THE CLOAK – MILITARY OUTFIT AND MARKER OF LIMINAL CONDITION IN DINO BUZZATI'S WORKS

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***Abstract**: In all Dino Buzzati's works the cloak is a crucial element: it is highlighted in texts that refer to the military world (short stories, novels, plays or librettos), in contexts where certain patterns emerge. This article analyzes the symbolic-anthropological implications of the cloak, including the human relationship with space. We argue that this texts associate the cloak with a transition stage and place, and examine its role in marking materially aspects peculiar to such scenes, related both to the location and interconnections of the characters and to the structure of the configured world/worlds.*

***Key words:** cloak, liminality, passage, military world, uniform, Dino Buzzati*

Sartorial item which lends its name to the title of a short story from the author's first collection of this type, nominated for and winning the *Strega* Award for 1958, text converted into a theatre play and libretto,[1] the military cloak constitutes an element fraught with meaning in Buzzati's works. This article examines its valences and role from a twofold perspective: of its association with the military and especially of its occurrence as a symbolic object in key scenes of transition in the characters' existence.

Besides the above mentioned texts, we will be referring to other relevant works, especially the novel *Il deserto dei Tartari*. The cloak is central to and plays an outstanding role in texts focusing on the military world. This world fascinated Buzzati, who repeatedly showed his interest in things military and motivated his literary option through the feelings of solidarity with and affiliation to a strictly organized group, in whose compactness originates the power and safety of the individual enrolled in the military (Acrocca 101), through his drive for generalising, and through his personal calling for this type of life (Sala 11-12).

The cloak is an item of the military uniform, whether of soldiers who go to war or are discharged ("Eleganza militare", "La canzone di guerra", and "Il mantello", respectively) or of state border patrols (*Il deserto dei Tartari*), which protects them against the wind and rain, but, especially, contributes to their heroic aura ("marciando faceva ondeggiare i panneggiamenti del candido mantello, come nelle favole antiche", Buzzati, 2011: 63), even when or, rather, especially when fate takes them to the final border of their country and life. The cloak is associated with the uniform, the emblematic outfit of these characters, which distinguishes them from civilians, all the more so as for the former the military condition does not constitute a tangential or fleeting aspect, but represents a mode of being (Jacomuzzi 51).

The cloak also signifies liminality, which corresponds, in Van Gennep's (22) tripartite scheme of the rites of passage, to the middle stage, when the individual is temporarily suspended between two worlds, without actually belonging to either one. Thus, the cloak works as Giovanni's identification garment in "Il mantello", a story built around the transition stage which recounts the homecoming of the son, discharged from war, and his reunion with his mother and siblings, before his final departure. The character is suspended between this world and the other

[1] "Il Mantello", short story published in the volume *I sette messaggeri* (1942) and *Sessanta racconti* (1958), as well as theatre play and lyrical opera in one act on the music of Luciano Chailly (1960).

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world: he no longer belongs here, as demonstrated by his conduct and his incapacity to communicate with his family; nor has he yet adapted himself to the other order of things. His assimilation to the new world is not actually possible as long as his links to the previous one have not been severed, which is the exact purpose of the entire narrative development, namely to signify symbolically the painful separation from the loved ones, the definitive detachment from this life, from his hearth and from the maternal sphere.

Liminality as construed by Victor Turner (1969: 95) involves juxtaposing opposites in one single scheme of representation: it is neither this nor that, or it is both one and the other. The neophyte's condition confounds traditional categories: neophytes are neither here nor there, or are both here and there; they are neither living nor dead, or both living and dead, neither male or female, or both at the same time. Liminality is regarded as the most dangerous of the constitutive phases of the rites of passage "because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable" (Douglas 97).

The cloak in which the character is tightly wrapped marks his isolation, the closing in of being, as well as the indistinct state in which he finds himself. It is a form of hiding which not only conceals the injury and the blood, but also maintains the duality at the level of the text – absurd and plausible equally – and of the character – alive and dead at the same time (Bonifazi 239). Worn similarly by Giovanni and the strange character who accompanies him, for both are wrapped up in it, the cloak constitutes the element which the two men share in common and can conceivably signal their connection, their belonging within the same dimension. The one whom Giovanni introduces as his travelling companion, and who waits for him outdoors, is depicted almost exclusively sartorially ("era tutta intabarrata e dava sensazione di nero", Buzzati, 2002: 72), through the black cloak which invites decoding him eventually as an angel of death. In the play, his identification as Giovanni's superior in the chain of command (a General Staff officer) vindicates their integration in the same category, by the means of the cloak, from both perspectives: of the military world and of the other world.

