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## Rhyme: figurality, memory, intertextuality

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### ABSTRACT:

Inscribed in a general theory of rhyme I am trying to outline, which is firstly aimed at giving an explanation of the overall sense of this device, the present article deals with the question of the relation between rhyme and intertextuality: using the same rhymes of a previous author, indeed, often carries an intertextual relation. As a premise, I briefly anticipate the main assumptions of my theory, with particular regard to what I have called the *figural function* of rhyme. Then, the close link between rhyme and memory is investigated, in light of both the coeval art of memory and modern psychology studies. Its mnemotechnical power is also the basis of its intertextual potential, in a shift from what is simply *memorable* to what is *memorable* obtained through aesthetic enhancement, mainly due to the so-called *figural function*. A brief comparison with Homeric formulaicity shows how verse-making devices may influence the text far beyond the mere scope of metrics, involving in particular literary memory phenomena. Finally, a selection of examples are provided to give an account of the many and varied types of intertextual relations the borrowing of rhymes may carry.

It is a well-known fact that rhymes, when borrowed from previous texts, either consciously or not, may become a privileged vehicle of intertextual allusion or reminiscence. Nonetheless, in the infrequent studies on rhyme, this issue has only recently begun to be addressed in a specific way and with not completely satisfactory results. What in particular is still lacking is a general theoretical framework concerning rhyme, with which we may connect the question of its intertextual potential. Indeed, despite its extraordinary, more than thousand-year fortune in European literatures, this device has been much less studied than would be expected considering its historical relevance. Moreover a general theory regarding rhyme, going beyond the traditional typological distinctions proposed by metrical treatises, is still to be completed. It is such a theory that I am working on at the moment, and of which an initial outline shall soon be published in review. Before moving on to the main subject of this paper, I shall briefly anticipate the basic assumptions, which I feel are a necessary premise – as we will see – to ensure a true advancement of knowledge concerning the relation between rhyme and intertextuality.

### 1. FOUNDATIONS OF A THEORY OF RHYME: SEMIOTICS AND FIGURALITY

The main question I asked myself regarding rhyme – which I believe is not only still unanswered, but usually not even posed – is: what should the general sense of rhyme be? I mean its *raison d'être*, the motive that historically brought this peculiar phonic device to establish itself as the most characteristic feature of poetic expression and to remain such for centuries, frequently re-emerging even after its 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century crisis. No doubt several functions of rhyme, such as creating strophic structures, marking the verse-end etc., have

been singled out by studies and metrical treatises<sup>1</sup>, but none of them can really explain the phenomenon as a whole. My answer to the question of the general sense of rhyme, which is also the main assumption of the theory I am trying to outline, is that rhyme imposed itself because it is intimately bound to the very essence of poetic diction, to its eminently metaphoric, analogic, figurative nature.

How does rhyme actually work in a text? It works by forcing the poet to insert in the verse-end a word chosen within a small group of words, singled out on the basis of a random criterion which has no connection to meaning, depending only on the phonetic, arbitrary structure of the signifiers. Sometimes it may happen that one of the words available is fully relevant to the poetic thought the author aims to express, but this is just a lucky and relatively rare coincidence. More often, once chosen one of the rhyming words (not necessarily the first one in the order), the relevance to the context of the possible following rhyming words will be only partial and often little or null: this inevitably leads or, better yet, compels to elaborate the diction in a figurative sense to express the poetic thought, in such a way to adapt it to include that word which, in itself, is not immediately relevant. This involves consequences in terms of imaginary: on the one hand, freedom of expression is limited, since the poet is forced to enter a word chosen among a few, many of which totally non-relevant; on the other hand, however, such a limitation, *compelling to adjust the poetic thought to the presence of a not immediately relevant word*, has quite an opposite effect, in that it compels the poet to resort to a wider, more sophisticated and often metaphorical imaginary. In short, the mere presence of rhyme always causes what Francesco Orlando calls an increase in the *figurality rate* of the text.<sup>2</sup> The more the insertion of a

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<sup>1</sup> I mention here only a few essential studies on the rhyme (others will be mentioned below): VIKTOR ZHIRMUNSKIJ, *Rifma, ee istorija i teorija*, [Rhyme: Its History and Theory], Voprosy poëtiki 3, Academia, Petersburg 1923; HENRY LANZ, *The Physical Basis of Rime: An Essay on the Aesthetics of Sound*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1931; SEYMOUR CHATMAN, *Comparing Metrical Styles*, in *Style in Language*, ed. by THOMAS A. SEBEOK, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1960; JEAN COHEN, *Structure du langage poétique*, 1966; MARIO FUBINI, *Metrica e poesia*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1966; SAMUEL R. LEVIN, *Linguistic Structures in Poetry*, Mouton, The Hague-Paris 1969; GEORGE S. FRASER, *Metre, Rhyme and Free Verse*, Methuen & Co Ltd, London 1970; BEVIS J. PENDLEBURY, *The Art of the Rhyme*, Scribners, New York 1971; ALVARO VALENTINI, *La rima, la forma e la struttura*, Bulzoni Editore, Roma 1971; PIER MARCO BERTINETTO, *Echi del suono ed echi del senso. Implicazioni semantiche della rima*, «Parole e metodi» 3 (1972), pp. 47-57; THOMAS EEKMAN, *The Realm of Rime: A Study of Rime in the Poetry of the Slavs*, Hakkert, Amsterdam 1974; PAUL ZUMTHOR, *Du rythme à la rima*, in ID., *Langue, texte, énigme*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, pp. 125-143; COSTANZO DI GIROLAMO, *Teoria e prassi della versificazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1976 (on the rhyme, see chap. 3, pp. 67-85); DONALD WESLING, *The Chances of Rhyme. Device and Modernity*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980; ALDO MENICETTI, *Metrica italiana. Fondamenti metrici, prosodia, rima*, Antenore, Padova 1993 (on the rhyme, see section 7, pp. 506-590); PAOLO CANETTIERI, *La metrica romanza*, section 4: *La rima*, in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo*, Salerno editrice, Roma, 1999, 2. *Il Medioevo volgare*, vol. 1, tome 1, pp. 521-536.

<sup>2</sup> FRANCESCO ORLANDO, *Per una teoria freudiana della letteratura*, Einaudi, Torino, 1973, p. 59 ff.. Of course, acknowledging the centrality of the figurative elaboration as a specific character of

rhyming word in its context turns out to be difficult, the more the poet must endeavour to plausibly insert it in his discourse, and this immediately implies a shift towards metaphor, towards the precious, analogic, non-literal and, in short, the eminently poetic image. I shall limit myself to just one evident example, taken from Dante's *Divine Comedy*<sup>3</sup> (*Inf.*, XV, 16-21):

... quando incontrammo d'anime una schiera  
 che venian lungo l'argine, e ciascuna  
 ci riguardava come suol da sera  
     guardare uno altro sotto nuova luna;  
 e sì ver noi aguzzavan le ciglia  
 come 'l vecchio sartor fa ne la cruna.

