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¹Michel Butor, "Une Autobiographie dialectique," *Repertoire* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1960), p. 262. All translations are my own.

²Butor, *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

³Butor, "Intervention à Royaumont," *Repertoire*, p. 272.

⁴Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures philosophales* (Paris: Schemit, 1930), pp. 82-83.

⁵Butor, *La Modification* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957), p. 236.

Time and Aesthetic Distance in Carlo Bernari's *Le radiose giornate*

From his first novel *Tre operai* (1934) to his latest, *Un foro nel parabrezza* (1971), one of Carlo Bernari's most consistent techniques is his unmasking of contradictions in both individuals and society. *Le radiose giornate* (1969), which is a complete redoing of *Prologo alle tenebre* (1947), best exemplifies this characteristic of Bernari's narrative. *Le radiose giornate* also represents the author's desire to rewrite a novel which in its original form was misunderstood. Perhaps *Prologo's* structure and the political atmosphere in which it was written are partially responsible for its misinterpretation. As a result, the novel was considered to be simply a detective story, or a fictional reconstruction of some political espionage which took place in Naples during the closing days of the Second World War. The author's desire to unveil personal contradictions among fascists and anti-fascists was completely overlooked in 1947. However, in 1969, after certain stylistic changes had been made (Bernari restructures the entire novel), the reader easily discovers the intended message which was undoubtedly present but seemingly hidden in the original version.

A brief analysis of *Prologo alle tenebre* and *Le radiose giornate* will reveal that in *Le radiose giornate* time and aesthetic distance are the primary instruments in portraying the protagonists' contradictions which are directly responsible for their social predicament. Moreover, we shall illustrate that in *Prologo* the historic background, with all its political allusions, and the actual structure of the novel, are primarily responsible for the ambiguities that Bernari needed to clarify twenty years later.

In *Prologo alle tenebre* the connecting link between what may appear to be five separate episodes is the recurring leitmotif of the "secret" which prevails throughout the entire novel and which is explicit in the titles of the chapters. The story unfolds as Eugenio, the narrator-protagonist, recounts events which took place in Naples during the closing days of the Liberation. Within this particular milieu it is not surprising that the characters disguise controversial thoughts or actions with lies. And we can reasonably assume that the political atmosphere is responsible for the secretive ambience. Bernari juxtaposes the political background and the psychological analysis of the main characters in such a manner that at first it is difficult to perceive that the political realism is merely an expedient to point out certain contradictions in the protagonists.

Unlike *Le radiose giornate*, where it is clear that both fascists and anti-fascists are more concerned with their personal affairs than with the problem of the Resistance, in *Prologo* it is not obvious that Eugenio, Bianca, and Andrea are primarily concerned with their own games of hiding as much of the truth as possible from one another. Eugenio and Bianca intentionally mask their love adventure with political espionage and simultaneously conceal their unsuccessful political involvement with their frustrating love relationship. In the same fashion, Don Placido's invention of a son is in reality his way of participating in the Resistance. Moreover, whenever Andrea and other characters resort to "necessary lies," it appears to be the result of the fascist regime which compels individuals to live with secrets. In fact, the recurring key expressions in *Prologo* are *menzogna*, *recitare*, *fingere*, and *segreto*. And if "lies," "fiction," and "secrets" are interpreted as instruments of defense against fascism it is understandable that the reader may actually sympathize with the protagonists.

Notwithstanding, the questions remaining after a reading of *Prologo* are: to what extent did Bernari in 1947 intentionally mask that which in 1969 he wished to unveil? Is the political regime of the period responsible for the main characters' acting in bad faith? Are the "necessary lies" completely justifiable? And finally, are there specific indications in *Prologo* suggesting that the secrets are indeed overt lies, as *Le radiose giornate* illustrates?