In *Il deserto dei Tartari*, too, there are scenes in which the cloak is associated with liminality, for it functions as a central prop in the specific scenario of this stage. One case in point is the neither-nor condition of the protagonist at the beginning, his oscillation between the city and the fort since the moment when he distanced himself from the former without having yet adapted himself to the latter. Among Lieutenant Giovanni Drogo's clothes can now be found a new and elegant cloak, which he is very proud of and dons shortly after his arrival at Fort Bastiani, when he goes to the regimental tailor. The way in which he wears and perceives it suggests to a certain extent the confusion which afflicts a person during the liminal stage (Mitchievici 148); it is well-known that at this point the individual can be wearing a disguise or can even turn invisible (Turner, 1967: 95), as Drogo appears to the ones whom he encounters on the way:

> Ebbe perciò piacere che le scale e i corridoi fossero quasi deserti. Un capitano che finalmente incontrò rispose al suo saluto senza uno sguardo in più del necessario. Neppure i rari soldati voltavano gli occhi a osservarlo. (Buzzati, 2006: 51)

In fact, while the invisibility effect is typically attributed to the cloak in mythology (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 268), it also relates to a difference in perception between the two worlds in which the character is situated. Drogo considers it, at the beginning, "un vivo collegamento con il suo mondo" (Buzzati, 2006: 50), convinced as he is that everybody would appreciate the

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quality of the stuff and the elegance of the tailoring. The deeper he adjusts to the space of the fort, though, the more his conviction alters, which puts the cloak in a new perspective and renders it more and more inadequate:

> Lasciò quindi la camera e si avviò giù per le scale, osservando dove la luce lo permetteva, l'eleganza della propria ombra. Tuttavia, man mano ch'egli scendeva nel cuore della Fortezza, il mantello sembrava perdere in qualche modo il suo primo splendore. Drogo inoltre si accorse che non riusciva a portarlo con naturalezza; gli pareva una cosa strana, da dare nell'occhio. (Buzzati, 2006: 46)

The entire scene centred on the image of the cloak suggests a transformation at the level of the individual's identity, which culminates in the workshop of the tailor Prosdocimo. Here occurs not only a procrustean adjustment to sartorial patterns, in accordance with the tailor's job, but also an adaptation to the norms of the military, to its formality and rigidity. Thus, externals translate the complex condition of the individual, so much so that the cloak conflates with the character, who at this stage seemingly lacks all substance and can be exclusively defined by his symbolic covering. We should notice, in this connection, the visual effect created by the projected outline which covers a shadow. The difference in the cloak pattern reflects the difference between the two worlds between which Drogo oscillates, between the glamorous social life of the city and the strict rules of the military world. However pretty, made as it is from a stuff whose quality even the tailor acknowledges, the cloak fit for the city does not also fit the military, for its short collar indicates the civilian tailoring subject to fashion fads ("è poco militare", Buzzati, 2006: 52). Renouncing this cloak amounts to annulling the signs of individualization, to a *uniformization*.

Adopting a uniform articulates a levelling, the fitting into a category in which personal identities do not matter; this aspect is illustrated by "a painting by Buzzati reproduced on the cover of the 1975 edition of *Il deserto dei Tartari*", where "there is a uniform with nobody inside which recalls T. S. Eliot's 'hollow men', 'shape without form, shade without colour'"(Pugliese 27). The same notion also underpins the description of the tailor's workshop, where countless empty clothes – military apparel – hang dead; the gloomy image encapsulates the state of things at Fort Bastiani and the essence of the novel, with puppets caught in the military gear, which await to come to life and be conferred meaning upon: "Tutt'attorno pendevano flosci, con sinistro abbandono da impiccati, decine e decine di uniformi, pastrani e mantelli" (Buzzati, 2006: 51). The cloaks and uniforms replace the people, transformed into small wheels of a mechanism, without face or personality, as seen in the tragic episode of the shooting of private Lazzari, because he didn't know the password, by a comrade who had recognized him, but above all, followed the rules and orders. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that Lazzari was buried, in accordance with the regulations, with his weapon and his uniform.

