strategies of Iris, for both Machado and Frost describe the nocturnal epiphany of the rainbow and its phenomenological effects on the lyrical self, in a way that the classical component is nearly absent.⁶ On the contrary, Iris reception in Montale and Celan is situated within a hermeneutic process that we shall define as ‘mytho-poietic’: it is aimed at the creation (ποιεῖν) of new mythological figures and therefore of new stories (μῦθοι). While retaining the role they played in the ancient Greek-Latin tradition, the new messengers of gods become figures that are now earthly and transfigured, but ontologically human, endowed (or emptied) of a body and a feminine form that *also* belong to the empirical world. It is, in other words, the creation of incarnate divinities that allow the lyric self to be able to communicate, convey or even express certain messages (ethical and historical alike), and of which Iris, as an intermediary (μετάγγελος) between gods and men, makes herself the bearer through her action in the world.⁷

As we shall see through an analysis of the two texts, the reception of Iris is syncretic in both Montale and Celan’s case: while preserving the messenger function attributed to her in her first Hesiodic incarnation (one later accepted by Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, among many others), Iris gathers in her name and in her textual (and macro-textual) presence various types of elements, ranging from the physical-visual (the gaze, the eye, the iris, the pupil, the eyelid) to the symbolic (the prodigious character of the rainbow as an element of union between heaven and earth through the curvature and the iridescence left by Iris during her journey). In this regard, both Montale’s epiphany of «Iri del Canaan»⁸ and Celan’s «Iris, Schwimmerin»⁹ take on an exquisitely hermeneutic value within their respective texts and the collections to which they belong, to the extent that the presence/absence of these figures in *La bufera e altro* and in *Sprachgitter* denotes a dialectical trend, either positive or negative, of the relationship between the self and the world, on the one hand, and the self and the thou, on the other.

⁶ In *Iris by Night* (*A Further Range*, 1936), the rainbow metaphorically welcomes the self and the thou into a relational ring («gathered them together in a ring»), in a private circle where the two «elected friends» follow a temporality that does not correspond to the historical time of the world («And we stood in it softly circled round / From all division time or foe can bring / In a relation of elected friends»). In *Iris de la noche* (*Nuevas canciones*, 1924), instead, the suspended temporality is suggested by the verbal inflection (always in the present tense) that describes and characterizes the nocturnal motion of a train headed to Madrid («Hacia Madrid, una noche, / va el tren por el Guadarrama») and, along with it, a reflection on the mortal condition of humanity through the gaze of a tragic passenger («Hay un trágico viajero, / que debe ver cosas raras, / y habla solo y, cuando mira, / nos borra con la mirada»). Quotations are taken from Frost 1979, 416–418, and Machado 1975, 262–263.

⁷ As Plato already noted in the *Cratylus*, the speaking name “Ἰρις stems from the Greek verb εἶπειν, ‘to speak’, ‘to announce’ (*Cratylus*, 407e–408b). The issue, however, is not entirely philologically resolved, even if, as Bonadeo notes, «this does not affect at all the antiquity of the paronymology “Ἰρις/εἶπειν, which, if it cannot trace back directly to Plato, can still be ascribed to his ancient commentators» (Bonadeo 2004, 79, n. 12); my translation. On Iris, see Weicker 1916, 2037–2043; Gualandi 1961; Kossatz-Deissmann 1990; Bonadeo 2004; Chantraine 2009, 451; Tanganelli 2018.

⁸ Montale 1980, 240.

⁹ Celan 2002, 32.

In this regard, however, it should be noted that in Montale and Celan there is no strictly philological or historical-literary interest in Iris, as occurs, for example, in a poet such as Giovanni Pascoli (1885–1912) – a point of both reference and comparison for the young Montale (in the 1925 and 1928 editions of *Ossi di seppia*) –, whose lyrical production is deeply rooted in classical Greek-Latin culture. For example, in the *Poemi conviviali* (1904), Pascoli, like Homer, plays on the nickname of the beggar Arnaeus, called «Irus» (*Od.* 18.6–7): in canto XIX, *Il ciclope*, Pascoli compares Arnaeus with Iris, saying that, like Taumante's daughter, he is «veloce» (but «non forte»), «è come Iri del cielo / che va sul vento con il piè di vento».¹⁰ Nevertheless, unlike the female figure, the beggar Arnaeus is a messenger unable to carry out his mission and, compared to Odysseus (and therefore also to Iris), he is presented in this section of the *Poemi conviviali* as a modern antihero. The linguistic mold of the Homeric epithets is evident (ἄλλόπος, ποδῆνεμος ὠκέα) and takes up the translation of *Il.* 8.196 that Pascoli had already published in 1899 in the scholastic edition *Sul limitare* («Iride [...] rapida piedi-di-vento / [...] Iride piedi-veloci», glosses Pascoli, «è la dea invincibile che scende, nell'arcuato sentiero dei sette colori, nelle sere di tempesta» in order to bring a «consiglio dal cielo».¹¹ Furthermore, this aesthetic process shows how in Pascoli – but the claim can be extended to the passage from classicism to modernism between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the «varieties of modernist mythopoeia», to quote Michael Bell)¹² – the rewritings of the myth are still affected by a strong and sought-after dialectic coexistence between philology and interpretation, between literature and history.

Likewise, let us also consider a poet such as Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) – whose verse will accompany and influence Paul Celan throughout his entire life¹³ –, author of the poem *La Grâce Exilée*, later collected in the *Calligrammes* (1918). In this text, we find a «nouvelle Iris ou nouvelle Vierge Nimbée dans son arc-en-ciel»¹⁴ hidden among the verses dedicated to Marie Laurencin, but then sent, as is well known, to Madeleine Pagès, together with the poems *La boucle retrouvée*, *Refus de la colombe*, *Les feux du bivouac*, *Les grenadines repentantes*, *Tourbillon de mouches*, *L'adieu du cavalier*. Although the reference to Iris is figurative and indirect («Et l'arc-en-ciel est exilé / Puisqu'on exile qui l'irise / Mais un drapeau s'est envolé / Prendre ta place au vent de bise»), the iconography of the divine messenger remains linked to the multiform colors of the rainbow (*varios induta colores*, *Met.* 1.270), so that, like the Latin poets (not only Ovid, but also Gaius Valerius Flaccus and Statius), Apollinaire fixes in the literary memory of the text and of the reader «the colors and the shape of the rainbow on the bright and colorful belt of the goddess».¹⁵ In *La Grâce Exilée*, in the wake of Ovid's Latin model (*in terram pictos delapsa per arcus*, *Met.* 14.838), Iris coincides nominally and figuratively with the movement of the rainbow («mon arc-en-ciel»), and in doing so she also coincides with her own material and celestial journey between earth and sky (*induitur velamina mille colorum / Iris et arcuato caelum*

¹⁰ Pascoli 2003, 111.

