

# Annali di Ca' Foscari

Serie occidentale

Vol. 49  
Settembre 2015

[online] ISSN 2499-1562  
[print] ISSN 2499-2232



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



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## Serie occidentale

[online] ISSN 2499-1562  
[print] ISSN 2499-2232

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Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing  
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Dorsoduro 3246  
30123 Venezia  
<http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/riviste/annali-di-ca-foscari-serie-occidentale/>

# Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale

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**Editore** Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing | Dorsoduro 3859/A, 30123 Venezia, Italia | [ecf@unive.it](mailto:ecf@unive.it)

**Stampa** Logo srl, via Marco Polo 8, 35010 Bogorico (PD)

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Il codice **ISSN 1125-3762** identifica *Annali di Ca' Foscari* dal 1985 al 2009 (sino al vol. 48, in edizione cartacea).

Il codice **ISSN 2499-2232** identifica *Annali di Ca' Foscari* con specificazione di *Serie occidentale*, a partire dal 2015 (vol. 49, in edizione cartacea). A questo si aggiunge il codice **ISSN 2499-1562** che identifica l'edizione digitale online.

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# Linguistica



# **English Support to Academic Staff**

## **A Pilot Study at the Department of Management**

Elena Borsetto and Daniel Patrick Schug  
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Abstract** The internationalisation of Universities is a global phenomenon that has an impact on teaching and administrative staff, who, as a result of top-down decisions are required to perform their tasks in another language, usually English. Given that this process often leads to concerns regarding the quality of services and teaching, more research is needed to better analyse potential issues. Therefore, this project seeks to investigate the main linguistic and methodological difficulties experienced by the teaching and administrative staff in an Italian university when English is the medium of instruction and communication. The Department of Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice has instituted a pilot project running from November 2015 to May 2016, in which linguistic support is provided to the academic staff, in the form of a language help desk. To understand the specific needs of the department, diary entries of help desk activities were analysed through the lens of Grounded Theory. Initial results indicate that less proficient users would ask for a revision of some grammar points, while more proficient users would prefer having their articles and slides proofread, or rehearsing their lessons.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Literature Review. – 2.1 Linguistic Difficulties in EMI. – 2.2 Lack of Support in EMI Implementation. – 2.3 Institutional Response. – 3 The Present Study: The Ca' Foscari Department of Management. – 4 Methodology. – 5 Data collection. – 6 Discussion of findings. – 7 Conclusions.

**Keywords** English-Medium Instruction (EMI). English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Teacher Education. Language Support Service. Internationalisation.

## **1 Introduction**

The stimuli to internationalise universities are not only of educational or geographical nature, but also political and economical (cf. Coleman 2006). The main drives of this phenomenon are the desire to acquire international recognition, attract foreign students and professors, create more partnerships with other institutions and companies (Wilkinson 2013, 8), as well as multiply the possibilities for receiving external funding. Considered all together, these factors would help improve a university's position in global rankings, a crucial element in establishing a renowned reputation:

The combination of higher individual fees, greater student mobility, and

excess of supply over demand has accentuated the market character of HE [Higher Education]: the student has become the customer. Universities are no longer institutions but brands. (Coleman 2006, 3)

In light of this phenomenon, the objective of this study is to analyse one of the main consequences of internationalisation: the enormous increase of English Medium Instruction programs all over the world, especially in the formerly linguistically diverse European tertiary education (for a list, cf. IIE 2013). This trend has had an impact on how universities organise their courses, how lecturers teach in their disciplines, and on how students learn the content of the courses.

For the purposes of this study, English Medium Instruction, or EMI, refers to both a language policy insisting on the use of English and a setting in which instruction is transmitted through the English language. While EMI is frequently associated with the concept of Content and Language Integrated learning, or CLIL, Strotmann et al. (2014) describe a subtle, though meaningful, difference between these two approaches. Through the use of authentic materials and pedagogical tools in English, the main goal of EMI resides in the transmission of content knowledge, assuming that the acquisition of English is implicit. In CLIL programs, instead, learning is a much more integrated process since students are more explicitly guided in their language learning with courses having both content and language objectives. Another difference lies in the fact that, while EMI promotes the use of English only, CLIL can be applied to develop also the use of languages other than English (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010). While research in both CLIL and EMI has informed the direction of this study, the specific context to be analysed here is purely EMI.

As it stands, numerous studies highlight the benefits for students in EMI programs at all levels of education, with a large portion citing higher learner motivation to master both language and content. At the high school level, for instance, Nikula (2007) presents the case of a Finnish classroom in which students willingly chose to speak in English between themselves during class time, even when not compelled to do so by the teacher. At the university level, Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) observed that students studying through EMI in Spain tend to attend class more often, are more likely to go to their professors' office hours, and send more emails asking for clarification on points discussed in class. While not focusing on the students' linguistic progress or content mastery, these observations certainly indicate the potential that EMI has for inspiring classroom learning.

Despite many reported positive effects of EMI, some of which have been described above, a number of problems remains unaddressed (cf. Dearden 2015, 3), especially at the tertiary level. Very often, the top-down decisions of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) result in a push for the rapid internationalisation of departments and a greater presence

of English, without consideration for the consequences such a process could beget (Byun et al. 2011). In Italy, the Politecnico of Milan represents an emblematic case, revealing how extreme and sudden this push can be. The Rector of this university decided in 2012 that, starting from the academic year 2014-15, all master and doctoral courses offered by the university would be taught only in English.<sup>1</sup> Members of the teaching staff immediately protested against this decision, and eventually appealed to the regional law court, which rejected the English-only language policy and restored the previous one (for a more detailed explanation, cf. Pulcini & Campagna 2015, 69-70). As this case shows, a strong backlash from lecturers is one of the potential issues that could arise when a foreign language is instituted as the main language of learning and communication. Given the often rapid transition to English-taught programs, lecturers involved in the change struggle to acquire the necessary language proficiency to avoid watering down the content of their courses (cf. Coleman 2006).

Vu and Burns (2014) echo this concern in their study of Vietnamese lecturers, two years into a new EMI program. Interviews with these lecturers revealed that code-switching between English and Vietnamese was a common practice when they wanted to make sure students could understand important concepts. Just as Coleman (2006) described, these Vietnamese lecturers also felt their English proficiency was insufficient for teaching effectively, and thus requested didactic support from their university.

It is against this backdrop that this project has collected data on the potential difficulties encountered by the academic and administrative staff at the Department of Management at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy, currently in a phase of internationalisation. Guided by research on new English-taught programs in other countries, this study uses Grounded Theory to analyse these difficulties and develop tailored solutions to assist this department's transition to EMI.

## 2 Literature Review

As mentioned above, several studies have analysed the learner experience in EMI, but lecturers' difficulties and the challenge of finding staff who possess a high level of competence both in their disciplines and in the foreign language are generally mentioned only as peripheral issues (Shohamy 2013, 203). In order to fill the paucity in current research on lecturers' experiences in new EMI contexts, several researchers have

1 The news as reported in a BBC article, dating back to 16/05/2012: URL <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-17958520> (2016-04-12).

tried to consider students' evaluations of courses, in relation to linguistic and didactic issues expressed by lecturers. Despite the diversity of the situations presented in these studies, many reveal surprisingly similar results. Indeed, three main themes consistently appear in the literature: the linguistic problems experienced while teaching in a foreign language, a lack of training in EMI, and a reaction to the institutional response to these problems (Byun et al. 2011; Costa & Coleman 2012; Hu & Lei 2014; Vu & Burns 2014). In the following sections, research in these areas is illustrated and applications to the current study are discussed.

## 2.1 Linguistic Difficulties in EMI

One of the most evident pitfalls that can arise from EMI implementation stems from linguistic deficiencies of the teaching and administrative staff, as highlighted by numerous case studies and experiments conducted around the world. Even though Helm (s.d.) points out that, given its recent development, very little research has been done thus far on EMI in the Italian context, studies conducted in a myriad of other contexts provides a wealth of information that is pertinent to this study.

The Asian context is of particular interest for this study, given that, as in Italy, EMI is still relatively in many Asian countries, too, with problems comparable to those faced by other European countries years ago (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2007). For example, Korea University presents a situation where students have to take a number of courses in English as a graduation requirement, and new professors have to deliver all courses in English as a condition for their hiring (Byun et al. 2011). From an institutional perspective, the results of these policies seem positive: more foreign students are enrolling and researchers are beginning to publish in English with greater frequency.

However, when one considers feedback from the professors involved in EMI, it is clear that some complications arise; interviews with them indicate that they do not feel competent enough to teach in English. Professors report having to rely heavily on PowerPoint presentations and previously prepared notes when delivering lessons. The authentic communication that is supposed to be the hallmark of EMI is practically absent, as the professors have trouble using English to give examples and detailed explanations to illustrate key concepts. They also seek to limit classroom interaction with and between students, in an effort to avoid embarrassment in the case that they do not understand what a student says.

These findings are similar to those from a case study by Hu and Lei (2014) in a Chinese university. Even if professors were enthusiastic about EMI as a way to facilitate English learning, most participants in the study described their English proficiency as low at the outset. As in the previous

case, professors reported relying heavily on notes and PowerPoint presentations, and even codeswitching to Chinese to explain the more complex concepts. Again, no instance of authentic communication in English was observed.

The lecturers' language difficulties did not appear to go unnoticed, as in both of the above cases students reported having to put significant effort into understanding the content of the courses. Although such findings may be due to the students' low level of comprehension, they also indicate a need for professors to be more flexible in their language use, in order to be able to explain concepts to students with different proficiency levels.

While language difficulties seem less extreme in EMI studies related to the European context, several points emerge that are worth addressing for the purposes of this study. In Northern Europe, in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, EMI has been widespread in higher education for quite some time (cf. IIE 2013, 7); once again, this phenomenon has not occurred without posing some challenges.

Indeed, the use of a foreign language at university level was the source of a large-scale and heated debate in Denmark, a country often recognized for its high English proficiency also outside the academic environment (cf. Duncan 2014). In their study, Jensen and Thøgersen (2011) used a questionnaire to understand lecturers' attitudes towards EMI at the University of Copenhagen. While reactions to EMI varied, with some of these lecturers believing EMI threatened the future of the Danish language, most lecturers reported more pedagogical concerns; they felt that when a non-native English speaker was teaching in English to non-native English speaker students, the quality of the teaching suffered due to the limited language skills of both parties. The fear was that teachers would not communicate effectively, and that students would not understand minor, though important, details.

Other researchers also used questionnaires and interviews to understand if lecturers felt their English language proficiency had a negative impact on the quality of their teaching. In his work with Swedish professors, Airey (2011) found that they often hesitated to 'go off script' in their lessons, or improvise with anecdotes or pertinent examples. In-depth explanations and details were also avoided, as professors feared that they would not be able to elaborate complex points in a way that students would comprehend. At the end of a questionnaire, Airey asked participants to give advice to new EMI teachers and one of the most common responses was to focus only on major ideas rather than going too deeply into a topic. Although this advice may help lecturers cope with language deficiencies, the implication remains that students will not have access to important course content. In the Netherlands as well, Klaassen and De Graaff (2001) discovered that Dutch lecturers in departments of engineering and technology were also reluctant to improvise explanations and give detailed

examples in EMI contexts, even those with very high levels of English. Again, students quickly picked up on lecturer difficulties, mentioning “the teacher’s lack of linguistic fluency and flexibility and above all [...] pronunciation” (Wilkinson 2013, 18).

One of the common themes in all of these studies seems to be the absence of authentic communication in EMI contexts; even when they claim to have a high level of English proficiency, professors still struggle to explain complex ideas, especially when making examples that would be helpful to illustrate complicated concepts. It is important to take this limitation into consideration in devising strategies to improve the quality of teaching, as well as teacher satisfaction.

## 2.2 Lack of Support in EMI Implementation

In their description of EMI, Ruiz-Garrido and Fortanet-Gómez (2009) present a number of concerns to be addressed that are unrelated to language proficiency. In particular, they refer to the need for all lecturers to understand the basics of language acquisition processes, as well as to have training in intercultural communication. This recommendation, coupled with the information of the aforementioned studies, illustrates the type of comprehensive training and support necessary at least in the early phases of EMI.

To determine what types of certification programs were in place to prepare lecturers to teach in English, O’Dowd (2015) analysed questionnaire responses from seventy universities across Europe. The results of this study are somewhat troubling, as 30% of the participating universities claimed that they did not feel teacher training was an important aspect of EMI implementation. For universities that did provide training, general communication skills were the most common focus of their programs. Other themes appearing with less frequency included lessons on teaching methodology and bilingualism. The study concluded with recommendations for training programs of a much more rigorous nature, to prepare lecturers to effectively teach advanced concepts in a language that is foreign to the students.

Strotmann et al. (2014) reported similar findings with lecturers in Spain; only some had training in academic English and even fewer had any formal training in teaching in English to non-native speakers. In fact, many lecturers reported teaching almost exactly in the same way in both their English courses and the courses conducted in the local language.

Also in Italy, where there has been a rapid increase in courses offered through EMI, Guarda and Helm (2016) found that teachers receive very little didactic assistance when implementing new programs. Their study polled 38 Italian universities, of which 77% reported offering no training



or didactic support to lecturers new to EMI, regardless of their experience or English proficiency.

Hui and Lei (2014) and Byun et al. (2011) presented similar results in the Asian context. In both cases, lecturers supported the push for internationalisation, but claimed that the rapid implementation of EMI did not allow for a proper analysis of available resources and deficiencies in the departments. As a result, they mentioned numerous linguistic and pedagogical concerns while also lamenting the lack of institutional support they had received.

Given the lack of proper EMI training in so many universities, it is not surprising that many professors have struggled in their early years of EMI. Wilkinson (2013) stated that lecturers often describe EMI as negatively affecting the quality of their teaching. For these teachers, EMI became tiresome and time-consuming given the extra preparation required for each lesson. Considering the range of difficulties expressed by academic staff in such a wide variety of contexts, a formal training program appears to be a necessity.

### 2.3 Institutional Response

In response to reported obstacles, many universities have attempted to provide support for their staff in the transition to EMI. For example, in 2001, one study presented a training course organized by the Delft University of Technology, in the Netherlands, to help professors deal with linguistic concerns. Participants would hone their presentation skills in front of their peers, with a particular focus on non-verbal behaviour, organizing lessons and interacting with students (Klaassen & De Graaff 2001, 283). The teacher-training program addressed the following topics (282):

1. Effective lecturing behaviour which suffers from a switch in language
2. Effective lecturing behaviour which addresses the needs of non-native speaking students
3. Awareness of second language (acquisition) difficulties
4. Reflection on beliefs and actual lecturing behaviour
5. Cultural issues if relevant to the first four aspects

This project resembles an English course organised at a Swedish university for new EMI professors. Airey (2011) describes the 12-week language course as having a clearly pedagogical slant. Lecturers were asked to post two video recordings of a lesson on an online platform, one recorded in Swedish, and then the same lesson recorded in English. Participants would receive feedback from their teacher trainer and then comment on each other's videos. In the end, even if participants reported some uncertain-

ties when teaching in English, they claimed to notice very few differences between the English and Swedish versions of their own video recordings.

Guarda and Helm (2016) describe a similar course recently held in a university in Northern Italy; the course was titled *English for Academic Purposes* and was offered during an intensive summer session. The participants were selected after an application process, partly based on their urgency to improve their academic English skills. The principal goal for this course was to understand lecturers' difficulties, with the intention of developing *ad hoc* training programs to address them specifically. This course was also of benefit to participants by encouraging them to share their positive and negative EMI experiences.

Such a setup appears to be sought out and highly valued by new EMI professors; for example, Strotmann et al. (2014) polled Spanish teachers and discovered that many of them asked for a community of EMI practice, requesting an online space to share experiences and teaching materials.

A further example of this kind of project, aiming to improve the language skills of lecturers teaching in English, was organised by the Copenhagen Business School. In 2003, their language centre launched a pilot project to provide "a tool for assessing academic staff with respect to their English language fluency and communication skills" (Kling & Hjulmand 2008, 194). The project was part of the Copenhagen Business School's plan to increase the quality of its courses as, at that time, 42% of their programs were offered exclusively in English. The goal of the project was to help professors from the Business School to reach an overall level of C1 on the CEFR scale (cf. COE 2001). It was also meant to identify both those who needed support, whether linguistic or didactic, and those who could be taken as role models (Kling & Hjulmand 2008, 194). The project proved to be quite effective and was applauded by professors, who felt better equipped to teach through EMI. The limit of this project, however, is that the professors who agreed to be assessed were part of a select group, as many of them had already taught abroad and possessed a high proficiency in English; other members of the teaching staff did not take part in the project (198).

### 3 The Present Study: The Ca' Foscari Department of Management

As the present study involves an Italian university, it is important to understand the Italian context with respect to EMI policies. Helm (s.d.) points out that, although the situation has rapidly evolved in the last five years, Italy is relatively new to EMI compared to other European countries. As the European Union has pushed for greater foreign language proficiency in all member states, Italy has tried to increase the presence of English in high schools through the implementation of CLIL projects. Some Italian regions, such as Lombardy, have been particularly enthusiastic in training teachers in best practices for teaching in English as well as in other foreign languages (cf. Eurydice 2004). However, in many cases, full implementation has been hindered by bureaucratic hurdles and logistical factors. Furthermore, many subject teachers lacked the necessary language proficiency to teach an entire course using English, a problem that was exacerbated by the lack of coordination between subject and language specialists in course development (cf. Leone 2010).

At the university level, apart from some experiences with CLIL (cf. Sisti 2009), Italy still lags behind other European countries in the number of programs offered in English (Costa & Coleman 2012). As is the case with many Italian high schools, research reports a lack of collaboration between subject lecturers and language specialists; institutions do not encourage such collaboration and many subject lecturers do not believe they need it. Other professors, however, are adamantly against teaching in English, feeling that the content would be reduced too much to be of any real benefit to students (Costa & Coleman 2010, 26).

It is in this context that the current study has found fertile ground. The Department of Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, has been offering courses in English for a number of years, like many other Italian business departments (cf. Costa & Coleman 2012, 8). However, now the process of internationalisation has put a stronger pressure on academic and non-academic staff to be able to conduct at least part of their work in English. In June 2015, the vice-director of the Department of Management contacted the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies, to request a language support service for their teaching and administrative staff. As the project evolved over the following weeks, the idea for a help desk service was proposed, which would run from the beginning of November 2015 until the end of May 2016, for 16 hours per week. In a face-to-face format, one English language tutor and one EMI didactics tutor would provide lecturers and members of the staff with support for improving their use of English. The tutors would be available at the department, on certain days and times, and members of the department would be able to book appointments through an online reservation

system. This tutoring service is meant to help lecturers to perform more effectively their teaching and research tasks in English, and to help the administrative staff communicate in English with incoming foreign students and visiting professors.

Additionally, to educate the teaching staff about different issues in EMI, guest speakers are invited once per month to address the following topics: potential issues when teaching in another language, the importance of pronunciation, the role of native or non-native speakers in an international context, and intercultural communication.

To monitor the effectiveness of this project, data has been collected as services are rendered. The aim is to investigate the main problems brought up by lecturers and staff and ultimately be able to meet their needs with tailored solutions to help them cope with the use of English in their academic lives. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

- What are the main language needs of the teaching and administrative staff?
- What are the main linguistic and/or methodological difficulties faced by lecturers teaching in English?
- What are the most effective ways to help the teaching and administrative staff to overcome communication problems in English?

To answer these questions, the tutors have kept a diary to record the activities they performed at each appointment. After the first two months, the period between the beginning of November and the end of December 2015, initial data were tabulated and analysed to identify the most common difficulties experienced by the teaching and non-teaching staff. The method used for this study, the collection of data, and a discussion of the initial results will be further explained in the following sections.

## 4 Methodology

The methodology chosen to carry out this study is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods:

A mixed methods study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study with some attempts to integrate the two approaches at one or more stages of the research process. (Dörnyei 2011, 163)

The choice of a mixed method approach was largely inspired by work done through the lens of Grounded Theory. This approach is data-driven, in the sense that it does not use a particular theory to predict a series of results confirming or denying previous studies on the same topic; instead,

it is based on the lack of pre-conceptual knowledge of a topic, to propose a series of theories that emerge from the observation of data. First, it is necessary to find the premises which will lead to the creation of a theory. Next, only as a second step, does one verify if this theory can be inscribed into a wider theoretical system (cf. Glaser & Strauss 2009).

The various advantages of a mixed method approach were also described by Dörnyei (2011, 45-6):

- "Increasing the strengths while eliminating the weaknesses", since mixed method allows to make the most out of the two methods. The qualitative part is the most suitable to understand the context of a study. The quantitative method, instead, gives a more quantifiable and objective point of view which is useful to generalise the result of a study.
- "Multi-level analysis of complex issues" appears as one of the features of mixed method which gives a more complete picture of a phenomenon, thanks to the integration of both numerical and non-numerical data: "words can be used to give meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words".
- "Improved validity" of a study can be obtained through the triangulation and convergence of data.
- "Reaching multiple audiences" is particularly important in this kind of study, which is addressed not only to experts in the field of language teaching, but also to stakeholders and a wider audience.

In this project, a qualitative method was used for recording the activities of the language help desk, by giving a detailed account of what was happening in the appointments with lecturers or staff members. Through the descriptions of the activities, it was possible to understand the heterogeneity of the situation at the Department of Management, where users presented various levels of English language proficiency and thus requested different kinds of services, ranging, for example, from the revision of grammar rules to suggestions on class management. Starting from a classification of the various activities, two categories were delineated: one listing the common requests and the other showing the most frequent mistakes which were corrected.

In the following steps of this study, a quantitative methodology will be applied, because data will be collected through a questionnaire handed out to the teaching and administrative staff of the department. The questionnaire will be asking about the usefulness of the language help desk service and the frequency of times in which it was used by each user. In a future

phase of the project, another questionnaire would aim to measure the impact of the service on the participants' self-perception of their language attitudes and abilities, as well as their use of communication strategies in English after using the service.

Furthermore, a questionnaire will be administered to students, who will be asked to give their opinions on the quality of the teaching and the services offered in their degree programs. In this way, it will be possible to triangulate the data and investigate if there are any discrepancies between lecturers and staff self-reported performance and their effects as perceived by students.

The two questionnaires, planned to be administered at different times in the short-term, are:

- The questionnaire to the teaching and administrative staff, which will be delivered before the start of the new academic year in September 2016, to determine whether the help desk service has had a positive impact as regards its usefulness in answering to the academic staff's needs.
- The questionnaire regarding students' experiences in EMI should be administered before the beginning of the fall 2016 semester, or one year after the beginning of the service (ideally at the beginning of November 2016), in a period in which there are no lessons or exams. The timing of this questionnaire is indeed crucial, as the hope is that students will be able to comment generally on their experiences rather than being overly influenced by their feelings about a single lecturer or course. By soliciting responses at a time when courses are not in session, the influence of certain memories should be limited.

A detailed planning of the quantitative data collection of this study has been necessary not only to improve the validity of the analysis, but also to provide a more relevant picture of the current situation at the Department of Management, concerning the quality of teaching. As part of the normal academic evaluation system, students are asked to give feedback on their courses, usually before taking the corresponding exam. Once obtained the data from students' feedback of the preceding years, it was observed that students of this department tend to evaluate courses held in Italian with higher scores than courses held in English.<sup>2</sup> Many hypotheses could be considered to justify these evaluations, and one of the future purposes of this study is to analyse them carefully.

<sup>2</sup> Data were provided by the Evaluation Office of Ca' Foscari University of Venice under privacy conditions.

## 5 Data collection

As described above, data collection was carried out during the activities of the help desk service, in which the teaching and administrative staff of the Department of Management could take an appointment to meet a tutor face-to-face. In the first part of the project, tutors had their office hours for 14 hours a week over a period of two months, between the 1st November and the 23rd December 2015, with the following timetables:

Table 1. Scheme of the help desk office hours

Day	Time	No. of hours a day	No. of weeks	Total hours of service	Total hours of tutoring
Monday	9:30 am – 12:30 pm	3	8	24	10
Tuesday	9:30 am – 1:30 pm	4	7	28	14
Wednesday	2:30 pm – 6:30 pm	4	8	32	13
Friday	9:30 am – 12:30 pm	3	7	21	2

The scheme also reports the number of hours in which tutors were available, and the number of hours in which the service was actually used. The striking difference in the amount of hours between the last two columns on the right of the scheme is due to several factors:

1. The tutors could not be present during week 1 and weeks 5-6 because of other work or personal engagements, therefore the availability of face-to-face service was interrupted, although it was still provided online.
2. Some hours dedicated to translation of documents for the department are not quantified in the table because they were not classified as direct tutoring, even though the translation of documents, for distribution to foreign students and to members of the department, constituted a significant part of the work carried out by the tutors.
3. Other hours, dedicated to online support and to the creation of materials or proofreading of articles, were not included either, as they were not performed on site.

However, since some days and times of the above timetable proved to be unsuitable given the time constraints of some lecturers, the timetable was changed in the second part of the project, which started on the 11th January and ran until the 31st May 2016.

During the initial two months of the project, eight people were making use of the help desk service for tutoring; six of them were part of the teaching staff, and two were part of the administrative staff. Table 2 shows some general data about the participants, whose identities remain anonymous, conforming to ethical norms. In the table, TS and AS refer to Teaching Staff

and Administrative Staff, respectively. The number associated with each user code is simply based on the order in which the user's reservation for the tutoring service was received.

Table 2. General data on the help desk users

User's code	Gender	Age (estimated)	No. of appointments	No. of tutoring hours
TS_001	Female	41-50	5	6
TS_002	Male	51-60	5	5
AS_003	Female	31-40	3	3
TS_004	Female	51-60	3	3.5
TS_005	Male	51-60	11	14.5
TS_006	Female	31-40	4	4
AS_007	Female	61-70	1	1
TS_008	Male	31-40	2	2

In this table, as in the previous one, the hours taken into account are only those in which the tutoring service was performed at the help desk. Thus, Table 2 does not include the hours used for translation services requested by other members of the administrative staff.

Five out of eight participants are female subjects, estimated to be between the ages of 31 and 70, while the three male subjects are estimated to be between the ages of 31 and 60.

An appointment at the help desk would usually last an hour, but in some cases, the user booked one hour and a half, or two hours; this explains why the number of appointments and the number of tutoring hours do not match. Further comments on the kind of participants who used the service, their level of English and their requests will be discussed below.

## 6 Discussion of Findings

From the initial data collected during the language help desk activities, the first element that was observed in the diary entries is the presence of various and heterogeneous language levels. Some of the participants possessed little to no knowledge of English, while others possessed a fair level of competence, corresponding to the B2+ or C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (COE 2001).

Another evident pattern is the diversity of the participants' language needs, which vary depending on their language levels, academic background and role:

- Some of the participants who already possessed a good or high level of English asked for help rehearsing the lessons they would eventu-



ally teach through English. Some of their main goals were improving their pronunciation, and increasing the level of interaction in their classes conducted in the foreign language.

- Participants with lower language proficiency often wanted to prepare materials for their future courses to be held in English, so they sought to improve their writing, listening and speaking skills, to feel more confident in front of their students or with other foreign colleagues.
- Some participants did not teach their subject in English, either because their topic dealt with local and national issues (e.g. Italian law studies) or because they preferred to keep on teaching their discipline in Italian. In these cases, they often sought to hone their general language skills for those occasions in which they have to meet foreign guest speakers, when they go abroad as visiting professors, or present and chair in English at international conferences. To meet these needs, the tutors provided informal language lessons, offering participants grammar and vocabulary exercises, as well as expressions to be used while chairing events.
- Conversation was a common request among the participants at all levels of competence, with many of them citing the difficulty of interacting and presenting in English. The fact that one of the tutors is a native speaker of American English also seemed to be appreciated by participants, as many mentioned having trouble understanding native speakers, and could therefore get used to a native speaker's accent.
- To the most basic English users, only some grammar rules and the basics of English pronunciation were introduced, along with strategies for autonomous practice.

To meet the different language needs of the participants, the activities carried out at the help desk were manifold:

- proofreading of slides and articles
- rehearsing of lessons
- tips on academic writing
- correction of pronunciation and prosody
- pronunciation rules
- vocabulary corrections and suggestions

The tutors kept track of the number of times each activity was requested, and they used this information to create specifically tailored materials to help participants overcome their linguistic hurdles and become more proficient, independent users of English. All of these resources were gathered in an online repository that the participants can access at any time. Even after the conclusion of the help desk service, the materials will still be accessible to help lecturers prepare future courses.

Another aspect that rapidly became the focus of many conversations

with lecturers during the help desk appointments has been their interest in alternative teaching techniques when using English in their lessons. It was originally assumed that they would not respond well to such a pedagogical aspect, as most of them have been teaching for many years and already feel confident in their teaching strategies. However, since the beginning of the project, the tutors' suggestions for using different and more interactive techniques in class have often been welcomed with a certain curiosity and sometimes enthusiasm. 'Providing tips on teaching techniques' was ultimately added to the list of activities given above.

## 7 Conclusions

Even though the results described in this study are still at an early stage, the project at the Department of Management has clearly proven itself an asset, as some professors recommended it to other colleagues, and it was reconfirmed also for the next academic year, in 2016-17. As explained above, the value of the help desk services largely derives from the English language assistance it provides. Lecturers specifically looked for it to develop their oral skills and improve their pronunciation; even when they were not preparing a specific course, they went to the help desk to talk generally about their fields of study, or to increase their language fluency for presentations in more formal contexts. They explicitly asked to be corrected on grammar and pronunciation, to sound more competent in front of their students. Probably with the same purpose, the proofreading of didactic materials, such as exams and PowerPoint presentations, was another commonly requested activity. The need for linguistic assistance is in line with Pulcini and Campagna's findings (2015) that language proficiency is one of the main hurdles to EMI implementation in Italy. As in their study, also the participants from Ca' Foscari University are aware of their linguistic deficiencies and have actively tried to compensate for them through practice and guided support.

The interest in the help desk service is not surprising given the results of the various studies of the Asian context referenced in the literature review, in which professors were frequently upset with university administration for not providing support in the transition to EMI (Byun et al. 2011; Hui & Lei 2014). Since the help desk in the present study represents such an important support, it makes sense that reactions from lecturers have been generally positive.

Still, the relatively small number of lecturers using the service requires some explanation. All professors were informed via email of the help desk's existence before its implementation, as well as several times during the semester. It is indeed possible that the fixed hours of the tutoring service were not conducive to the lecturers' schedules, given their various

teaching, research, and institutional obligations. Friday in particular was frequently cited as an inconvenient day, despite the fact that the schedule was approved by the department.

Another possible explanation for low participation may relate to the fact that many professors were not teaching in English every semester. As such, they may have felt that they had nothing to discuss during help desk hours, preferring to wait until their need for English assistance became more urgent.

The needs of the teaching staff expressed in the tutoring sessions thus far were in line with past research (Byun et al. 2011; Hui & Lei 2014; Airey, 2011). In the studies related to China and South Korea, teachers cited major communicative problems, related to limited English skills. Airey's study of Sweden (2011) presented smaller linguistic problems, such as lecturers not being able to improvise examples and joke with the students. Given that, the participants in this study included professors at all levels of language proficiency, it is perhaps normal that most of the activities have focused on language development and correction.

Regarding the pedagogical support, the tutors initially thought it was better to wait until they were asked for assistance with teaching strategies, to avoid the kind of tensions discussed by Guarda and Helm (2016), which arose in the early part of their course when some participants took personal offense to lessons on didactics. A possible explanation for this may be connected to Jensen and Thøgersen's findings (2011), showing that young professors were generally more willing to teach in English than their more experienced peers. If Guarda and Helm (2016) were working with experienced lecturers, these participants may have felt that their long-standing teaching strategies were being criticized. Newer university members, however, may be more open to learning to teach in English because they are still learning how to teach in general. While keeping these points in mind, the interactions with professors so far indicate at least some initial interest in EMI teaching strategies that will hopefully develop as the project continues.

Lastly, some other uses for the help desk service do not have a basis in the existing literature but still constitute an important part of its activities. One such example is the proofreading of academic articles before publication. As the Department of Management is trying to improve its position in international rankings, publishing quality articles in English is essential; such a finding indicates another considerable aspect of professors working in English, despite not having a direct connection with pedagogy.

Another important activity has been the translation of department communications and announcements, including calls for applications, descriptions of research projects, and applications for accreditation. The translation requests have largely come from the administrative staff and were frequently for documents aimed at increasing foreign student population.

As these two activities do not relate to the quality of teaching in the department, future research may seek to analyse the various linguistic challenges that come with internationalisation and are experienced outside of the classroom.

As mentioned, moving forward, this project will expand its data collection through the use of questionnaires to both lecturers and students in order to identify more clearly lecturers' language and didactic issues, and ultimately to offer suitable solutions and strategies to overcome them.

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# **The Interpretation of Indefinites with Adnominal Adjectives in the Sicilian Dialects**

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**Abstract** Indefinite nominals can typically be modified by pre- or postnominal adjectives in Romance languages. With the exception of a small group of adjectives concerning physical or moral characteristics whose meaning changes according to their pre- or postnominal use, the position of an attributive adjective does not alter its meaning. However, prenominal adjectives in a Spanish indefinite trigger its specific interpretation, thus preventing its variable reading; the same phenomenon obtains also in Catalan. The aim of this paper is to discuss specific cases in some Sicilian dialects – mainly in the dialect of Delia (province of Caltanissetta) – in order to provide further evidence of the fact that prenominal evaluative adjectives force the specific interpretation of indefinites in Romance. Since Sicilian dialects do not typically display prenominal adjectives, this paper will therefore draw on elatives to check whether Sicilian shows a parallel restriction in the postnominal position.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Interpretation of Indefinites with Adnominal Adjectives. – 3 Sicilian Elatives. – 3.1 A Problem of Ambiguity. – 4 Testing the Contexts of Non-specificity. – 4.1 Indefinites with Quantificational Adverbials. – 4.2 The Case of 'there-be' Sentences Under Deontic Modals. – 4.3 Indefinites in Habitual Sentences with Explicit Adverbials. – 4.4 The Non-specific Interpretation of Directive Contexts. – 4.5 Indefinites Within Negative Sentences. – 4.6 Indicative vs Subjunctive Relative Clauses. – 4.7 Indefinites within Rhetorical Questions. – 4.8 The Case of 'donkey sentences'. – 4.9 Floating Quantifiers. – 4.10 Indefinite Quantifiers. – 4.11 'Cleft-conditional' sentences. – 4.12 Prepositional Accusative. – 4.13 The Interpretation of 'aspetta ca' Sentences with Indefinite Nominals. – 5 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Sicilian dialects. Qualificative adjectives. Non-specific interpretation. Elatives.

## **1 Introduction**

One typical feature of Romance languages is the possibility for an adnominal adjective to appear in two different positions:<sup>1</sup> either before the N head or after it, the latter being the most occurring, unmarked position.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Guglielmo Cinque and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. All errors remain mine.

What types of adjective can occur in both pre- and postnominal position is subject to variation within Romance languages, especially within older stages of them or within their dialects. In Walloon, for example, the NP can only cross nationality APs, while it could fail



Let us see some examples of the two positions of adjectives with indefinite nominals in Italian, French, Spanish and Catalan:

- (1) a. *Una persona **importante**.* (Ita.)  
 a person important  
 a'. *Un'**importante** persona.*  
 an important person  
 b. *Une fleur **horrible**.* (Fra.)  
 a flower horrible  
 b'. *Une **horrible** fleur.*  
 a horrible flower  
 c. *Un vestido **elegante**.* (Spa.)  
 a dress elegant  
 c'. *Un **elegante** vestido.*  
 an elegant dress  
 d. *Un dibuix **divertit**.* (Cat.)  
 a drawing amusing  
 d'. *Un **divertit** dibuix.*  
 an amusing drawing

Generally, the different position of the adjective affects its interpretation, in fact postnominal adjectives license contrastive readings whereas prenominal adjectives license non-contrastive readings. However, the position of the adjective does not generally alter its semantics: the adjective *importante* 'important' in (1a-a'), for example, can be paraphrased as 'famous' or 'influential' in both cases. Nevertheless, there is a restricted class of adjectives concerning physical or moral characteristics whose meaning changes according to their pre- or postnominal use (French examples in (2c-d') are from Bouchard 2002):

- (2) a. *Un amico **vecchio**.* (Ita.)  
 'an aged friend'  
 a'. *Un **vecchio** amico.*  
 'a long standing friend'.  
 b. *Un uomo **povero**.*  
 'a poor man'  
 b'. *Un **pover**'uomo.*  
 'a pitiable man'

to cross nationality APs in Old Italian (cf. Cinque 2010). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.



- c. *Un femme **seule**.* (Fra.)  
 'a woman who is alone'
- c'. *Un **seule** femme.*  
 'only one woman'
- d. *Une victoire **certaine**.*  
 'a sure victory'
- d'. *Un **certaine** victoire.*  
 'a certain victory'

Among Romance languages, Sicilian dialects display just one available position for adnominal adjectives, that is after the N head, the only exception being the possible prenominal position of that restricted class of adjectives shown in (2). This situation is quite widespread in the dialects of central-southern Italy, which make limited use of the prenominal position (cf. a.o. Rohlfs 1969, 330; Ledgeway 2007; Andriani 2015). Examples in (3-4) are from the dialect spoken in Delia (province of Caltanissetta), while the examples in (5) are from Barese (from Andriani 2015):

- (3) a. *Nna pirsuna **'importanti**.* (Del.)  
 a person important
- a'. *\*Nn'**importanti** pirsuna.*  
 an important person
- b. *Nna casa **ranni**.*  
 a house big
- b'. *\*Nna **ranni** casa.*  
 a big house
- (4) a. *Un carusu **bjiddru**.*  
 a boy handsome
- a'. *Un **bjiddru** carusu.*  
 a handsome boy
- b. *Nna vicina **brava**.*  
 a neighbour good
- b'. *Nna **brava** vicina.*  
 a good neighbour
- (5) a. *\***Lèngə**/\***rùssə**/\***'taliànə**/\***amməquàtə** pəmədòrə.* (Bar.)  
 long red Italian rotten tomato
- b. *Pəmədòrə **grèssə rùssə'taliànə amməquàtə.***  
 tomato big red Italian rotten

It is important to point out that, although belonging to the same class of adjectives shown in (2), not all Sicilian prenominal adjectives seem to display

a difference in meaning with respect to their postnominal counterpart.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 The Interpretation of Indefinites with Adnominal Adjectives

It is a well-known fact that pre- and postnominal adjectives differ in interpretation with respect to the following semantic distinctions: stage-level or individual-level reading, restrictive or non-restrictive reading, implicit relative clause or modal reading, intersective or non-intersective reading, comparative or absolute reading of superlatives, specificity or non-specificity inducing reading, evaluative or epistemic reading of adjectives meaning 'unknown', NP dependent or discourse anaphoric reading of adjectives meaning 'different' (cf. Cinque 2010 for a complete analysis of these interpretations in Romance and Germanic languages). Among these pairs of semantic distinctions, I will take into consideration the specific vs non-specific reading and, following Bosque (1993) and Picallo (1994), I will apply it to indefinite nominals in Sicilian dialects.

When the adjective is in its unmarked postnominal position, it is ambiguous between the specific and the non-specific reading. On the other hand, when the adjective is prenominal, it forces the specific reading of the indefinite DP in *realis* context.<sup>3</sup>

The following examples are from Cinque (2010):

- (6) a. *Domani, alla festa so che interverrà* (Ita.)  
 tomorrow at-the party know.1sg that attend.FUT.3sg  
*un attore famoso.*  
 an actor famous
- b. 'Tomorrow, I know that a certain famous actor will come to the party'
- c. 'Tomorrow, I know that some famous actor or other will come to the party'

2 The most common case is that of *vjicchju/vicchju/vecchju* 'old', which gets the meaning of 'long standing' in prenominal position. Another prenominal adjective, *malu* 'evil', 'bad', does not have a postnominal counterpart. With regard to 'old', an anonymous reviewer questions the grammaticality of that adjective in prenominal position in the Sicilian dialects. I am aware of the fact that this position could sound a bit 'too Italian' and, perhaps, it is the result of the pressure of Standard Italian on the dialects of Sicily. Nevertheless, many speakers use 'old' (meaning 'long standing') in prenominal position. The example in (i) is from the dialect spoken in Milazzo (Messina):

(i) *Ajeri incuntraì a un vecchju amicu.* (Mil.)  
 yesterday meet.PAST.1sg to an old friend  
 'I met an old friend yesterday'

3 Cf. Cinque 2010 (ch. 2, fn. 10) to see the right interpretation of a prenominal adjective with an indefinite DP in Romance in a modal (*irrealis*) context.

- (7) a. *Domani, alla festa so che intervorrà*  
tomorrow at-the party know.1sg that attend.FUT.3sg  
*un famoso attore.*  
a famous actor
- b. 'Tomorrow, I know that a certain famous actor will come to the party'
- c. #'Tomorrow, I know that some famous actor or other will come to the party'

Whereas the canonical position of *famoso* ('famous') in (6) makes the interpretation of the DP ambiguous, (7c) shows an impossible interpretation, since the prenominal position of the adjective forces the specific reading of the DP.

In order to provide evidence that prenominal adjectives in the Sicilian dialects behave in the same way as Spanish and Catalan ones in forcing the specific reading of the DP, it is not possible to rely exclusively on normal degree prenominal adjectives, for the reasons pointed out in section 1. Therefore, I will draw on a particular type of adjectives, called elatives, which are maximum degree adjectives. The following section will offer an overview of the subgroups of elative adjectives that can be found in Sicilian dialects, taking into consideration the micro-variation this wide area is subject to.

### 3 Sicilian Elatives

Elative adjectives in the Sicilian dialects are always postnominal and fall under four different types:

- (i) **lexical** elatives, like *magnificu* 'wonderful', *stupendu/stupennu* 'amazing', or *maravighiusu* 'marvelous', are adjectives already displaying the maximum degree in their lexical entry.<sup>4</sup>
- (ii) **syntactic** elatives are the result of the combination of some specific adverbs which combine with the adjective to display its maximum degree. These adverbs can precede their adjective, as is the case of *troppu* 'very, too' or *veru/veramenti* 'really' or follow them, as with *assà/assai* 'a lot' or *piddaveru* 'for real'. The adjective *bjiddru/biddru/beddru* 'nice' and its feminine counterpart can also be used to create a syntactic elative, e.g.: *nna pirsuna beddra 'mportanti* 'a very important person';

4 The lexical elatives in (i) are taken from Traina (1868). An anonymous reviewer suggests that adjectives like *magnificu* 'wonderful' or *maravighiusu* 'marvelous' should be considered as gradable, since they can be used in the comparative and superlative and allow modification by intensifiers. I haven't found evidence of comparative use of those adjectives. Nevertheless, the claim is true in the sense that adjectives like *magnificu* can

- (iii) **morphological** elatives combine an adjective with the morpheme *-issimu/a*. Although cases are found of early use of morphological elatives in Sicilian (the most common example being probably *santìssimu/a* 'very holy'), they are still the last option for Sicilian speakers and can be considered the result of the constant contact with Italian.<sup>5</sup> An alternative elative form is found in the dialects of the province of Catania, featuring the morpheme *-uni/a* originally used for augmentative purposes, e.g.: *nna pirsuna'mportantuna* 'a very important person';
- (iv) **reduplicative** elatives are a typical feature of Italian and Italian dialects. They consist of the reduplication of an adjective, most typically describing physical characteristics. This type of elatives cannot be modified by adverbs, as is the case of (ii).

Lexical elatives are not usually preceded or followed by the adverbs in (ii), neither are they modified by the elative morpheme *-issimu/a*. Nevertheless, while in Italian such combinations are to be considered completely unacceptable, in Sicilian dialects cases like *stupinnissimu* (lit. 'very amazing') or *troppu magnificu* (lit. 'very wonderful') are not impossible.

### 3.1 A Problem of Ambiguity

Although we have seen in the previous section that some Sicilian dialects do display the morphological elative that parallels the Italian *-issimo/a*, the other non-lexical ways to form elatives are always ambiguous between a higher degree adjective and the maximum degree adjective. This means that, when native speakers are asked to tell whether a form is to be considered as an elative or just as a superlative, they need to refer to the whole sentence for an accurate answer. Let us take a look at the following examples:

be intensified by adding the suffix *-uni/a* (*magnificuni* 'very wonderful') in some dialects of eastern Sicily (provinces of Catania and Ragusa).

5 Some evidence of the fact that morphological elatives in *-issimu/a* are more available to speakers than before, as a result of the contact with Regional and Standard Italian, is the presence of elatives such as *bellissima*, as in:

- (i) *qj c'è nna bellissima jurnata.* (Del.)  
 today there-be.3sg a beautiful day  
 'Today it's a beautiful day'

Not only is the elative adjective in prenominal position (which is rather exceptional), but its morphology clearly indicates an Italian origin, since the elative of *beddra* 'nice' should be *\*biddrissima*.

- (8) a. *Nna pirsuna 'mpportantissima.* (Del.)  
 a person very important
- b. *Nna pirsuna troppu 'mportanti.*  
 a person too important
- c. *Nna pirsuna 'mportanti assà.*  
 a person important a lot  
 'A very important person'
- d. *Nna pirsuna veramenti 'mportanti.*  
 a person really important  
 'A really important person'
- e. *Nna pirsuna troppu 'mportanti assà.*  
 a person too important a lot  
 'An extremely important person'
- (9) *Nna strata stritta stritta.*  
 a street narrow narrow  
 'A very narrow street'

The morphological relative in (8a) is never ambiguous and speakers recognize it as a maximum degree adjective. On the other hand, the cases in (8b) and (8c), without the right context, can be perceived as simple superlatives. When speakers need to be unambiguous, they may turn to the syntactic option in (8d), with the adverb *veramenti* (really) – which is not completely free of ambiguities – or (8e), with a preceding and a following adverb (something which is not allowed in Italian). Reduplicative elatives, like the one in (9), do not generally allow for a simple superlative reading. The ambiguity some relative forms are subject to is relevant to account for some grammaticality judgements we will discuss in the next section with reference to non-specificity contexts.

#### 4 Testing the Contexts of Non-specificity

Following Diesing (1992), when the adjective precedes the N head, the nominal forms an operator-variable structure where the quantifier takes wide scope. So, the interpretation of these expressions is grammatically significant and does not depend on a theory of use (cf. Picallo 1994): it is a syntactic procedure, that is word order of the phrase, that triggers the particular reading for indefinites in some Romance languages. Prenominal qualificative adjectives and elatives, then, are marks of quantification that yield ungrammatical results in contexts where quantification is not possible. In this section I will, therefore, test Sicilian elatives in contexts which do not allow for the specific reading.

## 4.1 Indefinites with Quantificational Adverbials

Indefinite nominals get the non-specific reading when they are interpreted as variables under the scope of generic operators and quantificational adverbials (cf. Heim 1982). For Romance indefinite nominals with adnominal adjectives to be accepted in this reading, the adjectives must be in their canonical, i.e. postnominal, position. Prenominal adjectives and relatives behave alike in excluding indefinite DPs from the non-selective reading. Examples in (10) with the adverb *sempri* 'always' are adapted from Bosque (2001):

- (10) a. *A li setti c'era sempri* (Del.)  
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always  
*nna trasmissioni 'nteressanti.*  
 a program interesting  
 'There was always an interesting show at seven o'clock'
- b. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*  
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program  
*troppu 'nteressanti.*  
 too interesting  
 'There was always a very interesting show at seven o'clock'
- c. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*  
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program  
*veramenti 'nteressanti*  
 really interesting  
 'There was always a very interesting show at seven o'clock'
- d. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*  
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program  
*troppu 'nteressanti assà.*  
 too interesting a lot  
 'There was always an extremely interesting show at seven o'clock'

While (10a) is ambiguous between the interpretation in which a different TV show was showed every day and the one in which there was always the same TV show every day, and the interpretation of (10b) could still be, to some extent, ambiguous (although most speakers would prefer the specific reading), the only possible interpretation of (10c-d) is the specific one. The next section will test 'there-be' sentences in another context, namely under deontic modals.

## 4.2 The Case of 'there-be' Sentences Under Deontic Modals

According to Milsark (1974), indefinite nominals in English 'there-be' sentences under deontic modals or verbs of propositional attitude are not ambiguous, because the indefinite cannot take scope. The non-specific

reading is then the only possible one. Picallo (1994) provides examples in Catalan to show that the same phenomenon also holds in Romance languages. If we consider indefinite nominals modified by evaluative qualificative adjectives, grammaticality judgements of the sentences with *haver-hi* 'there-be' under modals or verbs of propositional attitude depend on the position of the adjective in the DP: the degree of acceptability of the construction with the prenominal adjective, Picallo argues, is very low, because it makes the specific interpretation obligatory. According to Diesing (1992), the indefinite DP is a variable in 'there-be' sentences. As such, the indefinite DP does not take scope at the interpretive component. Following Diesing's (1992) proposal that indefinites cannot uniformly be treated as quantifiers or as variables, Picallo (1994) makes the prediction that specific indefinites should not be able to appear in constructions where they are interpreted as bound to an operator, since they form operator-variable structures. On the other hand, non-specific indefinites, which are variables and do not have quantificational force, should be allowed in such constructions.

The Catalan sentences in (11), which are from Picallo (1994), are followed from examples in Sicilian:

- (11) a. *En Joan creia que hi havia* (Cat.)  
 the Joan believe.PAST.3sg that there have.PAST.3sg  
*un polític **corrupte** en el Senat.*  
 a politician corrupt at the Senate  
 'J. believed that there was a corrupt politician at the Senate'
- b. (\*?)*En Joan creia que hi havia*  
 the Joan believe.PAST.3sg that there have.PAST.3sg  
*un **corrupte** polític en el Senat.*  
 a corrupt politician at the Senate  
 'J. believed that there was a corrupt politician at the Senate'
- (12) a. *C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni 'ntelligenti* (Del.)  
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution smart  
*a stu problema.*  
 to this problem  
 'There has to be a really smart solution to this problem'
- b. *?C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni veramenti 'ntelligenti*  
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution really smart  
*a stu problema.*  
 to this problem  
 'There has to be a very smart solution to this problem'
- c. *\*C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni troppu 'ntelligenti*  
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution too smart  
*a stu problema.*  
 to this problem  
 'There has to be a very smart solution to this problem'

Although a little odd, the sentence in (12b) can be acceptable, if the adjective is not considered as a syntactic relative, so that the speaker him/herself could not have in mind a particular solution to the problem. On the contrary, the option in (12c) is not acceptable at all.

#### 4.3 Indefinites in Habitual Sentences with Explicit Adverbials

Both explicit adverbials, such as *sempri* 'always' and *solitamente* 'usually', and non-explicit operators in generic and habitual sentences containing indefinites bind the same type of individual variables (cf. Bosque 2001). The presence of an relative (as well as a prenominal adjective in those Romance languages allowing it), thus, fails to provide the suitable reading in the latter context too. The examples in (13) are from the dialect spoken in Enna:

- (13) a. *Vint'anni annarriri, un scarparu listu* (Enn.)  
 twenty years ago a shoemaker quick  
*si faciva i grana.*  
 SI make.IMPERF.3sg the money  
 'Twenty years ago, a quick shoemaker could earn a lot of money'
- b. \**Vint'anni annarriri, un scarparu listu assà*  
 twenty years ago a shoemaker quick a lot  
*si faciva i grana.*  
 SI make.IMPERF.3sg the money  
 'Twenty years ago, a very quick shoemaker could earn ù a lot of money'

In (13b) *un scarparu listu assà* 'a very quick shoemaker' cannot but be interpreted as an individual, a specific shoemaker the speaker has in mind, and thus fails to provide the needed variable to be bound by the generic quantifier.

#### 4.4 The Non-specific Interpretation of Directive Contexts

Let us now take into account another well-known fact, that is the non-specificity of indefinite nominals in directive contexts, such as imperatives, with deontic modals, and other intensional contexts (cf. Bosque 2001). Consider the following pair:

- (14) a. *Dunami un martjiddru gruissu.* (Del.)  
 give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer big  
 'Hand me a big hammer'



- b. *Dunami* *un martjiddru* ***bjiddru*** *gruissu*.  
 give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer nice big  
 'Hand me a very big hammer'
- c. *?Dunami* *un martjiddru* ***gruissu assà***.  
 give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer big a lot  
 'Hand me a very big hammer'

In (14c) the specific reading of the indefinite *un martjiddru* 'a hammer' is forced by the presence of the adnominal syntactic relative *gruissu assà* 'very big'. Since specificity cannot have wider scope than the imperative projection, the resulting sentence is odd. The syntactic combination in (14b), on the other hand, seems to be a legitimate option to ask the reader for a big hammer, without having in mind a specific one, present in the place. The examples in (14a) and (14c) can be compared with some Spanish sentences provided by Bosque (2001), showing the same results:

- (15) a. *Escribe* *una novela* ***interesante***. (Sp.)  
 write.IMPER.2sg a novel interesting  
*Te harás famoso.*  
 youCL make.FUT.3sg famous  
 'Write an interesting novel. You'll be famous'
- b. *\*Escribe* *una* ***interesante*** *novela*.  
 write.IMPER.2sg an interesting novel  
*Te harás famoso.*  
 youCL make. FUT.3sg famous  
 'Write an interesting novel. You'll be famous'
- c. *??Escribe* *una novela* ***interesantísima***.  
 write.IMPER.2sg a novel very interesting  
*Te harás famoso.*  
 youCL make.FUT.3sg famous  
 'Write an extremely interesting novel. You'll be famous'

The pronominal adjective in (15b) makes the sentence unacceptable, because it forces the specific reading in a context that does not allow it. The specific reading provided by the use of the morphological relative in (15c) cannot have wider scope than the imperative projection either.

#### 4.5 Indefinites Within Negative Sentences

Let us now consider the effect of negation on indefinite nominals with adjectives. As already noted by Bosque (2001) for Spanish, relatives and attributive pronominal adjectives cannot be interpreted under the scope of negation. The adjective *famosa* 'famous' in (16) yields different results in terms of grammaticality, according to its being postnominal (cf. (16a)),

prenominal (cf. (16b)) or in its relative form (cf. (16c)). Examples in (16) are adapted from Bosque (2001):

- (16) a. *No he leído una novela famosa* (Spa.)  
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a novel famous  
*desde hace años.*  
 since do.3sg years  
 'I have not read a famous story in years'
- b. \**No he leído una famosa novela*  
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a famous novel  
*desde hace años.*  
 since do.3sg years  
 'I have not read a famous story in years'
- c. *No he leído una novela famosísima*  
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a novel very famous  
 (\**desde hace años.*)  
 since do.3sg years  
 'I have not read a very famous story in years'

The same holds true for Sicilian. Imagine that the sentences in (17) are uttered by an unlucky journalist in search of important people to interview ('*mportanti* 'important' is one of the adjectives that can also be found in the morphological relative among most speakers):

- (17) a. *Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna* (Del.)  
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person  
 '**mportanti.**  
 important  
 'I have not interviewed an important person for two years'
- b. \**Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna*  
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person  
 '**troppu mportanti.**  
 too important  
 'I have not interviewed a very important person for two years'
- c. \**Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna*  
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person  
 '**mportantissima.**  
 very important  
 'I have not interviewed a very important person for two years'

The indefinite nominal *nna pirsuna* 'a person' in the negative context must be non-specific, that is why (17b) and (17c), which clearly indicate that the journalist has a specific person to interview in his/her mind, are not possible.

Bosque (2001) adds that there is the possibility for indefinite nominals to escape the scope of negation and allow the specific reading. But the presence of a negative polarity item bound by negation forces the non-specific reading, so that it is not compatible with any grammatical marker forcing the specific reading, such as a prenominal adjective or an elative.

- (18) a. *Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu* (Del.)  
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan  
*nni unu di sti du mircatara.*  
 in one of these two marketers  
 'I have not bought a saucepan from any of these two marketers.'
- b. \**Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu*  
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan  
***troppu caru*** *nni unu di sti du mircatara.*  
 too expensive in one of these two marketers  
 'I have not bought a very expensive saucepan from any of these two marketers.'
- c. \**Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu*  
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan  
***caru assà*** *nni unu di sti du mircatara.*  
 expensive a lot in one of these two marketers  
 'I have not bought a very expensive saucepan from any of these two marketers.'

In (18b) and (18c) it is the elative marker that conflicts with the non-specificity that the noun *taganu* 'saucepan' must have in the negative context.

#### 4.6 Indicative vs Subjunctive Relative Clauses

Indefinite nominals usually escape the scope of intensional predicates and become specific (cf. Bosque 2001). If the relative clause contains a verb inflected in the subjunctive mood, indefinites have to be bound by an intensional operator. Non-specificity can thus be tested also through subjunctive relative clauses (cf. Rivero 1977). The use of the elative in (19b) forces the specific reading of *нна carusa* 'a female assistant', so that the hearer understands that the speaker is referring to a very smart assistant already known. On the other hand, the sentence in (19c) is ungrammatical because the non-specificity of the subjunctive relative clause collides with the specificity forced by the elative *troppu sperta* 'very smart':

- (19) a. *Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **sperta** ca parla* (Del.)  
 have.1sg need of a girl smart who speak.3sg  
*'nglisi e francisi.*  
 English and French  
 'I'm looking for a smart assistant who can speak English and French'
- b. *Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **troppu sperta** ca parla*  
 have.1sg need of a girl very smart who speak.3sg  
*'nglisi e francisi.*  
 English and French  
 'I'm looking for a very smart assistant who can speak English and French'
- c. *??Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **troppu sperta** ca*  
 have.1sg need of a girl very smart who  
*parlassi 'nglisi e francisi.*  
 speak.SUB.3sg English and French  
 'I'm looking for a very smart assistant who could speak English and French'

#### 4.7 Indefinites Within Rhetorical Questions

According to Progovac (1992, 1993), rhetorical questions license the non-specific reading of indefinites. Since prenominal adjectives and relatives force a wide scope reading, either the question is not to be interpreted as rhetorical or the sentence is not grammatical at all.

Consider the following examples from Bosque (2001):

- (20) a. *¿Cuando me has regalado tú una novela* (Spa.)  
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you a novel  
***interesante** para leer por la noche?*  
 interesting to read.INF for the night  
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting novel to read in the evening?'
- b. *#¿Cuando me has regalado tú una **interesante***  
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you an interesting  
*novela para leer por la noche?*  
 novel to read.INF for the night  
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting novel to read in the evening?'
- c. *#¿Cuando me has regalado tú una novela*  
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you a novel  
***interesantísima** para leer por la noche?*  
 very interesting to read.INF for the night  
 'When on earth have you bought me an extremely interesting novel to read in the evening?'

The # mark indicates that the prenominal adjective in (20b) and the relative in (20c), which force the specific reading of the indefinite, are not rejected only when the question is not interpreted as rhetorical anymore. This is not the case in Sicilian, where rhetorical questions of this type are expressed through the element *quannu ma'/mai* 'when on earth', whereas normal questions only feature *quannu* 'when'. Nevertheless, the specific reading constraints hold for both Spanish and Sicilian:

- (21) a. *Quannu ma' m' ha arrialatu un libbru* (Del.)  
 when ever to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART a book  
 '**nteressanti** ppi leggiri la sira?  
 interesting to read.INF the night  
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting book  
 to read in the evening?'
- b. \**Quannu ma' m' ha arrialatu un libbru*  
 when ever to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART a book  
 '**nteressanti assà** ppi leggiri la sira?  
 interesting a lot to read.INF the night  
 'When on earth have you bought me an extremely interesting book  
 to read in the evening?'

#### 4.8 The Case of 'donkey sentences'

The 'Donkey sentences' can be used as tests for non-specificity (cf. Heim 1990, Picallo 1994, Bosque 2001). Consider the following sentences:

- (22) a. *Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu forti, cci duna* (Del.)  
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey strong to-itCL give.3sg  
*a mangiari.*  
 to eat.INF  
 'Every farmer who owns a strong donkey, feeds it'
- b. ?*Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu troppu forti, cci*  
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey too strong to-itCL  
*duna a mangiari*  
 give.3sg to eat.INF  
 'Every farmer who owns a very strong donkey, feeds it'
- c. ??*Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu forti forti, cci*  
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey strong strong to-itCL  
*duna a mangiari*  
 give.3sg to eat.INF  
 'Every farmer who owns a very strong donkey, feeds it'

In (22a) the indefinite nominal is bound to the universal quantifier and the clitic pronoun *cci* 'to it' is interpreted as a logical variable as well. This

means that there is a strong donkey for each farmer. In (22b) the ambiguity between the non-relative and the relative use of the phrase *troppu forti* 'very strong' allows the free variable reading only in case of the non-relative use. Nevertheless, the sentence sounds odd to some speakers. Finally, in (22c) the use of the reduplicative relative *forti forti* 'very strong', although still allowing for some non-relative reading (hence the ?? mark), makes the sentence extremely odd because relatives (and prenominal adjectives too) have to be specific and, therefore, are rejected in these constructions.