The association of the new cloak with the universe of the Fort is also proven by its temporary character, matching the four-month period left for Drogo before being discharged, by applying the stratagem suggested by Major Matti: "basta che duri quattro mesi" (Buzzati, 2006: 51). Subsequently the cloak acquires meanings which concern the identity peculiar to the new world, namely assuming the role which this world implicates and, moreover, anticipating a heroic destiny:

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> Folate di vento [...] scuotevano il mantello di Drogo, il mantello nuovo che significava per lui tante cose.
> Immobile egli fissava le barriere di rupi dirimpetto, le impenetrabili lontananze del nord, e le ali del mantello crepitavano come bandiera, drappeggiandosi tempestosamente. Drogo sentiva di avere quella notte una fiera e militaresca bellezza, diritto sul ciglio della terrazza, con lo splendido mantello agitato dal vento. (Buzzati, 2006: 73)

The enthusiasm which animates Drogo regarding his purpose there becomes apparent in the imposing air and stately waving of his cloak, likened several times to a banner fluttering in the wind ("Il vento batte contro lo splendido mantello dell'ufficiale e anche l'ombra azzurra sulla neve si agita come bandiera", Buzzati, 2006: 77). That the garment also reflects Drogo's understanding and conception of his mission is further demonstrated by Tronk's looks. Unlike Drogo, Tronk is completely lustre-less, with the common and rigid air which generally characterizes his performance of military duties ("Vicino a lui Tronk, infagottato in un largo pastrano, non sembrava neppure un soldato", Buzzati, 2006: 73).

Being in the fort entails a way of being and acting defined by military rules, by the formality and linearity of social relations, by operations which belong within the sphere of conflict. "The barracks house is a place where masculinity is articulated, ideated, and contained" (Ellen Nerenberg 36), a world grounded in collectivity, formed under the circumstances of relative isolation and potential danger and defined by the spirit of camaraderie between individuals who share the respective experience. In *Il deserto dei Tartari*, the fort is always set against the city, with its specific lifestyle, so that the frontier and the centre become two irreconcilable forces (Pugliese 26), two fundamentally different worlds which correspond to the distinction between the military and the civilian, between the masculine and the feminine. Unlike the rigid and austere universe of the fort, which involves commitment, the city is identified as the civilian world: "uomini [...] che *non vestivano l'uniforme*. E giravano liberi per la città e la notte potevano a loro piacimento mettersi a letto o andare all'osteria o a teatro" (Buzzati, 2006: 42, emphasis added). The clothes of townspeople are subject to fashion, construed as a typically female endeavour: "quasi tutti hanno vestiti nuovi o rimessi in ordine, le giovani donne portano cappelli con fiori e abiti a colori" (Buzzati, 2006: 146)". Fashion, which drives the world of the city, does not, however, also regulate life in the fort, with its almighty uniform. Such is also shown in the dialogue between Drogo and the tailor Prosdocimo, which suggests the incompatibility between the two types of apparel:

> "La moda vorrà il collo basso", disse il sarto, "ma per noi militari di moda non c'entra. La moda ha da essere il regolamento e il regolamento dice 'il collo del mantello stretto al collo, foggiato alla cintura, alto centimetri sette'". (Buzzati, 2006: 52)

Notwithstanding, elements of attitude and array do lend certain specific notes to uniforms; such is Captain Ortiz's uniform, described in the scene of the encounter by the bridge ("La sua uniforme era di linee rozze ma perfettamente in ordine", Buzzati, 2006: 11), or Lieutenant Angustina's ("La sua uniforme azzurra, stinta dal sole, spiccava fra le altre per un'indefinibile trasandata eleganza", Buzzati, 2006: 58). In the latter case, the apparel always individualizes the lieutenant among the men, from the uniform with aristocratic lineaments to the completely inadequate jackboots he wears during the mountain expedition, which hurt him as in a genuine ordeal, and to the elegant cloak in which he dies.

