

# **On Mario Savioni's literary work**

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## 1- Introduction

I am a high school German and English teacher from Barcelona who happened to meet Mario Savioni—a practically unknown artist, poet and short story writer—at a poetry reading in London in the summer of 2015. We became friends and I started to read one of his books, *Blue Emptiness*, out of curiosity. I liked it so much that I reviewed it. He was so satisfied with it that I wanted to continue reading his poetry books and ended up writing a review for each one. I really love all his books. Because of that I have decided to write this paper on his literary work, also to help him find new potential readers.

Mario Savioni has published four books that are collections of poems and short stories. The fifth book, *Blue Emptiness*, is a short novel or a long short story—consider it as you like—with inserted poems.

First, I will talk about what I have found to be the five central themes in his work. Then I will deal with the imagery and symbolism I have found in some poems and stories. Finally, I will tell you about the main conclusions I have drawn from the experience of getting deeply involved in what has become a beautiful literary discovery in my life, something I feel the need to share with as many people as possible for two main reasons: the first one is that I believe any artist/writer deserves at least once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be discovered by other people and thus come out of a permanent invisibility; the second reason is a strong friendship with the author, which makes me write this paper as an act of generosity toward him.

## 2- The five central themes

Until now Mario Savioni has self-published five books: *Blue Emptiness*, *This Way To The End*, *A Man Looking At Women*, *Uncertainty* and *After*. In all the books I have found five interrelated central themes which I strongly believe we can all identify ourselves with.

Nowadays we are all submerged in an economic system governed by capitalism. We suffer the consequences of this model: unnecessary wars with people dying for the profits of a few world rulers, increasing poverty and inequality, unemployment rates also getting higher, and power abuse relationships at many different levels in society.

In our everyday lives, we must deal with all these problems, we are constantly being confronted with them. Let us see a few general examples that affect us all: How many of you have not become unemployed or know someone in this situation? Have you not lost acquisitive power quite rapidly in the last months? Are you currently facing difficulties in paying basic human needs and services such as electricity, water, rent or mortgage, medical care, education, a nursery home for your mother or father? Are you not going through a hard time, directly or indirectly, with an aging relative of yours losing self-governance? Have you not had problems trying to live on art or literature and been forced to do a different job because of increasing financial problems? Who has not experienced any sort of human power abuse in life? Had problems with a love relationship? Well, all these things relate to five central themes Mario Savioni deals with in all his poems and short stories. I think they are beautiful and interesting to read because they are well written and because we can always identify ourselves with the concrete situations and experiences he describes, which become universal topics.

These are the five main themes that interrelate in Mario Savioni's poems and short stories:

- The impossibility to fulfil a love relationship
- The non-acceptance of an artist/writer in a too materialistic society.
- The problem of a mother losing self-governance
- The question of America' s identity
- The increasing human injustice in our present capitalist world.

## **2.1.- The non-acceptance of an artist/writer in a too materialistic society**

The artist/writer embarks himself in a life journey in search for truth and beauty, an attitude that collides with the too materialistic world he lives in where people are valued for what they have and not just for who they are as human beings. In such a world—which is what the capitalist economic model has brought us according to the author—people are only appreciated and respected if they have a good career, earn a lot of money or have a big house.

The main male character of *Blue Emptiness* is an artist/writer that remains unproductive according to the demands of the capitalist world. Thus, his other kind of productivity, artistic and literary, becomes worthless in such a system unless he suddenly becomes socially recognized, finds fame and, consequently, garners economic benefit. As that is not happening, he works as a waiter to survive on minimum wage trying to earn a living even though he still “remains financially insufficient”. According to the author this is seen as especially hard for men, who have traditionally been “the sustainers” for women. A beautiful woman often looks for a man “whom she does not love, but who can sustain her.”

## **2.2.- The impossibility to fulfil a love relationship**

Love appears as something that never lasts, has its high points, moments of happiness, until one of the two people involved breaks the relationship for a given reason, which is the fact that one person cannot, is not ready or willing to give what the other wants like having children or certain financial security, for instance. Thus love becomes a temporal illusion.

Sometimes the love relationship does not even take place. The male voice of the poem just imagines it as we see in the last lines of poem “Fall Leaves” from the book *A Man Looking At Women*, p.17-18:

“If I could just communicate how warm I am getting.

I am interested in the nudity

The openness

Fact that there are no secrets.