¹¹ Pascoli 1899, 13. On Pascoli poet-translator from the Greek, see the recent (and updated) work by Sensini 2018.

¹² Bell 1997, 41–119.

¹³ Cf. Jung 2015, 295–317.

¹⁴ Poupon 1967, 113.

¹⁵ Bonadeo 2004, 65. My translation.

curvamine signans, *Met.* 11.589–590).¹⁶ Although Apollinaire refers to the messenger of the gods as «infante» – therefore as the one who, etymologically, «does not know, is unable to speak» –, the phenomenology of Iris remains linked to the plurality of colors that characterizes her otherworldly motion («couleurs charmantes / [...] écharpes changeantes»). Finally, when Iris loses her role as a divine messenger among men («Mais un drapeau s'est envolé / Prendre ta place au vent de bise»), the relationship between form (rainbow) and figure (Iris) remains phenomenologically perceptible through the effect of her action which, even in exile, is still able to infuse the life of the self with the various colors of the rainbow, showing him a form, albeit a precarious one, of iridescence («Et l'arc-en-ciel est exilé / Puisqu'on exile qui l'irise».)¹⁷

Once the threshold of the early twentieth century (and, more generally, of European modernism) has been crossed, in Montale and Celan the historical-literary memory of new literary characters of mythological origin has changed according to a *principium individuationis* of a poietic order. This process responds to positions of cultural relativism that exhibits the need to overturn the dialectic between philology and interpretation, between literature and history, aimed at bringing the literary discourse back into a paradigm of hermeneutic matrix.¹⁸ On the one hand, both Montale and Celan's representations of Iris have changed entirely – Iris no longer has fast feet, as in the *Iliad* (πόδας ὠκεία, *Il.* 2.790), nor is she endowed with golden wings (ρυσόπτερος, *Il.* 8.398), nor is she swift as the storm (ἄελλόπους, *Il.* 8.409–410), nor does she present herself, as in Ovid, through her own *varios induta colores* (*Met.* 1.270), in *terram pictos delapsa per arcus* (*Met.* 14.838). On the other hand, what constitutes a clear and decisive element of separation between literary tradition and the modern rewriting of the myth of Iris is, precisely, the function she fulfills in *La bufera e altro* and in *Sprachgitter*. In both cases, Iris's presence invokes the crucial problem of the communicative power of poetry, that is, the aesthetic and formal possibilities of the poetic word to be capable of communicating a certain vision of the world to the self and the reader – however fragmentary, mutilated and/or partial –, so that the idea of the arch as a figurative and iconic path in turn becomes the expression of an interrupted path, of a real aesthetic *Kehre*, to quote Heidegger, in which the truth of being, hatched from poetry, appears as the very event of language.

The modern poet, who is confronted with the memorial legacy of the war conflict and the extermination of the Jewish people, can no longer rely exclusively on the auratic dimension of the literary tradition or on the function that figures such as Iris – in addition to Orpheus, Eurydice, Leda and Aphrodite – covered in the classical age, and in the subse-

¹⁶ Moreover, as Bonadeo notes, the «the link between Iris and the iris with the passage is finally revealed concretely and iconically in the image of the rainbow as the route on which the goddess walks in and through. If the notion of *via*, path, according to some linguists, is inherent in the term itself *iris*, the definition of the arch as a path, which theoretically is a Virgilian and an Ovidian literary creation, destined to crystallize as a way of speaking [...], actually it perhaps has its origins in a collective imagination that goes beyond the boundaries of Greek and Roman times. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the rainbow-passage association, in its simplicity that finds a justification in the immediate evidence of the phenomenon and its morphology, knows a transversal diffusion and, crossing spatial, chronological and cultural barriers, is present in the most disparate areas on a popular level as well as on a cultured level, in folktales and legends as well as in literary works» (Bonadeo 2004, 102). My translation.

¹⁷ Apollinaire 1965, 249. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Cf. Hardwick 2003, 98–120; Hutcheon 2006; Porter 2006, 2008; Lambropoulos 2010; Condello 2013, 2019; Richardson 2018; Fusillo 2019; Zgoll 2019.

quent modern rewritings by Rainer Maria Rilke (*Die Sonette an Orpheus*), H. D. (*Eurydice*), William Butler Yeats (*Leda and the Swan*), and William Carlos Williams (*Venus over the Desert*). In this sense, rather than a rewriting of myth, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of the creation of a new myth, of a new mythological metamorphosis of Iris. Poets such as Montale and Celan try, on the one hand, to assign new meanings to the literary tradition and, on the other hand, to resolve the epistemological crisis of the symbolic forms of art – in their case, lyric poetry – by inscribing these new myths into their own poetic system, and entrusting them with a specific function: religious syncretism (in Montale) and the loss of transcendence (in Celan).

The synchronic history of Iris – as well as her diachronic implications – in Montale and Celan unfolds mainly on two formal levels.¹⁹ The first is of a theoretical nature, to the extent that the construction of an intermediary between the self and the world (Montale), and the self and the thou (Celan) determines the confines and cognitive horizons of poetry, in other words, what lyric poetry can do through the enunciative and performative tools at its disposal. The second belongs to a hermeneutic order, given that the metamorphosis of Iris the messenger of the gods into a visiting angel and a visual body that emerges from the *grille* of language broadens the layers of meaning that the presence (and absence) of Iris produces in the text.

