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## Cesare Pavese's "Honest Illusion": Creating a Personal Myth

### ABSTRACT

Among the most influential Italian writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) had to come to terms with fascism, social disintegration and indeed, the sense of alienation derived from these. By directing his search for "sufficient wholeness" towards a dimension which he himself called "mythic", and through the creation of a personal mythology, Pavese sought to bridge the gap between the general and the particular, the past and the present, external and internal experience. His contact with this mythical dimension takes place through the representation of a cluster of 'fantastic associations' between the adult present and childhood recollections which in his view have marked his destiny as a man. To this end he adopts Giambattista Vico's concept of "imaginative universals" and of myths as pre-rational forms of the mind whereby mythical thought inverts the construction of the real and transposes metaphorically on the outside what is inaccessible to the individual within.

### KEYWORDS

Myth; the Irrational; Illusion; Imagination; Fantastic Associations.

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Cesare Pavese, poet, novelist, intellectual and translator, is unquestionably regarded as one of Italy's foremost men of letters in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Born in 1908 in the north-west province of Piedmont, Pavese spent his early years on his father's farm in an idyllic environment among the rolling hills of *Le langhe*, south of Turin. As a child, Pavese's natural reserve and his preference for solitude were enhanced by his love for books and his fascination with unfettered ramblings into the countryside. Throughout his career as a writer, Pavese was to juxtapose the rural and the urban as two opposing ends of nature and culture. Unhappy with both his personal life and the political climate of postwar Italy, he committed suicide in 1950 at the age of 42 and at the height of his literary career.

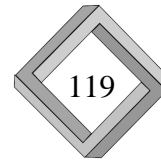
Critics are in agreement, when discussing Cesare Pavese's works, that there is an intimate association between his life and his art. Indeed, the most autobiographical of all his writings, the entries registered in his diaries, *Il mestiere di vivere*, are imbued with a sense of loss, of meaninglessness and anguish which urge the author to look inwardly and to translate his malaise artistically onto the page. "Poetry", which marks as most authentic the lyric-elegiac nature of his inspiration, "is not a feeling but a state, not an understanding but a being", says Pavese<sup>1</sup>. Literature is thus for

the author a metaphorical screen for his own existential condition through which he sought a resolution for his internal conflicts. It is perhaps this self-conscious attitude of Pavese towards his art, his painstaking search for symbolism and myth, which has led critics to describe his works as decadent, that is, confined within the narrow limits of personal concerns rather than affirming shared values. However, opinions abound, often contradictorily, in regard to Pavese's literary output. Novels such as *Il compagno* (*The Comrade*) written in 1947 and *La casa in collina* (*The House on the Hill*) in 1948 have, for example, been called neo-realistic for their social and political commitment to an ideological cause in times of instability. Pavese has also earned himself the label as a modernist writer for breaking with the Italian literary past and for flouting of conventions. He adopted, instead, the styles of American writers, especially Whitman and Melville, whom he saw not only as literary models, but guides to ways of living that he did not find in his immediate surroundings which exposed him to the incurable contradictions of modern man in a disaffected society. Nonetheless, whichever stance one might wish to take in his regard, Pavese's work remains complex and richly suggestive.

All his life Pavese lived in conscious isolation, seen by him as the proper status of the artist. It is this mania for solitude, his awareness of the fragmentation of his own subjectivity, exacerbated by the destruction brought about by war, and his deep affection for the countryside of his birth that leads Pavese to explore his childhood memories in an attempt to affirm the self. There is in Pavese a nostalgic feeling for the earth, for the primeval, and a yearning for a return to the origins wherein to regain wholeness of being. "Life", according to him, "is not a search for experiences, but of