Starting from a common and denotative word, "ciascuna" (each), the great poet can find, in the limited pool of rhymes in *-una*, two rhyming words, "luna" (moon) and "cruna" (needle's eye), from both of which an analogic image of exceptional figurative strength springs in his phantasy, letting a very concrete and frequent narrative event – the encounter with a new crowd of souls – shift to figurality, thus transfiguring this commonness and concreteness into something unique, very original and absolutely individual through two extremely realistic and unexpected similes: there is no doubt that both similes originate from the choice of their respective rhyming words and are suggested by it; at the same time, such a constraint due to the rhyme, instead of acting a restriction on freedom of expression, is, on the contrary, the *little spark* from which *bursts the mighty flame* of Dante's staggering imagination. And if Dante's case is particularly evident, this is still valid for all rhyming poetry, since rhyme almost always compels the author to bend, by means of artifice, an unsuitable word to the sense of the discourse and so to make it say what it would not be expected to say, increasing the text's figurative elaboration. Of course, the shift to the metaphorical, the analogic, the comparison, the similitude is often the most interesting and poetic result, but certainly not the only one: figurative language ("parlar figurato") as a whole is called upon to play a role, to insert a *trope* where there is no way to use the *proper*, the *literal*. From hyperbole to metonymy, from litotes to synecdoche, from allegory to antiphrasis, every rhetorical trope may be used to comply with the obligation of rhyme in the best, most elegant, most meaningful, most unexpected and, in

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poetic language goes back to the formalist-structuralist tradition and to the new rhetoric (as indeed in Orlando, by his own admission: p. 58, n. 1), to the idea of art as artifice or process tracing back to Šklovskij. This obviously does not mean, as we will see, that acknowledging the fundamental correlation between rhyme and figurality means to deny the importance of the semantic contribution of rhyme.

<sup>3</sup> On rhyme in Dante, see.: ERNESTO G. PARODI, *La rima nella «Divina Commedia»*, in ID., *Lingua e Letteratura*, Venezia, Neri Pozza, 1957, part II, pp. 206-209; IGNAZIO BALDELLI, *Rima*, entry word in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1970-1978, IV, pp. 930-949; ARIANNA PUNZI, *Le rime della Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, in ROBERTO ANTONELLI, ed. by, *La costruzione del testo poetico*, cit., pp. 269-310, already published in *Rimario della Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, Bagatto Libri, Roma, 2001.

short, in the most poetic way.<sup>4</sup> Here is, in my opinion, the deep meaning of the rhyme, its *raison d'être*, what I have called the FIGURAL FUNCTION of rhyme: *compelling to use a scarcely pertinent word means to compel, on the whole, – even though not in every single case – to the figurative elaboration of the discourse, to a more creative imagination, idiosyncratic to banality, in a word to the creation of what is specifically poetic.* This is why rhyme has been able to impose itself for centuries.<sup>5</sup>

The second basic principle underlying my theoretical analysis of rhyme, besides the figural function, is the recognition of its essentially SEMIOTIC nature. Traditionally, indeed, rhyme has been considered to be mostly a *phonic* device; at most, it is assigned the functions of marking the verse-end and of structuring the stanzas. It is only thanks to the fundamental contributions of Tynjanov<sup>6</sup> and, later, Wimsatt, Jakobson and Lotman<sup>7</sup> that the *semantic* dimension of rhyme also comes to be acknowledged: it indeed does create meaning interactions among rhyming words, establishing semantic relations, which are generated exclusively by the fact that those words rhyme with each other and which would therefore not be generated if they did not rhyme. However, even this important acknowledgement, in my opinion, is not yet sufficient, as it substantially leaves these various functions unrelated. The only perspective capable of giving an account of the extraordinary *transversal* character of rhyme, of its “verticality” which involves multiple levels of the text, making them interact, in my opinion is *semiotics*, following a suggestion

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<sup>4</sup> Here are some examples of not properly metaphoric figurality springing from the choice of rhyme: antiphrasis: *Inf.* XXVI, 1: *Godi, Fiorenza, poi che se' sì grande*; symbol: RVF 230, 12-13: *Non lauro o palma, ma tranquilla oliva / Pietà mi manda*; metonymy: *Fur.* I, 1, 5-6: *segundo l'ire e i giovenil furori / d'Agramante lor re*; synecdoche: *Inf.* XXXIV, 139: *e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*; litotes: *Inf.* II, 6: *che ritrarrà la mente che non erra*; hyperbole: *Lib.* IV, 5, 1: *Qui mille immonde Arpie vedresti e mille / Centauri e Sfingi e pallide Gorgoni*; allegory: RVF 269, 1: *Rotta è l'alta colonna e 'l verde lauro*; hysteron proteron: *Par.* XXII, 109-110: *Tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo / nel foco il dito*; synaesthesia: *Inf.* I, 60: *mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace*; oxymoron: RVF 134, 12: *Pascomi di dolor, piangendo rido*. The list is potentially endless. Note how the rhetorical figure allowing the insertion of the rhyming word often has a repercussion on the first part of the verse (the expression *lauro o palma* originates from *oliva*, *ire* from *furori*, *mille immonde Arpie* from *mille / Centauri*, *colonna* from *lauro*, *pascomi di dolor* from *piangendo rido*) because it affects the verse's construction, giving a contribution to the *inventio*, to the elaboration of the imaginary.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that this is, in my opinion, the general *theoretical* explanation of the sense of the rhyme, which does not at all exclude the *historical* explanation of its rise as a compensation of the metrical impoverishment in the transition from classical quantitative metrics to modern accentual-syllabic metrics. The first explains the *sense* of the rhyme, the second its *origin*.

<sup>6</sup> JURIJ TYNJANOV, *The Problem of Verse Language*, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1981 [1924]; see in particular chapp. *Rhythm as the constructive factor of verse*, pp. 31 ff., and *The sense of the word in verse*, pp. 64 ff.

<sup>7</sup> WILLIAM K. WIMSATT, *On Relation of Rhyme to Reason*, in ID., *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington, 1954, already published in «Modern Language Quarterly» V, 3 (1944), pp. 323-338; ROMAN JAKOBSON, *Linguistics and Poetics*, in *Style in Language*, cit., pp. 350-377; JURIJ M. LOTMAN, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Michigan Slavic Contributions 7, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1977 [1970].

by Roland Barthes.<sup>8</sup> In fact, if rhyme conveys its own meaning, this means that it is a *sign*, and as such it falls within the scope of semiotic analysis. As a system of signs, the device of rhyme becomes a full-fledged *subcode* of poetic language, structured according to its own rules and able to provide the poetic expression with its specific contribution of sense. Therefore, conceiving rhyme as a sign means, first of all, identifying its signifier, signified and sense.

The SIGNIFIER of the rhyme turns out to be not the phonic structure of the sounds involved, but rather the perception of the *identity* of the ending sounds of following or close verses, thus nothing more than what is still today considered to be the current definition of rhyme as a whole. The SIGNIFIED is in turn determined by the interference between the meanings of the single rhyming words, regardless of the context: for example, the rhyme *Nietzsche : camicie* in Gozzano has a playful and irreverent meaning, which would not arise if these two words did not rhyme. The commonly accepted definition of rhyme completely ignores this basic principle. Finally, one last aspect to be considered is that of SENSE, which needs to be distinguished from the meaning (the signified): if the meaning is the content of a message, that is, what the message says, the sense consists instead of the connection that meaning maintains with a communicative intention, placing the message within its context and thus building a bridge between semantics and pragmatics. The sense of rhyme as a sign will therefore depend on the relation between the meaning of the rhyme and the context: the verse, first of all, but also the phrase, the stanza, the entire poem, even the literary work as a whole.

## 2. RHYME AND ART OF MEMORY

After this brief look at the two fundamental concepts of my theoretical analysis of rhyme, i.e. its figural function and its semiotic dimension, let me now touch the specific subject of this paper: the close relation between rhyme and memory and in particular literary memory, that is to say intertextuality. The fact that borrowing rhymes from a previous text may have an intertextual dimension is self-evident. The technique of reusing the same rhymes of the correspondent in the typically medieval genre of the *tenzone* goes even as far as to make explicit the close relation often connecting rhyme with intertextuality. Nevertheless, the issue has not been specifically tackled before some recent studies, mostly Italian.<sup>9</sup> these, however, mainly focused on 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries conventionalized rhyme systems, at the expense of “strong” intertextual

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<sup>8</sup> ROLAND BARTHES, *Elements of Semiology*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1968 [1964], p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> ROBERTO ANTONELLI, *Tempo testuale e tempo rimico*, in ID., *La costruzione del testo poetico: metrica e testo*, Aracne, Roma 2004, pp. 143-170; ID., *Memoria rerum e memoria verborum. La costruzione della Divina Commedia*, «Criticon» 87-89 (2003), pp. 35-45; ANDREA AFRIBO, *A rebours. Il Duecento visto dalla rima*, in *Da Guido Guinizzelli a Dante. Nuove prospettive sulla lirica del Duecento. Atti del Convegno di studi Padova-Monselice 10-12 maggio 2002*, ed. by FURIO BRUGNOLO - GIANFELICE PERON; ID., *Sequenze e sistemi di rime nella lirica del secondo Duecento e Trecento*, «Stilistica e metrica italiana», 2 (2002), pp. 1-45; ARIANNA PUNZI, *Le rime della Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, cit.

relations which are, from a literary point of view, undoubtedly more interesting. But in order to investigate the question more in depth in a theoretical perspective, it is necessary to firstly clarify the relation between the technique of rhyme and memory, before moving on to consider the phenomenon of specifically literary memory.

