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# POETRY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING : ASPECTS OF A MAJOR CHALLENGE

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## **Abstract**

Debating the role of literature, and poetry in particular, in foreign language teaching (FLT), many scholars underscore the enormous potential represented by literature when it comes to developing the students' critical thinking, analytical skills, ability to understand other cultures and emphatic attitude. Nevertheless, poetry represents a challenge within foreign language teaching. Focusing on my personal experience of teaching Italian at Lund University, Sweden, where XXth century poetry is included in the literature course at the undergraduate level (7,5 ECTS credits), I will first discuss what difficulties students encounter when faced with the task of reading poetry. I'll then provide an example of a lecture in early XXth century Italian poetry from D'Annunzio to Hermeticism to show some methods that can be used to facilitate the students' comprehension and how their motivation can be increased.

Keywords: Literature in foreign language teaching, poetry in foreign language teaching, XXth century Italian poetry.

## **1 LITERATURE AND POETRY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

In the last decades, scholars have been enquiring the role of literature in foreign language teaching from different perspectives (FLT. For a survey, see Paran [1]). Most of them share the opinion that literature should undoubtedly be integrated as an essential part in the FLT; this opinion is motivated by the enormous potential represented by literature when it comes to developing not only the students' linguistic skills, but also their critical thinking and ability to understand other cultures and imagine other ways of life. From a wider educational perspective – that is not only a linguistic one – literature seems to have the unique ability to enrich readers' emotional life and to shape their empathic attitude (see for example Gilroy M. & Parkinson B. [2], Belcher & Hirvela, [3], Hall, G. [4], Paran [1]). For several reasons, these characteristics and potentials appear even more clearly when one considers poetry. In so much as, as Hanauer puts it, "the reading of poetry is a task in which the discussion of meaning inherently involves a consideration of form" ([5] p. 7), poetry seems to embody a marvellous potential if one wants to bridge the gap between teaching language and teaching literature. As Hanauer observes, constructing the meaning of a poem is a conscious process rather than an automatic one, since the reader cannot do that without being aware of the poem's formal features ([5] p. 8). Referring to White (see [6]), Hanauer argues that the comprehension difficulties have a positive effect in this active process, since they force the second language (L2) learner to evaluate his/her current linguistic level in the target language. Furthermore, as Cranston remarks, poetry "lends itself better than prose to the teaching of a language's prosodic elements: rhythm, intonation, melody" ([7] p. 955). She states that poetry "serves to develop, along with the intellect, imagination and sensory awareness, so essential to a love of poetry and literature in general" ([7] p. 955).

### **1.1 A challenge**

Despite the fact that the teacher might be aware of all the opportunities that poetry represents for L2 teaching purposes, he/she can still feel uncomfortable with the task. Indeed, teaching poetry within FLT is a challenge. Starting from this statement, the scope of the present article is – after having shortly discussed why this is the case – to provide an example of how a lecture in Italian early XXth century poetry at the undergraduate level can take advantage of the didactical potential that poetry in itself offers. This paper may serve as a contribution to the field of enquiry described above by way of testimony. According to Paran: "classroom interaction can be explored through the testimony of a practitioner reflecting on what they do in class, which can become extremely valuable" ([1] p. 470). Commenting on the importance of empirical evidence, Paran states: "we should realise that a consideration of the large number of papers of this type results in an understanding of what it is that

teachers actually do in their classrooms, and of the issues that are at the forefront of the concerns of the teaching profession” ([1] p. 470).

Encouraged by these remarks, I will now begin by accounting for the reasons why a lecture in Italian XXth century poetry from D’Annunzio to Hermeticism represents a challenge in the context where it takes place. In naming the problems I will also give some suggestions for how to turn them to your advantage, thus introducing the ideas supporting the lecture I’ll soon expose.

The context in which my lecture takes place is at Lund University, Sweden, where the XXth century poetry is included in the syllabus for the course in literature (7,5 ECTS credits, including both a historical survey of Italian twentieth-century literature and the specific study of some XXth century literary works). This course is given as part of the basic Italian course at the undergraduate level (in total 30 ECTS credits, also covering basic grammar, culture and communication skills). The time frame for a lecture on XXth century poetry is approximately two hours; the lecture is supposed to take place at the beginning of the term.

