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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER

IN CONVERSATION WITH

EUGENIO MONTALE

INCLUDING HIS
1975 NOBEL PRIZE
IN LITERATURE LECTURE

FOREWORD
BY
CANIO PAVONE



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FOREWORD

Eugenio Montale, a native of the Ligurian region in northern Italy, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1975 in recognition of his contribution to the world of Poetry, as exemplified in his three major volumes, *Ossi di seppia* (Cuttlefish Bones), 1925, *Le occasioni* (The Occasions), 1939, and *La bufera e altro* (The Storm, Etc.), 1954.

“Direct statement is contrary to the nature of poetry,” the poet tells Melinda Camber Porter during her 1976 interview with him for *The Times* of London, “...after all, why would one write poetry, if it was merely to make oneself understood?”

Is this a riposte to those who rate his poetry as difficult? It is ironic that Montale, whose concern from the beginning was to breathe fresh life into 20th century Italian poetry, eschewing the rarified and grandiose language of previous ages, should be branded as difficult. In his book of essays, *The Second Life of Art*, Montale expresses this ambition to “wring the neck of the eloquence from our old aulic language, even at the risk of a counter-eloquence.”



Fig. 2
Storefront, Canio's Books
Sag Harbor, New York
Photo: Joseph Flicek

In his poem, *I limoni* (The Lemon Trees), from his first volume, Montale writes:

Ascoltami, i poeti laureati
si muovono soltanto fra le piante
dai nomi poco usati: bossi ligustri o acanti.
Io, per me, amo le strade che riescono agli erbosi
fossi dove in pozzanghere
mezzo seccate agguantano i ragazzi
qualche sparuta anguilla:
le viuzze che seguono i ciglioni,
discendono tra i ciuffi delle canne
e mettono negli orti, tra gli alberi dei limoni.

Listen to me, the poets laureate
walk only among plants
with rare names: boxwood, privet and acanthus.
But I like roads that lead to grassy
ditches where boys
scoop up a few starved
eels out of half-dry puddles:
paths that run along the banks,
come down among the tufted canes
and end in orchards, among the lemon trees.

Translation by Jonathan Galassi

Montale's second volume is dedicated "to I.B.," Irma Brandeis, an American scholar who shared Montale's enthusiasm for Dante Alighieri. Their love affair was the background of many travels and occasions together, and she often serves as his muse, much like Beatrice served Dante, but without any divine connotation, as in these lines from *Stanze* (Stanzas):

In te converge, ignara, una raggèra
di fili; è certo alcuno d'essi apparve ad altri...
In te m'appare un'ultima corolla di cenere
leggera che non dura ma sfioccata precipita...
La dannazione è forse questa
vaneggiante amara oscurità
che scende su chi resta.

In you, unknowing, a crown of rays converges,
and some of them, no doubt, appeared to others...
In you I see a last crown of ashes
that won't stay, but disintegrates and falls...
It may be damnation is the bitter
raving darkness that descends
on those that remain.

Translation by Jonathan Galassi

In Montale's third volume the first section is titled *Finisterre*, suggesting the end of the world. The opening poem, *La bufera* (The Storm), is sprinkled with images of war, often specific to Fascism:

...i lunghi tuoni/marzolini e la grandine
(...the long March thunder and hail...)
...I suoni di cristallo nel tuo nido/notturmo ti sorprendono...
(...the sounds of crystal in your nighttime nest surprise you...)
...marmo manna/e distruzione...
(...marble, manna/and destruction...)

Translation by Jonathan Galassi

Montale's sensibility and search for his own poetic expression is influenced not only by Dante's style, i.e. many occasions of addressing the dead, but by the stark realism behind the metaphors. He indeed declared that his three volumes were verily three canticles of one book, modeled after the structure of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Montale also felt a kinship with the American poet T.S. Eliot (another disciple of Dante). Melinda Camber Porter has written that both poets possess similar styles and "a common predilection for dry, desolate, cruel landscapes."

Her interview with Montale offers the reader a candid view of the poet as he discusses with her some personal observations of his life and times.