It is a fact known to everyone that rhyme helps to memorize and recall texts: just think of the many mnemonic and nursery rhymes helping to remember the most varied types of information, such as the one for the length of the months. Since its origins, rhyme has, among its main distinctive functions, that of being a mnemotechnic device, this is also because of the close relation between the epoch in which it arose and the often oral – or at least aural – context of much of the literary production of that time. However, the actual process by which rhyme helps memory is not so obvious and intuitive as one might think: therefore, let us try to explain how this process works, how rhyme may be a valuable mnemotechnic tool, referring first to the principles of the coeval traditional art of memory and then also to the more recent acquisitions in scientific psychology.

It is not my intention to prove that there was any direct relation between the practice of rhyme and the art of memory,<sup>10</sup> nor such a relation – as far as I know – has ever been expressed in the traditional theorization concerning the rhyme. My aim is rather to show how some basic aspects of rhyme as a tool of memory may have a deep affinity with the coeval conception of memory, revealing a common cultural background and a shared heritage of concepts into which they both found a place and from which their similarities derive. The main principles of the traditional art of memory – developed in Antiquity, inherited by the Middle Ages and deeply revised during the Renaissance – have always been considered two: that of association and that of order. The first one, that of ASSOCIATION, is also the most important: typically, it concerns the association of the ideas to be reminded with visually effective images, which must then be placed with a precise order into imaginary places of memory. It is the well-known technique of the *loci*, the most important mnemonic technique in the tradition, variously reshaped during the centuries. As clearly appears, this basic principle marks itself an evident contact point with the technique of rhyme: also the latter, indeed, is based on a similar process of association of ideas, which is, from the semiotic perspective I have adopted, nothing else than the semantic dimension of rhyme, produced precisely by the interference between the meanings of the rhyming words, between the ideas and images they evoke.

Furthermore, in order to make the association of ideas useful to remember, all treatises of the art of memory prescribe that the images associated with what has to be remembered should be particularly vivid, so as to be more easily fixed in memory. They must therefore be *visually effective*

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<sup>10</sup> The reference text on the art of memory and its history is still FRANCES YATES, *The Art of Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966.

and connected to the associated ideas by a *metaphoric* or *metonymic* relation, allowing reconnecting easily the image to the idea to recall. Albert the Great, for example, one of the most important sources for the art of memory in the Middle Ages, speaking about the choice of images, admits that the metaphorical ones are less accurate than a precise, denotative description, («metaphorica minus repraesentant rem quam propria»), but concludes that they are, however, to be preferred, in order to remember, just because «metaphorica plus movent animam et ideo plus conferunt memoriae».<sup>11</sup> This aspect shows an even more significant point of contact between the art of memory and rhyme as a mnemonic tool: that increase of metaphoricity and figurality which, according to one of my main assumptions, is essentially linked to the use of rhyme (what I have called its *figural function*) turns out to be an essential process of the traditional techniques of memory too. The relation between memory and figurality, therefore, appears as a basic aspect of both the art of memory and rhyme.

Besides the association of ideas and the elaboration of metaphorical images it entails, the other essential aspect of the art of memory is that of ORDER: a mnemonic technique, as that of the *loci*, helps not only to remember, but also to remember *in a certain order*, as would be necessary for the sequence of the arguments of a speech as well as to memorize a poem. This is the purpose achieved by positioning the images in the memory places, whether they be invented, such as the famous “memory palace”, or rather mental images of well-known real places, like one’s own home: then, one has just to mentally walk through these places again and, running into the images one after another, he will remember in a predetermined order the ideas associated with them. Also the rhyme, as a memory technique, evidently holds a similar ordering function, although obtained otherwise: the rhyme series, indeed, structuring poetic texts in precise and predictable patterns of rhymes, arrange the ideas and the images associated with rhyming words in a specific order, which helps to recall them.

However, the similarity between the art of memory and the rhyme is even more subtle than these still relevant general principles. In our semiotic perspective, in fact, rhyme establishes a close link between the phonic dimension of words and their semantic dimension, particularly the connotative one. In doing so, it also builds a bridge between the two kinds of memory distinguished by the traditional art of memory, the *memoria rerum* and the *memoria verborum*: rhyme is in all evidence a tool to remember not just vague concepts but rather specific *words* (*memoria verborum*); at the same time, it produces an association of ideas which also helps to remember a certain sequence of *concepts and ideas* that are expressed by those words (*memoria rerum*). One of the rare examples of *memoria verborum* can be found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and from that example we understand that the invented images are not intended to remember ideas but just to recall the sound of specific words, even at the expenses of meaning, with a procedure similar to

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<sup>11</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De bono*, IV, quaestio II, articulus 2, solutio (point 18).

that used by rebuses in puzzle solving. In rhyme, something very similar happens: the relation between two rhyming words is initially based on a purely *phonic* affinity between endings of close verses, which then helps to recall the both of the two words involved. The two types of *memoria rerum* and of *memoria verborum* converge and reinforce each other, combining the association of ideas proper of the first with the phonic resemblance of the words peculiar of the latter.<sup>12</sup>

The affinity, then, becomes even more evident when looking at some complex revisions of the art of memory in the late Renaissance, such as those by Giulio Camillo and especially by Giordano Bruno. In such models, “artificial” memory becomes much more than a mere mnemotechnic tool/device: it no longer has, as it was in the ancient and medieval techniques, only the *passive* and almost mechanical function to recall what is already given, such as the arguments of a speech, but it also comes to assume an *active, dynamic, productive* function: through the combinations of the images of memory, new images are produced which generate a semantic enrichment of the ideas already present in memory. In this way, the art of memory becomes a powerful means of invention and even of knowledge, ordering human knowledge in a close network of reciprocal relations which makes of these most advanced models of the art of memory true encyclopaedias or even – as in the case of the wheels of memory conceived by Giordano Bruno – magical, mystical, hermetic tools, capable of tracing back from the contingent plurality of things to the oneness of the cosmos in God. If memory, indeed, works precisely producing images of things which are fixed into the mind, that is to say through a process of *imaginatio*, of image-shaping, then this turns out to be a process closely akin to the invention of *new* images, to creative imagination, to *phantasia*, all of which are based, after all, on recombination of images already present in memory. Thus, the theatre of memory conceived by Giulio Camillo is substantially a first great *machina memorialis*, which, by extending the techniques of association and categorization of the art of memory to the totality of knowledge, aims at becoming a sort of universal encyclopaedia.<sup>13</sup> Later, the wheels of memory developed by Giordano Bruno allow to combine in the most different ways the traditional *imagines* of the art of memory: in this way, they make of memory a productive tool, able to generate knowledge and to ascend from the particular to the universal and back again, and even to contribute to the production of literary text and to poetic imagination, as it happens in the *Cena de le ceneri* or in the *Eroici furori*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Some useful remarks on the relation of rhyme to *memoria rerum* and *memoria verborum* in Dante may be read in ROBERTO ANTONELLI, *Memoria rerum e memoria verborum*, cit.

