

Rainer J. Hanshe, *Dionysos Speed* (New York: C.M.P., 2024) 192 pp.

“This is a book that goes beyond any traditional criticism,” reads the brief review that appeared in *Bedlam Files*, underlining the extremely experimental character of the author’s narrative — or rather inventive prose — and summarizing this fifth dizzying literary effort by Hanshe as “a visionary concoction that can be categorized as surrealist poetry or avant-garde science fiction.” Similarly, in the *Advance Praise* at the head of the book, Erika Mihálycsa emphasizes that the author unfolds “the full range of avant-garde gestures and operations,” the core of which are “phantasmagoric images, striking associations, now raw visions, elaborate manifestoes punctuated with [...] outbursts of (non-sense) poetry”; and Stuart Kendall summarizes: “*Dionysos Speed* is a shot in the eye [...] a raw apocalypse [...] a jeremiad for the age of AI fantasies that inoculates its reader against the viral lure of virtual post-humanism.” The impersonal and absolute but polytonal narrative voice, almost extraterrestrial, or rather meta-terrestrial, punctuates with a rhythm as fluid as it is pounding, a sort of stream of consciousness that is both mythical-archaic and futuristic in the 21 brief sequences of the book, and categorically excludes any possibility of return or of nostalgia for a plot with characters of naturalistic heritage (still prevalent today in the narrative vulgate of world *fiction*), but does not enable Hanshe’s very

virtuosic pluristylism to be traced back to a pure dystopia of Orwellian heritage (although present and operating among the multiplicity of sources, of the literary, poetic-philosophical, and scientific references and echoes that pervade the book). This aspect is rather attributable, in fact, to an expanded, paraphrased, and “profaned” epic-biblical matrix – the pseudo-Johannean *Apocalypse* – transfigured, in a very personal postmodern and techno-metaphysical key, lashing and absolutizing, so much so that the overused definition of “dystopia” induces the reader to transform it into a “trans-topia,” as disturbing and anguished as it is lyrically mocking and outrageously satirical.

A permanent, conceptual, and linguistic oxymoron dominates here, mindful of the imperative sentence of Breton and the surrealists: “*La Beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas,*” starting from the ingenious and evocative cover, which “plays” with the famous Leonardo image of the Vitruvian Man, making it a perfectly Dionysian solar symbol, and imitating the boustrophedonic writing of Leonardo himself, which is mimetically transformed and reproduces the explosive and cosmic-symphonic closing of the book (a closing which in turn evokes the “Wormwood Star” falling from the sky and sets the waters on fire, or the Angel who, by sounding the trumpet, causes the eclipse of the sun, moon, and stars in the Apocalypse, but also recalls the *ekpyrosis* prophesied by the Stoics and the expressionist *Klangfarbe*).

The scenario — accompanied by disturbing artistic images — is that of a not too future Earth, whose population lives in “mega-lithic conglomerates,” heirs of oppressive skyscrapers, and is now chronically cybernetic and dominated by a para-fascist dictatorship (very Orwellian) of a wild capitalism and by its “digito-humanists” or “digitalists” or even “digitists,” aimed at the final replacement/fusion of the human with the virtual-technological, negating any form of personal conscience, “archaic” affects, and painful memories in one de-physicalized hyperreality: “Why be Real when you can be *Hyperreal?*” says the voice of the new Big Brother, but the visionary robotic transformation also recalls the much older Golem, the Creature from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, eighteenth-nineteenth century automatons, and “the mechanical man with changeable parts” dreamed of in Futurist manifestoes.

The antagonists of this horrifying “machinic angelism” are the enigmatic, imaginative, and elusive members of a band of anarchist-revolutionary saboteurs (and theatrically prankish figures) dressed canonically in black, the color of the cosmos, authors of surreal attacks aimed at destroying the status quo (“to disrupt” is the dominant verb), starting from the video-mirrors that compulsively nail humanity to the media: in the initial sequence “The Terror of Narcissus” (which refers to the classic Narcissus and that of Rousseau), the gang causes the chaotic shattering of the “8 billion mirrors” of narcissistic users of the hypnotizing image (mirrors

which, once laboriously recomposed, reveal the feared identity and personal interiority of the hyper-connected users, whose world is gradually distorted and annulled (even graphically) in satirical-dramatic masks, in floods of nonsensical messages, and grotesquely impersonal noises and colors, typographically mimetic and varied with a virtuosity that extends to the extreme and “elastic” punctuation of renewed Futurist-Dadaist legacy.

But the memory of Poe’s demonic Raven is not missing in the second sequence, “The Laughing Vulture,” in a context of detonations and silences that distort or nullify the identity of the body and of the millenary human language, reduced only to a “bale of data” and therefore degraded to a “bale of shit” – with a probable memory of Eliot, who already identified “data” as the zero degree of knowledge, a degree lower even than simple information.