Canio Pavone
Sag Harbor, New York 2014

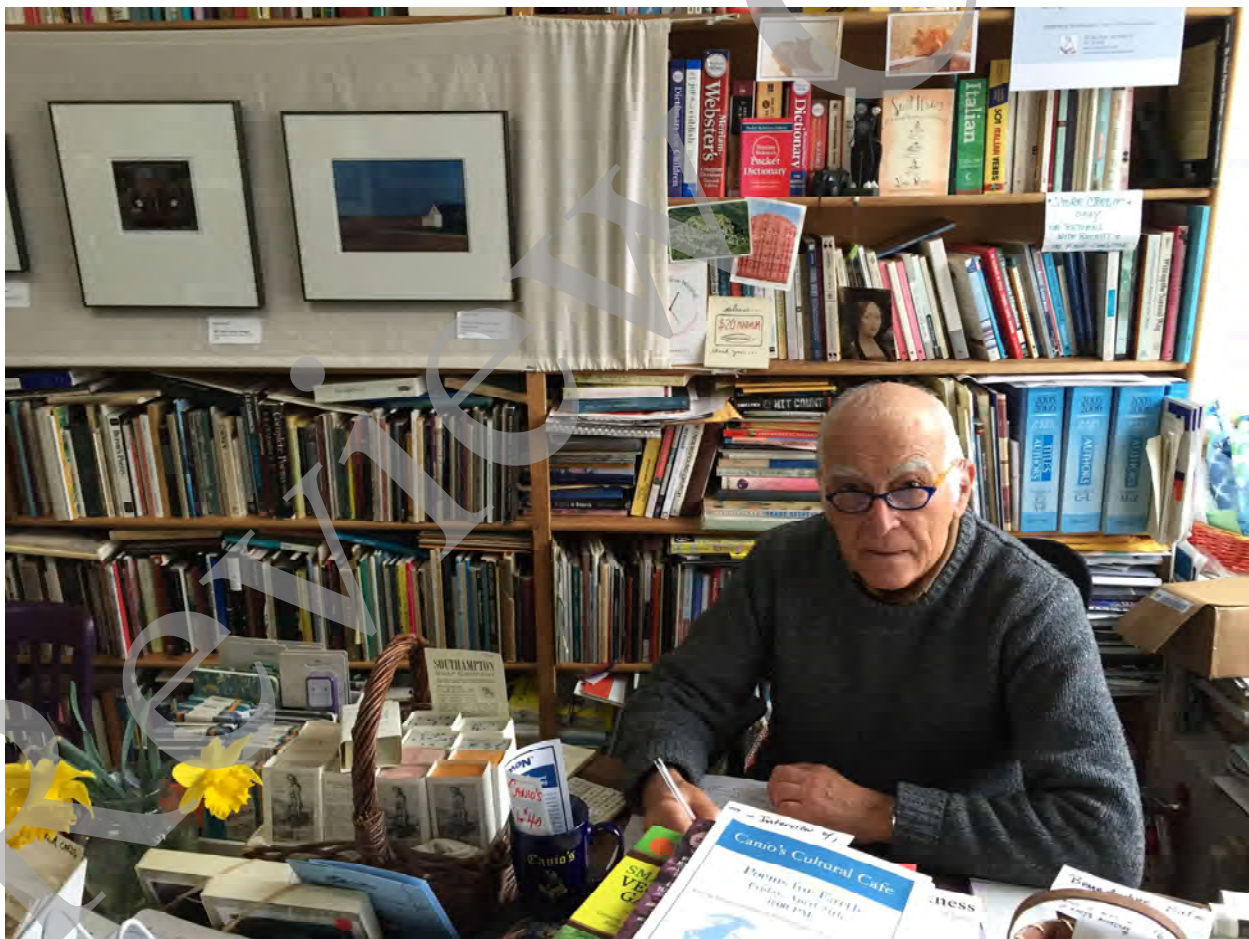


Fig. 3
Canio Pavone working at desk in Canio's Books, 2014
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Photo: Joseph Flicek

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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER
British, 1953–2008

Melinda Camber Porter was born in London and graduated from Oxford University with a First Class Honors degree in Modern Languages. She began her writing career in Paris as a cultural correspondent for *The Times* of London. French culture is the subject of her book *Through Parisian Eyes* (published by Oxford University Press), which the *Boston Globe* describes as “a particularly readable and brilliantly and uniquely compiled collection.”

