
This work is a translation of *Dante écrivain ou l’Intelletto d’amore* published by the Éditions du Seuil in 1982. In the preface we are informed that *Dante scrittore* “nasce in origine nella prospettiva del lettore francese” (ix). Dante, through Gustave Doré’s nineteenth century illustrations, has been considered “poussiéreux” and Risset proposes to remove the “dust” that, with time, has accumulated on Dante’s work. She writes, therefore, not for a scholarly audience: *Dante scrittore* “vuole soprattutto mettere sotto gli occhi di chi legge e scrive oggi il passaggio, come su uno schermo mobile, di quel ‘foglio bianco travagliato dai segni neri’ descritto dall’egloga a Giovanni di Virgilio” (xi).

Risset sees Dante’s *Divina Commedia* as “un enigma che non cessa di interrogarci,” and claims in the brief introductory chapter entitled “Enigma” that “un simile testo non può ridursi ad una interpretazione, poiché è esso stesso movimento incessante di interpretazione . . . per questo il testo dantesco . . . sopraffà ogni metodo globale d’analisi” (6). For her the key to unlock the text’s secret resides in the creative act itself, in the act of writing.

The rest of the book follows the evolution of Dante *scrittore* within the context of the medieval literary tradition in order to demonstrate the self-conscious programme of poetic renewal Dante attempted. All of his works are discussed from *Il Fiore* (“la scrittura del Fiore si può dire logicamente inclusa nel programma di Dante scrittore—ovvero di un grande costruttore poetico, e di un insaziabile sperimentatore nella lingua,” 36) to the *Vita Nuova*, the *Rime*, the treatises, and finally the *Commedia* itself.

Two appendices discuss 1. Dante’s fortunes, or rather, misfortunes in France (“Storia di un’assenza”); and, 2. the problems connected with the translation of Dante’s work into French (“Tradurre”).

Endnotes. Index.

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This volume collects Russo’s essays on Dante written over a five year period (1978–1983). All of the essays (both the more theoretical ones of the first part and those dedicated to a close reading of specific cantos of the second part) are held together by the belief that the *Commedia* should be assigned to the literary genre of the novel, or, more precisely, that Dante’s *poema sacro* should be seen “. . . come opera di trapasso dall’epopea al romanzo o come archetipo del genere principe della tradizione letteraria borghese, in particolare di quel filone in esso più significativo, designato

Schnapp proposes to “show the full extent to which the central cantos of *Paradiso* may be regarded as Dante’s Christian response to the dilemma of *Inferno* 4.” In this effort, he presents a detailed discussion of the Virgilian conception of history as seen in *Aeneid* 6, its relation to Florentine history, and the cross of lights in cantos 14–18, which he interprets as the symbol of Dante’s Christian solution to the limitations of the classical world.

In Chapter 1, the author sets out the dialectic between history and eternity, a recurring theme in his book. Drawing parallels among *Aeneid* 6, Cicero’s *Republic* (Book 6) and the *Paradiso*, he notes that in each a father tries to convince a son to undertake an epic task in order to escape from cyclical history. Chapter 2 concentrates on the figure of Mars as the negative and controlling force of classical history, the god who condemns cities such as Rome to an unending cycle of ascension, corruption, fall, and regeneration. Relating Dante’s Florence to Virgil’s Rome, Chapter 3 argues that the cross is the means by which the cyclic pattern of history may be transcended. Appropriately, therefore, Cacciaguida utters his imperatives to Dante in *Paradiso* 17 from the cross of light, a figure of Christ who significantly replaces the sun with his own light in the heaven of Mars. Virgil’s tragedy—and the limitations of the ancients—was that they could not recognize Christ as the means to another history, one which would solve “the dilemma of history under the destabilizing rule of Mars,” not through deification, but transfiguration, i.e. eschatology.