

GIUSEPPE JOVINE

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BOOKS: La poesia di Albino Pierro (Rome: Edizioni Il Nuovo Cracas, 1965);

Lu pavone (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1970)

La Luna e la montagna (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1972)

Tra il Biferno e la Moscova (Rome: Cartia Editore, 1975)

Benedetti Molisani (Campobasso: Edizioni Enne, 1979)

Marcello Scarano e la sua pittura, co-edited with Alberindo Grimani (Campobasso: Scarano Editore, 1986)

Lu pavone, 2nd Edition, with an introduction by Tommaso Fiore and a foreword by Walter Mauro (Campobasso: Edizioni Enne, 1983)

Giuseppe Jovine, poet, short story writer, journalist, as well as literary and social critic, has emerged, after his older cousin Francesco Jovine and the poet Eugenio Cirese, as one of the leading writers and intellectuals of the region of Molise. As with his two predecessors, at the

heart of his work is an abiding concern for the social, economic and political problems confronting his relatively less developed native region in a world dominated by mass communication and extremely rapid changes at all levels of the social spectrum. Even more pronounced is his political commitment, both in his literary production and in his intense activity as a journalist and lecturer, on the side of social reform and outspokenly against a political class in his view subservient to a widespread patronage system and insensitive to real economic and social needs. Therefore his use of dialect in his book of poetry, Lu pavone (The Peacock), and in subsequent works of fiction, is indicative not only of a precise literary stand within the context of both regional and national literature, but is grounded on a clear ideological substratum, a profound awareness of its potential for subversion and its complex symbiotic relationship with Italian language and society. As in Cirese, dialect, with its deep-rooted and wonderfully rich world of experiences, represents, as Jovine himself acknowledges, the inalienable, fundamental core of all of his writings, including those in Italian.

Giuseppe Jovine was born in Castelmauro, a small town in the region of Molise, in an old Ducal palace bought by his ancestors from the Dukes of Canzano. His mother, Adele Gallina, came from Montecilfone, a descendant of the Albanian colonies which settled in Italy in the Sixteenth Century. A woman with a fifth grade education, she was intelligent and sensitive, and remained dynamic and exuberant until her death in 1974, at the age of ninety. Jovine's father was from Castelmauro, a versatile man whose special interests were music and Florentine history, which he studied assiduously. He could play several instruments, but his favorite was the oboe, which he always kept locked in its case, never allowing his son to touch it. Jovine reminisces about this in an article which appeared in Il Paese (12 November 1954), entitled "L'oboe prigioniero" (The Captive Oboe), in which he sees the instrument as a symbol for his father, who remained a prisoner within the walls of his house while dreaming of a different life. Jovine's father was also active in local politics, and once, when both he, a Christian Democrat, and his son, a Communist, were scheduled

to give a speech on the same evening, he withdrew to avoid the possibility of a contrast. He died in 1954 of cancer.

When he was eleven years old Giuseppe Jovine was sent to study in the Salesian Institute in Macerata where he stayed for five years. It is here, at the age of sixteen, that he wrote his very first article, which was published in a student review. The article, on D'Annunzio's Contemplazione della morte, marked the beginning of a life-long interest in the poet from Abruzzi, and it was read by Professor Scremenna of the University of Florence, who was so impressed that he went to Macerata to meet the young author. In 1938 Jovine went to Chieti to continue his studies in the Liceo Classico, and during this time he decided to run away with a friend to join a battalion bound for Albania, but was stopped by the colonel when he noticed that the boys' military disguise did not include regulation trousers. He then attended the University of Florence, in his third year joining the army with the university battalions, and was stationed in the Brennero and then in Tuscany until the fall of Mussolini in 1945. During his university years Jovine began to write his first poems, which he published in student papers, and critical essays which appeared in Gioventù, a student publication of the University of Naples. At the University of Florence he studied with Giorgio Pasquali, the Greek scholar author of Pagine Stravaganti, and with Giuseppe de Robertis, whose teachings and formalist critical approach left a lasting mark on Jovine's own process of analysis, tending toward a very close reading of the text, but rejecting a strictly formalist procedure. Jovine is in fact often critical of modern methodologies such as structuralism and deconstructionism, which in his view can come dangerously close to a belated positivism. The critic must go beyond the purely linguistic phenomenon and, in the Marxist tradition, consider it in its complex dynamic interplay with the social context which has generated it.