The difficulties encountered by Swedish students when confronted with Italian poetry are primarily linguistic. Language, when used poetically, is often more difficult than ordinary language. Following White (see [6]), Hanauer claims that “Input that is not immediately comprehended forces the second language learner to evaluate her/his current level of L2 development” ([5] p. 8). Even if this evaluation has an important role in second language learning, the most immediate result of comprehension difficulties is probably an impediment to aesthetic pleasure. As Hanauer observes: “There should be some correspondence between the language knowledge of the student and the linguistic patterns in the poem” ([5] p. 10). This will be taken into account to the maximum possible extent in the choice of poems to be treated. A way to help the students in understanding the poem at the linguistic level can be to let them compare the original poem with a Swedish translation made by professionals. This too will at least in part guide the choice of poems commented during the lecture, the limitation being the Italian poems that are actually translated into Swedish.

Students have usually scarce prior exposure to literary works generally a lacking interest in poetry. Moreover the fact that they are at the beginning of their Italian studies and therefore lack references in the Italian literary field, may make it hard for them to feel any deeper motivation. The link between motivation and deep learning should of course not be underestimated. According to Hanauer “a poem should be chosen for its relevance to the students” and “the choice of poem should not be dictated by concepts of cultural value but by student motivation” ([5] p. 10). This later principle, though, is incompatible with the prescriptions of the syllabus in which the expected learning outcomes for the literature course are exposed as follows: “The students should be able to roughly account for the XXth century Italian literary history”. One might think that this is a very general description. However, the course is supposed to provide a general insight into the XXth century Italian literary history where some canonized poets are a must (D’Annunzio, the Crepuscular poets, Montale and Ungaretti are evident examples). The solution is then to try to select among the poems of the most representative poets of the period, those in which the vocabulary is most accessible, given the linguistic level of the students, in which the themes may interest them, ranging from sensual love to war in the trenches and, if possible, for which a translation to Swedish is available (difficult passages will of course be translated anyway).

In my lecture (held in Italian) I’ll address the students directly in a story-telling way, which means that I’ll try to make the authors become the characters of a story. They will be interacting with each other and there will be a background for their acting. It will be possible to follow the “red thread” of the story. Some photos shown with Power-Point will support the lecture.

## **2 A LECTURE ABOUT EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ITALIAN POETRY FROM D’ANNUNZIO TO HERMETICISM**

In the period included between D’Annunzio and Hermeticism, Italian poetry goes through profound changes. Modernism breaks out, meaning renewal and violation of rules. The renewal that is observable on the formal level, especially through poets’ extensive use of “verso libero” (free verse, that is a verse not submitted to the rules of traditional poetic metre) is accompanied by a change in the way poets interpret poetry’s function itself: the aesthetic function leaves room to a deeper existential one. This happens gradually. The process can be illustrated starting with D’Annunzio (1863-1938), going on with the Crepuscular poets (Gozzano, 1883-1916, Marino Moretti, 1885-1979), Futurism

(Marinetti, 1876-1944) and ending with Hermeticism (with Montale, 1896-1981, Quasimodo, 1901-1968, Ungaretti, 1888-1970).

It seems natural to begin our story with D'Annunzio since between the World Wars it was practically impossible to discuss poetry in Italy without taking position for or against D'Annunzio. Some idolized him, some hated him. D'Annunzio wanted to shape his life as a piece of art, he wanted his life to be inspired by the ideological and aesthetical principles of his own art. It is therefore difficult to talk about his life and art as two separate things. I will now read some expressive adjectives that can be found in Swedish and Italian anthologies in descriptions of D'Annunzio; they will give you an idea of his personality: snob, arrogant, hedonist, poseur, notorious lady-killer, beauty and pleasure worshipper, political adventurer, flaming patriot, extreme nationalist, fascist, propagandist, muckraker, pompous, rhetorical, ruthlessly self-assertive. Besides, every anthology will inform you that D'Annunzio was of medium size – short in other words: this bald, outwardly unimpressive man seems to have had an extraordinary personality, made of virility and infatigable energy.



1. Gabriele D'Annunzio

Quite significantly, one only adjective has been created to indicate the contrary of all these characteristics: that is “anti-d’annunzian”.