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In fact, in the above mentioned scene the presence of the cloak becomes highly eloquent, permeated as it is by the "rhetoric of the liminal"[2] manifest in the expedition of tracing the frontier on a yet unexplored northern stretch, which is one of the few actions in the novel that the Bastiani soldiers engage in. The mission unfolds in a transition space, in every respect: the area is a no man's land between the states, whose wildness suggests a passageway between the worlds: the vertical chthonian space opens up, on one side, above the infernal abyss, and projects infinitely upwards, on the other (Crotti 52-53). The precipitous crags become a land of passage between life and death for Angustina, who "plays" here his destiny: the lieutenant embraces his death, anticipated in Drogo's dream, in the chilly weather and swirling snow which strike them during the operation to secure the mountain ridge long disputed with the Northern Kingdom. Sequences from Drogo's dream are depicted alternately with the ones from reality as italicized stage directions placed between brackets, themselves ultimately a marker of liminality (this time at discursive level), as is also the middle position of the chapter where they are inserted (the fifteenth of the thirty in the novel) (Crotti 52). The text highlights, during this rite of passage scene centred on Angustina, the cloak and the way he is wearing it, fraught with symbolic meaning. In the saddle below the frontier crest already marked off by the enemy units, Angustina dies in a majestic pose, with his head leaning on a boulder, his forehead faintly lit by a weak lantern, his cloak falling in harmonious folds around him, like in an old portrait, in one of the meeting rooms at the fort, depicting the death of Prince Sebastian in the forest. Angustina's cloak draping contributes to the noble, elegant pose which likens the dying lieutenant to Prince Sebastian and further distinguishes him from the other soldiers who, by comparison, look like bumpkins:

> Ora Angustina [...] andava somigliando al Principe Sebastiano ferito nel cuore della foresta [...] identica la posizione delle membra, identico il drappeggio della mantella, identica quell'espressione di stanchezza definitiva. (Buzzati, 2006: 136)

The cloak now also distinguishes Angustina from Drogo on account of the role it plays: practical, protective, connected to life, to warmth and the comfort of a safe place, for the latter, but symbolical-decorative, for the former, the *shroud* which covers the dying ("le nobili pieghe del militaresco sudario", Buzzati, 2006: 138), whose noble folds Captain Monti disarranges accidentally, and thusone component element of the heroic pose of a statue:

> Ben riposato e asciutto, chiuso nel suo caldo mantello, Giovanni Drogo forse guardava invidiosamente i lontani lumi, mentre Angustina, tutto incrostato di neve, adoperava con difficoltà la residua forza per lisciarsi i baffi bagnati e drappeggiare minuziosamente il mantello, non allo scopo di serrarselo addosso e stare più caldo, ma per altro suo arcano disegno. (Buzzati, 2006: 136)

From a different interpretive perspective, the apparently gratuitous sacrifice of Angustina is apt to suggest, in mythical-symbolical terms, the originary violence of separation in founding

[2] See the article of Ilaria Crotti, "'La frontiera morta': per una retorica del liminale nel *Deserto*",published in *Narrativa* no. 23 "Dino Buzzati trent'anni dopo", University of Paris X – Nanterre, May 2002, pages 45-46, from which I have adopted the phrase.

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acts, which has to be re-lived, under one guise or another.[3] Through his act, he arguably "confirms"[4] the border, in the sense of marking off the space materially, in a gesture of ritual demarcation. By his own body covered with the cloak, Angustina contributes to the tracing of the frontier – which institutes order in a chaotic space, thus reclaiming it from provisionality and indetermination and conferring on it a dimension (Zanini 6) – considering, on the one hand, the suffering which the demarcation entails, and, on the other, the setting of a visible demarcation sign which declares the occupation of that space, intrinsic to such action. In a more profound gesture than laying the flag and the boundary stones which typically attest the conquest of the land and tracing of the frontier, as the units of the Northern Kingdom, the first to arrive on the northern crest, seemingly did, Angustina, transformed into a monument,[5] becomes himself the boundary stone, in abid to confer meaning on the space and heroism on death, as the allusion to the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian also suggests. Like the painting, the majestic image created through Angustina's posture and expression transfigures death and represents the scene in all its glory ("[...] il mantello ricadente con armoniose pieghe; nulla c'era nella immagine della sgradevole crudeltà fisica della morte", Buzzati, 2006: 136).