one self. Having once discovered the fundamental layer of being one realizes that it coincides with one's own destiny and peace is restored<sup>2</sup>". The images and places of his childhood thus become mythical motifs of his fiction in which the atemporal, cyclical time of nature is opposed to the linear time of man and of history. Pavese explains his mission as an artist: "For every writer mythical is that central image, distinct in its configuration, to which his imagination keeps returning and which has the power to arouse him... This image is mythical because the writer looks upon it as something unique that symbolizes his whole experience<sup>3</sup>". Thus myth, for Pavese, is associated with distinct recurrences of childhood impressions which keep on resurfacing in adult life and which, in his view, have become an elemental feature of his inner being. In his view, because these central images forge our destinies, the road to self-knowledge, therefore, is to identify and to clarify these constitutive myths. Life and art become inextricably linked for Pavese: "Modern art – if it has any value – is a return to childhood. The enduring motive of art is the discovery of things, a discovery that can take place in its most pure form only in the memories of one's childhood<sup>4</sup>". Pavese draws his only true inspiration from the conviction that his myth theory is a sound formula for penetrating the unknown and that art is the means by which he can begin his journey towards the reconstitution of his own identity.

Literary art because of the nature of language, as Pavese was well aware, creates illusions which nonetheless allow the artist to engage in an imaginative play capable of representing the virtual and the possible. If the mythical time of childhood is attainable only through the insubstantial means of memory, that is, through the fleeting grasp of an elusive image, then words have the power to bring to the surface that which by



its very nature would remain hidden, incomprehensible. The task ahead of him is challenging and Pavese in his diary reflects on the ephemeral relationship between memories of one's origins and art, between his own inner self and the means of expressing it:

When one speaks of poetry as rhythm and not as copy, one intends to define its nature. That is why the poetry we write tries to eliminate objects as much as possible. Our poetry tends to impose itself as object, as *substance* of words. ... Our style becomes chaste and bare, finding its rhythm in something more secret than the voice of things...<sup>5</sup>.

Further down the page, Pavese, a reader of Freud, clarifies what he means by "something more secret":

Subconscious life. The work one manages to produce is always something *other*. You keep going, moving from one thing to another, and the deeper "I" always remains intact; if it appears weary, it is because of the effort that shakes and confuses it like murky water, but then it clears up and returns, ambiguous, reappearing unchanged at the bottom. There is no way of bringing it to the surface; the surface is simply and always a play of reflections of other things<sup>6</sup>.

It is in this sense that Pavese's literary endeavours echo Nietzsche's view, when speaking of artists as 'free spirits', that art is honest in its use of illusion. Art or the artist, as Nadeem Hussain in his article on Nietzsche puts it, "understands that its illusions are illusions without the illusions themselves being undermined (2007: p. 165)<sup>7</sup>". Despite the obscurity of the object of his search, Pavese also understands that his art

is a "non-delusive illusion" in that, through its power of evocation, it is able to offer to both reader and author the possibility of imaginatively and emotionally living through an experience that can "achieve truth by correspondence to some possible world" (Walsh, 1983: p. 56).

Pavese, moreover, owes the richness of his artistic vision to the assumptions adopted by eighteenth-century Italian linguist and philosopher, Giambattista Vico, that scientific inquiry, the so-called rational pursuit of full knowledge, defines as illusions all phenomena which cannot be expressed logically or mathematically, and thus excludes them as irrelevant. For Vico, on the other hand, the limitation of scientific thinking, and hence its drawback, precludes the notion of 'imaginative universals', of those sensed images which first shaped men's thoughts. These images, according to Vico, are pre-rational forms of awareness and are manifest primarily in fable, myth, figurative language, specifically metaphors, and religion. Mythical thought, moreover, inverts the construction of the real and transposes metaphorically on the outside what is inaccessible to the individual within. Pavese's "discovery-memories" ("scoperte-ricordo")<sup>8</sup> of his childhood experiences relate to this primitive awareness of the individual and of the irrational forces which permeate his being:

That our memories hide their head signifies that that they draw from the sphere of the instinctive and the irrational. In this sphere – of being and of ecstasy – there is no before and after, a second and a first time because time does not exist. What lies therein, just is: here the instant is equivalent to the eternal, the absolute.<sup>9</sup>

It is upon this premise based on the atemporality of mythical time that Pavese



can build and create new and abstract concepts that will lead him to the discovery of a different mind-space. "The irrational", he states, "is the enormous *rèservoir* of the spirit, as myths are of nations<sup>10</sup>".