<sup>13</sup> Besides the cited work by Yates (chapp. 6 and 7), on Giulio Camillo see also LINA BOLZONI, *Il teatro della memoria. Studi su Giulio Camillo*, Liviana, Padova, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> As Yates (op. cit., pp. 311-312) writes: «The *Cena de le ceneri* affords an example of the development of a literary work out of the procedures of the art of memory. For the *Cena* is, of course, not a memory system; it is a set of dialogues with lively and well characterised interlocutors [...] We can thus see in the *Cena* how the art of memory could as it were develop into literature».



Such an extension of the functions of the art of memory matches an even more important aspect of the relation between rhyme and memory. Rhyme, indeed, by means of the association of ideas has also the fundamental function of stimulating imagination: while helping to remember the text, it is also a powerful incentive for creative imagination in the stage of composition. Just like the Renaissance art of memory, then, rhyme is not only functional to *memory* itself, but it also has a very important *productive* role, functional to imagination and fantasy, to creation of poetic images and, in short, to the very essence of the creative process. This leads us to also call into question intertextuality, which is indeed nothing more than the creative dimension of memory in literature.

### 3. RHYME AS A MNEMOTECHNIC TOOL AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

To analyse the psychic mechanisms allowing rhyme to enhance memory, already widely explained in reference to the traditional art of memory, in a more in-depth manner and from a more modern perspective, it will be helpful to look at scientific studies on memory made by contemporary psychology. The analysis of the mnemonic functions of rhyme has been specifically dealt with only in a few psychology studies (in particular that of Rubin on the memory techniques in oral literatures<sup>15</sup>), and it seems to me that a comprehensive framework of the mnemonic process triggered by rhyme has not yet been outlined, thus I shall attempt to briefly sketch one.

A mnemotechnic device, as rhyme is indeed, is nothing but a practice inducing a transfer of information from SHORT-TERM MEMORY (STM) to LONG-TERM MEMORY (LTM). The first lasts only a few seconds, and it is the one that allows us, for example, to remember a phone number just for the time necessary to type it on the telephone, while the latter is the true memory, that which allows us to remember even several years later and potentially forever. So how does the transfer from STM to LTM happen in the specific case of rhyme, making it an effective mnemotechnic tool?

The memorization process triggered by rhyme is complex and may be divided into a series of different stages. The first step occurs on a PHONIC level. The acoustic memory, immediately switched on by rhyme, is in fact the typical codification process of the STM: it has been demonstrated that in STM images and concepts do not have a visual or semantic encoding, but precisely an acoustic one, as sounds of words repeated by the “inner voice” to the “inner ear”. Rhyme favours acoustic memory in two ways: 1) it identifies, within the phonetic sequences of words that form a text, some *perceptual groupings*, technically called CHUNKS, which favour the stm in the same way in which, for example, a sequence of nine ciphers, such as a phone number, is much easier to remember for a few moments if we read the numbers visually grouped three by

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<sup>15</sup> DAVID C. RUBIN, *Memory in Oral Traditions. The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford, 1995; see also ALLAN PAIVIO, *Imagery and Verbal Processes*, Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, New Jersey, pp. 173-175.

three; 2) the *repetition* of the same sounds within a few seconds makes of them what is technically called a CUE OF RECALL: recalling to memory the element working as a cue or suggestion – that is rhyme as sound repetition – helps to remember the group of elements it identifies, namely the specific rhyming words.

The transition from STM to LTM occurs, then, at a later stage, thanks to a further encoding of semantic/visual type. Rhyme, indeed, on a memory level, triggers a typical DOUBLE CODIFICATION, first an acoustic one and then a semantic/visual one. As shown by the studies, particularly those of Paivio<sup>16</sup>, double encoding produces a sharp increase in fixing the element in question into LTM. Between the rhyming words, as we said, a SEMANTIC and often also VISUAL, IMAGINATIVE association is established, which not only makes the mnemonic process much more effective through a second encoding after the acoustic one, but also allows the fundamental transition from STM to LTM. If in fact acoustic memory is the typical coding process of STM, semantic/visual coding is of LTM.

Moreover, two general – and opposite – factors may be identified which help to remember the associations produced by rhyme: on the one hand, the CONVENTIONALITY of the association, which, already being encoded in memory as part of a common cultural background, is more easily linked to conceptual structures already present in a person's mind and, thus, also more easily remembered; on the other hand, conversely, the ORIGINALITY, INDIVIDUALITY and SIGNIFICANCE of the association, in brief all that makes it innovative, peculiar, able to surprise our imagination and thus be fixed in it. Once again, what mostly contributes to keep the association of words in rhyme away from banality and prosaicness is the rhetorical and metaphorical elaboration of the text, that is to say the FIGURAL FUNCTION we have often mentioned, and which corresponds to the metaphorical images opposed to the *propria* of some treatises on the art of memory, such as that of Albert the Great. A further factor facilitating memory is finally the MEANING of the rhyme in itself, that is to say the semantic enhancement due to interference between the meanings of the words in rhyme. Indeed, the more any sort of information is meaningful, the more it is easy to remember: for example, referring to a typical practice in tests of psychology of memory, remembering a *word* is much easier, especially in the long term, than remembering a *non-word*, a mere sequence of sounds without meaning.

However, the objective of the mnemonic function of rhyme is obviously not that of recalling to the mind only the single rhyming words and the rhyming series, but also the entire verses and therefore, potentially, the whole passage or even the text as a whole. This happens by means of a further memory process, technically called REDINTEGRATION: this is the very frequent process by which recalling a single element fosters recalling also its original context, integrating

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<sup>16</sup> ALLAN PAIVIO, *Images in Mind. The Evolution of a Theory*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1991.

those elements which are missing from memory. In its most noble and elaborate form, this is the well-known Proustian process of access to memories through a minimal sensory stimulus which evokes a much wider memory as by an illumination. Even rhyme, in its own small way, triggers a similar, though much more limited, process: recalling the rhyming word leads to remembering, backwards, also the whole verse much more easily.

At the same time, as Rubin points out, rhyme and rhyming series help to memorize a series of verses also because they strongly limit the choice of words to be entered at the end of the verse on the basis of a non-semantic criterion.<sup>17</sup> If, then, one remembers only the general meaning but not the exact words of a certain verse, knowing the rhyme from a previous verse implies a drastic reduction of the possible alternatives which may satisfy both the semantic and the rhymic demand (in most cases, as Rubin observes, the two demands are satisfied by only a single word, and in just 2-3% of cases there are equally plausible alternatives). In this way, finding the TARGET WORD is simplified and helps remembering the following verses from a previous one.

However, what we have said so far concerns mostly the memorization process, that is to say the encoding phase which helps to fix the rhyming text into memory. But to be effective as a mnemonic device, rhyme must also help as a retrieval cue in the moment of recalling an already memorized text. This happens thanks to the so-called PRIMING effect, the phenomenon of implicit memory by which exposure to a picture, a word or a concept facilitates at a later time, even unconsciously, the retrieval of information associated with it: «typically, a prime word (e.g., *table*) influences the speed or reaction time at which one can access a related word, the target (e.g., *chair*)».<sup>18</sup> In our case, priming depends not on a general semantic association (table-chair, cat-dog etc.), but on the previous exposure to an association experienced in a text read some time before. When recalling a rhyming text, then, the exposure to a first rhyming word works as a priming stimulus helping to retrieve the following rhyming word as a target; the limitation of choices imposed by the rhyme further facilitates this process and redintegration helps then to retrieve the entire verses. Besides, any rhyming scheme more complex than mere use of rhyming couplets makes of the whole poetic text an interwoven web of prime-target relations, where the prime of a couple is easily retrieved, through the aid of context, being stuck between the members of another, so that every prime-target relation helps to recall the next and thus, potentially, the whole text. But what is more important to us, priming does not only help to retrieve a text fixed in memory, but also suggests to the poet, at the time of composition, some associations of rhyming words in former texts, either conscious or not, thus connecting the mnemonic function of rhyme with INTERTEXTUALITY. As Giovanna Santini writes in an article on this topic:

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<sup>17</sup> DAVID C. RUBIN, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, cit., p. 75 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Entry word “priming” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. by DAVID MATSUMOTO, Leiden, Cambridge University Press, 2009. p. 400.

