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Rethinking the Ends of Poetry:
Elegy and 'Demi-deuil' in Eugenio Montale's "La casa dei doganieri"

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Is it possible to move fully *beyond* mourning? Jacques Derrida's answer is that mourning can—and most importantly should—never end. Traditionally, poetic elegies operate within what has been called their "consolatory machinery," meaning that they aim to achieve resolution, the "normal" and "healthy" end of mourning, by replacing the lost object of love with their own poetic contents.[1] By contrast, the majority of modern elegies tend to reject this linear and normative trajectory of mourning. As this article contends, Montale's poetry of mourning for the figure of Arletta rejects any "end" of poetry, i.e., any attempt to complete the traditional "work of mourning." Instead, it opens onto a never-ending and intermittent mourning that eludes the very idea of "end," a mourning in which poetry reaffirms its relevance, not only by displaying structures of communication akin to those offered by the shared communication systems of the living, but rather by proposing a new system which has been rejected by current society.

On this point, in his seminal essay "Antropologia poetica?" Giovanni Nencioni maintains that, "[i]l codice poetico dispone di strutture proprie, che possono coincidere esteriormente con quelle del codice comune, ma hanno una funzione diversa; e la diversità della funzione può essere dovuta alla conservazione di un contenuto arcaico ormai rifiutato dalla norma comune, e alla assunzione di contenuti da forme poetiche."[2] What follows is that poetry allows us to reconnect and dialogue with the dead in a way no longer possible in everyday life. From this standpoint, as Emmanuela Tandello suggests, poetry acquires two fundamental functions: "It answers death by displaying private grief publicly and in doing so it reaffirms the centrality of

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[1] I borrow the term "elegy's consolatory machinery" (3) from Jahan Ramazani as he employs it in his *Poetry of Mourning*. Ramazani's study is relevant for its helpful analysis of how mournful poetry is inflected by changing historical contexts, and in particular how it interacts with and relates to societal practices governing mourning. In his pioneering book *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Peter Sacks observes that an elegy is a poem of "mortal loss and consolation." However, as Ramazani argues, Sacks's compensatory model is helpful for what he calls "canonical" and "traditional" elegies, but not for "modern" elegies, which often do not reach any consolation. According to Sacks, two examples of canonical elegies that conform to his compensatory model are Edmund Spenser's "Astrophel" and John Milton's "Lycidas." It is worth noticing, however, as Ramazani highlights, while "tracking the [modern] elegy's melancholic turn," that both poems reach consolation but also anticipate what will be key characteristics of the modern elegy (e.g. "masochism, irresolution, irredemption, aggression, and self-criticism") (10). In other words, the melancholic development that took place in the modern elegy is one where the "part became the whole, the thread the weave in the transformation of a major lyric genre." Similarly to Ramazani, there have been other reinterpretations of these poems which challenge Sacks's reading. An instance regarding Milton's "Lycidas" is to be found in Stanley Fish's reading, which highlights how the poem plays with "the traditions of consolation" ("*Lycidas*: A Poem Finally Anonymous," *Glyph* 8 (1981): 1–18, 6). Similarly, Anselm Haverkamp observes that Milton rejects "the elegiac mode of consolation" ("Mourning Becomes Melancholia—A Muse Deconstructed Keats's *Ode on Melancholy*," *NLH* 21 (1990): 693–706, 698–99). Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994);. Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy. Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 3.

[2] Giovanni Nencioni, "Antropologia poetica?," *Strumenti critici* 19 (1972): 243–258; now in *Tra grammatica e retorica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 161–175, 172.

human emotions related to loss and bereavement, taking on the responsibility of passing on traumatic knowledge by framing it and allowing it to be processed."[3]

From this standpoint, it is important to consider how death, as Philippe Ariès argues, once so discursively omnipresent in the life of Western communities, has been increasingly marginalized in twentieth-century Europe.[4] Not only has it been gradually effaced as a subject-matter of public discourse, it has become shameful and forbidden, to the point of becoming unspeakable. In short, the modern attitude towards death involves an absolute interdiction of death in order to preserve "happiness." As Ariès explains, this makes mourning an even more difficult and painful experience.[5] Mourning is no longer perceived as a necessary period encouraged by society, but rather a "*morbid state* which must be treated, shortened, erased."[6] As a result, contemporary subjects lack the emotional ability to record and process their losses.

Ramazani investigates this idea in relation to modern elegy, focusing on the challenges such poems pose to the normative ways of mourning imposed by society. They do so by aiming "not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss."[7] Ramazani argues that although canonical elegies had depicted mourning as compensatory, modern elegies, in contrast, reject this normative "work of mourning" and enact an anti-compensatory ethics of mourning, which, following Freud, he sees as "unresolved, violent, and ambivalent" (3–4). Modern elegies actively engage with the disruptiveness of both death and mourning. Hence, the work of poets could be said to be a "social antithesis of society," resisting the normative discipline of grief that aims to bring bereavement to an end (14).[8] Ramazani's use of the term "modern elegy" needs a brief explanation as it presents an apparent oxymoron: modern poetry and "the elegy" have more than once been regarded as opposing poetic constructions. As Ramazani himself explains, the common assumption that modern poetry should/does neglect all inherited forms, including the elegy, is the result of the widespread misconception that all twentieth-century poets discarded both mourning and genre. On the contrary, it is possible to trace an opposite tendency that sees twentieth-century poets prolonging the ancient literary dialogue with the dead by renegotiating the possibilities as well as the limits of the elegy genre. I share Ramazani's view that modern poetry and the elegy should rather be seen, although not without tension, as caught in an inextricable state of co-existence; hence, the appropriateness of the term "modern elegy." Moreover, the poems which Ramazani includes in his study reveal his attempt to make this category of "modern elegy" as inclusive as possible since it includes poems as diverse as self-elegies, war poems, the blues, epochal elegies, and mock-elegies by various authors, among whom are Thomas Hardy, Wilfred Owen, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, and Seamus Heaney.

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[3] Emanuela Tandello, "A Note on Elegy and Self-elegy in Leopardi's *Canti*," *Appunti Leopardiani* 4/2 (2012): 8–24, 10.

[4] Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 85–92.

[5] Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 92.

[6] "The choking back of sorrow, the forbidding of its public manifestation, the obligation to suffer alone and secretly, has aggravated the trauma stemming from the loss of a dear one. In a family in which sentiment is given an important place and in which premature death is becoming increasingly rare [...] the death of a near relative is always deeply felt, as it was in the Romantic era. A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty. But one no longer has the right to say so aloud." Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 100.

[7] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, xi.

[8] Here Ramazani refers to Theodor W. Adorno's well–known statement regarding modern art in general.