Pavese's mythical imaginings based on the irrational in his narrative works reveal an animistic perception of nature in which he encounters Dionysian chaos, *il selvaggio* (the untamed), as he comes to call it. Nature, at its wildest, is inhuman, cruel and brutal, but, as the only path to self-discovery, the untamed is beguiling because it "means mystery, open possibility<sup>11</sup>". Like Nietzsche before him, Pavese delves into modern man's predicament by pitting the rational forces against the irrational, the Apollonian against the Dionysian or, as he prefers to define these contrasting features of the mind, the Olympian against the Titanic. In his writings the illusive landscape of his childhood wherein one finds the primitive, the unspeakable and the unnameable is juxtaposed with life in an urban environment subject to history, to progression, maturity and responsibility. Ironically, ever conscious of his own position, Pavese is faced with the challenge of having to unravel these contrasting inner forces in order to achieve his goal towards self-discovery. "You exalt order by describing disorder", he wryly muses over the course upon which he has chosen to embark<sup>12</sup>.

At first, Pavese's endorsement of Viichian tenets of "imaginative universals" enables him to construct his own mythology set chiefly in his narrative works and poetry in a regional and contemporary milieu. With the composition of *Dialogues with Leucò*, however, the action takes place within the timeless frame of the Greek myths understood, in this case, as repository of a common consciousness. Published in 1947, the *Dialogues* include twenty seven short sketches which aim at distilling the contents of

his existential myth and at amplifying its symbols. Indeed, most of the titles of these sketches bear a relation to familiar childhood images: "the cloud", "the horses", "the flower", "the wild beast", "the road", "the cliff", "the vineyard", "the mother" and so forth, and linked to themes like love, failure, daring, suffering, sex, death and destiny. In order to achieve an objective correspondence with the personal, Pavese in each chapter uses dramatic dialogue involving two protagonists, figures of classical culture and mythology, who dispute matters concerning man and the actions of the gods. These figures in turn, by becoming projections of the mind, represent opposing views: the voice of reason on the one hand and the imaginative configuration of the irrational on the other. This opposition, as mentioned earlier, is further reflected in the division of the ancient Gods who people the *Dialogues*, those of the old order, the Titans, who exemplify chaos or the untamed and who belong to the area of the undetermined, and those gods of the new dispensation, the Apollonians, bearers of the law and order.

The dichotomous alignment of the Gods emblemized in the *Dialogues* reveals a further dimension if related to modern theories on the construction of the subject. In formulating the structure of the psyche, Jacques Lacan defines three orders, the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic (Lacan 1977). These three orders exemplify the development of the subject from a state of undifferentiated oneness with nature, through its identification with the image of the other in the mirror stage, to the entrance into the social world of linguistic communication and of the law and rational power. Moreover, entrance into language marks the subject's irrevocable separation from the "real", area of the unconscious and of the repressed, and is characterized by a sense of loss or lack. For Lacan, the tension between the imaginary and the symbolic results in a



split subject. In other words, and this is evidenced in Pavese's quest, if the entrance of the subject into the symbolic is based on renunciation or repression of anything that threatens unity of identity, then unity, in this sense, is lived ambiguously. On the one hand, as idealized consciousness or sublimation of the real the subject is unstable because founded primarily on a linguistic construct. On the other, as lack or loss it is the source from which desire for wholeness erupts.

Linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, in discussing the mechanism of the process of signification, revisits Lacanian categories by advancing the concept of a dynamic subject. She proposes a subject situated in the symbolic, a speaking subject to be more precise, that is visited by drives and signs anterior to the phenomenon of language. Accordingly, she distinguishes between two modes of signification which influence the subject: the symbolic and the semiotic (Kristeva 1984: p. 26). While the symbolic which governs subjective unity is the space of representation, defined as the area of the paternal, the semiotic represents the pre-verbal state, the maternal. The semiotic is therefore that anarchic flux linked to emotional and bodily rhythms of language that precedes and goes beyond symbolization. The semiotic, moreover, is evidenced when language is receptive to pulsional shocks causing a breakdown in logic. As such, language, especially poetic language, from the standpoint of deconstruction of meaning, is a revolutionary force capable of destroying the existing order. For Kristeva, it is the task of the great artist to make manifest the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic and to expatiate fully on the point of rupture between these two modalities.