One would expect that the poet aims at repeating already known couples of rhyming words either because formed by words in any way connected at a linguistic level or because associated in other texts read or composed by him. This supposed result is actually consistent with what may be observed with regard to the recurrence of couples and constellations of rhyming words. [...] One would think that a rhyming word may function as a stimulus for a second word to be put into rhyme if there is any semantic connection, that is to say that a second rhyming word may be easily evoked on the basis of a semantic link, whether already existing in common language or activated by other poetic compositions.<sup>19</sup>

As in dealing with the traditional art of memory, examining the mnemonic function of rhyme from a scientific perspective also necessarily leads us again to its dimension as a stimulus to intertextuality. Before moving on to this, however, we have one last, crucial step to address.

#### 4. MEMORY, MEMORABILITY, INTERTEXTUALITY

We have now analysed the process by which rhyme helps to remember poetic texts word for word, with reference both to the art of memory, contemporary to the systematic use of rhyme, and to modern psychology. But, as we have often remarked, rhyme is also much more than a mere mnemotechnic tool: it helps to make the poetic text not only easier to memorize, but also and above all more *memorable*. What was, in origin, an eminently practical function acquires a specifically literary and aesthetic depth, elevating what is easy to remember into what is *worthy* to be remembered. The importance of the connection between memory and memorability is carefully identified by Gianfranco Contini in one of his best-known writings on Dante, in that specific instance in connection with the *Divine Comedy*:

The transfer to memory is a historical consequence of the objective memorability [of Dante's text]. [...] And what is for Dante the nutrition of the classics, the «long study» and the «great love» towards Virgil's volume, the *Aeneid* «mother» and «nurse»? [...] The teaching of the classics is [...] for Dante all in the authoritativeness of their diction, in its nature both new and definitive in its citability, in its memorability. Classical is that from which, at least in a select circle of users, unmodifiable words can be drawn out, finding them corresponding to one's own, although unprecedented, experience.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that this ability to forge extraordinarily memorable verses is one of Dante's most specific qualities; it is also true, however, that this inclination towards memorability is, although not always at the same level, a feature of poetry in general. The distinctive rhythmicity of the verse in its opposition to prose, which is an undoubted factor stimulating memory, comes up precisely to the basic requirement of poetry to make its words, as Contini writes, *unmodifiable*. Metrics "engraves" words on rhythm, fixing them in it,

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<sup>19</sup> GIOVANNA SANTINI, *Rima e memoria*, «Rivista di filologia cognitiva» (open-access online journal), III, 2005 (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Un'interpretazione di Dante*, in *Un'idea di Dante*, Einaudi, Torino, 2001 (1970), pp. 74-75 (my translation).

and in doing so it crystallizes them once and for all, making them permanent, definitive, irreplaceable; it fixes that objective concreteness, that *Dingheit* identified by Heidegger as one of the essential aspects of the artwork.<sup>21</sup> And what is the place where the word made unchangeable is fixed? Memory, of course: individual and collective memory, which become the receptacle and somehow the proper place for the poetry as eminently memorable discourse.

Rhyme, in vernacular poetry, takes part in a decisive way in such a process of – we might say – “monumental” fixation of the text, and this in a double sense. On the one hand, as we have widely shown, it makes in itself the text easier to be etched in memory for a concurrence of phonic, semantic and figurative factors. On the other hand, because of its decisive influence on the *ordo verborum* of the verse, rhyme is intimately linked to the rhythm of the verse (there is no exaggeration even in saying that the rhythm of rhyming verses is largely *generated* by the rhyme) and, above all, it binds a word (the one that has to rhyme) at the end of the verse, ipso facto making the last and most significant part of the verse unmodifiable. Dante’s verse «come per verdi fronde in pianta vita» (*Purg.* XVIII, 54; position of the metric accents: 1-4-6-8-10) is entirely structured, in rhythm and in its syntax bent to the limit of the Italian language possibilities, by the obligation of putting the word “vita” in the verse-end in order to make it rhyme with “sentita” and “unita” of the previous verses. Without the obligation of rhyming, syntax would have certainly been plainer, but also less peculiar and interesting, and ultimately less memorable, since several other regular dispositions of the words would have been possible in the hendecasyllable (the asterisk marks, as below, fictitious examples): \*come vita per verdi fronde in pianta (1-3-6-8-10), \*come per verdi fronde vita in pianta (1-4-6-8-10), \*come per fronde verdi vita in pianta (1-4-6-8-10) etc., without considering other very slight variations, ad es. \*qual vita in pianta per le fronde verdi (2-4-8-10) o \*qual vita in pianta al verde de le fronde (2-4-6-10). Three of these five fictitious variants, leaving substantially unaltered both words and sense, would have produced a different rhythm in the absence of the obligation to put the word “vita” at the end of the verse: the *ordo verborum*, and together with it the rhythm, depends therefore on rhyme. Besides, the word “vita” is blocked in the verse-end by the constraint of rhyming, so that if any variation is possible, it is only in the previous part of the verse.

But fixing words in the stable configuration of the verse, obtained thanks to rhythm and rhyme, is not yet a sufficient condition to achieve memorability. The uniqueness and, so to speak, the reification of the word in the verse is not enough in itself to make it memorable. What makes a distinction between the memorizable and the memorable is, first of all, the dignity, the value of what is remembered. The transition from the merely memorizable to the memorable, therefore, is basically achieved through a

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<sup>21</sup> MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *The origin of the work of art*, in *Off the Beaten Track [Holzwege]*, ed. by JULIAN YOUNG and KENNETH HAYNES, Cambridge University Press, 2002 (1950), in particular the first section *The Thing and the Work*, pp. 4-19.

process of *enhancement* on an aesthetic level. And regarding to the contribution of rhyme in this respect, what causes the process of enhancement, changing the merely memorizable into memorable? Once again, it is precisely that FIGURAL FUNCTION on which we have so often insisted. The inappropriateness of the rhyming word to the context is forced to appropriateness through artifice, through the resources of figurative language: in doing so, rhyme makes the text easier to memorize, according to the greater mnemonic power of the vivid images, but at the same time makes it also more elegant and elaborated, so more memorable, more poetic, more aesthetically meaningful. The figural function of rhyme is thus also the *trait d'union* allowing the transition from memorizability to memorability and to the enhancement of the text. Dante's famous verse «mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace» (*Inf.* I, 60) owes all its memorability to the synaesthaetic metaphor of the verb "tace" (is silent), whose use comes, however, from the obligation of rhyming with the previous words "face" and "pace": without this obligation, the verse could easily have been something more literal and much weaker like *\*mi ripigneva là 've 'l sol non batte* "or *\*mi ripigneva là 've 'l sol non raggia*; the equally memorable verse «così la neve al sol si disigilla» (*Par.* XXXIII, 64), with no rhyming obligation, could have been a banal *\*così la neve al sole si discioglie*,<sup>22</sup> and so on.

##### 5. A COMPARISON WITH HOMERIC FORMULARITY

At this point, a brief comparison with the only other literary phenomenon which, in my opinion, is in some way comparable to the phenomenon of rhyme seems quite appropriate: that of Homeric formularity. It is clear that the two phenomena of rhyme and formularity are in themselves very different; however, despite the obvious differences, they are akin and comparable in two basic aspects, namely: 1) their "transversality", the fact that they cross and link together different levels of the text (phonic, syntactic, metric, rhythmic, semantic) as no other literary device does, and 2) the fact that both of them are mnemotechnic tools, developed in similar contexts of orality or aurality, which later turned out to be also much more than that, triggering that eminently literary connection between memory, memorability and intertextuality we have analysed with regard to the rhyme.