Scholarship on elegy, and writing about death and mourning more broadly, has tended to remain within the rigid boundaries of Freud's early binary view on mourning as opposed to melancholia. This means that there are some critics who privilege mourning (Sacks, for example) and some who privilege melancholia (Ramazani). However, there are other scholars who have attempted to resist the "fictive" nature of such binaries claiming the impossibility of ever moving *beyond* mourning, without, however, proposing a static state of melancholic mourning (Derrida).[9] Montale's poetry of mourning for Arletta is worthy of attention given that it deviates from the aforementioned dualistic Freudian discourses on mourning and elegy's conventional aim of achieving resolution. At the same time, Montale's mourning is not strictly melancholic, as other modern elegies tend to be in their rejection of any end to mourning or replacement of the lost object of love. In other words, Montale's elegiac poetry departs from the binary view of the so-called "work of mourning" as initially presented by Freud in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917).[10] Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" is inevitably the starting point for any discussion about mourning as it has influenced almost all subsequent approaches to grief, both theoretical and therapeutic. In his essay Freud presents a strict binary distinction between "healthy" and "successful" mourning, as opposed to "unhealthy," never-ending melancholia. Freud refers to "normal" finite mourning as "when the work of mourning is completed [and] the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."[11]

Mourning in Montale's poetry never fully ends. From this viewpoint, I argue that it is productive to engage with Jacques Derrida, one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century, who has yet to be much considered in relation to either Montale or the wider Italian literary canon.[12] I will show that Derrida's concept of "demi-deuil," translatable as "mid-mourning" or "semi-mourning," provides the most faithful lens through which to look at Montale's poetic depiction of mourning.[13] In line with this, I will map out how Montale's mourning deviates from the traditional representation and ideology of both "healthy" mourning

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[9] Sacks, *The English Elegy.*

[10] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition to the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), 14: 243–258. As Ramazani points out, "Psychoanalysts as varied as Karl Abraham, Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva have reinterpreted and reinvented its ideas [Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia"], and literary critics and theorists have extended its terms into discussions of everything from the literature of the Holocaust and AIDS to such genres as tragedy, elegy, and the novel." Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 28. For overviews of classical psychoanalytic accounts of mourning, see Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset Press, 1965), 136–152; Lorraine D. Siggins, "Mourning: A Critical Survey of the Literature," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 47 (1966): 14–25; Beverly Raphael, *The Anatomy of Bereavement* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and Catherine M. Sanders*, Grief: The Mourning After* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1989), 22–41.

[11] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 245, 249. Freud did, however, subsequently develop his view, and later writings tended to emphasize how the gap of loss is actually never fully filled and the mourners are bound to remain inconsolable, but these remain marginal arguments that do not overturn his earlier and still influential binary view on mourning and melancholia which marks his legacy on this topic.

[12] My use of Derrida's "demi-deuil" finds its roots in the works of two scholars who have approached loss and mourning in the Italian literary tradition from a Deriddean perspective: Emanuela Tandello and Jennifer Rushworth. Tandello, "A Note on Elegy and Self-elegy in Leopardi's *Canti";* Jennifer Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[13] On Derrida's "demi-deuil" see Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 257–409 (335 for "mid-mourning"); and Jacques Derrida, "'Dialanguages'," in *Points ... Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber and trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 132–155 (153 for "semi-mourning").

and "unhealthy" melancholia. In fact, Montale's poetic subject resists what in Freudian terms is seen as successful mourning and rather asserts the impossible replacement of the lost object of love.

Derrida consistently criticized Freud's conceptualization of mourning as presented in "Mourning and Melancholia," in particular for its being fundamentally unethical, insofar as it involves forgetting and replacing the lost person. Instead of embracing the concept of "melancholia," Derrida proposes his own model of mourning: "demi-deuil." Derrida's "demi-deuil" challenges Freud's binary model in its perpetuation of the mourner's relationship to the lost love object by way of an "intermittent oscillation" between remembrance and forgetfulness.[14] This contradictory fluctuation is at the core of Montale's mourning: the poetic subject's scattered memories of the lost love object are bound to resurface unexpectedly and suddenly, only then to inevitably vanish once more.

In his *Levels of Life* Julian Barnes eloquently contemplates the "final tormenting, unanswerable question: what is 'success' in mourning? Does it lie in remembering or in forgetting? A staying still or a moving on? Or some combination of both?"[15] These are also the questions that arise throughout the poems belonging to Montale's "ciclo Arlettiano," poems that provide a remarkable insight into the nature of mourning in Montale's poetry and how it relates to poetic form, specifically to the genre or mode of the elegy.[16] Mourning is a central concern throughout Montale's vast poetic corpus and Arletta is far from being the only poetic figure that is mourned. She is, however, one of the most complex and least discussed figures that dwell in Montale's verse.[17] The unstable and fragile nature of the continued relationship with the lost object of love between Montale's poetic subject and Arletta echoes the nature of the connection

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[14] I borrow the term "intermittent oscillation" from Jennifer Rushworth as she employs it in *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 97. While Rushworth derives the notion of intermittence from Proust, it is a term that Montale himself also uses in the poem "Se al più si oppone il meno il risultato...": from *Quaderno di quattro anni* (Milan: Mondadori, 1977). For more information on mourning and intermittence in Proust see Jennifer Rushworth, "Mourning and Intermittence between Proust and Barthes," *Paragraph* 39/3 (2016): 269–287.

[15] Julian Barnes, *Levels of Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 116. Also cited in Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 97.

[16] Although much neglected by critics until very recently, a "ciclo" of Arletta is no longer a hypothesis. Starting from her very first appearance in "Lettera levantina" (1923) (*Poesie disperse*), although the attribution of this poem is still much debated among critics, and passing through almost all of Montale's poetic collections, her last visitation is to be found in "Ah!," now included in *Altri versi*. The poems included in the "ciclo di Arletta" are the following: in *Ossi di seppia*: "Vento e bandiere," "Fuscello teso dal muro...," "Il canneto rispunta i suoi cimeli...," "I morti," "Delta," "Incontro"; in *Le occasioni*: "Pareva facile giuoco...," "La casa dei doganieri," "Bassa marea," "Stanze," "Punta del Mesco," "L'estate," "Eastbourne" (critics still debate the right place for "Eastbourne"), in *La bufera e altro*: "Due nel crepuscolo," and "Ezekiel saw the Wheel...." (the latter is according to Maria Antonietta Grignani); in *Diario del '71 e del '72*: "Il lago di Annecy," "Ancora ad Annecy," and "Annetta"; in *Quaderno di quattro anni*: "Per un fiore reciso," "La capinera non fu uccisa...," "Se al più si oppone il meno il risultato...," and "Quella del faro," in *Altri versi*: "Il big bang dovette produrre...," "Quando la capinera...," "Cara agli Dei," "Una visita," "Postilla a una visita," and "Ah!" Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Eugenio Montale's works in Italian are from Eugenio Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

[17] Another pivotal female figure that helps to understand the nature of Montale's mourning is Mosca, especially in the two series of *Xenia I* and *Xenia II* as published in Montale's fourth poetic collection *Satura* (1971). What is interesting about "La casa dei doganieri," as well as other poems in the "ciclo di Arletta," is the fact that they not only address the topic of mourning at the level of content, but they also do so formally by engaging with the poetic genre of the elegy, something that is not present in the two series of the *Xenia*. For an analysis of the figure of Mosca and her relation to Montale's poetic subject, see Adele Bardazzi, "Eugenio Montale's *Xenia*: Between Myth and Poetic Tradition," in *Transmissions of Memory: Echoes, Traumas and Nostalgia in Post-World War II Italian Culture*, ed. Patrizia Sambuco (Madison Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), 21–38.

that the mourner attempts to maintain with the deceased in Derrida's "demi-deuil." "La casa dei doganieri," one of the most celebrated and difficult poems of the "ciclo Arlettiano," is also, I contend, a key text in shedding light onto the nature of Montale's mourning for Arletta. This is not to suggest that this poem is the only engagement with mourning for Arletta. One could in fact see the "ciclo Arlettiano" as a *canzoniere in morte,* regardless of the fact that many of the poems center on the theme of memory, which will soon emerge in this essay as profoundly connected to the process of mourning.

"La casa dei doganieri"

Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri
sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera:
desolata t'attende dalla sera
in cui v'entrò lo sciame dei tuoi pensieri
e vi sostò irrequieto.

Libeccio sferza da anni le vecchie mura
e il suono del tuo riso non è più lieto:
la bussola va impazzita all'avventura
e il calcolo dei dadi più non torna.
Tu non ricordi; altro tempo frastorna
la tua memoria; un filo s'addipana.