Pavese's adherence in his *Dialogues with Leucò* to both Lacanian and Kristevan thinking is attested in the explanatory

function he gives to these two opposing forces, the semiotic and the symbolic:

Cronus was monstrous but he ruled over the golden age. His defeat gave birth to Hades (Tartarus), the Islands of the Blessed /Elysium and Olympus, unhappiness and happiness set against each other and institutionalized.

The Titanic era (monstrous and golden) is that of undifferentiated men-monsters-gods. You always regard reality as Titanic, that is, as human-divine chaos (= monstrous) which is the ongoing form of life. You present the Olympian gods as superior, happy, detached, as the spoilsports of this humanity, upon which even the Olympians bestow favours out of Titanic nostalgia, or a whim, or out of pity deeply rooted in that time<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, the Olympians "Are not the source of life nor its end. ... They are not one with life which can be found in the beasts, in the currents, in the woods as well as man<sup>14</sup>". Pavese is thus sensitive to the split which exists in his vision of the 'real', and is reliant on his passion for his art to make him receptive to the creative potential of his medium as an aid to unravel the many riddles with which his personal quest is imbued:

The interest of a writer in his work – but also of those who understand it – is to see it taking shape amid opposing trends, to formulate and incorporate these trends, to give them a formal direction – and the highest form of contrast is between the unconscious and the conscious...<sup>15</sup>

However, what in fact faces Pavese in his writings is not only to experiment with



the limitations of language itself, but with the limitations of his own consciousness, for his is a journey beyond the control of reason and into a world peopled by monstrous presences which threaten the very boundaries of his own identity, shattering the status of the “I” as subject. The experience fills him with awe and abhorrence: “It is necessary that each one of us descends once into his own Hell. The orgy of my destiny has ended up in Hades<sup>16</sup>”. As the place of the irrational, of mystery, and paradoxically of illumination, Hades presupposes the inexorable goal that he must reach to achieve self revelation: “the only way to escape the abyss is to look at it, take its measure and descend into it<sup>17</sup>”. The task of the writer, therefore, he ends by declaring, is “the attempt to look into the vortex of the myth that draws him in”, to penetrate and preserve it and “reduce it to clarity<sup>18</sup>”.

Clarity, however, is the prerogative of a certitude firmly anchored in a systematized though constructed vision of the real, that is, in the institutionalized setting of the symbolic order. The world presented in the *Dialogues*, on the other hand, which also hosts the Titans is hostile and elusive. Nevertheless, the motive for the journey into unknown territory, however arduous, remains a firm commitment as Pavese himself admits in a letter to a friend: “Certainly the meaning of this tangle that the *Dialogues* represents also for me lies in the search of human autonomy<sup>19</sup>”. By placing the emphasis on ‘human autonomy’, with its open allusion to the Kantian precepts of sensibility, understanding and reason, Pavese is convinced that he will succeed in his mission to disclose what lies behind a life driven to capture all that is other. However, by challenging the constraints of language itself to represent the unnameable and by making this effort an integral part of his

personal quest, Pavese exposes the fragility of purpose inherent in his undertaking. Human endeavour and artistic vision, that is, life and art, collapse into one and thereby lending a tragic dimension to the task that he has set before him. Yet, it is this heroic yearning of man, his venturing into untrodden paths, which dominates the artist’s mind above all else:

Since it is their demonic nature that, while they captivate one with their uniqueness, with an irreducible absolute, these myths, which ask to be believed..., disturb one’s conscience like an important word that is half remembered, and they engage all the energy of the spirit so that they can be illuminated, defined and possessed in their entirety<sup>20</sup>.