The answers are found in the different style, structure, and use of time and aesthetic distance that Bernari applies to the two novels. For example, the original division in five chapters, each focusing on a central character and his major secret, and the emphasis on "necessary lies" disappear in *Le radiose giornate*. In 1969 the secrets are scrutinized more objectively, and at times are contested by the narrator who often alludes to the fact that individuals choose to accept, or adopt, secrets for personal reasons. Finally, regarding the choice of point of view, whereas in *Prologo* Eugenio documents as many incidents as possible, allowing other characters to relate their personal experiences, in the later version Eugenio, relying mainly on his memory and less on other witnesses, appears to dominate the narrative with his monologues. Through statements such as "Cominciavi a mentirmi,"¹ "Ti snidai dai falsi pudori" (p. 35), "Ti mentii" (p. 198), we notice that Eugenio is both judge and witness to the entire story. Thus, the first person narrator seems to control and even overrule the third person account of the events and of other characters.

These changes eliminate most of the ambiguity that existed in the first version. Bernari himself confesses that time distance was a necessary prerequisite in writing *Le radiose giornate*: "Si insiste sulle date per confermare non solo il distacco temporale ma altresì un distacco d'ordine estetico che conferisce alla narrazione di oggi una totale autonomia rispetto a quella più antica" (p. 285). In this brief note to the reader, Bernari alludes to a time and aesthetic distance which distinguishes the two novels, making them autonomous, with separate and particular messages. Nonetheless, we would like to focus on the aesthetic distance that we find in *Le radiose giornate* where the narrator succeeds in distancing himself from the other characters and, most of all, in distancing the reader from the political background which in 1947 tended to detract from a lucid analysis of the protagonists.

In *Prologo* Eugenio claims complete objectivity in documenting rather than inventing the story: "Fossi un romanziere inventerei; ma io non invento; racconto a lei, e un poco a me stesso, i fatti che conosco; faccio la cronaca delle tenebre in cui

fummo reclusi senza speranza."² The *lei* to whom Eugenio refers is Bianca, the woman who is present in 1947 when Eugenio first decides to relate the events which occurred between 1943 and 1945. It is the same *lei* that at the end of the story Eugenio considers a slave to a secret which must be kept by both: "In questo segreto, come per il passato ci creeremo una fittizia liberta per non accorgerci di precipitare, stretti alle nostre finzioni" (p. 431). Hence, even Eugenio contributes to the absurd condition of the period with his own contradictions. And, as every other character, he also wishes to mask them under a secret. On the other hand, in *Le radiose giornate* Eugenio no longer accepts the fusion of reality with fiction and allegedly induced lies, but rather, prefers to uncover the many contradictions which contributed to the chaos and state of uncertainty which prevailed during the Resistance. Eugenio begins the story specifying that once Bianca, the *tu* to whom he persistently addresses himself, is no longer present, now he can truly recount what happened: "Riscriverò tutto da capo, dalla prima all'ultima parola. Tu non ci sei più ad impedirmelo, gli altri scomparsi, morti, traditi. Quando ne scrissi la prima volta ci eravate tutti, vi affollavate attorno al mio tavolo, ciascuno a reclamare una parte congrua del racconto" (p. 11). The narrator implies that the *tu* and the others who are no longer around him represented a "false conscience" which he can now dismiss as he begins his true confession—and investigation.

It is noteworthy that whereas in *Prologo* Eugenio listens more passively to the *lei* and to the others in order to accumulate all available information, in *Le radiose giornate* the narrator's use of the *tu* affords him a more authoritative point of view. He can now gradually assert himself as judge of the events which he relates.

The Eugenio who in *Prologo* was happy to share secrets in *Le radiose giornate* prefers to tell the truth, and so he is not afraid to admit: "Ti mentii," or "È probabile che io abbia inventato i particolari" (p. 272); or more specifically, referring to Andrea, he confesses: "Più che difendere la sua vita clandestina, affermavo un mio diritto a fingere, a mentire, a rifugiarmi anch'io nel suo segreto" (p. 30).