#### 4.9 Floating Quantifiers

This is one point of divergence between the behaviour of indefinite nominals in Catalan and in Sicilian dialects. Drawing on Sánchez's (1994) proposal on floating quantification,<sup>6</sup> Picallo (1994) shows the behaviour of indefinite nominals with floating quantifiers like *cada un* 'each one' appearing in intermediate position in Catalan.<sup>7</sup> According to Picallo, specific indefinites (that is the ones with prenominal adjectives or with relatives) cannot be related to such floating quantifiers, whereas non-specific indefinites can. Let us see the following examples in Catalan (from Picallo 1994):

- (23) a. *Els meus germans van arribar [cada un] (Cat.)*  
 the my brothers go.3pl arrive.INF each one  
*en una camioneta impressionant.*  
 in a van impressive  
 'My brothers each arrived in an impressive van'
- b. ??*Els meus germans van arribar [cada un]*  
 the my brothers go.3pl arrive.INF each one  
*en una impressionant camioneta.*  
 in an impressive van  
 'My brothers each arrived in an impressive van'

The ?? mark on (23b) shows that the sentence is highly unacceptable, because the prenominal position of *impressionant* 'impressive' forces the

6 According to Sánchez (1994), floating quantifiers behave like the English *each other* (previously analysed in Heim, Lasnik & May 1991) in that they are distributed operators relating two arguments, that is the two terms of the distribution. The first argument is the antecedent of the floating quantifier, while the other argument is interpreted as a variable bound by this antecedent. The floating quantifier mediates between the two terms of the distribution.

7 Catalan floating quantifiers can also appear in sentence final position but, according to the author, this does not alter the interpretive effects provided by the examples reported in (23).

specific reading of *una camioneta* 'a van'. This latter element, then, cannot be interpreted as a bound variable and cannot be assigned the different referential values the distributive relation implied by the floating quantifier requires. On the other hand, the examples in Deliano in (24b, c), with an elative adjective functioning as the counterpart of the prenominal adjective in the Catalan indefinite nominal, are both acceptable, although no speaker would think the brothers got the same prestigious job. The floating quantifier *ognunu* 'each one' does not allow the variable reading of the indefinite nominal regardless of the position (and the degree) of the adnominal adjective. All the cases in (24), marked with #, are grammatical either without the floating quantifier<sup>8</sup> or with the non-specific reading only:

- (24) a. #*A li ma frati cci capità* (Del.)  
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg  
 [*a ognunu*] *un travagliu 'mportanti.*  
 to each one a job important  
 'My brothers each happened to get a prestigious job'
- b. #*A li ma frati cci capità* [*a ognunu*]  
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg to each one  
*un travagliu 'mportanti assà.*  
 a job important a lot  
 'My brothers each happened to get a very prestigious job'
- c. #*A li ma frati cci capità* [*a ognunu*]  
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg to each one  
*un travagliu troppu 'mportanti.*  
 a job very important  
 'My brothers each happened to get a very prestigious job'

#### 4.10 Indefinite Quantifiers

The following are some examples featuring the Sicilian indefinite quantifier *quarsiasi* 'any' which parallels the Spanish *cualquiera* 'any' and *ningún* 'no' or 'not any' in forcing the non-specific interpretation of the indefinite nominals (cf. Bosque 2001). For this reason, these indefinite quantifiers are not compatible with prenominal adjectives and elatives in Spanish, and with elatives in Sicilian (examples (25) and (26) are from Bosque 2001):

- (25) a. ?*Cualquier famosa novela.* (Spa.)  
 any famous novel  
 'Just any famous novel'

8 In this first case the adjectives cannot be interpreted as elatives for the reasons we have seen in the previous sections.

- b. ?*Ningún interesante descubrimiento.*  
not any interesting discovery  
'Any interesting discovery'
- (26) a. ?*Cualquier libro maravilloso.*  
any book wonderful  
'Just any wonderful book'
- b. ?*Ningún descubrimiento interesantísimo.*  
not any discovery interesting  
'Any extremely interesting discovery'
- (27) a. *Quarsiasi pirsuna 'mportanti.* (Del.)  
any person important  
'Any important person'
- b. ?*Quarsiasi pirsuna 'mportantissima.*  
any person very important  
'Any extremely important person'

#### 4.11 'Cleft-conditional' Sentences

Gutiérrez (1994) provides us with some interesting Spanish cleft conditional sentences that Bosque (2001) includes among his tests for non-specificity. These syntactic constructions feature a copulative clause whose predicate can be identified as the content of the pure variable. This type of variable can either be an indefinite pronoun, such as *algo* 'something' or *alguien* 'somebody' or a whole indefinite nominal (as in (28a)). As expected, Bosque argues, postnominal adjectives are allowed in these cleft conditionals because they are interpreted as the variable under the scope of the conditional operator *si* 'if'. Prenominal adjectives and elatives, on the other hand, are not allowed, since this construction necessarily requires a variable interpretation of the indefinite nominal (cf. (28b, c)):

- (28) a. *Si Juan ha conocido a una persona* (Spa.)  
if Juan have.3sg meet.PASTPART to a person  
**interesante** *en su vida, ha sido a María.*  
interesting in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART to María  
'If J. has ever met anyone interesting in his life, it is M.'
- b. \**Si Juan ha conocido a una interesante persona*  
if Juan have.3sg meet.PASTPART to an interesting person  
*en su vida, ha sido a María.*  
in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART to María  
'If J. has ever met anyone interesting in his life, it is M.'



- (29) \**Si Juan ha leído alguna novela*  
 if Juan have.3sg read.PASTPART any novel  
 {*larga / ??larguísima*} *en su vida, ha sido el Quijote.*  
 long quite long in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART the Quijote  
 'If J. has ever read a {long / quite long} novel, it has been el Quijote'

This is one of the cases in which the ambiguity between the superlative and the relative degree of most Sicilian adjectival constructions (described in § 3.1) does not allow us to provide examples with relatives that are clearly unacceptable (as was the case of (29) in Spanish). Thus, the # mark in (30c) shows that the sentence can be acceptable if the phrase *troppu beddra* 'very beautiful' is not interpreted as an relative. However, the pre-nominal position of *beddra* in (30b) yield as an ungrammatical result as the one provided by Bosque (2001) (cf. (28b)):

- (30) a. *Si c' è nna carusa beddra nni ssu paisjiddru.* (Del.)  
 if thereCL be.3sg a girl beautiful in that village  
*jè Maria.*  
 be.3sg Maria  
 'If there is a beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'
- b. \**Si c' è nna beddra carusa nni ssu paisjiddru.*  
 if thereCL be.3sg a beautiful girl in that village  
*jè Maria.*  
 be.3sg Maria  
 'If there is a beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'
- c. #*Si c' è nna carusa troppu beddra nni ssu*  
 if thereCL be.3sg a girl too beautiful in that  
*paisjiddru. jè Maria.*  
 village be.3sg Maria  
 'If there is a very beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'

#### 4.12 Prepositional Accusative

Some Romance languages share a typical accusative marking construed with the prepositions *a* 'to' in Spanish and Sicilian dialects (cf. Guardiano 2010), or *pe* 'on' in Romanian. In the former case, also known as 'personal a', the noun must have the [+specific] feature (cf. (31a)) but not necessarily the [+human] one (cf. (31b)). Thus, (31c) is ungrammatical with 'personal a' because the noun is not specific. The examples in (31) are from the dialects spoken in Catania:

- (31) a. *Visti a Gianni.* (Ctn.)  
 see.PAST.1sg to Gianni  
 'I saw G.'

- b. *Visti a Pacu, u ta canuzzu.*  
see.PAST.1sg to Pacu, the your puppy  
'I saw P., your puppy'
- c. *Visti (\*a) un cani o spicu da strata.*  
see.PAST.1sg to a dog at-the corner of-the street  
'I saw a dog on the corner of the street'

According to Bosque (2001), the absence of the preposition *a* with personal indefinites under the scope of intensional predicates provides the variable interpretation. The expectation that 'personal *a*' is necessary when the indefinite nominal contains an element forcing the specific reading is met in Sicilian too:

- (32) a. *Ciircu nna pirsuna 'mportanti ppi sta parti* (Del.)  
search.1sg a person important for this role  
'I am looking for a famous actor for this role'
- b. *\*Ciircu nna pirsuna 'mportantissima ppi sta parti*  
search.1sg a person very important for this role  
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'
- c. *Ciircu a nna pirsuna 'mportantissima ppi sta parti*  
search.1sg to a person very important for this role  
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'
- d. *Ciircu a nna pirsuna 'mportanti assà ppi sta parti*  
search.1sg to a person important a lot for this role  
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'

#### 4.13 The Interpretation of 'aspetta ca' Sentences with Indefinite Nominals

In section 4.7 we have seen the unacceptability of those indefinite nominals forcing the specific reading with rhetorical questions. Another rhetorical context that can be used to test the non-specificity of indefinite nominals is provided by a typical construction in the dialects of Sicily, which can be found in other Romance varieties, although it is less common: the 'aspetta ca' sentences.<sup>9</sup> These are sentences starting with *aspetta ca...* (literally: 'wait that...') that license the non specific reading of the indefinites.

<sup>9</sup> Naturally, sentences starting with *aspetta ca* can also be found in a non-rhetorical context. In that case, the non-specific reading is not necessary:

(i) *Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu {nuivu / nuivu nuivu}* (Del.)wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new new newppi pruvati ssa pinna.to try.INF that pen'Wait! I'll hand you a brand new sheet of paper so that you can try that pen.'

- (33) a. *Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu nuivu* (Del.)  
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new  
*ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!*  
 to try.INF that pen  
 'You don't want me to hand you a new sheet of paper just to  
 try that pen, do you?'
- b. \**Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu nuivu nuivu*  
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new new  
*ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!*  
 to try.INF that pen  
 'You don't want me to hand you a completely new sheet of paper  
 just to try that pen, do you?'
- c. \**Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu troppu nuivu*  
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet too new  
*ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!*  
 to try.INF that pen  
 'You don't want me to hand you a completely new sheet of paper  
 just to try that pen, do you?'

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown that Bosque's (1993) discovery that evaluative qualificative adjectives can trigger specificity effects on indefinite nominals does hold true for Sicilian dialects too. In the first part of the paper, I have briefly introduced the interpretation of indefinite nominals in terms of non-specificity, according to the pre- or postnominal position of the adjective. I have also described the various types of elatives that can be found in Sicilian and shown that some types, namely syntactic and reduplicative elatives, are ambiguous between a maximum degree and a higher degree interpretation. In the second part of the paper, following Bosque's (2001) analysis on Spanish indefinite nominals and Picallo's (1994) one on Catalan counterparts, I have tested the main contexts requiring the non-specificity of indefinite nominals to demonstrate that Sicilian elatives behave like Spanish elatives and Spanish and Catalan prenominal qualificative adjectives in producing unacceptable results, given that they force the specific reading of the indefinite nominals which is not allowed in those contexts.

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# Accented and Deaccented Definite Determiners in Notker's Translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*

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**Abstract** In Notker's translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* definite determiners receive a graphic accent in anaphoric and endophoric contexts, while determiners are not accented when the noun they precede denotes an abstract or unical entity. The study is based on Books I, II and III of Notker's translation of Boethius' text, and on a sub-categorization of Nominal Expressions which builds on the distinction between *Semantic* and *Pragmatic Definites*. I conclude that the evidence in Notker's text supports the hypothesis of the presence of two articles in Old High German; I propose the feature of *contextual identifiability* that regulates the choice between the two forms of the article.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Corpus. – 3 What is a Demonstrative and What is an Article? – 4 The Development of the Definite Article in OHG. – 4.1 An Empiric Study. – 4.2 A Quantitative Overview. – 5 Excluded NEs. – 6 Accented Articles. – 6.1 Anaphoric Reference. – 6.2 Endophoric Reference. – 6.3 Contextual Reference. – 6.4 NEs with a Genitive Phrase. – 7 Non-accented Articles. – 8 The Analysis: Two Articles in OHG. – 9 Concluding Remarks.

**Keywords** Nokter. De Consolatione Philophaie. Definite determiners. Accented articles.

## 1 Introduction

With this paper, I aim to study the presence of the accent on some determiners in Notker's translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*; in this text, the article receives an accent in contexts of anaphoric and endophoric reference while in Semantic Definiteness contexts the article is not accented. After excluding the instances of possible demonstratives, I investigate the instances of accented articles, taking into consideration the context surrounding the Nominal Expressions (hence NEs) under investigation. I conclude that the evidence in Notker's translation supports the hypothesis of the presence of two determiners in Old High German (hence OHG) and I propose the feature of 'contextual identifiability' that regulates the choice between the two forms of the article. In section 2, I introduce the corpus, while in section 3 I discuss the features that distinguish an article from a demonstrative and I propose a sub-categorization

of Definite Descriptions that builds on Löbner's (1985) distinction between Semantic and Pragmatic Definites; in section 4 I will present an empiric study on the grammaticalization of the definite determiners in OHG, while sections 5 to 7 are devoted to the study of the evidence in Notker's text, section 8 presents the analysis.

## 2 The Corpus

My study is based on Tax's edition of Notker's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (1986) and concentrates on Books I-II and a small part of Book III; the first two books are argued to follow more faithfully Notker's orthographic instructions (see Tax 1986, XXXVIII and LIII). More specifically, I have analyzed the whole of Book I, Book II up to page 70 (in Tax's edition) and book III from page 109 to 111 (in Tax's edition).

Notker's translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* has been defined as quite consistent as far as the accent system is concerned – even though Tax notes, for instance, that there are certain irregularities that are to be ascribed to scribal errors.

Notker's translation of Boethius' work is clearly pedagogic in its intentions;<sup>1</sup> in some cases, Notker expands the text with explanatory observations. In Book II the translation of the Latin text is suspended for two longer portions of text, which contain detailed commentaries of juridic and rhetoric nature; the sections are the following:<sup>2</sup> from page 54, line 21 to page 62, line 5 and from page 64, line 21 to page 65, line 12.

Since this text shows a high degree of independence from the Latin text and contains different portions inserted by Notker himself, I take it as a genuine representative of the variety of the OHG language it reports.

Another element that distinguishes Notker's work is the accuracy with which he had defined his accent system; the following quote from his letter to the Bishop of Sitten, dated around the year 1015, is illuminating: *Oportet autem scire quia uerba theutonica sine ac/centv scribenda non sunt. præter articulos. ipsi soli sine accentu pronuntiantur/ acuto et circumflexo* (*Codex Bruxellensis* in Tax 1986, XXXVIII; emphasis added).

1 Cf. following quote from Tax (1986, XXXI): "Ein Hauptgrund war gewiß die muttersprachliche A(b)neigung des Lateins im Dienste höherer pädagogisch-monastischer und letztlich religiös-theologischer Ziele. Wie auch sonst zerlegt Notker dabei zuerst den Grundtext in kleinere Einheiten, die dann jeweils mit Hilfe von Glossen – und Kommentarmaterial übersetzt und weiter erklärt werden, nicht selten in einer kombinatorischen Ineinsverarbeitung beider Schichten".

2 The page and the line numbers indicated here and in the following all refer to Tax's diplomatic edition (1986) of Notker's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.



This quotation witnesses Notker's awareness of the language, and, at the same time, it can be taken as an indication of the full grammaticalization of the definite determiner.<sup>3</sup> Empiric studies, such as those of Demske (2001) and Oubouzar (1992), agree that at Notker's time, the OHG definite article was fully grammaticalized. According to Oubouzar, in fact, it has lost its deictic<sup>4</sup> component and does not add any meaning to the interpretation of the noun. Its non-accentuation may point at its status of head of the functional projection DP.

However, both Tax (1986) and Oubouzar (1992) note that in certain contexts, Notker's articles receive a graphic accent, which Tax argues to indicate both vowel-length and main stress.<sup>5</sup> Tax notes, however, that Notker's differentiation between acute and circumflex accent may have not been transparent for the scribe(s), who were more concerned in indicating main stress rather than vowel-length. The contexts in which the article is accented are the following:<sup>6</sup>

- a. textual reference contexts;
- b. cataphoric reference with a restrictive relative clause;
- c. in complex NEs with post-poned genitive;
- d. before the morpheme *-sélb*;
- e. before cardinal numbers.

These contexts are defined as 'deictic' by Oubouzar, while Tax speaks of clear 'Demonstrativwirkung'. Tax does not comment further on the cases of accented articles and only label them as having a 'demonstrative effect'; however, this notion is not defined and the cases of accented articles remain unexplained. This label, however, underlines a possible ambiguity of the determiner and therefore I will delineate a criterion that helps in disambiguating between an article and a demonstrative in a language like OHG, where article and demonstrative are homophone and evidence comes *per force* from written texts. A discussion about the nature of the demonstrative and the article is nevertheless necessary when studying a Germanic language, since articles are thought of having arisen from the Germanic demonstratives \**sa* (masculine), \**sō* (feminine) and \**pat* (neuter) (cf. Buzzoni & Saibene 2006).

3 Needless to be said, Notker's consideration alone is not enough and it has to be supported by the empiric data.

4 Oubouzar does not define her label 'deictic', which is used to describe the use of the article. This label is used both for the contexts of anaphoric and endophoric reference and when the article is used in a complex genitive phrase. I prefer to use the label 'deictic' where there is a direct reference to elements pertaining to the text-external world (cf. Lambrecht 1994). It is easy to imagine that I will hardly use the label in this sense for the present work.

5 For a more detailed description of Notker's accent system, see Tax 1986, XXXVII-XLIV.

6 Contexts a. and b. will be restated in terms of 'anaphoric' and 'endophoric' reference, following Löhnner 1985.

### 3 What is a Demonstrative and What is an Article?

A notion that is associated with the full grammaticalization of the definite determiner is that of 'obligatoriness', 'expletiveness' or 'default marking', cf. Greenberg (1978) and Zubizarreta (1992) in Crisma (2011) and Philippi (1997). What emerges from these labels, then, is that the function of the definite article is only to signal that the noun it precedes is definite and that its reference is univocally retrievable from the Speech Participants in the Universe of Discourse. Since the definite article occupies the head of a functional projection, it is desirable that it does not add to the interpretation of the noun.

Demonstratives, on the other hand, are argued to display the feature [+location] (cf. Wiltschko 2009); the distal demonstratives 'this' and 'that', in Present Day English for instance, identify objects in different regions. Another function of the demonstrative is to help distinguishing between two similar or identical objects (cf. Löbner 1985); the demonstrative, contrarily to the definite determiner, adds to the interpretation of the noun, since it helps in identifying the referent denoted by the demonstrative and the noun.

I propose a sub-categorization of discourse referents, which can help track the development of the OHG determiners.<sup>7</sup> I argue that two determiners can be observed already at the OHG stage, the non-reduced one is used with the Pragmatic Definites, and the reduced one is used with the Semantic Definites.

(1) **The sub-categorization of Definite Descriptions:**

<b>Demonstratives</b>	<b>Pragmatic Definites</b>	<b>Semantic Definites</b>
deictic use >	textual anaphoric use >	anaphoric use >
	complex functional concepts >	abstract entities >
Proper Nouns		
	<b>full form of the article</b>	<b>reduced form of the article</b>

This sub-categorization builds on Löbner (1985); I think that the differentiation between Pragmatic and Semantic Definites can capture the distinction between the full and reduced forms of the definite determiner in PDG, but also in OHG.

In order to understand Löbner's (1985) definition of the definite determiner and the distinction between Semantic and Pragmatic Definites, I will illustrate three concepts that are at the basis of Löbner's study of

<sup>7</sup> The class of Proper Nouns is not preceded by an article in Standard PDG; in some varieties of PDG, however, articles can precede Proper Nouns (cf. Löbner 1985), this is why this class has been included in the sub-categorization.

**Definite Descriptions:**

- Functional concepts are inherently unambiguous; simple functional concepts denote unical and abstract entities, such as 'sun', 'sky', 'love', 'freedom', or unique parts of entities, such as 'head', 'roof'; to this class also belong nouns that denote events that occur only once, such as 'death' or 'beginning', and superlatives.
- Relational concepts denote objects as standing in a certain relation with respect to one another, such as kinship terms like 'sister', 'daughter' or social relationships like 'neighbour' or non-unique parts of an entity, such as 'hand' or 'eye'.
- Sortal concepts classify entities with respect to certain characteristics they possess in a given situation, such as 'woman'.

Löbner argues that the function of the definite article is to signal that the head noun has to be interpreted as a functional concept, while the other determiners require the noun to be interpreted as a sortal or as a relational concept, i.e. they select among several objects of the same kind. The demonstrative, for instance, selects between objects of the same kind, but in different regions.

A functional concept can be established either independently or situationally; this observation leads to the two classes of definite expressions he distinguishes, namely the Semantic and the Pragmatic Definites. The non-ambiguous reference of a Semantic Definite is established independently of the situation or context, while the non-ambiguous reference of a Pragmatic Definite is established situationally.

Semantic definites are made up of functional concepts; according to Löbner, to the functional concepts also belong the combinations of a noun and a genitive phrase or adjective, such as 'the meaning of the definite article' or 'the President of the U.S.'. However, some of these complex functional concepts are not completely independent of the surrounding context for their interpretation.<sup>8</sup> In the sub-categorization in (1), I placed them between the endophoric reference contexts and the simple functional concepts, since they are not wholly dependent on the context for their disambiguation, as the Pragmatic Definites, but they are not totally independent from the context as the Semantic Definites.

Pragmatic Definites receive a non-ambiguous interpretation thanks to their anaphoric and endophoric use. Löbner argues that within the Universe of Discourse, the referents constitute knots which are tied to one another thanks to the relations which are built in the course of the information exchange. In the case of endophoric reference, the reference of a sortal or relational noun is made non-ambiguous by its being linked to a

8 I thank the anonymous reviewer of this paper for pointing this to me.

relative clause, or to a prepositional or adverbial phrase.<sup>9</sup> While in the case of anaphoric reference, the non-ambiguous interpretation of a sortal or relational noun is obtained by its being related to the discourse. It is thanks to the relations built in this sense that sortal or relational concepts acquire non-ambiguous reference and are identified as functional concepts.

Löbner concludes that “in all its uses, the definite article has the meaning of indicating that the noun is to be taken as a functional concept” (1985, 314).

In accordance with Lambrecht (1994) and Breban (2012), I do not take definiteness to be a defining feature of the definite article, rather, I take the function of the article as that of signalling that the NEs it precedes are to be interpreted as identifiable functional concepts, both when the non-ambiguous reference is obtained contextually – as in the cases of Pragmatic Definiteness – as well as when the non-ambiguous reference is obtained independently of the immediate context – as in the cases of Semantic Definiteness.

Finally, Löbner answers a possible objection about demonstratives; one could object, for instance, that an NP with a demonstrative determiner can be taken as a functional concept (the string ‘this book’ unambiguously refers to a certain book). However, the role of the demonstrative is not to indicate that the noun is to be understood as a functional concept, but it directs the addressee to pick out one object out of a range of alternative objects. It is the co-occurrence of the demonstrative *and* the noun that makes up a functional concept, while the definite determiner does not add to the interpretation of the noun as a functional concept.

In the sub-categorization I propose in (1), I labelled the cases of deictic and textual anaphoric reference as instances where the determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz* are better analyzed as demonstratives, while in cases of Pragmatic Definiteness and Semantic Definiteness a definite article is found, since in both the cases of Semantic and Pragmatic Definiteness the entity denoted has non-ambiguous reference.

Coniglio and Schlachter (2014) report that in anaphoric contexts, the demonstratives *dieser* and (stressed) *DER* as well as the definite article can be found in PDG, while in these contexts in PDE only the demonstrative is found;<sup>10</sup> for this reason, I have excluded from my sample all the instances of determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz*, when these are found in a textual anaphoric context, in order to avoid possible ambiguities with a demonstrative interpretation.

9 Below I will argue that also sortal nouns specified by a genitive phrase belong to the endophoric reference contexts.

10 They note that, unlike PDE, where the demonstratives ‘this’ encodes proximal referents and the demonstrative ‘that’ encodes non-proximal referents, and are used with different activation statuses of the discourse referents, the demonstratives *dieser*, *jener* and *DER* in

These cases are different from the anaphoric reference in the sense of Löbner; the textual anaphoric reference I am referring to in this section is a typical device used in Old Germanic texts: the determiner identifies the referent it precedes as being the entity previously mentioned in the immediate context. According to Breban (2012), this is a textual function, used for instance in texts such as *Beowulf* or the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. On the contrary, when a determiner precedes a sortal or relational noun, whose reference is made identifiable by its being anchored in the discourse (i.e. it is described at length and not only anchored to the immediately preceding context), this is analyzed as an instance of anaphoric use in the sense of Löbner and hence as a definite determiner.

## 4 The Development of the Definite Article in OHG

### 4.1 An Empiric Study

Oubouzar (1992) directs her empiric search on the grammaticalization of the OHG definite determiner taking into consideration the differentiation between definite and indefinite nominal expressions; in sum, she argues that the article is used at the beginning of the OHG period in those contexts that she defines 'deictic', namely in anaphoric contexts, endophoric contexts and in complex nominal expressions containing a genitive phrase. Determiner-less nominal expressions refer either to non-definite referents or to abstract and unical entities; according to Oubouzar, there is no significant difference between the earlier text of Isidor and Tatian, while underlining that a new class of entities, namely those denoting identifiable groups of people, are consistently preceded by the definite determiner in the latter text. In Otfrid's text, the determiner starts to be used with abstract and unical entities, independently of a further specification and finally, in Notker, the article is the default strategy, marking all the definite nominal expressions, independently of their semantic content. She argues that the OHG determiner had lost its 'deictic' component and had become a functional category that only marks definiteness.

PDG do not seem to encode such distinctions; moreover, the definite determiner can also be used in contexts of anaphoric reference.

According to Breban (2012), the definite determiner underwent a functional shift during the history of the English language: it lost the textual anaphoric functions and is only used to signal identifiable referents, while the textual functions were taken up by the demonstratives and other complex determiners.

What emerges from Coniglio and Schlachter's observations is that in the German language, such a sharp shift may not have occurred, since in some contexts the different forms of the demonstratives and the full form of the definite determiner are likewise possible. For reasons of space, I will not pursue this observation in the present paper.

In De Bastiani (2015) I examined the same texts that make up Oubouzar's corpus and I traced the development of the definite determiner in OHG applying the differentiation between Pragmatic and Semantic Definites; it can be observed that in the earlier texts the use of the article in cases of Pragmatic Definiteness is robust, while the use of the article with cases of Semantic Definiteness is restricted in these texts to a few instances of functional concepts, but the use is not consistent.<sup>11</sup> The first cases in which the determiner is used with simple functional concepts is in Tatian, where nouns denoting identifiable groups of people<sup>12</sup> are consistently preceded by the determiner. In Otfrid's text, abstract and unical entities can be found both preceded by the definite determiner and determiner-less in similar contexts; Oubouzar argues that this text constitutes a turning point, since the article starts to be used with nouns denoting abstract and unical entities and starts losing its 'deictic' function. It can be observed, however, that the 'deictic' function is not lost, since in contexts of anaphoric and endophoric reference the article is still used in Otfrid's text. That the article is used with certain abstract and unical entities can be attributed to the gradual spreading of the article to contexts of Semantic Definiteness; let us observe the following examples taken from Otfrid's text:

- (2) *Lúdownig ther snéllo // **thes wísduames** fólló* (AD LUDOWICUM 1, 1)  
*Iz iuer húgu irwálló, // **wísduames** fóll* (AD SALOMONEM 9, 8)

As can be observed from these examples, the same abstract noun, in a similar context and followed by the same adjective can appear both preceded by the determiner and determiner-less; moreover, the accents fall on *wísduam* and *fóll* in both verses, regardless of the presence/absence of the determiner. The article not being compulsory in these contexts points, in my opinion, to the incomplete grammaticalization of the reduced form of definite determiner – metrical reasons, however, cannot be excluded.

Finally, the article in Notker constantly precedes definite NEs; as was already mentioned, the presence of two articles can be observed in Notker's text. Instead of arguing that the article loses its 'deictic' function, I argue that the grammaticalization of the definite determiner in OHG proceeded

11 An example of Semantic Definite in Isidor's text is: *dher hohista* (V, 4, 418). For this text, Egger's edition (1964) has been examined; the Roman number refers to the chapter, the second number to the paragraph and the third number to the line in which the nominal expression is found, as they are given in the edition examined.

12 Some examples are the following: *ther diuual* (xv, 50, 16); *thie pharisei* (xx, 58, 2). These are functional concepts, since their reference is unambiguous independently of the surrounding context. For this text, Masser's edition (1994) has been examined. The Roman number refers to the chapter, the second number refers to the folia of the manuscript and the third number to the line in which the nominal expression is found, as they are given in the edition examined.

in two separate paths: already at the early OHG stages a full form of the article was grammaticalized, while the reduced form grammaticalized later and gradually, spreading from NEs consisting of complex functional concepts to contexts of unical and abstract reference. As was argued for by Coniglio and Schlachter (2014), already during the OHG stage the first cases of cliticization of the article to a preposition can be detected; they show that the cliticization is only possible in cases of Semantic Definiteness.

## 4.2 A Quantitative Overview

For Notker's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, I have collected all the nominal expression containing the determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz*, and confronted them with the corresponding Latin nominal expression – if present – and I checked if there was a corresponding demonstrative in the Latin base text.

In Table 1,<sup>13</sup> the percentages for Isidor, Tatian and Notker are given, it can be observed that Notker's text presents the highest degree of independence from the Latin base text, which depends on Notker's pedagogic re-elaboration of the text, as was argued for in section 2:

Table 1<sup>14</sup>

Corpus	Percentage of the NEs not corresponding to a Latin Nominal expression	Percentage of the OGH NEs with a corresponding demonstrative in the Latin base text
Isidor	6,92%	11,68%
Tatian	0,80%	5,90%
Notker	42,9%	3,05%

As can be observed from the table, in Notker's text a consistent portion of the nominal expressions found does not correspond to a Latin nominal

**13** Tables 1 is adapted from De Bastiani 2015; the percentages for Notker's text differ slightly from the ones reported in Table 8.2 (De Bastiani 2015, 127) due to the correction of some errors in the classification of the NEs.

**14** The percentages were calculated with the following data: the Isidor Corpus contains 231 NEs, 16 of which do not have any corresponding NEs in the Latin base text and 27 correspond to a demonstrative in the Latin base text. The Tatian Corpus contains 560 NEs, 5 do not have any corresponding Latin NEs and 33 correspond to a Latin demonstrative. Notker's Corpus contains 622 NEs, 267 of which do not correspond to any Latin NEs, while 19 correspond to a demonstrative in the Latin base text. I have examined the whole of the translation into OHG of Isidor's *De fide catholica contra Iudaeos* and I have used Egger's (1964) diplomatic edition and I have examined the OHG translation of Tatian's *Harmonia Evangeliorum* from chapter I to chapter LXXVIII, using Masser's (1994) diplomatic edition.

expression and, moreover, only a small percentage of occurrences of the determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz* depend on the presence of a demonstrative in the Latin base text. This small percentage, however, is not enough to take the occurrences of the determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz* as occurrences of definite articles. Such a decision can only be taken with the scrutiny of the context surrounding the NEs under investigation; moreover, there are portions of text which were added by Notker and therefore cannot depend on the Latin base text. In these portions of text, therefore, there may be occurrences of *ter*, *tiu* and *taz* which can be taken as occurrences of a demonstrative, rather than as occurrences of their article counterparts

Of the overall sample of 622 NEs I have collected for Notker's text, I have excluded 46 due to the criterion proposed in section 3; these are discussed in the next section.<sup>15</sup>

## 5 Excluded NEs

I have excluded from my sample 46 NEs, since in the contexts under consideration, the determiners *ter*, *tiu* and *taz* have a possible interpretation as demonstratives. An example is given in (3):<sup>16</sup>

- (3) ***Tiu figura*** heizet *parabole*. *dáz chit comparatio*.  
 This *figura* means *parabola*, that means *comparatio*.  
 'This *figura* is called *parabola*, it means *comparatio*.'  
 (II, 47, 21-22)

This sentence is added after the following lines:

- (4) *Unde so si danne diu ding sturzen gestat. mit iro ubermuotun zeseuuun.*  
*so ueret si also der uuellonto uerbo.*  
 And so she then the things overthrow begins with her boisterous right hand, so steers REFL also the whirling wave.  
*Cum hec uerterit uices. superba dextra. rertur more exestuantis euripi.*

<sup>15</sup> There are in Notker's text also 20 instances of the demonstrative *diser*, which only in 4 cases does not have a Latin NE counterpart; in the remaining cases, the OHG demonstrative corresponds to a Latin demonstrative in 15 cases out of 16.

<sup>16</sup> In the examples taken from Notker's translation, the OHG text precedes the Latin text, when present. In the Latin text demonstratives are written in italics, while the NEs under discussion in the OHG portion of text are written in bold; in the English translation I have maintained the Latin words if they are present in the OHG text. The Roman numbers between brackets refer to the Book of the *Consolatio*, the Arab numbers to the page and the line in Tax's edition.



'And she can overthrow the things with her boisterous right hand, in the same way as whirling waves do.'

(II, 47, 18-19)

This example is found in the commentaries inserted by Notker; typically, Notker describes a certain rhetoric figure or Roman institution and then gives its name or explains it. In this portion of text, the unambiguous reference of *figura* as identifying the comparison Boethius makes between the Fortune and the stream of the Euripus Strait is obtained thanks to the determiner, that links the reference of the entity *figura* to the preceding context. I take this and similar occurrences as instances of demonstratives, since it is the determiner that helps in establishing the reference of the entity it precedes, in the same way as in the NE 'this book', the demonstrative restricts the reference of the entity 'book' to a particular referent.

Moreover, to the NEs excluded from the sample belong the NEs containing the determiner, the morpheme *sélb* and a noun; the combination determiner-*sélb* points at the exact same referent which is contained in the NE and which has been mentioned earlier. For this reason, I have excluded them from my sample, since it is the combination determiner-*sélb* that identifies the reference of the noun it precedes. On the contrary, when *sélb* precedes a combination of determiner and noun, I take it as an independent morpheme meaning 'even', just like in PDG.

After having thus excluded 46 NEs, there remain 576 NEs, which I argue contain a definite determiner. Of these 576, 157 present an accented determiner, while the remaining have an unaccented determiner. These are commented on in the next sections.

## 6 Accented Articles

I have studied the contexts in which the accented determiners occur and I have found out that 50 of them are in a context of endophoric reference, 51 in a context of anaphoric reference (in the sense of Löbner), 51 have a genitive phrase, while 4 are neither purely anaphoric nor purely endophoric, but their reference is retrievable from the context, and 1 presents an accent, but the presence of the accent on the determiner can be neither re-conducted to a Pragmatic Definiteness context, nor to a demonstrative use of the determiner. This is likely to be a case of scribal error.

As can be seen from these figures, the majority of the accented determiners can be re-conducted to cases of Pragmatic Definiteness; the NEs containing a genitive phrase will be discussed below, where I will argue that these cases are in-between the pure cases of Pragmatic and Semantic Definiteness.

## 6.1 Anaphoric Reference

As opposed to the ones discussed in section 5, the NEs discussed in the present section are not cases of textual anaphoric reference, i.e. the determiner does not establish the reference of an entity by anaphorically pointing to it – as in example (3) above – but it precedes an entity, which consists of a relational or sortal noun and has been mentioned in the previous context. The reference of this entity is tied to a knot in the Universe of Discourse and is non-ambiguous thanks to its being anchored in the Discourse; the determiner that precedes these NEs only signals that their interpretation is non-ambiguous. Let us observe some examples:

- (5) *Iro uuat uuas chleine. unde uuahe. unde festes kezivges. **Tíu uuat ist tiure** [...]*  
 Her dress was small and soft and of strong cloth. The dress is precious [...]  
*Vestes erant perfectę tenuissimis filis. subtili artificio. indissolubili materia.*  
 ‘Her dress was small and soft and of a strong material. The dress is precious [...]’  
 (I, 8, 15)

After the appearance of the personification of Philosophy, Boethius describes her aspect and her dress; in example (5), the sentence *Tíu uuat ist tiure* was added by Notker to explain the symbology of the dress of the Philosophy. In this case, the article does not define the reference of the entity it precedes, since the reference of the word *uuat* is non-ambiguous, it refers to the dress of the Philosophy, which is part of the Universe of Discourse; moreover, there is no contrast with other similar entities, hence the determiner does not select one item among a set of similar alternatives. I conclude, then, that in this example the determiner is to be interpreted as a definite article, that signals that the reference of the entity *uuat* is non-ambiguous. The non-ambiguity of the reference is established by the context.

- (6) *Aber **déro fier rationalium statuum** heizet ter eristo coniectura.*  
 But of the rationalium statuum is called the first *coniectura*.  
 ‘The first of the four *rationalium statuum* is called *coniectura*.’  
 (II, 57, 14-5)

This example is taken from one of the longer portions of text which do not depend on the Latin base text. In this portion, Notker describes Roman juridic procedures. This example is embedded in the following context: *So ist aber ze uuizenne. dáz man ze finf uuison stritet umbe dia legem. ze fier uuison umbe dia rationem* (II, 56, 15). After having described other concepts, which may have been difficult for the young monks for whom the

translation was thought (cf. Lühr 2009), Notker describes the four *rationalium statuum*. This concept is part of the Universe of Discourse. Moreover, the determiner cannot be taken as an instance of a demonstrative, since it is preceded by the numeral four, which is the total number of the items under consideration. There is no selection out of a set of similar objects, since the whole of the objects is taken into consideration; the entity *fier rationalium statuum* is defined as non-ambiguous by the context, the numeral and the adjective, which restricts the reference to that particular kind of procedure. The role of the determiner, then, is to signal that the referent has non-ambiguous interpretation.

- (7) **Téro brieuo undriiua chame uuola uure.**  
 Of the letters unfaithfulness came certainly out.  
*Quarum fraus aperta patuisset.*  
 'The falsity of the letters would have been certainly revealed.'  
 (I, 25, 17)

Also in this example, the non-ambiguous reference of the entity *brieuo* is established from the context; in this part of Book I, Boethius is telling the Philosophy that he was arrested because the emperor had received falsified letters, where he pleads for the freedom of the Senate from the emperor. The entity *letters* is mentioned three times in the preceding context and the treason of the Senate towards Boethius is described at length. The reference of the entity *letters* is non-ambiguous, since it can only refer to the false letters with which Boethius was accused of treason. Also in this case, then, the determiner signals that the noun it precedes has non-ambiguous reference.

## 6.2 Endophoric Reference

As was noted by Tax, the article takes an accent if it precedes a noun which is then followed by a restrictive relative clause; the restrictive relative clause establishes the reference of the noun it refers to and the article signals that the combination of noun and relative clause is non-ambiguous. Let us observe some examples:

- (8) *Uuaz habo ih nu fone dien luge brieuon ze saganne. mit dien sie mih zihent uuellen uidere guunnen umbe den cheiser dia rumiskun selb-uualtigi?*  
 What have I now of the false letters to say with which they me accuse want back obtain about the emperor the roman freedom.  
*Nam quod attinet de compositis falso literis dicere. quibus arguor sperasse romanam libertatem?*

'What do I have to say about the false letters with which they accuse me of wanting back the freedom of the Romans from the emperor?'  
(I, 25, 9-10)

This example is embedded in the same context of example (7): the entity *letters* has been mentioned twice and the cause of Boethius' arrest is described in details; this entity is already part of the Universe of Discourse and can only refer to the letters with which Boethius was accused of treason. Moreover, their non-ambiguous reference is defined by the relative clause. The determiner only signals that the entity *letters with which they accuse me of wanting back the freedom of the Senate from the emperor* has non-ambiguous reference.

- (9) **Dér scado** *dér dien sculdigen solta. dér liget ana dien unsculdigen.*  
The punishment that to the guilty should that lies on the innocent. Noxia poena debita sceleri. premit insontes.  
'The punishment that should go to the guilty goes to the innocent.'  
(I, 32, 6-7)
- (10) **Tîe sacha** *dîe daz uuib sament iro bringet. zuo demo man. dàz ist iro uuidemo.*  
The things that the woman with her brings to the man that is her dowry.  
'The things that the woman takes with her and brings the man constitute her dowry.'  
(II, 68, 27-28)

Similar conclusions can be drawn from these examples, where the article signals that the complex entity consisting of a sortal or relational noun and a restrictive relative clause has non-ambiguous reference. I conclude, then, that these are instances of definite articles, which receive an accent also in cases of endophoric reference.

### 6.3 Contextual Reference

In this subsection the instances of accented determiners, which are neither anaphoric nor endophoric, but precede an entity whose reference is retrievable from the context, are discussed.

Let us observe one example of what I will define contextual reference:

- (11) *Tér zun hiez uallum. Selben die bouma hiezen ualli ! Tíu luccha* *under zuisken boumen hiez interuallum.*  
The fence is called *uallum*. Even the trees are called *ualli*. The hole under between trees is called *interuallum*.

'The fence is called *uallum*; even the trees are called *ualli*! The cavity between the trees is called *interuallum*.'  
(I, 37, 27)

The entity *luccha* has not been mentioned in the previous discourse, however, it is retrievable from the context; in this portion of text, Notker is discussing the meaning of the words *uallum* and *interuallum* and is describing the process of the construction of a trench delimited by trees. The entity *luccha* is a 'bridging inferable', it is not directly mentioned in the discourse, but is retrievable from the context; moreover, its reference is specified by the PP that follows.

Finally, there is one instance of a determiner which presents an accent, but can be interpreted neither as a demonstrative nor as a Pragmatic Definite; in this case the accent falls on the determiner preceding an ordinal number, namely *táz dritta* (I, 39, 12). The other instances of articles preceding ordinal numbers are consistently non-accented and this particular instance can be re-conducted neither to an anaphoric use nor to an endophoric use; moreover, all the other ordinal numbers in the context in which this instance is embedded do not present an accent on the determiner, I conclude that this instance is likely to be a case of scribal error.

#### 6.4 NEs with a Genitive Phrase

As was noted by Oubouzar and Tax, the determiners preceding a discourse referent which is followed by a genitive phrase are accented. Of all the total NEs I have collected in Notker's text, the overall number of NEs containing a genitive phrase is 97, however, only 51 present an accent. In the 51 NEs with an accented determiner, it is the determiner preceding the head noun that is accented, while the genitive phrase only presents an accented determiner if this is to be interpreted as a demonstrative or as preceding a Pragmatic Definite.<sup>17</sup>

The 47 NEs that do not present an accented determiner are made up of a genitive phrase consisting of a determiner and a noun, but the head noun is not preceded by the determiner; in some cases the noun has to be interpreted as non-definite, in others it does not present an article and is preceded by the genitive phrase, the opposite order of the 51 NEs that present a determiner before both the head noun and the genitive phrase. It can be hypothesized that the composition of NEs with genitive groups is unstable at this stage of the language, since Demske (2001) notes that

<sup>17</sup> In the computation of the accented determiners, I have only included the determiners preceding the head of the complex NEs.

the grammaticalization of genitive attributes has undergone a process that started in the OHG period and was completed during the early New High German period.

The following discussion will concentrate on the 51 NEs with a determiner before both the head noun and the genitive phrase. Of these 51 NEs, in 9 cases the head noun has anaphoric reference, and in 3 cases the head noun is further specified by a relative clause, while the others are linked to different kind of entities: from Semantic Definites (cf. *dîe uerte dero sternon*, I, 20,2), to entities previously mentioned in the Universe of Discourse, to genitive phrases containing a possessive adjective, which links the reference of the head noun to an entity belonging to the Universe of Discourse (cf. *Dîe gezirten uuende dînero buochcamero*, I, 34, 10).

Moreover, in these complex NEs with a genitive phrase, the head noun is often a sortal or relational concept, which acquires non-ambiguous reference by its being linked to the genitive phrase. Such nouns are for instance *pild-image*, (cf. *an dâz pilde dero uuarun saldo*, III, 110, 3) *uuort-word* (cf. *nah tîen uuorten sancti pauli apostoli*, PROLOGUS, 5, 12), *uuende-walls* (cf. *dîe gezirten uuende dînero buochcamero*, I, 34, 10) or *namo-name* (cf. *tér baro namo dero saldon*, II, 68, 4); I think these are better analyzed as instances of endophoric reference, since it is their being linked to a genitive attribute that renders their reference non-ambiguous.

In other complex NEs with a genitive phrase, the head noun is a functional concept, such as *nebel-fog* (cf. *mit témo nebele tero stirbigon dingo*, I, 13, 26), or *unsculd-innocence* (cf. *tîe unsculde alles tes herotes*, I, 27, 7), or *suozi-sweetness* (cf. *dîu suozi des sanges*, III, 109, 3); however, in these complex NEs the entity referred to is not the functional concept as a whole, but rather a sub-type of it, and the reference to the sub-type is made non-ambiguous by the genitive attribute, which in some cases refers back to an entity previously mentioned in the discourse. The reference of these complex NEs, then, is dependent on the context and on the genitive attribute for its non-ambiguous interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

18 It is interesting to note that, in PDE, abstract nouns - which are functional concepts in the sense of Löbner (1985) - are not preceded by the definite determiner, unless their reference is restricted by a PP or a relative clause. See for instance:

- a. It is impossible to live in a world without hope vs It is impossible to live in a world without \*the hope.
- b. The hope of finding a cure for cancer is small vs \*Hope of finding a cure for cancer is small. (examples adapted from Foley & Hall 2009, 273)

The complex functional concept of example b. is similar to the complex NEs containing a functional concept and a genitive attribute I found in Notker's text.

This piece of evidence supports the claim I made in § 3 that the complex NEs made up of a Functional Concept and a linking attribute are not to be analyzed uniformly as bare

## 7 Non-accented Articles

The remaining 373 NEs consist of either abstract or unical entities, or of superlatives; these categories belong to the Semantic Definiteness contexts and the articles preceding them are not accented, unless their reference is further restricted from a relative clause or is anaphoric. Some examples for unical entities are: *den himel*-theACC sky (I, 8, 7), *demo manen*-theDAT moon (I, 12, 2), *die sternen*-theNOM stars (I, 14, 3), *ter mennisko*-theNOM human being (I, 29, 1); an example for a superlative is *diu iungesta*-theNOM youngest; some examples for abstract entities are under (12-13):

- (12) *Únde ímo lébendemo. úber sîgenôta sîn méister socrates ten dôt. mîr zûoséhentero?*  
 And him living over won his master socrates the death me watching.  
 Eodemque superstite. preceptor eius socrates. promeruit uictoriam iniustę mortis. me astante?  
 'And while living, Socrates his master defeated death face to face with me.'  
 (I, 15, 14-16)
- (13) *Sîe râment tóh álle ze éinero stéte. uuánda sie álle râment ze dero sâlighéite.*  
 They strive however all to one place since they all strive to the bliss.  
 Sed tamen nititur peruenire ad unum finem beatitudinis.  
 'But they all strive towards the same goal, because they strive towards bliss.'  
 (III, 111, 11-13)

In the next section, I will propose an analysis that takes into consideration the presence of two determiners in OHG.

## 8 The Analysis: Two Articles in OHG

The evidence in Notker's text supports the hypothesis of the presence of two articles in OHG and in PDG. Indirect evidence for this claim comes from Ebert's study of two articles in Frisian; to summarize, the *D*-article is used:

vor Nomina, deren Referent für den Hörer nicht eindeutig identifizierbar ist. Der D-artikel verweist auf eine Information im Kontext, die den

Functional Concepts, but rather as a category which lies between pure Pragmatic Definites and pure Semantic Definites.

intendierten Referenten aus der Menge der möglichen Referenten aussondert, wenn diese Information nicht direkt zwischen Artikel und Nomen steht. (Ebert 1970, 172)

while the *A*-article is used:<sup>19</sup>

vor Nomina, für die jeweiligen Sprechakt nur ein einziger Referent in Frage kommt, oder die sich auf räumlich und zeitlich Nahes oder Bekanntes ziehen. (172)

If we apply Löbner's terminology to this distinction, we can conclude that the *A*-article is used in cases of Semantic Definiteness, while the *D*-article is used in cases of Pragmatic Definiteness.

Moreover, other evidence for the presence of two articles comes from PDG and from varieties of PDG; Coniglio and Schlachter (2014) argue that the cliticization of the article on the preposition is only possible in cases of Semantic Definiteness, while Löbner (1985) claims that in some dialectal varieties of PDG there are two forms for the article: one can be defined as weak – a *scwha* – while the other is strong. The weak form is used with the Semantic Definites, while the strong form is used in Pragmatic Definiteness contexts; both forms are definite articles, since, according to Löbner, they are not stressed.

As was mentioned above, Coniglio and Schlachter's (2014) investigation of the full and reduced forms of the definite article in PDG builds on Löbner's categorization of Semantic and Pragmatic Definites. In order to account for the synchronic phenomenon of the cliticization of the definite article on prepositions, Coniglio and Schlachter trace a diachronic development of the OHG definite article, which they argue already displayed the reduced forms we can still observe nowadays in the PDG Semantic Definites.

Following Van Gelderen (2007), they argue that an interpretable 'location' feature is associated with the (textual) deictic/anaphoric properties of the demonstrative, which is located in [Spec, DP] in her representation. In the course of the development of the demonstrative into a definite determiner, the demonstrative is reanalyzed as the head of the DP, which is endowed with uninterpretable features that probe for the interpretable counterparts of the same features on the noun N. This generative approach confirms in my opinion Löbner's semantic considerations on the characteristics of the demonstrative and the definite determiner: while the demonstrative directs the selection of the referent denoted by the noun,

<sup>19</sup> Ebert differentiates between two kinds of *A*-article, one is described above, and the second one is used as generic article (1970, 172).



the definite determiner does not add to the interpretation of the noun.

As far as the German language is concerned, Coniglio and Schlachter (2014) propose that only part of the demonstrative was reanalyzed into the head of the DP, since they observe that the dental onset *th-/d-* that characterizes both the demonstrative and the definite article disappears when the article is cliticized to the preposition, which is only possible in Semantic Definiteness contexts, but is maintained in the cases of Pragmatic Definiteness<sup>20</sup> and when it is not possible to contract the preposition and the article.<sup>21</sup> The evidence in Frisian confirms this analysis, since only the *D*-article presents the dental onset.

Thus they argue that only the inflectional ending grammaticalized into the head D and lost the interpretable features and that in cases of Pragmatic Definiteness, [Spec, DP] is activated as well, since it is associated with interpretable anaphoric features; moreover, they argue that in OHG – where the cliticization to the preposition in Semantic Definiteness cases was optional according to them – and in PDG – where in some cases the cliticization to the preposition is not possible – [Spec, DP] can nevertheless be realized as a ‘dummy element’.

Their analysis for the full and reduced forms of the OHG definite article in combination with the preposition *zi* is given in (16) and (17):<sup>22</sup>

20 An instance of the anaphoric use of the definite article can be observed in the following example:

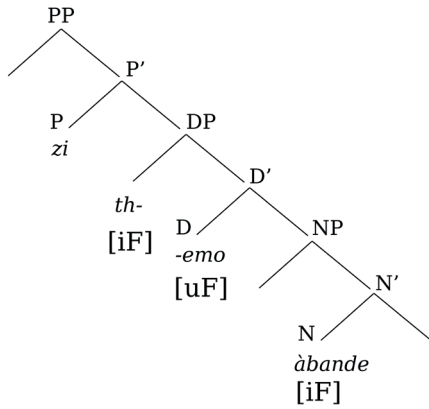
Hans hat heute einen Freund zum Essen mit nach Hause gebracht. Er hat uns vorher ein Foto # vom / von dem Freund gezeigt (cf. Coniglio & Schlachter 2014 for further discussion).

In this example it can be observed that the reduced form of the article is ruled out, since the use of the article is to anaphorically point to a previously mentioned referent. In this case, we are not dealing with a demonstrative (which in PDG would be accompanied by a special emphasis), but with a definite article. It is the context that established that the referent *Freund* is to be unambiguously identified with Hans' friend.

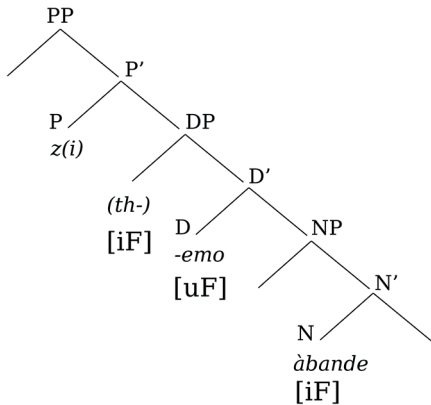
21 In PDG for instance, it is possible to contract the dative form of the definite article with the preposition *zu* in all the three genders (m. *zum*, f. *zur*, n. *zum*), but it is not possible to contract the dative form of the feminine definite article with the preposition *in* (m. *im*, f. *\*inr*, n. *im*). Coniglio and Schlachter notice that the reduced form of the definite article is restricted with certain prepositions, or is not possible for every gender or case. They attribute this restrictions either to the grammaticalization of the prepositions or to phonological reasons.

22 These forms are both attested in *Otfrid* (reported in Coniglio & Schlachter 2014, 155-6).

(16) *zi themo àbande*



(17) *zemo àbande*



In example (16), the article *themo* refers back to an entity previously mentioned in the discourse; this example represents a Pragmatic Definiteness case and the full form of the article is found.

In example (17), on the contrary, the reference of the noun *àbande* is unique, since it refers to the concept of 'evening' as one part of the day, and not to a particular evening which has been mentioned in the discourse - contrarily to example (16). Since this is a Semantic Definiteness case, the dental onset is not realized.

In the absence of a preposition, the distinction between Pragmatic and Semantic article is nevertheless signalled in Notker's text, since the ab-

sence of accentuation on the determiner renders it prosodically lighter and thus reduced, even if [Spec, DP] is activated as a 'dummy element'.

Since the accented articles in Notker's text precede entities, whose reference is defined thanks to the surrounding context – and not only through anaphoric reference, as I have shown in sections 6.1 to 6.4 –, I propose to introduce a 'contextual identifiability' feature; this feature is responsible for the accentuation of the definite determiner in OHG, for the choice of the *D*-article in Frisian and for the spell-out of the dental onset with prepositions when the referent preceded by the article is a Pragmatic Definite.

The determiner system of the OHG language can thus be explained in terms of features: as was argued for by Coniglio and Schlachter building on Van Gelderen (2007), and Wiltschko (2009), demonstratives display location and deictic features, while the definite determiner is endowed with uninterpretable features; the two forms of the article which can be detected in PDG – in the standard language and in the non-standard varieties reported by Löbner (1985) –, OHG and Frisian call for the presence of a third feature, which is different from the location/deictic feature of the demonstrative and from the uninterpretable feature of the reduced form of the article; I think that the introduction of the 'contextual identifiability' feature can account for the empiric evidence in the languages quoted and can complete the syntactic analyses put forth by Van Gelderen (2007) and Coniglio and Schlachter (2014).

## 9 Concluding Remarks

Following the grammaticalization of the definite determiner in OHG, it can be observed that a definite article used in cases of endophoric and anaphoric reference already grammaticalized in the earlier stages, while a definite determiner used in cases of Semantic Definiteness grammaticalizes gradually, following the path delineated in the sub-categorization of DDs in (1): from complex functional concepts to identifiable entities, to unical entities and finally to abstract entities. Contrarily to what Oubouzar claims, the functions the article covers in the earlier texts are not lost along the grammaticalization path, because these functions are still detectable in PDG, as Coniglio and Schlachter argue.

I proposed an interpretable 'contextual identifiability' feature, that can explain the accentuation of the article in cases of Pragmatic Definiteness contexts, the spell-out of the dental onset with Pragmatic Definites in PDG when a preposition is present, the choice of the *D*-article in Frisian and of the fuller form of the article in dialectal varieties of PDG.

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## On Noun Clausal ‘Complements’ and their Non-unitary Nature

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**Abstract** In this article, we discuss the status of clausal ‘complements’ of Ns, which have recently been analysed by various authors as restrictive relative clauses. First we argue that they do not constitute a unitary phenomenon. Two types should be distinguished: clausal “complements” that can be predicated of the noun across a copula (with nouns like ‘claim’, ‘news’, ‘idea’, etc.) and those that cannot (with transitive nouns like ‘proof’ and with ‘unaccusative’ nouns like ‘possibility’). While we argue that both types are not genuine complements of the noun, we address some apparent difficulties for an ordinary restrictive relative clause analysis. Using data from English, Bulgarian and Italian we suggest that noun clausal “complements” of the first type are best analyzed as the predicate of a non-restrictive reduced relative clause, ultimately derived from an inverse (specificational) copular structure where the “complement” clause that expresses the content of the N occupies the subject position and the Noun the predicate position ([[CP That he is a spy] Pred° [DP the claim]]). Concerning noun clausal ‘complements’ of the second type we tentatively assume that they involve the relativization of a propositional variable, as suggested by a number of authors.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Two Types of Noun Clausal ‘complements’ (Those that can and Those that cannot be Predicated of the Noun). – 3 Differences Between ‘Ordinary’ Restrictive Relative Clauses and the Clausal ‘Complements’ of Both Types of Ns. – 3.1 The Nature of the Subordinator. – 3.2 Fronting. – 3.3 Stacking. – 4 Toward an Analysis of Clausal ‘Complements’ of Ns. – 4.1 Nouns Whose Clausal ‘Complements’ can be Predicated of Them. – 4.2 Some Consequences. – 4.3 Appositions or Non-restrictive Relatives?. – 4.4 Nouns Whose Clausal ‘Complement’ cannot be Predicated of Them. – 5 The Nature of the Predication Relation Underlying Finite Clausal ‘Complements’ of Ns. – 6 Refinements and Further Questions. – 7 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Noun complements. Reduced relative clauses. Inverse predication. Unaccusative nouns.

### 1 Introduction

Ever since Stowell’s (1981) dissertation, the complement status of the CP clauses apparently selected by nouns like ‘idea’, ‘conclusion’, ‘belief’, ‘story’, ‘rumor’, ‘news’, ‘claim’, etc. (see the examples in (1)), has been called into question.<sup>1</sup> According to Stowell (1981, 200), the relation between the

1 We wish to thank for their helpful comments two anonymous reviewers and the audiences of Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics 21 at Indiana University (May 11-13, 2012), of the workshop “Similarities and Differences between Clauses and Nominals”, held at the University

clause and the N is one of adjunction rather than of th-role assignment, the adjunct CP being actually in apposition to N. Anderson (1979, 120), following Jespersen (1949), also characterizes the relation between the apparent clausal complement of a noun and the noun as an 'appositive' relation, and so does de Haan (1989, § 2.1.1.2).

- (1) a. the idea that he may stay on for another mandate  
 b. the claim that parallel galaxies exist  
 c. the excuse that John had left  
 d. the question whether John should leave

Grimshaw (1990, 74 ff.) also took the position that the property described by the embedded clause in cases such as (1) is an instantiation of a modification relation, rather than of a complementation relation, in part also because, as Anderson and Stowell suggested, the embedded clause specifies the content of the noun to which it is attached. One crucial piece of evidence that Grimshaw, following Stowell, adduces in favor of a modification type of relation for such apparent complements comes from the possibility of predicating the CP across a copula, as in (2), which is only available in modification relations and not in complement-head relations (we come back to this issue in section 2).<sup>2</sup>

- (2) a. the idea is that he may stay on for another mandate  
 b. the claim was that parallel galaxies exist  
 c. the excuse was that John had left  
 d. the question is whether John should leave

More recently, Kayne (2008a, 2008b), has motivated the nonexistence of nominal complementation as a consequence of his more general proposal that nouns do not project arguments, and analyses them as (restrictive) relative clauses; a conclusion shared and elaborated in partly different ways by other authors (cf. Manzini & Savoia 2003, 2011; Aboh 2005; Arsenijević 2009, Haegeman 2010; Manzini 2012).

of Aarhus on December 13-14, 2012, and of the Syntax seminar at New York University in the Spring of 2014; in particular Steven Franks, Richard Kayne, Claude Muller, Neil Myler, and Sten Vikner. For the purposes of the Italian academic system, Iliana Krapova takes responsibility for the sections 1,2,3,4 and Guglielmo Cinque for the sections 5,6,7.