She interviewed many leading cultural figures in film and literature from Europe and America over her career. These included Nobel Prize winners Saul Bellow, Gunter Grass, Eugenio Montale, and Octavio Paz, writers including Joyce Carol Oates, Joan Didion, and Frances Sagan, and filmmakers Michael Apted, Martin Scorsese, and Wim Wenders, among many others. [Audio recordings are available for more than fifty of these cultural interviews.]

Her novel *Badlands*, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, was set on South Dakota’s

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. It was acclaimed by Louis Malle, who said: “better than a novel, it reads like a fierce poem, with a devastating effect on our self-esteem,” and by *Publishers Weekly*, which called it, “a novel of startling, dreamlike lyricism.”

A traveling art exhibition celebrating Melinda’s paintings, curated by the late Leo Castelli, opened at the French Embassy in New York City in 1993. This exhibition, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the French Embassy, traveled to cities across the United States through 1997.

Peter Trippi, Editor of *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine said: “In our era of slickly produced images, teeming with messages rather than feelings, Melinda’s art strikes a distinctive balance between the achingly personal and the aesthetically beautiful. This equilibrium has developed, at least in part, through her discerning openness to a range of historical *mentors*, William Blake being the figure she has admired most passionately,” and “not surprisingly

she finds particular pleasure in Gauguin’s notebooks, which erase the boundaries between image and word.”

A film documenting the creation of her paintings featured in the art exhibition *The Art of Love* showed regularly on Public Television stations nationally, and a collection of her poetry and paintings, also entitled *The Art of Love*, served as companion to the show.

Her paintings have also served as the primary inspiration and as backdrops for several of her theatrical works. She created the backdrops, book, and lyrics for the musical *Night Angel*, with music by Carmen Moore, which was originally performed at The Clark Theater Lincoln Center, in New York City. She created the book, lyrics, and backdrops for the rock-opera-in-progress, *Journey to Benares*, with music, direction, and choreography by Elizabeth Swados, which was performed at the Asia Society and Museum in New York City in November 2003.

Robin Hamlyn, noted world expert on William Blake and senior curator of Tate Britain’s Blake and Turner collections, delivered a lecture and wrote a book on her watercolors entitled *William Blake Illuminates the Works of Melinda Camber Porter*. Mr. Hamlyn writes about her, “I believe that all great art is, in its essence, defined by fearlessness. Both Melinda Camber Porter’s and William Blake’s works exemplify and illuminate the fearlessness that is part of the very essence of all great art.”

Melinda Camber Porter leaves a prolific and creative legacy with thousands of paintings; more than two hundred hours of audio and film interviews with global creative figures in the arts, film, and literature; and tens of thousands of pages of writings: novels, plays, essays, journalism, and volumes of poetry. Her creative and spiritual works will be enjoyed for generations to come.

www.MelindaCamberPorter.com

“Nowadays, it is becoming harder to distinguish
between artistic and commercial life.

The role of the artist has been reduced to

his success or failure in commercial terms...these mass-produced voices are not those which
will tell us whether we are heading for disaster
and, if so, how to prevent it.”

Eugenio Montale speaking to
Melinda Camber Porter
Milan 1976



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With this publication, *Melinda Camber Porter In Conversation With Eugenio Montale, Milan, Italy, 1976* (Ebook ISBN: 978-1-942231-15-8), we have an opportunity to listen to the strong voice of Eugenio Montale (1975 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature) discussing poetry and its role in society.

“Nowadays, it is becoming harder to distinguish between artistic and commercial life. The role of the artist has been reduced to his success or failure in commercial terms... these mass-produced voices are not those which will tell us whether we are heading for disaster and, if so, how to prevent it,” explains Eugenio Montale when speaking to Melinda Camber Porter. This volume includes Eugenio Montale’s 1975 Nobel Prize Lecture in both English and Italian.

This book is Volume 1, Number 1 from The Melinda Camber Porter Archive of Creative Works, which comprises two series of books: Volume 1 are books of journalism, and Volume 2 are books of art and literature. [ISSN: 2379-2450 (Print); 2379-3198 (E-book); 2379-321X (Audiobook).]



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