The irruption of the semiotic into the symbolic in the works of Pavese is underscored by the dilemma and the anguish registered by the individual when confronting the uncanny. According to Freud (2003) the uncanny refers to a happening or event which provokes an experience of dread<sup>21</sup>. This uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed. Freud, moreover, traces the roots of the uncanny to a disturbing event experienced in childhood associated with the development of the subject, but which, despite its being repressed, surfaces repeatedly to consciousness and acquires fantastically the consistency of material reality. This is true in the case of Pavese’s obsession with his childhood memories. Yet in his drive to bring to light his own myth, he cannot escape the “demonic nature” of its contents. The cause of the unsettling experience, as he shows in the *Dialogues*, is the monstrous actions of the gods enacted, it appears, by



an alien will. Their violent, bloody and hard-hearted deeds inflicted upon humans originate from an unknown source and yield no reasonable explanation. As emblem of the untamed, this will, embodied by the gods, mirrors nature's indifference towards man, its arbitrariness, as well as its dual power of creating and destroying. Pavese reflects upon these phenomena at their point of convergence in his own art: "Nature, impassive, celebrates a ritual; man, impassive and moved, celebrates his most frightening rituals<sup>22</sup>".

If repetition is a distinct property of the uncanny, the other is the double. For Freud, the theme of the double is an invention of the psyche which, in order to ward off the annihilation of the "I" caused by the frightful encounter with the ineffable, considers the object under scrutiny as not part of the self, as a "not I". In Pavese's work, moreover, the forms of the double serve as an artistic device to defamiliarize and objectivise the split that has taken place in the speaking subject now penetrated by strange and ambiguous impulses. The impersonal and monstrous gods in his *Dialogues*, he muses, have thus become a projection of the other: "The gods for you are the *others*, the self-sufficient and sovereign individuals, seen from the outside<sup>23</sup>". The gods, therefore, become reifications of his myth. While the outcome of this exercise on the personal level is to give way to the ecstatic expression of his deeper being and to the liberating discovery of the diverse, on the artistic level, the reconfiguring these internal rhythms finds its justification in the cognitive process itself. It is by considering the dual functions of the personal and artistic that Pavese has assigned himself in his work that the full meaning of the title *Dialogues with Leucò* is revealed. Leucò, from the Greek *leukos*, white, is short for Leucothea, also known as the "white goddess", sea nymph of consolation and patron of shipwrecks.

But white is also the blank page which the artist fills with his pen.

Despite the fact that unity of language in the *Dialogues* is constantly broken down, that it is on the surface beyond the reach of logic and reason, Pavese's persistence to represent the unsaid through the medium of art as the only form of expression capable of capturing the ineffable, is nonetheless an attempt on his part to tap, in Lacanian terms, into the "impossible real" (Lacan 1977). In concrete terms, however, what Pavese recaptures on the page in creating his own myth can only present itself, according to Kristeva, as a "flash", as "interrupted visions, metaphors of the invisible" (1986: p. 162). The mystery, the secret of his own inner life can never quite reveal itself. Indeed, by its very nature it cannot ever reveal itself as Pavese himself acknowledges: "You would not be a mortal if you knew your own destiny. But then you live in the world of the gods. And the gods have also taken this away from you. You know nothing and yet you have done everything<sup>24</sup>". By measuring himself against the will of the gods, Pavese becomes aware of those aspects of our being which remain unpredictable, for it is they, the gods, and not he who ultimately shape the destiny of man. Pavese is thus confronted by the painful recognition of life's contingency and by the knowledge that the fullness of his own being can never be attained.

If Pavese's journey into the abyss has opened the door into a void, it has, nonetheless, offered the reader a rich account of his courage and of his acceptance that "the untamed is not picturesque but tragic<sup>25</sup>". He has shown, moreover, that when dealing with one's intimate life, 'human autonomy' is a mere illusion born from overbearing pride for, despite the claims of reason, there is no certainty. There is no reconciliation between the symbolic and the semiotic. Man