<sup>2</sup> That sentences like (1c-d) and (2c-d) should be in a transformational relation is originally suggested in Chomsky (1970, 197-98). Grimshaw (1990, 74 ff.) discusses other arguments in favor of the nonexistence of *that*-clause complements of nouns, but see Pesetsky and Torrego 2004 (§ 18.6 and note 22) for a different view.



The existence of two syntactically different types of noun clausal 'complements' (those that can be predicated of the noun and those that cannot), and the existence of certain differences between (both types of) noun clausal 'complements' and ordinary restrictive relative clauses, will lead us to propose a partly different analysis; one which may combine the virtues of the modifier analysis and the relative clause analysis.<sup>3</sup>

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we briefly review the typology of noun complement clauses, arguing that two cases should be distinguished. In section 3, we consider some basic differences between the two types of clausal 'complements' of Ns and restrictive relative clauses. In section 4, we sketch our proposal concerning the two types of noun clausal 'complements'. In section 5 we consider the nature of the predication relation between the 'complement' clause and the noun for the class of nouns whose clausal 'complement' can be predicated of them across a copula. Finally, in section 6, we briefly discuss possible refinements of the analysis and certain questions that remain open, while section 7 summarizes the main conclusions of the article.

## 2 Two Types of Noun Clausal 'Complements' (Those that can and Those that cannot be Predicated of the Noun)

The possibility for a noun clausal 'complement' to be predicated of the noun across a copula is a clear indication, as noted, of its modifier rather than complement status. However, not all noun clausal 'complements' can be predicated of the noun.

As already observed in Higgins (1973, 140 ff.) (cf. also Safir 1982, 122f.; Pesetsky & Torrego 2004, 527 note 22; Moulton 2008, ch. II, § 5), there is one class of nouns ('proof', 'indication', 'demonstration', 'confirmation', etc.) corresponding to verbs taking two clausal arguments, whose apparent internal argument cannot be predicated of the noun.

So, for example, the clausal 'complement' of "proof" in (3a) cannot be predicated of the noun preserving the same meaning. See (3b):

- (3) a. This is the best proof that John was not lying  
b. #The best proof is that John was not lying

3 By 'ordinary' (restrictive) relative clauses we mean relative clauses which relativize one of the arguments or adjuncts of the relative clause. For the time being, we leave open the possibility that noun 'complements' which cannot be predicated of the noun are relative clauses of a special kind (for example ones that relativize a sentential variable).

“The proof is that John was not lying” can only mean that ‘his not lying’ proved something else (cf. the discussion in Moulton 2008, 67).

The clausal ‘complement’ of nouns like ‘proof’, ‘indication’, ‘demonstration’, ‘confirmation’ refers to the content of what is proved/indicated/demonstrated/confirmed by the content of the external argument of the related verb, which can be rendered by a clause predicated of the noun across a copula (see (4), from Higgins 1973, 140).<sup>4</sup>

- (4) a. The best proof that John was not lying is that he was here last night  
 b. The first indication that anything might be wrong was that the barrel hadn’t been refilled  
 c. The reason why I left was that she wasn’t feeling well

As Higgins observes “the complement sentences cannot be reversed without change of meaning or ungrammaticality” (1973, 140). See (5):

- (5) a. #The best proof that he was here last night is that John was not lying  
 b. #The first indication that the barrel hadn’t been refilled was that anything might be wrong  
 c. #The reason that she wasn’t feeling well was why I left

As Higgins (1973, 136) notes nouns like ‘anger’, ‘insistence’, etc. share the same restriction: “[they] can appear with complements in noun phrases but not in copular sentences”. See the contrast between (6) and (7) (for additional cases, cf. Stowell 1981, 201):

- (6) a. John’s anger that he was not chosen  
 b. Mary’s insistence that we should leave
- (7) a. \*John’s anger was that he was not chosen  
 b. \*Mary’s insistence is that we should leave

There is a second class of nouns whose clausal internal argument cannot be predicated of the noun: that of unaccusative nouns like ‘probability’, ‘possibility’, ‘certainty’, etc.<sup>5</sup> See (8) (at this stage we still refer to

4 As Safir puts it “[i]n all of the examples in [(4)] the post-copular clause acts like the subject of the verb from which the nominals are derived” (1982, 123). Cf. *That he was here last night proves that John was not lying*.

5 We take such nouns to be ‘unaccusative’ (cf. Giorgi 1991, §5), as they correspond to adjectives (‘probable’, ‘possible’, ‘certain’, etc.) which Cinque (1990), Bennis (2000), Meltzer-

such clauses as complements, coming back later to the question whether they are genuine arguments of the noun or not).

- (8) a. \*The probability was that he arrived on time (cf. The probability that he arrived on time was remote)  
 b. \*The possibility is that he wins (cf. The possibility that he wins is unrealistic)  
 c. \*The certainty is that the goal is reached (cf. The certainty that the goal is reached is inexistent)

It thus appears that two fundamental types of noun clausal “complements” exist. Those that can be predicated of the noun in a post-copular position (which plausibly betrays their modifier relation to the noun even when they follow it immediately) and those that cannot.

Before proposing our analysis of the two types of noun clausal ‘complements’, we discuss in the next section a number of properties which distinguish both of them from ordinary restrictive relative clauses.

### 3 Differences Between ‘Ordinary’ Restrictive Relative Clauses and the Clausal ‘Complements’ of Both Types of Ns

#### 3.1 The Nature of the Subordinator

The first difference between ordinary relative clauses and the two types of noun clause ‘complements’ distinguished in the previous section regards the nature of the subordinator introducing them.

While there are languages, like Italian, French, English, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, which use the same introducer for both relatives and clausal ‘complements’ of Ns (*che/que/that/što*), which we take here for simplicity to be complementizers (but cf. Kayne 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Sportiche 2008, 2011; Arsenijević 2009; Manzini 2012), in other languages clausal “complements” to Ns are introduced by subordinators that can never introduce an ordinary (restrictive) relative clause. In Bulgarian, for example, the finite complementizer *če* ‘that’, which is used to introduce clausal ‘complements’ of Ns and (declarative) complements of Vs (see (9)) can never

Asscher (2011) categorize as ‘unaccusative’ (called there ‘ergative’) adjectives, because their subject behaves like an internal argument. Meltzer-Asscher (2011, § 5.4) attributes the necessary internal argument of such adjectives in Italian, English and Hebrew to the impossibility for propositions, as opposed to facts and events, to be externalized. For an alternative reason, suggested to her by Alexander Grosu, see Meltzer-Asscher 2011, 190, fn. 90.

be used to introduce an ordinary relative clause (see (10)).<sup>6</sup> The latter is necessarily introduced by a relative pronoun (either one agreeing with the NP, from the *kojto* 'who/which' paradigm, or an invariable one: *deto* 'that'):

- (9) a. *Mālvata, če sa arestovali ministār-predsedatelja,*  
rumour.DET that have.3PL arrested prime minister.DET  
*bārzo se raznese.*  
quickly spread.PAST.3SG  
'The rumour that they have arrested the prime minister spread quickly'
- b. *Mālvi se, če sa arestovali ministār-predsedatelja*  
it-is-rumored that have.3PL arrested prime minister.DET  
'It is rumoured that they have arrested the prime minister'
- (10) *Mālvata, kojato/deto/\*če bārzo se raznese*  
rumor.DET which/that.REL/\*that quickly refl spread PAST.3SG  
*po vsički novinarski agencii, beše če...*  
in all news agencies was that...  
'The rumour that spread quickly in all agencies was that...'

Relative clause markers are unavailable also in the second class of noun clausal 'complements' (those that cannot be predicated of the noun). Here too the declarative complementizer *če* is the only admissible subordinator. See (11a-b):

- (11) a. *Naj-dobroto dokazatelstvo \*koeto/\*deto/če Ivan ne lāže*  
most-good.DET proof \*which/\*that.REL/that John not lies  
*(e če beše u nas snošti)*  
(is that was here last night)  
'The best proof that John was not lying (is that he was here last night)'
- b. *Verojatnostta \*kojato/\*deto/če toj šte zakāsnee.*  
probability.DET \*which/\*that.REL/that he will be.late.  
'the probability that he will be late.'  
(cf. *\*Verojatnostta e če toj šte zakāsnee.* 'The probability is that he will be late')

6 A brief look at the history of this subordinator reveals that it is historically causative in meaning, first appearing in written texts around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and later accumulating more functions, one of which was a subordinator function of the declarative type. It is only this function that has persisted until the present day (Mirčev 1978, 259).

Thus, there seems to be no way of interpreting *če* in (9a) and (11a) and b. as an ordinary relative complementizer/pronoun.<sup>7</sup>

Romanian is another language where noun clausal ‘complements’ are introduced by subordinators (*că* ‘that’-indicative – *afirmația că va veni* ‘the claim that (s)he will come’ and *ca...(să)* ‘that’-subjunctive – *dorința ca el să vină* ‘the desire that (s)he will come’) which cannot be used as relativizers (Alboiu & Hill 2013, § 2.3.2). This is also noted in Manzini (2012, fn. 3). In Japanese noun clausal complements are also ‘introduced’ (followed) by a special complementizer (of the ‘say’ type), *toiu*, which is not found in either gap or ‘gapless’ relative clauses. See (12), from Sirai and Gunji (1998, 19f):<sup>8</sup>

- (12) a. [Naomi-ga ku-ru ]      *toiu*    *kitai*  
 N.-NOM    come-PRES COMP    hope  
 ‘the hope that Naomi will come’
- b. [Naomi-ga koko-ni ki-ta ]      (*toiu*)    *zizitu*  
 N.-NOM    here-LOC come-PAST (COMP) fact  
 ‘the fact that Naomi came here’

To the extent that the CPs in (13a-b) are also clausal ‘complements’ of the N, on a par with ‘that’ clauses, a similar problem may arise in English and Italian, as neither *whether* nor *se* ‘if’ can introduce ordinary relative clauses in these languages. This is shown by the contrast between (13a-b), which feature finite clausal ‘complements’ to the noun ‘question’, and (14a-b), which feature illegitimate relative clauses with the same subordinators:<sup>9</sup>

7 It is curious that even the clausal ‘complement’ of the nominal counterparts of factive verbs, which take a complement introduced by the relative complementizer *deto* ‘that.REL’ is necessarily introduced by *če* ‘that’. See the contrast between (ia) and (ib):

- (i) a. *Radvax se, deto raste umna i dobra*  
 rejoice.PAST.1SG that.REL grows.3SG intelligent and good-hearted  
 ‘I was happy that she was growing intelligent and good-hearted’
- b. *radostta če/\*deto raste umna i dobra*  
 joy.DET that/that.REL grows.3SG intelligent and good-hearted  
 ‘the joy that she was growing intelligent and good-hearted’

The same facts hold in Modern Greek, which also has a declarative subordinator (*oti*, corresponding to Bulgarian *če*) and a relative/factive one (*pu*, corresponding to Bulgarian *deto*).

8 Only nouns like ‘fact’ can omit *toiu*. ‘Fact’ behaves differently from other nouns taking clausal ‘complements’ also in Korean (cf. Cha 1998, § 4; Kim 2011, § 3) and English (cf. Kayne 2008a, § 12; 2008b, § 10). De Cuba (2014), which we became aware of after writing this article, also argues against taking noun clausal ‘complements’ as ordinary restrictive relatives on the basis of the different subordinator that introduces them in languages like Swedish, Finnish, Basque, Bulgarian and Durban Zulu and of different agreement facts in the latter language.

9 Also see the contrast between *The question who we should invite was not easy to answer* (de Haan 1989, 58, fn 6) and *\*The question<sub>i</sub> who<sub>k</sub> we should put t<sub>i</sub> to t<sub>k</sub> is not easy to answer*.

- (13) a. the question [<sub>CP</sub> whether intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe] is legitimate  
 b. *la domanda* [<sub>CP</sub> *se esista una vita intelligente altrove nell'universo*] è *legittima*  
 the question whether intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is legitimate
- (14) a. \*the question [<sub>CP</sub> whether we may ever solve t].  
 b. \**la questione* [<sub>CP</sub> *se potremo mai risolvere t*].  
 'the question if we may ever solve.'

### 3.2 Fronting

Bulgarian shows yet another difference between its ordinary (restrictive) relative clauses and its clausal 'complements' of Ns. As shown by the contrast between (15) and (16), a constituent belonging to the relative clause can be fronted in between the Head N and the relative clause (cf. Krapova 2010 for discussion of this peculiarity of Bulgarian) but no constituent of the clausal 'complement' of both classes of nouns can likewise be fronted in between the N and its clausal 'complement'. So, in (15) material from the relative clause can be fronted between the relative pronoun/complementizer and the Head noun (as is known since Rudin 1985 – see example (28) below), but similar frontings above *če* in noun 'complement' clauses result in ungrammaticality (see (16)).

- (15) a. *novinata* [*s Ivan*]<sub>i</sub> *kojato/deto* *čuxme t<sub>i</sub>*  
 news.DET with Ivan which/that.REL heard.1PL  
 'the news that we heard together with Ivan'  
 b. *dokazatelstvoto* [*v sáda*]<sub>i</sub> *koeto/deto* *dade t<sub>i</sub>* *advokatát*  
 evidence.the in court which/that.REL gave.3SG lawyer.DET  
 'the evidence that the lawyer presented in court.'  
 c. *vázmožnostta* [*s Ivan*]<sub>i</sub> *kojato/deto* *komentiraxme*  
 possibility.DET with Ivan which/that.REL discussed.1PL  
*t, če toj može da spečeli mnogo pari.*  
 that he can da to earn3SG much money  
 'the possibility that we discussed with Ivan that he can win a lot of money.'
- (16) a. \*?*novinata* [*za Ivan*]<sub>i</sub> *če šte se ženi* *Maria t<sub>i</sub>*.  
 news.DET for Ivan that will refl marry.3SG Maria.  
 'the news that Maria is going to marry Ivan.'  
 (cf. *novinata če Maria šte se ženi za Ivan*. 'the news that Maria is going to marry Ivan')

- b. \**dokazatelstvoto* [za Ivan]<sub>i</sub> *če se e oženila* Maria t<sub>i</sub>.  
evidence.DET for Ivan that refl is married.3SG.Fem. Maria.  
'the evidence that Maria has married Ivan.'  
(cf. *dokazatelstvoto če Maria se e oženila za Ivan*. 'the evidence that Maria has married Ivan')
- c. \**verojatnostta* [za Ivan]<sub>i</sub> *če šte se oženi* Maria t<sub>i</sub>.  
probability.DET for Ivan that will refl marry.3SG Maria.  
'the probability that Maria is going to marry Ivan.'  
(cf. *verojatnostta če Maria šte se oženi za Ivan*. 'The probability that Maria is going to marry Ivan.')

### 3.3 Stacking

A third difference, noted in the literature, is that unlike ordinary restrictive relative clauses, which can stack, clausal 'complements' of Ns cannot (Moulton 2009, 29). See (17a) and (17b) with (18):

- (17) a. The rumor that Fred made that Jill believed that Bill spread to his friends... (Moulton 2009, (21b))
- b. \*The rumor that Fred was happy, that he was in Paris, that he could see ghosts... (Moulton 2009, (21a))

Note that the examples in (17) are to be interpreted not as some form of conjunction, say asyndetic coordination, but as genuine stacking, which involves iterated set intersection, as more evident in (18) ((18) does not mean that John has written just one article, which would have been the case under coordination, but that John is not ashamed of just one of the articles that he wrote). While (17a) can be interpreted as involving stacking, (17b) cannot.

- (18) *Questo è l'unico articolo che ha scritto di cui non si vergogna*  
'This is the only article that he wrote of which he is not ashamed'  
(cf. %*Questo è l'unico articolo che ha scritto e di cui non si vergogna* 'This is the only article that he wrote and of which he is not ashamed', which, if good at all, implies that he wrote a single article)

Stacking of apparent clausal complements to nouns (as opposed to relative clauses) appears impossible also in Italian (19), Bulgarian (20) and Mandarin, as reported in Yip (2009, 46f). See the contrast between (21a-b):

- (19) \**La notizia che Gianni sia stato arrestato che l'abbiano preso mentre fuggiva è falsa*  
 'The news that Gianni was arrested that they caught him while he was fleeing is false'
- (20) a. \**Novinata, če Ivan e arestuvan, če se go hvanali, dokato e biagal, e falšiva*  
 the.news that Gianni is arrested that refl him caught while is fleeing is false  
 'The news that Ivan has been arrested that they had caught him while he was fleeing is false'
- b. \**Dokazatelstvoto, če e vzela parite, če gi e vložil v smetka, ne e ubeditelno*  
 proof.DET that is taken money.DET that them is put in account not is convincing  
 'The proof that he has taken the money that he has put it in a bank is not convincing'
- c. \**Verojnostta, če toj šte uceli celta, če šte izleze pobeditel v biatlona, e nulleva*  
 the.probability that he will hit the.target that will come.3SG first in the biathlon is null  
 'The probability that he will hit the goal that he will come first in the biathlon competition is null'
- (21) a. *nei ben [ta ding de] [wo bu xihuan de] shu*  
 DEM CL he order DE I NEG like DE book  
 'that book that he ordered that I don't like'
- b. \**[Zhangsan da Lisi de] [Lisi shoushang de] xiaoxi*  
 Zhangsan hit Lisi DE Lisi hurt de news  
 '\*the news that Zhangsan hit Lisi that Lisi got hurt'

Moulton (2009) attributes the ungrammaticality of stacking of apparent noun complements to a semantic incongruence: attributing more than one content to a single noun would amount to saying that the propositions of the stacked CPs are identical. However, multiple 'complement' clauses are possible with plural nouns, which allow for a distributive interpretation. Therefore examples like (22) (from Bulgarian) should not be considered a proper case of stacking:

- (22) *Sluxovete, če Ivan e izbjagal, če šte se ženi za švedka, če skoro šte ima bebe ...*  
 rumors.DET that Ivan is escaped, that will marry for Swede, that soon will has baby ...  
 'the rumors that Ivan has escaped, that he intends to marry a Swede, that he will soon have a baby born ...'



Here, every rumor is paired with a single proposition, indicating the uniqueness of the rumor. In relative clauses, on the other hand, stacking the second relative clause modifies the intersection of the Head and the first relative clause, as seen in (18).

## 4 Toward an Analysis of Clausal ‘Complements’ of Ns

### 4.1 Nouns Whose Clausal ‘Complement’ can be Predicated of Them

Let us begin with the one type of noun clausal ‘complements’ that can be predicated of the noun (i.e. with nouns other than the ‘proof’ class or the unaccusative class).

This type crucially differs from ordinary relative clauses in that it can be predicated of the Head N, while ordinary relative clauses cannot. So, for example, English (23c) contrasts with (23b) in that the relative clause “that Fred concocted” cannot appear in postcopular position:<sup>10</sup>

- (23) a. The story that Fred didn’t report his income...  
 b. The story is that Fred didn’t report his income (Moulton 2009, (21))  
 c. \*The story is that Fred concocted...  
 (cf. The story that Fred concocted...)

The same contrast is observed in Bulgarian (24b-c) and in Italian (25b-c):

- (24) a. *Idejata će neutrinite se dvižat po-bărzo ot svetlinata*  
 idea.DET that neutrins.DET refl move.3PL faster than light.DET  
 ‘the idea that neutrins move faster than light’  
 b. *Idejata e će neutrinite se dvižat po-bărzo*  
 idea.DET is that neutrins.DET refl move.3PL faster  
*ot svetlinata*  
 than light.DET  
 ‘The idea is that neutrins move faster than light’  
 c. \**Idejata e će mi kazaxa*  
 idea.DET is that me.DAT told.3PL  
 ‘The idea is that they told me’

<sup>10</sup> This impossibility is noted for English in Den Dikken 2006, 309, note 10; and Meltzer-Asscher 2012, 172; for Chinese in Tsao 2010, 94.

- (25) a. L'idea che i neutrini si muovessero più velocemente della luce.  
 DET idea that the neutrins move.SUBJ more fast than.DET light.  
 'the idea that neutrins move faster than light'
- b. L'idea era che i neutrini si muovessero più velocemente della luce  
 DET idea was that the neutrins move.SUBJ more fast than.DET light  
 'the idea was that neutrins move faster than light'
- c. \*L'idea era che mi hanno comunicato  
 DET idea was that me.DAT have communicated  
 'the idea was that they communicated to me'

The predication structure seen in the (b)-examples in (23), (24), (25) opens up the possibility that the CP predicate may enter a relative clause as a predicate, just as APs and NPs in predicate position can (a possibility that comes for free).<sup>11</sup> In other words, (23b), (24b), and (25b) can give rise to relative structures like (26a-c), corresponding to the three languages exemplified:

- (26) a. The story [<sub>CP</sub> which is [<sub>CP</sub> that Fred didn't report his income]]...
- b. *idejata* [<sub>CP</sub> *kojato e* [<sub>CP</sub> *če neutrinite se dvižat po-bārzo ot svetlinata*]]...  
 idea.DET which is that neutrins.DET refl move.3PL faster than  
 light.DET  
 'the idea which is that neutrins move faster than light'
- c. L'idea [<sub>CP</sub> che era [<sub>CP</sub> che i neutrini si muovessero più velocemente della luce]].  
 DET idea which was that DET neutrins move.SUBJ more  
 fast than.DET light  
 'the idea which was that neutrins move faster than light..'

This, in turn, makes it possible to view the clausal 'complements' of the N in the (a) examples of (23), (24), (25) as reduced variants of (26), as shown in (27), where the CP is in the predicate position of a reduced relative clause:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This is in fact among the possibilities contemplated in Chomsky: "The analysis as a reduced relative is also possible in the case of [*the question whether John should leave*]. Despite the unnaturalness of relative clauses formed in the usual way with [*The question is whether John should leave. The excuse was that John had left*] as the embedded proposition, one might argue that these are the sources of [... *the question whether John should leave; ... the excuse that John had left*], as reduced relatives" (1970, 197).

<sup>12</sup> For convenience, we give here a kind of 'whiz deletion' representation of clause reduction in the above relative structures. For more detailed discussion of the internal structure and external distribution of reduced relative clauses, see Cinque 2010, ch. 4, § 2.

- (27) a. the story [<sub>CP</sub> ~~which is~~ [<sub>CP</sub> that Fred didn't report his income]]
- b. *idejata* [<sub>CP</sub> ~~*kojato-e*~~ [<sub>CP</sub> *če neutrinite se dvižat po-bārzo ot*  
the idea ~~which is~~ that neutrins refl move.3PL faster than  
*svetlinata*]]  
light.DET
- c. l'idea [<sub>CP</sub> ~~che era~~ [<sub>CP</sub> *che i neutrini si muovessero più*  
the idea ~~which was~~ that DET neutrins move.SUBJ more  
*velocemente della luce*]]  
fast than. DET light

#### 4.2 Some Consequences

There are several immediate consequences which follow from the proposal that clausal 'complements' of the first class of nouns ('story', 'news', 'idea', etc.) are reduced relative clauses.

First, the proposal allows us to unify the apparent complement status of the CP following this class of nouns with the property that these CPs can be predicated of the noun across a copula. In other words, it allows us to relate two facts that would otherwise have looked unrelated.

Second, it can account for the fact that in certain languages clausal complements of this class of nouns are not introduced by ordinary relative pronouns/complementizers, as clearly shown by Bulgarian (as well as Romanian and Japanese), because the CPs in question are run-of-the-mill finite declarative or interrogative clauses in predicate position. See the examples in (9) and (12) above from Bulgarian, and (13) and (14) from English and Italian.

Note that for languages such as Italian, French, and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, which use the same subordinator for both declarative and ordinary relative clauses, it can be maintained that this subordinator neutralizes the difference found in languages like Bulgarian, which distinguish the two. The only real counterexample would be to find a language which distinguishes the subordinator used in clausal complements of verbs from the relative subordinator, and uses the latter also in the clausal complements of Ns, as in an imaginary variety of Bulgarian where only the relative subordinator *deto* were to appear in clausal 'complements' of nouns.

Third, our analysis may also explain the contrast noted in (15) and (16); namely the fact that a constituent from the relative CP, but no constituent from the CP 'complement' of a N, can be fronted to a position between the CP and the N. As discussed in detail in Krapova (2010, §4.2) for Bulgarian, in ordinary restrictive relative clauses (of the 'matching' type) the relative pronoun *kojato* 'which' in (28) may raise to a CP lower than TopicP (say, to FinP in Rizzi's 1997 Split-CP analysis, given in (29)), with the result that

the topicalized phrase comes to intervene between the Head N and the relative pronoun/complementizer introducing the relative clause.<sup>13</sup>

- (28)  $[_{DP} \text{ženata}]_{ForceP} [_{TopicP} \text{naj-složnite pesni}]_{FinP} \text{kojato/deto} [_{IP} \text{peeše...}]$   
 woman.DET most-complex.DET songs who/that.REL sang.3SG  
 'the woman who sang the most complex songs...'  
 (Rudin 1985, 127, ex. 9a)

- (29) The CP hierarchy: ForceP TopicP FocusP FinP (Rizzi 1997)

In contrast, to judge most clearly from examples like (30), the complementizer *če* 'that' which introduces the clausal complement of factive verbs appears to have to raise to a CP position higher than TopicP (say, ForceP in Rizzi's 1997 Split-CP analysis). This is shown by (30a) where *če* necessarily precedes the topicalized phrase [ot Evropa]:<sup>14</sup>

- (30) a. \**Sážaljavam ot Evropa če ne idva pomošt.*  
 regret.1SG from Europe that NEG comes help  
 b. *Sážaljavam če ot Evropa ne idva pomošt.*  
 regret.1SG that from Europe NEG comes help  
 'I regret that from Europe comes no help'

Given that the relative order of the complementizers is the one shown in (31) (cf. Krapova 2010 for a more detailed discussion of the left periphery in Bulgarian),

- (31) [ForceP *če* 'that' [TopicP [FinP *kojato/deto* 'who'/'that.REL' [ ... ]]]

13 Other languages that permit the fronting of material from the RC between the Head and the relative pronoun, include Latin (Bianchi 1999, 96 f.) and Georgian (Yasuhiro 2009).

14 The *če* introducing the CP complement of bridge verbs can instead target either the lower or the higher C indifferently, possibly via optional raising from FinP to ForceP. See (i) (from Krapova 2002):

- (i) a. *Mislja/kazvam ot Evropa če šte dojde pomošt*  
 think.1SG/say.1SG from Europe that will come.3SG help  
 'I think/say that from Europe help will come'  
 b. *Mislja/kazvam če ot Evropa šte dojde pomošt*  
 think.1SG/say.1SG that from Europe will come.3SG help

The modal/subjunctive complementizer *da* appears instead to be lower than TopicP. See (ii), which together with (30a-b) and the generalization in (31), gives the overall order in (iii):

- (ii) a. *Nadeždata na vsički (e) [ [TopicP ot Evropa], [FocusP skoro ] [da dojde pomošt t<sub>i</sub>]]*  
 hope.DET of all is from Europe soon SUBJ.PRT come.3SG help  
 b. \**Nadeždata na vsički (e) [ [da [ot Evropa], [skoro] dojde pomošt t<sub>i</sub>]]*  
 hope.DET of all (is) SUBJ.PRT from Europe soon come.3SG help  
 (iii) *če* TopicP FocusP *kojato/deto da*  
 that which/that.REL subjunctive particle

the ungrammaticality of (30a), where a topicalized phrase is fronted above the complementizer *če* 'that' is, under the present analysis, at the basis of the ungrammaticality of (16a) above, repeated here, where *če* has also failed to raise above TopicP.

- (16) a \*?*novinata* [*za Ivan*]<sub>i</sub> *če šte se ženi Maria t<sub>i</sub>*.  
 news.DET for Ivan<sub>i</sub> that will refl marry.3SG Maria.  
 'the news that Maria is going to marry Ivan.'  
 (Cf. *novinata če Maria šte se ženi za Ivan* 'the news that Maria is going to marry Ivan')

Given the fact that in relative clauses a topicalized phrase can intervene between the Head and the relative clause, as we saw in (28) above, one could expect the same possibility to obtain with the class of nouns like 'claim', 'news', 'idea', etc., whose *če* 'complement' is arguably a reduced form of *kojto/deto e če*. 'which is that.'. In principle the higher relative structure should be able to host a phrase between the Head and the relative pronoun/subordinator.

We take the ungrammaticality of (16a) and the like to be due to the islandhood of the *če*-clause in predicate position. Example (32a) gives the (reduced) relative structure corresponding to (16a), and (32b) confirms that a predicative CP indeed is an island for extraction.

- (32) a. \*?*Novinata* [<sub>TopicP</sub> *za Ivan*]<sub>i</sub> (*kojato e*) [<sub>ForceP</sub> *če šte se ženi Maria t<sub>i</sub>* ]]]  
 news.DET for Ivan which is that will refl marry.3SG  
 Maria  
 'The news that Maria is going to marry Ivan'  
 b. \**Ivan, s kojoto<sub>i</sub> istinata e [če az govorix t<sub>i</sub>]*.  
 Ivan, with whom the truth is that I spoke-1SG.

In section 5 we will see that the *če*-clause of (32b) is actually in subject position, so that we are dealing here with a subject island.<sup>15</sup>

All of these pieces of evidence raise the following question: what type of relative clause do the apparent clausal complements that can be predicated of the noun belong to, given the numerous differences we saw above with respect to ordinary restrictive relatives? Crucially, in terms of inter-

15 Another consequence of the proposed analysis is that it relates the ungrammaticality of embedded topicalization within finite clausal 'complements' of Ns, pointed out to us by Liliane Haegeman (see (i)a), to the ungrammaticality of topicalization within a finite CP in predicate position (see (i)b), and ultimately, to the ungrammaticality of topicalization within a finite subject CP (ic):

- (i) a. \*The claim that this film he saw made everybody furious  
 b. \*The claim was that this film he saw.  
 c. \*That this film he saw was the claim

pretation, the set provided by the relative clause (see (27), repeated here) does not intersect with the set provided by the Head with the effect of narrowing down the latter to a subset (which is the hallmark of restrictivity):

- (27) a. the story [<sub>CP</sub> which is [<sub>CP</sub> that Fred didn't report his income]]
- b. *idejata* [<sub>CP</sub> *kojato-e* [<sub>CP</sub> *če neutrinite se dvižat po-bārzo ot svetlinata*]]  
 idea.DET which is that neutrins.DET refl move.3PL faster than  
 light.DET
- c. *l'idea* [<sub>CP</sub> *ehe-era* [<sub>CP</sub> *che i neutrini si muovessero più velocemente della luce*]]  
 the idea which was that DET neutrins move.SUBJ more  
 fast than. DET light

What the clauses seem to do is rather specify the content of the Head (as originally noted by Jespersen, Anderson and Stowell). In other words, they appear to be a kind of (reduced) non-restrictive relative clauses.<sup>16</sup>

This is reminiscent of Jespersen's, Anderson's and Stowell's proposals that noun clausal 'complements' are appositions. However, before considering the second class of nouns (those whose clausal 'complement' cannot be predicated of the noun), we want to distinguish this kind of non-restrictive reduced relative clauses (and non-restrictives, more generally) from appositions.

### 4.3 Appositions or Non-restrictive Relatives?

The term 'apposition' covers a number of distinct phenomena, as McCawley (1998), Acuña-Fariña (2000), De Vries (2002), Heringa (2011) have shown. Even if various authors treat all appositions as reduced non-restrictive

**16** There appear to exist contexts where the clausal complement of the noun seems to have a contrastive (restrictive) import.

(i) A: Which claim that John made did you find so annoying?

B: Definitely the claim that complement clauses are arguments.

which does not seem to be paraphrasable through a (reduced) non-restrictive relative clause:  
 #Definitely the claim, (which is) that complement clauses are arguments.

This might suggest that under certain conditions, like the preceding context, the reduced relative clause can be used restrictively:

(ii) Definitely the claim which is that complement clauses are arguments

But this is dubious. Were they genuine (reduced) restrictive RCs they should allow stacking (like in *I prefer events prepared carefully organized much in advance*), but they do not. See (iii):

(iii) A: Which claim that John made did you find so annoying?

B: \*Definitely the claim that complement clauses are arguments that they are not relative clauses.

tive relative clauses (transformationally derived from the latter by simply deleting the relative pronoun and the copula) (cf. also Potts 2007, introducing a comma operator), here, we follow Burton-Roberts (1975), McCawley (1998) and Kayne (2008a, 2008b) in reserving the term 'apposition' for those structures which can be introduced by the adverb 'namely', as they differ from reduced non-restrictives. One of McCawley's (1998) main goals was to show that structures which are commonly lumped together under the name 'apposition' can be assigned to two different classes: 'namely'-constructions, which are canonical appositions, and reduced relatives, which, in his account, are only anaphorically related to their hosts. 'Namely' expressions constitute a unique construction, a detached NP, which he labels 'true apposition', and which can be successfully distinguished from non-restrictive reduced relatives.

The first difference is that 'true apposition' do not allow for a full relative clause paraphrase with 'who'/'which' plus a copula.

- (33) a. The recent winner of the Illinois state lottery, Albert Swanson, has announced that he plans to move to Bermuda. (McCawley 1998, 467 )  
 b. ??The recent winner of the Illinois state lottery, who is Albert Swanson, has announced his plans to move to Bermuda. (Acuña-Fariña 2000, 7)

Additionally, true appositions seem to allow for extraposition.<sup>17</sup> We give here an example from Bulgarian, which is adapted from McCawley's (1998, 468) original example:

- (34) a. *Trima duši, Ivan, Petăr i Maria, prisăstvaxa na săbranieto.*  
 Three people, John, Peter and Mary, attended the meeting.  
 b. *Trima duši prisăstvaxa na săbranieto, Ivan, Petăr i Maria.*  
 Three people attended the meeting, John, Peter and Mary.

Furthermore, as already recalled, true appositions can be introduced by *namely*, as in (35):

- (35) The recent winner of the Illinois state lottery, namely Albert Swanson, has announced that he plans to move to Bermuda

If 'namely' appositions do not allow for a paraphrase with a non-restrictive copular clause, and allow for extraposition, then the nominal 'comple-

<sup>17</sup> However, as (i) shows, this is not always possible with true appositives:

(i) My only brother, namely Peter, is a member of the student council. Cf. \*My only bother is a member of the student council, namely Peter.

For other problematic cases see the discussion in Acuña-Fariña (1998, 2000).

ments' we have been discussing do not belong to this group. Thus, we can account for the fact that nominal 'complements' cannot be introduced by 'namely' (cf. Kayne 2010, 175, fn. 32):

- (36) \**Idejata, a imenno če zemjata e krāgla, ...*  
 idea.DET, namely that earth.DET is flat, ...  
 \*'The idea, namely that the earth is flat...'

#### 4.4 Nouns Whose Clausal 'Complement' cannot be Predicated of Them

Concerning the second type of noun clausal 'complements', we saw that they behave identically with the first class as regards

- a. selection of the subordinator *če* (cf. (12))
- b. impossibility of fronting a topicalized phrase to the left of *če* (cf. (16b-c));
- c. impossibility of stacking (cf. (20b-c)).

These properties stem from shared constraints on the two types of nouns (non ordinary relative clause status of the noun 'complement' clause; obligatory raising of *če* to ForceP, impossibility of attributing more than one content to a single noun (see § 3.3. above).

Nouns like 'proof', etc. and unaccusative nouns like 'possibility', etc. differ from the class of nouns like 'claim', 'news', 'idea', etc. only in that their apparent complement cannot be predicated of the noun across a copula. Such complements rather seem to represent an internal argument of the noun (the propositional theme of nouns of the 'proof' class, related to the propositional theme of the corresponding verbs, and the internal argument of 'unaccusative' nouns like 'possibility', 'probability').

It is however dubious that even these clausal 'complements' are genuine arguments of the noun. In addition to the theoretical arguments discussed in Kayne (2008a, 2008b) against nouns taking arguments a possible empirical argument that the clausal 'complement' of nouns like 'proof' is not a complement is that differently from genuine complements it does not induce a Condition C violation under reconstruction. See the contrast between (37a) and (37b) given in Moulton (2009, § 5):

- (37) a. Whose proof that John<sub>i</sub> was at the scene of the crime did he<sub>i</sub> have expunged from the record?  
 b. \*Whose proving yesterday that John<sub>i</sub> was at the scene of the crime did he<sub>i</sub> not want his lawyer to hear?

Moulton concludes that "if bleeding of Condition C diagnoses non-argu-



ment status, then we need to find a way to let even the CP object of nominal 'proof' to compose as a modifier" (2009, 74).

A similar conclusion appears to hold of the unaccusative class:

- (38) a. What probability that John<sub>i</sub> may lose does (even) he<sub>i</sub> think there is?  
 b. \*How probable that John<sub>i</sub> loses does (even) he<sub>i</sub> think it is?

For this second class of noun clausal 'complements', we will tentatively assume an adjunct status, along the lines of what has been proposed in different variants in Manzini and Savoia (2003, 2011), Arsenijević (2009), Haegeman (2010), Jenks (2014) in terms of the (headless) relativization of a propositional variable whereby "the probability that John wins." is of the type "the probability of x: x John wins" (cf. Manzini 2012, § 2).

## 5 The Nature of the Predication Relation Underlying Finite Clausal 'complements' of Ns

The predication relation which we have argued underlies the clausal 'complement' of nouns like 'claim', 'news', 'idea', etc. (repeated here as (39b))

- (39) a. The claim that Fred didn't report his income  
 b. The claim is that Fred didn't report his income (adapted from Moulton 2009, 21)

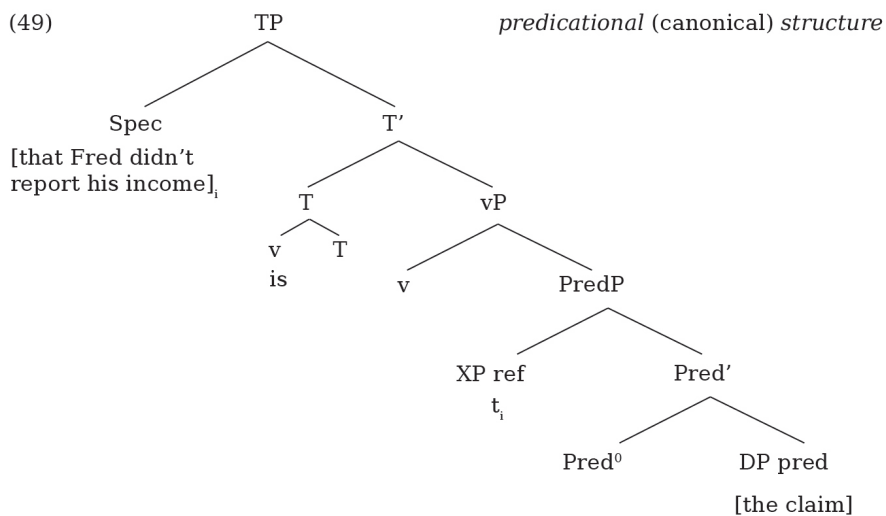
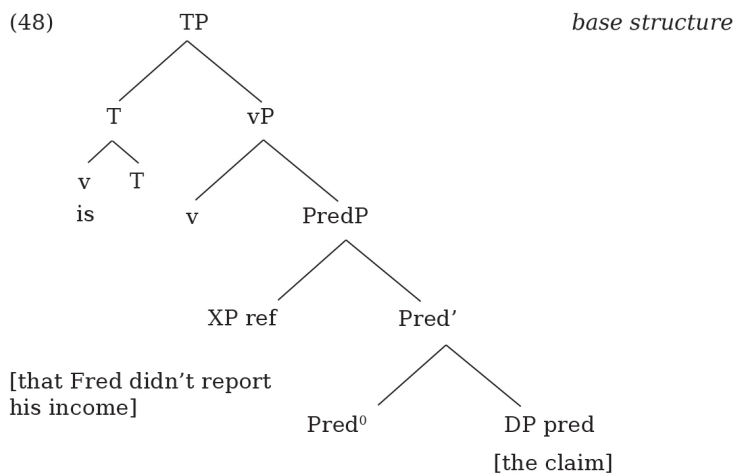
appears not to be a canonical predication but an inverse one (in the sense of Moro 1997). That in (39b) a predicate inversion has taken place, with the DP predicate inverted around the subject (the CP), becomes evident if we apply one of Moro's diagnostics for detecting inverse predications; namely the non-omissibility of the copula if the predication is embedded in a 'small clause' under a verb like 'consider'.<sup>18</sup>

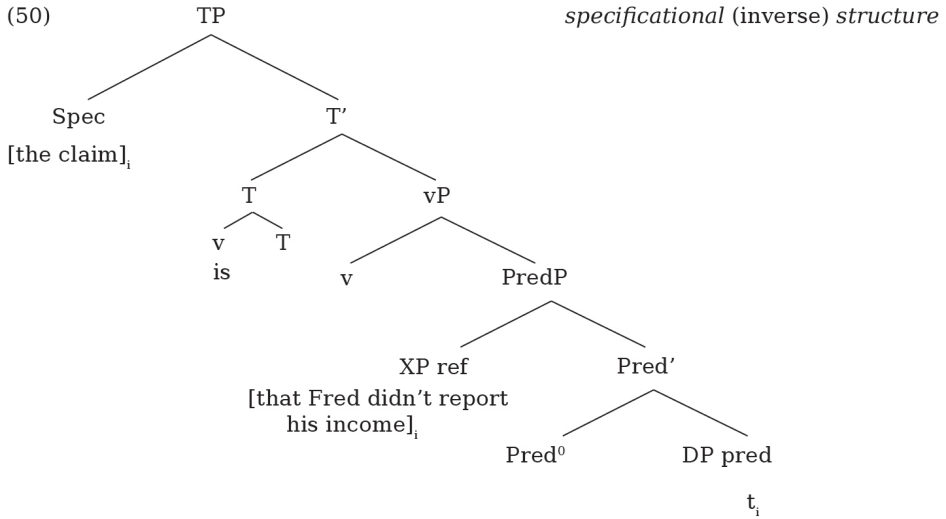
In fact, as also Den Dikken (2006, 244) notes, the copula between the N and its clausal 'complement' cannot be omitted in such a context (40a) just as it cannot in the same context in ordinary inverse predications like (40b):

<sup>18</sup> To quote from Heringa, who follows Moro (1997) in using this test to distinguish the canonical from the inverse predication involving two NPs: "Whereas the two NPs in a canonical copular structure can be used in the same order in a small clause complement without *be* for the verb *consider*, this is impossible for the two NPs in an inverse copular clause" (Heringa 2011, 88).









The entire derivation of a nominal phrase like “the claim that Fred didn’t report his income” could thus be represented informally as in (51):

- (51) a. is [that Fred didn’t report his income] [the claim] = base structure  
 b. [the claim] is [that Fred didn’t report his income] = specificational predication  
 (obtained through Predicate inversion)  
 c. [the claim]<sub>i</sub> [which<sub>i</sub> t<sub>i</sub> is [that Fred didn’t report his income]] = relativization  
 d. [the claim] which is [that Fred didn’t report his income] = relative clause reduction

This may account for the fact (cf. Bošković & Lasnik 2003, 534f.; Kayne 2010, 178) that the complementizer introducing the clausal ‘complement’ of a N cannot easily delete (as opposed to that introducing the clausal complement of bridge verbs like ‘believe’):<sup>20</sup>

- (52) a. The belief *?*(that) he is a spy is certainly false  
 b. They believe (that) he is a spy

<sup>20</sup> Bowen (2005, 187) reports that in his corpus “ten nouns were found with *that*-omission in the complement-clause”: ‘belief’, ‘doubt’, ‘evidence’, ‘feeling’, ‘hope’, ‘illusion’, ‘misconception’, ‘question’, ‘sign’ and ‘thought’.

For us, the marginality of (52a) (“the belief he is a spy.”) is possibly to be assimilated to that of (53):

(53) ?the belief which is he is a spy.

It could be thought that to derive such N + clausal ‘complement’ cases as “the claim that Fred didn’t report his income” no extra step involving a relative clause configuration (46c-d) is needed in addition to the predication structure (46b) (apart from the deletion of the copula). In Den Dikken (2006, 244), for example, the simpler structure (54) is assumed to underlie such nominal phrases

(54)  $[_{DP} D (...)] [_{RP} CP [ RELATOR [_{NP} claim]]]$

with subsequent raising of the NP ‘claim’ above RP. Notice, however, that the nominal predicate is a complex DP rather than a simple NP:  $[_{DP} Her\ claim]_i$  (copula)  $[_{RP} [_{CP} that\ Fred\ didn't\ report\ his\ income] RELATOR t_i]$ ;  $[_{DP} the\ claim\ that\ she\ made]_i$  (copula)  $[_{RP} [_{CP} that\ Fred\ didn't\ report\ his\ income] RELATOR t_i]$ . This suggests that the structure underlying these DPs is an inverted predication structure, an IP (or CP – see below) which needs to be embedded in a larger DP to be able to occupy a DP argument position as the object of verbs like ‘circulate’ (see (55)), which cannot take a simple IP/CP object (see (56)):

(55) Weir began to circulate the claim that he had developed a revolutionary technology

This can only be achieved, it seems, if the DP subject of the copula is relativized:<sup>21</sup>

(57)  $[_{DP} [_{DP} Her\ claim]_i [ which\ copula\ [_{RP} [_{CP} that\ Fred\ didn't\ report\ his\ income] RELATOR t_i]]]$ .

The relativization in (57) can only be non-restrictive as relative clause Heads modified by possessive adjectives are incompatible with restrictive relativization:

- (58) a. \*John’s book that you borrowed. (Lyons 1986,123) vs John’s book, which you borrowed.  
 b. \*Her claim that we heard is preposterous vs Her claim, which we heard, is preposterous)

21 For an analysis of relative clauses, compatible with antisymmetry, under both a ‘raising’ and a ‘matching’ derivation, see Cinque 2013, chs. 13-14, and forthcoming.

## 6 Refinements and Further Questions

In this section, we discuss certain possible refinements of the analysis sketched in the previous sections suggesting possible solutions that remain to be considered in the future.

One question concerns the selection parallelism between nouns and the corresponding verbs (in those cases where there is a verb corresponding to the noun). Nouns like 'claim', 'proof' or 'belief' appear to select the same clausal complements as the corresponding verbs 'claim', 'prove' and 'believe'. We tentatively propose that where the verbs are denominal this is a consequence of their derivation via incorporation/fusion of the noun with a light verb to derive the corresponding verb (cf. Hale & Keyser 1993).<sup>22</sup> For 'deverbal' nouns like 'argument', 'feeling', or 'suspicion' one possibility is that the corresponding verbs also derive from the incorporation/fusion of a neutral (verbal/nominal) root into a light verb, with the noun then derived from the root through the addition of a suffix.<sup>23</sup>

A second question regards the target of the raising of the predicate in the specificational structure in (50). There is some indication that the position targeted by the predicate DP may not coincide with that of the subject of the copula. This is apparently shown by the following colloquial French facts (kindly provided by Marie Christine Jamet, p.c.):

- (59) a. Que Jean soit parti (\*c') est un problème  
that Jean is left (\*it) is a problem  
b. Le problème \*(c') est que Jean soit part  
the problem \*(it) is that Jean is left

The obligatory expletive subject, *ce*, which appears in the inverted predication structure (59b), seems to indicate that the predicate "le problème" is in a specifier position above the subject (it should however be noted that not all French speakers find a sharp contrast between (59a) and (59b), which is possible without *ce* in higher registers of French - Claude Muller, p.c.). This may suggest that two distinct structural configurations

22 The question why the noun + clausal 'complement' is an island for extraction while the verb + clausal complement is not may be related to the fact that the incorporation/fusion of the noun with the light verb obliterates the NP/DP barrier.

23 It remains to understand how to account for the fact, pointed out by one of the reviewers, that while the noun can take either an indicative or a subjunctive apparent clausal complement ((i)a.), the corresponding verb can only take an indicative one ((i)b.):

- (i)a L'affermazione che Ida è/sia una ladra.  
The statement that I. is (subj.) a thief.  
(i)b Hanno affermato che Ida è/\*sia una ladra  
They.stated that I. is (ind./subj.) a thief

should perhaps be posited (one for each register level), corresponding to the two configurations (specification and inverted predication) argued for Danish in Mikkelsen (2002).<sup>24</sup>

Another refinement concerns the canonical predication in (49). Quite plausibly, the CP 'subject' in such structures is actually in a Topic position rather than in TP, as an instance of predicate topicalization. This has already been proposed in Koster's (1978) influential paper, which argues convincingly that what appear to be subject clauses do not actually occupy the canonical subject position but are rather located in a peripheral topic position with the canonical subject position bound by a null operator. Accordingly, (60a) does not have the representation in (60b) but rather that in (60c):

- (60) a. That these nouns behave differently is my claim.  
 b.  $[_{CP} [_{TP} [\text{that these nouns behave differently}]] \text{ is } [_{DP} \text{ my claim}]]$   
 c.  $[_{Topic} [_{CP} \text{ that these nouns behave differently}]] [_{OP}_i [_{TP} t_i \text{ is } [_{DP} \text{ my claim}]]]]$

It is also possible that both the canonical and the inverse predication structures involve two DPs, rather than a DP and a CP. In fact cross-linguistic evidence exists for a DP shell analysis at least for subject CPs in the canonical derivation. For example, Roussou (1993, 78; cf. also Roussou 2010) shows that CP subjects in Greek have the distribution of DPs since the overt determiner *to* in such a position cannot be omitted. Comparable facts hold for Bulgarian, except that the determiner there is optional (see (61a) from Greek, and (61b) from Bulgarian).<sup>25</sup>

- (61) a.  $[_{DP} *(\text{To}) [_{CP} \text{ oti efighe}]] \text{ ine to provlima.}$   
 It that left.3SG is the problem  
 b.  $[_{DP} (\text{Tova}) [_{CP} \text{ } \check{c}e \text{ zamina }]] \text{ e problem} \check{a}t.$   
 this that left.3SG is problem.DET

We have only a partial answer for the fact (apparent problem) that in Modern Greek and Bulgarian the expected *\*to provlima to oti efighe/\*problemät tova }e zamina* 'the problem that that he left' are bad (the determiner cannot remain overt). Note however that in Bulgarian the determiner cannot

24 On the basis of certain facts in Danish, Hankamer and Mikkelsen (2012) argue for an additional structural ambiguity of DPs like 'the idea that ginger aids digestion' corresponding to what they term 'anaphoric' and 'referent-establishing' nouns with clausal complements.

25 The view that subject clauses are hidden relatives has been integrated by Haegeman (2010) into an overarching proposal according to which clausal subject are dominated by a DP with a definite D. This proposal captures the fact that subject clauses convey familiar information because of their definiteness.



be overt even in the predicate position of the non-reduced relative clause counterpart, which we take to underlie the simple *ideja če izlese* (see: \*Ideja kojato e tova če izlese 'the idea which is that that he.left'). It is thus possible that the determiner can remain overt only when the clause associated with it is presupposed, typically in subject position (*Tova če izlese e problemāt* 'This that he left is the problem'), but not when it is not (see, for example, the case of the object position of non-factive verbs): \**Mislia tova če izlese* 'I think this that he left'.

The Greek and Bulgarian examples can thus be taken to show that there is more structure involved in CP clauses. It remains to be seen whether this is indeed the general case, but if it turns out to be so, then one may consider a unified analysis of clausal complements, subject clauses, and factive clauses, which have also been argued, ever since Kiparsky and Kiparsky's (1970) influential paper, to involve a DP complement with a null definite head corresponding to 'fact' or 'it' (but see the references in footnote 8 above for differences between 'fact' and other Ns taking a clausal 'complement').

## 7 Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed evidence showing that what appear to be clausal complements of nouns do not constitute a unitary phenomenon. Nouns split into two classes: those whose clausal 'complement' can be predicated of them across a copula and those (unaccusative nouns and nouns corresponding to bisentential verbs like 'prove') whose clausal 'complement' cannot. The clausal 'complement' of the first class of nouns was argued to be derived from a reduced (non-restrictive) relative clause built on an inverse predication structure in which the noun is an underlying predicate predicated of its apparent finite complement, which in fact is its deep subject. The clausal 'complement' of the second class of nouns was (following other authors) more tentatively taken to be a special kind of relative clause abstracting over a sentential variable of the 'complement' clause.

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## Subject Obviation as a Semantic Failure: a Preliminary Account

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**Abstract** Subject obviation in subjunctive clauses has drawn attention in the field of formal linguistics since the early eighties. Despite an abundant literature on the phenomenon, obviation still remains in many respects mysterious. This article explores a different approach to the phenomenon, whereby obviation can be accounted for by resorting to the notion of self-knowledge, as generally conceived in the field of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. Under the view proposed here, obviation is caused by a clash between the semantic characteristics of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. Particularly, it is suggested that obviation obtains if and only if an embedded clause expresses self-knowledge.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Problem. – 3 Obviation and Self-knowledge. – 3.1 Self-knowledge. – 3.2 Self-knowledge and Evidentiality. – 3.3 Self-knowledge and Clausal Implicature. – 4 Hypothesis. – 4.1 Analysis (i): Obviation. – 4.2 Analysis (ii): Obviation Weakening. – 5 Discussion. – 5.1 Competition. – 5.2 Mood. – 6 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research.

**Keywords** Obviation. Self-knowledge. Subjunctive clauses. Linguistics.

One says 'I know' where one can also say 'I believe'  
or 'I suspect'; where one can find out.  
(Wittgenstein 1953, 221)

### 1 Introduction

The phenomenon of subject obviation in subjunctive clauses (or 'subjunctive disjoint reference effect', as it has sometimes been dubbed, cf. Kempchinsky 1987, 1998, 2009) has drawn attention in the field of formal linguistics since the early eighties. The fact that a pronominal cannot be coreferent with a noun phrase that is *not* a coargument was at that time puzzling in view of the Binding Principle B, according to which a pronominal is free in its binding domain (which an embedded clause is, in principle).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The topic discussed in this paper was presented at a seminar held at the University of Venice, at the Cambridge Comparative Syntax 4 SinFonIJa 8 (Ljubljana). For discussion and advice I would like to express my gratitude to the audience of these events, and particularly to Alessandra Giorgi, Roland Hinterhölzl, Francesco Pinzin, Guglielmo Cinque, Daniel Brünig and Marijana Marelj. I would also like to thank Vesselina Laskova for helpful talks on the topic of this paper and two anonymous reviewers for thoughtful suggestions.



A number of studies addressed the question. Some have discussed it in view of the Binding Theory (Picallo 1985; Raposo 1985; Everaert 1986; Suñer 1986; Kempchinsky 1987, 1997, 2009; Rizzi 1991; Progovac 1993, 1994; Avrutin 1994; Tsoulas 1996; Avrutin & Babyonyshev 1997; Manzini 2000). Some others have tried to account the phenomenon in terms of competition between subjunctive and infinitive clauses and principles such 'avoid pronoun' (Bouchard 1984), 'blocking', in the sense originally discussed in Aronoff (1976) (Farkas 1992, Schlenker 2005), or 'anti-control' (Hornstein & San Martin 2001).

Despite this abundant literature on the phenomenon, obviation still remains in many respects mysterious. Binding-based approaches have been shown to be unable to account for all of the data in a principled way (cf. Farkas's 1992, Schlenker's 2005 objections to these approaches). Competition theories, on the other hand, appear to be empirically more powerful, but require some undesired stipulations and call upon sentence-level competition, which is controversial, at least from a syntactic viewpoint (see Embick & Marantz 2008).

I explore here an alternative hypothesis, which resorts to the notion of self-knowledge, as generally understood in the field of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, that is knowledge of one's own mental state (Shoemaker 1968; Burge 1988, 1996, 2007; Recanati 2007; Gertler 2011). I build my proposal on data from Italian involving first person epistemic attitude predicates (e.g. 'think', 'believe', 'suppose', etc.); although this kind of predicates is not the prototypical verb type selecting for subjunctive clauses, I capitalize on the fact that epistemic predicates have a simpler semantics if compared to predicates that select for subjunctive clauses more robustly from a crosslinguistic viewpoint, such as volition verb (cf. Heim 1992, Giorgi & Pianesi 1997). To be sure, a more comprehensive data set is to be analysed to draw a thorough assessment on the proposal - including sentences involving the third person and different types of attitude predicates. Yet, the approach to obviation proposed here, while still sketchy, appears to be very promising.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 I discuss the open questions about obviation. In section 3 I illustrate the notions of self-knowledge and I formulate a hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, obviation is caused by a clash between the semantic characteristics of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. Particularly, I suggest that obviation obtains when an embedded clause expresses self-knowledge (that is, when the information conveyed in the argument clause is achieved through introspection), and the embedding predicate introduces the implicature that the source of the information expressed in the embedded clause is indirect. In section 4 I analyse the relevant data on obviation in view of the proposed hypothesis. In section 5 I discuss some consequences of the theory. Particularly, I point out that mood competition is not required



to account for obviation and that obviation is not restricted to subjunctive clauses (a generalization which was taken for granted in all previous accounts). In section 6 I draw some conclusions and I state some suggestions for further research on facets of the issue discussed which have not been tackled in the present paper, such as the extension of the analysis to third person predicates, to attitude verbs other than epistemic, and the interpretive properties of the subjunctive mood *vis-à-vis* the infinitive.

## 2 The Problem

It is a well-known fact that Romance subjunctive clauses trigger subject obviation, that is, the embedded subject cannot be *de se* (Schlenker 2005). Sentence (1), for instance, is infelicitous exactly because the matrix and embedded subject refer to the same individual, the speaker, as the bearer of the attitude, as the contrast with sentence (2) shows.

- (1) # *Penso che io parta domani.*  
 think-1SG that I leave-SUBJ.1SG tomorrow  
 Lit. 'I think that I leave tomorrow.'
- (2) *Penso che Pietro parta domani.*  
 think.1SG that Pietro leave-SUBJ.1SG tomorrow  
 'I think that Pietro is/is going to/will leaving tomorrow.'

The phenomenon appears to be particularly puzzling because not all subjunctive clauses have been shown to be obviative (cf. Ruwet 1984 and subsequent literature). For instance, the *de se* reading in the sentences in (3) and (4) is acceptable for most Italian native speakers.

- (3) ✓ *Penso che io possa aver fatto molti errori.*  
 think.1SG that I may.SUBJ-1SG have made many mistakes  
 'I think I might have made many mistakes.'
- (4) ✓ *Penso che io sia stato autorizzato a partire.*  
 think.1SG that I is.SUBJ-1SG been authorized to leave  
 'I think I have been authorized to leave.'

Moreover, tense/aspectual features of the embedded verb also appear to affect the interpretation of the subject (see example (5)).<sup>2</sup>

2 For some Italian native speaker, the sentence is marginal under the *de se* reading even to report situation that facilitate this reading (see § 4.2). These speakers acknowledge,

- (5) ✓ *Penso che io abbia fatto molti errori.*  
 think.1SG that I have.SUBJ-1SG made many mistakes  
 'I think I have made many mistakes.'

All in all, the typology of the embedded predicate (functional vs lexical) appears to affect the interpretation of the embedded subject.

How exactly this characteristic of the embedded predicate affects the interpretation of the embedded subject is still an open question, even though different attempts have been made to solve the issue (see Picallo 1984, Raposo 1985 for a proposal within the Binding-based approach to obviation;<sup>3</sup> Farkas 1992 and Schlenker 2005 for a competition-based proposal).

Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) point out that the different status of sentence (1) as opposed to sentences (3) and (4) (sentences like (5) are apparently a different matter) does not involve the embedded subject only, but may lay in the different semantic import conveyed by the embedded clause as a whole. Particularly, Farkas suggests that her notion of 'responsibility' ('RESP', Farkas 1988) may discriminate between sentence (1) on one hand and sentences (3) and (4) on the other.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand Schlenker proposes to capture the different status between sentence (1) vs (3) and (4) by hypothesizing that the distinction between the *de re* and *de se* reading can be extended to event arguments. His idea is however admittedly "extremely preliminary" (Schlenker 2005, 295) and the notion of *de se* as applied to event arguments should be refined.

These ideas appear to be promising but they do not fully answer the paradigm represented by sentences (1) to (5) – sentences like (5), (involving a temporal/aspectual auxiliary) are not included in the analyses (there is no obvious reason why sentence like (5) should be analysed as different from sentences like (1) with respect to criteria like Farkas's RESP or Schlenker's event *de se*).

