

Preface to the English Edition

Inside of us—almost certainly in our brains, but modern science has not yet deciphered in what manner exactly—several distinct souls take shape over time, coexisting side by side. This is a theory of Plato's which was refuted by Aristotle; the controversy continued to fill the philosophical gossip pages into the Middle Ages until the appearance of *The Divine Comedy*, in which Dante Alighieri defends Aristotle's thesis (Purgatory, IV, 5–6):

And thus the error is disproved, which holds
The soul not singly lighted in the breast.

Still, I am with Plato because in the undecipherable confusion of my identity I hear discordant, dissonant voices

which do not originate from only one person. I often wonder whether these voices emerge from my multiple souls, or from those of my mother and father or even, at times, whether they are voices in real time or emerge instead from the “virtual” mouths of characters in novels.

In this dissonant polyphony, there is one particular voice that I hear; at times it cries or yells out in pain, but just as often it makes me laugh. It is the silvery voice of a child from sixty years ago who could be me—I’m not sure—crying out his unquestionably justified lament. A lament which is the book that is now in your hands.

As you will discover, that child saw it all, both good and bad. But what this book doesn’t tell you is that, in that terrible winter of 1944, in the snowy mountains of Piedmont, at the age of eleven, he encountered America and fell in love. As the result of a series of fortuitous circumstances, he was able to read *The Grapes of Wrath* (ed. Bompiani, 1941). This small and singular literary encounter occurred thanks to the Fascists, who, with their customary strange logic, had allowed the works of John Steinbeck to be published in Italy in order to demonstrate to the Italian populace the sorry state of America. Steinbeck had an altogether different effect on that boy, and instead of disdaining or hating America, he began to dream of it in the night of the Second World War.

Among the many things his immature brain could not fully grasp: “How could people who were so poor travel around the United States . . . in an automobile?” And so it

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was that *The Grapes of Wrath* became the first science fiction novel he ever read, at a time that—God help us—was more like a horror movie.

Welcome, my American friends, welcome to the enchanted, infernal cavern of the circles of this boy's childhood, improbable but true. Come, come see the monsters of the ego, the id, and the superego. Come, come tremble with these little child-monsters at the specters born of the final agony of the Third Reich . . . You'll see with your own eyes a war of specters, an armistice of ghosts. It's dark inside, but there's room for everyone.

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