These interjections, which are not found in *Prologo*, contribute to the aesthetic distance that the author instills in *Le radiose giornate* in order that the reader might become less involved in the political background and in other incidents which made *Prologo* resemble a detective story. Consequently, the aesthetic and critical distance achieved through Eugenio's comments becomes a means of detaching the reader from a deep involvement in the general plot and helps him to focus on the contradictions in the central characters, and in particular on Eugenio. In *Le radiose giornate* every character is suspected of having deceived the others. In fact, the narrator must also investigate himself in order to comprehend what caused so much deception and how he inadvertently became a spy. Even Andrea who could be the only sincere character is criticized by Eugenio. By the end of the novel, Eugenio uncovers so many contradictions within himself and his friends that it is impossible to judge whether anyone is guilty or innocent. With so much lying and deception everyone is responsible for the outcome of the Resistance.

We must point out that in *Prologo* the five major secrets posed a problem of communication, they represented an existential condition which induced the state of fiction and simulation. The same secrets, in 1969, become evidence of overt lies. The protagonists are cross-examined as if they were in a court room, and the

verdict is that everyone contributed to the accumulation of lies. Therefore, while the juxtaposition of internal contradictions among fascists and anti-fascists helps to detract in *Prologo* from any accusation which may be directed against the main characters, it becomes, in *Le radiose giornate*, a means of disclosing all the personal contradictions of the whole society, and shows that the former are as dangerous and as ridiculous as the latter.

The change in title from *Prologo alle tenebre* to *Le radiose giornate* indicates the narrator's irony by admitting that it was not hope and truth that they were striving for, but simple lies. The darkness of *Prologo* which covered both secrets and lies is partly shattered in *Le radiose giornate*, and so the "radiant days," ironically, are the means of revealing lies and deceptions that resulted in what the author calls a betrayed youth—"una giovinezza tradita."³ Thus, through hindsight, or better, with a new lucid awareness, the narrator sheds "light" on what was previously "darkness," focusing more on the protagonists and less on the political background.

That Eugenio and Andrea are in reality two projections, two aspects of the same person—namely the author's dilemma of involvement or non-involvement—is admitted by Bernari in one of his interviews.⁴ This can further explain why the juxtaposition of the two characters was so well balanced in *Prologo*. On the other hand, in *Le radiose giornate* Andrea is not the complete opposite of Eugenio; he is not the positive hero. Bianca brings this to our attention as she questions Eugenio's reluctance to speak freely of Andrea: "Hai proprio tanta paura di farne un eroe?" (p. 171). Naturally, Eugenio has no intention of speaking of heroes. To continue to praise Andrea, and to portray him in completely positive terms would mean a continuation of the fiction of *Prologo*. Consequently, in the 1969 version, as Eugenio presents Andrea within a more realistic framework, he is simultaneously shattering his own mask, both as narrator and protagonist.

In *Le radiose giornate* time distance filters out most of the naturalistic and folkloristic details that originally attracted the narrator in 1947, but more importantly it detaches Eugenio from the political atmosphere which supposedly conditioned everyone's actions. On the other hand, aesthetic distance provides the proper detachment from irrelevant incidents which detract from the intended critical analysis of the central characters' contradictions, and above all, it reveals that Eugenio, as narrator-protagonist, must also be judged with the others. He must also admit that in 1947—by merely narrating the events in a certain way—he contributed to the secretive ambience with lies and fiction. Hence, in *Le radiose giornate*—the novel of a novel—through time and aesthetic distance, Bernari instills in the narrator the objectivity that he lacked in the original version. This objectivity was needed to reflect the numerous contradictions responsible for the main characters' unauthenticity.

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NOTES

¹Carlo Bernari, *Le radiose giornate* (Milano: Marzorati, 1969), p. 28. Subsequent page references will be indicated in the text.

²Bernari, *Prologo alle tenebre* (Milano: Marzorati, 1947), p. 208. Subsequent page references will be indicated in the text.

³The author defined *Prologo alle tenebre* as "a story which reflects a betrayed youth"—"un libro che racchiude una storia di giovinezza tradita." See *Non gettate via la scala* (Milano: Marzorati, 1973), p. 250.

⁴Bernari confirmed that Eugenio and Andrea are indeed two projections of the same person (namely the author's) in an interview at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in New York, in 1969. I am indebted to the Istituto for their kind permission to consult the tape.