Moreover, competition theories resort to the notion of 'blocking' (in

however, that the status of this sentence is different than that of sentence (1), which is much more degraded.

3 Schlenker (2005, 288) shows that Binding-based theories have critical shortcomings, such as the inability to explain data involving overlapping reference. Thus, I will not consider these theories in the present work.

4 Farkas (1988, 36) defines the responsibility relation as a "two place relation holding between an individual *i* and a situation *s* just in case *i* brings *s* about, i.e., just in case *s* is the result of some act performed by *i* with the intention of bringing *s* about". It follows from her theory of obviation that in obviative subjunctive clauses the subject is in a responsibility relation with the situation expressed in the embedded clause. In non-obviative subjunctive clauses, on the other hand, the responsibility relation does not hold between the embedded subject and the situation expressed in the embedded clause.

the sense discussed in Aronoff 1976) to get the desired interpretation of sentences (1) to (4). Both Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) claim that obviation results from competition between subjunctive and infinitive, so that the infinitive 'blocks' the subjunctive under the *de se* reading at some conditions, which are met in sentence (1), though not in (3) and (4).<sup>5</sup> This appears to involve sentence-level competition, which is controversial, at least from a syntactic viewpoint (Embick & Marantz 2008). I suppose that this drawback is perhaps not inexplicable and may perhaps be worked out by assuming that competition involves multiple *head-level* competition, which is a less questionable notion. Thus, for instance, the infinitive and the subjunctive morphology may compete for the T head, pro and PRO for the subject DP head, or there may be just a single head-level competition (for instance between infinitive and subjunctive for T), where the choice between pro and PRO follows by Agree. This is however costlier than a theory which explains obviation without resorting to competition on the whole. So I assume that one should pursue such a theory.

In what follows I claim that it is in fact possible to construct such a theory, which is what I show in the next section.

### 3 Obviation and Self-knowledge

In this section I reformulate a crucial notion concerning obviation brought about by Schlenker (2005) in terms of the notion of 'self-knowledge' as understood in philosophy of language and in philosophy of mind. I then link the notion of 'self-knowledge' with the grammatical category of evidentiality and to clausal implicatures. Finally, I claim that these steps let us hypothesize that subject obviation in subjunctive clauses derives from a clash between the semantic properties of the attitude predicate and that

5 In a nutshell, Farkas's theory builds on two notions: the 'canonical control case', that is, the case where "both the complement subject and the matrix argument it is referentially dependent on bear the RESP [responsibility] relation to  $s_c$  [the situation denoted by the complement]" (1992, 104); the idea that, simplifying somewhat, in the 'canonical control case' the infinitive 'blocks' (in the sense discussed in Aronoff 1976) the subjunctive. Thus, sentence (1) cannot be *de se* because it conforms to the 'canonical control case' and the infinitive (see (i)) is available to convey the *de se* reading.

(i) *Penso di PRO partire domani.*  
think-1SG C PRO leave.INF tomorrow  
'I plan to leave tomorrow.'

Sentences (3) and (4) do not conform to the canonical control case, because the embedded subject does not bear the responsibility relation with the situation denoted by the complement. Hence, the infinitive does not block the subjunctive under the *de se* reading.

As for Schlenker's theory, he claims that by the principle 'Maximize presupposition!' (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2003), the infinitive must be chosen if the situation to be reported is *de se* with respect to both the individual and the event argument. If the situation to be reported is not event *de se*, the subjunctive can be used as a default.

of the embedded clause.

### 3.1 Self-knowledge

Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) have pointed out that obviation appears to involve not only the interpretation of the embedded subject but also the semantics of the embedded clauses as a whole. Schlenker formalizes this idea by stating that subjunctive clauses cannot be *de se* with respect to two parameters: the subject of the attitude ('individual *de se*' interpretation) and the event ('event *de se*' interpretation).

I take this intuition to be correct. Moreover, I take that the notion of 'event *de se*' can be formulated in terms of 'self-knowledge', in the sense used in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. In philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, that is, the knowledge of one's own mental states, such as beliefs, wishes, emotions, sensations, etc. (Shoemaker 1968; Burge 1988, 1996, 2007; Recanati 2007; cf. Gertler 2011 for an outlook on the main questions concerning self-knowledge from a philosophical viewpoint).

This view is in a way implicit in Schlenker's approach to obviation, because he builds the notion of 'event *de se*' interpretation on an idea originally discussed in Higginbotham (2003) concerning the semantics of gerundive arguments of verbs like 'remember' and 'imagine'. Comparing sentences like (6) and (7), Higginbotham points out that sentence (6) (which may be considered as having Schlenker's 'event *de se*' interpretation) would be appropriate only in a scenario where the speaker is remembering the event of going to school as being the agent of the event *and* the subject of the remembering state.

(6) I am remembering PRO walking to school in the 5th grade.

(7) I am remembering that I walked to school in the 5th grade.

Sentence (7), on the other hand does not convey this interpretation – it would be appropriate in a scenario where the speaker does not remember anymore the event in itself – she may recollect some specific circumstances of the event from which she may conclude that she used to walk to school, that is, by inferring.

Sentence (6) expresses a way of remembering 'from the inside', as Shoemaker (1968), Pryor (1999) put it, whereas sentence (7) does not. The idea of remembering 'from the inside', clearly concerns the notion of self-knowledge. Thus, the 'event *de se*' interpretation, with respect to which Schlenker refers to Higginbotham's remembering 'from the inside', may

be taken as involving self-knowledge as well.

Self-knowledge has been viewed as something different from knowledge about the world 'external' to oneself.

First, it relies on a unique method of knowledge, that is, introspection. Introspection lets one have a direct, non-inferential access to mental states and is highly epistemically secure. Because of this, if a speaker utters sentence (8A), it would be nonsensical to ask the question in (8B).

- (8) A: I feel pain.  
B: #How do you know that you feel pain?/Why do you think that?

By contrast, this question is not odd if the speaker utters sentence (9A), which does not involve introspection, since one may question the source of knowledge and the reliability of information about someone else.

- (9) A: He feels pain.  
B: How do you know that he feels pain?/Why do you think that?

Second, in self-ascribing a mental state, the subject is authoritative, that is, under normal circumstances self-knowledge is endowed with the presumption of truth. Thus, if the speaker utters sentence (10A), challenging the statement by saying (10B) is normally infelicitous.

- (10) A: I feel pain.  
B: # No, you don't.

By contrast, replying through (11B) to the sentence in (11A) may not be inappropriate.

- (11) A: He feels pain.  
B: No, he doesn't.

These facts have prompted different interpretations in philosophy of language, but I take the different epistemological views on self-knowledge immaterial for the present discussion, and I now turn to two relevant aspects concerning the morpho-syntactic encoding and the semantics of self-knowledge.

### 3.2 Self-knowledge and Evidentiality

I take that from a syntactic viewpoint it is possible to capture the notion of self-knowledge by resorting to the notion of evidentiality, that is, the

grammatical category indicating the source and the reliability of information (Chafe & Nichols 1986, Willett 1988, Rooryck 2001).<sup>6</sup> Since the philosophical notion of self-knowledge involves the way one gets some information, evidentiality appears to be suitable to the purpose. As for self-knowledge, the source of information is introspection, and the information is completely reliable as directly accessible.<sup>7</sup>

It has been shown (Izvorski 1997, Rooryck 2001, Simons 2007) that embedding predicates, like 'believe', 'think', etc. can function as indirect or inferential evidentials. The sentence in (12), for instance, indicates that the information expressed in the embedded clause is not completely reliable and the source of the information is not the speaker's own perceptual experience.

(12) I think it's raining.

This sentence would not be felicitous in a scenario where, for instance, the speaker is seeing from her window that it is raining, or where she is walking in the rain (assuming she is not experiencing some sort of delusion). In a scenario where a speaker perceives that it is raining, a sentence like (13) might instead be uttered.

(13) It's raining.

These observations suggest that clauses expressing self-knowledge cannot be embedded under attitude predicates exactly because of a clash between evidential sources: embedding predicates introduce the information expressed in the embedded clause either as not reliable (to different extents) or as indirect or inferred; on the contrary, self-knowledge is introspective and reliable.

### 3.3 Self-knowledge and clausal implicature

One may reach the same conclusion by calling on the notion of clausal implicature as defined in Gazdar (1979) and Levinson (1983), who point out that belief verbs introduce clausal implicatures as in (14).

<sup>6</sup> I take evidentiality as a different category with respect to epistemic modality, in that the latter only expresses the speaker's degree of certainty of the truth of the propositional content, while the former also expresses the source of the propositional content.

<sup>7</sup> The kind of evidential source involved here may be personal experience evidentiality (Willett 1988; Davis, Potts & Speas 2007) or ego-evidentiality (Garrett 2001).

- (14)  $a$  believes  $\phi$   
 a.  $\rightarrow \phi$  [ $a$  knows  $\phi$ ]  
 b.  $\rightarrow \diamond \neg \phi$

By (14), sentence (12) implicates (a) that the speaker does not *know* that it is raining and (b) that it may be the case that it is not raining. Thus, the sentence would be infelicitous in a context where the speaker is aware that it is raining thanks to her own perception, exactly because she could assert the propositional content of the embedded clause as true as of the actual world (which is what sentence (13) does).

Turning now to obviation, these observations suggest that the status of sentences like (1) may derive from a clash between the evidential nature of attitude predicates and the expression of self-knowledge (that is, introspective, directly accessible, non-inferential knowledge) in the embedded clause. In the next section I develop this hypothesis.

## 4 Hypothesis

In the previous section the hypothesis has been suggested that subjunctive obviation derives from a semantic clash: If a clause expresses self-knowledge, then it cannot be embedded under a predicate that implicates that the propositional content of the embedded clause is indirect or inferential.

- (15) Hypothesis:  
 #  $a$   $\forall \phi$ , where  
 (i)  $\forall$  is an attitude predicate and  
 (ii)  $\phi$  is a proposition accessible through introspection.

In the following subsections I implement this hypothesis. More specifically, in section 4.1, I show that the hypothesis pursued here correctly predicts the status of sentences like (1). In section 4.2 I show that the cases of obviation 'weakening' (examples (3) to (5)) also follow straightforwardly.

### 4.1 Analysis (I): Obviation

In this section I show that the hypothesis discussed here accounts for obviation in examples like (1), which I repeat here.

- (1) # *Penso che io parta domani.*  
 think.1SG that I leave.SUBJ-1SG tomorrow  
 Lit. 'I think that I leave tomorrow.'

To do this, I proceed along the following steps:

- i. I show that in sentence (1) the embedded clause is futurate;
- ii. futurate clauses can involve a plan the subject of a clause desires to carry out;
- iii. one's own plans are object of self-knowledge;
- iv. by (15), (ii) and (iii), in sentence (1) a semantic clash obtains.

In sentence (1), the embedded eventuality most naturally refers to a future time reference, although no future morphology occurs. This suggests that the embedded clause is futurate.<sup>8</sup>

Copley (2008) shows that futurates assert the existence of an entity (the 'director', as she dubs it) that has the desire for a plan to be realized and is committed to the plan being carried out. Moreover, futurates presuppose that the 'director' has the ability to act to the effect that the plan is realized.

Quite obviously, plans are mental state, which, as such, can be object of self-knowledge in the normal case – one is normally aware of one's own plans: it is pointless to question a sentence like *Prendo un caffè* 'I'll have a coffee' by asking 'how do you know that?'

Copley also points out that the director may be determined contextually or may be accommodated (2008, 270). In sentence (16), for instance, the presupposed director corresponds by default to the subject.

- (16) # *Parto domani.*  
 leave-1SG tomorrow  
 'I'm leaving tomorrow.'

However, if sentence (16) comes to the end of a discourse like (17), the director does not correspond to the subject of the sentence.

<sup>8</sup> Copley (2008) defines a 'futurate' as "a sentence with no obvious means of future reference, which nonetheless conveys that a future oriented eventuality is planned, scheduled, or otherwise determined".



- (17) *Il capo ha deciso cosa dobbiamo fare.*  
 The boss has decided what we have to do.  
*Tu parti oggi, io parto domani.*  
 You're leaving today, I'm leaving tomorrow  
 'The boss has decided what we have to do. You're leaving today, I'm leaving tomorrow.'

The same holds true in embedded clauses, where the presupposed director may correspond to the subject, it can be established contextually, or it can be accommodated. Thus, in a sentence like (18), Pietro's leaving may be planned by Pietro himself, by the speaker's colleague or by another contextually relevant agent (say, Pietro's boss).

- (18) *Il mio collega mi ha detto che Pietro parte domani.*  
 The my colleague me has said that Pietro leaves tomorrow  
 'My colleague told me Pietro is leaving tomorrow.'

Let us now turn to sentence (1). If, as it seems to be the case, the embedded clause in (1) is futurate, it involves a plan and asserts the existence of an individual, a 'director', conceiving a plan and having the desire for it to be brought about. Now, let us suppose (by *reductio ad falsum*) that in sentence (1) the director corresponds to the subject of the embedded clause, so that the sentence expresses a self-ascription of a plan. It follows that:

- i. since belief predicates function as indirect evidentials, sentence (1) indicates that the information conveyed in the embedded clause is *not* epistemically reliable from the point of view of the bearer of the attitude (the speaker);
- ii. because self-ascribing a plan involves self-knowledge, a semantic clash arises because of the indirect evidential nature implied by the matrix predicate and the introspective nature of the self-ascription of a mental state;
- iii. hence, the propositional attitude in (1) cannot be *de se*.

The same conclusion can be reached by resorting to clausal implicature. Let us stick again to the *reduction ad falsum* whereby the attitude report in (1) is *de se*. By (14), (1) implicates that the subject of the attitude does not know that she herself, *qua* the subject of the attitude, is committed to a plan and that for all she knows, it may be the case that she has no plans at all. But this is nonsensical, because the epistemic access to one's own plans is direct, so that in the normal case one introspectively knows what one's own plans are. Thus, again, the propositional attitude in (1) cannot be *de se*.

Notice that the analysis does not require that the embedded clause be futurate. Obviation is predicted to obtain whenever self-knowledge is involved in the embedded clause. Progressive and habitual eventualities, for instance, can be shown to involve self-knowledge. In the normal case a speaker is aware about what she is doing and what her habits are. Thus, if sentences (19A) and (19A') are truthfully asserted, it would be nonsensical to question them, as in (19B).

- (19) A: I'm reading a book.  
 A': I read the newspaper every day.  
 B: #How do you know that?

As expected, obviation arises even when the embedded clause in the subjunctive refers to progressive and habitual eventualities:

- (20) # *Penso che...*  
 think-1SG that  
 a. ... *io stia leggendo il giornale.*  
 ... I am.SUBJ reading the newspaper  
 b. ... *io legga il giornale ogni mattina.*  
 ... I read the newspaper every morning

#### 4.2 Analysis (II): Obviation Weakening

The hypothesis pursued here predicts that obviation obtains if and only if the embedded clause expresses introspective knowledge. If the hypothesis is correct, we expect that examples (3) to (5) do not involve introspective knowledge. In this section I show that this prediction is correct.

Let us first consider example (3), which I repeat here.

- (3) ✓ *Penso che io possa aver fatto molti errori.*  
 think.1SG that I may.SUBJ-1SG have made many mistakes  
 'I think I might have made many mistakes.'

The embedded clause includes an epistemic modal. The fact that one can reply as in (21B) to sentence (21A) shows that this type of modality does not express introspective knowledge.

- (21) A: I may have made many mistakes.  
 B: Why do you think that?

Thus, the fact that obviation does not occur in sentence (3) is expected.

The same reasoning can be applied to sentence (4), here repeated.

- (4) ✓ *Penso che io sia stato autorizzato a partire.*  
 think.1SG that I is.SUBJ-1SG been authorized to leave  
 'I think I have been authorized to leave.'

One can reply as in (22B) to a sentence like (22A).

- (22) A: I am allowed to leave tomorrow.  
 B: How do you know that?

Hence, the embedded clause in (4) does not express introspective knowledge and the status of (4) is also predicted.

As for example (5), which I repeat below, past eventualities can be recollected directly through one's own memory ('from the inside') or by inferring (see the contrast between (6) and (7)).

- (5) ✓ *Penso che io abbia fatto molti errori.*  
 think.1SG that I have.SUBJ-1SG made many mistakes  
 'I think I have made many mistakes.'

Remembering 'from the inside' is clearly introspective and one would expect that an attitude towards a past eventuality cannot be *de se* in this case. This appears to be correct. Imagine that I have just eaten an ice-cream. I could not reasonably utter sentence (23) (unless I suffer from short term memory loss).

- (23) # I think I have just eaten an ice-cream.

However, if one remembers a past event involving oneself by recollecting some circumstances in one's own past, that is, *not* 'from the inside', but by inference, one expects that obviation will not occur. This also appears to be correct. Suppose that I am talking about my first school day. I do not remember how I went to school on that precise day, but I remember that I used to go to school by car during my years as a schoolboy. In this scenario answer B appears to be acceptable.

- (24) a. *Come sei andato a scuola il primo giorno?*  
 How are.2SG gone to school the first day  
 'How did you go to school on the first day?'

- b. *Suppongo che ci sia andato in auto.*  
 suppose that there is gone by car  
 'I suppose I went by car.'

Sentence (5) can be derived in the same way and is felicitous under the *de se* reading only in a scenario where the speaker has not yet come to know that she has made mistakes.

## 5 Discussion

In this section I discuss some consequences following from the proposal discussed above. Particularly, two questions are tackled. The first concerns mood competition. We have seen (see § 2) that some theories of obviation had it that obviation occurs where an infinitival clause is *de se* and 'blocks' the *de se* reading of a subjunctive clause. The second concerns mood: all analyses on obviation have taken for granted that the phenomenon only obtains in subjunctive clauses.

If the analysis here proposed is correct, it is expected that (i) obviation occurs even in syntactic environments where no infinitival competitor is available, and that (ii) obviation is not limited to subjunctive clauses, but obtains wherever a semantic clash holds, no matter if the mood of the clause is subjunctive.

### 5.1 Competition

The analysis proposed in section 4 derives obviation simply from the semantic properties of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded eventuality. According to the hypothesis pursued here, competition between subjunctive and infinitive is not predicted to affect the interpretation of the embedded subject. In the next subsection I assess this prediction by means of two experiments designed so that a syntactic environment is built where a subjunctive clause, but not an infinitival clause, is available. The expected result is as follows: (a) if obviation is due to competition, in these environments subjunctive clauses are not obviative; (b) if obviation is due to a semantic clash, obviation is expected to obtain even though no competitor is available.

The two tests involve respectively epistemic modals and psych-verbs requiring an oblique experiencer.

## 5.1.1 Epistemic Modals

Epistemic modals have three properties. First, syntactically they cannot select for a control infinitival argument clause (Epstein 1984, Bhatt & Izvorski 1998).

- (25) a. \* It is probable/likely to read the newspaper.  
 b. \* *È probabile leggere il giornale.*

Second, in Italian epistemic predicates select for subjunctive clauses.

- (26) *È probabile che piova.*  
 Is probable that rains.SUBJ  
 'It is probable that it will rain.'

Third, semantically, epistemic predicates are relative to a 'judge', i.e., the person in view of whose evidence an epistemic possibility or necessity is asserted (the speaker, if not differently specified; cf. Lasersohn 2005).

Given these premises, it is now possible to build examples to test the hypothesis discussed in section 4. Epistemic modals are uttered in view of some evidence – that is, they cannot express introspective, direct knowledge (sentence (26) would be infelicitous if uttered by a speaker walking in the rain). Thus, according to the hypothesis (15), a proposition expressing self-knowledge cannot be embedded under an epistemic modal. Example (27) shows that this prediction is correct.

- (27) # *È probabile che io legga il giornale.*  
 is probable that I read-SUBJ the newspaper  
 'It is probable that I am reading the newspaper.'

Since epistemic modals cannot select for infinitival clauses, the unavailability of the first person in example (27) remains unexplained under competition models. Because an infinitive competitor is not there (see sentence (25)b), no blocking effect should obtain and sentence (27) should not be infelicitous.

Thus, competition theories are not able to account for the status of (27). By contrast, the status of example (27) follows straightforwardly from the hypothesis pursued here.

## 5.1.2 Oblique Experiencers

The second experiment builds on two characteristics. First, in Italian some psychological predicates, like *piacere* 'to please', select an oblique experiencer (cf. Belletti & Rizzi 1988).

- (28) *Mi piace questo.*  
 Me.DAT likes this  
 'I like this.'

Second, in infinitival clauses PRO can only be a canonical subject (see example (29)b) and cannot be an oblique DP (see example (30)).

- (29) a. *Pietro teme questo.*  
 Pietro is.afraid this  
 'Pietro is afraid of this.'  
 b. *Pietro ha detto di PRO temere questo.*  
 Pietro has said P/C PRO to-fear this  
 'Pietro has said he's afraid of this.'

- (30) a. *A Pietro piace questo.*  
 To Pietro likes this  
 'Pietro likes this.'  
 b. \**Pietro ha detto di PRO piacere questo.*  
 Pietro has said P/C PRO to-like this

While PRO cannot be an oblique experiencer, it is possible to build examples where the embedded clause in the subjunctive contains a psych-verb selecting for an oblique experiencer. Example (31) shows this.

- (31) *Dubito che questa situazione gli piaccia.*  
 Doubt that this situation him.DAT likes  
 'I doubt that he likes this situation.'

Now, clauses including psych-verbs, like *piacere* 'to please', typically express mental states. Self-ascribing these predicates expresses self-knowledge, as example (32) shows - it is nonsensical to reply to sentence (32A) through sentence (32B), exactly because sentence (32A) builds on introspection.

- (32) A: I like ice-cream.

B: # How do you know that?

Hence, the hypothesis explored here predicts that embedded clauses having a psych-verb with a quirky subject referring to the bearer of the attitude should be ungrammatical. To show this one can embed a sentence corresponding to (32A) under an attitude predicate. We can thus build a sentence like (33), where the oblique experiencer cannot take the same reference as the bearer of the attitude.

- (33) # *Suppongo che mi piaccia il gelato.*  
 suppose-1SG that me.DAT likes.SUBJ the ice-cream  
 'I suppose I like ice-cream.'

Since sentence (33) does not have an infinitival competitor, its infelicity is completely unexpected under competition-based theories. On the other hand, this is expected under the hypothesis investigated here, because the matrix predicate implicates that the semantic content of the embedded clause is epistemologically indirect, whereas the embedded clause expresses a proposition accessible through introspection. Thus, a semantic clash arises between the implicatures introduced by the sentence and the semantics of the embedded clause.

## 5.2 Mood

Another consequence of the proposal discussed here is that obviation may occur no matter what the mood selected by the main predicate is, as long as a semantic clash occurs between the implicatures the sentence introduces (see § 3) and the semantic import of the embedded clause. In this section I test this prediction.

First, it can be noticed that in Italian semifactive verbs (*sapere* 'know', *scoprire* 'discover', etc.), select for indicative embedded clauses (excluding indirect questions), as the following example shows:

- (34) *Ho saputo che Maria è partita.*  
 have known that Maria is.IND left  
 'I have come to know that Maria has left.'

In using these verbs, one implicates that the source of information is indirect. Sentence (34), for instance, is normally infelicitous in a context where the speaker has witnessed Maria's leaving.

Hence, if the embedded clause expresses a proposition whose source

can only be introspection, obviation is expected to occur under the hypothesis discussed here. Example (35) shows that this prediction is correct.<sup>9</sup>

- (35) # *Ho saputo che ho il mal di testa.*  
 Have.1SG known that have-IND.1SG the headache  
 'I've come to know that I've a headache.'

This contrasts with another traditional assumption concerning obviation, namely that it occurs only in subjunctive clauses, and could hardly be explained under previous theories on obviation.

## 6 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

Subject obviation in subjunctive clauses has been a puzzling phenomenon in formal syntax since the eighties. Different approaches have been implemented to account for it, but they have not achieved a full explanation of the phenomenon. In this paper I hope to have shown that obviation in subjunctive clauses may derive from a semantic clash between the interpretative properties of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. In particular, subject obviation appears to obtain when the embedded clause expresses self-knowledge, that is, a proposition that can only be achieved through introspection. The introspective source of the embedded clause is incompatible with attitude predicates that implicate an indirect epistemic access to a proposition. This allows us to account for crucial facts about obviation discussed in the literature, as well as other data that were not discussed in previous studies and were not predicted by other theories.

The theory proposed here underlines the role of self-knowledge in syntactic and semantic computation even in languages, such as Italian, where no specific evidential morphology is present (cf. however Squartini 2008 for other means of expressing evidentiality in Italian). Moreover, it does not require notions such as competition and blocking to account for obviation. Previous studies on obviation have emphasized the complementarity of infinitival (non-obviative) and subjunctive (obviative) clauses in explaining

<sup>9</sup> The sentence would not be infelicitous in scenarios where the speaker wonders whether the pain she is feeling is actually a headache or only a discomfort and is subsequently reassured that what she is feeling is actually a headache. However, in this scenario the information expressed in the embedded clause is not introspective. The appropriateness of the sentence is then expected under the hypothesis pursued here.



facts on obviation (Farkas 1992, Schlenker 2005, Costantini 2013).<sup>10</sup> The theory discussed here points out that mood complementarity appears to be misleading in handling obviation, because examples can be built where obviation obtains despite no competitor in the infinitive is available.

The analysis proposed here is restricted to epistemic predicates in the first person. This is in fact only a part of the entire picture of environments where obviation occurs: obviation obtains in all argument clauses in the subjunctive (including polarity subjunctive), namely argument clauses of volitional predicates and emotive-factive predicates (see examples (36) and (37)).

- (36) # *Voglio che io parta domani.*  
want-1SG that I leave.SUBJ tomorrow
- (37) # *Mi rammarico che io parta domani.*  
regret-1SG that I leave.SUBJ tomorrow
- (38) # *Non so se io parta domani.*  
Not know-1SG if I leave.SUBJ tomorrow

Although further research is needed to spell out a formal semantic analysis which encompasses all these instances of obviation, I take it is reasonable to suppose that the theory discussed here can be extended to other contexts: volitional and emotive-factive predicates introduce doxastic alternatives (Heim 1992), that is, a set of worlds compatible with what the attitude holder believes to be possible, which is exactly what epistemic predicates like the ones considered in this paper do. Future investigations should demonstrate the feasibility of this line of research, which appears to be promising.

Further research should also target the question how to extend the analysis from first person predicates to third person predicates, which are in fact the most studied case concerning obviation in the literature. I assume the question involves the nature of *de se* attitudes and the question what ascribing a *de se* attitudes means.

Moreover, an extension of the proposal so as to account for obviation in other languages should be the subject of future investigation. Epistemic predicates like 'think', 'believe', etc., do not select for subjunctive clauses in Spanish and French, for instance, and obviation does not seem to occur in sentences corresponding to (1) in these languages – see for instance

<sup>10</sup> In Costantini 2013 it is shown that in relative and adverbial clauses obviation arises only in the clause types where both subjunctive and infinitive moods are available, which was interpreted as evidence in favor of competition-based theories of obviation. However, these clause types (namely, 'volitional' relative clauses, *before*- and *until*-clauses having future orientation, purpose and result clauses, *without*-clauses) appear to involve futurate subjunctive clauses.

the following example from Spanish, which is felicitous even in a scenario where the 'director' is the speaker:<sup>11</sup>

- (39) *Creo que me marcho mañana.*  
 think-1SG that me leave-SUBJ.1SG tomorrow  
 'I think that I'll leave tomorrow.'

I notice however that it cannot be taken for granted that the semantics of epistemic predicates like Spanish *creer* 'to believe', is equivalent to the semantics of Italian *pensare* 'to think, to believe', or that futurate have the same semantic import crosslinguistically.

Future research should also provide a consistent syntactic theory of the phenomenon, which should include a thorough treatment of evidentiality as a constituent of the phrase structure.

Finally, future research should address the question why embedded clauses in the infinitive do not trigger obviation – on the contrary, the subject in an infinitival clause *must* be *de se* (at least in obligatory control clauses). If the hypothesis pursued here is correct, this would suggest that infinitival clauses cannot express self-knowledge, so that the semantic failure obtaining when a subjunctive clause is there, does not arise when the embedded clause is in the infinitive. A reasonable solution may resort to the divide between finite and non-finite verb forms, where the former display a full-fledged set of semantic features – including evidential source, and the latter do not.

Although several questions remain open, I believe that the line of explanation proposed in this paper is certainly worth considering, and that the role of evidential sources should not be underestimated in the effort to explain obviation.

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<sup>11</sup> I am thankful to María Martínez-Atienza for pointing out this.

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# Vowel Harmony in Sardinian -os/-us Plurals in Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei

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**Abstract** This descriptive contribution presents some data about a type of vowel harmony occurring in the Sardinian variety of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei. These two centres are located in the province of Ogliastra/Ogiastra, in the central-eastern part of the island, on the border between Campidanese Sardinian and Logudorese-Nuorese Sardinian. In addition to the largely attested Sardinian right-to-left metaphony, whereby the word-final vowel may affect the realization of preceding vowels, the variety of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei also displays a left-to-right vowel harmony that governs the choice of -os or -us as a plural ending. This phenomenon, which was directly observed in Santa Maria and which is attested in writing in Baunei, affects the formation of certain plural nouns and adjectives, as well as the behaviour of the masculine plural accusative clitic. A description of this phenomenon, with some personal considerations, will be provided with the intent that it might be of interest for further research.

**Summary** 1 Language and Methodology. – 1.1 The Sardinian Variety of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese. – 1.2 Methodology. – 2 The Data. – 2.1 Preliminary Observations on the Pronunciation of Vowels. – 2.2 The -os/-us Plural of -u Nouns. – 2.3 The -os/-us Plural of -u Adjectives and Past Participles. – 2.4 The Ending is Triggered by the Penultimate Vowel, not by the Tonic One. – 2.5 Apparent Exceptions. – 2.6 The Plural Clitic *ddos/ddus* in Postverbal Position. – 2.7 Preverbal *ddus* vs Postverbal *ddos/ddus*. – 2.8 The Forms *ddos/ddus* in Clitic Combinations. – 2.9 The Ending *us* as a Definite Article. – 3 Some Considerations and Further Observations. – 3.1 Not a Vowel Change. – 3.2 Mid with Mid. – 3.3 -us is the Default Form, -os is Marked. – 3.4 Rule and Order: Suffix Choice. – 3.5 General Conclusion.

**Keywords** Vowel harmony. Sardinian. Santa Maria Navarrese. Baunei. Plural.

## 1 Language and Methodology

### 1.1 The Sardinian Variety of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese

The settlers of Santa Maria Navarrese came – and the majority of the inhabitants still is – from Baunei, therefore the same Sardinian variety is spoken in these two centres. Santa Maria Navarrese is located on the eastern coast and Baunei is nine kilometers inland, both lying along an imaginary line where the southern Sardinian (Campidanese) and the northern Sardinian (Nuorese-Logudorese) varieties meet. Immediately south of Santa Maria Navarrese, the town of Lotzorai clearly displays some features

generally associated with Campidanese Sardinian.<sup>1</sup> North of Baunei, in Dorgali, typical Logudorese-Nuorese features occur.<sup>2</sup>

The Sardinian variety of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese shares a number of features with other varieties: lenition, assimilation, aphaeresis, epenthetic vowels and s-rhotacism. For a description of Sardinian in general and of its main varieties, I refer the reader to Jones (1993) and Lepori (2001). For specific features of Baunese and Santa Maria Navarrese Sardinian,<sup>3</sup> I refer the reader to Secci (2006a, 2006b). More detailed data about Baunei are reported in Calia (2010), although Santa Maria Navarrese was virtually non-existent at his times.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Methodology

Most data in this article come from observations that I have carried out over the years in Santa Maria Navarrese and from my informants' judgments. Written data are also taken from Calia's (2010) grammar of Baunese Sardinian. Given that both centres employ the same Sardinian variety, my examples about Santa Maria Navarrese are also valid for Baunei. Conversely, Calia's observations about Baunei must be held as valid also for Santa Maria Navarrese. Here, I focus only on the vowels and the behaviour of *-os/-us*. I will not represent graphically all the phonetic mutations, rather I will write according to the usual local convention and to Calia's written data and assign one and the same written form to each word. Word stress falls on the penultimate vowel, unless it is graphically represented (e.g. *ó, ò, é, è, à, ì, ù*). Only in the preliminary section 2.1, will I provide a phonetic transcription of words.

1 For instance, in Lotzorai the plural def. article has one form *is* both in the masculine and the feminine, while nouns show the plural ending *-us* (in place of *-os*) and *-is* (in place of *-es*): thus, Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunese *us culurgiones* (a typical local food) are called *is culurgionis* in Lotzorai.

2 For instance, according to Calia 2010, 14 velar consonants /k/ and /g/ occur before *e, i* in Dorgali and Urzulei as in Logudoro, whereas their palatal counterparts occur in Baunei. These occur in Santa Maria Navarrese, as well.

3 Peculiar features of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei include, for example: *pisce* 'fish' in contrast to northern *piske/pische* (Jones 1993, 68) and southern *pisci* (33); *kine* 'who' in contrast to *kie* (Lepori 2001, 33) and *kini* (65); *figgiu* 'son' in contrast to *fidzu* (Jones 1993, 33) and *fillu* (Lepori 2001, 3); *plus* 'more' and *dulce* 'sweet' in contrast to *prus* (Jones 1993, 23, 173; Lepori 2001, 14) and *durke/durci* (2001, 19).

4 Santa Maria Navarrese had 1652 inhabitants in 2012 (Vigna 2013, 166) and is contiguous to Tancau sul Mare, which is part of Lotzorai and had a population of 223 in 2001 (Istat 2001). Though belonging to the municipality of Baunei, Santa Maria Navarrese has its own postal office, its elementary school, and two churches. The *carabinieri* police station of Santa Maria Navarrese serves also the nearby municipality of Lotzorai. However, according to an informant, only 54 people lived in Santa Maria Navarrese in 1964. The population burst took place between 1970 and 1985, while Calia collected his data before 1979.



## 2 The Data

### 2.1 Preliminary Observations on the Pronunciation of Vowels

In Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese, word-final vowels are *-a*, *-i*, *-e*, *-o*, *-u*. Words may also end in *-s*, *-t*, *-nt* (with their actually various phonetic realisations), which mark features as number, gender and person. In (1) some words are shown, which end in a vowel. Final *e* and *o* are pronounced as /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ respectively. Word-internal *e* and *o* have two realisations, as in other Sardinian varieties:<sup>5</sup> they are pronounced /e/ and /o/ when followed by close vowels *i*, *u*, but are pronounced /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ otherwise.

(1)

Limba /'limba/ 'language'	Flore /'flɔɛ/ 'flower'	Drommi /'drom:i/ 'sleep!'	Botto /'bɔt:ɔ/ 'can, tin'	Dommu /'dom:u/ 'house, home'
Canta /'kaŋta/ 'sing!'	Mere /'mɛɛɛ/ 'lord'	Papperi /'pa'p:eri/ 'paper'	Canto /'kaŋtɔ/ '(I) sing'	Cantu /'kaŋtu/ 'song/chant'
Conta /'kɔŋta/ 'tell!, count!'	Mantene /'maŋ'tɛnɛ/ 'keep!'	Beni /'beni/ 'come!'	Conto /'kɔŋtɔ/ '(I) tell, count'	Contu /'kɔŋtu/ 'tale, count'

This phenomenon occurs also when the last vowel is followed by a consonant. For instance, (2) shows that the word-internal *e* is regularly realised as /ɛ/ when followed by *o* or *e* and as /e/ when followed by *i* or *u*, regardless of the presence of the final consonants (with possible lenition, voicing and epenthesis):

(2)

Tempus /'tempuzu/ 'time'	Tempos /'tɛmpɔzɔ/ 'times' <sup>1</sup>
Benit /'beniði/ '(he/she) comes'	Mantenet /'maŋ'tɛnɛðɛ/ '(he/she) keeps'

**1** Though not very frequent, the plural *tempos* may be used in some sentences as *in attros tempos, andànt a amarrare a Golgo* (lit. in other times/in old times, they went to hoe the fields in Golgo).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bolognesi 1998, 19-21 for a comparison of Campidanese and Logudorese-Nuorese regarding this phenomenon.

These pronunciation rules also apply to most nouns and adjectives, both in the singular and in the plural, as they usually build their plural by simply adding an *-s* after their final *a*, *o*, *e*, *i* ending. In (3), some nouns are exemplified:

(3)

Limba 'language'	Botto 'can'	Flore 'flower'	Mere 'lord'	Papperi 'paper'
Limbas 'languages'	Bottos 'cans'	Flores 'flowers'	Meres 'lords'	Papperis 'papers'

The plural of *-u* nouns and adjectives, which is the focus of this article, ends either in *-us* or in *-os* thus affecting the realisations of internal *e/o* vowels, as will be described in the next sections.

## 2.2 The *-os/-us* Plural of *-u* Nouns

In the Sardinian variety of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei, singular nouns in *-u* can form their plural either with *-us* or with *-os*. The two endings are not freely interchanged. While only *-os* is used for these nouns in Logudorese-Nuorese Sardinian and only *-us* is employed in Campidanese Sardinian, the variety of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese employs both plural endings, associating each one to a specific condition: if the penultimate vowel is *a*, *i*, *u* the ending is *-us*, as shown in (4a); if the penultimate vowel is *e* or *o* then the ending is *-os* as shown in (4b). This phenomenon, explicitly reported in Calia (2010, 18, 38), occurs also in Santa Maria Navarrese, as I have been able to observe. It appears that most *-u* nouns are masculine, but the few feminine *-u* nouns existing (e.g. *manu* vs *dommu*)<sup>6</sup> also obey this rule. According to it, also the few nouns that have *-us* in the singular (e.g. *tempus*, in 4b) switch to *-os* in the plural under the appropriate conditions.

<sup>6</sup> In Calia 2010, 38, it is stated that all *-u* nouns with plural in *-os* are masculine and the word *dommu* 'house' is listed as masculine in Calia 2010, 111. However, according to my observations, *dommu* requires feminine articles (f.sg. *sa dommu*) and adjectives (f.sg. *dommu alta*, f.pl. *dommos altas*). I have never heard anybody employing masculine articles nor adjectives with this noun (i.e. neither *\*su dommu* nor *dommu \*altu*).

(4a)

masculine					feminine
Cantu 'song'	Istiddu 'drop'	Ballu 'dance'	Libru 'book'	Muru 'wall'	Manu 'hand'
Cantus 'songs'	Istiddus 'drops'	Ballus 'dances'	Librus 'books'	Murus 'walls'	Manus 'hands'

(4b)

masculine					feminine
Contu 'tale, sum'	Isteddu 'star'	Oglu 'eye'	Beccu 'billygoat'	Tempus 'time'	Dommu 'house'
Contos 'tales, sums'	Isteddos 'stars'	Oglos 'eyes'	Beccos 'billygoats'	Tempos 'times'	Dommos 'houses'

In line with the metaphony of section 2.1, when alternating between singular and plural, the nouns in (4b) also change the pronunciation of their internal *-o-* or *-e-* vowel, depending on whether the last vowel is closed (sg. ending *-u*) or open (pl. ending *-os*). Two mechanisms are then at work: one determines the pronunciation of the internal *e*, *o* on the basis of the ending; the other one determines the choice of the *-os*, *-us* plural ending on the basis of the penultimate vowel.

### 2.3 The *-os/-us* Plural of *-u* Adjectives and Past Participles

As stated in section 2.1, adjectives behave in the same way as nouns. Thus, masculine adjectives ending in *-u*, as well as past participles, build their plural following the same rule of *-u* nouns described in section 2.2. Adjectives with plural in *-us* are exemplified in (5a), adjectives with plural in *-os* are shown in (5b). Adjectives are usually postnominal. Note that falling into the *-os* plural class or the *-us* plural class is a phonological phenomenon, as it is not a feature that spreads from nouns to adjectives, unlikely number and gender, for instance.

(5a)

beccu billygoat	mannu <i>big-M.SG.</i>	oglu eye	piccicu <i>small-M.SG.</i>	piccioccu boy	furbu <i>clever-M.SG.</i>
'big billygoat'		'small eye'		'clever boy'	
beccos <i>billygoats</i>	mannus <i>big-M. PL.</i>	oglos eyes	picciccus <i>small-M. PL.</i>	piccioccos boys	furbus <i>clever-M. PL.</i>
'big billigoats'		'small eyes'		'clever boys'	

(5b)

libru book	bellu <i>nice-M.SG.</i>	pippiu child	bonu <i>good-M.SG.</i>	dommu house	alta <i>tall-F.SG.</i>
'beautiful/nice book'		'good child'		'tall house'	
librus books	bellos <i>nice-M.PL.</i>	pippius children	bonos <i>good-M.PL.</i>	dommos houses	altas <i>tall-F.PL.</i>
'beautiful/nice books'		'good children'		'tall houses'	

Along the same lines, past participles are shown in (6a) and (6b). Regular and irregular forms containing *a*, *i* or *u* in penultimate position take *-us* in the plural, in (6a). However some irregular forms contain *e* or *o* and take *-os*, as in (6b).

(6a)

Dd' <i>him/it-M.SG.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	ciappau <i>caught-M.SG.</i>	Dd' <i>him/it-M.SG.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	istrintu <i>tightened-M.SG.</i>
'(they) have caught him/it'			'(they) have tightened it'		
Ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	ciappaus <i>caught-M.PL.</i>	Ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	istrintus <i>tightened-M.PL.</i>
'(they) have caught them'			'(they) have tightened them'		

(6b)

Dd' <i>him/it-M.SG.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	mortu <i>killed-M.SG.</i>	Dd' <i>him/it-M.SG.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	fertu <i>wounded-M.SG.</i>
'(they) have killed him/it'			'(they) have wounded him/it'		
Ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	mortos <i>killed-M.PL.</i>	Ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	ante <i>have-3.PL.</i>	fertos <i>wounded-M.PL.</i>
'(they) have killed them'			'(they) have wounded them'		

#### 2.4 The Ending is Triggered by the Penultimate Vowel, not by the Tonic One

Calia (2010, 18, 38) states that the choice of *-us* or *-os* as a plural suffix depends on the penultimate vowel. However, in his examples and in many Sardinian words, the stress falls on the penultimate vowel. This might lead to think that the plural ending (*-os* or *-us*) is related to the tonic vowel. The following examples from Santa Maria Navarrese make it clear that the ending does not depend on the tonic vowel. In (7a) the penultimate vowel *-e-* triggers the plural ending *-os*, although the tonic vowels are *-ù-* and *-ì-*. In (7b) the penultimate vowel *-i-*, which is pronounced as

/j/, is sufficient to trigger the ending *-us*, in spite of the tonic vowel being *-é-* (which itself represents a mid-close sound due to the presence of the *-i-* at its right).

(7a)

Postu liberu <i>Seat free-M.SG.</i> 'free/available seat'	Unu cugùmeru One cucumber 'a/one cucumber'
Postos liberos <i>Seats free-M.PL.</i> 'free/available seats'	Tres cugùmeros Three cucumbers 'three cucumbers'

(7b)

Dd' <i>him/it-M.SG.</i>	appo <i>have-1.SG.</i>	enténdiu <i>heard-M.SG.</i>
'I (have) heard it'		
Ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	appo <i>have-1.SG.</i>	enténdius <i>heard-M.PL.</i>
'I (have) heard them'		

## 2.5 Apparent Exceptions

As far as I have been able to observe, there are some apparent exceptions to the rules described. One type of exception concerns only the written form of some words, and must be taken into account when considering local books and writings. Another exception concerns the word *attru* which has the plural *attros* both in written and spoken form.

Writing exceptions occur because usual local writing conventions follow some Italian orthographic rules, therefore the sign *i* is also used to indicate that the preceding *c* or *g* has a palatal sound. In such cases, there is actually no *i*-sound in the word. Consequently, the word can take a plural in *-os* even though the written form might contain an *i* as a penultimate vowel. In (8) *bécciu* behaves as *beccu*, for example. Because in these cases the stress falls before the (apparently) penultimate vowel, it might be overtly represented in some books: for instance, the forms *bécciu* and *bèccios* can be encountered. *Bécciu* is employed in Calia (2010).

(8)

Beccu 'billygoat'	Becciu (written <i>bécciu</i> in Calia 2010)
Beccos 'billygoats'	Beccios 'old men'

Concerning the word *attru* 'other', its masculine plural *attros* looks like an exception, in place of the regular, but unattested \**attrus*.<sup>7</sup> Given what said so far, the presence of *a* is not compatible with the ending *-os*. Calia (2010, 41), however, lists double forms: *attru*, *attros*, *attra*, *attras* along with *àtteru*, *àtteros*, *àttera*, *àtteras*. The optional presence of an *e* in penultimate position in *àtteru/àtteros* is perfectly in line with the mechanism described in sections 2.2. and 2.3. As far as I could observe, *attru* is by far the most frequent (if not the only) form used in Santa Maria Navarrese. However, the coexistence of the regular variant *atteru/atteros* can account for the fact that *-os* is used also with *attru/attros*. Either the speakers are aware of the underlying *e*, even when they actually pronounce *attros*, or the form *attros* has arisen as a reduction of *atteros* and is still in the process of becoming a fossilised form. In either case, the plural *-os* can be traced back to an underlying vowel *-e-*.

The only real exception that I have been able to observe is the quantifier *tottu* 'all', which has the plural form *tottus* (not \**tottos*) and other irregularities, for instance it does not make any gender distinctions (*tottu* for both m.sg. and f.sg., *tottus* for both m.pl. and f.pl.).

## 2.6 The Plural Clitic *ddos/ddus* in Postverbal Position

The masculine accusative pronoun *ddu* can take two plural forms. When added to the end of a verb, i.e. in imperatives and gerunds, the plural is either *ddus* or *ddos*, depending on the preceding vowel as expected from the observations made in section 2.2. Compare, for instance, the imperatives *còmpora* and *mori* in (9a) with *allue* and *mi'* in (9b). Notice also that the gerund ending *-ndo* contains a vowel that always triggers *ddos* in (9a) and (9b).

(9a)

Comporaddu! <i>buy-it-M.SG.</i> <sup>1</sup> 'buy it'	Moriddu! <i>kill-him/it-M.SG.</i> 'kill it!'
Comporaddus! <i>buy-them-M.PL.</i> 'buy them'	Moriddus! <i>kill-them-M.PL.</i> 'kill them'
Soe comporandoddu <i>am buying-it-M.SG.</i> 'I am buying it'	Soe morindoddu <i>am killing-him/it-M.SG.</i> 'I am killing it'

<sup>7</sup> *Attrus* is Campidanese and is employed south of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese.

Soe <i>comporandoddos</i> <i>am buying-them-M.PL.</i> 'I am buying them'	Soe <i>morindoddos</i> <i>am killing-them-M.PL.</i> 'I am killing them'
1 There is no counterpart of the neuter 'it' in Sardinian. Pronouns are either feminine or masculine even for inanimate objects.	

## (9b)

Allueddu! <i>ignite-him/it-M.SG.</i> 'turn it on / strike it (match)'	Miroddu! (defective vb. <i>mi</i> ) <i>look-at-him/it-M.SG.</i> 'look at it/him'
Allueddos! <i>ignite-them-M.PL.</i> 'turn them on / strike them (matches)'	Miroddos! <i>look-at-them-M.PL.</i> 'look at them'
Soe <i>alluendoddu</i> <i>am igniting-it-M.SG.</i> 'I am turning it on / I am striking it'	
Soe <i>alluendoddos</i> <i>am igniting-them-M.PL.</i> 'I am turning them on / I am striking them'	

The fact that the postverbal *ddus* or *ddos* is determined by the immediately preceding vowel according to the same rules of plural endings described in sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, confirms that this element cliticises to the verb and forms one word with it in much the same way as endings attach to word stems. In relation to this, it is worth noting that attaching the clitic to the end of the verb also determines a stress shift in this Sardinian variety, so that the stress always comes to fall on the penultimate vowel of the verb+clitic compound, just as it often does on other words. For example, imperative *còmpora* (on 1st vowel) becomes *comporaddu/comporaddus* (on *a*, penultimate) and gerund is *comporandoddu/comporandoddos* (on penultimate *o*).

2.7 Preverbal *ddus* vs Postverbal *ddos/ddus*

As shown in examples (10a,b), there is one masculine form *ddus* in preverbal position, in contrast to the two postverbal forms *ddus/ddos* determined by the preceding vowel. Notice again that the gerund suffix *-ndo* contains a vowel that always triggers the postverbal *ddos*. Thus, in (10a) two plural forms are possible, depending on different conditions.

(10a)

Comporaddus! <i>buy-them-M.PL.</i> 'buy them'	Allueddos! <i>ignite-them-M.PL.</i> 'turn them on / strike them (matches)'
Soe comporandoddos <i>am buying-them-M.PL.</i> 'I am buying them'	Soe alluendoddos <i>am igniting-them-M.PL.</i> 'I am turning them on / striking them'

In (10b) only one plural form is allowed preverbally: using *\*ddos* gives rise to ungrammaticality.

(10b)

Ist' is	ora time	de of	ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	comporare <i>buy-INF.</i>	Ist' is	ora time	de of	ddus <i>them-M.PL.</i>	allùere <i>ignite-INF.</i>
'it is time to buy them'					'it is time to turn them on / strike them'				
* Ist' ora de ddos comporare idem					* Ist' ora de ddos allùere idem				

In my opinion, the fact that only *ddus* occurs in preverbal position<sup>8</sup> proves that this pronoun does not attach to preceding elements (e.g. the particle *de*) when it is preverbal, hence it remains a monosyllable and thus is not affected by the word suffix rules of sections 2.2. and 2.3.

## 2.8 The Forms *ddos/ddus* in Clitic Combinations

The asymmetrical behaviour of the masculine plural accusative pronoun *ddos/ddus* is observed also when certain clitics intervene. These are the locative (*in*)*n**ce* and the locative/partitive (*in*)*n**de*, two particles which may also give a totally new meaning to the original verb. For instance, in (11a) and (11b), *mòrrere* 'to kill' becomes (*in*)*n**de* *mòrrere* 'to turn off' and *pesare* 'to weigh, to raise' becomes (*in*)*n**ce* *pesare* 'to take away from'. To these two verbs the masculine plural accusative pronoun is then added. The forms (*in*)*n**ce* and (*in*)*n**de* contain a vowel *e* that triggers the plural *ddos* in postverbal position, yielding the postverbal combinations *-ndeddos* and *-nceddos* in (11a). However, the same elements give obligatorily *nde ddus*

<sup>8</sup> This might be related to the fact that also the form with penultimate *i-* are allowed in preverbal position, e.g. *iddu*, *iddus*. However, according to my observations, *ddu*, *ddus* do occur preverbally – even sentence-initially – and are more frequent, e.g. *Ddus còmporo geo* 'I buy them / it is I who buys them'. Also Calia (2010, 45) reports forms with and without *i* even at the beginning of a clause (he marks this drop with an apostrophe: '*ddus*', '*dd*').



and *nce ddus* in preverbal position in (11b): employing *ddos* in preverbal position gives rise to ungrammaticality.

(11b)

Morindeddos <i>kill-NDE-them-M.PL.</i> 'turn them off!'	Pesamineddos <i>raise-to-me-NCE-them-M.PL.</i> 'take them away from me!'
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(11a)

...po ...to	nde nde	ddus <i>them-M.</i> <b>PL.</b>	mòrrere <i>kill-INF.</i>	... po ... to	mi to-me	nce nce	ddus <i>them-M.</i> <b>PL.</b>	pesare raise
'...in order to turn them off'				'...in order to take them away from me'				
*...po nde ddos mòrrere idem				*...po mi nce ddos pesare idem				

The behaviour of *ddos/ddus* in (11a,b) confirms the observations made in section 2.7. In postverbal position, this pronoun attaches to preceding elements – even other clitics (as *nce* or *nde*) – thus forming one word that undergoes the *-os/-us* rule described in sections 2.1 and 2.2. In preverbal position, in contrast, it does not form one word with the preceding elements, therefore it is not affected by the *-os/-us* rule even though the preceding element (e.g. *nce* or *nde*) contains an open-mid vowel.

## 2.9 The Ending *us* as a Definite Article

In Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei, the plural marker *-us* appears in its pure form, as an independent morpheme, in the masculine definite article. In fact, in this Sardinian variety, the singular definite articles *su* ('the' m.sg.) and *sa* ('the' f.sg.) become *us* and *as* respectively in the plural. Empirically, the plural definite article comes to have an intermediate form between the northern and the southern variety: though beginning with a vowel, like Campidanese *is*,<sup>9</sup> it distinguishes the masculine and the

<sup>9</sup> The origins are different, however. It is widely accepted that Campidanese common-gender plural *is* originates as a truncation of the last part of latin *ipsos*, *ipsas* > *is(sos)*, *is(sas)*. In contrast, in the other varieties, the plural definite article appears as a truncation of the first part. The 'full' form seems to occur after few particles, e.g. *che* 'like, as' in *che i su mare / che issu mare* 'like the sea' (Calia 2010, 37), but it actually contains an *i* that appears before also other elements, according to my observations, as in *che i cussu* 'like that'.

feminine, along the lines of Logudorese-Nuorese.<sup>10</sup> This form is due to the fact that, for some unknown reason, the plural definite article of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese has lost the whole stem<sup>11</sup> of the latin demonstrative (*ips*)- and coincides fully with the last part, which represents the ending. Thus the plural article *us, as* contains the same elements *-us, -as* that appear on nouns and adjectives in sections 2.2 and 2.3, as well as demonstratives (e.g. *custus* 'these m.pl.' *custas* 'these f.pl.').

Two observations are in order here, on the basis of the contrast in (12). First, the masculine plural definite article never appears as *\*os* (unlike Logudorese-Nuorese *sos*), rather it must be always *us*. Second, this *us* article does not depend on any previous vowel because it can occur sentence-initially:

(12)

Us piccioccos funtis inongi 'The boys are here'	*Os piccioccos funtis inongi idem
--	--------------------------------------

### 3 Some Considerations and Further Observations

#### 3.1 Not a Vowel Change

As seen in sections 2.2 and 2.3, *-us* and *-os* behave as alternative endings with the same plural-marking function in both Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese. In contrast, as suggested by example (1) in section 2.1, *-u* and *-o* are distinct endings that often have distinct functions: *-u* appears on nouns and adjectives, *-o* often appears on verbs. The data in (13) prove that the distribution of final *-os* and *-us* in Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei is clearly different from that of *-o* and *-u*. In particular, the stems that take *-us* cannot take *-os*, and vice versa. The distribution of *-us* and *-os* is not related to that of *-u* and *-o*.

<sup>10</sup> I have noticed that *is* does exist in Santa Maria Navarrese, but only occurs to indicate time, when the word 'hours' is implied. Cf. *de is duas a is tres* 'from two to three o'clock' (lit. 'from the two to the three') with *a as tres piccioccas* 'to the three girls' and *a us tres piccioccos* 'to the three boys'. This use is not mentioned in Calia 2010.

<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Logudorese-Nuorese has retained the *s-* of the stem, as the plural article is *sos* (m.pl.), *sas* (f.pl.)

(13)

(geo) Canto '(I) sing' (su) Cantu '(the) song/chant' (us) Cantus '(the) songs/chants' (us) *Cantos	(geo) Conto '(I) tell/count' (su) Contu 'tale/sum/count' (us) Contos '(the) tales/sums/ counts' (us) *Contus	(geo) Trabballo '(I) work' (su) Trabballu '(the) work/task' (us) Trabballus '(the) works/tasks' (us) *Trabballos	(geo) Freno '(I) brake' (su) Frenu '(the) brake' (us) Frenos '(the) brakes' (us) *Frenus
--	---	--	--

In this light, the vowel variation in the endings *-os/-us* of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei seems to be morphologically constrained in the sense that this change concerns only the plural marking of certain categories of words. Unlike, for instance, the *o-to-u* reduction that transforms every final *os* into *us* as much as every final *o* into *u* in virtually all Campidanese Sardinian words<sup>12</sup> regardless of them being nouns or verbs (Lepori 2001, 13, 79, 99; Bolognesi 1998), the *-os/-us* variation of Santa Maria Navarrese and Baunei cannot be traced back to some more general *o/u* vowel change.

### 3.2 Mid with Mid

The data described in section 2.2 show that the choice of *-us* or *-os* as a plural ending of *-u* nouns is governed by a vowel harmony rule by virtue of which the ending vowel must share some features with the preceding vowel. Here I present some personal considerations. The presence of a high vowel in the plural ending *-us* co-occurring with a preceding low vowel *a* in the stem – e.g. *cantus*, *manus*, *mannus* – shows that the vowel harmony does not depend on the vowels being closed, nor open (i.e. neither high, nor low), unlike the right-to-left metaphony of section 2.1. If there were a rule as 'close vowels with close vowels' and 'open vowels with open vowels' we would expect, at best, plurals as \**cantos*, \**manos*, \**mannos* contrary to fact. It is also not possible to call into force vowel backness/frontness, given that *u* and *i* trigger the same *-us* ending, while *u* and *o* (both back) trigger different endings. Finally, it seems to me that (un)roundedness cannot also be called upon, because both *u* (rounded) and *i* (unrounded) trigger the same ending *-us*.

In my opinion, the only factor able to group together *e* and *o* (as triggers of *-os*) while at the same time excluding *a*, *i*, *u* (which require *-us*) is a feature of vowel midness. In *-os* plurals, both the ending vowel and the preceding vowel are mid vowels (in fact, open-mid given the pronuncia-

12 Except few monosyllabic function words.

tion described in § 2.1), whereas, in *-us* plurals, neither the ending vowel nor the penultimate vowel are mid. In this light, penultimate *a*, *i*, *u* are not grouped together (as triggers of *-us*) for having some feature, rather they go together for lacking a certain feature. This could explain why these three vowels fall in the same category to the purpose of this vowel harmony, despite having different features. I leave this consideration for people willing to provide an in-depth analysis.

### 3.3 *-us* is the Default Form, *-os* is Marked

The fact that only the plural *ddus* occurs obligatorily as a stand-alone form, as shown in sections 2.7 and 2.8, suggests that *ddus* is an unmarked form, employed by default when the vowel harmony rule cannot be triggered by any penultimate vowel. In contrast, *ddos* is a marked form triggered by (open-)mid vowels in penultimate position when the clitic forms one word with the preceding element. This is in line with the observation made in section 3.2 that the nominal and adjectival ending *-us* occurs by exclusion, when the penultimate vowel is not marked as (open-)mid, whereas *-os* occurs when the penultimate vowel is marked for midness. One further remark is in order here, albeit not as a cogent argument, but rather as a clue. As shown in section 2.9, the plural marker *us* appears as an independent morpheme in the masculine definite article, while *-os* does not. Because the definite article does not attach to the end of any preceding word<sup>13</sup> in Sardinian, it cannot be affected by the vowel harmony phenomenon described in sections 2.2 and 3.2. This strengthens the hypothesis that *us* is the default plural marker employed when there is no penultimate mid vowel to trigger vowel harmony in *-u* words. However, I do not address the issue of whether vowel midness should be taken as a feature in itself or can be further split into other features.

### 3.4 Rule and Order: Suffix Choice

The considerations put forward in sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 all point to the conclusion that the distribution of the plural endings *-os/-us* in this Sardinian variety is driven by the phonological features of vowels, but is not produced through any vowel change. The *-os/-us* alternation affects only the plural of a specific category of words. Under certain conditions, the plural is marked by *-os*, otherwise it reverts to the unmarked form *-us*.

<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, the article *us* does not attach to any elements, e.g. prepositions, in sequences as *...de us...* ('...of the...') in much the same way as preverbal *ddus* does not attach to other elements in *nce ddus pesare*. Rather, it occurs also sentence-initially.

This suggests that the suffix alternation does not involve any vowel mutation, rather it is a choice between two different endings already available. The phenomenon appears to occur only where two endings are already available for the same function (likely because variety contact), i.e. in the plural of *-u* nouns, adjectives, pronouns and determiners, because these have the ending *-os* in northern Sardinian and *-us* in southern Sardinian. In contrast, the alternation does not occur with endings that have different functions, e.g. nominal *-u* vs verbal *-o* as described in (13). It is for this reason that the *-os/-us* alternation is morphologically restricted to certain categories of words.