Ne tengo ancora un capo; ma s'allontana
la casa e in cima al tetto la banderuola
affumicata gira senza pietà.
Ne tengo un capo; ma tu resti sola
né qui respiri nell'oscurità.

Oh l'orizzonte in fuga, dove s'accende
rara la luce della petroliera!
Il varco è qui? (Ripullula il frangente
ancora sulla balza che scoscende...).
Tu non ricordi la casa di questa
mia sera. Ed io non so chi va e chi resta.

To include this poem in a study of Montale's "dialogo con i morti," I must give a short explanation. Critics are still divided on whether to consider the female poetic beloved at the center of this poem as alive or dead.[18] One of the reasons lies in the fact that at the time the poem was written the figure who inspired Arletta was still alive. Anna degli Uberti (1904–1959) was a young girl with whom Montale spent time during his summers in Monterosso between 1919 and 1923, the latter being the year in which Annetta stopped visiting Monterosso and a few (ill-fated) visits to Rome followed (see "Una visita" and "Postilla a 'Una visita'"—both now included in *Altri versi*, 1980). The insistence with which Montale declares this poetic figure to be dead

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[18] See, for example, Tiziana de Rogatis' notes and comments on "La casa dei doganieri" in Eugenio Montale, *Le occasioni*, ed. Tiziana de Rogatis (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 180–184.

even though she was still alive is well known, and therefore crafts her into the archetype of a young girl whose life has been taken too early, something that is highlighted in "L'estate" as well as in "Eastbourne" (*Le occasioni*).[19] Regardless of Montale's declarations identifying the female figure with that "[fanciulla] morta molto giovane" (now known as Annetta-Arletta), Tiziana de Rogatis, for instance, argues that lines 7 and 10 suggest that on a literal level the female beloved is not dead.[20] It is, however, important not to ignore the fact that Montale constructs the figure of Arletta on the specific model of the "fanciulle morte," and Leopardi's Silvia *in primis*. Following the poetic model of the absent female beloved, Arletta, like Silvia, is carefully crafted "su una trama persefonea, Core nella quale l'io poetico contempla la propria esistenza di morte, e su di sé canta 'funereo canto'."[21] One can in fact notice the presence of a strong and undisguised intertextual relation, established by Montale in "La casa dei doganieri," with Leopardi's poem "A Silvia." Leopardi's celebrated poem is one of the most well-known elegies dedicated to a young girl who could not see "il fior degli anni [suoi]."[22] Here lie the reasons for which scholars like Gilberto Lonardi consider Montale's female beloved as dead and the poem as an elegy lamenting her irrevocable absence.[23] However, one could also argue that both sides of the argument are not essential when considering Derrida's idea of anticipated mourning. Mourning can precede bereavement; hence it is not necessary to fixate on whether Arletta is alive or dead.[24] The analysis that follows therefore begins with the assumption that in "La casa dei doganieri" the poetic subject mourns Arletta as belonging to Montale's "care ombre" ("Proda di Versilia," *La bufera e altro*).

It is now worth discussing two typical conventions of the elegy: first, the attempt to move beyond grief and achieve consolation, and second, the traditional use of repetitions and refrains. While the latter of these two norms is observed in "La casa dei doganieri" (on which I will focus in the last part of this analysis) the former, as already anticipated, is not. It is helpful to begin this close reading of "La casa dei doganieri" by looking at what role consolation plays in the first two lines of the poem: "Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri / sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera" (lines 1–2). The "casa dei doganieri," already highlighted in the title of the poem, introduces, through its original function of "dogana," the central element of the poem: the liminal space of "confine"—the border between remembrance and forgetfulness, between presence and absence.

[19] In a letter to Silvio Guarnieri, Montale writes: "Nella "Casa dei doganieri" e in "Incontro" c'è la donna che chiamerò 4. Morì giovane e non ci fu nulla tra noi." Now in Eugenio Montale, *Il secondo mestiere. Arte, musica, società*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), 1510. Still referring to "La casa dei doganieri," Montale told Giulio Nascimbeni: "L'ho scritta ['La casa dei doganieri'] per una giovane villeggiante morta molto giovane. Per quel poco che visse, forse lei non s'accorse nemmeno che io esistevo." Giulio Nascimbeni, *Montale* (Milan: Longanesi, 1969), 116. Similarly, to Luciano Rebay Montale refers to Arletta as "una donna 'crepuscolare,' una donna segnata dalla morte. [...] [E]ra una persona morta molto giovane, di una malattia inguaribile." Luciano Rebay, "Sull''autobiografismo' di Montale," in *Innovazioni tematiche, espressive e linguistiche della letteratura italiana del Novecento. Atti dell'VIII Congresso dell'AISSLI*, ed. Vittore Branca et al. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1976), 76.
[20] See Note 19.
[21] Emanuela Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli: La fanciulla e l'infinito* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), 86. See Franco D'Intino's essay for a reading of Leopardi's Silvia as intertwined in the mythical laces. Franco D'Intino, "I misteri di Silvia. Motivo persefoneo e mistica eleusina in Leopardi," *Filologia e critica* 19 (1994): 211–271.
[22] "Tu pria che l'erbe inaridisse il verno, / da chiuso morbo combattuta e vinta, / perivi, o tenerella. E non vedevi / il fior degli anni tuoi" (lines 40–43). Giacomo Leopardi, "A Silvia," in *Tutte le opere. Le poesie e le prose*, ed. Francesco Flora (Milan: Mondadori, 1940).
[23] Gilberto Lonardi, "Mito e 'Melos' per Arletta: 'Punta del Mesco'," in *Il fiore dell'addio. Leonora, Manrico e altri fantasmi del melodramma nella poesia di Montale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 139–159.
[24] For an analysis on Derrida's idea of anticipated mourning see Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 100–102.

The position of the house itself on the "rupe" (as it will be referred to in a later poem—"Ancora ad Annecy," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 9) further underlines this liminal position and role of the custom guards' house.

Montale's poetic subject, from as early as *Ossi di seppia* until the later *Diario del '71 e del '72*, expresses one main ardent wish to his *tu*, whether still alive or already belonging to his "care ombre": that he or, more often, she, will be able to find the "varco." In finding this salvific channel one also finds the possibility to *infinitarsi* and thus to "[passare] al di là del tempo" and "[salpare] per l'eterno" ("Casa sul mare," *Ossi di seppia*, 22, 21, 37).[25] This is also the fear that haunts Montale's father in "Voce giunta con le folaghe" (*La bufera e altro*): the inescapability of forgetfulness. In other poems, including "Voce giunta con le folaghe," one generally finds the dead fearing that the living will forget them, something that in Montale's eschatological vision is not desirable because, insofar as the dead are alive in memory of the living person, they are still partly present, but when forgetfulness (which appears to be inevitable) takes their place, the dead fully dissolve into nothingness. In "La casa dei doganieri," however, the repeated *incipit* "Tu non ricordi" (lines 1, 10, 21) points out that there is a state of shared forgetfulness: it is not only the *io*, but the female beloved herself who does not remember. In the second stanza the image of the thread that connects the two is associated with a "filo-ricordo," which, earlier held by both of them and so keeping their connection alive, now "s'addipana" (line 11): it rolls up on itself. Forgetfulness thus undermines the connection that the poetic subject seeks to keep alive.