The suggestion, in these scenes which feature the cloak as paramount garment, of a transition stage in the characters'evolution is consistent with the representation of space through references to intermediate areas "of *in-betweenness*" (Caribbo 13): the border territory where the Bastiani Fortress is located or the strait and the wild area which constitutes the theatre of the cadastral operation in *Il deserto dei Tartari*, the threshold on which Giovanni stands in "Il mantello" ("Egli comparve improvvisamente sulla *soglia*"; "'Che bello!' fece lui con fioco entusiasmo, come fu sulla *soglia*", Buzzati, 2002: 71, 74, emphasis added), characterized by neutrality and ambiguity, situated as it is *between* two spaces and yet belonging to both. Other transition spaces are, in the short story, the courtyard and "the vegetable garden" separated by the low slat fence and the house walls, the intermediate space between the hearth and the road, between the territory defined by the presence of the mother and family and thereby linked to life, on the one hand, and the territory trodden by Giovanni's black attired companion, a man who embodies the mystery of death, on the other – two entities that, due to their symbolic freight, respectively of origin and end of life, cannot ever come in direct contact. The two categories share in common Giovanni, the young man who can transition the intermediate area, for he belongs equally to both and yet to neither.

The concentric series of separations,[6] in "Il mantello", also includes the human being. The interior-exterior relationship is marked in turn by the slat fence, the simple architecture of the nest-house, and the cloak in which Giovanni is wrapped, itself apt to institute a separation, if ontologically. The cloak is the "canvas" which materializes the difference, the barrier between

[3] On the stages of shaping the border, their meanings and implications, including suffering and sacrifice, see Piero Zanini, *Significati del confine. I limiti naturali, storici, mentali*, Mondadori, Milano, 2000, pages 5-10, 29-46; for the prose of Dino Buzzati, in particular, see Iuliana David, "La (de)limitazione dello spazio ne 'I sette messageri' e 'Il deserto dei Tartari' di Dino Buzzati – frontiera materiale e orizzonte mentale", in *Un secol de italienistică la Bucureşti*, vol. III –"Actele colocviului aniversar", edited by Doina Condrea Derer, Hanibal Stânciulescu, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2011, pages 225-233.

[4] We use Piero Zanini's term, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[5] For the monument and monumentality, from the point of view of both space and time, see Ciprian Mihail, "Monument şi narativitate – sau despre centru şi frontieră în viaţa cotidiană", in *Inventarea spaţiului. Arhitecturi ale experienţei cotidiene*, Paideia, Bucureşti, 2001, pages 145-167.

[6] In this connection, see our study "Forme e significati della frontiera nella narrativa di Dino Buzzati", in *La lingua e la letteratura italiana in Europa*, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi di Craiova, 18-19 October 2010, edited by Elena Pârvu, Universitaria, Craiova, 2012, pages 100-110.

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Giovanni and his family, actually between two irreconcilable worlds, a concrete form between life and death; it suggests the closing in of the individual whom it covers and the incommunicability symptomatic of the characters. The same material representation of the communication barrier appears explicit in *Il deserto dei Tartari*:it is the veil which comes between the speakers, namely Drogo and his mother ("come se fra loro il tempo e la lontananza avessero lentamente disteso un velo di separazione, Buzzati, 2006: 153) or his beloved ("Ma qualche cosa si era messo veramente fra loro, un velo indefinibile e vago che non voleva dissolversi", Buzzati, 2006: 156).

The cloak is the border which splits unity into appearance and essence, visible and invisible, which separates the subject from the object. It interposes, like a curtain (Bonifazi 239), between the one who is watching and the one watched. Like Gaia's mythical cloak, the earth cover, it provides a surface, an appearance, while hiding the substance from view and understanding; at the same time, it also draws attention to the reality beyond (Tugnoli 3). The cloak is the "unheimlich" (uncanny) element (Bonifazi 1982: 244) of the text in all its versions, for the way Giovanni wears it strikes his mother as strange and unintelligible, hence a source of anxiety:

> *E il mantello*? Perché se lo teneva stretto addosso, col caldo che faceva in casa? Forse perché, sotto l'uniforme era rotta e infangata? Ma con la mamma, perché vergognarsi di fronte alla mamma? Le pene sembravano finite, ecco invece subito una nuova *inquietudine*. (Buzzati, 2002: 73, emphasis added)