is unknown to himself and alone he has to struggle against his isolation and the spectre of meaninglessness. To explain Pavese's state of mind it is best to turn to one of his famous dialogues "The Wild Beast" ("La belva") in which Endymion, the shepherd, is visited by Artemis while sleeping under the moonlight and falls under the spell of her eyes. Upon waking Endymion begs Zeus to let him sleep eternally making him immortal and forever united with the goddess under her magic charm. Pavese, on the other hand, inverts Endymion's seductive dream into a nightmarish vision because his Artemis, with huge transparent eyes, the virgin of the hunt, mistress of wildlife and vegetation, giver and destroyer of life, is unmoved by love. She is the lady of wild beasts who tears apart the flesh of men and whose mere presence fills him with terror. Her scorching gaze makes her untouchable and forbidding, haunting Endymion who henceforth can find no peace in sleep and for whom daily life becomes an extension of the night's restless fight against sleep. When recounting his nocturnal encounter with Artemis, it is clear that the experience has sealed forever the fate of Endymion/Pavese:

"When the light came – a livid, veiled light – I looked down on the plain, on this road where we're walking now, and I knew that my home was no longer among men. I was no longer one of them. I was waiting for the night." (*Dialoghi con Leucò* 1947 : p. 41) The ambiguity between magic sleep and restless wake is the same ambiguity that exists between desire for physical contact and the impossibility of any contact. Ultimately, Pavese, like Endymion, is pursued by his own fate and tragically by his own volition to wait for the night.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *MV.*, 20 February 1946, p. 282: "La poesia non è un senso ma uno stato, non un capire ma un essere". *Il mestiere di vivere*, henceforth abbreviated as *MV.* In this paper I have used the original Italian editions of Pavese's works and all translations into English are mine. A more recent English edition of his diaries is also available: *This Business of Living: Diaries 1935-1950*, translated by A.E. Murch. (2009). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> *MV.*, 8 August 1940, p. 182. "La vita non è ricerca di esperienze, ma di se stessi. Scoperto il proprio strato fondamentale ci si accorge che esso combacia col proprio destino e si trova la pace."

<sup>3</sup> *MV.*, 15 September 1943, p. 234. "Di ogni scrittore si può dir mitica quell'immagine centrale, formalmente inconfondibile, cui la sua fantasia tende sempre a tornare e che più lo scalda. ... Mitica è quest'immagine in quanto lo scrittore vi torna come a qualcosa di unico, che simboleggia tutta la sua esperienza."

<sup>4</sup> *MV.*, 12 February 1942, p. 213. "L'arte moderna è – in quanto vale – un ritorno all'infanzia. Suo motivo perenne è la scoperta delle cose, scoperta che può avvenire, nella sua forma più pura, soltanto nel ricordo dell'infanzia."

<sup>5</sup> *MV.*, 17 July 1944, p. 260. "Quando si dice che la poesia è ritmo non copia, s'intende appunto definirne la natura. Ecco perché la nostra poesia vuole eliminare sempre più gli oggetti. Tende ad imporsi come oggetto essa stessa, come *sostanza* di parole. ... Da noi l'elocuzione si fa casta e scarna, trova il suo ritmo in qualcosa di ben più segreto che non le voci delle cose ..."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 260-1. "Vita dell'inconscio. L'opera che si riesce a fare, è sempre *un'altra cosa*. Si va Avanti, di altra cosa in altra cosa, e l'io profondo è sempre intatto; se appare

sposato, è soltanto la fatica che lo scuote e confonde come un'acqua che s'intorbida, ma poi schiarisce e torna, ambiguo, a trasparirne il fondo uguale. Non c'è modo di portarlo alla superficie; la superficie è sempre soltanto un gioco vano di riflessi d'*altre cose*."

<sup>7</sup> I have used the term coined by Nadeem J.Z. Hussain in his article, *Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche's Free Spirits*, when discussing Nietzsche's concepts of art, science and truth in *The Gay Science* and *Genealogy of Morals*.

<sup>8</sup> *Stato di grazia* [State of Grace], in *Saggi letterari* [Literary Essays], p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> *Stato di grazia*, in *Saggi letterari*, p.278. "Che i nostri ricordi nascondano il capo, vuol dire appunto che attingono alla sfera dell'istintivo-irrazionale. In questa sfera – la sfera dell'essere e dell'estasi – non esiste il prima e il dopo, la seconda volta e la prima, perché non esiste il tempo. Ciò che in essa è, è: qui l'attimo equivale all'eterno, all'assoluto."