This measured critical posture is a fundamental trait of Jovine's work, and was already apparent in his youth when, barely twenty years old, he would give political speeches advocating the need to reconcile Christian and Communist principles. The idea of a "historic compromise", Jovine

maintains, was not conceived by Berlinguer, the late Communist Party leader, but is a necessity strictly related to Italy's national reality. Even before Fascism, Guido Viglioli, author of Con Roma e con Mosca, which was a lasting source of inspiration for Jovine, and one of the founders of the Partito Popolare, was urging a reconciliation of Christian and Communist ideals. Jovine's own political ideas, however, had begun to develop much earlier, when he was only thirteen or fourteen years old and accompanied his uncle Paolo Jovine, a Socialist councillor for the province, to his meetings and discussions with the workers; he would later read all the speeches that his uncle had left in the family library at Castelmauro. Toward the end of the war, with Castelmauro under German occupation, the twenty-two-year-old Jovine was named Commissario Prefettizio, which after the fall of Mussolini was the equivalent of the office of mayor. Since in Molise there was no real war of resistance, Jovine helped to organize one of the liberation corps which were formed in every town during the partisan struggle. Jovine's group made possible the escape of several English prisoners, and Jovine himself gave instructions to clear the mines which the Germans had placed under the bridge leading out of town. The attempt failed, however, as the man in charge of the operation was spotted by the Germans and forced to flee (this episode will appear in one of the stories of Luna e la montagna (The Moon and the Mountain)). In 1948 Jovine passed a qualifying examination for a teaching position as a secondary school teacher and moved to Rome, where he began teaching in various secondary schools, first philosophy and then Italian and Latin. He taught in secondary schools from 1948 to 1973. In 1973 he decided to stop teaching, because the constraints of a rigid humanistic education, which at the time still did not go beyond the nineteenth century, prevented him from teaching modern poetry and contemporary literature and from carrying out a program which he felt could be of real interest to his students. He became instead a secondary school principal, a position which he holds to this day.

Jovine's conciliatory stance between Christian and Communist thought, and between idealism and Marxism, pointing to a necessary convergence of historical and literary phenomena,

is already evident in his first book, La poesia di Albino Pierro (The Poetry of Albino Pierro), a study of Pierro's Italian and dialect poetry published in 1965. The critic Gennaro Savarese, in his own monograph on Pierro, La lirica tursitana di Albino Pierro (Rome: Edizioni Il Nuovo Cracas, 1966), which appeared the following year, underscored Jovine's seeming contradiction (pp. 39-40): "Nel tentativo lodevole di approssimarsi ad una storicizzazione della poesia di Pierro, l'accertamento di Jovine procede in una prospettiva gramsciana della letteratura pur se oscilla tra il concetto marxistico dell'arte come modo di appropriazione del reale e l'ineliminabile eredità dell'estetica crociana" (In the laudable attempt to historicize Pierro's poetry, Jovine's inquiry proceeds in a Gramscian perspective of literature, even though it wavers between a Marxist concept of art as a way of appropriating reality and the unavoidable legacy of Croce's aesthetics). In fact Jovine balances a penetrating textual analysis of Pierro's poetry with an effort to place it within a historical and literary framework, from its "archaic" and natural Christianity, completely immune from confessional preconceptions, and therefore more responsible and problematic, to a secret longing for the fabulous baronial world of the Mezzogiorno. In Pierro he discovers the same contrast that Pasolini found in Eugenio Cirese, between a historicistic objectivation of reality inspired by Gramsci's formula of a literature which is both popular and national, and a personal religious introversion, which reflects on an individual level the psychological conflict of the people of southern Italy. To this extent, "la storia culturale di Pierro è un po' la storia culturale di tutta la borghesia italiana di formazione cattolico-idealista" (Pierro's cultural history is in a way the cultural history of the whole Italian middle-class with a Catholic-idealist background -p.24), while his complex spiritual drama is rooted in the convergence of a nineteenth-century romantic-philological heritage and twentieth-century ideological motivations. While recognizing Pierro's faithfulness to his own poetic universe, in which his painful condition as a spiritual exile leads to a near obsession with his childhood and his native region, and his compassion for others is nourished by his secret vocation for sorrow and human redemption, Jovine is critical in those places where he notices an excessive artistic detachment, which prevents the poet