Bearing in mind the richness and semantic scope that Iris brings and further acquires in the textual and macro-textual structures of *La bufera e altro* and *Sprachgitter*, what I would like to examine in this essay is the relationship between *poiesis* and reception, between poetic creation and the interpretation of myth, which the metamorphosis of Iris entails. By means of a comparative examination of Iris's new forms, I shall try to demonstrate that Montale and Celan's aesthetic operations start from a principle of a metamorphic order, that is, a change of state between past and present, between continuity and discontinuity, which characterizes Iris's changing state.²⁰ Relying on a phenomenological analysis grounded on the relationship between body, voice and poetry – and therefore by an elastic and plural vision of the concept of *Stimmung*²¹ – the essay has two main objectives: on the one hand, to open a first breach in the history of the literary reception of Iris in the twentieth century; on the other hand, to offer a comparative reading of Montale and Celan's poetry, relating both the theoretical-performative dimension of Iris and the hermeneutical implications that the presence/absence of the messenger of the gods entails in *La bufera e altro* and in *Sprachgitter*.

¹⁹ In this paper, I shall refer to synchrony and diachrony as hermeneutic linguistic functions. By hermeneutic linguistic function I mean the phenomenological dimension that language expresses and produces based on the way in which we comment on and read a text and/or a series of texts. Within this phenomenological-hermeneutical framework and within the overall argument of my paper, synchrony refers to the singularity of a text, i.e., how Iris appears in her unique, singular presence in one specific text (such as *Iride* or *Sprachgitter*); conversely, diachrony refers to the potential development of a textual figure such as Iris within a collection of poems (i.e., *La bufera e altro*, *Sprachgitter*): how Iris changes (or does not change) after her first epiphany, and how this eventual development affects (or does not affect) readers' understanding of Iris's presence in both Montale and Celan's works.

²⁰ On the relationship between phenomenology and metamorphosis in the arts, see the theoretical considerations by Tymieniecka 2004, xi–xvi, and by Kimmel 2004, 1–16.

²¹ Cf. Gumbrecht 2011.

After introducing certain structural, formal, and semantic elements of *Iride* and *Sprachgitter*, in the next section the analysis of Iris's reception will follow three strands of argument. First, I dwell on the syncretic value of the messenger of the gods in Montale and Celan, identifying the aesthetic-formal plurality that characterizes her epiphany (the dialectic between absence and presence; the disembodied corporeality and the physiognomy of the feminine thou). Second, I address the performative dimension of Iris, by describing her action and the agency she exerts on language in *Iride* and *Sprachgitter*. Finally, through an analysis of the traces – or textual residues – of Iris in the poetry collections *La bufera e altro* and *Sprachgitter*, I show how the reception of the messenger of the gods in Montale and Celan is of a synchronic, epiphanic nature, and how her diachronic effects in the life of the subject and of the lyric world that Iris inhabits are exhausted in the event of the poems *Iride* and *Sprachgitter*.

2. *‘Iride’, ‘Iris’, and the Voices of Poetry*

The epiphany of Iris in Montale and Celan follows two different lyrical-performative principles: absence, on the one hand, and presence, on the other. In the first case, *Iride* explains the new condition and function of Montale's feminine thou, the definitive metamorphosis of the beloved woman (the American poetess Irma Brandeis, already present, with the name of Clizia, in the second collection of the Italian poet: *Le occasioni*, 1939) into a visiting angel who has abandoned her own private destiny (the microcosm of the *Occasioni*) – and, therefore, her own physical and poetic body – to access the universal dimension of collective history in *La bufera e altro*, where in the decisive poem *La primavera hitleriana* Clizia «[si] abbàcin[a] nell'Altro e si distrugg[e] / in Lui, per tutti».²² For the lyric self, this new mission of the Montalean angel involves a progressive loss of the privileged relationship with the thou and, at least in the cycle of poems for Clizia (between *Le occasioni* and *La bufera e altro*, between 1939 and 1956), an idea of lyrical performativity of the thou in absence.²³ In the second case, however, *Sprachgitter* configures Celan's lyric speech as «Kunst und Poesie der ‘Wiederholung’ [...], die ihr Objekt in ‘Richtung nach vorn’ erinnern»,²⁴ to the extent that the entire poem – and its idea of the world – revolves around a horizontal (and not vertical) correlation between «Zeitlichkeit und Materialität»,²⁵ even when this correlation is made oblique and optative by the inscrutable «speech-grille». In other words, the presence and the deictic (pronominal) relationship of the self, the thou, and the Iris²⁶ become a direct expression of the «eigentümliche Materialität der Erde»,²⁷ of the performative capacity of poetry to be able to take root in the bodies to express, through

²² Montale 1980, 248.

²³ «c'è *Iride*, nella quale la sfinge delle *Nuove stanze*, che aveva lasciato l'oriente per illuminare i ghiacci e le brume del nord, torna a noi come continuatrice e simbolo dell'eterno sacrificio cristiano. Paga lei per tutti, sconta per tutti» (Montale 1996, 1483–1484).

²⁴ Miglio 2013, 99.

²⁵ Birus 2005, 355.

²⁶ As Celan himself writes, the concept of (lyrical and philosophical) presence must be read in relational terms: «Nicht wie oft ein Wort vorkommt, sondern in wessen Begleitung bzw. ohne wessen Begleitung es daherkommt» (Celan 2005, 125). Cf. also Hartung 1996, 25–29.

²⁷ Werner 1998, 107.

their voices (*Stimmen*, as the first text of *Sprachgitter* states) and the atmospheres (*Stimmungen*) that the respective bodies produce in presence,²⁸ what language is not (anymore) able to verbalize.²⁹