I would ask if I knew;

I would stand still until she gave me a sign.”

Also, in the book *Uncertainty*, we find many other examples of unfulfilled love as in short story “In the Distance,” p.12:

“With an end that lingers—dream unrealized, hope twisted in fragments of ‘What I should have done.’”

In all of Mario Savioni's work we usually have a male voice telling us, either in the first or in the third person singular, how he perceives women with all his senses.

In the book *A Man Looking At Women*—which is full of many metaphors and symbols that are truly erotic, very vivid images of desire, beautifully written—the male narrator expresses his short moments of happiness while a love relationship lasts, but also his sadness and loneliness when the relationship is either over or cannot take place.

In fact, *A Man Looking At Women* is a whole book full of erotism written in a most lovely way, using very beautiful images, symbols and metaphors that evoke our senses. In it we see how women are perceived by a man for how they taste, their touch, scent, movements, voices, lights and appearances, as in story “V's Massage,” for example. Women are always treated with admiration and respect but also with a critical eye as well as men's behavior in love relationships, where either one of the two ends up subordinating the other person, which leads to the end of the relationship.

Related to the theme of love between men and women is the question of religion and the Christian sense of guilt at having sexual desire and thinking or doing “dirty things”, which reminds us of the kind of Puritan Society North America is. Mario Savioni is critical of that excessive repression:

“It's like SEXY is not possible

“It's a kind of dirtiness that isn't allowed”

(from poem “Bets On Nothing Happening” in *Uncertainty*, p.62)

This conflict between sex and religion or God also manifests itself in the poem “Hannah,” also from *A Man Looking At Women*, p.10:

“Wanting to put my face,

where it should not be -

As god, never intended.

At least that is what they tell me.”

### **2.3.- The problem of a mother losing self-governance**

This is another recurrent theme in Mario Savioni's work. We often encounter a male narrator having to deal with an aging mother who is gradually losing self-governance. This theme is sometimes connected with the early death of the narrator's father when he was very young as the following lines of the story “Woman with a Crow” from the book *Uncertainty* reveal (p.41):

*“He listened to the passing cars on the freeway and noticed the sunlight coming in the bay windows and how his mother had aged and that his father's death 27 years ago was seen as a freak accident of physiological elements going haywire.”*

In the book *This Way To The End*, story “The Absence of Both Parents” also deals with the father's death at an earlier stage in life, added to the aging mother losing self-governance. Moreover, the mourning period after the father's death seems not to have been carried out properly by the story's narrator.

Instead, the great breakdown comes 25 years later when he says: “I wept uncontrollable for a half-hour outside Mahler’s 5th concert.” (p.18, e-book version)

Most of the times, the narrator describes the mother's situation, losing her mind, connected with his aging process— being aware of death coming closer day after day— and also with his state of unhappiness, sadness and loneliness as an artist/writer.

Very often writers and artists are not valued in society, they are poor and their purpose as beauty and truth seekers seems not to matter as it should:

“Meanwhile mother goes insane.

We're like twins.

We were both born poets

She with images

And I with words.”

“I see her sacrifice

To something she could not afford.

I understand why artists and writers,

In general, are poor;

There is no business in telling the truth anymore.”

(from poem “The Hidden Pleasure of Waiting” in the book *Uncertainty*, p.75)

## 2.4.- The question of America's identity

This theme appears in connection with the critique of our present capitalist world whose highest representative is America.

Thus, Mario Savioni expresses on many occasions how America's initial values have been perverted and changed into savage imperialistic policies leading to permanent wars because of huge economic interests:

“That we were willing  
To exchange someone's blood  
For oil  
To have stood on a side that kills  
Palestinians in an endless war.” (poem 14, from book *After*, p.28)

The author refers to America's previous moral values that were instilled in its foundations and claims to go back to them:

“We, as a people once stood for what was right.” (poem “Pledge of Resistance”, from *After*, p.19)

And also in poem “The Hidden Pleasure of Waiting,” from *Uncertainty*, p.74:

“I thought the *Constitution* was clear  
*The Declaration of Independence?*”

God appears related to this theme and also to the others Mario Savioni deals with in his literary work. The figure of God is seen as someone who is not evil, instead he gives us hope. However, God allows human beings to decide by themselves on many things that very often are wrong on all levels, the worst of them being massive killings and wars caused by America's foreign policies:

“But this is the plan of God.