In Montale the inescapability of forgetfulness[26] is closely related to the inexorable and pitiless passing of time, something that undermines remembrance and, in this poem, is embodied in the image of the "banderuola affumicata [che] gira senza pietà" (lines 13–14) on the rooftop of the custom guards' house. The deterioration of the passing of time that causes everything to dissolve into nothingness is not desired in "La casa dei doganieri": the poetic subject does not wish to forget Arletta, but rather mourns how forgetfulness undermines that fragile thread which connects them. Moments of remembrance seem to coincide with moments in which the lost beloved is present, as her presence can be evoked through memory. Forgetfulness, however, undermines these rare moments of presence and is therefore bound to lead to the mourned person's absence, which is like a second death. In this oscillation between presence and absence, Arletta is like a "living dead": she is treated neither as someone who is alive nor as someone who is dead, but as both at once.[27] This implicitly reinstates Montale's concept of the "vita-in-morte" and the "morti-vivi" as opposed to the ones who are dead and paradoxically more alive than the living ones. The fact that the dead and living do not appear very different from each other is one of the elements that break the barrier between life and death in Montale's poetic world, and that consequently allow a bridge to be created between absence and presence, between life and death.

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[25] Montale's invented verb "infinitarsi" is a Dantism. Dante employs a similar verb, "eternarsi": "m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna" (*Inferno*, XV, 85). As Pietro Cataldi and Floriana d'Amely argue, there are also other similar cases, including Dante's use of "indiarsi" and "infuturarsi." Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di seppia*, ed. Pietro Cataldi and Floriana d'Amely (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), 233.

[26] This is something on which Montale reflects in other poems included in *Le occasioni*, such as "Eastbourne," where the image of the "ruota [che] non s'arresta" becomes its embodiment ("Eastbourne," *Le occasioni*, 38).

[27] Montale's idea of the living dead / "morti-vivi" echoes Derrida's concept of the "mort vivant" [living dead]. For a discussion on Derrida's reflections on the "mort vivant" see Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 98. The term "mort vivant" can be found in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Christie V. Mc Donald and trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 58; and Jacque Derrida, "'Foreword': *Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," trans. Barbara Johnson, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xxi.

By repeating that Arletta does not remember, the poetic subject seems to position himself in contrast to this state of forgetfulness. Thus, what one reads is "Ne tengo ancora un capo" (line 12): the *io* still holds his side of this memory thread, he still remembers. But then, as is typical of the contradictory oscillation between remembrance and forgetfulness of "demi-deuil," the poetic subject tells us that the "casa" is fading away (line 13), which on a literal level is the result of the evening that is advancing and therefore the house becoming less visible because of the darkness: "s'allontana / la casa" (lines 12–13) and similarly later on "Oh l'orizzonte in fuga" (line 17). However, this also refers to the progressive fading away of the memory of the "casa dei doganieri," the location of this topical *incontro* between the *io* and Arletta.

This oscillation and intermittent movement between remembrance and forgetfulness is also captured by two images in the concluding lines: the wave, "ripullula il frangente ancora sulla balza che scoscende" (line 20), and the intermittent light of the "petroliera" (line 18) which is, moreover, said to be "rara" (line 18), but still sometimes lights up. Arletta's "apparizioni," the resurfacings of her memory, are also rare and unpredictable as we are told in a later poem entitled "Annetta": "Le tue apparizioni furono per molti anni rare e impreviste" ("Annetta," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 5). In an earlier poem belonging to Montale's fourth poetic collection, the *io* wonders why "può scattar fuori una memoria / così insabbiata," the memory of Arletta ("Il lago di Annecy," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 6–7).

Lastly, Arletta's repetitive and incessant movements of *su*/*giù* are then not only her *anabasis*/*katabasis* to and from Montale's underworld, but also a disappearance and resurfacing in the poetic subject's memory: an unpredictable movement of presence and absence from the *io*'s memory—a cyclical return/union movement which is inevitably followed by a departure or separation. Her being remembered brings her up from the well, but when the poetic subject comes closer to those "evanescenti labbri" that arise from death, the remembrance of the *sommersa* Arletta descends and disappears once again ("Cigola la carrucola del pozzo,...," 5). Similarly, in "Incontro" one reads: "Poi più nulla. Oh sommersa!: tu dispari / qual sei venuta e nulla so di te" ("Incontro," *Ossi di seppia*, 46–47). This "nulla so di te" can be read as a signal that complete forgetfulness has temporarily taken place, before an inevitable return. The "cifra arlettiano-funebre del *sommergere/sommersa*"[28] is thus embedded in a narrative of mourning where the lines in which she is suddenly buried must be read within the wider context of Montale's discourses of mourning, in which the fear of the inescapability of forgetfulness represents a threat to the mourner-mourned relationship that must be sustained after the loss of the loved object.

Montale does not encourage or look forward to achieving the normative finitude of a Freudian-like model of classical mourning, such as traditional elegy generally accomplishes, in which total forgetfulness and replacement of the deceased takes place, but nor does he present a static position in a melancholic state of endless and constant melancholia towards the lost object of love. Montale's "fluid" mourning swings back and forth between these two poles, just like Derrida's "demi-deuil." This never-ending and intermittent mourning is even more visible when the "ciclo di Arletta" is considered in its fullness as it then becomes possible to notice a movement of continual subversion and contradiction regarding the end of the poetic subject's mourning for Arletta. Sometimes forgetfulness seems to have taken over, but then Arletta's "apparizioni [...] rare e impreviste" ("Annetta," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 5), memories that belong to her, resurface and her smiling face re-emerges only to dissolve again as soon as the poetic subject approaches it.

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[28] Gilberto Lonardi, "Mito e 'Melos' per Arletta: 'Punta del Mesco'," 147.

It is helpful to consider here Jennifer Rushworth's reading of the relationship between Proust's narrator and Albertine in the *Recherche* as it helps to shed light on the relation of Montale's poetic subject to Arletta.[29] Rushworth points out that the intermittent and paradoxical coexistence of absence-distance and presence-closeness between Proust's protagonist and Albertine (with whom Arletta shares several letters of her vocal body [*Albert*ine; *Arlett*a]):

> [Proust's protagonist] re-experiences the terrible absence of Albertine when the "couvercle" [lid] or "portes de la prison" [gates of the prison] are momentarily opened, through the action of involuntary memory. Albertine is both inside the protagonist, but distant from him, invisible, and resistant to his appropriating memory. Proust's protagonist's unconscious melancholic fidelity means that Albertine remains both living and, as she was in life, inaccessible and unknowable. (99–100)

Echoing Proust's narrative of mourning, the poetic subject of Montale's poem similarly achieves no resolution on this issue and no consolation is reached. This emerges in the concluding two lines of "La casa dei doganieri": "Tu non ricordi la casa di questa / mia sera. Ed io non so chi va e chi resta" (lines 21–22). The poetic subject reasserts once more the beloved's inability to remember this meaningful place in which for him their encounter can still be evoked. He is therefore left without knowing who goes and who stays. An important aspect of the inescapability of forgetfulness in Montale's poetics of mourning is that the mourned is shown to be the one who has forgotten: it is Arletta who does not remember. This should be seen within the contradictory nature of the relationship between the mourner and mourned as thought to be in the unstable and fluid state of "demi-deuil," where the one guilty of "infidelity" is Arletta, and not the poetic subject, which could be seen as a consequence of the *io*'s own feeling of guilt projected on to Arletta. This is a fascinating, as well as painful, twist in Montale's narrative of mourning in "La casa dei doganieri."