from considering his own individual sorrow in the light of a broader human suffering : "si direbbe che il popolo lo interessi più come categoria tipica, nota paesistica, sfondo pittorico, che come mezzo per una verifica di pene e di conflitti umani (one would think that the people interest him more as a typical category, local color, pictorial background, than as a means to examine human sorrows and conflicts -p.58). This concern for the collective nature of human suffering, and ultimately for the social character of poetry and art, is defended by Jovine in a note at the end of the book, in which he justifies his critical methodology. Citing Lukacs and Croce, he attempts to resolve the apparent contradictions of idealist and marxist aims in his essay by reconciling the formalists' concern for the linguistic and stylistic phenomenon with the marxists's social and historical priorities. If poetry is nourished by the personality of the poet, which is historicity and morality, then the historical, moral, religious, psychological, political values of a particular society, real or imagined, are implicated in the creative process. Philological and historical research are complementary, not autonomous, activities (Going a step further, Jovine has recently advanced the notion that Croce's theory of reciprocity within a unified, circular, self-generating spirit can be compared to the reciprocal circularity of Marx's concepts of structure and superstructure, where all historical and political phenomena are intimately connected). Jovine concludes his study by saying that Pierro, "poeta di formazione e ispirazione cattolico-idealistica, ha saputo darci quello che i marxisti definiscono un 'rispecchiamento dialettico della realtà umana'" (a poet with a Catholic-idealist background, was able to give us what marxists call a "dialectical reflection of human reality" -p.93).

The multiplicity of Jovine's personal, literary and ideological concerns converge and come sharply into focus in Lu pavone (The Peacock), a collection of poems in dialect published in 1983, which is the product of a life-long meditation on the integration and interrelationship between dominant and subordinate cultures, reflected in the most immediate and immediately perceptible way in the complex question of language and its social implications, already touched upon in the book on Pierro. Pierro, who for a while was a colleague of Jovine, is one of the foremost dialect poets in

Italy, and his poetry has been a catalyzing agent for several southern poets. The contact with Pierro's poetry was for Jovine a decisive turning point in his reflections on dialect and its wide and profound ramifications. Jovine argues that all contemporary dialect poetry is characterized by the attempt to modernize the dialect and to recover its existential roots at the psychological as well as emotional level; the dialect-speaking province is a metaphor of the universe, the means of mediation of its relationship with the world, witness of a reasoned connection between poetry and contemporary historical reality, the occasion of an idiomatic compromise between language and dialect; a compromise which is the indispensable condition of the lexical, figurative and structural enrichment of both language and dialect. Without the dialectic relationship between hegemonic culture and subordinate peasant culture many modern poets would be unexplainable, because the question of the "popular" as an emblem of linguistic subordination has a more complex articulation than is suspected by dialectophobic purists. The "popular" is not only the realm of pathetic improvisation, of superstition, of romantic irrationality, but also the place of an autonomous cultural re-elaboration; and it's in fact on the level of an apparent diversionary and escapist folklore that one finds the authenticity of the so-called peasant culture, which is a "quid" which everyone, whether dominant or subordinate, carries within oneself and in all forms of behavior, including artistic forms. For this reason Lucania or Molise, for example, cannot be confined in an abstract or empyrean anthropological area, but are alive in everyone of us. The production in dialect, just as the production in Italian, is always an operation of cultural montage, which must aim at the conservation of the dialectal core of the poetic material, but contextually also at the assimilation, detectable in all great dialect poets, of "cultured" linguistic forms, which must be however readable in a dialectal key, without intellectualistic excesses or arbitrary literary ornateness. This dialectic, Gramscian view of peasant culture as an all-encompassing moral universe existing in all men, regardless of national or ethnic origin, is at the heart of Jovine's literary and ideological life, and it clearly precludes a priori any reductive, paternalistic approach, literary or otherwise, to that culture or its language. Writing

dialect poetry is a critical, far-reaching process of cultural mediation, requiring constant vigilance and control, at the service of a strategy of self-limitation, adopted with success by Jovine's immediate literary predecessor Eugenio Cirese, and by Jovine himself in Lu pavone, where the poetic persona rises from within the bounds of a precisely defined cultural and linguistic universe without ever going beyond them. Yet within this well-defined world Jovine's language moves, as Tullio De Mauro points out in the preface to the book, in the most diverse directions, from satirical representation and vivid realism, to irony, to lyrical dream, to hope. The image of the peacock in the very first poem, for instance, which inspired the title of the book, is emblematic of the power of poetic transfiguration, through which the experience of the war unfolds as a murky dream ("nu sunne 'ntruvedate"), a memorial displacement totally concentrated on one fabled, purifying vision :

Tamiente mò quille ciardine
 'ncima a lu paiese.
 É 'na macera.
 Mmane a lu Barone
 ce steva 'nu pavone;
 'ncopp'a chella costa assulagnata
 iava pascenne coma 'na cumeta,
 ma s'alluccava, Miserè,
 pareia 'nu murte accise.
 É passata la guerra,
 'nu sunne 'ntruvedate
 che nen sacce areccuntà:
 ghianche e nire, virde e gialle,
 Marucchine e Merecane

prutestante e mussurmane!...
Ieva guerra o carnevale?
Ieva guerra, Miserè!
Mò tu m'a sapè ddice, Miserè,
pecchè de tutte quille terramote
quille pavune sule m'arecorde
ncopp'a cchella costa assulagnata,
c'alluccava e faceva la rota
coma 'nu ventaglie arrecamate
mmane a 'na bella femmena affatata
o 'na signora de lu tiempe antiche...