The phenomenon thus probably arises as a specialisation of two otherwise redundant markers and left-to-right vowel harmony is the tool by which this is achieved. Vowel harmony is already at work in Sardinian as a right-to-left metaphony that determines the pronunciation of a vowel on the basis of the following one. The co-existence of two endings in the variety of Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese creates the need to differentiate them, as one would be superfluous otherwise. At the same time, their phonological features (*-os* has an open-mid vowel, *-us* has not) give the opportunity to extend vowel harmony in left-to-right direction, in order to determine the appropriate condition for the choice of each ending through a sort of 'vowel feature agreement' process.

### 3.5 General Conclusion

In Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese, both the northern Sardinian ending *-os* and the southern Sardinian ending *-us* are available to mark the plural of *-u* nouns, adjectives and function words. These suffixes have been specialised in order to serve different subset of *-u* elements. The distribution of the suffixes depends on the penultimate vowel of the word and is governed by a vowel harmony based on a vowel feature of midness. The ending *-os* is chosen when the triggering vowel is an open-mid vowel, whereas *-us* is the unmarked suffix, which speakers revert to by default. This rule also governs the choice of *ddos* or *ddus* as a postverbal clitic, both when it is directly attached to the verb and also when *nde* or *nce* intervenes. This shows that the postverbal clitic forms one plurisyllabic word with the preceding element(s). In contrast, only *ddus* occurs in preverbal position, showing that this preverbal form does not attach to the preceding elements and remains a monosyllabic particle.

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## **Access to Knowledge** The Issue of Deaf Students and More

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**Abstract** Language and communication barriers undermine everyday life for deaf people. In particular in higher education settings, these students often receive limited information and thus struggle to gain full access to knowledge. Considering these linguistic issues from several perspectives, this paper highlights some of the problems that arise in the everyday life of deaf students. Possible short- and long-term solutions to these barriers are presented and discussed. For example, simplified written texts ensure clarity and immediate access to complex and technical texts, but only provide one step toward linguistic autonomy. Linguistic mediation through sign language guarantees both direct access to content and personal involvement in interactive settings.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Communication and Linguistic Issues. – 3 The Need for Simplified Written Texts. – 4 Sign Language as a Medium. – 5 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Special education. Access to knowledge. Linguistic barriers. Deaf students.

### **1 Introduction**

Access to scientific content throughout a deaf person's lifetime of learning is key to making higher education accessible to deaf people in the long term. Throughout the world, deaf people experience limited access to higher levels of education, with the situation being especially worse in some European countries compared to others. Unfortunately, systematic information about the number of deaf people enrolled in higher education programs, the dropout rate, and the percentage of those who complete their academic career is hard to find.

For instance, according to an Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) 2009 report (Solipaca 2009), the number of deaf students enrolled at Italian universities has gradually increased over recent years, as shown in Table 1.<sup>1</sup>

**1** Data come from the MIUR-CINECA (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca - Consorzio Interuniversitario) database. The enrolment statistics for undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities in Italian universities from 2000/2001 to 2004/2005 can be ac-

Table 1: Deaf students enrolled in Italian Universities from 2000 to 2007

Academic year	Enrolled students (deaf)
2000/01	314
2001/02	368
2002/03	449
2003/04	470
2004/05	542
2005/06	567
2006/07	630

However, these data need to be considered carefully since they do not provide much information about the typology of the deaf population. For instance, there is no indication as to whether these numbers refer to prelingually deaf people or extend to late deafened people, nor whether the numbers include hard of hearing people or only profoundly deaf people, nor do the numbers make a distinction between signers and oralists. Furthermore, these data only indicate the numbers of enrolled students, thus failing to provide more critical data such as the number of students who complete the program versus dropout rates. Nonetheless, the Italian data are relevant because they reveal a consistent increase in the seven-year period under consideration in which the number of deaf students at the university level doubled from 2000 to 2007. Such results may be due to a better understanding of the specific needs of deaf students and to the gradual improvement of lecture accessibility (e.g., several universities started offering Italian/Italian Sign Language (LIS) interpretation for class lectures as part of the services offered to deaf students during this time<sup>2</sup>).

However, we must also consider that university reforms in Italy caused a substantial increase in the overall number of students enrolled over the same period,<sup>3</sup> as shown in the third column of Table 2. The increment of the deaf population and that of the hearing one are not correlated (Pearson's correlation index =  $-.075$ ,  $p = .887$ ). This fact indicates that the trend of enrolment of deaf students does not depend on the university reforms.

cessed in Solipaca 2009 (ISTAT report), and from 2001/2002 to 2006/2007 can be accessed here in Greco 2016, 71.

**2** Some universities also provide tutors that take notes for deaf students, including Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

**3** The enrolment statistics for the overall undergraduate and graduate students in Italian universities come from the CNSV (Comitato nazionale per la valutazione del sistema universitario) 2011 report. URL [http://www.cnvsu.it/\\_library/downloadfile.asp?id=11778](http://www.cnvsu.it/_library/downloadfile.asp?id=11778) (2016-07-23).



Table 2. Deaf students enrolled in Italian Universities in comparison to the overall population of enrolled students (from 2000 to 2007)

Academic year	Enrolled students (deaf)	Enrolled students (total)	Percentages of deaf students over the total number of students
2000/01	314	1,688,804	0.0186%
2001/02	368	1,722,457	0.0214%
2002/03	449	1,768,295	0.0254%
2003/04	470	1,814,048	0.0259%
2004/05	542	1,820,221	0.0298%
2005/06	567	1,823,886	0.0311%
2006/07	630	1,810,101	0.0348%

Just the same, the last column of Table 2 indicates the percentages of deaf students over the total number of students per year, showing that there is an increase of the deaf population which is independent of the increase of the general population of students. The incremental curves in figure 1 show the growing trend of the deaf students when compared with hearing students.

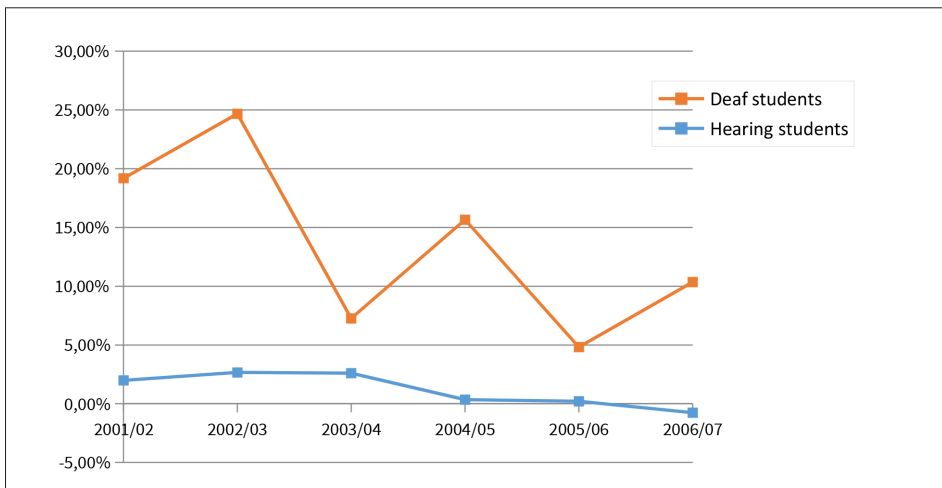


Figure 1. Percent change in enrollment from year to year in Italian universities (deaf vs hearing population of students)

Given the higher quality of services offered to deaf students, we would predict a further increase in the number of enrolled deaf students.

Despite growing numbers, the situation for deaf people in higher levels of education is, we believe, unsatisfactory not only in Italy but through-

out the European Union. There are several reasons why this is so. The most important one, we believe, is connected with the issue of language and how information is transmitted to deaf students. It should go without saying that deaf people access information mainly visually rather than auditorily, imposing several restrictions on how content is best transmitted to a mixed audience of hearing and deaf students. But even before this can be considered, there are even more basic issues concerning language skills that must be addressed. For example, while it is true that deaf people are multilingual in the sense that they must navigate at least one signed and one spoken language on a daily basis, it is also true that their competence in that spoken language rarely reaches levels which are adequate for the needs of higher education. Add to this the additional requirement of understanding the dominant language used in scientific contexts, namely English, which imposes further burden on deaf people living in non-Anglophone countries.

Language and communication issues cannot, however, simply be addressed in the context of higher education – they have to be considered within a broader perspective of lifelong learning. Certainly, planning ad hoc solutions during higher levels of education would make life easier for those few students who already meet the requirements for accessing these levels, but such solutions would not help to solve the access problem for the large majority of deaf students who do not meet these requirements. It is naïve to believe that the language gap can be bridged at the end of (or even after) the high school years.

An additional, non-trivial aspect of deaf students' achievement is connected to the motivations for deaf people to continue their academic careers. While it is true that higher levels of education generally correspond to better job positions and to overall better social conditions in hearing communities, this is not necessarily true for deaf people, especially in Europe. In many European countries, people with disabilities (including deaf people) have privileged access to middle-class jobs both in public and in private institutions, irrespectively of the quality of their training. This has the implicit side-effect of making college degrees less useful for these people.<sup>4</sup> However, the overall situation of the job market has become more fluid in the past twenty years (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998) and continues to undergo a dramatic but silent change. Today's network society is imposing new organization on work, requiring increasingly sophisticated skills for the same types of jobs (e.g., the introduction of software applications in public administration). While many of these skills may be gained through implicit learning (Cleeremans 1997) among hearing people, they rarely

4 Indeed, many deaf people start their university career once they already have a permanent position. This notably increases the probability of dropout.

reach deaf people given linguistic barriers.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that in the coming years, protected middle-class jobs will be out of the range of deaf people, with negative consequences for their social condition.

Linguistic and communication barriers undermine everyday life for deaf people, prompting them to enter higher levels of education where effective knowledge can be mastered. However, a person's motivation to pursue higher levels of education should not depend solely on social needs, but should rather emerge out of the natural individual inclination toward some scientific aspect of human life. Still, this can only be realized if scientific knowledge is sufficiently prevalent within the community. Indeed, deaf adults, parents of deaf children, or even leading personalities in the community become potential educators. If these people find interest in the sciences in the broad sense of the term, it is likely that this interest will be transmitted to the younger generations. However, given that access to scientific knowledge among the general deaf population is extremely reduced and fragmented, these types of role models largely cannot be found. The issue then becomes: how can deaf people let their natural inclinations toward science emerge if access to scientific knowledge within the broader community is basically nonexistent? Taking this broad perspective, it is important to keep in mind that access to higher levels of education is only the final step of a long journey that starts from childhood and has to be encouraged by the student's surrounding environment.

In this paper, we will highlight some linguistic and communication barriers that may prevent deaf people from accessing higher levels of education, we will present some of the communication and linguistic difficulties that deaf people experience in higher levels of education, and we will highlight the relevance of a broader perspective if real accessibility is to be provided. A potential short-term solution for the question of spoken language competence is subsequently offered, followed by some justification for using sign languages (SL) for optimally transmitting information to deaf people.

## 2 Communication and Linguistic Issues

Several types of linguistic mediation are available to deaf students in higher education who would like to access scientific content, including tools and techniques that can help deaf students understand the hidden meanings in complex texts. However, any of these techniques requires for students to be fluent in the language of the dominant community before they can access

<sup>5</sup> Note that in old economy professional jobs (e.g., tailor, carpenter), implicit knowledge mainly passed via the visual channel, therefore language was never a barrier. This situation is simply not replicable in the Information Society - visual learning for these type of procedures is simply too difficult.

higher levels of education since most of a student's or researcher's activities involve the written form of a spoken language. How does a deaf person gain such a base in the dominant language? Sign language interpreters are rarely provided in situations where general knowledge can be acquired. On the contrary, standard television broadcasting companies often provide subtitles during their programming, with some variation based on national laws (e.g., in France only highly-watched TV shows are required to be subtitled). Additionally, differing theories on what information should be included in subtitles have emerged, and some subtitles may include only a simplified version of the broadcast language<sup>6</sup> (see § 3). For the transmission of scientific content, simplified subtitles are not an optimal or perhaps even viable solution (see § 4). For instance, text simplification can allow students to acquire new information quickly, but it is probably not sufficient to facilitate that student's linguistic autonomy.

So how then can deaf students master the language used in their books and manuals?

While acquiring a spoken language is not impossible for deaf people, as confirmed by those few cases of deaf people who have full linguistic competence in a spoken language even though they are profoundly deaf since birth, having reduced auditory access to a spoken language changes the language learning experience. It is most often the case that deaf people display difficulties in understanding and producing written texts. Though there is some heterogeneity in the attested language errors, it is possible to point out the most frequent ones for deaf students (Caselli et al. 2006, 234-242; Radelli 1998; Fabbretti, Volterra & Pontecorvo 1998; Fabbretti 2000; Tuller 2000; Volterra, Capirci & Caselli 2001; Chesi 2006; Volpato 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Bertone & Volpato 2009; Bertone et al. 2011; Franchi & Musola 2010, 2011; Trovato 2014). Generally deaf people have trouble with the reference of clitic pronouns; the function of determiners and prepositions; the role of copular, auxiliary, and modal verbs; the use of verbal and nominal morphology; complex sentences such as passive and relative clauses; and both lexical and syntactic ambiguity. As stressed before, such difficulties do not arise from a specific language disorder. Effortless acquisition of a sign language under appropriate exposure demonstrates that the language faculty is not defective in the deaf population. Just the same, while deaf people may reach a level of competence in the dominant language which allows them to live productive everyday lives, the issue of language becomes an obstacle when they have to deal with complex texts. Part of the difficulties may lie in lexical aspects as discussed below, but there are also linguistic issues concerning the syntax of the dominant language.

6 Note that the Italian Deaf community via the National Deaf Association is not entirely in favor of using simplified texts on broadcast shows because of the risk of losing relevant information at the semantic and pragmatic levels.

What is missing in the linguistic competence of many deaf students is not so evident, at least at first sight. They may initially seem to succeed at deciphering many sentences, but in many cases comprehension is only partially obtained and heavily depends on non-syntactic strategies such as linear word order, lexical information, semantic plausibility, context, inferences, and world knowledge (Radelli 1998). Furthermore, while there are aspects of syntactic competence that are shared universally, it is at the level of crosslinguistic variation that the most relevant issues arise. For example, let us consider the use of sequence of tenses (*consecutio temporum*) in the verbal domain, or the use of clitic pronouns in the Romance domain. The examples below are taken from Chesi, who conducted a systematic investigation of the production errors made by deaf kids between 6 and 17 years old. In particular, (1) shows an incorrect sequence of tenses (2006, 96) and (2) shows a case of clitic omission (65).

- (1) Error: Il gatto segue il topo e poi il gatto faceva finta di essere una lampada.  
[The cat chases the mouse and then the cat pretended to be a lamp.]  
Target: Il gatto segue il topo e poi fa finta di essere una lampada.  
[The cat chases the mouse and then the cat pretends to be a lamp.]
- (2) Error: Il gatto prende la roba<sub>i</sub> e  $\emptyset$ <sub>i</sub> mette sopra il topo.  
[The cat take the stuff<sub>i</sub> and put  $\emptyset$ <sub>i</sub> over the mouse.]  
Target: Il gatto prende la roba<sub>i</sub> e la<sub>i</sub> mette sopra il topo.  
[The cat take the stuff<sub>i</sub> and put it<sub>i</sub> over the mouse.]

A similar concern should be raised for fine grained semantic aspects such as the behaviour of quantified expressions, exemplified by the ambiguous case in (3), and pronominal reference, as exemplified by the ambiguous case in (4) (Benincà & Tortora 2009, 20).

- (3) Tutti gli studenti hanno letto un libro.  
[Every student read one book.]  
Possible interpretations: Every student read a different book / There is a unique book such that every student read it.
- (4) Gli individui che si<sub>imp/refl</sub> erano presentati al direttore furono poi assunti.  
[the individuals that SI were presented to the director were then hired.]  
Possible interpretations: The individuals that one had introduced to the director were then hired (impersonal 'si') / The individuals that had introduced themselves to the director were then hired (reflexive 'si').

The generations of implicatures and the projections of presuppositions at the semantic/pragmatic interface are expected to be particularly problematic, too.

Effective communication in academic contexts also requires a stable technical vocabulary, which must be learned in the written language and

may pose additional problems for deaf students compared to their written language-fluent hearing counterparts. Technical vocabulary also poses a problem for sign language interpretation given the low equivalence between spoken/written words and signs in the technical domain. At the moment, various scientific disciplines have a restricted number of technical signs due to the fact that not many native signers have achieved a degree in those particular fields. The lack of stable lexical jargon could be overcome through several strategies such as creating neologisms, standardizing existing jargon, and developing and promoting scientific multimedia glossaries (see for instance the Spread the Sign lexicon, <http://www.spreadthesign.com>). From the perspective of the deaf community, recording new signs for previously undiscussed concepts provides a platform upon which students can learn about these new ideas. This may also provide a stronger sense of pride in signed languages by showing their versatility in describing complex concepts, perhaps even more succinctly than spoken languages especially for highly visual concepts. For interpreters, having a lexicon of such signs that can be studied before entering the interpreted interaction gives them confidence in the interpretation and promotes clarity for the deaf consumer. This eliminates the interpreter having to overtly describe the concept being discussed or to fingerspell<sup>7</sup> the word.

As signed languages use three-dimensional space as well as time for grammatical purposes, whereas spoken languages are completely linear (temporal) in their organization, some grammatical incompatibilities arise during the interpretation or translation from spoken/written languages to signed languages. For example, the English sentence 'Johnny went home after it was dark', would likely be interpreted or translated into a signed language with the concepts 'getting dark' and 'Johnny going home' arranged in temporal order to reflect the reality of the situation being discussed. Signed languages can also place these concepts along a grammatical spatial timeline that extends from the signer's body forward (now to future) or from the signer's left to right (now to future, for a right-handed signer). These issues need to be considered both for the interpretation and translation of academic materials for deaf students.

### 3 The Need for Simplified Written Texts

A potential short-term solution for linguistic issues is found in simplified texts which can replace more typical texts for the sake of improved readability. A simplified text is essentially a text adaptation for didactic

7 Fingerspelling is the use of a series of letter signs, often collectively called a 'manual alphabet', which represent the written version of a word from a spoken language.

purposes. By simplifying, the author modifies some lexical, syntactic and discourse features through either human or machine intervention (e.g., artificial intelligence software, Carroll et al. 1999). It is imperative however that during this process meaning and content should be neither altered nor reduced, rather that it should tailor the presentation to the linguistic skills of the student in order to facilitate access to new information. Common modifications include splitting long sentences, increasing the prevalence of unmarked word order, simplifying complex syntactic structures such as passive and relative clauses, removing clitic pronouns, substituting infrequent words with common ones, and increasing redundancy.

An illustrative example of text simplification is reported in (adapted from Brunato et al. 2015, 36), in which the following simplification strategies have been adopted: word reordering, explication, lexical substitution, and anaphoric replacement.

- (5) a. Original text:  
Il passante gli spiegò che, per arrivare al bidone, doveva contare ben 5 bidoni a partire dal semaforo.  
'The passer-by explained him that, to get to the dustbin, he had to count exactly 5 dustbins starting from the traffic light.'
- b. Simplified text:  
Il signore spiegò a Ugolino che doveva contare 5 bidoni a partire dal semaforo, per arrivare al bidone della carta.  
'The man explained to Little Hug that he had to count 5 dustbins starting from the traffic light, to get to the wastepaper dustbin.'

Generally, a simplified text is not meant to be static. In order to support the learning process, it can also include some visual cues such as boxes with vocabulary support, margin notes, keywords, pictures, and symbols (but see below for potential shortcomings of these strategies when used among deaf people).

Still, there is ongoing debate between those who believe that the text should fit the reader (i.e., advocates for simplification) and those who believe that the reader should fit the text (i.e., advocates for increased language learning among readers). Advocates of simplified texts emphasize the need for comprehensible input to support the learning process. Those on the other side of the debate claim that authentic texts should be preferred because they expose learners to natural language and allow them to improve their reading skills. To date, the literature is divided between the two camps (a.o. Power & Leigh 2000, Crossley et al. 2007).

Despite some criticism, text simplification is rather widespread in different educational settings and targets a number of populations. For instance, it can be useful with adults learning a foreign language for their continuing education, or helpful to second language learners of school age. Another possible application for simplified texts is in bilingual education where the



acquisition process of one of the two languages is delayed for some reason. Moreover, in both the educational and clinical environments, special adaptation may be necessary with cases of various language disorders, such as specific language impairment, dyslexia, and aphasia.

Returning, though, to our study of deaf learners, it would be interesting to assess how useful this technique can be for deaf people. In higher education programs most scientific content is transmitted in the written form using lexical jargon and complex sentence constructions. If these texts are not aligned with the linguistic competence of deaf students, the reading process inevitably slows down, causing reduced motivation and a potential lack of interest in the discipline.

These facts bring up some questions to consider regarding the applicability and benefits of text simplification. For instance, should scientific terminology be constantly replaced by commonly used words? Does adaptation allow deaf students to familiarize themselves with academic discourse? Finally, will these students be linguistically competent enough to produce their own scientific work in the upper levels of education?

Simplified texts are functional for the purpose of providing immediate access to content, but they should only be considered in terms of their long-term implications. If deaf students are methodically exposed to new linguistic features they could potentially improve their competence while learning and at the same time increase their self-confidence. That is precisely the reason why simplification should be gradually waned according to a single student's dynamic language skills, being as temporary as possible in order to enable the student to gain linguistic autonomy.

In addition to application in educational contexts, text simplification may also be useful in everyday life since we know that the Information Society relies heavily on written texts given that the Internet is accessible mostly in textual form. Again, the process of adapting texts should not reduce them to summaries or abridged versions of themselves, given that transmitting a restricted amount of information to the student would be an unwanted outcome.

A recently developed spin-off within the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, VEASYT (<http://www.veasyt.com>), is witness to new understandings toward special needs. This project aims to offer multimedia guides about local tourist sites in an inclusive and accessible way. The informative materials contain simplified text, sign language, audio, and images, and manage to target a large number of people including those with hearing, visual, and language impairments. In some instances, specialized terms from the fields of architecture and art (e.g. *loggia*, *Corinthian column*, *keystone*) can be preserved in the simplified version because comprehension is supported by visual aids. The main aim of this particular approach is to make common knowledge available among the entire population, including those with special needs.



## 4 Sign Language as a Medium

The traditional model for lectures within higher education is not ideal for deaf students. Standard visual aids normally used during lectures like slides or handouts can even worsen the situation if they overload the visual channel. Obviously for hearing students these tools complement what the instructor says, and it often happens that speech overlaps with the requirement to look at slides (e.g. because there is a picture to comment on, or an example to discuss). In this situation, the content is transmitted by two channels, the auditory one and the visual one, a combination not available to deaf students. The same situation occurs with the use of the blackboard. While it would be possible to adopt the best practice of avoiding information overlap via a careful timing of the presentation, this would only be a short-term solution. If used systematically, this approach would stretch the length of the lesson, forcing the whole program to be reduced. This approach would be further complicated by the fact that what a teacher says in class does not directly reach the deaf student, as there must be an intermediate step in which the spoken message is transformed into a signed message. This can be done in some more or less efficient ways, though we consider the best situation to be the use of a signed language interpreter.

A professional interpreter acts as a real-time link between two people who use different languages. In the case of deaf students in an otherwise hearing classroom, interpreters convey spoken messages through a signed language, i.e., through a natural language that is produced in the visual channel. The main advantages of using a sign language are direct access to content and personal involvement in interactive settings.

The process of interpreting requires three main steps: first, the interpreter must receive and understand the input; second, (s)he must construct meaning from this input; and third, (s)he must deliver equivalent meaning in the target language. In sequential interpreting, the interpreter receives an entire phrase before the speaker pauses to allow the interpreter to provide the interpretation. This setting is considered ideal for the highest quality of interpretation. In this specific case, the three steps of the interpreting process happen independently and in order. This is because the pause allows the interpreter to construct meaning without further input and to provide an equivalent interpretation before the speaker continues with more input. However, signed language interpreters most commonly work in simultaneous interpreting situations (especially in higher education) wherein the speaker provides input at a natural pace and does not provide pauses for the interpreter to go through the steps of interpretation. Instead, the interpreter is expected to do all three tasks at the same time, receiving input all while constructing meaning and providing output.

It is important to keep in mind that the hearing students in the classroom are only required to do some of the cognitive tasks that the inter-

preter does, that is, the hearing students are only required to receive the input and make sense of it in their first language before moving on to other input. Even for hearing students, this task is not easy and can prove overwhelming when new content is introduced or high-level topics are discussed. For the interpreter, this simultaneous mode of interpreting negatively affects the quality of the interpretation for all involved parties – by degrading certain parts of the target message from cognitive overload, or by requiring interruptions of the speaker by the interpreter for the purposes of requesting clarification. Some ways that this can be resolved are detailed below.

First, it is a common practice among signed language interpreters to work in teams of two or more during long or challenging interpreting situations. A team interpreter can provide immediate feedback on any of the three steps listed above: (s)he can provide a word that was not heard; (s)he can help clarify meaning of new, foreign, or semantically heavy words; and (s)he can correct the output should an error arise. In these situations, the 'active' interpreter can focus more on constructing meaning in a general sense and the 'passive' interpreter can focus more on provide clarifications or specifications when necessary.

Second, using a long interpretation processing time (also called a *décalage*, or delay) gives the interpreter more time to construct true meaning in step two. Because of the challenging cognitive task interpreting represents, interpreters already introduce a delay into the interpreted interaction that has consequences on the interaction. Participants who use the target language, for example, often miss out on being able to ask questions because they are receiving a delayed input where the appropriate turn taking pauses are no longer aligned with those in the source language. Shortening the processing time would help mitigate the effect of the interpretation on turn taking, but would jeopardize the interpretation fidelity.

Third, having a knowledge of the material at hand allows the interpreter to call upon previously-constructed meaning in step two, arguably the most difficult of the steps. The interpreter community quite stringently requests preparatory materials to be provided well in advance of the interpreted interaction to ensure that interpreter provides the truest interpretation possible. In the context of the university, this often requires that interpreters be trained at the university level in a field *other than* interpreting. Unfortunately, in many interpreting programs, students take only language, culture, and interpreting practice courses and rarely are exposed to the likes of a university chemistry laboratory or textbook. It could be argued that it is impossible to interpret something that one knows nothing about. It is for this reason that university-level interpreters must be especially careful to have the right prior knowledge before accepting work assignments.

Attempting to take notes in class also presents itself as a difficult task for a deaf person when in a hearing class. This is because similarly to the above

observations on the ability of the deaf student to watch an interpreter and a slide presentation at the same time, it is impossible for a deaf person to watch a lecture in a signed language and look at his/her notepad to take notes simultaneously – the scientific nature of vision does not allow for this to occur. Some might suggest, then, that hiring a note taker for the deaf student or providing the deaf student with a video recording of the class could help with this important part of the learning process. Unfortunately, these suggestions rarely become solutions, as every person takes notes in a unique manner and university students do not generally have the time to re-watch a professor's lecture (hence the existence of notes at all). Deaf students generally must have a strong command of working memory in order to find appropriate breaks in the discourse to write dense notes on the lecture material.

One solution that is sometimes raised is the use of CART (Communication Access Real-Time Translation), which is a speech-to-text technology not unlike court reporting. This requires a specially-trained stenographer to listen to a spoken presentation and transcribe it into a written language. The benefits of such a system are that no interpretation happens during this process and thus the discourse remains within a single language, and that the resulting text file can be saved and distributed to the audience for them to have a record of the lecture. On the other hand, the stenography process requires that language only flow from the spoken medium to the text medium, thus prohibiting deaf students from responding to questions or otherwise interacting in the classroom. Also, prosodic markers are generally lost in CART transcriptions, unlike in human interpretation. Finally, understanding a CART transcription requires that a deaf person have a strong command of a written language, the letters of which represent sounds to which the deaf person has limited or no sensorial access. This makes CART a solution generally only viable for specific deaf consumers or when used in tandem with signed language interpreters. For most deaf students, accessing material in a signed language is preferable to accessing it in a written language.

All these facts raise non-trivial questions: is the timing of a lecture designed for hearing people compatible with the timing of a lecture for deaf student (e.g., is there sufficient time for the deaf student to take notes, are there sufficient visual rest periods in the lecture period)? Are classes designed for hearing people compatible with the needs of a deaf audience (e.g., are sight lines acceptable for deaf people, are deaf people able to participate in classroom conversations or debates without forcing pragmatically-awkward moments on the spoken language discourse)? What is the role of written language in the instruction of deaf students?

Despite the fact that these questions have existed for many years and that various proposals have been put forth to remedy them (Thumann 2007), it remains true that when a deaf student steps into a classroom academics do not generally know how to behave. This is likely due to the fact that there are so few deaf students that access high levels of education. Often

it becomes the role of the interpreter to educate the instructor on how best to direct the class for the deaf student and to ensure that the deaf student asks questions at the appropriate time in the discourse. This again supports the use of interpreters in higher level educational settings to provide solutions to problems that technology otherwise could not provide.

Of course, providing education directly in a signed language resolves the issues that are discussed here. This occurs at Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), both in the United States. Gallaudet is the only university in the world completely devoted to university-level education for deaf people. Classes at Gallaudet are taught in American Sign Language so that students have direct access to the content and do not require interpreter involvement. NTID is one college at the Rochester Institute of Technology and provides a similar approach to Gallaudet. Such academic models have not been copied in other countries in the world, potentially because of the financial cost involved with setting up such institutions, especially in light of the amount of people in a country that would attend this type of institution. Should deaf higher education become an issue of European concern, this model might be more efficiently adopted at the level of the European Union rather than within individual member states.

One issue that has not been addressed in any country is the accessibility of frozen learning materials for deaf students. Even at Gallaudet and NTID, deaf students are largely required to learn by reading texts in English or another written language, once again, languages that are based on sounds to which a deaf person has limited or no access. The development of educational materials in signed languages is an interesting research direction that should be explored for the entire academic life of the deaf student. For example, building a solid base in science from a young age will lead to success in scientific studies (and studies in other fields) throughout life. This also presents a strong opportunity for deaf professionals to be involved in creating texts that will directly benefit their own community and provide jobs to community members who may have trouble finding steady work.

## 5 Conclusion

Among the students enrolled in university programs, deaf people encounter communication and linguistic barriers in their everyday lives. In this paper we have highlighted some of these challenges and have given some possible short-term and long-term solutions. Access to the spoken language of the dominant community (and to the language of the scientific community) is a goal that would allow deaf students to be autonomous in their academic carriers. However, this result cannot be achieved without considering that the primary language of communication for deaf people is usually a signed language. Signed languages thus become the key to break the sound barrier.

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# **Inter-comprendere all'orale delle parole in contesto frasale**

## La trasparenza lessicale nella coppia di lingue italiano-francese

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**Abstract** This article examines the role of oral lexical transparency of some words in the field of romance languages' inter-comprehension. An initial list of 200 Italian words was presented orally without context to a group of French people who had no knowledge of the Italian language. Eleven of these words had then been submitted in different sentences with a different level and nature of transparency to another group made up of a variety of French adolescents and adults. They had to concentrate on every useful linguistic element – phonological similarities or contextual clues – present in the phrasal context and then recognize the meaning of the Italian words. After presenting the methodology of the research, the essay goes on to analyse the data collected and to give some conclusions. Overall, words are better understood in the presence of a context and adults seem to have more strategies to adopt in order to grasp the meaning of the given words.

**Sommario** 1 Introduzione. – 2 Obiettivi e ipotesi. – 3 Il riconoscimento delle parole italiane da parte dei francofoni. – 3.1 L'esperienza. – 3.2 Le undici parole in contesto frasale. – 3.3 Il pubblico interessato. – 3.4 Modalità adottata per la raccolta dati. – 4 I risultati quantitativi. – 5 Analisi dei risultati. – 5.1 I risultati degli adolescenti e degli adulti. – 5.2 Il ruolo del latino e delle lingue straniere nel riconoscimento. – 5.3 Un confronto tra i risultati delle parole in contesto frasale e le stesse isolate. – 5.4 Il ruolo del contesto nella scelta della risposta.

**Keywords** Italian. French. Lexicon. Transparency. Phrasal context.

## **1 Introduzione**

Questo resoconto sviluppa due precedenti studi sul riconoscimento delle parole nell'ambito dell'intercomprensione orale tra lingue romanze, nella fattispecie per la coppia di lingue italiano-francese (Jamet 2007a, cap. 1; Passalent 2015, cap. 2). Nel primo dei due contributi appena menzionati, duecento parole francesi sono state sottoposte al riconoscimento orale da parte di un pubblico di italofofoni che le ascoltavano per la prima volta. In modo simmetrico, nel secondo contributo, le stesse parole in italiano sono state sottoposte a un pubblico di francofoni per il loro riconoscimento orale. In entrambi gli studi il riconoscimento è stato fatto su parole isolate,



pronunciate singolarmente una dopo l'altra. Lo scopo era quello di verificare il livello di trasparenza fonetica e lessicale tra lingue romanze prendendo in considerazione un pubblico in sé significativamente rappresentativo. Questi due contributi hanno evidenziato che il fenomeno di trasparenza lessicale esiste anche all'orale oltre che allo scritto. In altre parole, si è dimostrato che parlanti francesi possono comprendere largamente l'italiano, a partire dalla loro prossimità, pur non avendolo mai studiato e viceversa. Il passaggio da una lingua romanza all'altra è incoraggiato dalle numerose somiglianze esistenti tra le due lingue e dalle risorse cognitive che ogni parlante può utilizzare per praticare la comprensione della lingua vicina presa in considerazione.

Sapendo tuttavia che la percezione delle unità isolate varia a seconda che siano pronunciate in un contesto o meno (Blanche-Benveniste 2009, 23), con questo studio ho proposto a un altro pubblico di francofoni di riconoscere alcune delle parole italiane della lista originaria all'interno, questa volta, di un contesto frasale. Nei successivi capitoli, dunque, mi soffermerò sulla lista di queste parole, sul genere di contesto dove ho presentato le stesse, sul pubblico coinvolto nello studio. In seguito, analizzerò i risultati esplorando come la presenza di un contesto possa costituire un fattore importante per il riconoscimento lessicale delle parole. Introdurrò quindi l'importanza dell'aspetto sintattico nel quadro dell'intercomprensione orale.

## 2 Obiettivi e ipotesi

In quale misura una parola intesa in un contesto, in relazione cioè ad altre parole, può essere più facilmente compresa? La presenza di un contesto frasale costituisce un fattore privilegiato per coglierne il significato? Quali elementi possono incoraggiare la trasparenza di una parola in un contesto di intercomprensione? Sebbene una parola in sé opaca possa non diventare trasparente in contesto, l'ipotesi iniziale si basa sul fatto che qualsiasi elemento lessicale all'interno di una frase o di un discorso possa costituire un aiuto e sviluppare delle risorse cognitive individuali a cui ricorrere per riconoscere la parola straniera tra altre che sono altrettanto sconosciute ma in misura diversa. Per questo motivo, l'ipotesi di fondo è che alcune delle parole che hanno posto difficoltà in isolamento possano divenire più trasparenti all'interno di un contesto. Nell'ambito dell'intercomprensione, ad ogni modo, non ci sono parole isolate ma sempre un flusso di elementi le cui trasparenze convergono tra loro.



### 3 Il riconoscimento delle parole italiane da parte dei francofoni

Nei seguenti paragrafi presenterò il test preparato per il pubblico di francofoni, soffermandomi sulla scelta delle parole che lo formano e sui gruppi di frasi in esso contenuti. In seguito, presenterò le caratteristiche del pubblico al quale è stato sottoposto il test e descriverò come si è svolta la raccolta del materiale da analizzare.

#### 3.1 L'esperienza

Le undici parole scelte per questa esperienza sono le seguenti: 'autore', 'paura', 'energia', 'territorio', 'mago', 'violenza', 'piede', 'conoscenza', 'scuola', 'rischio' ed 'estate'. La scelta, compiuta a partire dalla lista di duecento parole iniziali, non è stata arbitraria. Al suo interno vi sono delle parole che erano risultate opache e altre, invece, trasparenti.<sup>1</sup> Ci sono parole di differente lunghezza sillabica, una falsa trasparenza lessicale, alcune cominciano per una sillaba divergente o comunque possiedono una divergenza consonantica importante, altre contengono una particolare sequenza vocalica all'inizio o alla fine della parola. Esse rappresentano largamente i diversi punti di contrastività che possono ostacolare la comprensione nel passaggio dall'italiano LS al francese L1. Ho inoltre incluso qualche parola che, in isolamento, era risultata trasparente per verificare se in contesto lo sarebbe stata in uguale misura. Le parole, infine, non sono state proposte in ordine alfabetico. Nel paragrafo successivo, presenterò in dettaglio la natura delle difficoltà ad esse correlate.

*I. autore* rappresenta il solo termine a non appartenere alla lista originaria di 200 parole. È stato scelto per proporre una parola contenente, nella sillaba iniziale, una sequenza vocalica pronunciata diversamente all'orale in francese. La parola *I. paura* era risultata opaca al pubblico di francofoni nell'esperienza compiuta con le parole in isolamento. Mi sono chiesto se la diversa posizione della sequenza vocalica 'au' implicasse in francese delle conseguenze differenti. La parola *I. energia* era stata compresa all'unanimità quando era stata pronunciata isolata. In effetti, essa contiene in francese gli stessi fonemi consonantici presenti anche in italiano, inoltre la sequenza vocalica 'ia' alla fine della parola non pone alcuna difficoltà alla comprensione anche perché l'accento tonico cade sulla stessa vocale nelle due lingue. Infine, *I. territorio* funziona allo stesso modo: non possiede divergenze consonantiche e custodisce la sequenza vocalica 'io' alla fine in posizione post-tonica che rende la differenza tra /ɔrjo/ e /war/ meno influente.

<sup>1</sup> Il riferimento è ai due contributi citati in precedenza, in «Introduzione». A seconda dei risultati quantitativi, le parole erano state classificate in trasparenti, semi-trasparenti, semi-opache e opache.

In seguito *I.mago*, pronunciato in isolamento, era stato classificato nel gruppo delle parole opache. Nella lista risulta essere la sola parola corta in italiano a corrispondere a una parola lunga in francese. Il contesto può aiutare i francofoni nel loro processo di riconoscimento? *I.violenza* presenta un livello di opacità nella seconda parte della parola ma, la prima sillaba rimane totalmente trasparente. *I.piede*, poi, era risultato semi-trasparente in isolamento e non sembra procurare molte difficoltà.

*I.conoscenza* era una parola risultata semi-opaca soprattutto a causa della divergenza consonantica riguardante il fonema /ʃ/, tradotto in francese col suono /s/. Nella lista delle parole vi è ugualmente *I.scuola* che comincia con la vocale in francese, scomparsa in italiano, e che possiede una sequenza vocalica al centro. *I.rischio* non pone delle difficoltà degne di menzione, *I.estate* è stata confusa spesso con una falsa trasparenza. La scomparsa in francese della consonante /s/ infatti e la brevità della parola nella sua realizzazione l'avevano classificata tra le parole più opache della lista sia tra gli adolescenti che tra gli adulti.

Nella tabella 1, le undici parole sono accompagnate dal livello di trasparenza<sup>2</sup> che esse avevano ottenuto in precedenza nel riconoscimento in isolamento.

Tabella 1. Livello di trasparenza delle parole in isolamento

	I.Autore	I.Energia	I.Territorio	I.Rischio	I.Violenza	I.Piede
<b>Adolescenti</b>	-	T	T	T	T	ST
<b>Adulti</b>	-	T	T	T	T	T
<b>TOT</b>	-	T	T	T	T	ST

	I.Scuola	I.Conoscenza	I.Paura	I.Mago	I.Estate
<b>Adolescenti</b>	SO	O	O	O	O
<b>Adulti</b>	ST	ST	O	O	O
<b>TOT</b>	ST	SO	O	O	O

### 3.2 Le undici parole in contesto frasale

Per ognuna delle parole e per testare la loro comprensione in contesto, ho composto tre frasi con gradi di opacità diversi. Ho sempre cercato di rendere la prima frase più opaca delle altre due che la seguivano. Nella composizione di queste frasi, ho selezionato parole appartenenti allo stesso campo lessicale, come pure delle conoscenze enciclopediche e de-

<sup>2</sup> T indica una parola trasparente; ST una parola semi-trasparente; SO una parola semi-opaca; O una parola opaca.

gli enunciati che si possono incontrare nella vita reale e nell'interazione comune di tutti i giorni. Lo scopo era quello di comprendere fino a che punto questi diversi elementi e conoscenze possono facilitare o impedire la comprensione della frase italiana che include la parola campione a un pubblico francese che lo ascolta per la prima volta. In questo paragrafo mi soffermerò su ciascuna frase, analizzando e presentando i punti di criticità in esse contenuti per mostrare il grado di isolamento della parola campione all'interno del suo contesto frasale. Nelle frasi in posizione 'a', la parola campione si ritrova quasi come nell'esperimento di comprensione isolata; nelle frasi in posizione 'b' e 'c', un fascio di trasparenze può aiutare la comprensione della parola campione.

(1) *AUTORE*

- a. Manzoni è l'autore de 'I Promessi Sposi'.
- b. L'autore di questo libro è molto amato in Grecia.
- c. Preferisco leggere degli autori americani.

In (1a), l'opacità 'Manzoni' è di tipo 'nome proprio' e il titolo della sua opera più famosa 'I promessi sposi'/'Les fiancés' rappresenta una nozione culturale enciclopedica che può essere sconosciuta al pubblico francese. La mancanza di trasparenza sonora tra *I.sposi* e *F.époux* rende la frase opaca. In (1b), *I.libro* si avvicina a *F.livre* e la divergenza consonantica ha poco peso. In (1c), infine, l'unica difficoltà di comprensione orale sembra risiedere nel verbo *I.leggere* che possiede una sillaba supplementare e una divergenza consonantica rispetto a *F.lire*.

(2) *ENERGIA*

- a. Quanta energia hanno i bambini quando giocano!
- b. L'energia positiva ci fa stare bene.
- c. Quanto costa l'energia elettrica?

(2a) è la sola a non contenere un aggettivo legato al sostantivo *I.energia*. Le parole *I.bambini* e *I.giocano* rappresentano una difficoltà per la comprensione poiché non sono facilmente associabili alle parole che le traducono: *F.enfants* e *F.(ils) jouent*. La presenza dell'aggettivo in (2b) e (2c) rende totalmente trasparente la parola *I.energia*, anche se il suo livello di trasparenza sembrava già evidente fin dall'inizio.

(3) *TERRITORIO*

- a. Ieri ha piovuto su tutto il territorio della regione Lazio.
- b. Il territorio agricolo di mio padre è molto esteso.
- c. Il territorio collinare in Friuli è preponderante.

Questa parola sembra completamente trasparente. Per creare diversi livelli di opacità, (3a) presenta il nome *I.territorio* da solo, senza la presenza di alcun aggettivo. Al contrario, *I.territorio agricolo* e *I.territorio collinare* possono confermare le ipotesi del pubblico. La parola utilizzata da sola è più opaca. Il participio passato *I.piovuto* del verbo *F.pleuvoir* è difficilmente riconoscibile, mentre il verbo *F.être* al presente dell'indicativo in (3b) e (3c) sembra più facilmente comprensibile.

(4) *RISCHIO*

- a. Il rischio del nostro paese è quello di non dare un futuro ai nostri figli.
- b. Il rischio di morire accompagna la vita di ogni militare.
- c. Attenzione: rischio di incendio!

In (4a), ciò che costituisce una ragione di opacità è il verbo *I.dare*, il quale non porta facilmente al suo corrispondente francese *F.donner*. Anche l'oggetto indiretto *I.figli* che si traduce con *F.enfants* e che all'orale è distante da *F.fils* rappresenta un ostacolo. In (4b), il verbo *F.mourir* e *F.accompagner* sono comprensibili così come il sostantivo *F.militaire* per via delle loro somiglianze fonetiche. (4c) fa parte di quelle conoscenze culturali comuni e, dunque, non sembra poter porre difficoltà.

(5) *VIOLENZA*

- a. Ogni uomo è in sé una persona che nasconde della violenza.
- b. La pace non si ottiene incoraggiando la violenza.
- c. La violenza sugli animali rimane un flagello nella nostra società.

In (5a) è la più opaca poiché il verbo è indecifrabile a dei francofoni che non hanno mai ascoltato dell'italiano orale. Non si deduce *F.cacher* attraverso *I.nascondere*. Inoltre, la divergente sequenza vocalica presente in *I.uomo* non porta immediatamente al suo corrispettivo francese *F.homme*. Le due frasi successive sembrano trasparenti.

(6) *PIEDE*

- a. Anna si è rotta un piede mentre era al lavoro.
- b. Ho riconosciuto le impronte dei tuoi piedi per terra.
- c. La distanza si può misurare con l'unità di misura 'il piede'.

Questa parola si è rilevata trasparente in isolamento. In (6a), l'avverbio *I.mentre* non conduce subito a *F.alors que*, l'imperfetto del verbo essere *I.era* è opaco e *I.lavoro* è foneticamente distante da *F.travail* e anche dalla parola della stessa radice *F.labeur*. Il participio passato *I.rotta* non è poi affatto un elemento facilitatore per il riconoscimento del verbo in francese. In (6b), sembra che la sola difficoltà sia costituita dal participio passato *I.riconosciuto* a causa della sua lunghezza e della divergenza consonantica

che li separa da *F.reconnu*, ma anche la parola *I.impronte* ha un grado di opacità. In (6c), l'espressione «unità di misura» è facilmente comprensibile così come la parola *F.distance* che facilita il riconoscimento immediato del contesto.

(7) *SCUOLA*

- a. La scuola inizia il 12 settembre.
- b. Lo sciopero dei professori contro i tagli alla scuola è previsto per domani.
- c. La scuola pubblica è gratuita, laica, obbligatoria fino a 16 anni.

In (7a) c'è solo un elemento che potrebbe facilitare la comprensione della parola ed è la data dell'inizio del nuovo anno scolastico. In (7b) è contenuta la parola trasparente *I.professori* che orienta il contesto, mentre (7c) è completamente trasparente poiché si introduce il fatto che la scuola pubblica è gratuita, laica e obbligatoria.

(8) *CONOSCENZA*

- a. L'umiltà è prerequisito per ogni sana conoscenza.
- b. Socrate invitava a percorrere la via della conoscenza di sé stessi.
- c. L'ignoranza non aiuta all'incontro e alla conoscenza dell'altro.

In (8a), le parole *F.prérequis* e *F.saine* contengono dei tratti simili rispetto ai loro corrispondenti italiani, ma essi sono in buona parte opachi. In (8b), ho aggiunto un riferimento al filosofo Socrate, l'ostacolo nella comprensione è dunque enciclopedico poiché non tutti possiedono la conoscenza di questo personaggio storico. Qualora questo elemento fosse noto, il contesto rappresenterebbe un aiuto. In (8c), le parole sono piuttosto trasparenti. La presenza di una negazione e della parola *F.ignorance*, che è il contrario di *I.connaissance*, dovrebbe orientare le ipotesi del pubblico. Il verbo *I.aider*, tuttavia, possiede una rilevante opacità all'inizio di parola.

(9) *PAURA*

- a. Ho paura di non riuscire a superare l'esame.
- b. La paura di ciò che è simile genera omofobia.
- c. Devi avere coraggio per vincere la paura!

In (9a), solo il sostantivo *I.esame* può essere associato per trasparenza lessicale al suo omologo *F.examen*, ma non è immediato. Il tratto della negazione potrebbe essere compreso. Le altre parole sono intrinsecamente opache. In (9b), le parole *F.similaire* e *F.homophobie* sono facilmente riconoscibili, mentre *F.cio* è opaco. La frase imperativa (9c) sembra maggiormente trasparente, nonostante *I.vincere* si discosti foneticamente da *F.vaincre*.

(10) *MAGO*

- a. Hai mai chiesto a un mago di leggerti il futuro?
- b. Solo Mago Merlino può fare magie.
- c. Il mago ha sempre una bacchetta magica.

In (10a), il più grande ostacolo sembra essere rappresentato dalla difficoltà di individuare il verbo. *I.chiedere* è volutamente stato preferito a *I.domandare/F.demander*. L'espressione «leggere il futuro» può, in seguito, costituire un ostacolo supplementare poiché in questo caso il francese non utilizza la parola *F.futur*. L'espressione è tradotta con *lire l'avenir*. In (10b), Mago Merlino rappresenta una difficoltà di tipo 'nome proprio' che è allo stesso tempo un riferimento culturale enciclopedico sulla quale appoggiarsi. Le altre parole sono trasparenti. In (10c) sembra la meno opaca a livello lessicale, il solo ostacolo è caratterizzato da *I.sempr*e che si può tuttavia comprendere attraverso la conoscenza dello spagnolo.

(11) *ESTATE*

- a. In estate tutti vanno al mare.
- b. Gli studenti aspettano le vacanze d'estate per riposarsi.
- c. Le quattro stagioni dell'anno sono: autunno, inverno, primavera ed estate.

In (11a), il solo indizio è costituito dalla trasparenza tra *I.mare* e *F.mer*. La difficoltà è rappresentata dal fatto che non ci sono altre parole utili su cui fare riferimento. In (11b), l'espressione *vacances d'été* può aiutare così come il verbo *F.se reposer*. È comunque molto probabile che la presenza di tutte e quattro le stagioni in (11c) aiuti il riconoscimento della parola. Sebbene *I.stagioni* non sia trasparente, gli indizi dati sono sufficienti per individuare la risposta a partire dal contesto.

### 3.3 Il pubblico interessato

Le persone coinvolte in questa esperienza sono state trenta in totale: quindici adolescenti e quindici adulti. Si tratta di francofoni che non hanno mai compiuto degli studi di lingua italiana nella loro vita, prerequisito indispensabile per questa esperienza d'intercomprensione orale sulla coppia di lingue francese-italiano.

Il gruppo degli adolescenti è formato da liceali di età variabile tra i 14 e i 18 anni, provenienti da diverse città francesi. Dodici sono state le ragazze, il resto ragazzi. Nel gruppo c'è una ragazza bilingue francese/portoghese. Al momento dell'esperienza, tutti studiavano inglese a scuola. Le altre lingue straniere rappresentate sono state lo spagnolo e il tedesco, studiate come principianti o apprendenti autonomi a seconda dell'anno scolastico

da loro frequentato. Eppure, c'è anche qualche studente che ha seguito dei corsi di russo e di cinese nel proprio percorso di studi. Tre ragazzi, inoltre, affermano di aver studiato il latino per uno o due anni durante la scuola media. Questo fattore si rivela interessante. Pur non essendo rilevante ai fini delle conclusioni, la metà degli adolescenti è stata testata individualmente, l'altra metà è stata testata invece insieme in uno stesso luogo.

Nel gruppo dei quindici adulti, l'età variava dai 19 ai 68 anni. Le loro città di provenienza sono molteplici. Nel gruppo vi è un parlante bilingue arabo/francese che veniva dal Libano, un bilingue creolo/francese che veniva da Haiti, una ragazza svizzera e due giovani dalla Costa d'Avorio. La metà di loro sta facendo degli studi universitari, per esempio nelle facoltà di medicina, filosofia, lettere, teologia ed economia. Il resto degli adulti sono delle persone in pensione oppure dei lavoratori senza studi universitari alle spalle. Sei sono uomini, il resto donne. L'inglese resta la lingua più studiata e conosciuta all'interno del gruppo, principalmente per delle ragioni di formazione. È d'altronde arduo stabilire quale sia il livello di padronanza delle altre lingue da loro indicate: il livello di competenza posseduto per lo spagnolo, il tedesco e/o il cinese varia a seconda dell'approfondimento che ciascuno ha potuto fare. Sei persone hanno seguito dei corsi di latino. Tutti sono stati testati individualmente.

### 3.4 Modalità adottata per la raccolta dati

Il test è stato proposto seguendo diverse tappe. Innanzitutto, il pubblico ha ascoltato la parola isolata. In seguito, il primo gruppo di tre frasi è stato pronunciato due volte di seguito. La consegna era quella di scrivere la parola francese da associare alla parola italiana ascoltata in contesto, indicando altresì l'elemento/gli elementi che aveva/no facilitato la comprensione della parola in questione. Lo stesso procedimento è stato compiuto per le altre dieci parole e gruppi di frasi correlate. Diversamente dall'esperienza compiuta con le parole isolate, i francofoni intervistati potevano ora trovare un tempo di riflessione che avrebbe permesso loro di formulare alcune ipotesi prima di rispondere.<sup>3</sup> Infine, se una lingua straniera fosse stata utile nel percorso della riflessione, si era chiesto di segnalarlo indicando in parte la lingua utilizzata. Lo spazio dei commenti ha infine consentito di comprendere meglio le associazioni compiute e di distinguere chiaramente le parole che hanno causato più difficoltà.

3 Questo momento è stato relativamente breve. Si è trattato di 30 secondi circa dopo ogni frase. Prima di passare alla parola seguente, è stato dato un ulteriore minuto per la scelta finale.

## 4 I risultati quantitativi

Dopo aver compiuto l'esperienza con le parole in contesto, le risposte sono state raggruppate distinguendo quelle degli adolescenti da quelle degli adulti. Accanto a ogni parola proposta dal pubblico coinvolto, sono stati elencati gli elementi che hanno permesso di rispondere e che hanno costituito degli elementi facilitatori sui quali fare affidamento per il riconoscimento delle parole. In questo paragrafo, mi limito a riassumere i risultati in rapporto alle risposte corrette e poi farò qualche osservazione generale prima di iniziare un'analisi più approfondita.

Nella tabella 2, per ogni parola è indicato il numero di persone che l'hanno compresa nell'esperienza in contesto frasale:

Tabella 2. Il numero di risposte comprese in contesto

	<i>l.Autore</i>	<i>l.Energia</i>	<i>l.Territorio</i>	<i>l.Rischio</i>	<i>l.Violenza</i>	<i>l.Piede</i>
<b>Adolescenti</b>	3	15	14	15	15	15
<b>Adulti</b>	8	15	15	15	14	15

	<i>l.Scuola</i>	<i>l.Conoscenza</i>	<i>l.Paura</i>	<i>l.Mago</i>	<i>l.Estate</i>
<b>Adolescenti</b>	15	5	1	3	13
<b>Adulti</b>	14	14	8	8	15

Per quanto riguarda le parole che già furono classificate come meno trasparenti, più di qualcuno ha avuto difficoltà. Questo significa che i due gruppi di persone hanno spesso esitato quando le singole parole contenevano degli elementi di opacità significativi, difficili da riconoscere perfino in un contesto. Eppure, si vede come delle parole inizialmente opache siano state comprese meglio per il fatto di essere state introdotte all'interno di un enunciato.

## 5 Analisi dei risultati

Cercherò ora di analizzare nel dettaglio i risultati ottenuti e di stabilire in quale misura le parole in contesto possono essere più facilmente comprese rispetto alle parole isolate. Per questo motivo, mi soffermerò sulle diverse strategie di riconoscimento utilizzate dal pubblico. In seguito, mi focalizzerò sui numerosi elementi utilizzati per accedere al significato delle parole in questione. Esiste un genere di parole nella sintassi che incoraggia il riconoscimento lessicale?



## 5.1 I risultati degli adolescenti e degli adulti

Risulta evidente che gli adulti hanno compreso meglio le parole in contesto rispetto agli adolescenti. Le undici parole sono state comprese almeno dalla metà degli adulti, mentre questo risultato non è stato ottenuto dallo stesso numero di liceali. Ancora una volta, come dimostrato negli esperimenti precedenti dunque, sono gli adulti a portare a termine meglio il riconoscimento delle parole. Le cause sono da ricercare nel fatto che un adulto possiede una più grande elasticità linguistica così come una più accurata capacità di riflessione sulla lingua. Per questo non stupisce che siano ancora una volta gli adulti a riconoscere il più alto numero di elementi e che essi utilizzino delle strategie più efficaci nell'individuazione delle risposte. Si noti inoltre, che il risultato finale potrebbe essere stato influenzato dalle caratteristiche socioculturali del gruppo, la metà infatti è composta da studenti universitari.

## 5.2 Il ruolo del latino e delle lingue straniere nel riconoscimento

Focalizzandomi sui risultati e sui commenti lasciati dai membri dei due gruppi, si scopre che spesso altre lingue sono implicate nel processo di riconoscimento delle parole. Tra le strategie utilizzate, vi sono certamente la presenza del contesto e le sue informazioni preziose, spesso nascoste, da estrapolare. Ogni conoscenza linguistica precedente può costituire inoltre un aiuto importante nell'ambito dell'intercomprensione.

In primo luogo, nonostante il latino sia stata una lingua studiata da poche persone nei due gruppi, almeno tre adulti affermano di averlo usato in alcune delle loro risposte al test. Per comprendere la parola *I.scuola*, *L.schola* ha costituito un aiuto prezioso nell'elaborazione delle ipotesi di uno di loro. In seguito, è interessante notare che la parola *I.estate* è stata presto compresa da una religiosa che vive da una ventina d'anni in monastero. Ha correttamente associato la parola in questione al francese *F.été* perché nella liturgia delle ore è la parola latina *L.aestate*, utilizzata per significare l'estate, ad essere impiegata. A partire dunque dalla sua frequentazione del mondo monastico, non è caduta in errore associando, per esempio erroneamente, quella parola alla falsa trasparenza *F.état*. Ha piuttosto messo in pratica le sue risorse enciclopediche per rispondere. In seguito, un altro dei nostri intervistati afferma che il latino l'ha molto aiutato a comprendere alcune frasi, sebbene non abbia elencato un esempio preciso per argomentare il suo punto di vista. Tra gli adolescenti, nessuno ha usato il latino per rispondere.

In secondo luogo, si scopre che il ruolo dello spagnolo è stato fondamentale per una buona parte di persone. Prima ancora di focalizzarsi sul contesto, una adolescente ha associato la parola *I.territorio* alla parola in

spagnolo *E.territorio*, arrivando così con certezza al francese *F.territoire*. Allo stesso modo, un'altra giovane adolescente afferma di aver compreso *I.autore/F.auteur* grazie alla parola in spagnolo *E.autor* che condivide quasi la totalità dei fonemi con il corrispondente francese e che diventa una parola utile come ponte tra una lingua e l'altra. In seguito, anche *E.escuela* costituisce un aiuto importante per comprendere *F.école/I.scuola* prima ancora di intendere le tre frasi che la contengono. Inoltre, c'è un'altra osservazione che si può fare e che è legata all'influenza dello spagnolo nelle strategie di riconoscimento: una terza adolescente afferma di aver utilizzato lo spagnolo nell'associazione di *I.mago/F.magicien* alla parola della stessa famiglia *F.mage*. Questa imprecisione si spiega, a mio avviso, perché la parola in spagnolo *E.mago* è tradotta ugualmente in spagnolo con *F.magicien* o *F.mage*. D'altra parte, anche un gruppo di adulti si riferisce a questa lingua romanza per collegare l'italiano al francese. Un adulto afferma che la parola *I.conoscenza/F.connaissance* è stata compresa attraverso *E.(yo) conozco*, cioè la prima persona del verbo *E.conocer/F.connaître* al presente dell'indicativo. È sorprendente vedere come le strategie si moltiplichino e come ciascuna risorsa cognitiva posseduta dal pubblico possa migliorare e incoraggiare il riconoscimento delle parole. Una signora è arrivata a *F.pied* grazie all'equivalente *E.pie*, affermando che lo spagnolo le ha permesso di ricostruire una parte del contesto frasale, come per esempio la similitudine tra *E.siempre* e *I.sempre*, *E.primavera* e *I.primavera*. A partire da questi elementi generali che hanno moltiplicato il numero di parole comprese nella frase, ella ha poi potuto formulare delle ipotesi più convincenti. Infine, la ragazza bilingue francese/portoghese afferma che le sue conoscenze plurilinguistiche l'hanno aiutata nelle risposte. A partire dalla loro competenza plurilingue, mi sono chiesto se queste persone sarebbero giunte alle stesse conclusioni senza l'utilizzo delle frasi. È possibile. Tuttavia la presenza di un contesto frasale sembra costituire un fattore di maggiore sicurezza per le proprie ipotesi o associazioni di significato.

In terzo luogo, mi sono interrogato sull'utilizzo dell'inglese, lingua che tutti gli adolescenti ritrovano nel proprio percorso di studi e che gli adulti incontrano spesso nella società contemporanea a partire dal proprio contesto di lavoro e di vita. A partire dai commenti ricevuti, la sola parola che sembra aver permesso l'utilizzo dell'inglese è la parola *I.scuola/F.école* poiché la somiglianza con *A.school* è significativa.

