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POETRY AS THE 'VERB INCARNATE'

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Rossella M. Riccobono

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Front cover image: Gustav Klimt, *Der Kuss* (1907-08).

Poetry as the 'Verb Incarnate', Illness and the Phenomenological Body

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Notes on Contributors

DR LUANA CIAVOLA has a degree in Modern and Contemporary Italian Literature from The Sapienza University in Rome and a Ph.D in Cinema Studies from The University of Melbourne, Australia. She taught Italian language and literature/cinema both in Australian Universities and in Madrid, Spain. She currently researches in the areas of psychoanalytical theories, cinema, literature and photography. She has several publications, among which *Revolutionary Desire in Italian Cinema* (2010) is noteworthy.

DR CINZIA GALLO has a PhD in Literary and Linguistic Sciences, she specialises in Contemporary Italian Literature and she collaborates as a Lecturer with the Ragusa SDS branch of The University of Catania. She has published edited volumes, conference proceedings and articles for the following journals: *Siculorum Gymnasium*, *Forum Italicum*, *Le Forme e la Storia*, *Carte di viaggio*, *US-China Foreign Language*. Other publications include: *Spigolature letterarie tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Il Poligrafo, 2017); 'La Grande Guerra, esperienza modernista per Giani Stuparich', in *I cantieri dell'italianistica* (2016); 'Flora, la "dalmata italiana" di Maria Rosaria Dominis', in *Letteratura dalmata italiana* (2016); ' "bianchi e immobili per sempre": Vincenzo Consolo e il Mediterraneo', in *The Mediterranean as seen by insiders and outsider* (2016); 'Città e "ruine" di città: Retablo di Vincenzo Consolo', in *La Città* (2015); and the critical edition of a short story collection by Giani Stuparich (2015).

PROF. ILONA KLEIN (Professor Emerita of Italian, Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah) is the recipient of BYU's prestigious Alcuin Fellowship in General Education (2002-2005) and the Karl G. Maeser General Education Professorship (2006). She served as Book Review editor for Italian Culture (1997-2001) and has guest edited two issues of *Lingua Romana*. Her academic interests and publications span from Applied Pedagogy to European Romanticism, to Dante, to Shoah Studies. Currently she is working on a monograph on Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*.

ANNA KOSTNER studied General and Comparative Literature in Munich, Paris and Madrid. Currently she is a PhD student at the Graduate School Practices of Literature (WWU Münster). Since 2019 she has been the recipient of a DAAD scholarship. Her research interests include post 19th century Austrian, French and German literature.

DR SARA MURGIA studied for a Ph.D in Italian Studies at The University of Zurich which was awarded in 2012. Her research interests span narrative, modern and contemporary poetry, female writing and literature of migration. She actively conducts research whilst also teaching Italian Literature at a Secondary School in Turin.

CAROLINE NARRACCI is *agrégée* of classics and she is interested in contemporary poetry. She is working on a thesis under the supervision of Aude Préta-de Beaufort on childhood figures in the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy. She has published two articles about this poet, one about the figures of the Isis and the other about the angelic figure.

DR ROSSELLA M. RICCOBONO (Ph.D University of Edinburgh) is an independent retired scholar (University of St Andrews). She has taught and researched in Italian Studies since 1991 firstly at The University of Edinburgh (1991-97), then at The Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand (2002-03) and, finally, at The University of Saint Andrews (2004-2020). Her main areas of interest are Italian poetry and cinema. She has written on the poetry of Eugenio Montale and Cesare Pavese, and on the cinema of Nanni Moretti and Mario Martone. Lately, her research interests have shifted to the use of poetry therapy for the support of terminal cancer patients in the Hospice institution and, together with F. Gilmour and E. Haraldsdottir, she has co-written an article on 'The value of poetry therapy for people in palliative and end of life care' (*Progress in Palliative Care*, 28, 1, 2020). She wrote poems which were published in *Real Life Bird Song* (Wai-te-ata Press, Wellington, 2003), and her first poetry collection, *States of Mind and Love*, was published by Edizioni Joker, Transference in 2008.