(Look at that garden now
at the top of the town.
It's in ruins.
During the Baron's times
there was a peacock;
on that sunswept hillside
it went browsing like a comet,
but if it cried out, Miserè,
it sounded like someone led to slaughter.
The war is over,
a murky dream
I don't know how to tell:
white and black, green and yellow,

Moroccans and Americans
Protestants and Moslems!..
Was it a war or a carnival?
It was war, Miserè!
But now you have to tell me why, Miserè,
from all that turmoil
only that peacock I remember
on that sunswept hillside,
crying out and spreading its tail
like an embroidered fan
in the hand of a beautiful enchantress
or a lady from days gone by.)

The realism of the peacock's cry (like someone led to slaughter), an arresting image of universal sorrow, is not always redeemed by a healing, cathartic memorial process; in "Sò le tre nu palazze" (It's three o'clock in the building), in the silence of the afternoon every word becomes a cry of pain: "e nu viche ogne parola/è nu taluorne de malate/o nu llucche ammizz'a la nevefra" (and in the alley every word/is the moan of someone sick/or a cry in the middle of a snowstorm). This recurrent theme of universal suffering, with its all-pervasive death imagery, is often embodied by the most beautiful or fragile creatures, like the peacock, or the sparrow in the terrifyingly real "La tagliola" (The trap):

'Mbaccia a lu fuche dormene le gatte;
scrocchiene cioccre e ceppe allegre allegre.
'Ncopp'a la neve senza 'na pedata
nu passarielle stritte 'na tagliola

a vocca aperta sbatte e scennecheia.

(The cats are all asleep before the fire;
the log and firewood crackle cheerily.
On the snow without footprints
a sparrow gripped in a trap
thrashes and flaps his wings with his mouth
gaping.)

While the anthropomorphic gaping mouth replaces the beak in fraternal empathy for a suffering creature, the controlled tonal uniformity, the uncompromising lack of rhythmic discrepancy between the peaceful initial verses and the striking death scene, rather than to tragic irony attest to the doleful acceptance of a natural order. The representation of all suffering through a similar split image will reach its greatest lyric intensity in one of the best poems of the book, "Quanta volte 'ei lassate mamma sola!" (How many times I left my mother all alone!)

"Pù partive!
E mamma,
nu cellucce 'mpazzute tra le mure
ca n'artrova la via pe lu ciele,
sbatteia le scenne a la ventura
e zitta zitta z'abbiava
pe chille stanze spicce
ca parevane cisterne."

(Then I would leave!
And my mother,
a bird gone mad inside the walls
who can't find the way to the sky
would beat her wings every which way
and very silently set out
through those empty rooms
that looked like cisterns.)

In this memorial recovery of a slowly disintegrating world, death itself is a constant but variously modulated presence, obsessive in the thought of the dead parents:

Ogne notte arepenze a mamma e tata.
Le vede com'arrete a 'na tendina
o pettate nè mure de la stanza
coma chille fegure 'mgiallanite
e tutte pette e crepe e ciammaragne
ne' lamie de 'na chiesa add' ce cantene
le grille e le cichèle.

(Every night I think of my mother and father.
I see them as from behind a curtain
or painted on the walls of the roomm
like those yellowing figures

all spots and cracks and cobwebs
 on the vaults of a church where crickets
 and cicadas sing.)

Or almost a playful game, even in a concentration camp : "La morte è na pazziella de quatrare" (Death is a children's game). The dead that people this world, the frequent funerals, the faces of long-forgotten friends suddenly surfacing, the wind, the snowstorms, the many memorable townspeople, his father's ties, the fairs, the sound of a boy's " cirche de fierre" (iron hoop) bouncing and singing like a bell, the moon leaving a white pearl of snow on the dresser, the sky like "'Na cuncarella spiccia, 'na chitarra!/Cuscè te fischiene le recchie" (An empty seashell, a guitar!/To make your ears whistle!), are the objects of a redemptive mnesis celebrating the boundless renewability of life: "Gna quille fille d'erva trettecante/dent'a 'na crepa mbusse d'acquarezza/me vé sempe da dice ogne matine:/mo vé lu sole e m'aretrove sciore (Like that shivering blade of grass/in a crack wet with dew/I feel like saying every morning/now comes the sun and I'll turn into a flower).