### 5.3 Un confronto tra i risultati delle parole in contesto frasale e le stesse isolate

Dopo aver sottolineato il ruolo e l'influenza delle altre lingue sui dati di questo test, mi focalizzerò ora sulla natura delle risposte. Per questo motivo, comparerò i risultati di questa esperienza con quelli ottenuti in quella precedente laddove le parole italiane erano presentate in isolamento.

Anzitutto, le parole trasparenti in isolamento lo sono rimaste anche in contesto. È il caso di *I.energia*, *I.territorio*, *I.violenza* e *I.rischio*. In effetti, lo sono stati all'unanimità. Mi sembra che la grande somiglianza tra le due lingue e il numero di fonemi che queste parole condividono con le loro corrispondenti francesi abbiano avuto un ruolo importante per il riconoscimento finale. Per questo motivo, almeno la metà del pubblico interessato non ha avuto bisogno di elementi supplementari per rispondere. Prima ancora di ascoltare queste frasi, essi affermano di aver capito le parole in questione. In relazione a queste quattro parole trasparenti, l'altra metà del pubblico si è focalizzata su alcuni elementi per confermare le ipotesi formulate precedentemente. A volte si è trattato della presenza di un'altra parola trasparente come *I.(energia) elettrica/F.(énergie) électrique*; altre volte si sono focalizzati su molteplici parole appartenenti a frasi diverse; altre volte il pubblico afferma che è stata la frase intera nella sua integrità ad averlo aiutato. Quindi l'opacità ricercata nel contesto delle frasi 'a' non ha ostacolato la comprensione della parola immersa, nonostante fosse inserita in un contesto opaco. Non era scontato perché, in una sequenza opaca, le frontiere tra parole sconosciute si percepiscono meno.

Se si fa riferimento al gruppo di parole classificate in isolamento come semi-trasparenti, *I.piede* e *I.scuola* sono state ugualmente ben comprese in contesto. Gli adolescenti così come gli adulti, sostenuti dagli elementi supplementari presenti nelle frasi, le hanno riconosciute all'unanimità. Solamente una persona adulta non ha compreso la parola *I.scuola*, perfino dopo l'ascolto della terza frase contenente i valori della scuola pubblica: «gratuita, laica e obbligatoria fino a sedici anni». Un quarto soltanto delle persone non si è appoggiata su altri elementi nelle sue risposte. Il resto ha fatto affidamento a *I.distanza* e *I.misura* per riconoscere *I.piede*; e a *I.professori* e *I.pubblica* per *I.scuola*. È interessante ribadire che anche *I.settembre*, che normalmente non fa parte di questa famiglia di parole, abbia rappresentato una chiave d'accesso importante per comprendere la parola *F.école*. Almeno dieci persone hanno velocemente associato il mese in questione al rientro scolastico e, quindi, alla scuola. Questa parola li ha aiutati a dare un senso alla frase, a formulare un contesto di partenza e infine a operare un riconoscimento valido. Quindi dalla semi-trasparenza, si passa alla trasparenza quasi totale in contesto.

Non resta ora che focalizzare l'attenzione su quelle parole che si erano dimostrate opache nell'esperienza in isolamento. In che modo la presenza

di un contesto può aver facilitato il loro riconoscimento? Comincerò con la parola *I.estate*. Era stata una delle parole meno comprese in assoluto nel gruppo delle duecento parole isolate. Nessuno l'aveva riconosciuta. Eppure, in contesto, il risultato è stato completamente opposto. Tutti gli adulti l'hanno riconosciuta e soltanto due adolescenti non l'hanno associata alla parola francese corrispondente. Se ci si concentra sulle indicazioni lasciate dal pubblico e se si prendono in considerazione i loro commenti, si comprende che la frase ad aver aiutato di più è stata la terza, la quale conteneva esplicitamente in italiano il nome delle quattro stagioni. Allo stesso modo, la parola *I.vacanze/F.vacances* nella seconda frase sembra aver automaticamente fatto allusione all'estate, facendo scattare la buona associazione tra le lingue. Ciò che si deduce dunque è che il passaggio dall'italiano al francese è stato possibile grazie anche alla presenza di altri elementi che hanno orientato la risposta. Se nell'esperienza delle parole isolate questa parola era stata spesso confusa con *F.état* o con il verbo *F.être*, in contesto non ha posto alcuna difficoltà. Ventotto persone su trenta l'hanno riconosciuta in quanto parte di un enunciato. Come da loro affermato, interrogare il contesto costituisce una potente ed efficace strategia di riconoscimento.

*I.Conoscenza* era stata classificata come parola semi-opaca quando il pubblico l'aveva intesa da sola. In contesto, solamente cinque adolescenti l'hanno compresa mentre nel gruppo degli adulti francofoni, una persona soltanto l'ha confusa. Come si vede dalla tabella 1 dunque, c'è una grossa divergenza tra i risultati dei due gruppi in rapporto a questa parola intesa in contesto. Gli adolescenti non sembrano aver tratto indicazioni utili dall'ascolto delle tre frasi. Al contrario, circa metà di loro non ha nemmeno risposto. Tra quelli che hanno esitato, è interessante constatare come alcuni dicono di aver associato questa parola a una parolaccia francese che le assomiglia. Per cercare di comprendere la ragione di questo divario inatteso, vale la pena focalizzarsi sugli elementi che gli adulti dicono di aver largamente utilizzato per rispondere. Essi sostengono che soprattutto *I.Socrate* e la parola *I.ignoranza* sono state parole rivelatrici. Da una parte, il nome del filosofo greco ha fatto spesso ricordare agli adulti la celebre frase «Conosci te stesso» e dunque il legame con la parola *F.connaissance* è stato presto evidente. Dall'altra, nella terza frase proposta, la presenza della parola *I.ignoranza* e la corretta comprensione della particella negativa *I.non* ha permesso a vari adulti di accedere direttamente al suo contrario *F.connaissance*. Soltanto un adulto si è sbagliato: aveva scelto il verbo *F.commencer*, evidentemente non comprendendo gli elementi chiave delle frasi. Molto probabilmente la più grande difficoltà degli adolescenti consiste nella mancanza di conoscenze enciclopediche e nel debole livello di elasticità nella riflessione linguistica. Per questa parola, delle semplici conoscenze generali di filosofia o un'attenzione metalinguistica avrebbero facilmente potuto incoraggiarne il riconoscimento in contesto tra gli ado-

lescenti. Si capisce ora meglio il motivo di questo divario nelle risposte tra un pubblico e l'altro.

Mi focalizzo ora sulle tre parole che restano e che hanno rappresentato quelle più opache in contesto: *I.mago*, *I.autore* e *I.paura*. La parola *I.mago* è stata compresa da più della metà degli adulti e da soltanto tre adolescenti. Il gruppo degli adulti ha fatto riferimento a *I.bacchetta magica* per rispondere, espressione che è stata associata immediatamente a *F.baguettes magique* grazie alla presenza di *I.Merlino/F.Merlin* o grazie alla terza frase nella sua interezza. La forte somiglianza sonora di questi elementi supplementari nelle due lingue e l'utilizzo di una conoscenza enciclopedica hanno rapidamente permesso il riconoscimento della parola. Inoltre, tra coloro che l'hanno compreso, nessuno ha fatto ricorso ad altri elementi. Diversamente, il gruppo degli adolescenti ha avuto delle grosse difficoltà. Un terzo del pubblico non ha risposto, meno di un terzo ha capito la parola, più di un terzo l'ha confusa. Risulta interessante notare che più di qualcuno ha notato alcuni indizi chiave nelle frasi, ma senza riconoscere alla fine correttamente la parola. Il legame immediato che esisteva tra questi elementi e *I.mago* non è stato percepito. Eppure, bisogna ammettere che la stessa parola è stata meglio compresa in contesto che in isolamento. Il fatto che tre adulti e un adolescente abbiano scelto *F.magie* o *F.mage* sottolinea che l'appropriata famiglia semantica era stata compresa da altre persone, pur senza distinguere la natura della parola come avevo ipotizzato. In questo caso, il riconoscimento non è in sé pieno, ma parziale. Infine, è probabile che la differente lunghezza della parola abbia rappresentato ancora una volta un aspetto da non trascurare. La parola corta *I.mago* si traduce in francese con la parola più lunga *F.magicien*. Questa discrepanza può creare, anche in contesto, degli ostacoli rilevanti nel riconoscimento.

Le due ultime parole, di cui parleremo in questo paragrafo, sono *I.autore* e *I.paura*. Entrambe contengono in italiano il dittongo discendente 'au'. In tutti e due i casi, esso si realizza diversamente in francese attraverso il monottongo: /o/ nel primo caso per *F.auteur*, /œ/ nel secondo per la parola *F.peur*. Vi è dunque una divergenza vocalica importante. Non è un caso se la seconda parola non sia stata riconosciuta da nessuno quando era in isolamento. In che modo questa difficoltà vocalica influenza il pubblico di francofoni quando le due parole fanno parte di un contesto e sono pronunciate in diversi enunciati? Nell'ambito delle frasi di questa esperienza, oltre la metà degli adulti dimostra di aver compreso le due parole, mentre al massimo tre adolescenti le hanno capite. Anche in contesto, esiste un alto livello di opacità e questa divergenza vocalica non è stata annullata. Dall'esempio precedente, si è di fronte a uno scarto tra i due gruppi di pubblico e sono gli adolescenti ad aver avuto più difficoltà. Ciononostante, si constata che le due parole sono più trasparenti quando sono parte di un contesto.

Dove risiede quindi la differenza tra il pubblico di adolescenti e quello degli adulti in riferimento alle ultime parole prese in esame? Da una parte,

ci sono degli adolescenti che riconoscono qualche elemento delle frasi ma che non compiono la buona associazione con la parola messa in esame. Ce ne sono altri che non hanno capito bene alcuni elementi e che poi si sono sbagliati. Ci sono anche degli adolescenti che non sembrano riferirsi alle frasi date e che si limitano a proporre delle parole della stessa famiglia semantica, parole che a loro volta assomigliano alla parola da loro ascoltata. Paradossalmente, si trovano anche coloro che affermano di aver preso in considerazione una frase intera, ma che alla fine si sono sbagliati.

Dall'altra, gli adulti che sono arrivati all'esatto riconoscimento delle parole hanno fatto sempre riferimento a elementi precisi, elementi che poi garantivano la corretta associazione delle parole. Sono spesso giunti a *I.autore/F.auteur* per mezzo di *I.libro*, *I.americani*, *I.leggere* e sono arrivati a scegliere *I.paura/F.peur* grazie alla trasparenza lessicale di *I.simile*, *I.omofobia*, *I.vincere*, *I.coraggio*. Coloro che si sono sbagliati hanno spesso riprodotto in contesto alcuni meccanismi di riconoscimento che avevano già utilizzato quando la parola ascoltata era pronunciata in isolamento. Per esempio, cinque adulti si sono basati sulla prima sillaba per poi proporre *F.autorité* o *I.autre* per la parola *I.autore*. È interessante realizzare che l'ostacolo vocalico era stato perfettamente superato per l'inizio della parola, mentre il resto, ossia il cambio tra *I./o/* e *F./œ/* è rimasto opaco. In questo caso, il contesto non aveva facilitato il riconoscimento da una lingua all'altra. Altri adulti avevano custodito la maggior parte dei fonemi consonantici della parola italiana originaria e avevano proposto per *I.paura* le parole *F.parole*, *F.parure*, *F.apparence*. Ancora una volta, la famiglia semantica attivata dal pubblico degli adulti e il contesto non li hanno guidati a sufficienza per comprendere la risposta corretta. Occorre ammettere, tuttavia, che la presenza di un contesto dato costituisce un'ottima strategia per il riconoscimento lessicale: le parole sono state meglio comprese all'interno delle frasi.

#### 5.4 Il ruolo del contesto nella scelta della risposta

Dopo aver analizzato i risultati nel paragrafo precedente, si comprende che ogni adolescente e adulto è stato costantemente in ricerca di inferenze per comprendere le parole della lingua vicina sconosciuta. Trovare degli indizi, sfruttare ogni risorsa cognitiva previa e appoggiarsi sul contesto sono strategie fondamentali. Come direbbe Castagne, il pubblico cerca di «trovare un senso usando l'insieme» (2002, 104) poiché una parola trova la sua pienezza a contatto con le altre unità. A partire dall'insieme di una frase, il pubblico può utilizzare delle strategie per comprendere la parola che inizialmente non arriva a decifrare. Per quanto riguarda questa esperienza di riconoscimento delle parole in contesto frasale, si nota che il contesto può aiutare in rapporto al livello di trasparenza/opacità degli altri elementi

della frase. Questo stesso parametro varia in relazione alle conoscenze e alle risorse cognitive di ciascuno e in rapporto al proprio modo di trattare l'informazione ricevuta. Più gli elementi della frase risultano opachi, più la parola da comprendere mantiene la sua opacità. Tra le cinque parole meno comprese, il pubblico ha soprattutto fatto riferimento alla terza e alla seconda frase che avevo loro letto. Si è trattato, in effetti, delle frasi più trasparenti e dunque più facilmente utilizzabili per dedurre il significato delle parole in questione. La prima frase raramente è stata quella di riferimento per effettuare il riconoscimento. Ho ugualmente compreso che l'attenzione può portarsi su un elemento, su molteplici elementi, sulla frase nella sua interezza.

## 6 Conclusioni

Si può concludere, rispondendo così alle domande poste nel paragrafo 2, che le parole più opache sono meglio comprese in presenza di un contesto: all'interno di un enunciato hanno concretamente avuto più possibilità di essere riconosciute. Eppure, queste parole custodiscono ancora una piccola traccia di opacità per gli adolescenti. Da parte loro, gli adulti sembrano meglio padroneggiare le loro competenze cognitive e la loro capacità di riflettere sulla lingua. Questa peculiarità sembra giustificare il divario esistente nelle risposte dei due gruppi alle parole più opache della lista. Per quanto riguarda le parole che risultavano più o meno trasparenti in isolamento, esse hanno mantenuto il loro significativo livello di trasparenza anche in contesto. In questi casi si può concludere che spesso il pubblico non ha neppure bisogno di elementi supplementari per confermare le proprie associazioni: le convergenze consonantiche, la natura della prima sillaba e la lunghezza della parola bastano per le ipotesi fatte dall'italiano al francese. In effetti, quando il numero di fonemi in comune per le due lingue è importante, il pubblico fa rapidamente il riconoscimento lessicale. Rimane tuttavia vero che soltanto nell'ambito di un contesto, l'associazione fatta può essere verificata. Quando la parola mantiene un certo livello di opacità, l'intercomprensione in atto utilizza altre strategie.

La prima strategia di riconoscimento adottata dal pubblico sembra riguardare l'utilizzo delle lingue straniere. Spesso è stata adoperata grazie alle competenze in spagnolo, portoghese, inglese e latino di alcuni di loro: una lingua che funge da intermediario può risvegliare delle similitudini e dunque delle associazioni corrette. D'altra parte, occorre saper evitare la trappola delle false trasparenze che mantengono una certa similitudine fonetica ma, allo stesso tempo, una forte divergenza semantica. In seguito, sembra che gli elementi del contesto frasale rappresentino la seconda grande strategia di riconoscimento che è normalmente adottata.



L'aspetto sintattico, che si manifesta nell'ordine di ogni parola all'interno della frase ascoltata e in rapporto agli altri elementi, è fondamentale. A partire dallo studio dei dati di questa esperienza, si può concludere che se la parola non è totalmente trasparente all'inizio, ci sono almeno tre livelli di utilizzo degli elementi del contesto:

- a. utilizzo di una o più parole trasparenti a fianco di quella da riconoscere (*I.bacchetta magica/F.baguette magique, I.quattro stagioni/F.quatre saisons*);
- b. utilizzo di certi morfemi grammaticali che possiedono ugualmente un valore semantico e che fanno parte del contesto frasale (*I.tutta/F.toute, I.solo/F.seul*);
- c. utilizzo della/delle frase/frasi nella sua/loro integralità.

Questi elementi facilitatori possono spesso essere delle conoscenze enciclopediche o, a volte, possono evocarle nel pubblico che ascolta. Si può concludere dunque che non c'è per forza un determinato tipo di elementi a veicolare il riconoscimento. Ci sono piuttosto dei gradi di opacità che variano in rapporto alle risorse cognitive di ciascuno, in rapporto alle loro competenze anteriori, in rapporto alla loro flessibilità nella riflessione, in rapporto alle loro conoscenze linguistiche. Mi sembra interessante il fatto che una persona adulta del pubblico affermi che la comprensione è stata possibile grazie alla pronuncia in italiano di tutte le lettere delle parole. Secondo lei, questa caratteristica le avrebbe rivelato l'ortografia permettendole di fare delle inferenze in francese.

Si può affermare che, tra le parole più opache, la sequenza vocalica italiana 'au' ha mantenuto la sua opacità e la sua ambiguità anche in contesto. Si tratta di un elemento che andrebbe approfondito. Infine mi sembra che quest'esperienza di riconoscimento delle parole, nell'ambito più ampio dell'intercomprensione, andrebbe approfondita in simmetria sottoponendo le stesse parole contestualizzate in francese a un pubblico di italofoni. Questo eventuale lavoro speculare potrebbe permettere, per la coppia di lingue francese-italiano, di comparare i risultati e analizzare le differenze e le similitudini nel riconoscimento delle parole in contesto frasale.

A livello didattico infine, sembra giustificare la necessità di creare attività specifiche di riconoscimento di parole che si sanno essere opache in contesto frasale.



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## **Analisi degli errori nella produzione orale in francese lingua straniera: studio di caso**

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**Abstract** This experimental research investigates the nature and the causes of the errors made by Italian university students in the oral production of French. First, the method used to create the corpus is described. Secondly, it is illustrated the analysis grid that was designed according to the Jamet model on the basis of psycholinguistic and language teaching research in the second half of the twentieth century. The grid is a tool for collecting and describing errors in the oral production, enabling us to identify their causes, out of an evaluation context. At the linguistic level, the results show that lexical errors are dominant followed by syntactical, morphological and phonetic errors. At the pragmatic level, in most cases the communication is possible even if words are incorrect. Concerning the sources of mistakes, it was found that errors due to the interference (transfer of the mother tongue) are more frequent than errors caused by the interlanguage (evolutionary errors). Error analysis currently receives a renewed attention in the light of advances in psycholinguistics and language teaching. The understanding of errors in their nature and in their psycholinguistic mechanisms can lead researchers, teachers and students in their activities. Researchers can find answers for questions about the relationship between native language and learning language; teachers are involved with the question of adopting the best reaction to errors; students can be led to develop their metacognitive competences.

**Sommario** 1 Introduzione. – 2 La situazione di insegnamento e la costituzione del corpus. – 2.1 I tre poli. – 2.2 La metodologia di insegnamento. – 2.3 La costituzione del corpus. – 3 La griglia di analisi degli errori per la produzione orale. – 3.1 La natura linguistica dell'errore. – 3.2 L'operazione linguistica. – 3.3 La natura pragmatica. – 3.4 La categoria di appartenenza: la causa. – 3.5 Le strategie psicolinguistiche. – 3.6 Le strategie comunicative. – 3.7 L'applicazione della griglia di analisi. – 4 I risultati dell'analisi. – 4.1 Le indicazioni date dalle cifre. – 4.2 La tipologia e l'interpretazione degli errori. – 5 Le implicazioni didattiche. – 6 Conclusione.

**Keywords** Error analyses. French oral production. L1 interference. Interlanguage.

### **1 Introduzione**

L'errore è sempre stato un punto focale nell'insegnamento/apprendimento delle lingue, ma ricorrendo agli studi sull'acquisizione linguistica ha permesso alla glottodidattica di farne un campo di ricerca in continuo sviluppo. Nell'ambito della didattica delle lingue la percezione dell'errore si è evoluta da uno status negativo come enunciato sbagliato, ad uno più positivo come indice di un processo in corso. L'errore, visto come disfunzio-

namento e come deviazione rispetto a una norma, era solo penalizzato nei metodi di insegnamento, influenzati dal modello psicologico comportamentista del periodo dagli anni Quaranta agli anni Sessanta. Successivamente, a partire dagli anni Settanta l'errore è stato ed è tuttora percepito innanzitutto come un indice rivelatore di meccanismi psicolinguistici sottostanti all'apprendimento delle lingue straniere.

La concezione di Chomsky del linguaggio come processo creativo ha influenzato le ricerche di Pit Corder (Corder 1967) e di altri studiosi che si sono dedicati alla comprensione degli errori, come scrive Marquilló Larruy (2003) nella sua descrizione del percorso storico dell'analisi degli errori.

Questo tipo di studi è stato affrontato dalle seguenti principali correnti dell'approccio didattico e psicolinguistico: l'analisi contrastiva, l'analisi degli errori, le ricerche sull'interlingua. La prima, fondata sul confronto tra la lingua d'origine e la lingua obiettivo e sulla psicologia comportamentista, ha generato il concetto di trasferimento negativo della lingua materna che condiziona l'apprendimento della lingua straniera e che permette di prevedere le difficoltà di apprendimento e gli errori. Tuttavia Marquilló Larruy rileva i limiti dell'analisi contrastiva dimostrati dall'esperienza: da una parte non tutti gli errori previsti si verificano nelle produzioni di apprendenti della stessa lingua madre, e dall'altra apprendenti di lingua madre diverse possono anche commettere errori sugli stessi punti, indipendentemente dalle interferenze. Inoltre Marquilló Larruy nota che secondo Besse et Porquier (1984) la distanza o la prossimità tra le lingue induce comportamenti diversi a seconda del modo con cui si trasferiscono le strutture della lingua madre verso la lingua obiettivo. Pertanto, nonostante le critiche, l'analisi contrastiva oggi è ancora presa in considerazione nelle ricerche in corso sull'intercomprensione delle lingue simili fondata sulle somiglianze linguistiche (Jamet 2009).

Il passaggio dall'analisi contrastiva all'analisi dell'errore è rappresentato dalla «Griglia di classificazione tipologica degli errori» del BELC (*Bureau d'enseignement de la langue et des cultures*) elaborata nel 1967 da Debyser per la creazione di un manuale destinato ad allievi africani del primo anno di scuola secondaria di primo grado. A tal fine era stato raccolto un corpus di due mila compiti provenienti da diversi paesi francofoni. Nell'impossibilità di applicare un metodo contrastivo, non essendoci sempre una descrizione linguistica delle diverse lingue degli apprendenti a disposizione del ricercatore, il metodo del BELC non ha tenuto conto della specificità di ogni contesto, ma è stata elaborata una griglia con l'ambizione di includere tutti i tipi di errori presenti nei test scritti (dettati e redazioni).

Si sono avviati in seguito gli studi sull'interlingua con Selinker (1981) che, tra i vari meccanismi cognitivi alla base dell'evoluzione dell'interlingua, indica anche il trasferimento linguistico della lingua madre sul sistema della lingua obiettivo, la sovrageralizzazione di regole, le strategie di apprendimento e le strategie di comunicazione (cf. cap. 3). Gli studi

si estendono quindi alla scoperta dei sistemi linguistici transitori degli apprendenti per osservarne le produzioni corrette e devianti in modo diacronico.<sup>1</sup> In queste ricerche, l'errore non è un elemento da penalizzare, né va previsto a priori con esercizi preventivi, ma assume un valore positivo come indice di un'acquisizione in corso d'opera, sotto questa luce fornisce al docente elementi per programmare una didattica mirata allo stato di sviluppo dell'apprendente.

A seconda del proprio oggetto di ricerca, l'analisi degli errori può essere effettuata sulla base di diversi corpus:

- corpus per studi longitudinali che seguono alcuni apprendenti nel loro sviluppo (per esempio le prove sostenute dagli allievi durante l'anno) in situazione di valutazione oppure no (situazione di classe);
- corpus trasversali che prendono in considerazione una classe di produzione per lo stesso livello di apprendimento, ad esempio in situazione di certificazione nella stessa situazione di comunicazione.

Nel caso esaminato in questo contributo, il corpus è costituito di produzioni orali ed è stato raccolto nel contesto del tutorato per gli studenti di francese lingua straniera, iscritti al secondo anno presso il Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Comparati dell'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia al di fuori di una situazione di valutazione. È interessante in quanto più rari sono gli studi che vertono sull'errore in produzione orale che prendono in considerazione varie situazioni di comunicazione degli stessi apprendenti in contesto meno rigido di quello dell'esame. Gli strumenti adoperati sono stati la registrazione delle lezioni, un diario di bordo e una griglia interpretativa dell'errore che tenga conto della letteratura in materia. I risultati dell'analisi ci guidano verso possibili interpretazioni degli errori rilevati all'orale. La comprensione degli errori contribuisce a far emergere per i ricercatori nuove riflessioni sui rapporti tra la lingua materna e la lingua di apprendimento e l'attenzione sarà portata sulle implicazioni didattiche dell'analisi degli errori nell'ottica di avvicinare le ricerche alla dimensione dell'insegnamento della lingua straniera.

## 2 La situazione di insegnamento e la costituzione del corpus

Le condizioni didattiche del tutorato sono illustrate alla luce del modello dell'«atto didattico» di Balboni (2002) i cui tre poli sono l'allievo, l'insegnante e la lingua. Il loro profilo, applicato al nostro studio di caso, è descritto tenendo conto della loro comunicazione interazionale.

<sup>1</sup> I risultati del Progetto europeo della fondazione per la scienza (ESF), che ha riunito cinque paesi dal 1981 al 1988, hanno dimostrato l'esistenza di stadi evolutivi nell'acquisizione linguistica che appartengono a tutti gli apprendenti (Klein e Perdue 1992).

## 2.1 I tre poli

Le caratteristiche degli studenti partecipanti al tutorato e il loro bisogno di apprendimento sono qui illustrate. In seguito, l'insegnante-tutor è presentato nel suo ruolo e infine è precisato il significato della lingua straniera.

### a. Gli allievi

- sono studenti di francese lingua straniera;
- sono iscritti al secondo anno accademico del Corso di Laurea in Lingue, civiltà e scienze del linguaggio all'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia;
- sono italofoeni, appartengono alla stessa comunità culturale;
- la loro età varia tra i 20 e 23 anni ad eccezione di due persone che hanno più di 40 anni;
- hanno un livello B1+ secondo il Quadro Europeo Comune di riferimento per le lingue;
- tutti hanno appreso il francese, come seconda lingua straniera dopo l'inglese, nel contesto scolastico italiano e non parlano francese nella loro vita quotidiana;
- alcuni hanno studiato il francese nella scuola secondaria inferiore e/o nella scuola secondaria superiore, altri hanno studiato il francese solo nella prima o solo nella seconda;
- pochi studenti hanno trascorso dei soggiorni in Francia per tirocini o nel contesto di scambi tra scuole;
- avvertono la necessità di maggiori spazi per praticare la lingua e per migliorare la produzione orale al di là dei loro studi di grammatica e di letteratura;
- sono molto motivati, cosa dimostrata anche dal fatto che hanno scelto di partecipare al tutorato i cui incontri sono facoltativi.

### b. L'insegnante

- madrelingua italiana, con bilinguismo asimmetrico e sequenziale (Luise 2010);
- parla solo francese in aula.

Il compito principale dell'insegnante-tutor è di facilitare la produzione orale degli studenti; esprimendosi su temi diversi egli fa emergere le loro conoscenze e le competenze già acquisite, li incoraggia e attiva i loro meccanismi psicologici, culturali e operazionali per comunicare in lingua straniera.

### c. La lingua

- il francese come lingua straniera appresa unicamente in contesto scolastico e che non è utilizzata nella vita quotidiana;
- il francese come mezzo di comunicazione e non solo come oggetto di studio.

## 2.2 La metodologia di insegnamento

Nel corso nel tutorato, che si è svolto nel primo semestre dell'anno accademico 2012-2013, l'insegnante-tutor ha creato le condizioni per mettere gli studenti nella situazione di parlare e agire in lingua nelle migliori condizioni. Il tutorato<sup>2</sup> è stato concepito e realizzato secondo la 'metodologia umanistica' e secondo quella 'costruttivista'. Tenendo conto da un lato del bisogno degli studenti di migliorare la produzione orale e dall'altro valorizzando la pratica e l'esperienza diretta, la metodologia del tutorato propone delle attività fondate sull'interazione e sull'attribuzione di compiti (*tasks*) in una prospettiva di cooperazione e su un tema diverso per ogni incontro e vicino ai loro interessi secondo l'approccio di Willis e Willis (2010).

Il valore del *task* è nel fatto che gli studenti devono utilizzare tutte le loro conoscenze e competenze linguistiche per raggiungere un obiettivo che non è solo linguistico. Lo studente ha l'incarico di svolgere una missione, di risolvere un problema, di esprimere un'opinione, ecc. per esempio quando viene chiesto di organizzare un evento o di simulare un dibattito televisivo o di recitare il ruolo di personaggi in determinate situazioni. Oltre al valore pedagogico, questo permette di raccogliere un corpus molto variegato.

## 2.3 La costituzione del corpus

Il corpus comprende le produzioni orali legate ai temi affrontati in ogni incontro di tutorato. La costituzione e l'osservazione del corpus è stata possibile grazie alla trascrizione delle produzioni registrate durante dodici ore di lezione.

Per ogni sequenza, l'insegnante ha rilevato sistematicamente gli errori riascoltando le registrazioni, senza tenere conto, dell'identità dello studente. Questa scelta si giustifica dal fatto che il pubblico è abbastanza omogeneo. La griglia di analisi, di seguito illustrata, ha permesso di classificare, di descrivere e di interpretare gli errori rilevati nelle diverse situazioni comunicative. È stata utilizzata una trascrizione ortografica, che riproduce i suoni ascoltati, accompagnata in alcuni punti da una trascrizione fonetica.

2 Anche se l'idea fondamentale del tutorato è presente fin dall'antichità con Socrate, la nozione di tutorato si deve soprattutto a Comenius, filosofo e pedagogo ceco (1592-1670). Nella sua opera *La Grande Didattica*, presenta un modello di educazione in cui il maestro è sostenuto nel suo compito dai migliori allievi che apportano il loro sostegno agli altri bambini. Oggi si mette in evidenza anche il concetto di 'tutorato tra pari' in cui tutti gli allievi, e non solamente gli allievi eccellenti, possono assumere il ruolo di tutor per gli altri (Balboni 2013, 28).

### 3 La griglia di analisi degli errori per la produzione orale

Numerose griglie di analisi sono state definite nel corso delle ricerche in psicolinguistica e in glottodidattica. La griglia qui proposta è una sintesi e un aggiustamento di diversi modelli che permettono di avere uno strumento adatto al nostro caso di studio sulla produzione orale. La griglia per l'orale è un adattamento della griglia elaborata da Jamet (2013) per lo scritto.

I criteri di analisi classificati nella griglia fanno riferimento alle fonti teoriche di numerose ricerche a partire da Corder (1967-1984) e Selinker (1972-1992), citati da Jamet (2013), passando per Tarone (1983) e Porquier (1979), citati da López (2001) fino ai lavori di Astolfi (2001) e di Marquilló Larruy (2003).

Descrizione dell'errore				Interpretazione dell'errore		
Segmento erroneo	Natura linguistica	Operazione linguistica	Natura pragmatica	Causa	Strategie psicolinguistiche	Strategie comunicative
	<b>Semantica Lessicale</b> - non-senso - improprietà - barbarismo  <b>Morfologia</b> - morfologia lessicale - morfemi erronei - morfologia verbale Sintassi -accordo -ordine -subordinazione Fonetica	Aggiunta Omissione Sostituzione	<b>Errori pragmatici (uso):</b> - Comunicazione possibile, ma scorretta - Espressioni e parole inappropriate per la comunicazione  <b>Errori socio-linguistici:</b> - stile e registro inappropriato al contesto  <b>Modifica dell'intenzione:</b> - riduzione dello scopo comunicativo - interruzione	<b>Interferenza</b> Trasferimento della lingua materna  <b>Interlingua</b>	<b>CALCO:</b> traduzione letterale  <b>PRESTITO diretto:</b> cambiamento di codice Semplificazione: - Arciforma - Ipergeneralizzazione  <b>COMPETENZA PARZIALE:</b> - selezione erronea - applicazione incompleta di una regola - creazione di parole - generalizzazione di parole	<b>Strategie di cooperazione:</b> il parlante si fa aiutare  <b>Evitamento</b> di un argomento, di una risposta  <b>Strategia non linguistica:</b> Gestì, mimi



La griglia di analisi, che è stata elaborata per la produzione orale nel nostro caso di studio, comprende sei categorie che raggruppano i diversi criteri di analisi. Benché si sappia che ci sono aspetti di soggettività nella classificazione di singoli errori, ogni categoria ci permette di osservare gli errori rilevati secondo i seguenti aspetti:

### 3.1 La natura linguistica dell'errore

È una categoria che ci propone la distinzione classica sull'identità linguistica dell'unità su cui verte l'errore:

#### a. Errori lessicali

A livello del lessico, si riscontrano i seguenti aspetti:

- Non-senso: la parola esiste, non appropriata, non interpretabile;
- Improrietà: la parola esiste, non appropriata, parzialmente interpretabile;
- Barbarismo: la parola non esiste, ma può essere interpretabile o no.

#### b. Errori morfologici

La morfologia riguarda la struttura interna delle parole:

- Morfologia lessicale: il genere delle parole;
- Morfemi erronei (elisione, articoli non contratti, ecc.);
- Morfologia verbale: coniugazioni.

#### c. Errori sintattici

Che riguardano l'organizzazione delle parole nella frase:

- Accordo (soggetto-verbo, nome-aggettivo, participio);
- Ordine delle parole;
- Subordinazione.

#### d. Errori fonetici (pronuncia: articolazione, intonazione, ritmo).

### 3.2 L'operazione linguistica

Ad ogni livello linguistico si possono sotto-raggruppare gli errori utilizzando la divisione di Corder (1967):

- Errori per addizione (o aggiunta);
- Errori per omissione;
- Errori per sostituzione.

Questa descrizione è utilizzata dal punto di vista dell'osservatore che descrive uno stato del funzionamento della lingua di cui l'apprendente non ha necessariamente coscienza (Jamet 2013).

### 3.3 La natura pragmatica

Accanto agli errori di tipo linguistico, esistono anche degli errori di tipo strategico e socio-culturale legati all'uso della lingua. Sono gli errori che informano sullo scarto tra l'intenzione (ciò che il locutore vuole comunicare) e il prodotto (l'enunciato). In questa categoria, si nota la distinzione tra gli errori che rendono possibile la comunicazione del messaggio e gli errori che bloccano o modificano l'intenzione comunicativa. Pertanto si possono identificare i seguenti errori:

- a. Errori pragmatici quando la comunicazione è possibile, ma la forma non è corretta; essi si verificano nei seguenti casi:
  - possesso insufficiente delle risorse linguistiche;
  - uso di espressioni e di vocaboli inappropriati.Spesso essi possono essere generati anche dalle conoscenze concettuali e contestuali d'origine.
- b. Errori pragmatici quando l'intenzione è modificata o la comunicazione è bloccata; essi sono prodotti in caso di
  - riduzione dello scopo comunicativo;
  - interruzione.
- c. Errori socio-linguistici che si verificano in caso di stile e registro inappropriati al contesto e/o alla situazione: formule di cortesia, registro formale, informale secondo le norme sociali. Esempio: «La littérature française est *vachement* riche».

Riguardo al rapporto intenzioni-mezzi, in caso di conflitto tra le intenzioni comunicative e le risorse disponibili, il locutore può:

- sia provare a cambiare o a modificare il messaggio previsto (intenzione) in funzione delle risorse di cui dispone; ciò spiega le strategie di evitamento, le strategie di riduzione o concettuali; López (2001) cita Corder che parla di «message adjustment strategies» (1983);
- sia provare a cambiare o a modificare i mezzi espressivi (linguistici); ciò spiega le strategie di formulazione; la parafrasi o il prestito; il locutore, quindi, cerca di aumentare le sue risorse, Corder parla di «resource expansion strategies» (1983).

### 3.4 La categoria di appartenenza: la causa

La causa degli errori è qui evidenziata. Contrariamente agli studi dell'analisi contrastiva (a partire dagli anni Cinquanta) che erano interessati all'analisi 'a priori' degli errori e quindi alla loro prevenzione, negli anni Ottanta si mira alla comprensione degli errori e alla ricerca delle loro cause. Questa categoria comprende:

- a. gli errori dovuti all'**interlingua**: di tipo evolutivo, legati allo sviluppo acquisizionale e generati all'interno della lingua che sta apprendendo;
- b. gli errori dovuti all'**interferenza**: generati dalla pressione della lingua materna o di un'altra lingua conosciuta.

Questa distinzione è indicata per motivi pratici di classificazione, tuttavia si precisa che gli errori di interferenza rientrano nell'interlingua.

Per quanto riguarda l'interferenza, questo concetto è stato posto da Uriel Weinreich nel 1953. In seguito, Lado (1971) l'ha sviluppato parlando di trasferimento. In questo caso, gli enunciati prodotti sono una traduzione di un sistema di rappresentazioni che l'apprendente si è costruito rispetto alla propria lingua. È una tipologia di errori che non è mai stata messa in questione anche se è stato dimostrato che un gran numero di errori non sono imputabili alla pressione della lingua materna (Chini 2012).

### 3.5 Le strategie psicolinguistiche

Questa categoria ci mostra come l'apprendente utilizza la lingua e quindi, da un lato, essa è legata alla natura pragmatica dell'errore (uso della lingua, intenzione comunicativa) e, dall'altro, alla causa dell'errore. In caso di conflitto tra i mezzi linguistici di cui l'apprendente dispone e le sue intenzioni comunicative, le seguenti possibilità si presentano al locutore:

- a. prova a cambiare o a modificare i mezzi espressivi.

L'**interferenza** spiega il trasferimento delle forme erranee dovute alla pressione della lingua materna o di un'altra lingua conosciuta, essa si manifesta come segue:

- attraverso il **prestito** diretto delle forme di lingua materna (cambiamento di codice: introduzione di una parola della lingua materna);
- attraverso il **calco**: adattamento alla lingua obiettivo a tutti i livelli della lingua (fonetico, lessicale, grammaticale, testuale e pragmatico). Si tratta dell'applicazione di tratti della lingua materna alle parole 'inventate' della lingua straniera.

L'**interlingua**, sistema transitorio tra la lingua materna e la lingua straniera, spiega gli errori di tipo evolutivo dovuti a quanto segue:

- una **semplificazione** del sistema attraverso l'uso
  - di un arciforma (per esempio, l'infinito al posto del verbo coniugato);
  - o attraverso l'iper-generalizzazione di una regola;

- una **padronanza parziale** attraverso
  - una selezione erronea;
  - un'applicazione incompleta di una regola;
  - una generalizzazione delle parole, per esempio *animal* (animale) per *lapin* (coniglio);
  - la creazione di parole.
  
- b. Il locutore prova a cambiare o a modificare l'intenzione comunicativa (il messaggio previsto) in funzione delle risorse di cui dispone (López 2001): si tratta quindi dell'uso delle strategie comunicative.

### 3.6 Le strategie comunicative

- La **strategia cooperativa** si presenta quando il locutore ricorre ad un aiuto esterno, egli chiede aiuto all'interlocutore, verifica di essere stato capito o quando si serve di un linguaggio non verbale come un gesto, dei disegni, ecc. (strategie non linguistiche).
- Le **strategie di evitamento**: si rinuncia ad esprimere il proprio pensiero nelle sfumature ricorrendo a formule o espressioni di cui si è sicuri oppure si cambia argomento, si passa la parola a qualcun altro o si tace. È opportuno notare che una strategia di evitamento può nascondere delle lacune non solo linguistiche, ma anche di ordine sociologico o contestuale o delle differenze di rappresentazioni culturali tra gli interlocutori.

### 3.7 L'applicazione della griglia di analisi

Un estratto del diario di bordo del tutor precede l'illustrazione della griglia di analisi applicata al Corpus 2 con lo scopo di mostrare come la griglia è stata applicata per ogni corpus. Il diario di bordo descrive gli obiettivi, le attività didattiche, le riflessioni sul rapporto tra le attese in fase di concezione e i risultati. Segue la tabella che raccoglie e classifica gli errori registrati e trascritti.

Corpus 2

Tema: 'Organizziamo un evento culturale'.

Numero di partecipanti: 19

Età: da 20 a 50 anni.

Gli studenti avevano il compito di organizzare degli eventi culturali. Alcuni hanno creato delle simulazioni recitando dei dialoghi davanti al pubblico, altri hanno presentato i loro progetti abbastanza vicini a progetti reali co-

me l'organizzazione di un concorso letterario o di eventi per la promozione di prodotti del territorio.

Gli studenti erano talmente coinvolti nella loro missione che la correttezza formale della lingua è diventata meno prioritaria della dimensione pragmatica. La produzione orale è stata caratterizzata da un'interazione molto accentuata. Pur essendo tutti italofoeni, gli studenti hanno parlato tra di loro solo in francese durante tutta l'attività. Chiedendo aiuto al tutor soprattutto per la ricerca di vocaboli non conosciuti, ognuno ha attivato e condiviso le proprie strategie di comunicazione.

Griglia di analisi degli errori rilevati – Corpus 2

Nm.	Segmento erroneo	Natura ling.	Operazione ling.	Natura pragmatica	Causa	Strategie psicoling.	Strategie com.
2.1.	<i>Fête <u>sorpresa</u></i>	Lessico		Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata.	Interfer.	Prestito	Strategia di cooperazione. Richiesta di aiuto.
2.2	<i>Je ne sais pas <u>comme</u> organiser</i>	Lessico	Sostituzione <i>comme/ comment</i>	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata	Interfer.	Calco ( <i>come</i> )	
2.3	<i>Pour que tout le monde ne doit <u>BLOCAGE</u></i>	Sintassi	Omissione congiuntivo ( <i>doive</i> )	Interruzione	Interling.	Padronanza parziale	Strategia di cooperazione. Richiesta di aiuto.
2.3	<i>Pour que tout le monde ne doit <u>BLOCAGE</u></i>	Lessico	Omissione ( <i>conduire</i> )	Interruzione	Interling.		Evitamento
2.4	<i>Rue <u>pedonale</u></i>	Lessico	Barbarismo	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata.	Interfer.	Prestito ( <i>pedonale</i> )	
2.5	<i>Dans un <u>fenile</u></i>	Lessico		Comunicazione possibile con un italiano.	Interfer.	Prestito	Strategia di cooperazione. Richiesta di aiuto.
2.6	<i>Mauvaise<i>air</i></i>	Morfologia lessicale	Aggiunta della lettera [e] femminile	Comunicazione possibile, ma scorretta.	Interfer.	Calco (genere femminile in italiano)	
2.6b	<i>Mauvai <i>sair</i></i>	Fonetica	Aggiunta del suono [z]	Comunicazione possibile, ma scorretta.	Interfer.	Calco	
2.7	<i>Marcher sur le <u>fango</u></i>	Lessico		Interruzione	Interfer.	Prestito	Strategia di cooperazione
2.8	<i>Je parle <u>con</u></i>	Lessico		Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata.	Interfer.	Prestito	
2.9	Surreal	Lessico Barbarismo	Sostituzione [a]/[e]	Comunicazione possibile, ma scorretta	Interfer.	Calco ( <i>surreale</i> )	
2.10	<i>Comment vous dites <u>timidezza</u></i>	Lessico		Interruzione	Interfer.	Prestito	Strategia di cooperazione

Nm.	Segmento erroneo	Natura ling.	Operazione ling.	Natura pragmatica	Causa	Strategie psicoling.	Strategie com.
2.11	<i>Manger avec allegria</i>	Lessico		Comunicazione possibile con un italiano. Parola inappropriata.	Interfer.	Prestito	Strategia di cooperazione
2.12	<i>J'ai vu</i>	Fonetica	Sostituzione del suono [u]/ [y]	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata.	Interfer.	Calco del suono[u] nella lingua materna	
2.13	<i>le<u>ct</u>ions</i>	Morfologia lessicale	Sostituzione [eks]/[ɛs]	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata	Interling.	Padronanza parziale: creazione di una parola	
2.14	<i>Je fais <u>part</u> de</i>	Lessico	Improprietà <i>Part/Partie</i>	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata	Interfer.	Calco ( <i>parte</i> )	
2.15	<i>Faire une <u>prop</u>ose</i>	Morfologia lessicale	Non-senso <i>Je propose/ proposition</i>	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata	Interfer.	Calco ( <i>proposta</i> )	
2.16	<i>Habillé <u>de</u> sorcière</i>	Lessico	Sostituzione <i>de/en</i>	Comunicazione possibile. Parola inappropriata	Interfer.	Calco <i>Vestita da</i>	
2.17	<i>sour<u>is</u>e</i>	Lessico Barbarismo	Sostituzione	Comunicazione possibile, ma scorretta.	Interfer.	Calco ( <i>sorriso</i> )	
		Fonetica 2 Lessico 13 Morfologia 3 Sintassi 1		Scorretta 4 Inappropriata 11 Interruzioni 3	Interfer. 15 Interling. 2	Calco 8 Padronanza parziale 2	Strategia cooperativa 6 Evitamento 1

#### 4 I risultati dell'analisi

I risultati dell'analisi degli errori raccolti nel nostro studio di caso nella sua totalità sono illustrati nella tabella qui di seguito presentata. Dopo la lettura delle cifre, la tipologia degli errori più frequenti e la causa sono messe in evidenza con degli esempi di errori significativi rispetto alla frequenza, alla categoria di appartenenza e alla loro conseguenza a livello della comunicazione orale.

Precisiamo che l'analisi è limitata dai fattori seguenti:

- la situazione della comunicazione è fittizia: nello svolgimento delle attività e dei compiti gli studenti hanno il tempo di riflettere contrariamente alla situazione reale in cui si è obbligati ad esprimersi direttamente;
- lo statuto bilingue del tutor: è nella condizione di capire le espressioni erranee o inappropriate che un nativo non comprenderebbe; ciò può influenzare la valutazione della natura pragmatica;

- alcuni errori sono difficili da circoscrivere, degli esempi dimostrano che certi segmenti erronei sono dovuti sia all'interferenza sia all'interlingua;
- l'analisi, effettuata al di fuori di un contesto di valutazione, è di tipo descrittivo; le cifre non hanno un valore statistico, ma esse ci permettono di avanzare delle riflessioni di tipo interpretativo sugli errori.

**Numero totale di errori: 133 – 6 corpus**

Natura ling.	Operazione ling.	Natura pragmatica	Causa	Strategie psicoling.	Strategie comunicative
<b>Numero di errori lessicali:</b> 55 (41,3%)	Sostituzione: 51 (92,7%)	Numero di segmenti in cui la <b>comunicazione è possibile, ma linguisticamente scorretta:</b>  87 (65,4%)	<b>INTERFERENZA:</b> 78 (58,6%) del totale degli errori  di cui errori lessicali: 47 (60,2%)	<b>CALCO:</b> 56 (71,8%)  <b>PRESTITO:</b> 22 (28,2%)	<b>Strategie di cooperazione:</b> 18 (13,5%) del totale degli errori
di cui barbarismi: 32 (58,1%),  improprietà: 16 (29%),  non-sensi: 1 (0,1%)	Omissione: 4 (7,2%)	Numero di segmenti in cui la <b>comunicazione è ancora possibile ma inappropriata:</b>  27 (20,3%)	errori sintattici: 11 (14,1%)  errori morfologici: 13 (16,6%)  errori fonetici: 7 (0,9%)		
<b>Numero di errori sintattici:</b> 50 (37,5%)	Sostituzione: 20 (40%)  Omissione: 14 (28%)  Aggiunta: 7 (14%)	Numero di segmenti in cui la comunicazione si interrompe:  19 (14,2%)	<b>INTERLINGUA:</b> 55 (41,3%) del totale degli errori  di cui errori lessicali: 8 (14,5%)  errori morfologici: 7 (12,7%)  errori sintattici: 39 (70,9%)  errori fonetici: 1 (0,2)	<b>PADRONANZA PARZIALE:</b> 42 (76,3%)  <b>SEMPLIFICAZIONE:</b> 8 (14,5%)	<b>Evitamento:</b> 3 (0,2%)  <b>Strategie non linguistiche:</b> (mimo): 1 (0,07%)
<b>Numero di errori morfologici:</b> 20 (15%)	Sostituzione: 10 (50%)  Omissione: 4 (2%)  Aggiunta: 4 (2%)  Barbarismo: 1 (0,5%)  Non-senso: 1 (0,5)				
di cui morf. less. 15 (75%) morf.verb. 5 (25%)					
<b>Numero di errori fonetici:</b> 8 (6%)	Sostituzione: 4 (50%)  Aggiunta: 4 (50%)				

#### 4.1 Le indicazioni date dalle cifre

Dopo aver raccolto, raggruppato e analizzato gli errori trascritti per ogni corpus, abbiamo elaborato la tabella, qui presentata, che raggruppa il numero totale degli errori rilevati per ogni categoria e sotto categoria di analisi. A partire dai dati analizzati, la tabella è uno strumento che ci permette di tentare

- di identificare la tipologia linguistica degli errori più frequenti o meno frequenti,
- di capirne la ragione sottostante (interferenza o interlingua) dominante,
- di individuare le principali strategie psicolinguistiche che li hanno determinati,
- di notare il loro impatto al livello della comunicazione e della trasmissione del messaggio e quindi di osservare quante volte la comunicazione è possibile, nonostante gli errori, o quante volte essa è interrotta.

Per quanto riguarda la natura linguistica, gli errori lessicali sono dominanti (41,3% del totale degli errori), immediatamente seguiti dagli errori sintattici (37,5%).

Riguardo alla natura pragmatica, nella maggioranza dei casi la comunicazione è possibile, nonostante l'uso di parole o di espressioni scorrette (65,4%) o inappropriate (20,3%). Ciò dimostra che nella maggior parte delle situazioni gli studenti manifestano la loro competenza comunicativa.

Rispetto alla categoria della causa che genera le diverse tipologie di errori, constatiamo che gli errori di interferenza (trasferimento negativo della lingua materna) sono più numerosi degli errori di interlingua (errori evolutivi) con uno scarto del 17,3%. La vicinanza delle due lingue (italiano e francese) spiega senza dubbio il peso dell'interferenza (58,6% del totale degli errori). Tuttavia, malgrado il peso notevole dell'interferenza, la quantità di errori di interlingua è significativa (41,3%). In particolare, gli errori lessicali di interferenza sono dominanti (85,4%) e gli errori di sintassi sono i più numerosi nell'interlingua (78%). Quest'ultimo risultato invita i ricercatori a interrogarsi sulle cause.

Dal punto di vista delle principali strategie psicolinguistiche che determinano i vari errori, gli errori dovuti al calco (71,8%) superano gli errori dovuti al prestito (28,2%) rispetto all'interferenza, mentre gli errori di padronanza parziale (76,3%) sono dominanti nella classe degli errori di interlingua.



## 4.2 La tipologia e l'interpretazione degli errori

Dopo avere considerato le indicazioni fornite dalle cifre, la natura degli errori è stata osservata mettendola in relazione con la causa e con le strategie che li hanno generati. Pertanto, per ogni categoria della natura linguistica illustreremo qualche esempio di errori frequenti sui quali una lettura interpretativa può essere avanzata.

### 4.2.1 Gli errori lessicali

Gli errori lessicali presentano più barbarismi (58,1%) di improprietà (29%) o non-sensi (0,1%). L'uso di vocaboli inesistenti si spiega con l'interferenza della lingua materna e quindi con maggior frequenza attraverso il prestito di vocaboli italiani (per esempio, *penser aux spese / frais*) e in certi casi attraverso i calchi che sono all'origine delle parole inventate (*donner mon contribut / contribution*). Il primo esempio (prestito) dimostra un cambiamento di codice con l'introduzione di un vocabolo appartenente alla lingua materna. Il secondo esempio (calco) mostra il caso ricorrente dell'applicazione dei tratti della lingua d'origine alla lingua obiettivo (*contribut* è vicino al vocabolo italiano *contributo*). Inoltre la parola inventata potrebbe entrare nella logica del sistema lessicale del francese (cf. *attribut*).

In alcuni casi il problema nasce dalla dissimmetria lessicale tra il francese e l'italiano: per esempio, la parola *ancien* è vicina alla parola 'anziano' sul piano fonetico, ma il significato è diverso sul piano semantico: 'anziano' corrisponde a *âgé* per le persone, 'antico' corrisponde a *ancien* per le cose. La stessa osservazione vale per il verbo *trouver* che è foneticamente vicino al verbo italiano 'trovare', ma che non è usato nel senso di *aller voir* (andare a trovare) qualcuno.

Un altro errore frequente è l'uso di *part* al posto di *partie* (cf. § 2.14 griglia Corpus 2). Ciò si spiega attraverso la dissimmetria lessicale tra le due lingue. Quindi la parola italiana 'parte' ha due traduzioni possibili: *part* nel senso di una porzione (ad esempio: *une part de tarte*) equa rispetto al resto e *partie* sempre nel senso di una divisione di qualcosa senza rapporto alla divisione uguale rispetto al resto (esempi: *une grande partie des enfants était rentrée, les parties du discours, ecc.*).

Riguardo alle conseguenze sul piano pragmatico, gli errori lessicali per calco rendono la comunicazione possibile in un gruppo di italofofoni, anche se l'uso dei vocaboli è inappropriato (improprietà) o non corretto. Al contrario, quando si tratta di prestito, nella maggior parte dei casi la comunicazione subisce un'interruzione spesso per chiedere aiuto all'insegnante. Il ricorso frequente al prestito di una parola della lingua materna si spiega per il fatto che i partecipanti sono tutti italofofoni.

Tra gli errori lessicali dovuti all'interferenza, abbiamo constatato qualche caso di trasferimento di vocaboli inglesi (appartenenti quindi alla se-

conda lingua straniera dello studente). Per esempio, *il y a une place à côté de Dijon*, il significato della parola inglese *place* (in cui la vocale è pronunciata con il suono [a] in francese) è usato per *lieu, endroit* in francese. Il risultato sul piano pragmatico è l'uso di un vocabolo corretto, ma inappropriato (la parola *place* indica uno spazio in città o una parte dello spazio occupato da una persona). In un altro esempio, *ils sont méfiants, so*, la congiunzione *so* è usata al posto di *donc*.

Se gli errori lessicali derivano principalmente dall'interferenza,<sup>3</sup> gli errori lessicali dovuti all'interlingua sono spesso generati da strategie di evitamento o di cooperazione che sono all'origine dell'interruzione della comunicazione. Nell'esempio, *nous avions des* - interruzione, lo studente ha utilizzato il mimo (strategia non linguistica) per la parola *panneaux*; in un altro caso lo studente ha chiesto aiuto (strategia cooperativa), *nous aurions des* - interruzione, per cercare la parola *frais*. Alcuni segmenti erronei, appartenenti all'interlingua, mostrano la costruzione di nuove parole come *peinteur*, costruito sul modello di *chanteur*.

#### 4.2.2 Gli errori sintattici

Gli errori sintattici che derivano dall'interlingua rappresentano il 78% mentre gli errori sintattici che dipendono dall'interferenza sono minoritari (22%). I primi riguardano con maggior frequenza l'accordo nome-aggettivo e nome-articolo, sono dovuti quindi all'interlingua salvo i casi in cui il genere del nome è diverso tra il francese e l'italiano (per esempio, *la lièvre / le lièvre*, si tratta di un calco dovuto all'interferenza dell'italiano 'la lepre'). Gli errori di accordo dovuti all'interlingua sono generati da una padronanza parziale di una regola (per esempio: *les caractéristiques principaux / principales*). Si trovano anche degli errori ricorrenti che riguardano l'ordine non corretto delle parole; sono anch'essi generati da una padronanza parziale di una regola. Questo è il caso di *de n'avoir pas d'argent / de ne pas avoir d'argent* in cui la regola della negazione dell'infinito passato non è applicata correttamente. L'aggiunta o l'omissione di una preposizione e la sostituzione di un pronome con un altro sono anch'essi degli errori sintattici appartenenti all'interlingua.

Il secondo tipo di errori provenienti dall'interferenza si manifesta anche nell'ordine delle parole: il posto dell'avverbio nella frase, per esempio, *j'ai aimé beaucoup / j'ai beaucoup aimé*, l'ordine inappropriato è dovuto all'interferenza dell'ordine in italiano in cui l'avverbio è posto dopo il verbo ('ho amato molto').

3 L'85,4% del totale degli errori lessicali è originato dall'interferenza; il 14,5% del totale degli errori lessicali deriva dall'interlingua.

#### 4.2.3 Gli errori morfologici

Riguardo agli errori di morfologia, il 35% proviene dall'interlingua e spesso dalla padronanza parziale di una regola. In particolare, un errore frequente è nella coniugazione del verbo *étudier* (studiare) come l'esempio *j'étude le français / J'étudie*. Il problema è spesso generato dalla mancanza di abitudine a riconoscere la radice del verbo (*étudi*) e la desinenza (*er*). La radice è percepita in modo incompleto *étud* senza la vocale [i]. La maggior parte degli errori morfologici deriva dall'interferenza (65%). Infatti, gli errori di morfologia lessicale sono dovuti all'interferenza per calco come *surreal / surréel* che mostra il trasferimento dell'italiano *surreale*, (cf. § 2.9 griglia Corpus 2), oppure *sourise / sourire* (cf. § 2.17 griglia Corpus 2). In questi ultimi casi, abbiamo notato che è difficile stabilire il limite tra la sottocategoria del barbarismo (errori lessicali) e la categoria della morfologia lessicale. Tra gli errori di morfologia lessicale abbiamo incluso gli errori dovuti al calco del genere maschile in italiano, per esempio *tout l'année*, o del genere femminile in italiano, per esempio, *ma vélo*.

#### 4.2.4 Gli errori fonetici

Nella categoria fonetica gli errori sono originati dall'interferenza. Le regole di pronuncia della lingua materna esercitano una pressione sulla decodifica fonetica del vocabolo francese. Spesso lo studente pronuncia la vocale [y] come sarebbe pronunciata in italiano [u] (cf. § 2.12 griglia Corpus 2); in altri casi il suono [t] (*sport*) e [c] (*estomac*) sono pronunciati alla fine della parola. Errori ricorrenti appaiono nella pronuncia di *française* in sostituzione di *français* e *mauvaise* (cf. § 2.6 griglia Corpus 2) al posto di *mauvais*. Essi sono dovuti sia all'interferenza (pressione del suono [z]) sia all'interlingua (competenza parziale della regola di pronuncia). In entrambi i casi il locutore non pensa necessariamente al genere femminile quando pronuncia il suono [z].

#### 4.2.5 Gli errori pragmatici

Riguardo alla natura pragmatica degli errori, le cifre indicano che nella maggior parte dei casi la comunicazione è possibile e quindi l'uso della lingua dimostra che i locutori hanno raggiunto una competenza comunicativa nonostante gli errori linguistici. Il risultato può confermare il livello B1 degli studenti. Il livello degli studenti e il loro coinvolgimento nei compiti proposti permettono ai locutori di ottenere il loro scopo pragmatico. Le interruzioni sono dovute a volte all'uso di strategie di cooperazione quando il locutore aspetta l'aiuto da parte dell'interlocutore o all'uso di strategie

di evitamento quando l'apprendente non trova la parola che sarebbe adatta. Tuttavia, abbiamo già sottolineato che il ricorso al prestito è il fattore dominante all'origine dell'interruzione della produzione.

#### 4.2.6 Gli errori di performance e di competenza

Anche se la nostra classificazione non esplicita la differenza, proposta da Corder (1969), tra l'errore di performance, occasionale, non sistemico, dovuto alle circostanze e l'errore di competenza, che riflette le conoscenze sottostanti dell'apprendente in un dato momento, questa distinzione è stata riscontrata negli interventi degli studenti, in particolare quando i ragazzi si correggevano spontaneamente durante l'esposizione (errore di performance) e quando invece l'errore dimostrava una competenza parziale nell'utilizzo delle regole.