Introductory note

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (1:1) opens John’s Gospel of the King James’s translation of the Bible. It is the very first verse whose three sentences introduce the principle of creation through the ‘Word’ and then progressively associate and identify it with God. Over the imperfect translation of the original ancient Greek λόγος (logos), we shall prefer ‘Verb’, from the Latin *verbum*, which renders more aptly the fully totalising meaning of the original λόγος, which comprehends both the linguistic nature of ‘Word’, a sound with a semantic meaning produced by a thinking/speaking subject, but also the ‘idea’ (ιδέα) which is included in the vision and design of such a subject, i.e. God’s idea, design and act of creation. ‘Verb’, with its extra function of giving agency to the subject (the Italian, Portuguese and Spanish *verbo*, and French *verbe*), will be our favoured version of the original λόγος.

‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’, continues John (1:14). Here the evangelist reveals to the reader more of God’s original idea and design, the incarnation of the Verb, which descends into the space and time we inhabit as human beings to act our salvation. It is the revelation of the Incarnate Verb (the Christ) that is able to save humanity exactly because it assumes our own nature in order to experience it and to fall in love with us and our imperfection – therefore ‘living among us’ is the necessary condition to experience the essence of His created marvels. The Incarnate Verb is already at the origin of the idea, design and eschatological destiny of humanity: God as idea, architect and agent of creation and salvation. ‘In the beginning was the Verb’ [my change] identifies the Verb as God and God as the absolute entity that breathes life into all things simply by naming them. The Verb names (and creates) with *auctoritas* in its numinous meaning of ‘sacred’ and ‘awe-inspiring’, in a pure language of total communication that we cannot even imagine or comprehend and that, here, we associate, very imperfectly, to the poetic word: the ‘verb’ that names, creates and saves.

Roman poet Valerio Magrelli, author of *Nel condominio di carne* (2003), attributes the role of ‘guide’ in his poetic writing to the very daily coexistence with illness from the young age of 17 – not serious debilitating illness, but incidents that accompanied him along his life and his writing often enough to become intrusive life companions whom he recognises to be at the foundation of his poetic inspiration. Magrelli’s search into the body as a ‘condominio di carne (e di lingua)’ looks at illness as a pre-existing condition within the human phenomenological body, with the consumption of the body seen as the very reason of its existence: a body which is consigned to a physical force of disaggregation that allows it to continue to exist. A body which, in its disaggregating nature, is colonised by illness as well as by language: illness allows it to live on whilst consuming it, whilst language becomes the authoritarian discipline, alongside medicine, that tries in vain to cure its natural condition. Within the paradoxical biological system that Magrelli examines, a body suspended between physical consumption and living force, both language and medicine become the cures that, in a sort of bio-political colonising fashion, try to control the human body and consequently the people (and peoples) that own those bodies.

In our research into the phenomenological body in its (natural) condition of illness, we shall research the poetic word as its antidote. Poetry, therefore, will be our means of researching the power of the verb for a very approximative, human, nonetheless powerful salvation. We shall not approach the 'Verb' in its numinous dimension in this context, but in its therapeutic value in the context of illness as the pharmakos (φάρμακός) that can transform stigmatised, marginalised and passive human beings by giving them agency and dignity. The poetic word will be re-thought as a quasi-numinous poetic 'incarnate verb' 'dwelling among us' more fully to function from its textual (both oral and written) dimension as art and as therapy for the healing of the ill body explored from the perspective of phenomenology.

The First Issue of Il Pietrisco Journal, contains seven articles on the subject of 'Poetry as the "Verb Incarnate", Illness and the Phenomenological Body' in English, French and Italian by early career and more established international scholars.

Rossella M. Riccobono, 30 June 2022