What sets Jovine apart from other dialect poets from Molise, Cirese in particular, is the richness and versatility of his poetic language, which is capable of the most delicate nuances and subtle effects, yet frequently breaks into a grating, bristling realism, which guarantees a strict adherence to a determined linguistic (and ethical) universe. This jarring phonic density of the poetic discourse, uncommon even among dialect poets and occasionally present in Pierro, is probably the most distinctive feature of Jovine's dialect poetry and can be considered, as Francesco D'Episcopo proposes (Nuovo Mezzogiorno, No 3, March 1985, p. 37) the anthropological result of a continuous representation of thought and feeling, of a physical sense of being. From the description of Zi Michele "nu cucce/de pippa stracca quanne z'arrachisce/nu cencone stutate na ciniscia!" (a shard /from a worn-out pipe when it hoarsens,/a burnt-out log in its ashes), to the remake of ancient folk poems, to the humorously shocking, expressionistic dinner of a hungry

old marquis in "Lu pullastrelle" "The rooster" : "e sberretatte feghete e vedelle/le squartatte, tretatte tutte l'ossa/piette, pulmune, core e cuderizze" (and she unraveled liver and entrails/tore apart and crushed all the bones,/breast, lungs, heart and rump), to the the havoc wreaked by the wind in "Aria rosca" (Red air): "atturcina la munnezza, /scorcio le capre, arechieca lu firre,/sdellazza porte e gente gna nu sbirre" (it tangles garbage,/flays goats, twists iron/batters doors and people like a cop), Jovine poetic dialect sparkles and crackles with ever-renewed intensity and inventiveness.

In 1972 Jovine published a collection of short stories entitled La luna e la montagna (The Moon and the Mountain), most of which were written in the years 1948-1950. Four of them had already appeared in Paese sera in 1950-1951. In the tradition of Verismo, the stories are set in his native region of Molise, teeming with a multitude of characters still rooted in a primitive, instinctive, ancestral world, which the author explores in all its seething, occasionally explosive, humanity. Jovine follows the lives of his characters with a natural, profound understanding of the forces that motivate and shape them, but his participation in their joys and sorrows, his privileged insider's perspective on a world he knows so well, are counterbalanced by a pervasive narrative subtlety and guarded irony, which dispel any possibility of nostalgic musings or veiled sentimentality. Jovine felt he needed to move away from both Verga and Francesco Jovine, the latter in particular, whose occasional tendency toward an embroidered prose was a temptation to be avoided. He aims therefore at immediacy of expression, achieved by means of a language deeply rooted in the social context and keenly attuned to the psychology and moral universe of his characters, which are of course steeped in dialect. In Jovine's language one immediately senses the extensive influence of dialect, its flavor, its cadence, its earthiness, its expressive power and vitality, especially in the lively conversations of the people. Yet, when the character or the situation demand it, it can handle philosophical speculations as well as political invective. The dialectal underpinning of Jovine's language is a direct, necessary link to the historical and social reality of the region. In this sense the events and characters described are all real, Jovine points out, because their fictional

identity has a precise, definable, historical determination. Therefore the regional reality can be transcended, at times even transported into completely unfamiliar and estranging terrain, as in the surrealist dialogue of "La luna e la montagna" and the quasi-hallucinatory experience of "L'alluvione". All legitimate operations, Jovine holds, as long as the writer achieves credibility, that is, as long as he is able to establish a relationship between fictional and historical reality which the reader is willing to acknowledge. Jovine's manipulation of surrealist imagery, unexpectedly arising from the commonplace and the ordinary, like the hanged dogs in "Il vento degli impiccati" (The Hanging Wind) or the horse torn to pieces by a famished crowd in "La guerra" (The War), attest to his determination to reinterpret a native realist tradition in a personally distinctive way. Always present, whether the theme of the story is war, passion, fratricide, homosexuality or superstition, are the historical and social forces against which the characters try to assert themselves. "L'alluvione" (The Flood), with its nightmarish, surrealist description of mass destruction and death, is a rather overt political allegory, a violent invective against modern society and its corrupt ruling class; and a contained undercurrent of social criticism is perceptible in the moving, complex portrayal of Signora Impedove, the leading character in one of the best stories in the book. Yet the light irony running through all the stories is a self-corrective strategy which usually prevents the implied polemical stance from assuming a denunciatory tone. A lightness of touch is evident in "Il miracolo" (The Miracle), where seven men afflicted with hernia make a pilgrimage in search of a miraculous cure, or in "La piuma" (The Feather), where a retired colonel falls to his death trying to reach a feather that had come to rest on his rooftop. In all these stories one senses a controlled narrative skill, a natural instinct for story telling, and above all a deep understanding of human nature.