He allows our delusions of grandeur

To test our sense of equality among men and nations.

It is our responsibility, no matter how far we have elected

to be:

Some of us in homes, where we've drawn the drapes.

These are our bombs.”

(from poem “Pledge of Resistance,” from *After*, p.19)

## **2.5.- The increasing human injustice in our present capitalist world**

Most poems contain lines that are critical of any kind of injustice, which the author relates to the capitalist system and what he considers its wrong values being the main cause of so much unnecessary human suffering, power abuse, wars, deaths and increasing poverty as I have already explained in point 2.1.

In the book *This Way To The End*, the poem “The Weeping Meadow” reflects this strong critique of human injustice, war and people dying with

“Whole cities burned under

Mud, inhabitants

Forced to paddle into

Somber melancholy.”

All the images make us think of our present war conflicts where people “Recollect, gather, and mourn,” and where “sheets are scattered” suggesting what happens with thousands of dead bodies.

Mario Savioni clearly intends to cause rebellion in us, make us think that our present world has many flaws and that we definitely need to rebel against this situation.

We can see another clear example of this in poem number 9 from the book *After*, p.16:

“I look to our leaders and I see that  
There’s money in stealing  
In lying, in raping  
Out of some fear that there would not be enough.”

### **3- Imagery and symbolism**

I have to say that this is a short paper where I just intend to provide a first insight into Mario Savioni's work. For this reason, I will only talk about a few elements the author uses as images in his poems and short stories, even though there are many more symbols and metaphors in all his literary work.

The images, symbols and metaphors I have decided to deal with are the first things that drew my attention when I read Mario Savioni's books for the first time. Nonetheless, I am sure there are still many more aspects I have not considered in this paper as well as analysing his writing style with the accuracy and thoroughness it deserves.

### 3.1.- Inanimate elements of nature: water, ice, rocks and sculptures

I have noticed many natural elements, especially in *Blue Emptiness*, being used as images to describe something that is unwelcoming, unpleasant, dangerous and cold. When the male narrator of the book dreams of a world where people should help each other, return to the pre-instilled real moral values—instead of considering everything and every person for pure economic benefit—he sees himself and the rest of humanity as “floating icebergs waiting for vessels, cold fellows of the sea that seem as deep as the bellowing waves that crash against the rocks then fade.”

It seems that sadness and loneliness are expressed with all these water and ice images, associated with emotions and feelings. We humans need “vessels” as hope, something to hold on to. This water is not peaceful, but dangerous and deep. Even the rocks mean something hostile, showing how difficult life is, “Everything is a dream that sends us through the cape, where life is only a curtain to the silent peace.” The word “cape” appears to be hope again, though life is fragile as the idea of the curtain to the silent peace suggests, which we could associate with death.

These elements of nature seem to be clearly associated to the question of human existence as in the existentialist philosophers like Sartre and Heidegger. What is our purpose in life? What is the purpose of the artist/writer in this world? Are we entering a new dark age? A period of decadence? Decadence of capitalism and materialism where a change of economic model is urgently needed?

In the book *A Man Looking At Women*, whose main theme I would define as being man's search for true love, women are often associated with sculptures (also with dancers), images for someone unattainable, cold and distant, often causing the male character a complex of inferiority because he remains financially lower; he suffers from the sad truth he faces and could even regard himself as a “tortured rock” as the following lines seem to suggest:

“Like steel sculptures,  
Your nipples are so hard,

They could cut diamonds  
Into puddles of tortured rock,  
Or sharpen this sword  
With the truth that cuts.”  
(from poem “Recumbent Siren”, p.29)

### **3.2.- Animated elements of nature: butterflies, chirping birds, dogs and snakes**

There is a lovely butterfly metaphor in *Blue Emptiness*:

“He feels joy and inspiration  
It represents transformation.  
He can see butterfly wings in a clamorous fight.”

but “nothing seems to be breaking”. The male narrator of the book sees butterflies and “it seems like an animal is struggling to be free, but no one is hurt.”

To me all this suggests the idea of peaceful change (inspiration is transformation) without breaking the world into pieces, which would be the case of any non-violent peaceful collective movement or revolution in our world. What is the purpose of life? I think this butterfly metaphor applies to the artist as an individual but also to the collective. Again, we have the existential question of humanity, which is always present in Mario Savioni's work.