In "La casa dei doganieri" Arletta's death, together with the loss and bereavement that this death brings to the poetic subject, is not entirely an "occasion of poetry" offered by the "luce della petroliera" (line 18) that brings a greater knowledge to the poetic subject's "animo [...] informe" ("Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato...," *Ossi di seppia*, 2). The gnomic concluding statement—"Ed io non so chi va e chi resta" (line 21)—contains several layers of meaning. First, it stands for the question of who makes it through the "via di fuga" ("La casa sul mare," *Le occasioni*, 28) represented by the "varco," and who does not; this brings forth a second concept: the question of who is really dead and who is fully alive, who is freed from the constraints of this world, and who is still bound to "le coincidenze, le prenotazioni, / le trappole, gli scorni" (*Xenia* II.5, 5–6). The statement also stands for the possibility of being forgotten and hence not even living in the memories of the "vivi," thus starting the process of de-materialization.[30] Finally, and most importantly, it also stands for the impossibility of knowing

[29] See in particular Chapter 3, "Proust's *Recherche*, Derridean 'demi-deuil,' and Mimetic Mourning." Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 91–126.
[30] In Montale's eschatological vision the dead can continue to live in the afterlife in proportion to how they are remembered by their dear ones who are still alive. This key characteristic of Montale's eschatology leads the poetic subject to articulate an obligation to keep the memory of his lost "care ombre" alive. Remembrance indeed, from the perspective of the living, becomes a responsibility, a way to remain faithful to one's dead after they move to the "oscura regione" ("Delta," *Ossi di seppia*, 8). However, the viewpoint from the afterlife appears to be significantly different. As becomes clear in "Voce giunta con le folaghe" (*La bufera e altro*), remembrance and, more broadly,

whose absence can still be evoked in the mourner's life and whose cannot, as forgetfulness is presented as something uncontrollable: "l'orizzonte in fuga" (line 17) and the house of the custom guards that drifts away ("s'allontana," line 12) are outside the poetic subject's control. The poetic subject "resta" (line 22): once more he predictably stays "a terra" ("Falsetto," *Ossi di seppia*, 51) in a dimension of existential constraint where the unstoppable passing of time marks his life with all its pitilessness and violence: "Ripullula il frangente ancora sulla balza che scoscende" (line 19). Just as in Derrida's "demi-deuil," by making the poetic subject visit those "vecchie mura" (line 6), beaten for years by the violent *libeccio*'s blows, the modern elegist Montale presents a work of mourning that does not free the subject from grief and bereavement, but rather sustains it. This is a work of mourning that does not heal but rather keeps intermittently reopening the wounds of loss in an attempt not to forget, and thus not to replace the lost love object unethically.

The way Montale's mourning relates to poetic form and the way he negotiates elegy's traditional elements can be seen in his employment of a key convention of the genre: the use of repetition and refrain. In *The English Elegy,* Sacks argues that "[r]epetition creates a sense of continuity, of an unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the extreme discontinuity of death. Time itself is thereby structured to appear as a familiar, filled-in medium rather than as an open-ended source of possible catastrophe."[31] Repetition, moreover, as Sacks continues, is:

> one of the psychological responses to trauma. The psyche repeats the shocking event, much as the elegy recounts and reiterates the fact of death [...]. By such repetitions, the mind seeks retroactively to create the kind of protective barrier that, had it been present at the actual event, might have prevented or softened the disruptive shock that initially caused the trauma. (23)

At the same time, however, repetition is also a way of controlling grief: "the repetition of words and refrains and the creation of a certain rhythm of lament have the effect of controlling the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion. It is as if the grief might be gradually conjured forth and exorcised. This returns us to the idea of ceremony, and to the idea that repetition may itself be used to create a 'sense of ceremony'" (23). This last note by Sacks is relevant insofar as it highlights the relationship between elegy's conventions and the original role that the use of repetition and refrain had in archaic funerary rites.

What emerges from Sacks's observations on the conventional use of refrains and repetitions is that Montale does not work within the traditional consolatory machinery of the elegy, but still

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attachment to the dead one's lost earthly life, is accepted only "fin che giova"; for the dead, memory can run the risk of becoming a "memoria-peccato" ("Voce giunta con le folaghe," *La bufera e altro*, 42–45). Memory thus chains the "care ombre" to earthly life and the dead themselves must abandon it in order to complete the required process of de-materialization, the required step towards a more complete and authentic form of being in Montale's afterlife. More specifically, this "processo di smaterializzazione" is the one that the dead must undertake in "Zona II," one of the zones in Montale's underworld as he presents it to us in the short story "Sul limite" in *Farfalla di Dinard*. Yet the dead fear to be forgotten by the living. One significant example of this is the figure of the father in "Voce giunta con le folaghe" who is reluctant to make the "nuovo balzo" (*La bufera e altro*, 33). This purification-like process must be undertaken by all shadows in order to complete their journey from earthly life (which is paradoxically perceived in Montale's eschatological vision as "morte"), to death (equivalent to "vita"). It is through the development of this peculiar working of memory that Montale is able to create an eschatology where there is presence in absence. Eugenio Montale, "Sul limite," in *Farfalla di Dinard*, in Eugenio Montale, *Prose e Racconti*, ed. Marco Forti (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 187–192.

[31] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 23.

employs some of its main conventions (such as the use of repetitions and refrains), which can therefore be read as an indication of his attempt still to achieve some degree of consolation. However, the repetitions in "La casa dei doganieri" seem to painfully re-enact and re-open the wound created by Arletta's death, rather than exorcising grief. This view does not exclude the other and should be seen in a contradictory state of co-existence with Montale's attempt to respond to grief in a normative and consolatory way, in tune with the contradictory nature of "demi-deuil" itself.

There are two main refrains in "La casa dei doganieri": "Tu non ricordi" (*a*) and "Ne tengo ancora un capo" (*b*). These should be seen together in a supposed dialogue where *b* stands as a stoic answer to *a* forming the following scheme: *a-a-b-b-a*. It is no longer possible to answer the last *a* with *b*—only a hopeless deduction can follow at this point: "Ed io non so chi va e chi resta" (line 22). Inevitably one must make reference here to Leopardi's "A Silvia" refrain on which Montale constructs his poem:

> Silvia, rimembri ancora
> quel tempo della tua vita mortale,
> quando beltà splendea
> negli occhi tuoi ridenti e fuggitivi,
> e tu, lieta e pensosa, il limitare
> di gioventù salivi?[32]

While Leopardi formulates the doubt of whether Silvia can remember the time of their encounter as a question, Montale presents it as a definite statement: "Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri / sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera" (lines 1–2).

Equally significant to Montale's relationship with the elegy in this poem is his use of repetition of the phonemes /r/ and /t/ and /k/. This should be seen in line with Montale's consistent and obsessive textual strategy of disseminating Arletta's "vocal body," following the textual strategy of removing Arletta's forename (of which the most evident instance is "Incontro" [*Ossi di seppia*]). In the sub-stratum of the text the strident and feral sound /r/ (that belongs but is not limited to Arletta's "decapitated head" /AR/)[33] and the equally discordant and sharp sound of the phonemes /t/ and /k/ evoke from the "lower" parts of the poem the bereavement narrated in the "upper" parts of the text. Below is the poem with the phonemes highlighted in italics where the phoneme /r/ returns for a total of 35 times, the phoneme /t/ is repeated 33 times, and the phoneme /k/ is counted 21 times.