D'Annunzio is a complex and contradictory figure. There are many startling anecdotes about his life: he liked luxury, engaged in duels and even staged once his own death. He had a big admiration for past golden ages, in particular Ancient Greece and Rome, and loved to collect Greek vases and all kind of exclusive art objects. One single image says sometimes more than a thousand words: look at the magnificent villa called “Il Vittoriale degli Italiani”, which D'Annunzio planned and developed himself, situated on the bank of Lake Garda. D'Annunzio took residence in the Vittoriale 1921 and lived there until his death in 1938. Vittoriale is now a national monument and a museum commemorating D'Annunzio's life and times. The villa has an adjacent arena for 1500 spectators:



2. “Il Vittoriale degli Italiani”, D'Annunzio's home at Gardone Riviera.

Many of D'Annunzio's lyrics are patriotic. Let's look at one short example, the last stanza in “Canto del sole” (*Sun song*), which belongs to his third poetry collection, entitled *Canto Novo (New Song)*, from 1882:

O mare, o gloria, forza d'Italia,  
alfin da' liberi tuoi flutti a l'aure  
come un acciar temprata  
la giovinezza sfolgori!

The language in this invocation to the sea is rhetorical and declamatory. These lines contain many motives that fascist propaganda was going to elaborate on (strength, symbolized by steel, youth, that fascism celebrated for having the divine mission to lead the movement that would purify the nation).

D'Annunzio himself participated in the First World War, fighting on the ground, at sea and in the air. His vitality, virility and drive belong to the overman he wanted to be, inspired by Nietzsche. Actually, D'Annunzio's snobbish conception of life can be explained as an interpretation of the Nietzschean philosophy, on a private level (hedonism, physical strength, power will, luxury and erotic excesses) as well as on a political level (he preached the beauty of war and celebrated Italy's colonial adventure as the best proof of the nation's greatness and power).

But along with D'Annunzio's bombastic poems, there are others in his oeuvre, which are very different, imbued as they are of a particular feeling of pain and convalescence, where the poet languishes, feels tired and sorry, experiencing a deep sense of spleen. What does an Italian overman do, then? Well, he turns to his mum. The poem I'm thinking of is called "Consolazione" (*Consolation*) and is included in the collection *Poema paradisiaco*, 1893 (*Paradisiac poem*). *Consolazione* is a monolog where the *I* of the poem addresses his mother and invites her to take an evening walk. The poem expresses goodness and sadness, a feeling of regret and longing. It's important to remember that this aspect of the D'Annunzian poetry was going to inspire many a poet after D'Annunzio, actually even those who intended to react against him.

The language in *Consolazione* is unusually easy, almost prosaic, close to spoken language. D'Annunzio uses here the hendecasyllables (that is the traditional verse in Italian poetry, defined by having the last stress on the tenth syllable) and a rigid rhyme scheme: ABBA. But he fragments the hendecasyllables by punctuation, he uses direct questions and many word repetitions, all features that create a strong impression of speech. Let's listen to this poem interpreted by the Italian actor Giovanni De Nava on Youtube (see [12]). (The poem is listened to in the classroom and the students receive a collective assignment to be done at home, consisting in translating the poem into Swedish on a Google-docs they will be invited to).

What this poem clearly shows is that D'Annunzio, who had a big influence on his time, was in turn influenced by the *Zeitgeist*. He was living in a period called decadentism. The French poet Verlaine, who founded the review "Le décadent" 1866, is a good representative of this cultural movement. Let's look at the first verse in Verlaine's poem "*Langueur*": "Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence" (*I am the Empire in the last of its decline*). Verlaine compares the last manifestations of life in the late Roman Empire and the feeling he experienced, along with other poets of the young generation (such as Tristan Corbière and Jules Laforgue): tediousness, resignation, an existential weariness, a kind of spiritual twilight. The decadents turned away from rationality and turned to inner life, they cultivated a half religious aesthetics, looking for mystery and the hidden side of reality. D'Annunzio's ultimate truth is beauty; poetry is to him a way to get closer to the world, far from the positivistic belief in science and from the naturalistic aesthetics based on reproduction of exterior reality.