In the book *This Way To The End*, the image of a family of chirping birds appears in some poems and short stories as an ideal to attain which seems not to be possible in human life, especially in our capitalist society where relationships are usually based on the needs our system has created. This is opposed to animals' nature; for instance, the way a family of chirping birds acts, the bird mother protecting the little birds and doing this simply out of sacrifice.

Therefore, the images of the chirping birds appear on several occasions as the already mentioned ideal to attain, something human beings seem not to be able to do. That is not how love relationships work nor how an elderly mother ends her last living days, nor how one gender abuses the other, nor how a few very rich people rule the world and allow the rest to suffer from poverty and modern enslavement in a dehumanized society.

A clear example of all the above mentioned is story number 15, “The Silent Morning Compared” which tells us about a silent morning except for some birds chirping rampantly.

This is a beautiful image we can see reminding us of the ideal world as opposed to the hard reality of an aging mother who is losing self-governance. As a reader one inevitably thinks about the living conditions of the elderly people in our present world. None of us wants to become dependent on others because it means losing the limited freedom we may have acquired throughout our lives. Losing self-governance is actually what we fear most when we start to age.

The story establishes an interesting analogy between the role of the birds’ mother and the one of a human mother. The birds’ mother has to protect her babies as well as the human mother. They both need to sacrifice themselves. The fact that children become something so important in human life affects love relationships to the extent that “... sometimes the love between a man and a woman must take a back seat.” Thus, children can bring couples closer to each other but they can also separate them.

Finally, the last image associated with an animal I would like to talk about in this section of my paper is the dog. In Mario Savioni's book *Uncertainty* it appears at least on two occasions: in the stories “Adultery” and “Pavlov Bell.”

In the first story the male narrator talks about the impossibility to keep a love relationship:

“...love is nothing but an empty shadow, a need that once satisfied redirects the body to some new fixation...” (p.27)

At that stage he compares himself and human beings, in general, with a salivating dog that, once its needs have become satisfied, is waiting for a new meal to satisfy him again:

“...Until satisfied, the body yearns, like a dog in heat, its hips jar until the lid of the evening meal is cut away and we smell the meat of a new dish.” (also p.27)

The second story where the dog comparison appears is “Pavlov Bell” as its title already tells. In this story the reader will find a very beautiful, sensual and erotic description of the male narrator's feelings for a girl:

*“...Passion is also from which the voice ensues. It is the lips that give it form. It is the eyes that see her coming into the room. She gives pause to pick up the pen and dabble to recreate the emotion caused. What kind of lines do I put down when you come through the gate at Runway 1?*

*Do I salivate like a Pavlovian dog or am I a priest at confession? ‘Dear God, let her be beautiful! Let her presence evoke my eloquence. Let me fill thy chamber with the affirmation that life is more than torture.’ Still, I shall not forget those words you uttered long ago, as a gift: ‘Life is a lesson, not a playpen.’”* (from story “Pavlov Bell” in the book *Uncertainty*, p.45)

In *A Man Looking At Women*, female descriptions are often compared or associated with animals such as a female peacock, serpents of nipples, and snakes related to Adam and Eve's myth:

“I am not safe here,  
Longing for the composition of snakes,  
Offering of apples,  
Comforter of this outlay as the petals drift.”  
(from poem “Twist of the Question Mark,” p.13)

### 3.3.- Images related to different arts: painting, music, photography and movies

While reading most of Mario Savioni's poems and short stories I found out that they often look like vivid descriptions of paintings. Others sound like music or are based on some kind of music, relate to photography or are poems created after the author has found inspiration from a movie.

If we take poem "The Past Ages of Sorcerers" from the book *This Way To The End*, we will find that, at a given point, the poem makes reference to Nicole Eisenman's painting *Beer garden with Ulrike and Celeste*, where every person is sad, instead of having fun which would be the normal thing in a beer garden.

While reading this part of the poem one has the impression of standing right in front of Eisenman's painting: "The orange cat, barkeep, and the glass."

The words in the poem as well as the painting express America's decline as a society. The "long red line" is a "sad exclamation point" of the barkeeper, a victim of this American downfall:

"That long red line  
Is a sad exclamation point  
As the iconography floats.  
Each charismatic portrait  
Gives no birth."

In the book *A Man Looking At Women* the poem "Fall Leaves" (p.17) reminds us of the action of painting and mixing colors:

"There is no point in affixing flower  
Flower on top of flower  
Sign of death or mutation?"