Iride is divided into two parts, separated by three asterisks that denote not only a structural and mechanical break in the poetic flow, but also a change in its thematic articulation. Each part consists of three stanzas of seven lines of various sizes, while the last stanza features a three-line dismissal, followed by a concluding couplet. Specifically, the first three stanzas constitute, in their semantic and syntactic complexity, an evocative rite of Iris by the lyric self: the poem opens with a temporal subordinate («Quando di colpo san Martino smotta») and with a spatial localization of the text (the lake «Ontario»), followed by a phenomenology of naturalistic-pagan (the «braci», the «schiocchi di pigne», the «cenere», the «fumo d'un infuso di papaveri»), Christian (the «Volto insanguinato sul sudario») and oriental (the «zàffiri celesti», «i palmizi», «le cicogne su una zampa») elements.³⁰ Through this dialectic between the profane, the sacred, and the religious, between the red signs of the celestial catastrophe, the Veil of Veronica and the fictitious signs of a salvific place («questo e poco altro [...] // è quanto mi giunge da te»),³¹ Montale establishes from the very first stanza the ethical premises of Iris's sacrifice, the Christophoric mission from which she can no longer escape. Such fate will occur in the second part of the text when Iris – with the name of «Iri del Canaan», a syntagm that preserves the pagan and Christian nature of the rainbow, as well as the spatial and utopian idea of the Promised Land – will return in a new guise among men («Ma se ritorni non sei tu, è mutata / la tua storia terrena») to bring Christ's message to completion («perché l'opera Sua (che nella tua / si trasforma) dev'esser continuata») through her own sacrifice «nella notte del mondo»,³² that «compito di inconsapevole Cristofora» that does not «consente altro trionfo che non sia l'insuccesso quaggiù». ³³

Sprachgitter is a heterostrophic poem divided into six parts (respectively of 1, 3, 2, 4, 4 and 5 lines), the entirely parenthetical fourth part of which presents an indirect dialogue between the lyric self and a (feminine) thou, suggested by Celan in hypothetical and potential terms («Wär ich wie du», «Wärst du wie ich») through an interrogative rhetorical construct («Standen wir nicht / unter einem Passat?») that culminates in closing with an affirmation – or, better, with a declaration of (non)existence on the part of the self – of total cognitive and communicative extraneousness («Wir sind Fremde»).³⁴ Unlike Montale, who gives Iris the robes of a Christian-pagan angel carrying the message of Christ, Celan does not enact any mechanisms of evocation (or introduction) of Iris, nor does he perform an angelic transfiguration of her in *Sprachgitter*, although the poem – and, metonymically, the entire collection of poems – is set in a church.³⁵

²⁸ On the relationship between voices, bodies, and presence, see Gumbrecht 2004. On Celan and the presence of poetry, see Valtolina 2015.

²⁹ On the Celanian concept of *Stimmen*, see Lampart 2013, 364–381.

³⁰ Montale 1980, 239.

³¹ Montale 1980, 239.

³² Montale 1980, 240.

³³ Montale 1997, 92.

³⁴ Birus 2005, 209–212; Lehmann 2012, 73–74.

³⁵ Cf. Wiedemann 2003, 652–653; Birus 2005, 209–210; Perloff 2006, 186–188; Lehmann 2012, 77–79.

From the first line, Iris appears in all her textual polysemy (mythological, biological, and nominal) as a referent, as a term of comparison for the lyric self, and, finally, as the body of poetry: Iris is a round eye between the speech-grille («Augenrund zwischen den Stäben»), it is at the same time an eyelid and a creature similar to a butterfly («Flimmertier Lid»), it is subject («Augenrund») and object («einen Blick») of sight, it is a disenchanted figure («traumlos und trüb»), a liquid body devoid of verbal messages to convey («Schwimmerin») who lives waiting for the parenthetical word of the self («Standen wir nicht / unter *einem* Passat?»), before silence («zwei / Mundvoll Schweigen») abruptly interrupts the visual and relational contact, separated by the grille of language, between the I and the thou. This condition of waiting is further emphasized by the passage from the third (*Iris*) to the second (*du*) singular person, and therefore by the presence of several textual figures (the self, Iris, the thou) who cannot reach a communicative dialogic (or plural) dimension so as to overcome the physical, linguistic and existential distance – as indeed Celan himself wrote to Rudolf Hirsch in a letter of July 1958³⁶ – impressed by *Sprachgitter*, by the grille of words, and thus produce a linguistic-performative act between the two relational subjects of the poem.³⁷

2.1. *The Syncretic Bodies of Iris*

As previously stated, in Montale's and Celan's poetry, Iris does not preserve the aesthetic-formal traits typical of the classical iconographic tradition. She is a syncretic figure who, on the one hand, contains in her name a semantic and historical richness such as to make her identity poetically plural, and who, on the other hand, tries to solve problems of a historical and ethical nature on the level of language according to divergent religious postures (Christian-Pagan, in Montale, apophatic, in Celan).

Now, it is true that in Montale Iris fully represents a Christological transfiguration of Clizia, and therefore of Irma Brandeis – whose name, which can be broken down into the German words *Brand* (‘fire’) and *Eis* (‘ice’), is fully perceptible in the line «fuoco / di gelo»³⁸ –, while in Celan Iris seems to perform a pragmatically synchronic function (of intermediary between the I and the thou, between being and language), without acquiring further diachronic or nominal developments. In the poetic system of the Italian poet Iris is neither configured nor presented simply as a new form of Clizia, precisely by virtue of the syncretic and plural dimension that characterizes her being. As Clizia's metamorphosis, Iris still retains some physical and moral traits, now however extended to a range of action that goes beyond the sphere of the self – and which therefore tends to escape any rigid and taxonomic classification. In this sense, one cannot help but notice the association

³⁶ «Ich sage mir aber gleichzeitig, daß mir im ›Sprachgitter‹ auch das Existentielle, die Schwierigkeit alles (Zueinander) Sprechens und zugleich dessen Struktur mitspricht (vgl. ›Raumgitter‹), damit ist das zunächst amphibisch Anmutende wieder zurückgedrängt – Sie sehen ich zögere noch» (Celan-Hirsch 2004, 44).

³⁷ On the relationship between lyric poetry and performativity, see the mimetic-fictional positions of Klaus Hempfer 2013 and the non-mimetic and non-fictional positions of Jonathan Culler 2015. For a more historical-literary vision of lyric poetry – and in particular of its modern understanding –, see Lamping 1993 and Mazzoni 2005.