<sup>10</sup> *MV.*, 8 February 1944, p. 250. "L'irrazionale è l'enorme *rèservoir* dello spirito, come i miti lo sono delle nazioni."

<sup>11</sup> *MV.*, 10 July 1947, p. 305. "*Selvaggio* vuol dire mistero, possibilità aperta."

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* "Tu esalti l'ordine descrivendo il disordine."

<sup>13</sup> *MV.*, 24 February 1947, p.297. "Crono era mostruoso ma regnava su età d'oro. Venne vinto e ne nacque l'Ade (Tartaro), l'isola Beata e l'Olimpo, infelicità e felicità contrapposte e istituzionali.

L'età titanica (mostruosa e aurea) è quella di uomini-mostri-dèi indifferenziati. Tu consideri la realtà come sempre titanica, cioè come caos umano-divino (= mostruoso), ch'è la forma perenne della vita. Presenti gli dèi olimpici superiori, felici, staccati, come i guastafeste di questa umanità, cui pure gli

olimpici usano favori nati da nostalgia titanica, da capriccio, da pietà radicate in quel tempo.”

<sup>14</sup> *MV.*, 4 August 1947, p. 306. “Non sono la sorgente della vita né il suo fine. ... Non sono una cosa sola con la vita che è nelle bestie, nelle correnti, nei boschi come nell’uomo.”

<sup>15</sup> *MV.*, 6<sup>h</sup> August 1947, p. 307. “L’interesse di un’opera per chi la fa – e anche per chi la capisce – è di vederla formarsi tra dentenze contrastanti, comporre e innestare queste tendenze, dar loro un senso formale – e il Massimo dei contrasti è fra l’inconscio e il conscio...”

<sup>16</sup> *Dialoghi con Leucò*, p.79. “È necessario che ciascuno scenda una volta nel suo inferno. L’orgia del mio destino è finita nell’Ade”.

<sup>17</sup> *MV.*, 14 April 1936, p. 37. “l’unico modo di sfuggire all’abisso è di guardarlo e misurararlo e di scendervi”.

<sup>18</sup> *Del mito, del simbolo e d’altro* [Of myth, of symbol and other], in *Saggi Letterari*, p. 276. “Il tentativo di vedere nel gorgo del mito che [lo] afferra ... ridotto a chiarezza.”

<sup>19</sup> *Lettere* [Letters], p. 571. “Certamente il senso di questo groviglio che sono anche

per me i *Dialoghi*, sta nella ricerca dell’autonomia umana.”

<sup>20</sup> *Il mito* [Myth] in *Saggi letterari*, p. 318. “Giacché è loro natura demonica che, mentre incantano con l’esperienza di un unico di un assoluto irriducibile, questi miti, che vogliono essere creduti..., inquietano la coscienza come un’importante parola ricordata solo a metà, e impegnano tutte le energie dello spirito per rischiararli, definirli, possederli fino in fondo.”

<sup>21</sup> Freud wrote his essay on the uncanny in 1919 under the title *Das Unheimliche*.

<sup>22</sup> *MV.*, 26 August 1944, p. 263. “La natura impassibile celebra un rito; l’uomo impassibile e commosso celebra i suoi riti più spaventosi.”

<sup>23</sup> *MV.*, 6 January 1946, p. 279. “Gli dèi per te sono gli *altri*, gli individui autosufficienti e sovrani, visti dall’esterno.”

<sup>24</sup> ‘La rupe’ [The cliff] in *Dialoghi con Leucò*, p.72. “Non saresti un mortale, se sapessi il destino. Ma tu vivi in un mondo degli dèi. E gli dèi vi hanno tolto anche questo. Non sai nulla e hai già fatto ogni cosa.”

<sup>25</sup> *MV.*, 2 September 1944, p. 264. “il selvaggio non è pittoresco ma tragico.”