In 1975 Jovine published Tra il Biferno e la Moscova (Between the Biferno and the Moscow River), a collection of poems in Italian written for the most part between 1950 and 1960. A few of them had already appeared as early as 1942 in Gioventù, the student publication of the University of Naples. While Jovine rejects any affiliation with the various

literary currents and poetic schools, and is in fact openly adverse to all types of hermetic or neo-hermetic movements, the neo-avanguardia and the trans-avanguardia in particular, he readily acknowledges that his first book of poetry betrays a diffuse cultural conditioning, especially in the constant echoing of themes and patterns made popular by D'Annunzio, whom Jovine has always considered one of the great innovators of Italian poetry, heralding the recent widespread effort to restore a more balanced critical view of the latter's poetry. D'Annunzio presence is felt, for example, in the frequent recurrence of anaphoric reiterations and long catalog of images, as in "Il canto dell'emigrante" (The emigrant's song):

...e ci tornavano in sogno le notti
 il canto dei pollai,
 le stanze odorose di stame,
 le stanze odorose di grano,
 la luna d'agosto sull'aia,
 il fermento del mosto nei tini,
 l'erba fresca e la lingua degli agnelli,
 l'acqua riccia dei ruscelli...

(...and in our dreams came the nights again,
 the song of the hen-houses,
 the rooms fragrant with wheat,
 the august moon on the threshing-floor,
 the must fermenting in the vats,
 the fresh grass and the lambs' tongue,
 the swirling water of the streams...)

The counterpoint to this sustained, unrelenting verse, is the surfacing of a more subdued tone and subtle, self-deprecating irony, strongly reminiscent of Crepuscolarismo, as for instance in the affectionate, tongue-in-cheek treatment of the nun in "Suora Bianca":

Io busso ogni mattina ad una porta
di fronte al tuo convento, in una via...
in Via, ahimè, delle Botteghe Oscure.
Per voi, per voi, sorelle castigate
quella porta è la porta dell'inferno!

(Every morning I knock at a door
across from your convent, in a street...
alas, in Via delle Botteghe Oscure.
For you, for you, chaste sisters
that door is the door to hell!)

The reference to the Communist Party headquarters in Via delle Botteghe Oscure as the door to hell in the eyes of the chaste nuns, with all its good-natured wit, underscores Jovine's political theme, which runs through the whole book. In fact the amiable exhortation a little later on: "Suor Bianca, orsù, prendiamoci per mano!" (Come now, Sister Bianca, let's walk hand in hand), with which the poet tries to overcome an old friend's suspicions, has also much wider implications, which point to a possible reconciliation between Christian and Marxist ideology.

It is this commitment to bring to light the moral (and political) grounding of reality which is highlighted by Massimo Grillandi in his preface to the book (p. 3): "Perché Jovine è riuscito a creare una sua personale dimensione poetica, centrata fortemente sul reale. Non poesia realistica,

intendiamoci; ma semmai un realismo filtrato attraverso una ferma concezione morale, diciamo un moral-realismo, che può essere appunto una nuova dimensione della nostra poesia, dopo gli abbandoni ermetici e neorealisti" (Because Jovine has succeeded in creating a personal poetic dimension, sharply focused on reality. Not realistic poetry, let's be clear about this; but rather a realism filtered through a moral conception of reality, let's call it moral-realism, which could indeed be a new dimension of our poetry, after the Hermetic and Neo-realist self-indulgence). His dedication to ideas of social justice, equality, and civic duty generates a severe underlying moral tension, which cannot always find the ironic detachment of "Suor Bianca", and often erupts in open invective. Such is the case in "In morte of Saverio Trincia" (On the death of Saverio Trincia), where the sadness for the death of the beloved teacher suddenly gives way to literary derision and biting sarcasm: "C'è persino un poeta fonemático,/una metasemantica poetessa/ansimanti 'pistards' della cultura" (There is even a phonematic poet/a metasemantic poetess/panting 'pistards' of culture). The polemical tone becomes even more violent and explosive and the political fervor more impassioned when Jovine deals with topical issues. "Mosca" (Moscow) is a fierce attack on the injustices and corruption of the West, while "Brescia" is a blistering excoriation of Italy's ruling class:

Vampiri d'Italia

se avete sete

andate a bere il sangue ai petrolieri

che comprano i Ministri a peso d'oro,

ma non bevete il sangue proletario.