³⁸ Montale 1980, 239.

between Iris and the butterfly (the metamorphosis of the chrysalis, already described by Montale in the poem *Crisalide* in *Ossi di seppia*), that is, between the female thou and the canonical animals of Montale's lyric bestiary (the jackals, the Western capercaillie, the eel, the fly, the fox) – to which we must also add the animals of the fourth stanza of *Iride*: the wildcat lynx («lince»), the lovely tabby («bel soriano»), the hummingbird («uccello mosca»);³⁹ Similarly, one also notices the salvific function that the pupil – and, synecdochally, the gaze of the beloved («i tuoi / occhi d'acciaio»,⁴⁰ «Guarda ancora / in alto, Clizia, è la tua sorte»)⁴¹ – plays between *Le occasioni* and *La bufera e altro*. Nor, similarly, should the space-time dimension of Iris be underestimated, given that the flower «Iris fiorentina» (the White Giaggiolo or Florentine Lily) can be linked as much to Montale's stay in Florence (and therefore to the poet's second collection of poems, *Le occasioni*) as well as to one of the most important poems of *La bufera e altro*, *Il giglio rosso* (the lily is the symbol, as well as the emblem, of Florence), whose lines foretell the mortuary destiny, the sacrifice of the thou *in* and *through* Iris: «il giglio rosso già *sacrificato* / sulle lontane crode / ai vischi che la sciarpa ti tempestano / d'un gelo incorruttibile e le mani, – / fiore di fosso che ti s'aprirà / sugli argini solenni ove il brusio / del tempo più non affatica...: a scuotere / l'arpa celeste, a far la morte amica».⁴²

In Celan, the semantic progression (*Augenrund*, *Lid*, *Blick*, *Iris*) that leads to the epiphanic materialization of Iris as *Schwimmerin* between the bars (*Stäben*) of the grille responds to the need to recover – or at least to experience on a poetic level – the communicative and evocative power of lyrical language through the eye («Es wird noch ein Aug sein, / ein fremdes, neben / dem unsern: stumm / unter steinernem Lid», writes Celan in *Zuversicht*).⁴³ In *Sprachgitter* – and, more generally, in Celan's œuvre – the eye and/or the gaze gave rise to a new voice of the lyrical self – the *Augenstimmen* in *Windgerecht*⁴⁴, the *Augentausch* in *Nacht*⁴⁵ –, particularly when the voices of the world become incapable of expressing the pain of both the past and the present («*Stimmen* von Nesselweg her», «*Jakobsstimme*», «*Stimmen* im Innern der Arche»),⁴⁶ of the historical and biblical time that the self experiences phenomenologically through the (poetic) world. Moreover, a (negative) vision of the relationship between the self and the world is already evident in a text such as *Stimmen*, whose anaphoric series (by *Stimme*) culminates in the knowing subject's awareness that there are no voices inhabiting the spaces of the self («*Keine / Stimme*»),⁴⁷

³⁹ Scholars do not agree on the function and meaning that this series of animals plays in *Iride*. For an overview and a textual discussion of this (indecipherable) semantic series, see Romolini 2012, 243–246; Comparini 2014, 110–115; Campeggiani-Scaffai 2019, 245–247.

⁴⁰ Montale 1980, 177.

⁴¹ Montale 1980, 249.

⁴² Montale 1980, 197. Emphasis mine. On the relationship between *Iride* and *Il giglio rosso*, see Montale 1980, 962: «*Silvae*. *Iride*: il personaggio è quello del *Giglio rosso* e di tutta la serie di *Finisterre*. Ritorna in *Primavera hitleriana*, in varie *Silvae* (anche col nome di Clizia) e nel *Piccolo testamento*. Già si era incontrato in molte poesie delle *Occasioni*: p. es. nei *Mottetti* e nelle *Nuove stanze*. *Iride* è una poesia che ho sognato e poi tradotta da una lingua inesistente: ne sono forse più il *medium* che l'autore. Altra è la figura della *Ballata scritta in una clinica*; altra ancora quella dei «*Flashes*» e *dediche* e dei *Madrigali*».

⁴³ Celan 2002, 17.

⁴⁴ Celan 2002, 34.

⁴⁵ Celan 2002, 35.

⁴⁶ Celan 2002, 11–13. A «*Verbindung zur Vergangenheit*» (Seng 1998, 273).

⁴⁷ Celan 2002, 13.

nor scars (traces, *Spuren*) on the bodies of those who have survived the inscrutable motion of History. At most, among those who are survivors, that is, witnesses of History,⁴⁸ a faint sign remains («ins Grün / der Wasserfläche geritzt»),⁴⁹ to measure of the eye («ein / Fruchtblatt, augengroß, tief / geritzt»), a «Spätgeräusch, stundenfremd»⁵⁰ from which, albeit late (*spät*), a residue of resin and tears drips, which within the poem becomes a legacy (though ephemeral) of the past.⁵¹ The eye, in this sense, prefigures the action of Iris in *Sprachgitter* and inscribes her way of being – and with it her status as a character in poetry⁵² – within the collection macro-structure, in such a way «daß bewahrt sei / ein durchs Dunkel getragenes Zeichen».⁵³

2.2. *Iris, between Action and Language*

On the performative level, moving between the poles of absence and presence, the Iris of Montale and Celan converges in a common and dialectical direction, to the extent that it welcomes and fulfills the role of messenger received by the classical literary tradition. However, it is not a question of bringing the message of the gods among men, but of transmitting and bringing back the sense of being in the world through her own private action – an action which, taking root in language, defines the distinctive traits of the new nature of Iris in performative (and *not* aesthetic) terms.⁵⁴ On the one hand, the Montalean visiting angel, after a long absence and distance from the lyric self («ti dileguasti / in quel nimbo di vischi e pungitopi») which had led her to abandon all forms of earthly presence – and individual and private salvation («è mutata / la tua storia terrena») – to embrace the saving message of Christ («Perché l'opera tua (che della Sua / è una forma)»), she went through the «la notte del mondo» to return to human beings with a new message of salvation («perché l'opera Sua (che nella tua / si trasforma) dev'esser continuata»),⁵⁵ replacing herself not only with Christ, but also the light of the «sole di San Martino» (now obscured, due to her absence).

On the other hand, placing herself as an intermediary body and emerging as an anaphoric result in the game of gazes between the I and the thou, Iris as *Schwimmerin* crosses the physical grille of both language and space thanks to the liquid nature of her being;

⁴⁸ Cf. Benveniste 1969.

⁴⁹ Celan 2002, 11.

⁵⁰ Celan 2002, 13.