> *T*u non *r*ico*r*di la *c*asa dei doganie*r*i
> sul *r*ialzo a st*r*apiombo sulla s*c*oglie*r*a:
> desola*t*a *t*'a*tt*ende dalla se*r*a
> in *c*ui v'en*tr*ò lo sciame dei *t*uoi pensie*r*i
> e vi sos*t*ò i*rr*equie*t*o.
>
> Libeccio sfe*r*za da anni le ve*cc*hie mu*r*a

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[32] Leopardi, "A Silvia" (lines 1–6).
[33] It is Gilberto Lonardi who suggests reading a "decapitation" of Arletta as latently present in this dissemination of Arletta's strident and dissonant vocal body/decapitated head: /AR/. Lonardi, "Mito e 'Melos' per Arletta: 'Punta del Mesco,'" 148.

e il suono del *tu*o *r*iso non è più lie*to*:
la bussola va impazzi*t*a all'avven*t*ura
e il *c*al*c*olo dei dadi più non *tor*na.
*T*u non *r*i*cor*di; al*tr*o *t*empo f*r*as*tor*na
la *t*ua memo*r*ia; un filo s'addipana.

Ne *t*engo anco*r*a un *c*apo; ma s'allon*t*ana
la *c*asa e in cima al *te*tt*o* la bande*r*uola
affumi*ca*t*a* gi*r*a senza pie*t*à.
Ne *t*engo un *c*apo; ma *t*u *r*es*t*i sola
né qui *r*espi*r*i nell'os*c*uri*t*à.

Oh l'o*r*izzon*t*e in fuga, dove s'accende
*r*a*r*a la luce della pe*tr*olie*r*a!
Il va*rc*o è qui? (*R*ipullula il f*r*angen*t*e
an*cor*a sulla balza *c*he s*c*oscende...).
*T*u non *r*i*cor*di la *c*asa di ques*t*a
mia se*r*a. Ed io non so *c*hi va e *c*hi *r*es*t*a.

Moreover, one notices that pronouns such as "tu" (lines 1, 10, 15, 21), "ti" (3,), "tuo" (7), "tua" (11), "tuoi" (4), and words that contains the pronouns "tu" and "te," are another means by which Montale constructs an important refrain to address the beloved female figure. Examples of this are "t'at*te*nde" (3), "avven*tu*ra" (8), "*te*mpo" (10), "*te*ngo" (12, 15), "orizzon*te*" (17), "frangen*te*" (19), "*te*tto" (13). As in the archaic rituals at the origins of the poetic genre of elegy, this obsessive "repetition-compulsion" in the mourner's address aims to evoke the presence of the absent-mourned person.[34] Repetition does not bring the lost love object back, but instead succeeds only in painfully reaffirming her absence.

It is helpful to look at a similar case in Proust that sheds further light on Montale's use of repetition. As Rushworth explains, Proust's narrator also repeats Albertine's name obsessively in the *Recherche* an incredible total of 2,360 times. Petrarch too presents us with a similar repetitive use of the name of Laura. The fragmented syllables of her name are dispersed throughout his *Canzoniere*: "alloro," "lauro," "l'aura," "l'oro," "l'ora," to name just a few.[35] However, in both Petrarch and Proust, the use of repetition does not bring a presence, it confirms an irreversible absence, something that they share with Montale.

> [Repetition] does [not] really substitute for their presence, but instead emphasizes their distance and absence. It is, thus, a repetition of loss, or a refusal of loss that perpetuates and sustains the loss experienced. Through repetition, the name becomes an empty signifier, which is reduced to the sonorous fragments of which it is composed. (113)

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[34] The idea of compulsive repetition in relation to trauma has its roots in Freud's reflections on it in his 1920s essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," now in *The Standard Edition to the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 18, 7–64.

[35] For more information on Petrarch's repetitive use of Laura's name see Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 111.

Therefore, the initial attempt to conceal Arletta's presence by concealing her name from the poems of the "ciclo Arlettiano"—as if obeying the demands of the normative healthy-forgetful trajectory of mourning—is followed by an unstoppable repetition-compulsion to disseminate her name/presence/vocal body throughout the cycle of Arletta. However, this attempt that exhibits all the instability and contradictory nature of "demi-deuil" does not evoke the desired presence of the loved one, but stands as a painful re-enactment of her death. Ultimately, the gap that separates the poetic subject and the irrevocably absent Arletta cannot be filled.

Still on a phonic level, another less easily identifiable sound resonates throughout the poem. It is an almost shamanic, ritualistic sound that emerges from the lower sub-stratum of the poem. This is the sound of "lo sciame [...] / irrequieto" (lines 4–5), the sound of the *libeccio* (well-known for its violent and erratic blows, whose violence is highlighted in the verb "sferzare," line 6), the sound no longer "lieto" of the beloved's laughter in line 7 (just as in the case of Mosca, this recalls a Medusa-like feral laughter), the *frastornare* of time (line 10), and the sound of the "frangente [che ripullula] / ancora sulla balza che scoscende" (lines 19–20). All these violent images depict a collision, be it of the waves against the cliff or the frantic swarm. These sounds transcend language—as any lamentation or moan does—and easy classification in one individual phoneme. It is a discordant and strident sound perfectly in tune with the sense of bereavement that moves through the poem and, most importantly, this is the sound of the irresolvable collision between Arletta's presence, as evoked through poetry, and her irrevocable absence that will always ultimately prevail.

Another significant element emerges from the sub-stratum of this poem. Prayer, and liturgical language more broadly, is a discourse that also makes extensive use of patterns, repetitions, and refrains. Hence, elegy could even be regarded as representing the pattern of prayers, be it religious or not.[36] "La casa dei doganieri" also partly enacts a prayer. One can hear it when distancing oneself from the poem as Arletta's shadow does: "Tu [...] resta." The first word that opens the poem, "tu" (line 1), and the word that marks its end, "resta" (line 22), together give life to a request by the poetic subject to the dead beloved. Although she does not remember and although he does not know who stays and who goes, the creative force of the text performs a prayer asking whether she can stay, without vanishing as a result of the inexorable passing of time that will make even her shadow disappear irreversibly from his memory. The use of the imperative mood ("tu resta") as opposed to the use of the indicative ("tu resti") encourages this reading, as it shows that the poetic subject has no certainty in his request. Hence the request is more similar to a prayer than an assertive statement by the poetic subject. This request, once again, aligns itself with a contradictory and unstable trajectory of "demi-deuil" where the mourner rejects complete forgetfulness and, in the threat of its inescapability, seeks remembrance and attempts to sustain the relationship with the lost love object.

Furthermore, in "La casa dei doganieri" one finds oneself on a liminal border between absence and presence, in an irreconcilable collision between a fleeting moment of contact and a renewed separation. This also emerges geographically at the level of the landscape, which is able to evoke the presence of the absent Arletta. This movement between absence and presence is something inherent in Montale's elegy: the poetic subject addresses an absent person not to renew her absence, but to find a point of contact through the evocation of the mourned person. Ultimately, however, the momentary presence of the mourned person vanishes and the mourner

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[36] More broadly, as Robert Hass observes, prayers can also be considered a fundamental element of lyric itself: "The impulse of prayer seems to be very near the origin of the lyric." Robert Hass, *A Little Book on Form: An Exploration into the Formal Imagination of Poetry* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 202.

is again at the starting point where what is present is only the absence of the beloved. As previously mentioned, the title of the poem already introduces us to the issue at its core, namely, the custom guards' house. The "dogana" is also the "varco" (line 19) seen as the limit/border between memory and forgetfulness, presence and absence, constraint and freedom. Similarly, the "scogliera" (line 2), the "sera" (3), the "mura" (6), and the "frangente" (line 19) are all words and places on the edge between being and not-being as on a "rialzo a strapiombo" (line 2) between one line and the other. Significantly, they are all at the end of a line and all stand for what the poem itself is trying to perform: an extension of Arletta's presence in all her irreversible and irrevocable absence: "Tu resta."