(Vampires of Italy

if you are thirsty

go drink the blood of the oilmen

GIUSEPPE JOVINE

who buy off the Ministers with gold,
but don't drink proletarian blood)

Yet Jovine's indignation is not the inevitable byproduct of a rigid ideological posture; it is born instead from his deep love for his people and for his land, which he feels is being ravished by greed and indifference. A land with its vineyards and wheatfields, olive trees and poplars, but also with its harshness and starkness:

La mia terra ha il silenzio
che dissecca i fiumi,
sbianca i boschi e l'erba dei prati,
sfianca e spolpa le montagne
come branchi di vecchie elefantesse.

(My land has the silence
that dries up the rivers,
that bleaches the woods and the meadow grass,
wears out and strips bare the mountains
like herds of old elephants.)

This description of an austere landscape in "Che venga il tuo regno Signore" (May your kingdom come Lord) leads to a meditation on the cruel life of the emigrant, another key figure in Jovine's work, and finally to a sense of outrage for those "non ancora stanchi/di giocare le vesti logore di Cristo" (not yet tired/of gambling away Christ's tattered clothes). One could say with Gianni Barrella ("Il Molise emblematico di Giuseppe Jovine, Giornale d'Italia, 16 march 1976), that the book is "un

unico, ininterrotto discorso d'amore" (a single, uninterrupted declaration of love), moving from the people and the landscapes of Molise to a more intimate, personal space, which history cannot reach, and the poems dedicated to his wife are among the best in the volume.

In 1979 came Benedetti Molisani (Blessed Molisani), a collection of essays on the cultural history of his native region. In his prefatory remarks the author warns us that his way of speaking is "matta e sghemba" (crazy and crooked) and that the book is a kaleidoscope of images whose unity of design, while perhaps not immediately discernible, the reader can discover in the intricate interweaving of impressions and ideas: "Ci si può collocare dinnanzi al libro come dinanzi a un'anamorfofi', una deformazione prospettica, voglio dire, che consente una visione esatta solo a chi guarda dal punto giusto" (We can place ourselves before the book as before an 'anamorphosis', I mean a perspective deformation which allows an exact view only to those looking from the right angle). The author's humorous reference to the book's internal contradictions is an acknowledgement of its thematic and structural sketchiness, no doubt due to the fact that the various pieces were written at different times and for different purposes; yet this apparent lack of a clearly recognizable organizational pattern does not preclude an underlying thematic cohesiveness, but rather suggests, as Francesco D'Episcopo points out, with an allusion to Eco's book by that name, "un'opera aperta" (an open work): "Questa 'apertura' dell'opera di Jovine è sintomatica della pregnante validità interna della sua costruzione storica e fantastica insieme, che impedisce ai vari capitoli di porsi come atipici compartimenti stagni, garantendo la intrinseca fluidità e dialettica circolarità inventiva delle loro sotterranee linee di comunicazione" (This 'openness' of Jovine's work is symptomatic of the telling inner validity of his historical as well as imaginative construction, which prevents the various chapters to stand as atypical watertight compartments, guaranteeing the intrinsic ideological fluidity and dialectical inventive circularity of their subterranean lines of communication) (Critica Letteraria, 29 November 1980, p.840). What in fact guarantees the book's coherence despite its patchwork heterogeneity is an uncompromising determination to reconstruct and reposition the cultural heritage

and historical significance of the region of Molise within the wider national framework. This region, one of the smallest and poorest of Italy, "un Mezzogiorno nel Mezzogiorno" (a South within the South), as Jovine calls it, is examined from a variety of different angles, constantly shifting from a socio-political and historical analysis to aesthetic and personal judgements, all intimately connected and made relevant by the author's encompassing memory and critical acumen. While Jovine's attempt to draw a distinctive portrait of the regional character within the broader context of the Mezzogiorno is not entirely convincing, his overview of the literature, art and architecture of Molise, presented with a great deal of intelligence and discernment, while professedly an open-ended exhortation to further study, succeeds in its important aim to restore the full cultural and artistic significance of the region by elevating it to national levels. One can only agree with Sabino D'Acunto (Molise Oggi, 22 February 1981) when he says that not everyone has understood the importance of this book for the cultural history of Molise. While some have underscored marginal elements, very few have seen it as the record of an epoch.

Three of the first four chapters of the book, "Benedetti Molisani", "I molisani e la politica" (The people of Molise and politics), and "La luna e la provincia" (The moon and the province), are the most controversial and uneven of the whole book, as they take up the thorny question of moral, social and political responsibility. The picture Jovine draws of the people of Molise is on the whole far from flattering, and while he takes great pains to uncover their numerous faults and weaknesses, this moral portrayal lacks the marked distinguishing traits that would define the regional character and differentiate it from the more traditional perception of the failings of the Mezzogiorno (p. 17):

É sorprendente come i Molisani, insofferenti al più impercettibile fiato che appanni il vetro del loro prestigio, si rivelino poi maestri del soffiutto e del compromesso, della lisciatura e del piatire e alla fine confondano l'amore con il lassismo pietistico e caritativo, la giustizia con la foia forcaiola, la fede col sanfedismo, l'amicizia col

traffico sottobanco o l'imbroglione col galantuomismo, ch'è la pietra di paragone del bene e del male.