Two petals, where only one would do,  
There is no point making the same point  
Even if the colors run.”

In the book *After*, poem 8 (p.14), inspired by Pablo Neruda's poem “Love Dragged Its Trail of Pain,” the reader gets the feeling that the voice of the poem is drawing the person he or she seems to love:

“I draft the first argument of your skin  
Onto a canvas  
Try to figure out why  
The crease in your mettle  
Appeals to me,  
Why fragile beauty  
Holds such strength.”

In number 23, also from *After*, we find a description of how the male narrator longs for a woman, which is associated with Monet's painting:

“There's absolutely no rust here. Only the stagnant pond of  
Monet's memory, where washed be-gone dreams cover  
the surface with wet-green algae, and a woman lay in  
silver shoes and candy, with red tones in her hair and a  
face that quiets melody.”

In *Uncertainty*, the poem called “Personal Ad” (p.56) has a male voice that says he is an artist and a writer:

“A Warhol-like painter,  
A color field painter,  
A line drawer,…”

He seems to look for a woman in his ad which goes from telling things in the first-person singular to a “we”. This could suggest an attempt to include the woman he is looking for.

Also, here we find many associations with literature and art, especially painting in these lines:

“We are the canvas,  
The gesso,  
The oil paint,  
Moreover, the image, one-after-another…”

Now going back to *After*, it contains two poems inspired by movies: “The Sea is Watching” and “Behind The Sun.” In the second poem, for instance, we see the very description of the movie events already in the first lines, how the blood on the T-shirt turns yellow showing that another person will have to be killed following the Law of Talion, an eye for an eye. If you watch the movie after having read the poem, you will be able to imagine it almost the same way you pictured the poem; your mental pictures of the poem will be very similar to the ones of the movie.

## 4- Conclusions

As I have already mentioned, the intention of this paper has been to provide a first insight into Mario Savioni's work in order to help him attract potential readers. Therefore, I am sure I have missed many aspects of his literary work that should be considered in a deeper and more detailed analysis.

However, I am glad I have been able to show you some of the basic themes he deals with, which are also our everyday problems: Human injustice in our world of growing inequality, difficult love relationships that very often fail or cannot take place, elderly people losing self-governance, and the hard life most of our current artists and writers have to go through in a world where economic benefits are seen as the most important thing to achieve.

All these themes allow us readers to identify ourselves with the situations and characters Mario Savioni presents in his work. I am sure each of us can see ourselves reflected in the mirrors of all these poems and short stories. There is always something that connects each story or short poem with our lives. That is precisely what makes them interesting reading and they are also beautifully written, very musical, deep, sensual and with lovely images and metaphors. As a reader, I can only tell you I feel wrapped up in all the books. I think, feel and taste every poem and short story. Furthermore, they all exude beauty and authenticity which, as Mario Savioni says—and I completely agree with—is the main purpose of any writer or artist in this world.

## 5- Bibliography

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By Mixing the Letters a Bit of Humor Is Created. "Literary Devices | Literary Terms." *Literary Devices | Literary Terms*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.

## 6- Annex

Mario Savioni's blog Musings: <https://savioni.wordpress.com/>

Book sites with my reviews for each book:

**- Blue Emptiness:**

<https://savioni.wordpress.com/2016/04/03/a-review-of-mario-savionis-blue-emptiness-by-marta-pombo-salles/>

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/mario-savioni/blue-emptiness/paperback/product-21035691.html>

( go to the American version of this site, ratings and reviews, paperback)

**- This Way to the End:**

(go to the American version of the site, ratings and reviews, e-book (epub)):

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/mario-savioni/this-way-to-the-end/ebook/product-22310998.html>

**- Uncertainty:**

[http://www.blurb.com/b/2134039-uncertainty#book\\_comments](http://www.blurb.com/b/2134039-uncertainty#book_comments)

<https://savioni.wordpress.com/2016/04/05/a-review-of-the-book-uncertainty/>

**- A Man Looking At Women:**

[http://www.blurb.com/b/2133990-a-man-looking-at-women#book\\_comments](http://www.blurb.com/b/2133990-a-man-looking-at-women#book_comments)

**- After:**

<http://www.blurb.com/b/1986861-after>

<https://savioni.wordpress.com/2016/03/29/review-of-the-book-after/comment-page-1/#comment-467>