Let us remember that by Homeric formula, on the basis of the definition given by Milman Parry, later widened and made more flexible, is meant a fixed and unchangeable expression (at the most subject to only slight modifications) communicating a certain basic idea and always appearing in the same metrical place (again with a certain margin of ductility).<sup>23</sup> The mnemotechnic function,

<sup>22</sup> Eng. Trans. of the fictitious examples: "(it) drove me back to where the sun does not shine", "(it) drove me back to where the sun does not radiate [its light]"; "so the snow melts in the sun".

<sup>23</sup> MILMAN PARRY, *The Making of the Homeric Verse*, ed. by ADAM PARRY, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971 p. 272: «The formula in the Homeric poems may be defined as a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea». For minor modifications of Homeric formula may undergo and a less rigid definition of it, see JOHN BRYAN HAINSWORTH, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968.

which we have explained with regard to the rhyme, is an even more significant aspect in relation to formulaicity, which develops indeed in oral contexts precisely in order to facilitate both improvised oral composition and memorization of a shared literary heritage. As well as the rhyme, it combines *memoria rerum* and *memoria verborum* or, if you prefer, the semantic and acoustic memory of precise words; the two kinds of memory mutually reinforce, making of the techniques of formulaicity and rhyme powerful mnemonic tools. Both rhyme and formulaicity make some parts of the verse fixed and predictable, facilitating both memorization of the text and its recalling. But what interests us most is that the expressions which assume a formulaic character are selected not only on the basis of their practical usefulness to versification, but also on the basis of their poetic value, their peculiarity, vividness, expressive strength, according to a true aesthetics of conventionality: who does not remember, for example, some of the most beautiful noun-epithet formulas, or “the rosy-fingered dawn”? Just as happens with rhyme, the technique for memorizing becomes thus a filter selecting the most beautiful expressions to make them memorable and therefore much more easily a vehicle of intertextual relations: the Homeric formulas become indeed a privileged repertoire of literary memories shaping the whole Greek poetry from its origins.

We can draw from ancient Greek lyric two famous examples of Homeric intertextuality mediated by the memorability of the formulas. The most famous of Mimnermus’ fragments (ex. a, see below) derives the long-standing comparison of the ephemeral human condition with the generations of leaves from the Homeric speech between Glaucus and Diomedes (b). But most of the borrowed expressions are precisely formulaic: they surely establish a privileged reference to the passage of *Iliad* VI, but that passage is itself a reworking of a clearly more conventional and traditional formula (attested both in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), where a numerous army is hyperbolically compared to the number of leaves and flowers in spring (c, d). I underline formulas or formulaic elements:

a) MIMN. fr. 2 West, 1-2:

ἡμεῖς δ’ οἷά τε φύλλα φύει πολυάνθεμος ὄρη  
ἔαρος

b) HOM. *Il.*, VI, 146-148:

οἷη περ φύλλον γενεή, τοῖη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.  
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ’ ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δὲ θ’ ὕλη  
τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ’ ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη

c) HOM. *Il.*, II, 468:

μυρίοι, ὅσσα τε φύλλα καὶ ἄνθεα γίγνεται ὄρη

d) HOM. *Od.*, IX, 51:

ἦλθον ἔπειθ' ὄσα φύλλα καὶ ἄνθεα γίγνεται ὄρη<sup>24</sup>

Another fragment, still from Mimnermus (a), borrows at a short distance two famous formulas, very frequent in the Homeric poems, respecting even their verse-end metrical position: the one, ἦματα πάντα (b, c), is specifically bound to the theme of eternal youth, the other, ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως (d), conventionally marks the passing of time.

a) ΜΙΜΝ. fr. 12 West, 1-4:

Ἥλιος μὲν γὰρ πόνον ἔλλαχεν ἦματα πάντα  
οὐ δέ κοτ' ἀμπανσις γίγνεται οὐδεμία  
ἵπποισίν τε καὶ αὐτῶι, ἐπιὶ ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως  
Ὠκεανὸν προλιποῦσ' οὐρανὸν εἰσαναβῆι

b) HOM. *Il.*, VIII, 539

εἶην ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήραος ἦματα πάντα

c) HOM. *Od.*, V, 136 = VII, 257 = XXIII, 336:

θήσειν ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήραον ἦματα πάντα

• ἦματα πάντα (*ēmata panta* = “eternally, for all the days [to come]”): HOM. *Il.* 10x; *Od.* 21x (always in verse-end)

d) HOM. *Il.*, I, 477 = XXIV, 788; *Od.* 20x

ἦμος δ' ἠργένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως<sup>25</sup>

• ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως (*rhododaktylos Ēōs* = “the rosy-fingered Dawn”): HOM. *Il.*, 5x; *Od.* 22x (always in verse-end)

Thus, like rhyme formularity begins as a mnemotechnic tool, but through the aesthetic enhancement of certain expressions, which go from being memorizable to becoming memorable, it develops a very remarkable influence at an intertextual level on the whole history of Greek poetry.

## 6. TYPES OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN RHYME

After these vast theoretical premises, let me finally come to analyse some concrete examples of how rhyme becomes a vehicle of intertextual relations. Of course, the typologies of literary memory that rhyme may convey

<sup>24</sup> Eng. trans.: a) «but we, like the leaves that come in the flowery / springtime...» (from *Elegy and Iambus*, ed. by JOHN MAXWELL EDMONDS, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, London, 1982); b) «like leaves on trees the race of man is found, / now green in youth, now withering on the ground; / another race the following spring supplies» (trans. by ALEXANDER POPE); c) «thick as in spring the flowers adorn the land, / or leaves the trees» (trans. by ALEXANDER POPE); d) : « [They came] thick as the budding leaves or rising flowers / o'erspread the land, when spring descends in showers» (trans. by ALEXANDER POPE).

<sup>25</sup> Eng. trans.: a) «for the Sun's portion is labour every day, / nor is there ever any rest either / for him or his horses when rosy-fingered Dawn / hath left the Ocean and climbed the sky» (from *Elegy and Iambus*, cit.); b) «oh! might my days endure, / from age inglorious, and black death secure!» » (trans. by ALEXANDER POPE); c) «to bestow / immortal life, exempt from age and woe» (trans. by A. POPE); d) «till rosy morn had purpled o'er the sky» (trans. by ALEXANDER POPE).



are many and varied: here I cannot but limit myself to a very short selection just to give an idea of the wide range of possibilities.

### 6.1. *Phonic and syntactic memory*

A much neglected but very important aspect of poetic intertextuality is that of purely *phonic* or *syntactic* memory, owing to which the verse of a poet recalls the sound structure of another verse, either someone else's or his own, without borrowing contents or words. Poetic memory is also acoustic and rhythmic memory, and it is clear that in such processes the resumption of rhymes may play a prominent role. As Contini states in relation to Dante (but also in this case we certainly have to do with a general fact of poetic language):

... Dante's memory [...] is not purely verbal, due to suggestions coming from similar objects, but is organized in rhythmic figures. Peculiar to rhythm, in accordance with the twofold, phonic and symbolic, nature of language, is to associate equally to the mental pattern of the utterance, to the categorical value of the element (as such or such part of the speech), to the timbral realization of the word.<sup>26</sup>

A wonderful example of such a phonic-syntactic relation mediated by the borrowing of rhyming words, which does not seem to me to have ever been noticed, can be found in a couplet of the *Jerusalem delivered* (V, 22, 7-8):

nol soffrir tu; né già soffrirlo dèi,  
ma ciò che puoi dimostra e ciò che sei.

