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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The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi. Ed. Robert S.C. Gordon. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. 205. ISBN 978-0-521-84357-7 (cloth), 978-0-521-60461-1 (paper). US\$ 85 (cloth), US\$ 29.99 (paper).

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

prose written in the first-person narrative mode; certainly, the Anglophone phrase “creative non-fiction” is inapplicable, as is the Francophone “memoir.” Furthermore, “testimony,” a word often used to describe Levi’s major works, has also been stripped of its etymological richness and is often reduced to the mere legality of an eyewitness account. The difficulty of classifying Levi’s irreducibly idiosyncratic major works intensifies as generic categories collapse under careful scrutiny; those works, the foremost of which are *Se questo è un uomo* (1947), *La tregua* (1963), and *Il sistema periodico* (1975), stand alone even when placed in relation to each other. Indeed, the lattermost asserts its own singularity in such a way that precludes comparison to any other writing—including Levi’s—as it concludes with the astounding story of a single atom of carbon that is transformed, over the course of slightly more than 125 years, into the book’s final word (“questo”). And while *Il sistema periodico* ironically maintains its self-effacing style, the most famous of these books, *Se questo è un uomo*, stands at a dignified remove from an entire genre of writing that includes the renowned deportation/prison narratives of the twentieth-century, a group that would include the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Elie Wiesel, Nelson Mandela, and Wei Jingsheng. And in the Italian tradition, where the canonical prison writings of Pellico and Gramsci occupy the book-ends of the Risorgimento, Levi’s writings on the Lager are as elusive in relation to those other Italian internment narratives as they are clear in their self-imposed, bitterless version of Dante’s exile from their Italian literary peers.

Regarded in this light, Levi’s ability to stand alone, yet invoke so much literary tradition, is all the more astounding given his own profound debt to other literary works that appear throughout his writings. Literary works such as *La Divina Commedia* and *The Magic Mountain* frame Levi’s books as the Alps that stand behind Levi’s Torino. How might any of Levi’s readers devise a criticism worthy of such unique writings? And would it even begin to illuminate the wonderful genera that Levi himself devised for his ancestors in *Il sistema periodico* where he described them according to the noble, inert, and rare gases? Clearly, any collection of essays seeking to offer representative writings about Primo Levi must contend with the fact that it is presenting its readers with a writer whose style avoids familiarity, jargon, and easy definition.

The essays included in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi* succeed in presenting the singularity of Levi’s life and work. They do so despite editor Robert S. Gordon’s introductory argument that it is best to “come at Levi through themes, issues and motifs, which cut across the boundaries and covers of separate books...” (xix). If there is a unity that spans Levi’s writings it has been overwhelmed by the extraordinary richness and depth of the majority of essays in this volume. Yet, certain singularities are more unique than others. As a result, the individual essays in the volume are best evaluated within the context of the collection as well as in their relationship to Levi’s works and those who study them. Ironically (and for reasons of space), only a synoptic view of the book’s organization will help to clarify the matter.

The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi begins with a brief yet compelling chronology of Levi’s life and writings, then proceeds to the editor’s succinct intro-

ductory essay. The four sections that follow it each contain several essays (there are eleven in total) that explore the themes of each respective section; they are "Cultures," "The Holocaust," "Science," and "Language and Literature." The collection concludes with an index and guide to further readings, the latter of which is nearly exhaustive. It is a well-edited volume, to say the least, and it is to the editor's credit that certain essays shine more brightly than others. This effect results in part from the editor's decision to organize the essays according to the four categories of inquiry that I cited above; these are apparently designed to focus the reader's attention on separate strands of that alleged unity which joins Levi's works together. The editorial attempt to unify them fails, and it is precisely for this reason that the volume excels in presenting Levi's life and works.

