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Roberto Sanesi's *The First Day of Spring* An Act of Love for Humanity

Review of: Roberto Sanesi, *The First Day of Spring. Il primo giorno di primavera*, Matteo Brera (ed.), Heather Scott (trans.), Leicester, Troubador, 2014, xv + 137 p. ISBN: 9781783063772, £ 9.95.

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This volume is constructed in two parts. The first part consists of the twenty-one poems which constitute Roberto Sanesi's last collection *Il primo giorno di primavera*, published by Book Editore in 2000, followed by seven poems unpublished before now. The poems, in the original Italian, are presented with parallel texts very aptly and sensitively translated by Heather Scott. The volume includes a preface by Paolo Valesio and an introduction by Matteo Brera. In the second part, the *Critical Appendix*, Brera analyses the poems in a fine academic essay and Joseph Farrell authors an introduction to the poet, recalling a poetic event in 1988 when Roberto Sanesi and Edwin Morgan were invited to read at The Edinburgh Scottish Poetry Library. This is followed by a conversation between Farrell, Morgan and Sanesi on their activity as translators. Finally, the volume closes with an afterword by Carlo Sini and a complete and up-to-date 'Bibliography of Roberto Sanesi'.

This is a multifaceted volume, which presents to the reader the figure of Sanesi from new and complementary perspectives. Sanesi was a poet as well as an acclaimed translator, whose poetic and translating voices are very different and do not interfere with each other, as Paolo Valesio notes in the preface to the volume. This last volume by Sanesi is 'less cruel than better known ones' (p. xiii), continues Valesio, ascribing the poet to the poetic lineage of modernist T.S. Eliot whose *Wasteland* incipit 'April is the cruellest month' is evoked by the very title *The First Day of Spring*. Whilst Eliot's images somehow convey a sense of warmth and possibility of renewal, Valesio emphasises that Sanesi's last volume is 'more wintry and intellectually austere' (p. xiii), as its original title would have suggested (*Notizie dall'inverno*, News from Winter).

Brera's philological introduction 'The First (and Last) Day of Spring. Philological Notes on *Il primo giorno di primavera*' is a refined article detailing the development and the metamorphoses of the manuscript(s), from *Quaestiones* all the way to the final shaping of the volume published in 2000. We get a sense of the complexities behind the shaping over the years (1994-2000) of *Il primo giorno di primavera* out of a much larger corpus of texts, some of which are still unpublished and are currently held in the archival folders at casa Sanesi.

Brera further enhances the volume by analysing its poetics in his essay 'Crossing the century: Roberto Sanesi and the Enigma of contemporaneity', where Sanesi is presented as a poet who is able to create a bridge between the traumatic wasteland left by the nineteenth century and our current century. The unsettling *quaestio* Sanesi seems to pose to humanity is one which is suggested by the epigraph to the book, 'Un giorno ti dirò chi c'è in cantina', which Brera informs us 'is in fact dedicated to his wife, Anita' who had the 'habit of asking aloud "Who's down in the cellar?" before going down the stairs' (p. 96). His wife's habitual innocent question becomes for Sanesi an occasion for a quest into an ontological search through poetry

and a philosophical stance of his role to help his reader, addressed as a 'tu' ('you'), to find a path in 'traversing' the dark times of contemporaneity and in developing the ability to listen: 'ma tu / eri in viaggio da troppo tempo per ascoltare' ('La casa infanta', p. 16).

The extensive use of objective correlatives throughout the collection marks a strong Eliotian influence. However, as Brera clarifies further, a Montalean connection is also evident. Indeed, not only are images often constructed around Montalean vocabulary ('palo confitto sgocciolante d'alghe', 'la gravità delle acque', 'la m̀acina del mare', 'La primavera incompiuta' reminding the reader of the 'primavere che non fioriscono' of 'Carnevale di Gerti'), but the intonation can be epigrammatic like in Montale's later production in *Satura*. Indeed, can a poet-traverser of the twentieth century not somehow have traversed Montale's verses and been influenced by them?

While this volume contributes a valid scholarly work on 'an internationally renowned poet, a distinguished critic and a translator of repute' as Joseph Farrell calls him (p. 111), in December 2014 *Rivista di studi italiani* published a whole issue dedicated to Roberto Sanesi, also edited by Matteo Brera. This has shed further light on the work of a poet, literary and art critic and translator, whose image of spring becomes a symbolic passage from one extreme century to another which enables, as Brera concludes, a possible 'dialogue with the reader and, above all, an act of love for humanity' (p. 104).

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