⁵¹ In *Ein Auge, offen*, after describing the pain of the entire visual apparatus of the self («Schmerzende Augapfelftiefe, / das Lid / steht nicht im Wege, die Wimper / zählt nicht, was eintritt») Celan offers a similar image in the final triplet, when a «Träne, halb, / die schärfere Linse, beweglich, / holt dir die Bilder» (Celan 2002, 51), thus assigning to the tear – and therefore to the suffering eye – the power to capture images of the world.

⁵² On characters in (lyric) poetry, cf. Testa 1999; Winko 2010; Kunin 2019.

⁵³ Celan 2002, 23. For a general view of the lyrical paradigm as *Augenblick*, see Miner 2017.

⁵⁴ While in Celan the body of Iris is an integral part – liquid, as *Schwimmerin* – of the bodies of the two lovers, of which she is the eyelid, the gaze, the eye and, precisely, the iris (*traumlos und trüb*), in Montale the body of Iris is almost absent and is distinguished in the world by her origin (American and Jewish, the «Ontario» and the «Canaan»), her «segno, un ammicco», her past («il naufragio / delle mie genti, delle tue») and the ethical and moral uniqueness of her heart («Cuore d'altri non è simile al tuo»).

⁵⁵ Montale 1980, 240.

and before the silence takes physical-corporal forms in the last stanza («zwei / Mundvoll Schweigen») both in the gaze and in the words of the two lovers, Iris is able to throw a hint, a sense of light (*Lichtsinn*) in the spout of iron («in der eisernen Tülle».⁵⁶ If, then, in *Tenebrae* the eyes and mouth were open and empty («Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer»), and hinted at a negative dialogical form between an indefinite collectivity («Nah sind wir») and battered («Windschief gingen wir hin, / gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken / nach Mulde und Maar») from the fate of history, and the body of the Lord («dein Leib, Herr»),⁵⁷ the floating light («schwimmendes Licht», writes Celan in *mit Brief und Uhr*)⁵⁸ that Iris embodies in her liquid status as «Schwimmerin» in *Sprachgitter*, is charged with meaning (*Sinn*) through the encounter between the irises of the two lovers, whose silent mouths show the power of the gaze and of the shared moment of light in the darkness of words – even when those words cannot be pronounced, uttered.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the appearance of Iris causes that stub of light (*der Lichtstumpf*)⁶⁰ around which the aesthetic (and ethical) experience of *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* closed⁶¹ and becomes a partial source of communication between those who are able (or aspire) to inhabit the *Dunkelheit*, and therefore to say dark things to each other («wir sagen uns Dunkles»),⁶² to accept what Celan called the «Weltfracht».⁶³

Replacing Christ and the divine light that cannot penetrate the darkness of the night of the world, Iris appears as a performatively acting figure, to the extent that she carries and produces in the text the conditions required to convey a message of collective hope (in Montale) and dual communication (in Celan). The modern lyrical paradigm, therefore, passes from a strictly egocentric perspective – a narcissistic one, in the words of Guido Mazzoni (2005) – to a more performative one, linked to a concept of the agency of bodies and subjects engaged in poetic discourse. Montale and Celan therefore activate a process of definition of the subject through the action of an external agent (Iris) who, intervening in dynamics that are now both universal and private, transforms the event of poetry (the epiphany of Iris, the dialogue between the self and the thou) as the very place (*Ort*) of poetic saying, where the interrupted paths of language can be reconfigured starting from a return to the original saying, to what the (lyrical) world can disclose through the word. This does not imply that the word must be pronounced, on the contrary: both in Montale and Celan, Iris, the self, and the thou are silent, and wait in the «notte del mondo» and among the darkness of the grille for the word to gush out, to emerge and to name what surrounds them. Performativity, then, must be read for and through Iris's synchronic and diachronic modalities, that is, in light of the linguistic function that she exercises in the text and to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* that Iris's rainbow leaves, diachronically, in *La bufera e altro* and in *Sprachgitter*.

⁵⁶ Celan 2002, 32.

⁵⁷ Celan 2002, 27.

⁵⁸ Celan 2002, 18.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kim 2010, 85–91; Bogumil-Notz 2020, 78–82.

⁶⁰ In the last text of the 1955 collection, the swimmers («Schwimmer») are the dead («Ihr Toten»). Celan 2002, 140.

⁶¹ Celan 2004, 69.

⁶² Celan 2003, 97.

⁶³ Celan 2005, 97.

2.3. *Iris, between Synchrony and Diachrony*

Having defined Iris's performativity in terms of agency, that is, the ability to act, in presence and absence, in the world, there is one final point to discuss: the synchronic and diachronic dimension of the messenger Iris in Montale and Celan. In the overall economy of the collections *La bufera e altro* and *Sprachgitter*, Iris appears as a synchronic figure, a terrestrial deity appointed to a precise and singular epiphany that aims to explore the dimensions of language and poetry and potentially produce new conditions of communication and knowledge; on the other hand, as we shall see in the last part of this essay, the synchronic dimension of these figures is such that their task is exhausted within *Iride* and *Sprachgitter*, in the sacrificial «effigie di porpora» that had brought Iris back to the earthly spaces of the self, and between the two heart-gray puddles («die beiden / herzgrauen Lachen») that, similarly to the sky («der Himmel, herzgrau»), allow the irises of the two lovers to look at each other in silence through the epiphany of Iris.

Although Montale and Celan extend the synchronic horizons of the messenger to the entire collection, the traces of Iris are still noticeable in *La bufera e altro* and *Sprachgitter*, but only as a diachronic, weak expression of a communicative and poetic condition destined to fail and to weakly resist in the temples of History. On the one hand, through the representation of Iris in the guise of a fallen and fragile angel, defeated and mortal; on the other, through a deconstruction of Iris to the status of eye and eyelid. In this sense, compared to the classical tradition, in which the ontological status of a character (Iris as messenger of the gods) was guaranteed by the divine will and by the overall telos of the epic poems (in the *Iliad* and in the *Aeneid*, for example), Iris becomes the expression of a precarious condition, on a relational level, of existence; her presence in the lyric stations following *Iride* and *Sprachgitter* and within their respective macro-texts is peripheral, to the extent that only textual traces persist as iconographic *tesserae* that refer to the messenger of the gods, but only in a partial and allusive key. In other words, Iris's textual life ends with the extinction of the creative and communicative power of poetry, taking, on the one hand, in the *Piccolo testamento*, the ephemeral, but still resistant forms of a «tenue bagliore / strofinato» of «un fiammifero» that does not want to stop emitting heat (and therefore to stop guaranteeing life for those who gather around this hope of light and fire), and, on the other, in the (non) anthropological places of *Engführung*⁶⁴, the «Licht» of a «Stern» that, in the dusk («In der Eulenflucht»)⁶⁵ of gray days («taggrau»),⁶⁶ leaves traces of deep water through the shared, dialogical, pronounced word («die Gespräche»)⁶⁷.