The rhyme *dèi* : *sei*, in one of the rare cases where it seems reasonable to assume an unconscious reminiscence, comes from a passage of the *Furioso*'s first canto: this borrowing influences the sonority and the metric-syntactic structuring of the couplet as a whole, although the respective contexts of the two passages (caricatural and almost comical that of Ariosto, totally serious that of Tasso) are very different (*Furioso*, I, 27, 7-8):

non ti turbare, e se turbar ti dèi  
tùrbati che dî fè mancato sei.

Extremely similar are the identical metrical position of the negative imperative at the beginning of the verse and the immediate repetition of the same verb in the second hemistich of the first verse, as an infinitive depending on "dèi". Tasso's well-known anxiety of influence toward his great predecessor penetrates here into the phonic-syntactic texture itself of these verses and works under the surface, maybe even unconsciously, in a sound reminiscence probably suggested by a remote situational association between Argalia's ghostly apparition to Ferrau and the interior speech of the daemon to Gernando to urge him to oppose Rinaldo: in both cases, indeed, the result is to arouse «ira» and «sdegno», with a further correspondence which confirms the

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<sup>26</sup> GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Un'interpretazione di Dante*, cit., p. 83.

reminiscence, in an evident case of the so-called “viscosity” of intertextual relations pointed out by Cesare Segre.<sup>27</sup>

### 6.2. *Einzeltextreferenz and Systemreferenz*

One of the basic distinctions in the field of intertextuality, investigated especially by German scholars such as Hempfer and Pfister,<sup>28</sup> is that between *Einzeltextreferenz* and *Systemreferenz*,<sup>29</sup> that is between the intertextual reference to a precise single text, from which, in most cases, diction is explicitly borrowed, and conversely the reference to a more generic literary or ideological system, e.g. to Petrarchism or to a certain philosophical doctrine. Rhyme may be the vehicle for both these typologies of reference. However, it is my opinion that, even if the distinction may be useful, we should not exclude the *Systemreferenz* from the scope of intertextuality, as Hempfer, for example, would prefer:<sup>30</sup> the two phenomena are in fact not clearly distinguishable and often have a definitely similar literary function. I will limit myself to one very famous example, capable to explain both typologies of relation and to support my opinion.

It is well known how Dante’s Paolo and Francesca episode, in thematizing courtly love and its overcoming, reuses lexicon and images typical of courtly literature and Stilnovo poetry. In such an operation, the borrowing of rhymes plays a major role. The first of the three verses opened by the anaphora of the word “amor” (*Inf.* V, 100: «Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende») is an almost literal quotation of vs. 11 of the Stilnovo canzone-manifesto *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore* by Guinizelli (vs. 11: «foco d’amore in gentil

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<sup>27</sup> The word refers to the tendency of intertextual relations not to be isolated, but to bear with themselves also other elements of the source-text. See CESARE SEGRE, *Esperienze ariostesche*, Nistri-Lischi, Pisa, 1966, pp. 57, 65-66; see also DENNIS LOONLEY, *Compromising the Classics. Romance Epic Narrative in the Italian Renaissance*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, pp. 39-40. The concept of intertextual “viscosity” is by Segre himself explicitly linked also to the rhyme (*Esperienze ariostesche*, p. 57: «una parola per rima ne porta con sé un'altra»).

<sup>28</sup> KLAUS W. HEMPFER, *Intertextualität, Systemreferenz und Strukturwandel: die Pluralisierung des erotischen Diskurses in der italienischen und französischen Renaissance-Lyrik (Ariost, Bembo, Du Bellay, Ronsard)*, in MICHAEL TITZMANN, ed. by, *Modelle des literarischen Strukturwandels*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1991, pp. 7-43 (Italian trans.: *Intertestualità e referenze sistemiche: pluralità e compresenza dei discorsi amorosi in Ariosto, Bembo, Du Bellay, Ronsard*, in KLAUS W. HEMPFER, *Testi e contesti. Saggi post-ermeneutici sul Cinquecento*, Liguori, Napoli, 1998, pp. 177-225); MANFRED PFISTER, *Konzepte der Intertextualität*, in ULRICH BROICH, - MANFRED PFISTER., ed. by, *Intertextualität. Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1985, pp. 1-30. For the German debate on intertextuality, see also: ULRICH BROICH, *Formen der Markierung von Intertextualität*, in ULRICH BROICH, - MANFRED PFISTER., ed. by, *Intertextualität*, cit., pp. 31-47; RENATE LACHMANN, *Dialogizität und poetische Sprache*, in EAD., ed. by, *Dialogizität*, Monaco, 1982, pp. 51-62; EAD., *Ebenen des Intertextualitätsbegriffs*, in *Das Gespräch (Poetik & Hermeneutik XI)*, ed. by KARLHEINZ STIERLE - REINER WARNING, München, 1984, pp. 133-138; HEINRICH PLETT, *Intertextualities*, in ID., ed. by, *Intertextuality*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1991, pp. 3-29. The most of these text are collected and translated into Spanish in the volume *Intertextualität 1: La teoría de la intertextualidad en Alemania*, «Criterios», La Habana, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> I prefer to keep here the German expressions, which are particularly clear.

<sup>30</sup> KLAUS W. HEMPFER, *Intertextualität, Systemreferenz...*, cit., p. 14.

cor s'apprende»), and from the same canzone also the rhyme *discende : s'apprende* is borrowed. The imitation of rhyme, thus, helps to identify this *Einzeltextreferenz* and to confirm it. But the role played by the borrowing of rhymes becomes soon after even more evident. The two series of rhyming words *viso : riso : diviso* and, even more, *martiri : sospiri : desiri* no longer refer, however, to a specific text, but are among the most typical and characteristic of Stilnovo lyric poetry in general, being connected with some themes and motifs which are central to that poetic conception. In this case, therefore, the borrowing of the two series of rhyming words is the clue of a more general *Systemreferenz* to the courtly and Stilnovo conception of love.

If, then, at a short distance we can find here two paradigm cases, respectively, of *Einzeltextreferenz* and *Systemreferenz* mediated by the rhyme, we must also recognize – in line with the above thesis – that it is impossible to draw a clear demarcation between the two phenomena, maybe up to consider only the first one true intertextuality. On the contrary, also the reference to the ideological and thematic system of Stilnovo lyric poetry, being undeniably also a reference to a specific *corpus* of texts, is certainly an inter-textual phenomenon, so much so that it can be precisely mediated by an eminently textual element such as the rhyme. Moreover, the function of the two kinds of reference is in our case strictly in agreement and pointed to a same meaning strategy: this clearly shows the belonging of both to the same macrophenomenon of intertextuality.

### 6.3. Parody

That of parody is clearly one of the more evident and strong kinds of intertextual relations. An example among countless others is Cavalcanti's sonnet *Per gli occhi fere un spirito sottile* (*Rhymes*, XXVII), in which the poet does a self-parody of his own style, leading to excess the recurrence of one of the keywords of his philosophical lyric poetry, the word "spirit". However, also the borrowing of some rhymes and rhyming words which are particularly frequent in its production helps to express the parodic reference of the author to his own style, all the more so as they are evident thematic words of his poetic conception, triggering an internal *Systemreferenz* in the same *corpus* of texts which they belong to. In the octave, the identical series of rhyming words in -*ile* (*sottile : gentile : vile : umile*) is entirely found in another sonnet (*Rhymes*, XVII, *S'io prego questa donna che pietate*), and three out of four are also present in a ballad (*Rhymes*, XXV, *Posso degli occhi miei novella dire*); the couple of rhyming words *appare : tremare* can also be found in another ballad (*Rhymes*, XXVI, *Veggio negli occhi de la donna mia*). As for the sestet, the rhyme *soave : chiave* is also present in *Rhymes*, XXX, *Era in pensier d'amor quand'io trovai*, and XLII, *Certo non è de lo'ntelletto accolto*, and the rhyme *mercede : vede* can be found in no less than other four of his compositions.