In the pressing and pulsating language of Hanshe’s bio-poetic and gnomic *beat* – rich in neologisms, technical nomenclature, and parodic scientisms that refer, with pyrotechnic wit, to his multiple and favorite literary sources, from Rabelais to Baudelaire to Rimbaud, from Nietzsche to Artaud and to the aforementioned modernist and expressionist avant-gardes – the sequence “Memory Surgery,” and the complementary one “Map the Universe, Map the Unconscious,” stand out for their intensity, which in the satirical form of advertising slogans incite digital users to a “memory surgery” that liberates them from Freudian complexes and psychiatric therapies, from childhood family frustrations and

from the painful romanticism of love wounds, having bad memories extracted “like tonsils” and replacing them with new positive memories, thus obtaining “the best of all possible selves” through the “Candido” digital-neural center of Voltairean echo, and reaching the pure and efficient coincidence between the virtual and the real: “the virtual is real because the real is virtual,” is a paraphrase of the famous sentence of the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, “fair is foul and foul is fair.” But for every satirized bionic victory, the “hurricanes of silence” that reveal the “low pulsation of the cosmos,” provoked alternately by the anarchist-artistic terrorists (who also remind us not a little of the apocalyptic anti-bourgeois *Exterminating Angel* from the film by Buñuel) and by wild, mocking “Baubos,” who in the sequence of the same name, “Hurricane Baubo,” exhibit their genitals in mockery of the scrutinizing and voyeuristic video surveillance, and transform them into facial masks that launch destructive laser beams. Here the memory of the myth of Demeter is active, desperate for the loss of her daughter Kore, and finally induced to laugh by the old Baubo who discovers her sex in front of her; but the memory of Diderot’s *Bijoux indiscrets* and the biblical memory of the fiery sword that comes out of the mouth of Christ on the throne and destroys the corrupt Babylon in the *Apocalypse* also seem to be present.

The theme of the oral mutation of vaginas results in a true piece of bravura centered on the motif of the digital labyrinth that produces the mutation itself; the monster of power is widespread

and invisible, and time is canceled out in a narcissistic and fictitious auto-erotic eternity, up to the paroxysm of a “polyphemic imagophagy,” which then becomes “teleintimatic virotics.” The use of varied anaphora and the *beat* of musical ebb & flow punctuation, which inherits Wagner’s “infinite melody” or, at times, the Ravel of the *Bolero*, unfolds along the following six sequences, which evoke sandstorms destroying the world banks and their acolytes, as well as hallucinatory bodies of colonial slaves falling from the ceiling of the New York Stock Exchange, in a sort of phantasmatic revenge of the anarcho-saboteurs intent on their various para-police “operations” (“Operation Wordstorm,” “Operation Tradewinds,” “Operation Sandbox,” “Operation Disport,” etc.), spiraling toward a scientific tone: in the final part, the sequence “The Temple of Blue Light” evokes the pseudo-religious effects of the idol or digital God, compared to a nuclear bomb. As a mimetic consequence, in the last three sequences, the crescendo of Big Brother’s impersonal narrative voice becomes increasingly more eloquent, urging once again, in a sort of hypnotic *suasoria*, to abandon the ancient, Huxleyan biological “doors of perception” in favor of an ascetic and fusional rebirth in the “Virtual Sanctum” and of an ultra-parodic “telemetaphysics.” *Suasoria* becomes imperative through the constant use of obsessive neologisms (also increasingly typographically sophisticated) which mimic the orders repeatedly given to the cybernetic “slave,” to surrender every will and every biological organ to the “digital whip,” which de-

stroys every individuality and every memory of evil for its ultimate goals of economic-social submission, centered on the presumed neutrality of data: “all roads lead to data” is the polemical variant of the well-known Italian proverb “All roads lead to Rome,” a city that Hanshe implicitly identifies with the Great Whore of the Scriptures, who has become a planetary electronic Babel with many international names, a “digital golem” that methodically denies and destroys the primordial energy of the body and soul, human nature, and intimate and cosmic conscience.

But finally, in the last two sequences, “The Cosmic Dream Machine” and “Terra Nullius,” the digital exposure of human subjects comes to an end – through a hyper-silent and disturbing epiphany of darkness and a solar eclipse with paradoxical lunar dominance, meticulously described and complete with collapsing astronomical consequences – to a literally apocalyptic psychedelic and depersonalizing assimilation of the human world to the cosmos, rhythmically evoked in the pathos of a varied linguistic-typographic flow, which results in a suspended punctuation of the unspeakable, translated into extended ellipses, parallel to the almost entirely white pages that contained the silence of Nietzsche’s madness in Hanshe’s previous book, the monumental epistolary novel-essay *Closing Melodies* (2023). These visions evoke to the reader both the fiery ones of the aforementioned Apocalypse and the now classic cinematic ones of Kubrick’s masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey* – the revolt of the cosmos

against the devastating human species is sealed, and at the same time transformed, into a *renovatio* through an explosion of fire – the remembered *ekpyrosis* – in a return of the cosmos itself to chaos, which is musically marked in the binomial *Aqua nullius* – *Terra nullius* by the mysterious band (Orphic-Dionysian and plural in form) of musicians and cosmic sailors, in symbiosis with the innocent animal and astral world.

A strictly “unmodern” book in the Nietzschean sense very valued by its author and, we hope, in our time so devoid of hope that it is now ripe for a new, unknown, but total as well as profound and necessary sacredness.

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