This can be seen in a poem like "La pioggia nel pineto" (*The rain in the Pinewood*), belonging to the third volume, entitled *Alcyone* in D'Annunzio's big cycle of poems, in five volumes, called *Le Laudi del cielo del mare della terra e degli eroi*, 1903-1912 (*Praise to the Sky, the Sea, the Land and the Heroes*). In *Alcyone* one hears no imperialistic fanfares but a voice that whispers, someone seeking for solace and rest (*Alcyone's* first poem is entitled "Tregua", *Truce*).

It's raining in a pinewood and the *I* of the poem invites his woman Ermione to stop talking ("Taci!" *Be quiet!*) and listen. Actually, the exhortations "Taci!" (verse 1) and "Ascolta!" (*Listen!* verses 8, 40, 65 twice and 88), and the question "Odi?" (verse 33, *Do you hear?*) are addressed to the readers as well, drawing their attention to the acoustic experience the poem is offering. As they go deeper in the wood, the lovers immerse in a vegetable world of pure sensations where perfumes are inseparable from sounds and where the woman's body becomes one with the surrounding nature. The rain falls on the pinewood's vegetation as on a music instrument: different underlayers, combined with the rain which alternately increases and decreases, produce different tunes, rhythms and harmonies, embodied by rhymes and assonances. The result is a sonorous enchantment. An osmosis takes place in the poem between human beings and nature, poetry and music, words' meaning and sound: everything melts together.

The 128 verses of this poem have to be listened to, even without understanding all the words; in fact, the poem conveys the feeling of a communion with nature through its music. Let's listen to the interpretation by the Italian actor Roberto Herlitzka, available on Youtube (see [13]). In order to understand D'Annunzio's linguistic virtuosity and the sensuality of his poetry, try to listen to this poem as one listens to a symphony, a music of words, where vowel and consonant sounds are like notes. (It has to be made clear to the students that the expectations of the listening task differ from those of reading comprehension tasks. Students are given the text of the poem which they can follow while

they listen. The stressed vowels are underlined in the text, a colour per vowel, to help them to follow the sound patterns. Possibly the poem will be listened to a second time, with focus on consonant sounds. Difficult words – as “tamerici” (tamarisks), “salmastre” (brackish), “scagliosi e irti” (scaly and bristly), “mirti” (myrtles), “ginestre” (broom), “ginepri” (junipers), “pianto australe” (the rain brought by the southern wind called Austro) etc) – will be translated).

If we now try to leave D’Annunzio behind to go further, then we’ll do exactly what many poets after D’Annunzio tried to do: among them, Guido Gozzano, who was 20 years younger than D’Annunzio. He’s the major representative among the so called *Crepuscolari*, the twilight poets (Gozzano, Sergio Corazzini, Fausto Maria Martini and Marino Moretti). The term *Crepuscolari* was coined by a critic named Borgese, to indicate a new era of twilight and gloaming, coming after the sunny period dominated by D’Annunzio.

What do the Crepuscolar poets want? They want to demystify words after D’Annunzio’s mannerism and question established cultural aesthetics. They damp the tone of their poetry, use plain words, a spoken language that resembles prose. Their poems are populated by average, conventional middle-class people, those you would find in the registry office. They sing “le piccole cose”, the little things in everyday life, ranging from dust-covered objects in the attic (rather than Greek vases) to their own physical weakness (Gozzano had tuberculosis and died at the age of 33). They are ironical about D’Annunzio’s power myth and his obsessive search for precious, unique art objects; they repudiate his elevated tone and flamboyant rhetoric. Irony, self-conscious mockery, irreverence and a tongue-in-cheek tone are indeed important ingredients in Gozzano’s poems.