(It is surprising how the Molisani, intolerant of the most imperceptible breath which might cloud over the glasspane of their prestige, then turn out to be masters of puff and compromise, of fawning and pleading, and at the end they confuse love with pietistic and charitable laxism, justice with reactionary zeal, faith with ultraconservatism, friendship with underhanded dealings, or cheating with gentility, which is the touchstone of good and evil.)

Even more acerbic is the tone when Jovine turns to the historical and political causes behind the eternal backwardness of his region: the greed and selfishness of the landowners and "galantuomini", a conniving and insensitive clergy, the "trasformismo" or quick-change artistry of a ruling class whose power base is built on a widespread and deeply-rooted patronage system, the careerism of a paternalistic middle class, the conservatism of the dominant political party and its lack of political will to address the real economic and social problems of the region.

In the subsequent chapters, which deal with literature and art, Jovine the polemicist yields to Jovine the critic. He surveys the narrative tradition of his region in the works of writers such as Francesco Jovine, Lina Pietravalle, Sabino D'Acunto, Vincenzo Rossi, Franco Ciampitti, Felice Del Vecchio and Giose Rimaneli in search of a native voice, the irreducible core of a shared heritage which the multiplicity of results and experiences cannot obliterate. Jovine offers some penetrating insights on the substantial gap that can exist between technological progress and psychological adaptation, and which the novelist must always take into consideration. A modification of the process of production does not imply an immediate modification of behavior or social relationships. Even language itself can be misleading:

Può accadere che un borghese parli il linguaggio del moderno proletariato industriale e e sia ancora affettivamente, sentimentalmente legato a realtà storico-soziale conservatrice. Lo scrittore in questo caso deve guardare al comportamento del borghese, non al linguaggio.

(It can happen that someone from the middle class speaks the language of the modern industrial working class and is still bound by feelings and emotions to a conservative socio-historical reality. The writer in this case must look at the behavior of the person from the middle class, not the language.)

Just as insightful are Jovine's observations on the possible emergence of a new southern fiction from a new social, political and religious consciousness within the folds of a middle class psychology, where aestheticism, Marxism, realism, Catholicism and anarchism are commingled in an incandescent magma, a very fertile ground for novelists. Jovine's discussion of the dialect poetry of Molise in the next chapter is the thoughtful culmination of a life-long interest in dialect poetry which began with the study on Pierro and found its fullest expression in Lu pavone. After a brief excursus of the early poetry in the dialect of Molise (the very first poems were written toward the end of the last century), Jovine examines at some length the work of the most important poet of Molise, Eugenio Cirese, who brought the dignity of the highest literary standards to a language almost devoid of literary precedents, and subsequent poets like Nina Guerrizio, Giovanni Cerri, Giovanni Barrea. At the heart of his analysis is the necessity to keep at all times within the expressive possibilities of dialect; nothing is more pernicious to a dialect poet than borrowing linguistic structures from the Italian which are alien to the dialect in which he is writing.

The chapter titled "Pittori Molisani" (Painters of Molise) is a perceptive introduction to the painters Gilda Pansiotti, Domenico Fratianni and Marcello

Scarano, whose works Jovine will bring to national attention in numerous articles and in his later participation in the publication of books on Fratianni and Scarano [He co-edited Marcello Scarano e la sua pittura (Marcello Scarano and his paintings) (Campobasso: Scarano Editore, 1986)]. Finally, the book closes with a series of "medaglioni" (medallions), brief sketches of notable Molisani, among which stands out the portrait of the writer Giose Rimaneli, now living in the United States.

No discussion of Giuseppe Jovine would be complete without at least mentioning on the one hand his political activity, which as we have seen began when he was a young man and led him in the fifties and then in 1979 to run for regional and national office and to lecture widely both in Italy and abroad; and on the other hand his work as a journalist, having written more than two hundred articles on a remarkable variety of subjects: farmers's rights, emigration, art and architecture, the Mezzogiorno question, dialects and dialect poetry, literary theory, pedagogy, political parties, travel, to name a few. Until 1988 he wrote for Paese Sera, and currently writes for Critica Letteraria. Between 1970 and 1973 he was co-editor with Tommaso Fiore of Il Risveglio del Mezzogiorno.

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