I would now like to consider "La casa dei doganieri" in its relation to the "ciclo Arlettiano" as a whole. As already mentioned, the cycle marks Montale's *oeuvre* from the very beginning of his poetic journey until "Ah!" in *Altri versi*, spanning a period of more than fifty years. In looking at the poems belonging to the cycle as a cohesive constellation, I want to propose that mourning in Montale's poetry for Arletta works on two distinctive levels. The first is the level of the individual poem, as we have seen in my close reading of "La casa dei doganieri," but it can also be found in other poems of the cycle that center around mourning for Arletta. There is, nonetheless, a second level at which mourning functions. Poems rarely exist in complete isolation, but rather in a complex web of intertextuality. For this reason, I argue that Montale's mourning for Arletta should also be considered from within the cycle dedicated to this "fanciulla morta" as a whole. What is the trajectory from the *Ossi* to *Altri versi* and how does Montale's mourning for Arletta move and develop throughout this group of poems? Does it follow the same narrative as seen in the individual poems? I believe that the same intermittent and never-ending movement traceable within the single poems, as discussed above with reference to "La casa dei doganeri," can also be traced within the cycle as a whole. There are poems where there is a stronger presence of forgetful mourning, that involve memory and seem to be on the verge of fading, and others where the poetic subject attempts, more forcefully, to keep his memory of Arletta alive in tune with a more melancholic approach to mourning. This oscillation, typical of "demi-deuil," sits at the heart of the complexity of Montale's narratives of mourning and of his "ciclo di Arletta."

"Annetta," the poem that in *Diari del '71 e del '72* brings to an end the triptych dedicated to the "Silvia montaliana," is a particularly helpful text, through which we can glimpse the relation of mourning and its functions in the others poems of the "ciclo":

"Annetta"

Perdona Annetta se dove tu sei
(non certo tra di noi, i sedicenti
vivi) poco ti giunge il mio ricordo.
Le tue apparizioni furono per molti anni
rare e impreviste, non certo da te volute.
Anche i luoghi (la rupe dei doganieri,
la foce del Bisagno dove ti trasformasti in Dafne)
non avevano senso senza di te.
Di certo resta il gioco delle sciarade incatenate
o incastrate che fossero di cui eri maestra.
Erano veri spettacoli in miniatura.

Vi recitai la parte di Leonardo
(Bistolfi ahimè, non l'altro), mi truccai da leone
per ottenere il 'primo' e quanto al nardo
mi aspersi di profumi. Ma non bastò la barba
che mi aggiunsi proissa e alquanto sudicia.
Occorreva di più, una statua viva
da me scolpita. E fosti tu a balzare
su un plinto traballante di dizionari
miracolosa palpitante ed io
a modellarti con non so quale aggeggio.
Fu il mio solo successo di teatrante
domestico. Ma so che tutti gli occhi
posavano su te. Tuo era il prodigio.

[...] Ora sto
a chiedermi che posto tu hai avuto
in quella mia stagione. Certo un senso
allora inesprimibile, più tardi
non l'oblio ma una punta che feriva
quasi a sangue. Ma allora eri già morta
e non ho mai saputo dove e come.
Oggi penso che tu sei stata un genio
di pura inesistenza, un'agnizione
reale perché assurda. Lo stupore
quando s'incarna è lampo che ti abbaglia
e si spenge. Durare potrebbe essere
l'effetto di una droga nel creato,
in un medium di cui non si ebbe mai
alcuna prova. ("Annetta," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 2–24, 34–48)

What immediately strikes the reader is that the name of the deceased finally resurfaces from the substratum of the texts from which it was until now hidden. From being consistently concealed—not only in "Incontro" (*Ossi di seppia*) (which was initially entitled "Arletta"),[37] but also in poems that were not included in the final edition of the *Ossi* (for example, "Dolci anni che di lunghe rifrazioni...," *Poesie disperse*), whose title in two manuscripts was "Destino di Arletta"—Annetta is now finally called by her name.[38] Her presence is evoked through memory, but through memory she can also be forgotten, potentially lost forever in the work of forgetful mourning. The poetic subject's apologetic *incipit* should be read from this standpoint: "Perdona Annetta se dove tu sei [...] / poco ti giunge il mio ricordo" (lines 1, 3). Just as in the preceding

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[37] See Rosanna Bettarini and Gianfranco Contini's notes on "Incontro" (*Ossi di seppia*) in "Varianti e autocommenti," in Eugenio Montale, *L'opera in versi*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 890.

[38] As Zampa confirms in his "Note ai testi": "Prima redazione manoscritta, senza data e con titolo *Destino di Arletta*, conservata da Luciano Rebay. [...] Trascrizione in pulito, con titolo *Destino di Arletta* e data '1926,' a tergo di una lettera ad Angelo Barile datata 'Monterosso 9.IX.26.'" Both letters and the facsimile are reprinted in *Letteratura* 30 (1996): 79–81, 230–231, now in Silvio Ramat, ed, *Omaggio a Montale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1966), table 10. Zampa, "Note ai testi," in Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, 1152.

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poems "Il lago di Annecy" and "Ancora ad Annecy" (*Diario del '71 e del '72*), the poetic subject ruminates on his forgetfulness of the deceased beloved with an overtone of guilt, and thus seems to reject the normal Freudian-like work of mourning.

It is helpful to underline here that a concern regarding the nature of potential "infidelity" towards one's dead by way, for instance, of forgetting, is a recurring focal point not only in Montale's mourning for Arletta, as the poems in the *Diari* highlight, but also in Derrida. The French thinker in fact often ponders on what it means to be ethical and faithful towards the dead, as this passage exemplifies:

> Is fidelity mourning? It is also the contrary: the faithful one is someone who is in mourning. Mourning is an interiorization of the dead other, but it is also the contrary. Hence the impossibility of completing one's mourning and even the will not to mourn are also forms of fidelity. If to mourn and not to mourn are two forms of fidelity and two forms of infidelity, the only thing remaining—and this is where I speak of semi-mourning—is an experience between the two. I cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, because by mourning, I keep it inside me.[39]

A similar viewpoint on mourning can be found in Roland Barthes's *Journal de deuil* where he opposes the normative-teleological Freudian "work of mourning," raising the possibility of transforming grief without suppressing it: "Not to suppress mourning (suffering) (the stupid notion that time will do away with such a thing) but to change it, transform it, to shift it from a static stage (stasis, obstruction, recurrences of the same thing) to a fluid state."[40]

This fluid state to which Barthes refers echoes the core of Derridean "demi-deuil" where one finds a similar conception of "work" insofar as it is the "impossible mourning that nonetheless remains at work, endlessly hollowing out the depths of our memories."[41]

For many years Annetta-Arletta's "apparizioni" (line 4) were both "rare e impreviste" (line 5). Echoing the oscillation of Derridean "demi-deuil" between forgetful mourning and melancholia, the *io* highlights that moments of remembrance were present but only in small number and they were unexpected, outside of his control.[42] Moreover, Arletta is "pura inesistenza" (line 42), and the original "senso / [...] inesprimibile" (lines 36–37) that she stood for has turned from an initial "oblio" (line 38) into one sharp-edged absence:

> più tardi
> non l'oblio ma una punta che feriva
> quasi a sangue. (37–39)

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[39] Derrida, "'Dialanguages'," in *Points ... Interviews, 1974–1994*, 151–152. Also cited in Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 97.

[40] Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, ed. Nathalie Léger and trans. Richard Howard (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), 142. Also cited in Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 98.

[41] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. and trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 94–95.

[42] This recalls Mosca's "visite mute" and "inesplicabili" in "Luci e colori" (*Satura*, 3).

