Christine Ott. *Montale e la parola riflessa. Dal disincanto linguistico degli Ossi attraverso le incarnazioni poetiche della Bufera alla lirica decostruttiva dei Diari*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2006. Pp. 311. ISBN 88-464-8086-4. €26.

In what is a translation/revision of a doctoral thesis written originally in German, Christine Ott's brilliant and original study of Montale's *oeuvre* examines the Ligurian poet's life-long reflection on the nature of poetic language in general and his own in particular. In the process, she enters into a dense and impressive dialogue with virtually all of the major critics who have concerned themselves with the poetry of Montale. What is especially innovative about Ott's approach, as Stefano Agosti points out in his Preface to the book, "sta nel declinare l'intero percorso creativo di Montale all'interno di una ininterrotta riflessione metalinguistica" (9).

In her "Introduzione: la deontologizzazione della lirica," the author situates Montale's views on poetic language within structuralist and poststructuralist discourses, reviewing in the process idealist notions of language that constitute "un concetto di lirica che conferisce al linguaggio poetico una funzione magica, e al poeta un potere profetico" (26). She then explains the distinction between ontologized and deontologized concepts of language by elucidating the constructs of logocentrism and fonocentrism, as formulated by Jacques Derrida. With this thought, she frames the sub-genre of ecstatic or orphic poetry, such as that of Campana and Ungaretti, to which she opposes Montalean scepticism, on which she comments at length in the second chapter titled "Scepsi linguistica in *Ossi di seppia*."

In a close reading of "Merigiare pallido e assorto" and "In limine," Ott sheds light on the ambivalence, in Montale's verse, between a concept of poetic language as representation of the fictionality of the real and a concept of language as itself fictional and unreliable; she speaks of "la polarità [...] di effimera 'rappresentazione' ed 'espressione assoluta'" (66). In such statements, Ott identifies the anti-Orphic stance that the poetic subject assumes throughout the Montalean *oeuvre*. Poetry, however, appears also to assume a capacity for communication, which in "Merigiare" and in other poems in *Ossi di seppia* is negated.

This paradox is developed masterfully by Ott, producing striking new insights into poems studied by many critics. In "La dissociazione della voce lirica nelle *Occasioni*," the third chapter, Ott interprets that dualism in terms of a dialogue between the lyrical subject and the "tu." Ott reads, for example, "Il balcone" as an allusion to a liminal space that separates the exterior from the interior, the knowable from the unknowable, but also consciousness from the subconscious: "una soglia che conduce per l'appunto alla vita interiore" (145). Ott follows the development of the reflexivity and lyricism binomial from the "scepsi linguistica" of *Ossi di seppia* to the greater confidence in language's capacity to signify in *Occasioni*. She also lays the groundwork for her analysis of Montale's third volume, suggesting that even this newfound confidence is tempered by scepticism.

This is the line that she pursues in "Ontologia e deontologizzazione in *La bufera e altro*," the fourth chapter. In addition to interpreting the female interlocutor as a divine messenger, as others have done, the author sees this figure as a component of the poet's personality which struggles with the nature and function

of its poetic activity. Ott analyzes “Personae separate,” “Due nel crepuscolo,” and “Iride,” producing fresh insights into poems that have been the subject of much critical attention. In her reading of such personae as Clizia, Annetta, Dora, and Iride, Ott privileges their role as emblematic of certain aspects of poetic discourse, as “incarnazioni di tre diverse poetiche” (186). In “Due nel crepuscolo” the “defectiveness” of language not only obstructs interpersonal communication, but renders impossible any meaningful contact between the lyrical “io” and the “tu,” dimensions of the self, thereby frustrating the realization of poetic expressiveness. This same unbridgeable distance is at work in “Personae separatae,” a title that refers not only to the solitude of the lyrical subject vis-à-vis the Other, but also to language’s inability to signify.

In the final chapter, “Una prassi decostruttiva da *Satura* a *Diario postumo*,” Ott finds that the “scepti linguistica, nelle prime tre raccolte ancora cifrata, si fa esplicita e aggressiva” (229). She characterizes this process as deconstructive; however, it does not prevent the emergence of lyricism, that very lyricism that the poet appears to be both resisting and generating throughout his work: “dallo sfacelo di significati e di certezze emergono nuovi effetti poetici” (229). While acknowledging ambiguities, reconsiderations, and paradoxes, Ott interprets key poems from *Satura*, *Diario del '72*, and *Quaderno di quattro anni* in relation to her previous comments on *Ossi di seppia*, *Le occasioni*, and *La bufera e altro*. She argues that, in the post-*Bufera* period, Montale’s poetry becomes increasingly complex and engages in a “decostruzione dell’opposizione fra il significato letterale e quello figurato” (259). Ott concludes by reading *Diario postumo* as Montale’s final deconstructive act in which, from beyond the grave, the lyrical subject sends out those very signals and messages that, in life, he had sought from his interlocutors. The only problem is that these linguistic signals are so encrypted as to be incomprehensible, a situation Ott takes to encapsulate the entire thought of the poet. She writes: “Il linguaggio è un dio dimidiato: nulla di più, e nulla di meno. È questa la convinzione su cui si costruisce la poesia di Montale” (296).

To conclude, although one could make the argument that *Montale e la parola riflessa* creates the impression that Montale’s poetry is almost entirely a philosophizing on the nature of language and the language of poetry, it is not difficult to imagine that this publication will appear in the bibliographies of most future studies on the poetry of Eugenio Montale, those dealing with his poetics in particular, and will constitute an authoritative work against which such studies are evaluated.

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Primo Levi’s major writings evade the standard vocabularies we use to describe