One of the most famous poems he wrote is called “La signorina Felicita ovvero la felicità” (*Miss Felicita or Felicity*) from the collection *I Colloqui*, 1911 (*The Colloquies*). The *I* of this poem addresses Felicita, a young woman belonging to the middle-class whom he once knew. He describes the grey, somnolent and tedious provincial environment she lives in. Felicita is hardly presented in the poem as the object of a man’s desire and she has not much in common with D’Annunzio’s noblewomen: she’s unattractive (verse 49: “Sei quasi brutta”, *You’re almost ugly*), she has freckles and wears a peasant-type dress, she is near to earth and simple, she’s portrayed in the kitchen where she roasts coffee and does the cooking among her utensils; the kitchen smells of garlic. But Felicita lives an uncomplicated, real life. A stanza from this poem’s sixth part is representative:

Tu non fai versi. Tagli le camicie  
per tuo padre. Ha fatta la seconda  
classe, t’han detto che la Terra è tonda,  
ma tu non credi... E non mediti Nietzsche...  
Mi piaci. Mi faresti più felice  
d’un’intellettuale gemedonda.

Observe here the irreverent rhyming of *Nietzsche* with such a prosaic word as *camicie* (*shirts*), which underscores both Gozzano’s disdain for Nietzsche’s notion of the overman and his dissociation from D’Annunzio’s way of conceiving poetry. This is an example of the “the injection of the prosaic into the world of the lyric”, as a critic puts it ([8] p. 4). Look also at the way the hendecasyllables are interrupted by punctuation, creating an anti-rhetorical and discursive tone.

With her unpretentiousness and modesty, Felicita makes the poet doubt about himself: “Ed io non voglio più essere io!” (verse 246 and verse 253: *And I don’t want to be myself anymore*). This verse can be interpreted as indicating the uncertainty concerning the role of the intellectual. No doubt it indicates a radical departure from the view that poetry is a way to sublimate life: poetry appears rather as something preventing you from living it.

Another example of twilight poetry is represented by Marino Moretti’s “A Cesena” (*In Cesena*). Many of you surely know Cesena because of its serie A soccer team. But Cesena is – and was at Moretti’s time – a quite dull middle sized provincial town in Emilia Romagna. Let’s read this poem’s initial verses:

Piove. È mercoledì. Sono a Cesena  
Ospite della mia sorella sposa,  
Sposa da sei, da sette mesi appena.

It’s raining on Cesena just as it was raining on the pinewood. But this rain is grey, it doesn’t sing any melody when falling, it’s rather like a veil of sadness covering the boring low middle-class environment. The poetic line is fragmented and the words strike you as they are so ordinary. The

world of the understated, unremarkable events has become a new dimension for the poetic exploration.

The Crepuscolar cut down to size the figure of the poet and denied his role as being either a voice speaking for the nation or a solitary genius; their self-representation is deliberately and provocatively set up in opposition to D'Annunzio's grandiloquence. These poets had few illusions about poetry: the tone of their poetry is off centre, modest, minor. Still one should not fail to see a continuity between D'Annunzio (at least in some of his poems, exemplified by 'Il poema paradisiaco') and the Crepuscolar poets. Actually, both try to escape from reality but they do it in opposite ways: the former by creating a world of pure beauty through his art; the latter by searching for sentiment – exorcised by irony – in the bittersweet memories of a provincial microcosm.

Contemporary to the Crepuscolar were the Futurists. Futurism is a clearly defined movement that declared its revolutionary intents in a highly public way. It was launched in 1909, when Tommaso Filippo Marinetti published the "Manifesto del Futurismo" in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. Marinetti glorified speed, machines and war (which he notoriously defined "la sola igiene del mondo", the world's only hygiene) and repudiated tradition, past and conventional morality. At the formal level, he put his emphasis on "verso libero" (a verse free from the rules of traditional poetic metre) and developed a theory called "parole in libertà" (words in freedom): this formal innovation gave rise to poems that showed a broad breakdown of syntax and unusual arrangements of words, aiming at visual effects. Let's have a look at an example of "Parole in libertà". The example is an excerpt taken from a long poem called *Zang Tumb Tumb* from 1914. Here is a detail of the cover, by the author:



3. Detail of *Zang Tumb Tumb*'s cover

*Zang tumb tumb* is an account of the battle of Adrianople, in Turkey, in 1912. By graphical means such as different typefaces of various size, some hand-designed words, the use of mathematical signs and other non verbal elements and all kinds of typographical compositions evoking the shapes of things, and with the help of a large use of onomatopoeias, the author tries to express the various sounds and noises of a battle, like explosions of grenades and gunshots. Here is a passage from the poem, entitled "Indifferenza":