### 6.4. Thematic rhyme

Some of the greatest masterpieces of Italian literature, such as the *Divine Comedy*, the *Canzoniere* and the *Jerusalem Delivered*, share a few essential

elements of their macro-structure in relation to the Christian ideology within whose horizon they were conceived, and are all three structured in the form of an *itinerarium* from error to salvation. No wonder, then, if Tasso's Mannerism pays careful attention to allude to his great predecessors in the key points of this path to salvation. We will focus here on Rinaldo's purification ritual on the Mount of Olives: this episode marks the final turning point in the poem and brings the action to its last part and to the fulfilment of the epic *telos*, putting an end to Rinaldo's moral and physical error and sanctioning the regained unity of the crusaders which will allow the conquer of Jerusalem. Octaves 12 and 13 of canto XVIII, among the most beautiful of the poem, already show many references to the *Purgatorio*. Just beyond, in octave 15, also the rhyme *fronte : monte* carries the memory of another passage of the *Purgatorio* (a), when the divine breeze blowing in the earthly paradise strikes Dante upon the forehead as a sign of his accomplished purification, similar to that of Tasso's hero (b).

DANTE, *Purg.*, XXVIII, 7-12:

Un'aura dolce, senza mutamento  
avere in sé, mi feria per la *fronte*  
non di più colpo che soave vento;  
per cui le fronde, tremolando, pronte  
tutte quante piegavano a la parte  
u' la prim'ombra gitta il santo *monte*.

TASSO, *Jer. Del.*, XVIII, 15, 1-6:

Così pregava, e gli sorgeva a *fronte*  
fatta già d' auro la vermiglia aurora  
che l'elmo e l'arme e intorno a lui del *monte*  
le verdi cime illuminando indora;  
e ventillar nel petto e ne la *fronte*  
sentia gli spirti di piacevol *ora*.

It is precisely the rhyme, being highly thematized, to establish a very memorable connection between the purifying breeze blowing upon the forehead of the redeemed character («piacevol ora», cf. *Purg.* XXVIII, 6: «un'aura dolce») and the mount as a symbolic place of redemption (the Mount of Olives as the peak of the purgatorial mount). Obviously, it makes no sense to assign the precedence, in triggering the reminiscence, either to Dante's image or to the rhyme that carries it; rather, they reinforce and co-imply each other: the highly thematic rhyme prompts the purgatorial image, the image retrieves the rhyme.

#### 6.5. *Unsystematic rhyme: the Ginestra and Meriggiare pallido e assorto*

Finally, two last examples may show how the borrowing of rhymes keeps its intertextual potential even after the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century decline of systematic rhyme. In Leopardi's *Ginestra* rhyme, as is typical in his *canzoni libere*, is used only occasionally, remaining compulsory just to mark the end of the stanzas. Limiting myself to these compulsory rhymes at the end of the stanzas, I believe it is noteworthy that in no less than six out of seven total stanzas the final rhyme carries an intertextual reminiscence. The first stanza ends, in rhyme, with the famous antiphrastic quotation from the Dedication of Mamiani's *Inni Sacri*, «le magnifiche sorti e progressive» rhyming with «queste rive» (vv. 49-51), that is to say with the central symbolic image of the desolate volcano's slope on which the lonely broom endures. The rhyme *folle : estolle* closing the second stanza (vv. 85-86: «...colui / che se schernendo o gli altri, astuto o folle, / fin sopra gli astri il mortal grado estolle») is already present, as pointed out by Fubini, in Parini's ode *La gratitudine*, 209-210:

«Almo sapor, che a sé contrario il *folle* / secol non gusta, e pur con laudi *estolle*», but above all – what seems to me to have passed unnoticed – refers to one of the most famous Tasso’s couplets of gnomic character: «Ne gode e superbisce: oh nostra folle / mente ch’ogni aura di fortuna *estolle!*» (*Jerusalem Delivered*, XII, 50, 7-8), with which the conceptual affinity is much more evident: the insane arrogance of Tancredi, who is about to kill Clorinda, obviously represents the foolish arrogance caused by progress in modern man. The third stanza ends with the rhyme *piede* : *sede*, less characterizing, though itself traceable, similarly to the end of a stanza, in *Bruto minore* (vv. 89-90: «quando ne’ danni / del servo italo nome, / sotto barbaro *piede* / rintronerà quella solinga *sede*»). At the end of the fourth stanza a likely memory of a verse from the *Aminta* is this time, so to say, only disguised, rather than pointed out, by the rhyme: the reminiscence is hidden, removing from the rhyming position the dittology “*pietate e riso*” of Tasso’s verse: *Aminta*, I, 1: «si ch’insieme movea *pietate e riso*» becomes «qual moto allora... / verso te finalmente il cor m’assale? / Non so se *il riso o la pietà* prevale». But after the fifth stanza, free of intertextual references, the sixth shows an even more evident case, concerning rhyme’s memorial function, what has sometimes been defined as “negative” intertextuality,<sup>31</sup> namely the author’s conscious intention of avoiding a literary memory which comes to his mind. The strong intertextual reference to the literary *topoi* of the *tempus edax* and of the vanity of things, particularly close to Petrarca’s formulation (*Tr. Temp.*, 112-114: «Passan vostre grandezze e vostre pompe, / passan le signorie, passano i *regni*: / ogni cosa mortal Tempo interrompe») and even more of Tasso’s (*Jerusalem Delivered*, XV, 20, 3-6: «Muoiono le città, muoiono i *regni*, / copre i fasti e le pompe arena ed erba, / e l’uom d’esser mortal par che *si sdegni*: / oh nostra mente cupida e superba!»), in the *Ginestra* is not stressed, in this case, but partly concealed (vv. 294-296): the thematic rhyme *regni* : *sdegni* is carefully avoided, removing the word “*regni*” from its verse-end position and paraphrasing the other rhyming word “*sdegni*” so as to leave its meaning unchanged (the man who «d’esser mortal par che *si sdegni*» becomes the man who «d’eternità s’arropa il vanto»):

Caggiono i *regni* intano,  
 passan genti e linguaggi: ella nol vede:  
 e l’uom d’eternità s’arropa il vanto.

This does nothing more than confirm, even though in a negative way, the intertextual potential that, in all evidence, rhyme still fully retains even in the now unsystematic use made by Leopardi. To close the poem we find, finally, the rhyme *frali* : *immortali*. This is of course a rather frequent rhyme, which in this case carries not an *Einzeltextreferenz* but a *Systemreferenz*: it refers to the traditional theme of the fragility of human existence overcome by

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<sup>31</sup> See HEINRICH PLETT, *Intertextualities*, cit.

the immortality of poetic fame, but reversing the *topos* in an antiphrastic and *ante litteram* nihilistic way.

But the intertextual potential of rhyme lasts even after its 20th Century final crisis. Let us consider the frequent use of rhymes, sometimes even systematic, in Montale's *Ossi di seppia*. In *Merigiare pallido e assorto* some memories of Dante, precisely mediated by the borrowing of rhymes, are very evident, also because the associations of the rhyming words are highly individualized and unconventional: the first, *sterpi* : *serpi*, reminds any average culture reader of what is perhaps the most famous example of sound symbolism in the poetry of the tradition, that is the episode of the forest of suicides (*Inf.*, XIII, 37-39), evoked to the poet's mind because of its affinity to the phonic effects of which his new text is similarly sprinkled; the second, *formiche* : *biche*, is an infrequent rhyme borrowed from a passage in Dante (*Inf.*, XXIX, 64-66: «si ristorar di seme di *formiche*, / ch'era a veder per quella oscura valle / languir li spirti per diverse *biche*») of which the desolate image of the heaps of the damned is evoked, an image in some way similar to the existential desolation revealed by the sunny solitude of Montale's Ligurian landscape.