Three essays deserve particular consideration. The first, Bryan Cheyette's excellent "Appropriating Primo Levi," offers a summary of how Levi's writings circulate in the Anglophone literary world. The essay is simply remarkable for its controlled polemical momentum, which is based upon an empirically sound account of the politics of memory studies and its various proponents, progeny, and critics; it is an academic trend that is nearly entirely absent from the volume, and Cheyette's essay clearly explains why. The second essay, Pierpaolo Antonello's essay "Primo Levi and Man as Maker" is strongest in both its polemic and discursive interventions. The former are reserved for Levi's Italian critics, and particularly those on the Left, who mistreated him as an apologist for the post-WWII technocrats; by contrast, the latter element of Antonello's argument explains Levi's relationship to that of a line of modern thought which regards technologies as expressions of a creative human impulse rather than as obstruction to it. Known since Francis Bacon's time as the maker's tradition, this tradition had its most formidable Italian proponent in Giambattista Vico, and Antonello offers an excellent survey of its later manifestations in twentieth-century European thought (as well as Levi's relationship to them). Finally, Jonathan Usher's "Primo Levi, the Canon, and Literature," notes that "[o]n Levi's craft as a writer, and on his literary standing, there is surprisingly little" (171). It is a shocking, almost incredible statement to read, particularly because it follows excellent essays by Mirna Cicioni and Charlotte Ross on that very subject. But like the majority of the volume's contributors, the target of Usher's reserved polemic is outside the text, and his essay quickly turns to offer a history of Levi's insightful relationships to other important Italian writers of his time.

The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi is notable for how its individual essays render Levi's writings new and surprisingly unfamiliar, and perhaps more so for how the cumulative effect of reading this collection recalls their sober, mundane, and occasionally stubborn beauty. While some might regard it as a fault of the volume or its editor, the fact that the collection does not embark on extensive renditions of Levi's status in contemporary critical theory (in either the writings of Giorgio Agamben or more generic studies of Internment Narratives) is perhaps one of the volume's strongest points (even if such discussions might have clarified some rather blunt lines of criticism in the volume). Nonetheless, I would appropriate a phrase from Cheyette's excellent essay to stress how the collection reminds that "the gap between Levi's writing and the discourses that encircle him could not

be greater" (77). Indeed, if excellent criticism can be described in terms of its turbulent distance, rather than alleged proximity, to the writer's work, then *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi* is a companion of the finest sort: conversational, but not intrusive, and one whose intelligence aims to enhance rather than diminish the singularity of its subject.

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Beatrice Barbato. *Sul palco c'è l'autore. Scrivere, filmare, interpretare: Carmelo Bene, Gianni Celati, Ascanio Celestini, Vincenzo Cerami, Roberto De Simone, Mario Martone*. Louvain: UCL Presses Iniversitaires de Louvain, 2006. Pp. 280, b/w ill. ISBN 2-87463-031-4. n.p.

Barbato's topical book looks at an emerging trend in the arts. Its focus on the six Italian artists cited in the title aims at foregrounding *la centralità dell'autore* and the scope of their work in a world overwhelmed by corporate information and commodified news. The urgency of individual artists to stand out of the 'cultural marginality' and into the spotlight where their voices re-appropriate ancestral stories, topically re-glued into the present time, finds new energy in a *mise-en-scène* inhabited by the author himself in all of his human and intellectual complexity. Barbato speaks of a rebirth of the Italian cultural scene, but she may well be intended as referring by extension to a larger community reaching the periphery of Europe or elsewhere and to a regeneration of *loci* and methods in which each community finds renewed forms of *mimesis* with its own remote (or more recent) past. To the century-old discourse on the relationship between written texts and images Barbato offers an *ex-novo* framework of experiences drawn from a contemporary context. She offers several such examples throughout the book: "[R]agiona intorno a degli esempi, in una radicata convinzione della difficoltà oggi a teorizzare e categorizzare i passaggi tra letteratura e arti visive[...] (13).

In the first part of her book she speaks of Carmelo Bene's embodiment of Amleto throughout his artistic career. Barbato argues that Bene registers an anti-romantic vein of the classic tale and its metaphysic meditations. He does so in order to renew the 'mask' and bring on the stage a topical enactment. He regenerates plot, language, and acting with a nuclear identification of the character's praxis with his own persona. The same operation occurs when adopting the French language as stock verses, which Carmelo Bene deploys both as cultural 'de-composers' and 'fertilizers' of an otherwise monolithic culture. In Barbato's view such representation by Bene finds *humus* in the re-visitation and recycling of the historical text and personage as an interpretative process by an author who constantly recreates himself in *mimesis* to the other.

In several chapters of part two, Barbato deals with the work of Mario Martone and Roberto De Simone. Particularly, she dissects on Martone's films such as *Caravaggio l'ultimo tempo* and *Teatro di Guerra*. In the first instance Barbato focus-