## 5 Le implicazioni didattiche

La riflessione sull'interpretazione degli errori ci rinvia alla reazione degli insegnanti rispetto ad essi. Una cosa è la padronanza notevole della lingua, un'altra cosa è l'attitudine ideale di fronte agli errori. Durante il tutorato e, in particolare, nel corso dei primi incontri, le attese degli studenti verso i loro errori erano elevate. Esse erano focalizzate più sugli aspetti formali della lingua, cosa che qualche volta poteva e può avere degli effetti inibitori. Per questo motivo, le attività proposte sono state concepite e realizzate per facilitare la produzione orale sollevando i locutori dalla paura di fare errori. Il rischio poteva essere di fare come se l'errore non esistesse. Tuttavia, ritenendo che la segnalazione degli errori permette migliori *performance* linguistiche, il tutor ha scelto di adottare un'attitudine benevola verso l'errore ma nello stesso tempo attenta e attiva. Si riconosce in effetti che l'assenza di una correzione (con il pretesto di facilitare la comunicazione) potrebbe contribuire alla fossilizzazione; d'altro canto, una correzione sistematica potrebbe inibire il locutore. La ricerca della buona misura per evitare le due attitudini estreme ci ha guidato nel trovare dei momenti dedicati al confronto sugli errori senza stigmatizzarli.

La reazione ideale sarebbe di far riflettere gli studenti sui loro errori e sulle loro competenze metacognitive nella fase finale, una volta in cui il compito comunicativo è stato svolto. È stata notata una scarsa capacità di autocorrezione nel gruppo. La questione si pone sul grado di coscienza degli studenti sulle strategie utilizzate per ottenere gli scopi comunicativi. Di conseguenza, si prende in considerazione la realizzazione di attività che conducono gli studenti a riflettere sulla loro capacità di dialogare e sulla loro efficacia pragmatica oltre alla correzione formale. Il riascolto

di parte degli scambi registrati potrebbe essere un punto di partenza per l'autocorrezione. Inoltre, riascoltarsi tramite registrazione fa sì che non sempre ci si riconosca e quindi si ha un atteggiamento più critico e si percepiscono gli errori più facilmente. Si sottolinea, inoltre, la necessità di condurre gli studenti a riflettere sul lessico, di renderli consapevoli ad esempio delle dissimmetrie tra alcuni vocaboli francesi e italiani, dei calchi e dei prestiti che si attivano spesso senza rendersene conto e delle strategie comunicative utilizzate più o meno consapevolmente. Questo non esclude il rinforzo delle conoscenze lessicali anche attraverso la proposta di una lista di vocaboli inerenti al contenuto delle attività previste prima del loro svolgimento.

## 6 Conclusione

Nonostante lo sforzo di rispettare i dati reali, abbiamo notato il carattere soggettivo dell'interpretazione degli errori. L'attribuzione di un errore ad una categoria o ad un'altra non è sempre unica. Il punto di vista dell'osservatore può passare dall'interlingua all'interferenza in alcune situazioni complesse in cui gli aspetti linguistici possono essere considerati su piani diversi. Pertanto, l'interpretazione degli errori può essere oggetto di contestazioni secondo il punto di vista che si può avere sul tipo di disfunzionamento o di scarto rispetto alle norme. Marquilló Larruy (2003) constata che durante i colloqui a carattere scientifico le forme stigmatizzate sono ritenute accettabili da alcuni e non da altri a seconda della scelta e del peso attribuito alla norma; alcune persone possono condividere o non l'analisi proposta e il riferimento alla teoria è contestabile data la mancanza di un modello teorico unico sull'acquisizione linguistica.

La divergenza sull'attribuzione delle cause degli errori spiega che l'interpretazione degli errori resta uno dei settori più instabili e mutevoli nella didattica delle lingue (Marquilló Larruy 2003, 118).

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# **More Languages Than We Might Have Thought. Fewer Languages Than There Might Have Been**

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**Abstract** In working toward an understanding of the syntactic component of the human language faculty, syntacticians necessarily ask question after question. One prominent question is: (1) What properties do all languages have in common? A related question is: (2) How exactly do languages vary in their syntax and what are the principled limits on that variation?

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2 Fewer Languages Than There Might Have Been. – 3 More Currently Spoken Languages Than We Might Have Thought. – 4 More Possible Languages Than We Might Have Thought.

**Keywords** Languages. Dialects. Syntax. Variation.

## **1 Introduction**

In working toward an understanding of the syntactic component of the human language faculty, syntacticians necessarily ask question after question. One prominent question is:

- (1) What properties do all languages have in common?

A related question is:

- (2) How exactly do languages vary in their syntax and what are the principled limits on that variation?

## **2 Fewer Languages Than There Might Have Been**

In partial answer to the first question, we can think of the following:

- (3) All languages have negation (cf. Horn 1989, xiii; Dryer 2005, 454)

- (4) All languages have demonstratives (such as 'this', 'that') (cf. Lyons 1999, xv)

The interest of these two properties is enhanced by the observation that other familiar elements are not universally present (at least not in visible form), e.g. definite and indefinite articles, which many languages lack, Russian being one well-known example.

A second, different type of property that all languages have in common is given by the statement that all languages prohibit sentences such as (cf. Ross 1967):

- (5) \*Which student were you talking to this student and?

Even in languages in which an interrogative phrase such as 'which student' is normally brought to sentence-initial position, as it is in English and in Italian, it is never possible to apply that operation to the part of a coordination that immediately follows 'and'.

A third type of property, different from the first two, that holds of the set of human languages is the following one:

- (6) Every possible language is such that its mirror-image is an impossible language.

Put another way, there are no mirror-image pairs of languages. There is no mirror-image English (or mirror-image Italian), where mirror-image English would be defined as a language identical to English in its vocabulary, but such that every well-formed English sentence would have a counterpart in mirror-image English with the same words in reverse order. For example, corresponding to English:

- (7) The dog was running after the cat.

mirror-image English would have:

- (8) \*Cat the after running was dog the.

The property given in (6) is clearly valid, as far as anybody can see, even if, for the purpose of evaluating it, we set aside questions of constituent structure. Once we bring in such considerations, however, we can formulate an even stronger principle for which I have used the term 'antisymmetry' (cf. Kayne 1994). Informally put, antisymmetry states in part that if some constituent structure (tree structure) representation is the correct one for some sentence, or phrase, in some language, then the exact mirror-image of that constituent structure representation cannot be correct for any sentence or any phrase in any language.

Taken together, (3)-(6) have told us that there are many fewer languages than one might have imagined. The set of human languages might have

included some lacking negation, or lacking demonstratives, but such languages are not to be found. A language that would allow (5) is imaginable but unattested and is virtually certain never to be attested. One can, finally, readily understand what mirror-image English would look like if it existed, but it doesn't exist and neither does any language exist, as far as we can tell, that is the exact mirror-image of some other possible language. As in the title of this essay, there are many fewer languages than there might have been had the human language faculty been otherwise than it is.

We will of course also want to reach an understanding of why (3)-(6) hold as properties of the human language faculty. The properties given in (3) and (4) can be put into context alongside the wide-ranging cartography work of Cinque (1999) (along with related later work of his), which suggests that there are a considerable number of syntactic elements common to every human language. Future work will ask how best to characterize that set of common elements, as well as how best to distinguish, within that set of common elements, those that can apparently consistently be left silent in some languages from those, like negation and demonstratives, that are always visible (at least sometimes) in every language.

The property concerning coordination given in (5) might be reducible to Rizzi's (1990) relativized minimality principle or to some variant of it (it might be, more specifically, that the first phrase of the coordination sharply blocks the extraction of the second phrase. As for (6), an initial answer is that it follows from the Linear Correspondence Axiom (LCA) of Kayne (1994). A further, more ambitious, question asks why the language faculty should follow the strictures of the LCA. The answer suggested in Kayne (2011) rests on the view (not shared by Chomsky<sup>1</sup>) that temporal/linear order is uniformly integrated by the language faculty directly into the merge operation that creates larger constituents out of smaller ones and that lies at the heart of syntax.

### 3 More Currently Spoken Languages Than We Might Have Thought

The second question given toward the beginning of this essay, in (2), was the following:

- (9) How exactly do languages vary in their syntax and what are the principled limits on that variation?

1 Cf. Chomsky (2005, 15) takes linear order to be "restricted to the mapping to the phonetic interface".

This second general question can be approached by linking it to a third:

(10) How many languages are there?

which should itself be broken down into two further subquestions:

(11) How many possible languages are there?

(12) How many languages are currently spoken?

The question in (12) looks more manageable than the one in (10), but it is in fact less easy than it might look. Encyclopedias and other sources often give an answer on the order of 6,000 languages currently spoken.<sup>2</sup> But they don't always say how they've done the counting, or justify the criteria they've used.

One criterion often thought of in counting or individuating languages is that of mutual intelligibility, i.e. count two languages as distinct only if they're mutually unintelligible. Although that criterion may be useful for some purposes (even with the complication that mutual intelligibility is in practice not a black and white matter), it is not a sufficiently fine-grained criterion for a syntactician.

Take English. Is there one English or many? If there are many, how many? We all know that British accents differ from American accents, i.e. we all know that the phonology of British English differs from the phonology of American English. What is less widely appreciated is that the syntax of British English differs from the syntax of American English, as we shall now see.

Here is one example (cf. Algeo 2006, 288):

(13) Are you going to the theater tomorrow? I might (do).

In such cases, British English allows 'I might do', 'He might have done', etc. in a way that American English does not. To count English as one language would amount to deciding to overlook this rather striking syntactic difference. Let us agree, then, to count British English and American English as two languages (despite substantial mutual intelligibility), each with its own syntax. Of course the syntactic differences between them are smaller than those between either of them and Japanese. But as far as we can see this is a matter of degree, not a matter of kind.

One might wonder where this is leading. What about American English itself? We all know that there are many different accents within the

2 For some discussion, cf. Comrie 1987, 2; Comrie et al. 2005, 3; Crystal 1987, 284.

United States. Again, what is less widely appreciated is that there are also, within the United States, many differences in syntax. As an example, consider:

(14) I might could.

which is found in the English of the southern United States (cf. Hasty 2014). Why would we want to say that the English that allows 'I might could' is identical in its syntax to the English that disallows 'I might could'? The syntax of the one is simply not identical to the syntax of the other.

In this way, we are led to distinguishing, syntactically speaking, southern American English from, say, northeastern American English, which lacks 'I might could'. But northeastern American English is itself not uniform in its syntax, since in northern New England one finds (cf. Wood 2014):

(15) Mary is intelligent, but so isn't John.

which is not at all possible in my (New York City) English. One might at this point think of bringing in the notion 'dialect' and of calling the English that allows (13) or (14) or (15) a dialect of English, a different one in each case. As most linguists recognize, though, the dialect/language distinction is not in essence about phonology or syntax (or semantics), but rather concerns the political/cultural/social importance of the sets of speakers in question and the associated prestige of the language/dialect. We can note in addition that neither American English nor British English is called a dialect of English (at least not by Americans).

Once we do bring in dialects, a revision of the question in (12) is called for. A more satisfactory version is:

(16) How many languages/dialects are currently spoken?

This version makes it clear that as far as syntax is concerned (and similarly for phonology and semantics) what are called dialects must be taken into account.

It would be natural to ask again how far this is taking us. If we look for and find more and more and more syntactic differences within what we call English, how many syntactically distinct subvarieties of English will we end up with?

Before attempting to answer this question, let me point out that, although the syntactic differences so far mentioned can be characterized regionally (British English, southern American English, northeastern American English, northern New England English), that is not always the

case, as far as we know. An example of a non-regional syntactic difference would be the one indicated by:<sup>3</sup>

(17)            these kind of horses

For a subset of speakers of English it is possible to have singular 'kind' in combination with plural 'these', as in (17). For other speakers, (17) is excluded. Yet in this case there is no obvious regional generalization about where such speakers are found.

As a second instance of what seems to be a syntactic difference across varieties of English that is not characterizable in regional terms, consider:

(18)            a woman that's husband is quite wealthy

which has been attested in various parts of the English-speaking world (cf. Seppänen 1999 and Herrmann 2005). The standard version of (18) is:

(19)            a woman whose husband is quite wealthy

in which the relative clause is introduced by 'whose'. Examples like (18), in which the relative clause is introduced by 'that's', are not at all possible in my English. So I was astonished many years ago to hear one example like it produced by an old friend of mine who had grown up in New York City only a few miles from where I did.

It would be easy to draw up a longer and longer list of syntactic differences within English, such as the ones mentioned so far, that split the set of English speakers into overlapping or non-overlapping subsets. Although useful and instructive for both descriptive and theoretical purposes, drawing up even a partial list of that sort would be a long-range enterprise that far exceeds the bounds of this essay.

A quicker answer to (16) can be reached using the following thought experiment. Take any two speakers of English. How long would it take an English-speaking syntactician to discover a clear difference in syntax between those two speakers? Assume, as my experience working with syntax leads me to believe true, that there is, for every pair of speakers of English, an answer to this question, i.e. that there is a finite length of time, whether five minutes or five hours or five days or five years, within which I could find a clear syntactic difference between the English of the one and the English of the other. If so, then no two speakers of English have exactly the same syntax (by parity of reasoning, the same is almost certain to be true of all other languages/dialects).

3 The existence of which is noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* under 'kind (of)'.

The English language, then, has a current population of speakers whose syntax (and phonology and semantics) is sufficiently similar to justify, against the background of political/social/cultural considerations, the convenience of a single term 'English'. I have tried to show that this can be so even if, as seems extremely likely, there are no pairs of speakers of English whose syntax is identical across the board.

Extrapolating from English to the rest of the world, the number of syntactically distinct languages currently spoken may well be at least (given bilingualism) as great as the number of people currently alive (setting aside babies up to a certain age).

#### 4 More Possible Languages Than We Might Have Thought

The question in (11) should also be revised to integrate dialects. Revising it yields:

(20) How many possible languages/dialects are there?

Included in this set, in addition to those currently spoken, are those languages or dialects that were spoken in the past, those that will be spoken in the future and even those possible languages that may for one reason or another never be spoken. To try to answer (20), we can proceed as follows.

We already know of a great many syntactic differences found across languages and dialects. A small number have been discussed earlier. To approach (20), let us take some arbitrary pair of syntactic differences and ask whether or not they are independent of one another (in technical terms, this amounts to asking whether or not the two differences in question can be traced back to a single difference in the value of a single more abstract syntactic parameter).

To see how this kind of reasoning works, consider the following example. English and Italian differ in that Italian allows sentences with no visible subject in a way that English does not:

(21) Parla troppo.

(22) \*Talks too much.

English and Italian also differ in that in sentences with an auxiliary and a past participle Italian has an alternation between auxiliary 'be' and auxiliary 'have' that English does not. Thus Italian allows:

(23) Gianni è arrivato ieri.

whereas English would require 'have':

(24) John has/\*is arrived yesterday.

It seems virtually certain that these two Italian-English differences are independent of one another. Evidence comes in part from other languages, e.g. from the fact that Spanish is like Italian with respect to (21) but like English with respect to (24), while French is like Italian in (23) but like English in (22) (put more technically again, there is almost certainly no single parameter that underlies both the subject difference and the auxiliary difference at issue).

The key question is now:

(25) How many such independent differences are there, cross-linguistically?

Put another way:

(26) How large is the set of syntactic differences such that each is independent of all the others?

More technically:

(27) How many independent syntactic parameters does the language faculty allow for?

There is no simple way to answer this question, but it seems to me reasonable to think, just taking into account those syntactic differences that we are already aware of, that the answer to (25)-(27) may well be on the order of 100.

If so, and if each parameter has two possible values that can, by assumption, fluctuate independently of the values of all the other parameters, then the number of possible combinations of parameter values, and hence the number of possible syntactically distinguishable languages, will be 2 to the 100th power, which is approximately 10 to the 30th power, i.e. the number that would be written out as 1 followed by 30 zeros. In other words, if the assumed answer to (25)-(27) is 100, or even close to that, then the total number of syntactically distinct languages made available in principle by the language faculty is 'astronomical'.

Syntacticians need not despair (nor need anyone else despair). Syntacticians do not need to (and could not possibly) study each and every one of



these  $10^{30}$  languages individually.<sup>4</sup> We do, on the other hand, need to reach an understanding (and are in the process of doing so) of what the set of parameters is, of what the set of possible syntactic differences looks like, of what the limits are on those differences, and of why those limits hold. Simultaneously, we need to reach an understanding (and are in the process of doing so) of what properties all possible human languages have in common, and of why they have in common those properties and not others.<sup>5</sup>

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4 For important methodological discussion of the study of 'exotic' languages, cf. Davis, Gillon and Matthewson 2014.

5 For some relevant discussion, see Chomsky 2005.

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**Letteratura, cultura, storia**



## “Quite another Vein of Wickedness” Making Sense of Highway Robbery in Defoe’s *Colonel Jack*

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**Abstract** In early 1720s London highway or street robbery, especially by ‘gangs’, was highly topical; for some decades it had been a cause of much anxiety, and had recently been the target of increasingly harsh legislation. Yet the vast literature that “accompanied and stimulated” that legislation has been described by Robert Shoemaker as deeply ambivalent, swinging between negative images of ruthless brutes and positive images of polite gentlemen highwaymen. In Daniel Defoe’s *Colonel Jack* (1722) the protagonist’s thieving career follows a rising curve of violence, ‘progressing’ from picking merchants’ pockets and compounding to mugging old gentlemen and ambushing apprentices. Jack and his tutor/companion Will then fall into “quite another Vein of Wickedness” by getting in with a gang of footpads and burglars, a promotion Will promises, will make them “all Gentlemen together”. This essay suggests that we read the robbery episodes in this novel as an attempt to “make sense of” such violent crime and its conflicting cultural representations, especially as they relate to the gentlemanly aspirations which are a dominant motif in this novel.

**Summary** 1 Deepening Ambivalence. – 2 From Picking Pockets to Street Robbery. – 3 A Wretched Gang of Fellows. – 4 The Life of a Gentleman? – 5 Forming Ideas.

**Keywords** Eighteenth century. Defoe. Crime. London.

### 1 Deepening Ambivalence

Introducing their recent, much-needed edition of Defoe’s *Colonel Jack*,<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Cervantes and Geoffrey Sill attribute critical neglect of this novel to its reputation as a fiction of historical rather than literary interest (Cervantes & Sill 2016, 12). Against this “narrow view”, they make a case for seeing literary merit in its abiding interest in distortions of perception, imperfect knowledge, and the provisional and often unstable language used to name and make sense of the world (14). This is not to deny that the novel “tells us something significant about English life at the turn of the eighteenth century”, but that significant something lies less in its

1 Samuel Holt Monk’s edition of 1965 has been out of print since 1989.

many “verifiable historical details” than in “the confusing, contingent, and sometimes flimsily constructed beliefs, assumptions, and inaccuracies of perception and judgment often bundled together with rather than cordoned off from empirical knowledge” (15).<sup>2</sup>

These acute observations, applicable in part also to *Moll Flanders*, provide the starting point for Cervantes’ and Sill’s reading of the novel as a whole. This essay discusses only one small set of the tools Defoe uses in order to “name and make sense of the world”, in particular with the world of highway robbery entered by Colonel Jack in the second phase of his thieving career.

To understand this phase we need to see that it differs from the first – that of ‘private stealing’, i.e. thefts carried out without the victim’s knowledge – in ways I believe to have been crucial for Defoe and his early readers.<sup>3</sup> After the death of his foster nurse Jack makes a living by running errands and guarding shops from thieves (like Moll!), then is taught by an expert “diver” how to steal pocket-books from City merchants and bankers. Picking pockets had long been a capital offence, though it was rarely prosecuted for a number of reasons, among which reluctance on the part of victims to risk hanging someone – often a woman or a child – for an offence commonly (though not in law) perceived as relatively petty and often the fault of the victim (Beattie 1986, 180-1). As in Defoe’s first criminal novel, the pick-pocketing anecdotes in *Colonel Jack* highlight the skills needed to execute such thefts and escape from the scene of the crime, and offer readers object lessons on the simple precautions they should take in order to defend themselves from such predators.

No easy advice could be offered potential victims of robbery, defined by Edward Coke in 1634 as “a felony in Common law committed by a violent assault, upon the person of another, by putting him in fear, and taking from his person his money or other goods” (quoted in Spraggs 2001, epigraph). Well-to-do travellers could and did arm themselves or their servants, perhaps hire bodyguards; but many victims were labourers and servants walking to and from work in the dusk and early morning, and would not have had the means to protect themselves at their disposal. Many Londoners, including women, did react valiantly against muggers, and passers-by would usually respond to cries for help; but on lonely roads and in deserted alleys there might be no-one to hear.

2 I would argue that those “verifiable historical details” have an important rhetorical function in shoring up “confusing, contingent, and sometimes flimsily constructed beliefs”. On the use of concrete particulars to orientate interpretation, see Marta Bardotti’s excellent study (1990) of *A Journal of the Plague Year*, published in March 1722 just few months after *Moll Flanders* and before *Colonel Jack*; see especially 157-65.

3 This distinction has not, it seems to me, been sufficiently noticed. McBurney (1962), for instance, treats the whole of Jack’s thieving career as a continuum.

Night-watchmen were few and far between on the streets of London, at least until payment, beats and watch-houses were organised well into the eighteenth century (cf. Beattie 2001, ch. 4). As with all property crime, the main response of post-Glorious Revolution government to what was perceived as a rising tide of robbery was to resort to deterrence in the form of capital punishment. One of the earliest to be removed from benefit of clergy (1531), robbing on the King's highway was in 1692 given a key place in the new statutory reward system aimed at encouraging prosecutors and informers, becoming the first felony for which huge, permanent incentives were offered for apprehending and convicting. Successful prosecutors could earn £40 for every robber convicted,<sup>4</sup> and witnesses who 'discovered' accomplices qualified for pardons. In 1706 the same conditions were extended to cover housebreaking and burglary, two forms of theft also associated with violence, and often with the same perpetrators. With the coming of peace in 1713, and subsequent demobilisation of many thousands of soldiers and sailors, the incidence of these crimes – or rather the frequency of Old Bailey prosecutions – rose from less than eighteen per year to over forty (Pocklington 1997, quoted by Beattie 2004, 372). Government reacted by stiffening the relevant legislation with two measures aimed specifically at robbers working in and around the capital. The Second Transportation Act of 1719 included a clause stipulating that *all* the streets of London – i.e. including lanes and courts – were to be considered highways under the statute of 1692; and in January 1720 a royal proclamation added a massive £100 over and above the statutory £40 for convicting a robber committing an offence within a five-mile radius of Charing Cross (Beattie 2001, 378).

The metropolitan focus of these measures was reinforced by linguistic and cultural innovations. Robert Shoemaker (2006, 386) has traced the first appearance in print of the expression "street robber" to the July 1722 issue of the *Daily Journal*, where an article spoke – misleadingly – of a "gang" of "fifteen persons whose sole business is to rob about the streets of London".<sup>5</sup> Four years later *A Brief Historical Account of the lives of the Six Notorious Street Robbers Executed at Kingston* (1726) was still describing the street robber as a new type of criminal, one distinguished from others in that he (those accused of robbery were mostly male) combined

4 As Robert Hume states (2014, 492), it is impossible to say what this sum would be equivalent to in today's money, but over the period 1660-1740 £40 would probably have represented the best part of a year's income for more than 90% of the population; Hay & Rogers 1997, 19 (cited by Hume 2014, 496).

5 Misleadingly because robbers usually did not specialise in any one type of crime, method or territory, and rather than forming large, cohesive membership tended to work in loosely linked networks of whom few men would participate in any given robbery (Beattie 2001, 373; Shoemaker 2006, 386).

murdering with theft; the author, until quite recently thought to be Defoe, stated – erroneously – that street robbers never used horses or operated in fields or on open roads.<sup>6</sup>

The 1720s saw a plethora of pamphlets on street robbery and how to deal with it, of which two were by Defoe and others were until recently attributed to him. They constitute a small part of the vast literature which accompanied and stimulated the introduction and enforcement of the legal measures of 1719-1720. The language used to “name and make sense of” what many saw as a new curse on a blessed city (Sill 1976, 77) was commonly as “provisional and unstable”, and run through with “assumptions [...] inaccuracies of perception and judgment” as that Cervantes and Sill find in Defoe’s fictions (2016, 14).<sup>7</sup> The same is true of genres purporting to inform the public about specific crimes. Reporters devoted disproportionate attention to violent theft as compared to far more common non-violent larcenies, such as pick-pocketing and shop-lifting. The semi-official *Old Bailey Proceedings* was obliged to report all trials and did so fairly soberly, but gave little space to prosecutions ending in acquittal and a great deal to sensational crimes (Shoemaker 2008, 567). The *Ordinary’s Accounts*, published by the chaplains of Newgate on each hanging day, gave the biographies and confessions only of the few condemned who actually went to the gallows, thus offering a biased sample of London criminals. Newspapers, free to choose stories that would sell, favoured the dramatic and scurrilous over the petty and mundane. In the mid century (1723-1765) robberies amounted to only 6.8% of all Old Bailey prosecutions, but accounted for 44.2% of newspaper crime reports (Shoemaker 2006, 383). These reports tended to label robbers “rogues, ruffians, and villains” and include graphic descriptions of alleged brutalities (384). The early 1720s, years that saw several gangs of robber/burglars brought to the Old Bailey by professional thief-takers eager for rewards and accomplices trying to save their necks, produced some lurid accounts. In April 1722 the *Weekly*

6 Furbank and Owens (1994, 141) discount the evidence for Defoe’s authorship of *Six Notorious Street Robbers*, and (146) follow Clinton S. Bond (1971) in de-attributing *Street Robberies Consider’d [...] Written by a Converted Thief* [1728]; they also doubt Defoe’s authorship of *An Effectual Scheme to the Immediate Preventing of Street Robberies* (1731 [for 1730]). On these, as well as the ‘Andrew Moreton’ pamphlets *Augusta Triumphans* (1728) and *Second Thoughts are Best* (1728), in both of which Defoe proposes schemes for dealing with urban crime, see Sill 1976.

7 Denominations for robbers can be very confusing. ‘Highwayman’ is often used to mean a horseman working heaths and roads leading into and out of London, as opposed to a robber working city streets on foot. In law, however, there was no distinction between the mounted and unmounted, and as we have seen, from 1719 even the narrowest of London alleys counted as a highway. Confusions like these are exacerbated by supposed social distinctions of rank which may have held good for an earlier period but by our period had become slippery or changed meaning altogether (Spraggs 2001, ch. 14).



*Journal* reported that, after an attack by three of the Hawkins gang on a stage-coach, a pedlar woman “cried out to the people that she knew the rogues” at which “they turned back and cut her tongue out” (quoted in Beattie 2001, 152); one witness claimed that they had thrown the tongue over the hedge (*The Old Bailey Proceedings*, OA17220521 [2016-03-31]). Even Ralph Wilson, a member of the gang who had testified to the robberies, supported the Hawkins’s denials of brutality and complained that he himself had been falsely accused of rape and cruelty (quoted in Shoemaker 2006, 384).

So far we have met only with negative images of robbers, but as Shoemaker writes, “public perceptions of robbery had always been divided between two long standing traditions”, one which “decried his use of threatened or actual violence”, while the other “celebrated the highwayman’s courageous and entertaining exploits” (2008, 381-2; cf. also Faller 1987, ch. 8). Gillian Spraggs (2001) has traced the evolution of the second of these traditions from medieval celebration of the courageous and aggressive rebel motivated by injustice through the rise in the sixteenth century of the stereotype of the destitute gentleman driven to use his military training and horsemanship to restore his fortunes by methods thought more honourable, and indeed more English, than stealing covertly or – God forbid – begging or working (106-7, 260-1). By the seventeenth century, the script of the heroic highwayman required that he be courteous and avoid aggressive violence; by the eighteenth gentle birth was no longer mandatory, but polite and humane behaviour to victims had become hallmarks (183-5). Andrea McKenzie (2007, 105) sees the 1720s as marking “an apogee of the highwayman or street robber, not only as a social critic, but also as a celebrity in his own right”. The dashing James Carrick, whom Defoe could have seen die at Tyrburn in July 1722, McKenzie cites as

the quintessential game highwayman, spending his last minutes smiling, cracking jokes, taking snuff, and assuming ‘genteel airs in fixing the Rope aright around his Neck’. (105)

Shoemaker has shown systematically how, even as the perceived growth of crime and the publicising of its more sensational manifestations reinforced the negative image of the highway robber in early Georgian London, “prevailing cultural ideals such as civility, politeness and the increasingly loose definition of gentility” were exploited by robbers themselves, as well as by journalists, novelists and dramatists.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, he argues, the traditional ambivalence concerning robbers deepened into a dichotomy:

<sup>8</sup> The best known theatrical robber with pretensions to gentility is, of course, Macheath, protagonist of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). Among actual examples, Maclaime, “the gentleman highwayman” who held up Horace Walpole in Hyde Park, was lionised as

“Between the 1720s and the middle of the century competing discourses crystallized into two contrasting images: the violent street robber, and the polite gentleman highwayman”.

Competing and contrasting, but not always neatly separated. On trial at the Old Bailey in May 1722, John Hawkins and his accomplice, George Simpson, the same two who had been accused of cutting out the old woman’s tongue, impressed the *Weekly Journal* as “persons of genteel and extraordinary behaviour” (Shoemaker 2008, 391). Awaiting his execution in Newgate, Hawkins admitted to over twenty robberies, but claimed that “he never dealt in Barbarous Actions” (*The Old Bailey Proceedings*, OA17220521; [2016-03-31]). A few months earlier James Shaw, though confessing to a “vast Number” of assaults and soon to die for robbery and murder, claimed “that in all his Robberies he never us’d Violence to any Man”, and piously told the chaplain that he was:

firmly of Opinion, that, as it is more sinful to rob a poor Man or the Church of God, so it was less sinful to rob those who would have spent the Money taken in Gaiety and Luxury, or those who perhaps had unjustly acquired it by Gaming. (OA17220208; [2016-03-31])

Throughout 1722 Defoe would have been reading and talking about men like Hughs, Hawkins, Shaw and their accomplices, as would many of his own early readers. By the spring and summer he may also have already been planning to follow up the success of his story of a status-conscious older woman pick-pocket and shop-lifter with a fictional biography of a young man obsessed with gentility, one who for a period of his youth becomes materially involved in highway robbery, and ideologically entangled in the ambivalences that beset representations of this very topical “Vein of Wickedness”. The robbery episodes in *Colonel Jack* may be read as, among other things, an attempt to sort out that tangle and make sense of a new and perplexing feature of London life.

## 2 From Picking Pockets to Street Robbery

That *Colonel Jack* is an untidy and incoherent work of fiction is a complaint voiced by critics from Coleridge to Watt. Since the hold of organicism has slackened, critics have felt less obliged to project onto Defoe expectations formed by classical realism, and more dynamic ways of reading have helped us see in his inconsistencies “*segni di una scrittura in movimento*,”

“The Ladies Hero” for his supposed gallantry and fine manners (cf. Hitchcock & Shoemaker 2006, 170-80).

di un modo di narrare che 'si fa' man mano che procede" (Sertoli 1998, 65). Lincoln Faller (1993), taking a slightly different but no less dynamic approach, focuses on the many confused and confusing "comparisons and contrasts [...], parallelisms and analogies which riddle the text". Not only is it "hard to say what many of these analogies mean",

they cut across and threaten to perforate the cognitive schemes by which Jack's narrative might otherwise be ordered. The relationships they indicate have a double effect, binding the text together and disrupting it at another. (1993, 171)

The comparison/contrast which binds and disrupts the two early thieving phases in Colonel Jack's life pairs him with his variously denominated "tutor", "guide", "companion" and "brother", initially named Robin, soon renamed Will.<sup>9</sup> During their pick-pocketing phase their relationship is a simple one of leader and led, with the younger boy slavishly admiring the older for his skill in executing thefts and getting away successfully:

THIS was a most exquisite Fellow for a Thief, for he had the greatest Dexterity at Conveying any thing away; that he scarce ever pitch'd upon any thing in his Eye, but he carried it off with his Hands, and never that I know of, miss'd his Aim, or was catch'd in the Fact (98-9).<sup>10</sup>

Jack is a beginner in the execution of such "tricks", and even more so, in Will's eyes, in his childish wish to restore to their owners large bills and credit notes they would be unable to turn into cash (78-9, 86). Yet it is precisely the former's insistence that the value of these bills not be lost that lead the pair to devise a clever way of selling them back to their owners,<sup>11</sup> and in so doing precociously put to use Jack's "entrepreneurial talent [...], his great talent [...] in negotiating deals" (Faller 1993, 193).

Once Will and Jack move on to street robbery, however, this gift drops from narrative view; we hear no more of marketing the booty and all analogy between crime and trade disappears. The change to open and aggressive methods is associated with their beginning to "look higher" (108), but the narrative does not suggest that robbery brings bigger profits or greater glory than picking pockets. The boys' first mugging takes place

<sup>9</sup> The name change illustrates Sertoli's notion of "writing on the move", but the "ripenamento" seems appropriate given Will's ability to impose his 'will' on the younger lad.

<sup>10</sup> All references to the text of *Colonel Jack* [1722] are to the 2016 edition by Cervantes and Sill.

<sup>11</sup> Though illegal, compounding was a practice appreciated by many a victim of theft as a service that minimized damage to themselves while allowing the thief to earn some profit (cf. Beattie 2001, 228).

in Smithfield meat market, where while “strouling about” one Friday they notice “an antient Country Gentleman” who has just been paid for a sale of large bullocks. When he is over-taken by a fit of coughing “ready to be strangl’d”, Will makes an “artificial stumble” so that “[t]he violence of the blow beat the old Gentleman quite down”; Jack runs to get hold of his Bag of Money “gave it a quick snatch, pulled it clean away, and run like the Wind” (109). Sharp observation, quick-wittedness, a clean execution, and a speedy getaway: the reader may participate in the excitement of the hit and flight, yet be perplexed by the use of force by two healthy young men against a sick old one. Unlike the many who, like Sarah Reed and Hester Pepper, resisted their attackers and called for help, this frail old farmer is in no condition to react:

frighted with the fall, and his Breath so stopp’d with his Cough, that he could not recover himself to speak till some time, during which, nimble Will was got up again and walk’d off; nor could he call out stop Thief, or tell any Body he had lost any thing for a good while; but Coughing vehemently, and looking red till he was almost black in the Face, he cry’d the Ro--- Hegh, Hegh, Hegh, the Rogues Hegh, have got Hegh, Hegh, Hegh, Hegh, Hegh, then he would get a little Breath, and at it again the Rogue--- Hegh, Hegh, and after a great many Heghs, and Rogues he brought it out, have got away my Bag of Money. (109)

As Hal Gladfelder (2001, 106) writes, “The comedy of such an anecdote depends on the suspension of sympathy”; we can only be amused at the onomatopoeic rendering of the old man’s coughing fit and share in Jack’s jeering at the sight of his congested face if we surrender to “that strain of blunt, rather unfeeling laughter which runs through canting books and the picaresque”. It is by no means clear whether Defoe is inviting us to make that surrender.

The next episode is not much easier to read. The boys’ second victim is a “young Fellow” who might have given them more trouble if they had attacked him in daylight and in a busy street. But for “such Work as we had to do” (111) they choose darkness and seclusion. It is dusk when, in a half-enclosed court off Lombard Street, Jack and Will notice a woollen-drapeer’s apprentice paying in money at a goldsmith’s shop. They wait until he comes out with “still a pretty large Bag under his arm”, by which time it is “Very Dark”.

[Will] flies at the young Man, and Gives him such a violent Thrust, that push’d him forward with too great a force for him to stand, and as he strove to recover, the Threshold took his feet, and he fell forward into the other part of the Court, as if he had flown in the Air. [...] I stood ready, and presently felt out the Bag of Money, which I heard fall, for it

flew out of his Hand, he having his Life to save, not his Money: I went forward with the Money, and Will that threw him down, finding I had it, ran backward. (110)

As with the Smithfield mugging, this narrative bristles with active verbs of thrusting, pushing, striving, falling, throwing and running, verbs which involve the reader in hope for their success. Yet the epithet 'poor' demands sympathy for the apprentice, and the specification that he had "his Life to save" implies that the outcome could have been fatal for him.

Defoe would not have needed to spell out to his early readers how victims could suffer serious injury during a robbery. On hearing that he had "reported to his Master [...] that he was knock'd down", Jack insists that this "was not true, for neither Will, or I, had any Stick in our Hands" (110). Early eighteenth-century readers would have recognised here a reference to a weapon more commonly used than swords or pistols, especially by those who robbed on foot. In September 1722, for instance, they could have read about how, at ten o'clock on the night of the previous 17 July, Jane Young was thrown down in a street just off the Haymarket by Arthur Hughs, that he cut off her pocket, threw it to one of his four comrades and then "punched her on the Breast with a short Stick which he carried in his Sleeve" (*The Old Bailey Proceedings*, t17220907-40; [2016-03-31]). Sticks could be innocent things; at his trial Hughs claimed he carried it "to play Trap ball". In gaol, however, he confessed to the Ordinary that

the Stick he carry'd in his Sleeve on those Occasions, was with intent to Stun those they robb'd, and serv'd better than a Pistol, because it made no Noise. (OA17220924; [2016-03-31])

Sticks may have been meant only to stun, but blows to the head could of course kill. James Shaw, whom we have already met, was convicted of murdering Philip Potts

by giving him one mortal Bruise on the Forehead, near the Left Eye, with a wooden Staff, on the 24th of June last, of which mortal Bruise he languish'd till the 26th of the same Month, and then died. (t17220112-14; [2016-03-31])

The staff had in this case been used to knock the victim off his horse as – according to Shaw himself – was usual in attacking mounted travellers from the ground. His explanation of his *modus operandi* would have confirmed the widespread view that robberies committed on foot involved greater brutality than those committed on horseback. Shaw told the Ordinary of Newgate that

he often robb'd on Horseback on Hamstead-Heath, Finchly-Common, & c. and often on Foot, but that the most Cruel and Savage, was the way of Robbing on Foot, Murther being most commonly committed, they having no other method on Foot of escaping from a Horseman, but by striking him down from his Horse, and then either Binding or else Disabling his Body. (OA17220208; [3016-03-31])

In denying that either he or Will carried a stick, Jack is surely trying to dissociate himself and his partner from the likes of Hughs and Shaw, but paradoxically draws attention to affinities between them. Defoe now begins to multiply those affinities by having Will join, and then drag Jack into, a network very much of akin to that of which James Shaw was a member.

### 3 A Wretched Gang of Fellows

After the Lombard Street job and several vaguely indicated "Enterprises, some of one kind some of another", Jack announces a turning point in Will's life which will turn out to be one in his own life too:

My Companion Will, who was now grown a Man, and encourag'd by these Advantages fell into quite another Vein of Wickedness getting acquainted with a wretched Gang of Fellows that turn'd their Hands to every Thing that was vile. (111)

The word "Gang" would have rung alarm bells with readers alert to the threat of what, according to recent press reports, were growing numbers of tightly-organised bands of vicious thieves (Wales 2000, 71). In collocating "Gang" with "wretched", and their practices with "every Thing that was vile", Defoe speaks through the prosecutorial idiom of the retrospective narrator, but then picks up again the naïve one of Jack the junior thief:

Will was a lusty strong Fellow, and withal very bold and daring, would Fight any Body, and venture upon any thing, and I found he began to be above the mean Rank of a poor Pick-pocket. (111)

This glowing description bestows on Will the manly attributes celebrated in the traditional cult of the courageous, aggressive robber (Spraggs 2001, 106). It is not Jack's first adulatory description, but new is the rueful contrast with "the mean Rank of a poor Pick-pocket" Jack sees himself as occupying. As Stephen Gregg has shown (2009, ch. 6), later in the novel Jack will play the subaltern gender roles of cuckolded husband (twice) and runaway Jacobite rebel. Here we see him failing to measure up to another model of manliness. The figure he cuts in boasting to Will of

his recent “pretty good Purchase[s]” in the “old Trade” may not be very prepossessing: he has picked a young woman’s pocket of eleven guineas, and “neatly” relieved a country girl just off the stage coach of £8 17s. Will scoffs condescendingly, then offers a seductive alternative:

I always said you were a lucky Boy, Col. Jack, says he, but come you are grown almost a Man now, and you shall not always play at Push-pin, I am got into better Business I assure you, and you shall come into it too, I’ll bring you into a brave Gang Jack, says he, where you shall see we shall be all Gentlemen. (112)

“[Y]ou shall come [...], I’ll bring you into a brave Gang”, Will promises. As a boy Jack had sorely resented his brother the Major’s excluding him from his “Society” of pick-pockets, “whereby I might have been made as happy as he” (74). The homosocial happiness now offered confers companionship but also adulthood, bravery, and superior social rank.<sup>12</sup>

In an evident effort to establish a serious, moral perspective on these allurements, Defoe once again switches idiom, reformulating Will’s tempting proposal in condemnatory terms:

THEN he told me the Trade it self in short, which was with a Set of Fellows, that had two of the most desperate Works upon their Hands that belong’d to the whole Art of Thieving; that is to say, in the Evening they were Footpads, and in the Night they were Housebreakers. (112)

These are the words of an external, older narrator, much removed from the mindset of his young protagonist, who in story time goes along with the gang “without any hesitation” (112). But, even taking into account his naivety, why does he do so? Jack’s retrospectively offered excuse for so doing opens up the contradictions in the positive gentleman-robber stereotype which, I would argue, Defoe is here trying to dismantle. While claiming that lack of religious instruction in youth had left him vulnerable to the persuasive power of Will’s “many plausible Stories” and talk of “great things”, Jack does not claim that such talk had appealed to his “strange original Notion [...] of my being a Gentleman”. Indeed it had been the “secret influence” of that very notion that had “kept me from [...] Raking and Vice, and in short, from the general Wickedness of rest of my Companions”. It had stopped him swearing, it appears from the narrative digression that follows, but not – we might notice – from picking

12 For a useful discussion of early modern “construction of manhood” and the correlation with social standing, cf. Foyster (1999, ch. 1).



pockets, mugging and now joining a gang of footpads and housebreakers. This must count as one of the many congruities, an incongruity Jack valiantly tries to sort out in an inconclusive reflection on the semantics of thieving and gentility:

Will it seems understood that Word in a quite different manner from me; for his Gentleman was nothing more or less than a Gentleman thief, a Villain of a higher Degree than a Pick-pocket; and one that might do something more Wicked, and better Entitling him to the Gallows, than could be done in our way. But the Gentleman that I had my Eye on, was another thing quite, tho' I could not really tell how to describe it either.<sup>13</sup>

Jack will never learn how to describe clearly “the Gentleman I had my Eye on”, a problem McBurney (1962, 325) long ago identified as the “dominant motif” of the novel, and which David Blewett (1979) thoroughly explored in the context of Jacobitism. In this, the context of crime and punishment, Defoe has Jack judge the “Gentleman thief” a greater “Villain”, potentially “more Wicked” and more deserving of the gallows than a pick-pocket. In so doing he gives voice to the cultural intolerance of violence in all its forms which to grow throughout the eighteenth-century society, affecting attitudes to duelling, to public insult, to rioting, and indeed to capital punishment (cf. Hitchcock & Shoemaker 2006, 43, 105, 237) – but which had not yet in the 1720s been embodied in the English penal system, which classified thefts minutely but prescribed death for all convicted felons, from pick-pockets to murderers. He also sets himself more clearly than he had hitherto against the glamourization of street robbers we have noticed above.

This position is consolidated in the series of anecdotes that follow. The long night of miscellaneous mayhem in which Jack now joins Will and two other gang members (114-8) completes what Gladfelder (2001, 105) calls the novel’s “catalogue of the varieties of street robbery”. Most of Defoe’s early readers would have found somewhere in it a victim with whom to identify, or recognised a part of the metropolis they knew and frequented. Those attacked include men and women of all ages and from all walks of life: professional, labouring, commercial and leisured,<sup>14</sup> while the territory of rapine, so far confined to the City, is now extended right across London

<sup>13</sup> Here Jack makes one signifier cover two opposed signified, confirming Faller’s comment that *Colonel Jack* “fits together better as a collection of signifiers than of signifieds” (1993, 171-2).

<sup>14</sup> In this Defoe’s robbers differ from vehicles for social satire described by McKenzie (2007, 96): “semi-fictionalized seventeenth century highwaymen typically robbed lawyers, quack doctors, moneylenders and crooked tradesman, declaiming at length against their perfidy and hypocrisy, and forcing them to give up their ill-gotten gains”.



and its suburbs. On the road from Kentish Town a lone foot traveller strikes with his cane at Will, but is wrestled to the ground, forced to beg for his life and left tied up by the side of the road. A doctor and apothecary in a coach yield their "considerable fees", watches and silver surgical instruments without resisting. To Jack, the novice, falls the "easie [...] Bargain" of dealing with "a Couple of poor Women, one a kind of a Nurse, and the other a Maid-Servant". In the initial telling of this significant incident Jack begins with the kind of polite banter ascribed to gallant highwaymen (Spraggs 2001, 185), but quickly changes to a more threatening tone when the women scream:

hold, says I, make no Noise, unless you have a mind to force us to murder you whether we will or no, give me your Money presently, and make no Words, and we shan't hurt you. (116)

The maid hands over her shilling, the nurse her "Guinea, and a Shilling, crying heartily for her Money, and said, it was all she had left in the World; well we took it for all that". Jack's concluding phrase here, with its casual, phatic "well", mimes callous indifference to victims' poverty, reducing what is everything to her to a puny "it", and her distress to a mere "all that".

If Defoe here uses lack of feeling to disqualify robbers from being gentlemen in the newly emerging sense of the term, in the next few segments he further undermines their standing by casting doubt on their courage and determination. When they hold up a gentleman and a punk in a coach in Hyde Park the client hands over his money, but from "the Slut" they get an earful of abuse - and "not one Six-penny Piece". Their next potential prey, three gentlemen crossing Chelsea Fields, are "too strong for us to meddle with", for they have "hired three Men at Chelsea, two with Pitch-Forks, and the third, a Waterman, with a Boat-Hook-Staff to Guard them". Challenged by slightly superior numbers and a rudimentarily armed, makeshift bodyguard, the four robbers scuttle quickly off. They cut no better figure in a bungled attempt at burglary: they have bribed a footman to let them in to a house, but the "Rogue" has got drunk and been shut out.<sup>15</sup> What turns out to be a farce, Jack reminds us, could have resulted in a massacre:

it was a happy Drunkenness to the Family, for it sav'd them from being robb'd, and perhaps murder'd, for they were a cursed bloody Crew.

15 On paranoia about servant theft and relevant legislation, cf. Beattie 2001, 37, 335-6. Specially feared were the kind featured in this anecdote and described in a pamphlet of 1708 as "Servants who belong to the Gang of House-Breakers [...] who oblige them to rob the House, or let some of the Gang in to do it" (336).

The night concludes, prosaically, with the gang breaking into a brew-house and wash-house to steal “a small Copper and about a Hundred weight of Pewter”, goods which next day they sell for half their value.

Financial particulars such as these might have struck Defoe’s more attentive readers: Jack’s share of the takings from this long night, £8 19s, is less than he had earned from either one of his recent, much-despised pick-pocketing ventures. But if Jack does “not seem so elevated at the Success of that Night’s Ramble”, it is not for mercenary reasons. Somewhat belatedly, the taking of the poor nurse’s last guinea fills his heart with “abhorrence [...] at the Cruelty of that Act”, and from this

there necessarily follow’d a little Distaste of the thing it self, and it came into my Head with a double force, that this was the High Road to the Devil. And that certainly this was not the Life of a Gentleman!

Cruel as an act, “the thing it self” has somehow turned distasteful, taste being one of the hallmarks of eighteenth-century gentility. The memory of this “very small crime” will return to torment Jack several times in the remainder of the novel, and is a key one in the process of Jack’s reformation into man of feeling (Cervantes & Sill 2016, 44). I would add that the case of Mrs Smith, as she turns out to be called, is only the worst of a whole string of robberies consisting of assaults on or ‘putting in fear’ men and women, some rich, some poor, but all of them vulnerable in some way, as they go about London on their – more or less respectable – business, or sleep innocently in their beds.<sup>16</sup> Though petty (from the gang’s point of view) in terms of the profits they bring and relatively harmless in terms of the violence actually inflicted, the callousness and cowardice involved in all of them expose the emptiness of Will’s claims to the gentlemanly status of robber gangs. The narration treats us to moments of semi-farce, others of pathos, others of potentially gory cruelty: of audacity in the face of danger, intelligence, elegance and excitement, none. Stories about robbers and burglars, should not, Defoe is perhaps telling us, be written in such a way as to entertain their readers or celebrate their protagonists.

#### 4 The Life of a Gentleman?

Concluding the introduction to their edition of *Colonel Jack*, Cervantes and Sill (2016, 44) note that it is at this point in the novel that Defoe’s protago-

<sup>16</sup> In theory, the City of London was subject to curfew, and ‘night-walkers’ could be arrested by the watch. Physicians, nurses, servants and market folks were among those assumed to have legitimate reasons for being abroad at night (Beattie 2001, 170), so it is interesting that Defoe assigns several of the gang’s victims to just those trades.

nist begins to draw “a firm boundary between his story and that of one of his various doubles”, namely Will. Nearing my own conclusion I turn to the confrontation in which the two young men heatedly debate the nature of their “Business” and its compatibility with gentlemanly status (118-9). “Mighty full” of their success so far, but eager for even greater things, Will proposes that they “buy a Couple of good Horses, and go further a Field [...] take the Highway like Gentlemen”. The change of method and territory he suggests would in the popular literature of the 1720s carry an assumption of the mounted highwayman’s superiority, either in the old-fashioned terms of birth or in the more modern sense of ethics and manners, to the mean and lowly footpad (Shoemaker 2008, 387; Beattie 1986, 151). Jack, however, fails to register any such distinction; rather he assimilates their past robberies (on foot) and to the proposed future ones (on horseback) into a single “way of living”:

I said to him, do you call this the Life of a Gentleman?

WHY, says Will, why not?

WHY, says I, was it like a Gentleman for me to take that Two and Twenty Shillings from a poor antient Woman, when she beg’d of me upon her Knees not to take it, and told me it was all she had in the World to buy her Bread for her self and a sick Child which she had at home.

Will’s reply, which also makes no distinction between highwaymen and footpads, is a chilling sketch of the cruelties any robber must commit if he is to save his neck:

YOU FOOL you, says Will, you will never be fit for our Business indeed [...] why, if you will be fit for Business, you must learn to fight when they resist, and cut their Throats when they submit; you must learn to stop their Breath, that they may beg and pray no more; what signifies pity? prethee, who will pity us when we come to the Old-Baily? I warrant you that whining old Woman that beg’d so heartily for her Two and Twenty Shillings would let you, or I beg upon our Knees, and would not save our Lives by not coming in for an Evidence against us; did you ever see any of them cry when they see Gentlemen go to the Gallows?

That highway robbers will inevitably “come to the Old-Baily” is taken for granted here, but without eye-witness evidence against them,<sup>17</sup> it is implied, they can avoid being convicted and hanged. It follows, in Will’s reasoning, that all those at the scene, even the weakest and most submis-

17 On the importance of eye-witness evidence in law and in Defoe with special reference to *Colonel Jack*, cf. Clegg 1998.

sive, must be killed. Unlike the pick-pocket's prey, the robber's victims usually see their predators, and even if the robber escapes, he may be identified and testified against later. It is the very open and public nature of such robbery, Defoe shows us, that far from making it more honourable than pick-pocketing, of necessity makes it more brutal.

Will's "Gentlemen" will indeed "come to the Old-Baily", but if they are convicted it is ironically not on the evidence of any "whining old woman", but of one of themselves. In a thirteen-man attack on a suburban house a gardener loses his life, but since, in accordance with the self-help ethos of eighteenth-century law-enforcement the neighbours have organised armed resistance, "the Gentlemen Rogues were pursued, and being at London with the Booty, one of them was taken" (120). One is enough. Promised the favour of being saved from the gallows in exchange for his testimony, George, as the captured robber turns out to be called, informs on his "Companions, and Will among the rest, as the principal Party in the whole Undertaking". On his evidence Jack's tutor, partner and first double, will be caught, tried and hanged; so much, it seems, for the fine comradeship of the "brave Gang".<sup>18</sup> Awaiting his trial in prison, Will admits to Jack that he had been "far out [...] when I told you to be a notorious Thief, was to live like a Gentleman" (131). The widow Mrs Smith, on the other hand, far from "coming in for an Evidence", refuses to recognise in Jack the man who had taken her last guinea and shilling (134).

## 5 Forming Ideas

If this were Jack's last word on the subject of highway robbery, we might conclude that Defoe had 'made sense' of the phenomenon for us, coming down clearly down on the side of the negative image and dismantling the celebratory tradition. *Colonel Jack* would be a more straightforward novel if Defoe had left us with Will voicing that callous realist creed as the novel's last embodiment of the street robber. But much later, having returned to London after many years abroad, Jack learns the fates of his two brothers, and tells us about them in terms that destabilize the disapproving attitude we have been invited to adopt. The Captain, "growing an eminent Highway man, had made his Exit at the Gallows, after a life of 14 Years most exquisite and successful Rogueries", while the Major had

<sup>18</sup> Robber gangs were indeed vulnerable to betrayal from within, both because they were often so loosely-organised and inexpert, and because of the huge £140 rewards on offer to accomplices and thief-takers (Beattie 2001, 381). The *Proceedings* and *Ordinary's Accounts* for 1722 make especially grim reading. Thomas Bishop, John Hawkins, George Simpson, James Shaw and Paul Croney, along with another three of the latter's associates, were all impeached by accomplices.

follow'd the like wicked Trade; but was a Man of more Gallantry, and Generosity, and having committed innumerable Depredations upon Mankind, yet always had so much Dexterity, as to bring himself off. (227)

Though eventually taken, “no Fetters would hold him”; he breaks out of prison and escapes to France,

where he followed the same Trade, and that with so much Success, that he grew famous by the Name of Anthony, and had the honour with three of his Comrades, who he had Taught the English way of Robbing generously, as they called it, without Murthering or Wounding, or Ill using those they robb'd, I say, he had the Honour to be broke upon the Wheel at the Greve in Paris.

How are we to take the eminent Captain's “14 Years most exquisite and successful Rogueries eminence”, the Major's “English way of Robbing generously”, or the “Honour” of his atrocious death? If there is irony in this adoption of the jolly rogue idiom, it risks being misunderstood. We can only conclude that to the “remarkably diverse range of positive and negative images of robbery” disseminated in the literature of eighteenth-century London (Shoemaker 2006, 382), Defoe's second criminal novel contributes some remarkably incongruous examples. The “comparisons and contrasts” between Jack and Will, and then between Jack and his foster brothers, bind but also disrupt “the cognitive schemes by which Jack's narrative might otherwise be ordered” (Faller 1993, 171), while forcing us to continually revise and re-think the sense of the fictional – and indeed the real – world.

Cervantes and Sill (2016, 25-6), discussing the general tendency for racial differences which in Defoe's day “were still flexible and being negotiated”, to become “fixed over time”, suggest that “*Colonel Jack* is a novel that actively participated in the formation of ideas about what race meant”. We may also see it as a novel which participated in the formation of ideas about what crime meant, in making distinctions between “Vein[s] of Wickedness” which were as yet confused, but were increasingly informed by intolerance of violence in all its forms. If in *Colonel Jack* those ideas appear as “confusing, contingent, and sometimes flimsily constructed beliefs” (Cervantes & Sill 2006, 15), it is surely because these are “*segnì di scrittura in movimento, di un modo di narrare che 'si fa' man mano che procede*” (Sertoli 1998, 65).

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## Adolescents and Family Crises in Victorian vs Contemporary Prose Versions of *Romeo and Juliet* for a Female Audience

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**Abstract** The article is concerned with the female readership of Shakespeare's plays and the way abridgements, adaptations, and appropriations have mediated and still mediate the cultural relationship that girls or young women establish with the Bard. The analysis concentrates on the relationships between generations, and the way narrators focus and comment on the family crisis originated in the play. By exploring motivation, establishing new links between the characters, and having narrators pass authoritative moral judgements, all these texts negotiate with well-established interpretations of the play, often challenging and channelling them into unexpected critical directions. Although narrative versions of *Romeo and Juliet* can't help being loaded with the baggage of the tragedy's associations, the female young reader may be captured by the power of narrative fiction – in the same way, we might imagine, in which Shakespeare was captured by novellas about the story of the two lovers from Verona. In addition, narrative amplification in the young adult novels adds a creative impulse to the narrative reconfiguration of the play, implicitly inviting girl readers to reflect on the differences, and occasional similarities, in the growing up crises of early modern or medieval teenagers and today's adolescents.

**Keywords** Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*. Children literature. Female readership. Teenagers. Adolescents.

Ever since the Lambs' *Tales* (1807), young female audiences have always been an essential part of the history of children's adaptations of Shakespeare. In the "Preface" to the *Lambs' Tales from Shakespeare* (2007, 3) we read that the intention was to "make these tales easy reading for very young children". Immediately after, though, the author of the "Preface" (presumably Mary who, because of her lack of formal education, may have been sensitive to the issue of giving girls the chance to read Shakespeare), added that

For young ladies too it has been my intention chiefly to write, because boys are generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are, they frequently having the best scenes of Shakespeare by heart, before their sisters are permitted to look into this manly book. (4)

In the second edition of the *Tales*, an "Advertisement" identifies a narrower readership than the 1807 edition:

The Proprietors of this work willingly pay obedience to the voice of the public. It has been the general sentiment, that the style in which these tales were written, is not so precisely adapted for the amusement of mere children, as for an acceptable and improving present to young ladies advancing to the state of womanhood. They therefore offer to the public an edition prepared with suitable elegance. They are satisfied that every reader of taste will thank them for not suppressing the former Preface, though not exactly applicable on the present occasion (Lamb 2009, iii).

This edition clearly posits the original reference to young children as no longer applicable. A relationship between prose adaptations of Shakespeare and girls is therefore established very early, and is crucial in the construction of a Shakespearean canon for children.

The history of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for a young audience has been for the greatest part of two centuries a tale of drama turned into prose narrative, with the same 'story' abridged, distilled, or expanded, into the different 'plots' (cf. Marchitello 2003) of the single adaptations.<sup>1</sup> The process of transposing a mimetic mode into a diegetic mode has a powerful impact on time-place coordinates, character and setting presentation as well as perspective. An omniscient narrator is introduced, who generally simplifies complex issues for the young reader and intrudes with comments and interpretations. With children's prose versions added explanations and attempts at ideological reorientations of the plays in educational terms are all the more significant as in most cases the adaptation is accessed *before* the source is read or experienced at the theatre (which may be interpreted as a challenge to the notion of priority or authority of the 'original', Hutcheon 2006, xiii). This is particularly relevant in the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, as the adaptor can rely on a general cultural awareness of the play as an archetypal and 'universal' love story, with which the young reader may already be familiar in some way. This is also a play with teenage protagonists, so it would appear to have immediate relevance to a young audience although adaptors may find issues like suicide and ambivalence towards parental authority difficult to present to children. For example, in the collection of essays *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (1993) the chapter on *Romeo and Juliet* lists a number of Young Adult Novels dealing with teenage suicide or peer pressure that should

1 "Novels for children and Young Adults are the most likely to rework the plot of a Shakespearean play or even just to rewrite the entire plot as prose" (Castaldo 2007, 409).

help introduce teenagers to the play. The author of the chapter remarks: "The themes are as current as they were in Shakespeare's time: parent-child conflict, teenage love, friendship and peer pressure, and suicide" (Reed 1993, 93). On the contrary, a survey of a number of children's versions of *Romeo and Juliet* in prose, from the first narrative renditions of the play in English, by Charles Lamb (1807) to contemporary versions, reveals that these narratives offer quite different angles from which to look at family politics and gender representations as central themes which resonate differently in different ages.

While Shakespeare's theatrical text can keep all interpretive choices open, narrative versions for children need to narrow the spectrum of interpretations, changing a dialogical theatrical form into a linear monological narrative. I am going to concentrate on the relationships between generations, and the way narrators focus and comment on the family crisis originated in the play. In the manner adolescents are represented and are seen to claim a right to a private space in the civic space occupied by the two feuding families, these adaptations are revealing of *their* notions of the family and the way adolescents defy contemporary morality - all the while providing a mediated, safe and often abridged version of the play which would ultimately have educational value for a female readership.

