**Bart Van Den Bossche**

**Quasimodo, Salvatore (1901-1968)**

**Born in 1901, Quasimodo left his native Sicily in 1919. In the volumes of poetry *Acque e terre* (1930), *Oboe sommerso* (1932) and *Erato e Apollion* (1936) he gradually developed a distinctive poetic voice within the Italian *ermetismo* of the thirties. Quasimodo’s poetry of this period combined a pursuit of stylistic purity with strong visionary elements. In the next decade, though remaining faithful to his lofty ideal of poetry, his poetic style underwent striking changes, with a shift from hermetic language to a more epic stance. This shift, already present in the *Nuove poesie* published in 1942, was confirmed and further elaborated in *Giorno dopo giorno* (1947), *La vita non è sogno* (1949), *Il falso e vero verde* (1956), *La terra impareggiabile* (1958) and *Dare e avere* (1966). In 1959 Quasimodo received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Struck by a cerebral hemorrhage in 1968 that lead to his death, the poet was buried in the Cimitero Monumentale of Milan, the city where he had lived since 1934.**

**Quasimodo’s first poems were published during his adolescence, when he studied Geometry at a technical institute in Messina. After leaving Sicily in 1919, he lived in various places in Italy (Rome, Florence, Imperia, Milan), gradually getting acquainted with different literary circles (the reviews *Solaria*, *Circoli*, *Letteratura*). His first collections of poetry clearly tied in with the trends towards purity and hermetism in Italian poetry of the interwar period, yet Quasimodo rapidly developed a distinctive poetic style, characterized by striking metaphors and synaesthesia, lyrical evocation of landscape (a good example being the poem “Vento a Tindari” or “”) and the fragmentation of language structures. As Quasimodo regarded poetry as an attempt to reach out to the unknown hidden beneath the appearances of everyday life, the atmosphere in his poetry of this period is often auratic and mysterious. In 1942, he collected his previous books of poetry in *Ed è subito sera* (the title refers to a three-line poem that is his most well-known text), including also a section with *New Poetry*, some twenty poems marking a shift from the hermetic language of the previous years to a much more epic stance. This change was confirmed by *Giorno dopo giorno* (1947), a collection of poems written during and immediately after World War II. Quasimodo’s poetry now engaged actively in a dialogue with social and historical contexts, intertwining individual experiences and reflections with references to wartime experiences, moral challenges and societal transformations in postwar Italy and Europe. Quasimodo’s poetic and personal dialogue with history and society was pervaded with strong ethical and metaphysical stances, as he constantly addressed issues of suffering and death, good and evil, love and hate, chaos and order. In his poetry written after 1945, Quasimodo continued to regard poetry as a unique way of voicing the deeper truths and dilemmas of human existence, an idea evoked for instance in his address at the ceremony for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1959, when he defined authentic poetry as the *summa* of all the human experiences of his time.**

**List of works**

*Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia* (red. Gilberto Finzi), Milano, Mondadori (“Meridiani”), 1971. (*Complete poems*, trans. Jack Bevan, New York: Shocken Books, 1984).

*Acque e terre*, Firenze: Edizioni di *Solaria*, 1930.

*Òboe sommerso,* Genova: Edizioni di *Circoli*, 1932.

*Erato e Apollion*, Milano: Scheiwiller 1936.

*Ed è subito sera*, Milano: Mondadori, 1942 (contains the *Nuove poesie*).

*Giorno dopo giorno*, Milano: Mondadori, 1947.

*La vita non è sogno*, Milano: Mondadori, 1949.

*Il falso e vero verde*, Milano: Schwarz, 1954 (1956).

*La terra impareggiabile*, Milano: Mondadori, 1958.

*Dare e avere*, Milano: Mondadori, 1966.

**References and Further Reading**

Tedesco, N. (1977) *L’isola impareggiabile. Significati e forme del mito di Quasimodo*, Firenze: la Nuova Italia Editrice.

Finzi, G. (red.) (1986) *Salvatore Quasimodo. La poesia nel mito e oltre*, Bari: Laterza.

Baroni, G. (ed.) (2003) *‘Nell’antico linguaggio altri segni’. Salvatore Quasimodo poeta e critico*, Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici.

**Paratextual material**

Nuzzi Chierego, ,Plaster Bust, 1967

<http://www.nuzzichierego.com/scultura.php?ID=38>

Renato Birolli, Portrait of Salvatore Quasimodo, 1942 (National Gallery of Slovenia)

<http://www.ng-slo.si/en/default.asp?id=274&prikaz=umetnina&ust=25>

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<http://www.salvatore-quasimodo.it/casaquasimodo.htm>