**INDIFFERENZA**  
**DI 2 ROTONDITÀ SOSPENSE**  
**SOLE + PALLONE**  
**FRENATI**

fiamme giganti	colonne di fumo	spirali di scintille
-------------------	--------------------	-------------------------

villaggi turchi incendiati

grande **T**

rrrrrrrronzzzzzzante d'un monoplano bulgaro

+ neve di manifesti

Noi, Bulgari, facciamo la guerra al governo ottomano che è incapace di governare convenientemente. Noi non siamo contro la po-

As you see, this is an example of creative typography, where the materiality of language is made clear; the words' semantic meanings are stressed visually by their disposition on the page. A normal linear left-to-right reading and top to bottom is not really appropriate; the page is a canvas for multiple spatial relationships and many readings along different axes. (The students are given some hints about what is narrated and described by this text, that is the episode of the siege of a Turkish village by the Bulgarians. Smoke columns rise from the village that has been put on fire; the sun and an aerostat are in the sky; a monoplane passes by and drops some leaflets with Bulgarian politic propaganda. The students are invited to find the way these descriptive elements are expressed typographically and to comment on it).

The words in freedom became a distinctive literary trademark of the Italian Futurist poets. But it's important to point out that experimentations on language were typical for other representatives of avant-gardism, not only in Italy. At the same time as the Futurists were active, Apollinaire was writing his poems called *Calligrammes* (1918). As you can see from the celebrated example below, called "La cravate" (Tie), Apollinaire too thought language was something to be experienced for its concrete shapes, and he wanted to investigate different ways to convey meaning:

L A   C R A V A T E  
 D O U  
 L O U  
 R E U S E  
 Q U E T U  
 P O R T E S  
 E T Q U I T'  
 O R N E O C I  
 V I L I S É  
 O T E -   T U V E U X  
 L A   B I E N  
 S I   R E S P I  
           R E R

Marinetti's political views were nationalistic and reactionary; the Futurists supported Italian colonial politics, expressed violent misogynistic opinions and campaigned for Italian intervention in the First World War. The movement became closely associated with Fascist ideology. D'Annunzio believed that beauty could be experienced either through sensual experiences or through the cultivation of the myths from ancient Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages and the humanist tradition. Marinetti, on the contrary, despised tradition and history. But he couldn't prevent Futurism from becoming a historical phenomenon: when Futurism's 100th anniversary was celebrated in 2009, the celebrations took place just in those very museums and academies that Marinetti wanted to tear down.

The Futurism was short-lived but influential: it contributed to move the focus from the verse to the word, which became the new poetic unit, and to encourage innovation in literary language and content. With their audacity and their freedom-aesthetics the Futurists surely left a trail in Italian poetry. But a much deeper innovation was to be brought by a poet who fought in the First World War and interiorised the tragic experiences of the trenches, where he wrote some of his most celebrated poems: Giuseppe Ungaretti.



4. Giuseppe Ungaretti

His first collection of poems is from 1916 and is called *Il porto sepolto* (*The buried port*); it was written in the trenches. The next collection is called *Allegria di naufragi*, from 1919 (*The joy of Shipwrecks*), published again in 1931 with the title *Allegria* (*Joy*). I won't mention all his works, but I will tell you how



intensely personal they all are. Whereas D'Annunzio and the Futurists had glorified the war, Ungaretti had a profoundly different attitude: his poems are laconic and anti-rhetorical, they talk about human vulnerability and need for brotherhood and express suffering and compassion. *Allegria* is generally considered as Hermeticism's starting point.

The term Hermeticism was coined by the critic named Francesco Flora: in an article from 1936 he reviewed the contemporary poetry and stigmatised it as enigmatic and impenetrable. The brevity and cryptic condensation of this poetry, immune to excesses and whose images were stripped of lyricism can be partly explained by the severe control of literature exercised by the Fascist regime in the period between the two wars. The formalistic devices of Hermeticism are shortness, elimination of punctuation, fragmentation of syntax and stress on the evocative power of single words. The Hermetic poets respected the simple, naked word, they strove to create exact expressions and to suppress the superfluous. Musicality, tightness, intensity and concentration are the key-words.