The "punta che feriva" (line 38) is "la punta amara del rimpianto, con un ricordo ancora leopardiano, da *Aspasia* (30–31)": "lo stral, che poscia fitto / ululando portai."[43] It is important to highlight here the significance of that "quasi" (line 39), which further supports the affinity of Montale's mourning with the non-finite state of "demi-deuil": it is a "punta" that *almost* hurts to the point of drawing blood, but not completely. Melancholia has often been associated with an open wound, and it is therefore particularly relevant to notice how the wound produced by Arletta's absence is "*quasi* a sangue" (line 39, my emphasis)—not a fully open, bleeding wound, but a wound nonetheless: a "demi"-wound.[44]

The movement between remembrance and forgetfulness is intermittent as were the "lampi" ("I pressepapiers," *Quaderno di quattro anni*, 8), "fari" ("Se al più si oppone il meno il risultato...," *Quaderno di quattro anni*, 7–8), and "barlumi" ("Pareva facile giuoco...," *Le occasioni*, 9) that return throughout Montale's poetry: the "lampo che ti abbaglia / e si spenge" ("Annetta," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 44–45), the aforementioned "petroliera" ("La casa dei doganieri," 17–18), or the "faro" also from Montale's second poetic collection:

> il punto atono
> del faro che baluginava sulla
> roccia del Tino, cerula, tre volte
> si dilatò e si spense in un altro oro

in "Vecchi versi," *Le occasioni*, 7–10) or of "Quella del faro" (*Quaderno di quattro anni*) and of "Se al più si oppone il meno il risultato...":

> Anche il faro, lo vedi, è intermittente,
> forse è troppo costoso tenerlo sempre acceso.
> Perché ti meravigli se ti dico che tutte
> le capinere hanno breve suono e sorte. (*Quaderno di quattro anni*, 7–10)

Not to mention the poem opening *Le occasioni*: "La vita che dà barlumi / è quella che sola tu scorgi" ("Pareva facile giuoco...," *Le occasioni*, 9–10). Furthermore, as this reading of "Annetta" allows us to observe, a similar intermittence and oscillatory moment is present at the level of the "ciclo di Arletta" as a whole. If in "La casa dei doganieri" the poetic subject was struggling with the inevitable advancing of forgetfulness, but was still able to firmly hold one end of the "filo-memoria" ("Ne tengo ancora un capo," line 12), in "Annetta," from the beginning, we find the poetic subject speaking from a rather different position: apologizing for the feeble power of his memory of Arletta, without her being entirely absent ("Perdona Annetta se [...] / [...] poco di giunge il mio ricordo," 1–3). If we move forward to 1977, when Montale composed "Quella del faro," we still find an *io* that is determined not to bring his mourning and remembrance to an end, but rather sustains his relationship with the absent object of love, who becomes ever more elusive and difficult to "locate." The two concluding lines highlight this: "che farebbe ridere / anche te dove sei, se ancora sei" (8–9).

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[43] Angelo Marchese's notes and comments in Montale, *Poesie*, ed. Angelo Marchese (Milan: Mondadori Scuola, 1991), 255.

[44] On melancholia as an open wound, see, among others, Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," where he states: "melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies [...] from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished." Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 253.

The present study of the poetic subject's mourning for Arletta cannot but benefit from taking into account one last text: a short story included in *Farfalla di Dinard* (1956)—"Sulla spiaggia"—where the narrator-protagonist refers to the lost "Annalena o Annagilda o Annalia" or maybe "Anactoria," all names resonating with both Annetta and Arletta.[45] Here Montale provides us with a complementary reflection on the role of memory in relation to mourning when referring to the female figure's sudden re-surfacing in his beloved's memory—exactly what the poetic subject presents us in the Arletta's cycle:

> Ma qui non c'è da discutere: Anactoria o Annabella era stata del tutto soppressa dal mio pensiero per quattro cinque sei anni, ed ora è tornata perché ha "voluto" tornare, è lei che mi fa grazia di sé, non sono io che mi degno di ridestarla andando dilettantisticamente alla ricerca del tempo perduto. È lei l'amorevole, la degna intrusa che rivangando nel suo passato s'è imbattuta nella mia ombra ed ha voluto ristabilire nel senso migliore della parola una "corrispondenza." (195)

As the story continues, the narrator-protagonist refers to the "scherzi della memoria" which echo, among others, the ones portrayed in "Il lago di Annecy" and that make the poetic subject wonder about how "può scattar fuori una memoria / così insabbiata non lo so" ("Il lago di Annecy," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 6–7):

> A dire il vero sono avvilitissimo. Penso agli scherzi della memoria, al pozzo di San Patrizio del ricordo. Io mi credevo in credito verso di me e verso gli altri supponevo che infinite cose tramontate vivessero ancora in me, trovassero nel mio petto la loro ultima giustificazione: mi credevo ricco ed ero invece indecente. Qualcuno che avevo dimenticato m'ha colto di sorpresa; sono io che esisto ancora nella mente di Anactoria o di Annabella, io che sopravvivo in lei, no lei in me. Già; e come può un ricordo sparire fino a questo segno? Ero consapevole di custodire nello scrigno della memoria una follia di fantasmi possibili, virtuali che non evocavo per non ridestare ombre non sempre grate, ma che tuttavia affioravano talvolta alla superficie della coscienza e ne formavano in qualche modo la ricchezza. Reminiscenze così fatte, spore inesplose, castagnette a scoppio ritardato possono senza fatica spiegarsi, giustificarsi. Ma che dire del fatto che pullula "ex abrupto" dalla nostra inerte materia grigia, che pensare del fenomeno di una scomparsa totale che a un tratto si rivela presenza? (194–95)

A "scomparsa totale"—death—can unexpectedly reveal itself as a "presenza" through memory. This leads the narrator-protagonist of "Sulla spiaggia" to question the common understanding of the nature of memory that he had: "[i]o credevo insomma a dimenticanze relative e quasi volontarie, a un processo, come chiamarlo?, tayloristico della mente che mette in pensione quanto non può giovarle, pur conservando il bandolo e il filo di se stessa" (195). However, his memory for Anactoria or Annabella does not work within this "work of mourning," traditionally perceived as beneficial for the mourning subject, where forgetfulness gradually takes over, but rather plays some unpredictable *scherzi*.

To conclude, Montale's poetic mourning is an endless mourning that keeps resurfacing intermittently in a constant, unpredictable oscillation between forgetfulness and melancholic

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[45] Eugenio Montale, "Sulla spiaggia," in Montale, *Prose e Racconti*, 193.

remembrance, with no beginnings and no ends. "A certain melancholy must still protest against normal mourning. This melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. [...] Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore *necessary*."[46] These words by Derrida help us to see once more how Montale's mourning is in tune with "demi-deuil." Montale's mourning for Arletta allows the experiencing of a liminal state of in-betweenness in all its instability and vulnerability: an on-the-edge experience between the two antithetical states of mourning and melancholia. In this way resolution is never fully reached, and the teleological nature of psychoanalytic accounts that share Freud's antithetical view of mourning is frustrated. Never-ending mourning is no longer rejected as unsuccessful and melancholic.[47] Unlike what Derrida terms the "deuil normal," mourning in Montale's poetry is a "punta che feri[sce] / *quasi* a sangue" ("Annetta," *Diario del '71 e del '72*, 38–39, my emphasis). Most importantly, Montale is able to create an atemporal space in his poetry where mourning can continue to breathe, intermittently, in all its unbearability, rather than being suffocated or being perceived, as it often is in everyday life, as something which needs to be cured. It is in this space of poetry that the ethical endurance of mourning can prolong our dialogue with the dead beyond the threshold of death.

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[46] Jacques Derrida, "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski, in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 135–63, 160. Also cited in Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 96.

[47] Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, 97.