Hence she insistently attempts to remove his cloak ("'Ma togliti il mantello, creatura' [...] 'Togliti il mantello, dammelo qui, non senti che caldo?'", Buzzati, 2002: 71) and thereby get close to her son and understand his plight ("'ma il mantello, non te lo levi dunque?... non senti che caldo?'", 74). Her efforts, nevertheless, run against Giovanni's reactions ("Lui ebbe un brusco movimento di difesa, istintivo, serrandosi addosso il mantello, per timore forse che glielo strappassero via", 272), in a game of hiding and unveiling which culminates with Pietro's childish gesture and the fleeting revelation it occasions ("Pietro sollevò un lembo del mantello per sapere come il fratello fosse vestito di sotto"; "I due lembi di panno azzurro si erano dischiusi un istante", 76). The veil comes off for a short while, unveiling the painful reality "camouflaged" by the cloak, which, however belatedly, affords understanding, the true, in-depth view. The effects of this quintessential moment, followed by the son's departure to the far north, are significant for knowledge and living. Through the chain mechanisms of comprehension which they actuate, they afford Giovanni's mother an accurate, complex grasp of the events, and the reader the symbolic key of reading:

> E allora la mamma finalmente capì, un vuoto immenso, che mai e poi mai nei secoli sarebbero bastati a colmare, si aprì nel suo cuore. Capì la storia del mantello, la tristezza del figlio e soprattutto chi fosse il misterioso individuo che passeggiava su e giù per la strada, in attesa, chi fosse quel sinistro personaggio fin troppo paziente. (Buzzati, 2002: 76)

In addition to what we have already discussed, the play offers a series of further details associated with apparel by developing the theme of the cloak. Rita, Giovanni's sister, darns clothes: her occupation accounts for the introduction of another important clothing item, namely

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the colonel's coat, which his maidservant brings for retouch. The coat has a twofold role: anticipative and reflective. The former regards showing a human figure hidden within the garment, which causes the mother apprehensions: it turns out, however, that the maidservant has donned the coat to protect herself against the wind. The latter becomes apparent when the mother examines the cloak carefully: the garment for reflection also provides the foil for the military cloak. Well kept, made of a fine stuff, warm and comfortable, with a special breast piece to pin medals, the colonel's coat – the opposite to the soldiers' drab uniform, dusty and dirty, torn and soiled with blood on the battlefield –indicates a certain state of things, unfair and incomprehensible for the mother.

Trying to create a communicating bridge between them, to make Giovanni feel at ease, through reference to the familiar and family space, the sister and mother show him the wardrobe in his room, with all its contents, proud as they are of how well they have kept his things, during his absence, looking after them as well as possible and keeping them unchanged, in the hope that he could easily find his place again. They look perfectly unchanged from before his departure, which is apparent even to the protagonist: "Ma qui è tutto in ordine, tutto come prima, non è cambiato proprio niente" (Buzzati, 1980: 161). In fact, through their household occupation and their shared view on the relationship with the son and brother, respectively, the two female characters create a safe, domestic and feminine universe, the very opposite to the one Giovanni comes from and belongs to, symbolically represented by his cloak. The sartorial reference highlights here the difference between the civilian and the soldier, between the previous life stage of the protagonist, in which he cannot reintegrate himself, resuming from where he left it, and the one which he has passed on to and which directs him elsewhere:

> ANNA (*lietamente va col figlio a esaminare l'armadio*) Oh sì, guarda qui... Guarda se non è vero che ti aspettavo... Ecco tutta la roba in ordine. (*Apre i vari cassetti*) Qui le camicie... Qui le maglie... qui le calze... (*apre un'anta*) e qui i vestiti... Il grigio, il marron, quello da caccia... Tutto pulito e stirato... e qui le scarpe... e qui in fondo il tuo schioppo... lo tengo sempre unto, come mi hai raccomandato... Vedi? (Buzzati, 1980: 165)

To these alternatives which the two women propose to Giovanni to lure him on the side of life, which they embody but especially depict enthusiastically to persuade him to renounce the cloak, is added the new garment the mother has prepared as a surprise gift for her son, which occasions a talk about the appearance of clothes, the merits of textiles and cuts. Nothing, however, can persuade the protagonist to take off his cloak, which he wears indoors under different pretexts, among which his highly symbolic constant sense of feeling cold, symptomatic of his sense of transitioning, of not feeling at home in that milieu ("Non te lo toglieresti il mantello? Mi dà quasi l'impressione che tu non *ti senta a casa tua*", Buzzati, 1980: 165, emphasis added).

We can conclude, therefore, that in Dino Buzzati's texts the cloak, more than being a mere garment, conflates two essential dimensions: that of the military, assumed as an existential condition, and that of the passage to which the human is subject, two phenomena convergent at a deeper level. The cloak renders visible the separation and, at the same time, convergence of states, dimensions and stages, in the structural ambiguity peculiar to Buzzati's universe.

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