The mood is often one of uncertainty, disorientation and pessimism. Montale, who together with Quasimodo (both of them Nobel-laureates, the former in 1975, the latter in 1959) gained international fame, is completely disillusioned and resigned, he doesn't raise his voice, neither to complain or to protest. Their poetry is a highly personal concern, with metaphysical resonance. In spite of their hermeticism on the formal level, these poets were open to impulses from outside, also as a reaction to the cultural autarchy forced upon them by Fascism; Ungaretti was influenced by Apollinaire (whom he had met in Paris), Montale translated Eliot.

Now back to Ungaretti's *Allegria*. I would like to focus on a particular poem, a very famous one, entitled "Mattina" (*Morning*):

Mattina

Santa Maria La Longa il 26 gennaio 1917

M'illumino  
d'immenso

This short poem has recently been analysed by Niklas Schiöler in a chapter of his book (see [9] pp. 97-107) and I will now expose his analyses, which I think is – the adjective fits the context perfectly – illuminating. The poem is tiny, it takes no more than 1,5 seconds to read it: two verses, 17 letters, 7 syllables, 5 words, including the title. But if you think about the pronunciation, then the words are just 3, since *M'illumino* and *d'immenso* are so called phonological words (because of the apostrophe, *mi* and *di* are pronounced as integrated to the words *illumino* and *immenso*).

If you listen to the poem you'll hear the identity of vowel and consonant sounds between verse 1 and 2 (the repetition of *i* and *o* and of *m* and *n*). This identity of sounds suggests the identity between the instantaneousness of an illumination ("m'illumino", *I light up*, evoking the light, or the sky) and the immeasurable ("d'immenso", *with immenseness*, evoking the sea). The poem expresses a feeling of euphoria, due to the sudden perception of boundlessness experienced by the subject embodied in the first word of the poem, the pronoun *Mi*. Within this subject, a unique experience takes place: the instant receives infinite proportions.

How about the indication of day and place, then: Santa Maria La Longa? This is a little town near Udine, where Ungaretti had been recruited by the army. If we compare two translations into Swedish of this poem, the first one by Anders Österling, in 1968, and the second one by Pierre Zekeli and Marianne Sandels in 2001, we'll see that only in the latter the indication of time and place has been translated. (see [10] and [11]). (The students are given the two translations into Swedish of Ungaretti's poem). The two Swedish translations differ not only with regards to the indication of time and place, but also to punctuation and lexical choices. If we compare them and try to express a motivated judgement about which is the best translation – let's say the most faithful to the original – then I would argue that is the one from 2001. In fact, although one might think the indication of time and place is a superfluous detail, it really belongs to the poem and contributes to its meaning: it reminds us that Ungaretti wrote this poem in the middle of the war, at winter, one particular day, at one particular place. This indication ties the poem to a specific here and now. Then we understand that the sudden perception of boundlessness and immensity felt by the subject is no more than a short release, sentenced to death: there is no hope about escape, no way to reach a place beyond the crude surrounding reality. Finally I want to point out that the fact that a new translation of Ungaretti's poems was published as late as 2001 shows that his poetry is still alive.

### 3 CONCLUSION

This lecture has been inspired by some general ideas, based on the awareness on one hand of the difficulties students encounter when faced with poetry and, on the other hand, of the necessity to fulfill the requisitions of the syllabus. The lecture illustrates the following points:

- the choice of relatively short poems, with simple linguistic patterns and presenting themes that the students can be familiar with or spontaneously have interest in (love, sadness, war);
- the presence of a red thread, through emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity: as examples, the continuity on the thematic level (the rain in D'Annunzio's poem and in Moretti's crepuscular poem); the continuity between different poetic movements, in spite of their opposition (some aspects of D'Annunzio's poetry are to be found in the Crepuscular poetry, such as the endeavor to escape reality); discontinuity represented by the very short and tight character of Hermetic poetry compared to the D'Annunzian grandiloquence; the strong break introduced by Futurists' contempt for the past compared with D'Annunzio's cult of old golden ages;
- the use of translation, for different purposes: to facilitate comprehension, to train language awareness and to increase sensitivity to the problematic field of the possibilities and limitations of translation itself;
- the use of technical means as Youtube to ensure that the poetry maintains its oral dimension and to move it closer to the students' daily universe.

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