Iris's earthly sacrifice, the loss of her private corporeality, was indeed to lay the foundations for getting out of the «tregenda / d'uomini che non sa questo tuo incenso»⁶⁸ that Clizia, in *Nuove stanze* (in *Le occasioni*), could only deal on the dual (I-thou), and not the universal (thou-we) plane. Yet, in the series of texts that follows *Iride* within the *Silvae* section – in the penultimate one (*Madrigali privati*), Iris-Clizia is absent and the entire series

⁶⁴ Cf. Schlosser 2016.

⁶⁵ Celan 2002, 67.

⁶⁶ Celan 2002, 68.

⁶⁷ Celan 2002, 68.

⁶⁸ Montale 1980, 177.

is dedicated to Maria Luisa Spaziani («Mia volpe»)⁶⁹ –, Montale returns to rely on the body and action of Clizia. It becomes clear and necessary, for example, in *L'orto*, where the «messaggera» (Iris) that once «leggev[a] l'ora chiara come in un libro / figgendo il duro sguardo di cristallo / bene in fondo»,⁷⁰ now cannot but resume human forms («labbri», «membra», «diti») and suffer, together with the self, the defeat of History («Se la forza / che guida il disco di già inciso fosse / un'altra, certo il tuo destino al mio / congiunto mostrerebbe un solco solo»).⁷¹ And again, a similar mechanism occurs in *La primavera hitleriana* («Guarda ancora / in alto, Clizia, è la tua sorte, tu / che il non mutato amor mutata serbi»)⁷² and in *L'ombra della magnolia* («Non è più il tempo dell'unisono vocale, / Clizia, il tempo del nume illimitato / che divora e rinsangua i suoi fedeli [...] // Addio»),⁷³ where the messenger is no longer there and is replaced by the nominal and performative return of the figure of Clizia (but devoid of any ethical and/or performative power).

With the decline of Iris, the temporary manifestation of Clizia and the new presence of the Volpe, the messianic, Christian-Pagan message of Iris can no longer oppose the earthly dimension – erotic material, on the one hand, and death on the other – of existence; and when in the last text of the *Silvae*, *L'anguilla* «l'anima verde che cerca / vita là dove solo / morde l'arsura e la desolazione»,⁷⁴ Iris can only be reduced to the state of «iride breve», to a biological-material, a bestial dimension of the body («l'anguilla, torcia, frusta, / freccia d'Amore in terra»),⁷⁵ but without manifesting the relational dimension of the gaze and eye contact between the I and the thou, as occurs instead in *Sprachgitter*. Although it retains, in the poet's literary memory, the carnal and distinctive traits of Clizia («i tuoi cigli»),⁷⁶ the eel no longer has the prophetic and ethical properties that could have allowed a collective redemption and escape for those who, in the earthly hell of *Finisterre*, clung with «squallide mani, / travolte» to the *Orecchini*, to the «lobi»⁷⁷ of the beloved woman. It will be no coincidence, then, that following this negative progression of the forms and functions of the thou, the collection ends up with the poem *Il sogno del prigioniero*, around a lyrically egocentric idea of poetic practice, an ethical need on the part of the subject to re-appropriate the cognitive tools of the world (the capacity to transform the «paglia» in «oro», to see and read the «lanterna vinosa» in a «focolare»).⁷⁸ In this last poem, Montale finally seeks to face the postwar aftermath («e ancora ignoro se sarò al festino / farcitore o farcito»)⁷⁹ without the thou being able to take divine or earthly forms («ho suscitato / iridi orizzontali», «mi sono alzato, sono ricaduto / nel fondo dove il secolo è il minuto»)⁸⁰ for assisting (again) the knowing subject.

⁶⁹ Montale 1980, 263.

⁷⁰ Montale 1980, 243.

⁷¹ Montale 1980, 244.

⁷² Montale 1980, 249.

⁷³ Montale 1980, 252.

⁷⁴ Montale 1980, 254.

⁷⁵ Montale 1980, 254.

⁷⁶ Montale 1980, 254.

⁷⁷ Montale 1980, 194.

⁷⁸ Montale 1980, 268.

⁷⁹ Montale 1980, 269.

⁸⁰ Montale 1980, 269.

In a 1959 fragment then collected in *Mikrolithen* (2005), Celan states that «es gibt, mit anderen Worten, ein dem Gedicht und nur ihm eigenes Sprach-Tabu, das nicht allein für seinen Wortschatz gilt, sondern auch für Kategorien wie Syntax, Rhythmus oder Lautung; vom Nichtgesagten her wird einiges verständlich; das Gedicht kennt das argumentum e silentio».⁸¹ In the regime of poetry, to know (*kennen*), to say (*sagen*), and to understand (*verstehen*) can emerge and produce new enunciative forms through the dialectic between *argumentum* and *silentio*, as was already envisaged in the homonymous lyric dedicated to René Char and published in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*. In the darkness of the night, between «Gold und Vergessen», in a progressive desire for light on the part of the self (and therefore for lyrical and communicative clarity: «was herauf-/ dämmern will neben den Tagen»), everyone can access the word flown over by the stars and submerged by the seas («das sternüberflogene Wort, / das meerübergossne»),⁸² so that the subject can try to assert himself («zu behaupten») between poetry and reality («Gedicht und Wirklichkeit») through a close and direct confrontation with the poetic word («mit dem dichterischen Wort»)⁸³

To take up an icastic image from Celan's notes to the famous *Meridian* speech, the place where this condition can occur is, precisely, the poetic word: «das Dichterische, das ist der Ort die im Dunkel verwehenden Anführungsstriche».⁸⁴ The sliver of light (and meaning) that Iris is the bearer of in *Sprachgitter* activates a communicative and creative process of this type, aimed at bringing back to the closed and narrow spaces of dual existence a principle of order that moves, *mit dem dichterischen Wort*, towards the eyes of the world.⁸⁵ But if the iris, in the mutual gaze of the two lovers, figured as a (communicative) *trait d'union* between the I and the thou, already in the following *Schneebett* the eyes are blind to the world («Augen, weltblind») and the subject is no longer welcomed among the grille of language (*Sprachgitter*), but rather among the cracks of dying (*Sterbegeklüft*).⁸⁶ In the absence of Iris, therefore, the self is alone («Ich komm») and the thou is immediately associated with an indistinguishable body of people (to which finally the lyric subject also belongs and yields: «wir fallen, / wir fallen und liegen und fallen. // Und fallen: / Wir waren. Wir sind. / Wir sind ein Fleisch mit der Nacht»),⁸⁷ devoid of that soul («die Seele») that the interlocutor of the self, thanks to the sense of light brought by Iris («Lichtsinn»), could have guessed («du errätst»)⁸⁸

In *Windgerecht* eyes are like voices («Augenstimmen»),⁸⁹ in *Nacht* soulless bodies exchange eyes out of time («Augentausch, endlich, zur Unzeit»),⁹⁰ and in *Sprachgitter* the mouths are no longer filled with silence («zwei / Mundvoll Schweigen»),⁹¹ but with blood

⁸¹ Celan 2005, 135.

⁸² Celan 2004, 66.

⁸³ Celan 2005, 102.

⁸⁴ Celan 1999, 63.

⁸⁵ Cf. Pufal 2018, 230–235.

⁸⁶ Celan 2002, 33.

⁸⁷ Celan 2002, 33.

⁸⁸ Celan 2002, 32.

⁸⁹ Celan 2002, 34.

⁹⁰ Celan 2002, 35.

⁹¹ Celan 2002, 32.

(«das Rot zweier Münder»);⁹² The mouths, free of *Lichtsinn*, are then an outgrowth of darkness («Finstergewächs»);⁹³ and in this state of mind the self can only wish the thou follows the performative motion («(Du / fragst ja, ich / sag dir:)») to re-find that «Aug», made up of image («bildnah») and time («zeitstark»), which reproduces the potential conditions of dialogue experienced in *Sprachgitter* – «das ichs / schwirren hör», desires the subject, «als Auge, jetzt», in *Aber*.⁹⁴ Moreover, the penultimate section of the collection (V), before the final dismissal in *Engführung*, marks the end of the communicative function of the eye: the passage from the eye as a voice («Augenstimme») to the voice of Nobody («Niemandes Stimme») in *Ein Auge, offen*, whose body, without an iris, prevents the self from being able to reach the Other in a closed and private space. Compared to *Sprachgitter*, finally, the physical and communicative conditions have totally changed: the back of the eye is painful («Schmerzende Augapfeltiefe»), and its anatomical parts («das Lid», «die Wimper») cannot oppose the action of History («Das nicht mehr zu Nennende»);⁹⁵ in this sense, the opening of the eye towards reality is nothing more than a further decay – in terms of loss and defeat – of the function of Iris in the world, whose presence, in the «Gelände / mit der untrüglichen / Spur»,⁹⁶ is no longer needed or requested.

Appendix

Eugenio Montale

Iride

Quando di colpo San Martino smotta
le sue braci e le attizza in fondo al cupo
fornello dell'Ontario,
schiocchi di pigne verdi fra la cenere
o il fumo d'un infuso di papaveri
e il Volto insanguinato sul sudario
che mi divide da te;

questo e poco altro (se poco
è un tuo segno, un ammicco, nella lotta
che me sospinge in un ossario, spalle
al muro, dove zàffiri celesti
e palmizi e cicogne su una zampa non
chiudono

l'atroce vista al povero
Nestoriano smarrito);

è quanto di te giunge dal naufragio
delle mie genti, delle tue, or che un fuoco
di gelo porta alla memoria il suolo
ch'è tuo e che non vedesti; e altro rosario
fra le dita non ho, non altra vampa
se non questa, di resina e di bacche,
t'ha investito.

Cuore d'altri non è simile al tuo,
la lince non somiglia al bel soriano
che apposta l'uccello mosca sull'alloro;
ma li credi tu eguali se t'avventuri
fuor dell'ombra del sicomoro
o è forse quella maschera sul drappo bianco,
quell'effigie di porpora che t'ha guidata?

⁹² Celan 2002, 35.

⁹³ Celan 2002, 44.

⁹⁴ Celan 2002, 46.

⁹⁵ Celan 2002, 51.

⁹⁶ Celan 2002, 61.

Perché l'opera tua (che della Sua
 è una forma) fiorisse in altre luci
 Iri del Canaan ti dileguasti
 in quel nimbo di vischi e pungitopi
 che il tuo cuore conduce
 nella notte nel mondo, oltre il miraggio
 dei fiori del deserto, tuoi germani.

Se appari, qui mi riporti, sotto la pergola
 di viti spoglie, accanto all'imbarcadere
 del nostro fiume – e il burchio non torna

indietro,
 il sole di San Martino si stempera, nero.
 Ma se ritorni non sei tu, è mutata
 la tua storia terrena, non attendi
 al traghetto la prua,

non hai sguardi, né ieri né domani;

perché l'opera Sua (che nella tua
 si trasforma) *dev'esser continuata*.

Paul Celan

Sprachgitter

Augenrund zwischen den Stäben.

Flimmertier Lid
 Rudert nach oben,
 gibt einen Blick frei.

Iris, Schwimmerin, traumlos und trüb:
 Der Himmel, herzgrau, muß nah sein.

Schräg, in der eisernen Tülle,
 der blakende Span.
 Am Lichtsinn
 Errätst du die Seele.

(Wär ich wie du. Wärest du wie ich.
 Standen wir nicht
 Unter *einem* Passat?
 Wir sind Fremde.)

Die Fliesen. Darauf,
 dicht beieinander, die beiden
 herzgrauen Lachen:
 zwei Mundvoll Schweigen.

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