In Lamb's *Tales* omitting the Histories and the Roman plays may have been justified by the slight interest ladies were believed to take in battles and history: as has been noted, "love is the one element of the plot which is never abridged" (Marsden 1989, 52) and its centrality in the *Tales* is further emphasised by the concentration on a single story-line. However, although *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about young love and the way love may not be a central factor in marriage, especially when it is the parents who choose a partner for their offspring, Lamb's version tends to be less conventionally romantic than later versions (cf. Bottoms 2000, 19) and less willing to reproduce the ideology of romantic love (cf. Callaghan 1994). Romeo is introduced as "a sincere and passionate lover, and one that lost his sleep for love" (Lamb & Lamb 2007, 210) long before he meets Juliet, and when they do meet and then separate after the balcony scene, the narrator glosses that "she had been smitten with the same hasty and inconsiderate passion for Romeo, which he had conceived for her" (212). The narrator goes to great pains to justify Juliet's confession of love:

She, unconscious of being overheard, and full of the new passion which that night's adventure called upon her lover by name (whom she supposed absent) [...] The lady continued her passionate discourse with herself (as she thought). (212-3)

When she realises that Romeo has been there all along, "a crimson blush came over Juliet's face [...] she would fain have recalled her words, but

that was impossible" (213). The narrator then reassures its readers that "nothing was further from his thoughts [Romeo's] than to impute a shadow of dishonour to such an honoured lady" (214). As it should be expected, the nurse puts in only a brief appearance. The Lambs were the first of many generations of adapters to cut subplots, minor characters as well as bawdy talk and double-entendres. Lord Capulet's choice of Paris is represented as sensible: "The husband he had chosen for her, not dreaming that she was married already, a gallant, young and noble gentleman, no unworthy suitor to the young Juliet, if she had never seen Romeo" (219).

As often happens in Lambs' *Tales*, characters are described through a narrow range of descriptive terms that work as labels which clarify for the reader their moral traits. For example, the friar is invariably referred to as "the holy man" (215) or "this good friar" (215, 218, 219) and once as "the friendly friar" (220). Consistently with this unambiguous characterization, at the end of the tale the friar is cleared "from any hand he could be supposed to have had in these complicated slaughters" (225). Descriptors are also used to divide characters along age lines: on one side Romeo, the young Montague, who "had never thoroughly entered into the family quarrel, being by nature wise and gentle" (116), "young Juliet" (220) and the "young count Paris" (220, 223), and on the other side, the parents, led by "the old lord Capulet" (219) whose reaction to Juliet's decision to marry Paris (she, "modestly dissembling, promised to become his bride", 220) is rejuvenation: "It seemed to put youth into the old man" (220). After the marriage, Juliet is referred to as Romeo's "dear lady" (218, 222) or "dear wife" (219), and he becomes "her dear husband" (220), as if the marriage had in some way removed them from the 'young' category, and upgraded them to a more defined, acceptable and mature position in the social hierarchy of the play. Lamb is also more sympathetic to the parents than later adapters. For example, when Juliet refuses to marry Paris, Lord Capulet

was deaf to all her excuses, and in a peremptory manner ordered her to get ready, for by the following Thursday she should be married to Paris: and having found her a husband rich, young and noble, such as the proudest maid in Verona might joyfully accept, he could not bear that out of an affected coyness, as he construed her denial, she should oppose obstacles to her own good fortune. (220)

When Juliet changes her mind following the friar's advice, "Juliet, who had displeased him exceedingly by her refusal of the count, was his darling again" (220-1). And when they believe Juliet is dead,

still more piteous it was to hear the mournings of the old lord and lady Capulet who having but this one, one poor loving child to rejoice and solace in, cruel death had snatched her from their sight, just as these care-

ful parents were on the point of seeing her advanced (as they thought) by a promising and advantageous match. (211)

Although in the end the parents' responsibility for the feud is not underplayed ("so did these poor old lords, when it was too late, strive to outgo each other in mutual courtesies", 226) there is a touch of compassion for these unfortunate parents (Capulet is not portrayed as an abusing father) who in the domestic sphere appear well-meaning in the way they conform to the rules and duties of a patriarchal society, like arranging a marriage. They don't seem to fail so much as parents, but as heads of families that have created the civic crisis in Verona by putting their private quarrels before the common good, even though this is precisely what brings about domestic tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century women studied and popularized Shakespeare's plays through children's and adults' editions, actresses' memoirs (the fame such performers as Ellen Terry or Helen Faucit were enjoying at the time celebrated what was perceived as a strong connection between Victorian womanhood and Shakespeare's female characters), critical articles in journals, and the establishment of reading groups for women. As Prince (2008, 79) has argued, "Victorian women had their choice of a wide variety of modes for experiencing Shakespeare". Gail Marshall (2009) in her *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* has analysed the way Victorian women were interested in discussing the nature of Shakespeare's hold over them and the necessity of his cultural inheritance - as if the difference and the distance between Shakespeare and the Victorians were recognized and then suspended, and the Bard, mediated and explained, could indeed instruct Victorian girls in how best to be feminine (or 'womanly', a favourite adjective of the period). The hugely popular *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical* (1832) by Anna Jameson<sup>3</sup> was one of the pioneering works in establishing a tradition of female character criticism in the nineteenth century. As Julie Hankey notes, "After Jameson it became commonplace to describe Shakespeare as the 'champion' of women" (1994, 427). Along the same lines, Cowden Clarke writes in her essay "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend":

Her sex is set before her, limned with the utmost fidelity, painted in genuinest colors, for her to study and copy from or vary from, in accordance with what she feels and learns to be supremest harmonious effect in self-amelioration of character. (1887, 355)

2 See also Chapter 4, "The Family: Behaviour, Convention, Social Agreement and Their Breakdown", in Hunter & Lichtenfels 2009.

3 For an introduction to Anna Jameson and her contribution to character criticism, cf. Slights 1993.

Female critics of Shakespeare developed ways to discuss Shakespeare's female characters as if they were idealized models of real human beings with which girl readers could identify.<sup>4</sup> For most of the nineteenth and twentieth century heroines acted as sites of projection for different constructions of femininity. Speculating on the heroines' past or future lives, supplying motivations according to the logic of realism that was characteristic of the novel (Fleming 2000, 13), and releasing female characters from their pre-destined theatrical spaces was the point of departure for imaginative journeys such as those undertaken by Mary Cowden Clarke in *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (2009). But even Anna Jameson, who inserts Juliet in the category of "characters of passions and the imagination" and writes that "Juliet is love itself. The passion is her state of being, and out of it she has no existence" ([1832] 1858, 163), ultimately needs to imagine a past for her heroine, in which she is a rich heiress.

Cowden Clarke was one of the most remarkable female scholars of Shakespeare and already had an established career as editor and philologist when she published her collection of 15 novellas which reconstruct the childhood and teenage years of a number of Shakespeare's female characters. Clarke's prequels can be considered appropriations rather than adaptations – my working definition of appropriation being that provided by Julie Sanders.<sup>5</sup> However, *unlike* the Lambs' *Tales* and most Victorian/Edwardian children's Shakespeares, Cowden Clarke's novellas are defined by narrative amplification: new characters and new incidents and episodes are interpolated into the familiar world of the plays. A typical trait of Clarke's novellas is the addition of female "doubles" who provide a mirror to the heroines' experiences.

Mothers are the co-protagonists of many novellas of Clarke's collection where the reader can see the formative (both for good and bad) influence of mothers at work and ponder on the way this relationship affects the behaviour of the heroine. We should not forget that these tales were suitable for family reading: mothers were also the recipients of these tales (in their own very peculiar way, these tales can be considered an early example of Crossover fiction). The theme of education in these tales is central, as we follow in detail the heroines' emotional, intellectual and sentimental education (or lack of it – as in the case of Juliet). The heroines' future

4 "Long before a feminist sisterhood was born in the 1960s, nineteenth-century women writers appealed to an audience of fellow women among whom they expected to find sympathetic readers" (Ziegler, Dolan & Roberts 1997, 19).

5 "Appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations" (Sanders 2006, 26).

choices appear to be determined primarily by the kind of family environment they were born in, by what they learned (or rather, by what they didn't learn) first from their mothers and then from their masters, friends, nurses and mentors. Cowden Clarke's "Juliet: the White Dove of Verona" concentrates mainly on the love education of Juliet's mother, Angelica, who is married as a teenager to the shallow and gallant Lord Capulet, an old friend of her father's. Angelica falls in love with her husband almost immediately but her insecurity prevents the couple from reaching happiness and mutual understanding for many years. Lord Capulet is described as a "good-humoured voluptuary [...] full of lively gossip, proficient in all the scandal of the day, versed in all the talk, the practice, the intrigue, of society" (2009, 349) whose life has been "a mere pursuit of pleasure". Angelica's jealousy, which she hides from her husband behind a cold exterior behaviour, is misplaced. Giacinta, the first lady she believes her husband has fallen in love with, dies unexpectedly and Lady Capulet, at the funeral, witnesses the suicide of a young man, falling on her corpse. The couple were secretly betrothed:

His corpse was laid beside hers on the bier; the chanting of the dirge was resumed; the funereal ceremonies proceeded; Giacinta and her betrothed were borne together to one tomb, and side by side rested in death. (372)

This is in effect an Italianate novella which owes a lot to revenge tragedy motifs. In this anticipation of the unhappy fate of the star-crossed lovers, as well as in other incidents, much is made of poison. The next lady Juliet's mother is jealous of, is her husband's ward Leonilda: first she poisons a pair of gloves that her husband was going to give Leonilda as a gift (she is brought to her senses when she sees little Juliet playing with a similar pair), then she silently employs an assassin (here we are in a Radcliffian gothic world of banditti) to get rid of her - only much later it will be revealed that Leonilda has died of natural causes (but the assassin keeps blackmailing Lady Capulet until she gains this knowledge). When her husband does stray in the end, Lady Capulet is not capable of reading the signs and even befriends this high-class courtesan by the suggestive name of Virginia (who falls in love, eventually, with Mercutio, who cynically rejects her). Lady Capulet, neglected and feeling more and more insecure, even envisages taking a lover, but soon realizes that she is still much in love with her husband, and invites her admirer to find true love elsewhere. As has been noted, "What young Victorian mother, neglected as she might be by her lawful husband, could seriously contemplate taking a lover after reading Mrs Clarke's redundant but impressive message?" (Gross 1972, 50; cf. also Brown 2005). Most of the novella actually describes the way Angelica learns how to overcome her marriage crisis - she



can thus be considered an example of good wife (if not mother) behaviour. Prudence is the supreme virtue and happiness cannot be found outside marriage (this, at least, for ladies); this is the warning the narrator issues to the benefit of its female audience, composed of mothers and daughters. But what of Juliet? Only a few pages of this novella are devoted to Lady Capulet's daughter. Like Ophelia in the same collection, she spends the first few years of her life with the nurse, and we have a description of the earthquake that killed Susan, the nurse's little daughter mentioned in the play, and her husband. Clearly the lady Angelica is too engrossed in her own complicated marriage life to care for her daughter's education so, like other heroines, Juliet is left to her own devices and to a secluded life, the only people she associates with being her cousin Tybalt and the Friar:

For the lively questions that naturally sprang to her lips, learned to restrain themselves from utterance, when, through a course of years, they met with monosyllables, or short sentences spoken abstractedly, in reply. Gradually, her communion with both father and mother became almost entirely restricted to the wonted periodical salutes, exchanged between Italian parent and child, when she kissed, first their cheeks, and then their hands, on bidding them good-morning - after meal-time - and before retiring to rest. [...] The person whom Juliet held in chiefest reverence as her friend and counsellor, was her spiritual director [...] a certain holy man, called Friar Lawrence. With him she learned to perceive and partially to analyse the feelings, the impulses, the aspirations within her. With him she attained something of self-consciousness. (443-4)

But it is obvious that Juliet's education is far from being complete, especially as she "inherited a susceptible disposition from her father" and, from her mother, "a sensitive, passionate temperament" (444). It is as if Juliet were all nature and no culture, but a nature that is informed by "a natural affinity with the beautiful. [...] Her heart informed her mind. It might be said, that her feelings, rather than her understanding, thought" (445) (the intellectual of the family is her cousin Rosaline, who is her opposite in everything). As in Jameson's vision of Juliet as the embodiment of passion, Cowden Clarke's Juliet is "awaiting [...] the vital fire of Love, which was to make her, from a dreaming child into a sentient, passionate woman" (451). The narrator appears to have exhausted the moralistic and didactic intent in the depiction of Lady Capulet and the dangers a lady in a similar position may be exposed to - as the reader must already have learned her lessons by her example, Juliet can be described as someone in between states, blooming, and ready to be awakened to mature life by the events of *Romeo and Juliet* (Clarke's novellas end immediately before the heroines make their entrances into the plays).



It is clear that the Lambs' *Tales* and Cowden Clarke's *Girlhood* represent two remarkably different traditions. The "Lamb tradition" extending to writers such as Garfield or Birch, relies on the structure of the short story collection. Versions in this tradition can also be considered reductions or abridgements; they do not supplement Shakespeare's meanings with creative material and in general they are less likely to perform acts of radical cultural appropriation than expanded versions.

The *Tales* have enjoyed continual success since publication and many collections have reproduced their style and structure. Most were published in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, at the same time in which England was experiencing an unprecedented flowering of the literary fairy tale for children (see Zipes 1999). These versions on the whole tend to embrace the ideology of romantic love more decidedly than the Lamb's *Tales* (for example, there is invariably a fairy-tale element in the description of the ball at the Capulets' palace where Romeo and Juliet fall in love at first sight) although they often insert elements of comedy. For example, Adelaide Gordon Sim's *Phoebe's Shakespeare* (Phoebe was Sim's niece) (1894), makes the most of act 2, scene 5 in which the nurse is reluctant to tell Juliet about her meeting with Romeo (similarly, Hoffman's *The Children's Shakespeare* (1911) ridicules a lame nurse, while Sim's has rheumatism). But Sim is not ready to make allowances for Romeo's planned suicide: "he did a very wicked thing" when he went to the apothecary, remarks the narrator, "if only Romeo had been a little more patient and less selfish, and had remembered that he had no right to kill himself just because he was unhappy" (1894, 145-6). There is a general tendency to sympathise more with Juliet than with Romeo, who is often described as an immature and irrational youth. In Nesbit's version (1897) Romeo "wanted to love somebody, and as he hadn't seen the right lady, he was obliged to love the wrong one" [Rosaline] (Nesbit 2004, 10-1). In contrast, in Constance and Mary Maud's *Shakespeare's Stories* (1913, 44), Juliet is perceptive and intelligent, as well as beautiful and innocent, as she is described as "knowing her parent [her mother] far better than that they knew her [...]. Her mother [...] had brought her up well in spite of the spoiling of the nurse". In Mary MacLeod's *The Shakespeare Story Book* after the exchange of love vows, Juliet "could scarcely rejoice in the contract they had made; it seemed too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, to last" (1902, 142) while we see Romeo through the friar's perception:

he foresaw that one of Romeo's passionate, excitable nature was never likely to be happy; the hot-headed young man was always in extremes, either in a state of rapture or in the depths of despair. He would listen to no counsel, and never paused to reflect. (143)

In these versions, when the nurse is not a comical character, she unambiguously takes the parents' side and is portrayed as selfish – it is her insensitive behaviour that drives Juliet to despair as she feels deserted by *all* her loved ones. For example, in MacLeod the nurse is “good-natured after a fashion, but vulgar-minded, and very selfish if anything came to cross her own convenience. [...] When trouble arose, the nurse's shallow, selfish nature became apparent and poor Juliet was soon to learn that she must rely solely on her own strength and judgement in the sorrows that overwhelmed her” (147-8). In Thomas Carter's *Stories from Shakespeare* Juliet “could not have had a more unworthy comforter, for the nurse was an unscrupulous old woman, and her counsels were always of a selfish type” (1910, 250). In these revisions the lovers, especially Juliet, are alone against an unlucky fate – the occasional moments of comic relief (some of these versions have Romeo dressed up as a pilgrim at the party, which makes his courting metaphors appropriate) do not dispel a generally sombre atmosphere.

In contrast, contemporary Young Adult novels based on *Romeo and Juliet*, tend to emphasize the comedy element. It is as if the generic instability that has been noted in the play (cf. for example Snyder 1970 and Rozett 1985), a play that has lots of affinity with comedy, was resolved by having the plot avoid the shift into tragedy after the first half of the play and continue, consistently, into the romantic comedy mode. Some of these novels based on *Romeo and Juliet* rely on a different chronotope: Avi Wortis's *Romeo and Juliet. Together (and Alive!) At Last* (1987) relocates Shakespeare's story in a school where a group of teenagers put on a quite disastrous and therefore very humorous production of the play (in which “Alack a day” becomes “I lack a day” and “What an unkind hour. Is guilty of this lamentable chance” turns into “What unkind hour is guilty of this lemon table chance”). In the play the two very shy students taking the lead finally have an opportunity to declare their love and after a while students start to identify with their roles: the boy playing Tybalt, who tries to disturb the performance, ends with a week's suspension, while the boy playing Romeo uses Shakespearian words to defend himself from the school bully:

Saltz swung around and began to shout lines from the play at Hamilton. “I do protest,” he said, “I never injured thee!”

That made Hamilton blink. Me too.

Saltz went on. “All the same, I bite my thumb at you!” And he did. Hamilton, for once, was speechless.

I never thought Shakespeare could be useful like that. I was impressed. (Wortis 1987, 58-9)

The world of skirmish and violence of *Romeo and Juliet* is here transposed into teenage bullying at school – a reality that today's young readers may well be familiar with.

David Belbin's *Love Lessons* (1998) is also set in a school.<sup>6</sup> In this novel the impediment to the romance is not the feud but the difference in age and position of the two central characters, a 15-year-old student and her teacher, Mike, who is in his twenties. This version also emphasizes for a contemporary readership the inappropriateness and inequality of the situation and the secrecy it requires. As in Avi's novel, the love story is paralleled by a production of the play in which Rachel, the Juliet character, is cast in the role of Juliet and a boy her age in the part of Romeo. However, the 'real life' Romeo and Juliet situation between Rachel and Mike breaks the rules of the school microcosm which forbids relationships between students and teachers has dire consequences, as Mike loses his job and Rachel her chance to go to college. As their relationship is ending, a cynical side of Mike emerges:

Mike had never had to finish with anybody before. When the time came, he would break it to her gently. Maybe Rachel would work it out for herself beforehand. Maybe the two of them would simply let things fizzle out over the summer. If Rachel was mature about it, maybe they'd even manage to remain friends.

Or maybe not. (Belbin 1998, 229)

In this novel the didactic intent is more explicit than usual. Young Adult fiction, as has been noted by Falconer (2010, 89) generally concerns itself with questions of gender identity and thresholds between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Here a dangerous threshold appears to have been stepped across, and the love lessons that have been imparted by Mike complicate and interrogate the young reader's notions of romance that wins everything.

Lisa Fiedler's *Romeo's Ex. Rosaline's Story* (2006) is the contemporary novel that most follows Cowden Clarke's format, with which it shares a number of stylistic and ideological features, such as the choice to focus on a marginalized female character, and the construction of a fictional prequel within the narrative. Although Cowden Clarke has an extradiegetic narrator, while Klein's novel presents the story mainly through the eyes of Rosaline, this novel is aligned with *The Girlhood* in the addition of motivation, extra information on the play, and new characters. Even if Rosaline's narration is occasionally interspersed with shorter chapters by Benvolio, Romeo, Mercutio and Tybalt, we watch the familiar story of *Romeo and Juliet* unfold through the wise and commonsensical perspective of a character almost entirely invented but which provides a remarkable alternative

6 Avi Wortis's *Romeo and Juliet. Together (and Alive!) At Last* and David Belbin's *Love Lessons* are discussed in Megan Lynn Isaac 2000.

to Juliet – in fact, Juliet emerges as an ‘anti-model’ for the young girl reader of today. When she confides in Rosaline after Romeo has been banished, her wiser cousin suggests a different course of action:

“Mark me, cousin, there is nothing mighty in quitting life. The only victory is summoning the audacity to stay. If you truly wish to exert power in the face of your father’s cruelty, there is only one thing for you to do”.

“And what is that?” she asks.

“Live. No daggers, no potions. Live and tell your lord that you cannot marry for you have already married”. (195)

As in Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* (1966) what is offstage (Rosaline’s encounters with Romeo, for example) becomes the main action, while the Romeo and Juliet plot proceeds to its predetermined ending, but with a twist. In the Capulet family vault Rosaline detects that Romeo is not dead and gives him a powerful antidote so that he does not die after all (for Juliet there’s nothing to do although Rosaline is tempted to try and perform a heart transplant from Tybalt who is not dead yet). He escapes death, but not a long tirade from Rosaline on the irrationality of teenage love and the way suicide should not be a solution to a crisis:

“Love?” I roar, fist clenched. “Bloody hell, that word should leave a blister on thy tongue. Your recklessness, yours and Juliet’s, was an affront to true devotion, your irreverence dishonored love. You met and admired one another and impiously called it love. ‘Twas quick and bright and dangerous and magical. But you did not *think*. You settled for desire, but did not allow time for love”.

“And now”, he concedes, “she lies here, dead, as would I, were it not for you”. (226)

The couple that the reader is supposed to admire, unsurprisingly, is that of Rosaline and Benvolio, although Rosaline falls for Mercutio first, and even climbs his balcony to tell him her love, only to be rejected and ridiculed (so in a way, she mirrors Romeo’s own path from infatuation to love). As often happens in Cowden Clarke’s novellas, the Benvolio-Rosaline couple provides a double for the Shakespearian one – coming from the same feuding households, but with more time to get to know each other. Rosaline is an early modern version of a career woman so she refuses Benvolio’s marriage proposal – and this is where more anachronism intrudes in the plot – in order to answer her calling and study medicine at the university of Padua, where she is escorted by none other than Petruchio and Grumio. Four years later (in 1599) and without a formal degree (“I fear ‘twill be decades before the university, enlightened as it is, will have the courage to bestow a degree upon a lady”, 245) she returns to a pacified Verona

and to Benvolio who has been waiting for her all along. This novel engages playfully with the Shakespearian intertext and borrows motives from other Shakespearean plays. The reader is constantly alerted to possible collision between various dramatic worlds: for example, Benvolio befriends a couple of orphan twins called Viola and Sebastian and rescues them from poverty, and characters meet at a tavern called "The Untamed Shrew".

In this version of *Romeo and Juliet* Rosaline is given a voice which opens up new narrative possibilities. She plays many parts, from that of confidante and friend (in a way she embraces the friar's role although not his plans) to healer and lover, but refuses that of the victim to the old generation's decisions and actions: her narrative of survival opposes itself to Juliet in the fashioning of an empowered character that challenges and transgresses both the Elizabethan code of gender behaviour and the Great Code of canonical literature. In the absence of family education, characters like Rosaline and Benvolio educate themselves, thus refashioning gender identities that can be resilient and rebellious, but also wise and mature. By contrast, prose retellings in the earlier collections of tales tend to intervene by eliminating characters and sections in order to concentrate on the educational implications of the Young vs Old People's choices and the way the Young respond to the Old by precipitating the crisis started with the feud. With different degrees of inventiveness, both the retellings in the Lambs' tradition and the contemporary amplified prose narratives interrogate the canon "simply through changes in the mode of discourse [...] since the language and style of the pre-texts are usually not then reproduced" (Stephens 2009, 94-5).

By exploring motivation, establishing new links between the characters, and having narrators pass authoritative moral judgements, all these texts negotiate with well-established critical interpretations of the play, often challenging and channelling them into unexpected critical directions. Although narrative versions of *Romeo and Juliet* can't help being loaded with the baggage of the tragedy's associations, the female young reader may be captured by the power of narrative fiction – in the same way, we might imagine, in which Shakespeare was captured by novellas about the story of the two lovers from Verona. Narrative amplification in the Young Adult novels adds a creative impulse to the narrative reconfiguration of the play, implicitly inviting girl readers to reflect on the differences, and occasional similarities, in the growing up crises of early modern or medieval teenagers and today's adolescents.

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## **Vita teatrale e sviluppo culturale a Liverpool tra il 1740 e il 1820**

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**Abstract** The pace of theatrical life in Romantic Liverpool – as in the provinces in general – was a tight schedule that involved both the lives of managers, actors and actresses, and the management of every season, as the provincial theatres were places where the players, while experiencing theatrical conditions different from those in the capital, might serve their apprenticeship, practise their skills and test the reaction of the public as well. After tracing back the origins of the first theatres in Liverpool in the second half of the eighteenth century – through biographies, periodicals referring to Liverpool theatre, and Broadbent's *Annals of the Liverpool Stage* –, the analysis will focus on the presence of managers such as Joseph Younger, Philip Mattocks, and Francis Aickin in Liverpool from 1772 until the end of the century, and their relation with actors of Kemble's and Siddons' calibre. The third aspect that will be highlighted is the importance of theatrical life in Liverpool seen in a wider perspective of cultural vitality strictly connected to forms of investment.

**Keywords** Liverpool. Romanticism. Theatre. Cultural vitality.

Nel 1805 James Winston, figura eclettica nel panorama teatrale inglese, architetto, illustratore, manager e attore, pubblica *The Theatrical Tourist*, un accurato inventario di ventiquattro teatri di provincia, unico per l'epoca, corredato dalle tavole dei prospetti disegnate a mano. Pur trattandosi di una selezione – il numero complessivo ammontava a circa novanta, confermerà poco più di vent'anni dopo Lemau Thomas Rede (1827) in *The Road to the Stage* – il resoconto fornito da Winston offre una ampia panoramica delle realtà dei teatri di provincia, spaziando da località come Bath, già nota fin dal secolo precedente come luogo di villeggiatura, passando per città interessate da una fase di rapido sviluppo economico e demografico come Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester e Newcastle, per giungere a centri minori quali Exeter, Reading e Grantham.

Della città di Liverpool tra le pagine di Winston si legge «from its trade, situation, and other advantages, it may generally be considered a successful resort» (1805, 51) e «The people of Liverpool, though opulent, having acquired vast sums by trade, are not the most enlightened. They are, as is natural under such circumstances, prejudiced and tenacious, though they are extremely generous wherever they approve» (53). Più di un aspetto ne fa un luogo predisposto allo sviluppo di una cultura teatrale o, piuttosto, a una sua rivalutazione in chiave moderna e commerciale. Percorrendo a ri-

troso le forme di intrattenimento realizzate a Liverpool, le attestazioni più lontane nel tempo raccontano di raffinate esibizioni di giullari normanni nel castello della città fin dall'undicesimo secolo, poi sostituite da spettacoli di carattere più popolare nelle fiere e nei mercati, per arrivare alle rappresentazioni del sedicesimo secolo, realizzate da attori girovaghi nella torre di Liverpool e privilegio solo delle classi più abbienti. Liverpool tra la metà del Settecento e i primi dell'Ottocento è una città ricca e fiorente, abitata e percorsa, oltre che da mercanti e viaggiatori, da un'élite di intellettuali – un nome per tutti, quello di William Roscoe – che intravedono negli investimenti in ambito culturale la chiave di uno sviluppo in grado di abbracciare ogni aspetto della vita della città.

I primi teatri civici, secondo quanto riportato da Broadbent (1908) negli annali da lui redatti, saranno il Town Hall, utilizzato anche come tribunale, e il Cockpit Yard, un edificio modesto, probabilmente un vecchio magazzino, di cui si conserveranno tracce fino agli inizi del diciannovesimo secolo. Quel che le note sulla città di Liverpool e sui suoi abitanti fornite da Winston e da Broadbent e le biografie dei manager e degli attori rivelano è la volontà di emancipazione dei teatri di provincia dalle attività culturali londinesi, pur al prezzo di ritmi di produzione serrati e condizioni non sempre favorevoli.

Per cominciare, gli anni che vanno dal 1740 al 1780 videro uno sviluppo straordinario dal punto di vista architettonico e delle infrastrutture, tanto nelle province dell'area londinese quanto in Irlanda e in Scozia (Nicoll 1980, 61). Non è facile risalire con precisione alla data di inaugurazione dei primi teatri di Liverpool, quel che è certo è che dopo la costruzione dell'Old Ropery nel 1740 ad opera dell'ingegnere navale Thomas Steers, il teatro principale, il Drury Lane, aprì intorno al 1750 sotto la gestione congiunta di Gibson e Ridout, entrambi membri della London Covent Garden Theatre Company, molto apprezzati dal pubblico di Liverpool.

Nel 1768 William Gibson, già impegnato con le attività del Drury Lane di Londra, inizia a porre le basi per l'apertura del Theatre Royal di Liverpool con la richiesta di una licenza. In seguito alla Restaurazione solo nei Patent Theatres era permessa la rappresentazione di *spoken drama*, mentre commedie, pantomime e melodrammi si svolgevano nei teatri privi di licenza. Nonostante il Licensing Act del 1737 avesse dichiarato illegali e bandito tutte le rappresentazioni nei teatri di provincia a favore dei teatri londinesi, vi furono molte pressioni perché il Parlamento lo revocasse. A iniziare dal 1767 Edimburgo ottenne la sua licenza, seguita da Bath e Norwich. Allo stesso modo a Liverpool la Camera dei Lord in principio rifiutò la richiesta di Gibson, per poi assecondarla e nel 1771 concedergli una licenza della durata di ventuno anni. Seguiranno Manchester nel 1775 e Bristol nel 1778.

Un altro dettaglio importante riguarda il finanziamento di tali progetti. Mentre in Germania e in altri paesi continentali erano le amministrazioni

delle singole città ad occuparsi della costruzione e della gestione dei teatri, in Inghilterra un simile impegno dipendeva esclusivamente da iniziative private. Pertanto il costo della costruzione del secondo teatro, stimato intorno alle seimila sterline, fu suddiviso in quote da duecento sterline l'una; ogni quota avrebbe garantito al donatore la titolarità di una 'tessera d'argento' per accedere gratuitamente alle rappresentazioni. Si racconta che la somma necessaria fu raggiunta in meno di un'ora dall'apertura delle sottoscrizioni e che il 3 giugno 1771 il primo cittadino di Liverpool, John Sparling, pose la prima pietra della nuova costruzione. Il nuovo teatro, costruito secondo il progetto dell'architetto Sir William Chambers, si presentava come un edificio spazioso e proporzionato, dotato di una ottima acustica, rifinito elegantemente sia al suo esterno che all'interno. Nel disegnare il suo progetto, Chambers si ispirò alla galleria presente nel Drury Lane, collocandola dove comunemente era posizionato l'ordine di palchi più alto.

L'anno successivo, in seguito alla morte di Gibson, la licenza per le rappresentazioni teatrali passò a Elizabeth Bennett, una donna a lui molto cara, che a sua volta la cedette per quattordici anni a Joseph Younger e George Mattocks, al costo annuale di centoquaranta sterline. Pur trattandosi di due attori non particolarmente famosi, erano entrambi amati dal pubblico di Liverpool, già noto il primo nel ruolo di suggeritore al Covent Garden di Londra, il secondo per aver recitato sulle scene di Liverpool fin dal 1765. La sera del 5 giugno 1772 tutta l'élite della città partecipò all'apertura del Theatre Royal. Joseph Younger pronunciò un intenso prologo composto da George Colman, a cui seguirono la messa in scena della tragedia *Mahomet* e della farsa *The Deuce is in Him*.

Nel settembre del 1784 la stampa salutò la scomparsa di Younger con un caloroso omaggio, definendolo dalle colonne del *Manchester Mercury* «a man of the strictest honour and integrity» (Burnim et al. 1973-93, 16, 366) e ricordando quanto egli avesse dato «constant proofs not only of an extensive knowledge of the business of the drama, but of the most liberal disposition to serve his distressed brethren» (367), come riportato da *The Public Advertiser*. Ormai unico titolare della licenza, George Mattocks svolse il ruolo di manager fino al 1786, ma pare che a causa di eccessive speculazioni economiche fu costretto a rinunciare alla gestione del teatro. Nel dicembre del 1786 una nuova licenza per le rappresentazioni fu concessa a George Case, uno degli amministratori dei proprietari del teatro, per un periodo di quindici anni. In realtà però soltanto sei anni dopo ci fu un ulteriore passaggio di licenza nelle mani di Francis Aickin, manager del Theatre Royal dal 1786. L'anno successivo assunse la gestione della stagione estiva e tre anni dopo ottenne, in collaborazione con John Philip Kemble, la locazione del teatro per sette anni.

Nei primi anni trascorsi a Liverpool in qualità di manager, Aickin si rivelò un modello di efficienza, ingrandì il teatro per ottenere una acustica

migliore e maggiore spazio, costruì un colonnato lungo l'ingresso di Williamson Square, fu attore e regista al tempo stesso e grazie al suo talento fu capace di attrarre a Liverpool i più celebri attori delle scene londinesi – Sarah Siddons, Joseph Munden, Charles Lee Lewes, John Bannister, Charles Incedon, Charles Farley, Stephen Kemble e molti altri. Sfortunatamente, il pubblico che frequentava il suo teatro era spesso rumoroso e violento – la stampa lamentava la presenza di marinai e prostitute negli ordini più alti della galleria – al punto che gli spettatori più rispettabili si rifiutarono di acquistare biglietti per le rappresentazioni, così come, col trascorrere del tempo, gli attori migliori declinarono gli inviti che venivano loro offerti. Il numero di ottobre del 1799 di *The Monthly Mirror* rimproverò pubblicamente Aickin per lo stato deplorabile dell'auditorium e delle scenografie e per la licenziosità del comportamento dei suoi spettatori. Con il passare degli anni e in assenza di una qualunque forma di competizione, Aickin divenne più permissivo e nel momento in cui il suo accordo per la gestione del teatro terminò nel gennaio 1803, la sua domanda di rinnovo non fu accolta, nonostante egli avesse offerto una somma superiore a quella con cui William Thomas Lewis e Thomas Knight infine conclusero il nuovo accordo. Entrambi avevano recitato a Liverpool tra il 1799 e il 1802 e ottennero una licenza per la gestione del teatro della durata di quattordici anni. Durante l'inverno del 1803, mentre erano impegnati con la stagione teatrale al Covent Garden di Londra, i due nuovi manager avviarono la ristrutturazione del teatro, la cui riapertura fu realizzata nel mese di giugno del 1803.

Ai ritmi serrati delle vite dei manager si intonavano quelli delle vite degli attori, impegnati a recitare durante le stagioni invernali nei due principali teatri della capitale, il Drury Lane e il Covent Garden, e pronti a viaggiare tra le località di provincia, dove le stagioni teatrali si svolgevano durante l'estate, in perfetta corrispondenza con la chiusura e la riapertura delle stagioni della capitale. Pionieri, li chiama Joseph Younger in un bel prologo rivolto al pubblico del Theatre Royal di Liverpool in apertura della stagione del 1774. Nei versi recitati da Younger gli attori sono truppe schierate con orgoglio, pronte a mostrare le insegne all'udire un rullo di tamburi, «eager to fight, to conquer, or to fall, | From first to hindmost». Il manager come un «old Serjeant» li richiama all'ordine ma per quanto la sua voce possa incoraggiarli, saranno solo gli applausi del pubblico a decretarne il successo e infondere in loro il giusto ardore. Così conclude, dando il benvenuto ai presenti e ricordando nell'ultimo verso lo scopo e l'auspicio delle vite movimentate condotte dagli attori: «Bless'd if we please you, whom to please we live!».

Tra gli attori itineranti, i nomi di John Philip Kemble e Sarah Siddons, ben noti sulle scene londinesi, spesso ricorrono nei documenti relativi alla vita teatrale e culturale dei teatri di provincia e in particolare della città di Liverpool tra la fine del diciottesimo e l'inizio del diciannovesi-

mo secolo. Una coincidenza felice quella che vede il loro apprendistato svolgersi proprio negli anni di rinascita delle attività culturali e teatrali della città. Il 26 giugno 1777 Kemble fu aggiunto alla *paylist* di Liverpool dove rimase anche per i mesi di ottobre e novembre. L'anno successivo vi ritornò per portare in scena una sua tragedia intitolata *Belisarius; or Injured Innocence*, poi recitata anche a York e Hull, ma mai giunta su un palco londinese. Secondo una lettera di referenza inviata da Liverpool a Tate Wilkinson per un incarico nello Yorkshire e datata giugno 1778, Kemble aveva nel suo repertorio sessantotto ruoli tragici e cinquantotto ruoli comici. Nei due anni successivi al suo debutto aveva già acquisito una notevole esperienza e, dopo aver svolto il proprio apprendistato a Liverpool - durante il quale, come riportato dal *Theatrical Inquisitor*, riceveva una paga di dieci scellini per ogni spettacolo in scena, che vi prendesse parte o meno - vi ritornò nell'estate del 1784 per recitare sotto la direzione di Younger e Mattocks. Sua sorella Sarah Siddons iniziò a recitare per Joseph Younger a Liverpool nel 1776 e, con il fratello, entrò a far parte della compagnia teatrale del manager per recitare nella stagione teatrale invernale a Worcester e Manchester. Nel luglio 1777 fece la sua prima apparizione nei panni di Gertrude in *Hamlet* - ruolo che avrebbe proposto sulle scene londinesi per la prima volta solo il 29 aprile 1796 - e nel mese di settembre recitò per la prima volta la parte della regina Elisabetta in *Richard III*. Della collaborazione con la compagnia di Younger si ricorda anche un celebre *Othello* recitato a Manchester nel 1778 con Kemble nei panni del Moro, Sarah Siddons nei panni di Desdemona e Younger in quelli di Iago.

L'attrice tornò a Liverpool a giugno del 1783 e poi ancora nell'estate del 1786, recitando per sedici sere consecutive. A Liverpool, dove John Kemble e Francis Aickin erano subentrati nella gestione del teatro nel mese di gennaio, la Siddons provò a conquistare il favore del pubblico recitando nei mesi di novembre e dicembre del 1789. Il 26 giugno 1797 *King Lear* fu rappresentato «for the benefit of the divine Sarah», dunque per uno spettacolo i cui compensi sarebbero spettati interamente all'attrice, come annunciavano i manifesti in occasione dell'ultima sera in cui avrebbe recitato su quelle scene.

Recitare nei teatri di provincia significava essere costantemente pronti a viaggiare - a volte durante la notte e in pessime condizioni - e ad adattare la propria vita a luoghi diversi, diverse gestioni e un pubblico estremamente vario, sera dopo sera. Tuttavia molti tra i più famosi attori delle scene londinesi sceglievano di recitare nei teatri di provincia perché in alcuni casi erano luoghi in grado di fornire delle 'libertà drammaturgiche' irrealizzabili nei teatri della capitale, sovente disciplinati da regole e convenzioni difficili da trasgredire e con platee molto più esigenti. Un esempio per tutti è l'interpretazione del personaggio di Amleto che Sarah Siddons propose nei teatri di provincia più di una volta tra gli anni settanta e gli anni novanta del diciottesimo secolo. La Siddons non intendeva contesta-

re la tradizione di interpreti maschili del principe di Danimarca vigente sulle scene londinesi – da Garrick a Kemble – ma al tempo stesso quelle consuetudini non le impedirono di proporre al pubblico delle province l'energia e la delicatezza della propria interpretazione dell'eroe tragico shakespeariano. Il pubblico dei teatri di provincia era forse meno elegante e sofisticato di quello della capitale, ma la genuinità del suo carattere gli consentiva di apprezzare e incoraggiare le nuove possibilità interpretative che gli attori sperimentavano durante le stagioni estive.

Nel caso di Liverpool si può sostenere che l'emergere di una cultura più raffinata sulle prime fu impedito dal vigoroso spirito commerciale di una città impegnata in una rapida serie di cambiamenti occorsi nel secolo successivo alla Restaurazione. Liverpool era dominata dal commercio, e pur se ad un livello inferiore, dal settore manifatturiero. Prova ne furono i più importanti interventi architettonici a favore dei magazzini costruiti lungo i *docks*. La classe mercantile svolse un ruolo determinante nei cambiamenti in atto a Liverpool tra il 1680 e il 1800. Sebbene modesta se considerata in relazione all'élite londinese dell'epoca, era sostenuta da una oligarchia mercantile in costante evoluzione, in grado di abbracciare gli interessi di ogni nuova ondata imprenditoriale e coinvolgerne i suoi membri più rappresentativi (cf. Belchem 2006, 140).

La cordialità e la capacità di aggregazione erano elementi comuni nella realizzazione di progetti culturali ed erano di importanza vitale in una comunità che si fondava sulle reti di cittadini e sulla circolazione di capitale. È interessante a tal proposito evidenziare come persino le attività culturali fossero plasmate dalle consuetudini lavorative della classe mercantile. Se si osserva il primo teatro costruito in Drury Lane da Steers negli anni quaranta del Settecento, all'apparenza può sembrare un edificio grossolano, comprendente solo platea e galleria, ma in realtà fu molto apprezzato da mercanti, marinai e uomini provenienti dalle vicine realtà rurali, perché ben si intonava alla loro propensione per attività poco raffinate e spesso svolte all'aperto, come si può evincere dalla mappa di Liverpool disegnata da John Eyes nel 1765, in cui si possono notare due campi da bocce, delle terme, un viale alberato chiamato Ladies' Walk e le aree verdi dei Ranelagh Gardens, inaugurati nel 1759.

L'accento principale era posto sulla convivialità e sull'intrattenimento, più che sulla necessità di stimoli intellettuali. Tuttavia anche in questo ambito nell'ultimo quarto di secolo si registrò una graduale fioritura di interesse per le attività culturali, con l'inaugurazione dell'Athenaeum nel 1799, del Lyceum tre anni dopo e, nel 1814, della Liverpool Royal Institution. Athenaeum e Lyceum erano sale di lettura pubbliche al pari delle biblioteche ed erano concepiti per fornire lo stesso accesso libero all'informazione, seppur ad un livello più esclusivo, promosso in precedenza dalle locande e dalle *coffee-houses*. Tali cambiamenti ben si intonavano con un più generale sviluppo culturale iniziato nei primi anni del secolo

precedente e diffuso per tutte le province inglesi nelle forme di un 'Rinascimento urbano', come lo definisce Peter Borsay (1989), e al tempo stesso rispondevano al desiderio di prendere le distanze dalla deplorabile, e pur crescente, partecipazione di Liverpool al commercio degli schiavi.

Un altro elemento a favore dello sviluppo della città di Liverpool è dato dall'idea, condivisa dai suoi abitanti, della cultura come forma di investimento. Se si ritorna per un istante alla storia della costruzione del Theatre Royal - uno dei teatri di provincia più costosi dell'Inghilterra del Settecento - coloro che parteciparono alla sottoscrizione delle quote non provenivano esclusivamente dal mondo delle arti. Nel settembre 1772 i titolari delle quote del teatro erano per quasi due terzi gentiluomini, professionisti, mercanti e commercianti dallo spirito pragmatico, interessati a realizzare un investimento astuto. Un episodio simile si era già verificato nel 1758, all'atto della sottoscrizione di quote per l'edificazione della biblioteca di Liverpool, in cui quarantasette su centonove sottoscrittori erano mercanti. E tuttavia, per quanto significative per l'epoca, le cifre impegnate per la promozione di attività culturali appaiono irrisorie se considerate in relazione al costo di realizzazione degli edifici della Borsa, costruiti tra il 1803 e il 1807: in poche ore furono raccolte più di centodiecimila sterline.

Durante la seconda metà del diciottesimo secolo Liverpool si distinse anche per il pesante coinvolgimento nella tratta degli schiavi, una vicenda che favorì, accanto alla presenza di mercanti e imprenditori, la nascita di una classe di intellettuali liberali e dissenzianti coordinati dalla figura di William Roscoe. Quello che prese il nome di «Roscoe's Circle» e che in principio fu considerato una piccola società letteraria privata, in realtà coinvolgeva, tra i suoi membri, anglicani, ministri unitariani e uomini provenienti dal campo delle scienze mediche. Insieme a loro, Roscoe, scrittore, storico e uomo d'affari, realizzò progetti di ampio sviluppo e propose un esempio illuminante di come il commercio, l'educazione e le arti potessero cooperare con successo persino in un ambiente percorso e agitato da conflitti politici. In qualità di abolizionista e unitariano, fu spesso in violento contrasto con le forze commerciali e politiche dominanti della sua città. A tal proposito, l'istituzionalizzazione delle arti realizzata a Liverpool fornì un modello utile per i suoi seguaci americani, impegnati in sfide simili nell'affrontare la rapida espansione delle città della costa atlantica.

L'importanza del ruolo svolto da Roscoe nella promozione della cultura tra la fine del diciottesimo e l'inizio del diciannovesimo secolo può misurarsi osservando il numero e la qualità di iniziative in cui fu coinvolto: la Liverpool Society for Promoting Painting and Design (con esposizioni nel 1784 e nel 1787), l'Athenaeum Club, la Literary and Philosophical Society, la Liverpool Library, il giardino botanico, inaugurato nel 1802, e la Liverpool Royal Institution, aperta nel 1817. Il discorso che egli tenne in occasione dell'apertura della Liverpool *Royal Institution* nel novembre del 1817, intitolato *On the Origin and Vicissitudes of Literature, Science and*



*Art, and their Influence on the present State of Society*, riassume perfettamente la sua visione critica del passato e le intenzioni che egli coltivava guardando al futuro della città: «scientific and literary pursuits are not only consistent with our more serious avocations, but they have a direct and manifest tendency to promote the welfare and exalt the character of every community into which they have been introduced» (Roscoe 1817, 9).

Nonostante non vi siano testimonianze di un coinvolgimento diretto da parte di Roscoe e del suo circolo di intellettuali nella promozione della vita teatrale della città, lo sviluppo di cui le attività dei teatri di Liverpool hanno goduto tra la fine del diciottesimo e gli inizi del diciannovesimo secolo potrebbe essere letto in una prospettiva più ampia di promozione della cultura e delle arti in generale, come del ruolo dell'individuo e della sua capacità di produrre opere di alto livello qualitativo. Uno dei meriti di Roscoe fu infatti aver avuto l'illuminante percezione di quanto la collaborazione tra l'impresa commerciale e la fioritura delle arti avrebbe potuto portare frutti, soprattutto all'interno di una istituzione che, pur sovvenzionata da sottoscrizioni private, si offriva ad una più ampia fruizione pubblica. L'esempio del rapido sviluppo del porto atlantico, per molti lontano dal raffinato centro metropolitano della capitale, dev'essere sembrato molto attraente per città in via di espansione come New York e Boston.

La creatività di Roscoe si manifestò in particolare sotto forma di atti di mecenatismo e possibilità di forme più accessibili di attività pubbliche legate all'educazione e all'intrattenimento. Egli in qualche modo fu il nume tutelare dello sviluppo culturale della città di Liverpool e le attività da lui promosse furono sostenute da istituzioni produttive e vivaci che gli assicurarono fama indiscussa per molti anni, un successo di cui forse si può riconoscere una scintilla persino nel ruolo svolto da Liverpool nel 2008 come capitale della cultura. Il dinamismo della vita teatrale durante gli anni del Romanticismo e l'eccezionale contributo dato da Roscoe allo sviluppo della città appaiono come esempi pertinenti di quanto i cambiamenti realizzati in tutti gli ambiti, tra la fine del diciottesimo e l'inizio del diciannovesimo secolo, abbiano fornito le basi per una creatività culturale di lunga durata.

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## Un'ordinata bellezza Le traduzioni della casa editrice Laterza durante il regime fascista

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**Abstract** Laterza publishing house became one of the leading publishers in Italy between 1920 and 1945. Giovanni Laterza, its founder, in strict cooperation with Benedetto Croce, brought to Italy several foreign novels and philosophical essays. The idea lying behind this policy was to forge in the country a critical mass of ideal European readers, able to break the Italian cultural marginality and create new literary canons. This paper focuses, in particular, on the policy of Laterza publishing house, and analyses how responses to the fascist ambiguous 'revision' system changed depending on law, patronage, and material conditions in which the translators worked. After tracing a map of the whole corpus of foreign works (philosophical, historical and scientific) published by the Italian publisher, the focus moves to the five English literature translations issued during the regime (Milton's *Aereopagitica*; Huxley's *The Olive Tree*; Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*; Well's *A Short History of the Word*; More's *Utopia*), with particular attention paid to Huxley's *The Olive Tree* translated in 1939 by Ada Prospero Gobetti. Analyzing the unpublished correspondence among the translators, Laterza and Croce, and through a close reading of Huxley's book and its translation, it was possible to identify both the policy of the publisher and the different translation strategies adopted, that reflect respectively submission or resistance to the dominant thinking. This in turn made it possible to discuss more in general the role of ideology as an explicit (censorship) or implicit (self-censorship) component of the translation process.

**Keywords** Translation. Censorship.

A datare dal 1° aprile c.a. soltanto questo Ministero potrà autorizzare la diffusione in Italia delle traduzioni straniere; 2. Gli Editori possono inviare a questo Ministero direttamente o a mezzo della Prefettura, nella lingua originale, i libri che intendono tradurre in italiano; 3. Questo Ministero farà conoscere all'Editore - tramite la Prefettura competente - il suo giudizio nel termine più breve; 4. È data facoltà agli Editori di presentare le opere anche in bozze nella traduzione italiana.

(Fabre 2007, 28)

Così Dino Alfieri, Ministro della Cultura Popolare, decretava nella circolare nm. 1135 del 26 marzo 1938. Il 1938 è un anno cruciale per la censura editoriale negli anni del regime fascista. Infatti, anche se già dal 1934 il regime imponeva agli editori il *nihil obstat* alla pubblicazione di testi italiani e stranieri, nella pratica fino al 1937 la censura si era concentrata sul seque-

stro di opere, letterarie e non, di contenuto 'indiscutibilmente' pericoloso. Con la circolare del 1938 si obbligavano invece gli editori a inviare copia di tutte le loro pubblicazioni, in originale o in bozze, direttamente al Ministero, imponendo una sorta di auto-censura o di censura preventiva. Iniziava così una nuova e difficile stagione dell'attività editoriale italiana: gli editori cercavano l'approvazione ministeriale nella scelta stessa dei testi da pubblicare e, nel caso delle traduzioni, sottolineavano i loro 'interventi', i 'tagli' operati sugli originali, le manipolazioni 'dovute' affinché un testo potesse entrare a far parte delle letture del pubblico italiano senza 'corromperlo'. Già negli anni Venti il 'taglio', l'*editing* dei passaggi che avrebbero potuto esser considerati disdicevoli era pratica ammessa e consueta tra i traduttori e gli editori italiani, «questi arbitrari interventi si potevano effettuare più liberamente sui testi tradotti, poiché dovevano essere adattati alle mode correnti e ai parametri di gusto definiti dal regime: velocità, immediatezza, scioltezza di stile e argomenti accattivanti» (Billiani 2007, 202).

La scorrevolezza, l'addomesticamento di un testo tradotto (cf. Venuti 1995, 2000) era sia uno 'strumento' economico che assicurava la fruibilità del testo e dunque la sua vendibilità sia, al contempo, uno strumento di potere che permetteva al regime di 'filtrare', per così dire, la letteratura straniera importata in Italia, controllandone l'influenza sul pubblico italiano:

le traduzioni hanno contribuito ad evitare l'importazione dei volumi originali, non solo con vantaggio economico, ma anche spirituale. Ciò per un duplice motivo: perché leggendo le opere di autori tedeschi, inglesi, americani ed anche francesi, in lingua italiana, anziché come era norma, in lingua francese, quei prodotti letterari di civiltà straniere sono filtrati attraverso il pensiero italiano e perché il traduttore o l'editore italiano sanno presentare quelle opere con le opportune attenuazioni o soppressioni di cui non è traccia nell'originale. In altre parole: oggi si leggono in ottime traduzioni italiane quei libri che fin a pochi anni fa si leggevano in traduzioni francesi. (Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma, Segreteria Particolare del Duce/Carteggio Ordinario, 18 gennaio 1938, in Billiani 2007, 174-5)

Le traduzioni incarnavano l'incoerenza del fascismo: se da una parte permettevano di accrescere la cultura italiana, dall'altra rischiavano di essere l'immagine di un popolo attratto più dall'estero che dalla cultura nazionale. Dunque, se da un lato il fascismo auspicava una supremazia culturale italiana in ambito internazionale, dall'altro mirava a ottenere tale posizione dominante attraverso la partecipazione attiva alla vita culturale europea, infondendo nel 'genio italiano' il meglio delle culture straniere e 'addomesticandole' al punto che esse cessassero di essere estranee, straniere appunto.

La politica del regime fascista, così attenta alla diffusione della cultura italiana all'estero e straniera in Italia (Bonsaver 2007, 4-6), diventa, dal 1938 in poi, sempre più miope, accecata dalla volontà di pulizia etnica e

culturale che di lì a pochi mesi sarebbe esplosa (l'introduzione della legislazione razziale è del settembre 1938).

Eppure, anche alla fine degli anni Trenta, l'Italia era il paese europeo che traduceva il maggior numero di romanzi stranieri (Rundle 2010, 4-5). Nella letteratura straniera risiedeva la possibilità di sfuggire alla marginalità culturale e i lettori italiani avrebbero trovato posto in quell'*élite* culturale europea che decretava i nuovi canoni del gusto (Billiani 2004, 3). Le traduzioni erano, per gli editori, il luogo in cui la crisi culturale poteva trasformarsi in ripresa.

In questo complesso rapporto instaurato dal fascismo con l'editoria si innesta l'attività editoriale della casa editrice Laterza. Giovanni Laterza e Benedetto Croce diedero vita, insieme, a un progetto culturale che prendeva forma nelle scelte editoriali della casa editrice «Gius. Laterza & Figli». La collaborazione di Croce diede fondamenta solide alla tenacia di Laterza. Il filosofo napoletano (d'adozione) chiarì da subito la linea editoriale che Laterza avrebbe dovuto seguire nelle pubblicazioni della collana da lui diretta, la «Biblioteca Romantica»:

Credo poi che fareste bene ad astervi, almeno per ora, dall'accettare libri che sono romanzi, novelle e letteratura amena; e ciò per comparire come un editore con una fisionomia determinata: ossia come editore di libri politici, storici, di storia artistica, di filosofia, ecc...: editore di roba grave. (AL, AA,<sup>1</sup> 4 giugno 1902, citato in Coli 1983, 22)

Scegliere di pubblicare solo «roba grave» voleva dire plasmare, istruire e, in un certo senso, addirittura creare quegli intellettuali che si sarebbero dovuti fare promotori di una riforma culturale e morale nel paese (Coli 1983, 23). Tale riforma era immaginabile solo all'interno di un più vasto contesto europeo: la pubblicazione di autori italiani, così, era sempre affiancata da quella di autori stranieri, l'autarchia culturale e il genio italiano professati e inseguiti dal fascismo erano nei fatti osteggiati dai 'libri di cultura' pubblicati dalla Laterza.

In particolare, dopo il congresso degli intellettuali fascisti tenutosi a Bologna nel 1925 e la pubblicazione, in risposta a tale congresso, del «Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti» il 1 maggio dello stesso anno su *Il Mondo*, il legame di Laterza con Benedetto Croce significò per l'editore barese essere 'alleato' con il «più disturbante e frustrante simbolo che il fascismo detestava con maggior asprezza» (Cannistraro 1975, 45) e, dunque, definitivamente rompere con il regime.

**1** L'Archivio Laterza (sigla: AL) si compone di due sezioni: l'Archivio Autori (sigla: AA), che conserva le lettere autografe inviate dagli autori e traduttori all'editore barese e i Registri Copia Lettere (sigla: RCL), che contengono le lettere inviate dall'editore agli autori, traduttori e intellettuali con cui corrispondeva.

Le conseguenze economiche e culturali di tale rottura non fecero altro che rendere evidente l'ostinata dignità e il non comune coraggio che guidavano un editore che, invece, aveva con umiltà scelto il motto *constanter et non trepide*, come se solo la 'tenacia' fosse il tratto distintivo della sua natura:

Scelsi il motto *constanter et non trepide* perché non avevo né costanza, né coraggio, ed a furia di vederlo stampato su migliaia di copertine e frontespizi e di sentirmi perciò lodato da giornali e riviste ho finito col credere io stesso che quelle erano qualità dell'essere mio. (AL, lettera del 20 settembre 1927 ad Angelo Fortunato Formiggini)

E nel 1938, quando la Bonifica del libro inasprì la censura fascista e intensificò i sequestri sia di libri in stampa sia già pubblicati, Giovanni Laterza rispose al direttore della Federazione Nazionale Fascista con queste parole appassionate:

Ricevo la stimata vostra lettera del 5 c.m., con la quale confermate la circolare riservata al Sig. Presidente per la Bonifica del libro e raccomandate di mandarvi subito i risultati dell'autocernita. | Per quanto riguarda la casa Laterza, sorta nel primo anno di questo secolo per volontà mia e prosperata per volontà di Dio, vi dirò che, per lo spirito che mi ha guidato durante il non breve tempo, negli oltre mille volumi che ne sono venuti fuori circola sangue mio ed ognuno di essi mi è caro quanto gli altri del mio corpo, quanto i miei figli stessi. | A chiunque mi strappasse un sol libro dal mio catalogo, se anche fossi impotente ad oppormi, come a Dante le anime dei suicidi, griderei anch'io: «Perché mi scerpi? Non hai tu spirito di pietà alcuno? Uomini fummo ed ora siamo fatti sterpi: ben dovrebbe essere la tua mano più pia, se state fossimo anime di serpi». | Quindi con la maggiore riverenza verso tutto ciò che ho pubblicato vi spedisco per Sig. Presidente l'ultimo mio catalogo intatto e ne aggiungo uno precedente in cui è ripubblicato l'annuncio del primo libro uscito, perché nulla è mutato nello spirito che sin da allora mi anima nel mandare avanti casa Laterza. (AL, lettera dell'8 dicembre 1938)<sup>2</sup>

E questo suo «farsi onore restando sempre onorato» (AL, lettera a Benedetto Croce del 6 giugno 1903, in Coli 1983, 23-4) contraddistinguerà i saggi, la «roba grave» che pubblicò contribuendo così a quel processo di sprovvincializzazione della cultura italiana e di resistenza culturale alla omologazione fascista.

<sup>2</sup> Bisogna ricordare, però, che l'orgoglio e la dignità di Giovanni Laterza furono sempre facce della sua caleidoscopica personalità. Intelligente editore e instancabile tipografo, promotore del progetto culturale pensato da Benedetto Croce e, allo stesso tempo, imprenditore attento a una politica editoriale che salvaguardasse la sua casa editrice e l'idea che ad essa

La funzione politica delle traduzioni in catalogo durante il fascismo è evidente. Laterza pubblica filosofi e storici, saggisti che dalla Francia alla 'perfida Albione', dalla logica settecentesca alla disamina della contemporaneità, incoraggiano i lettori a pensare, a sviluppare un'idea critica della realtà (da Fisher a Leon, da Descartes a Locke).

Tradurre da altre lingue negli anni Trenta in Italia significava scegliere un'apertura all'altro da sé spesso formalmente osteggiata dal potere costituito e, allo stesso tempo, permetteva a editori e traduttori di provarsi con un'attività 'nuova', diversa dalla pratica traduttiva del passato poiché più filologicamente rispettosa degli originali.

Nella traduzione della «roba grave» edita dalla «Gius. Laterza & Figli», i traduttori avrebbero dovuto saper mantenere un'«aria di famiglia» perché «la traduzione che si dice buona è un'approssimazione» (Nergaard 2007, 213).

Nel catalogo Laterza degli anni Trenta leggiamo di storici (Fisher, Carlyle), di filosofi (Descartes, Bacon, Hume) e di scrittori conosciuti - oltre che per i loro romanzi - anche per saggi e trattati (Poe, Wells, Huxley). *L'Areopagitica. Discorso per la libertà della stampa* di John Milton (1933), *Esperienza e vita morale. Conversazioni con Boswell* di Samuel Johnson (1939), la *Breve storia del mondo* di H.G. Wells (1930) e *L'albero d'olivo. Saggi su atteggiamenti e realtà spirituali* di Aldous Huxley (1939) sono i titoli inglesi scelti di concerto dall'editore barese, dal filosofo d'Italia e dai traduttori nel tentativo di portare avanti quel progetto culturale crociano che vedeva nell'intreccio tra cultura e politica l'unica via possibile alla formazione di un pensiero critico in Italia.

È interessante notare come nel catalogo di quegli anni compaiano Aldous Huxley e H.G. Wells, due autori conosciuti per i loro romanzi basati sull'immaginario scientifico. Wells aveva pubblicato nel 1895 *The Time Machine*, un romanzo che, attraverso lo specchio deformante della fantascienza, era, proprio come l'«antiutopia» del *Brave New World* di Huxley, una critica della contemporaneità.

Seguendo il suggerimento del professore e traduttore F.E. Lorizio, Laterza nel 1930 pubblica *Breve storia del Mondo* di Wells. La storia editoriale della *Short History of the World* è interessante perché mostra, nella «Nota del Traduttore» e nel carteggio intercorso tra Lorizio e Laterza, non solo l'arte necessaria alla 'ricreazione poetica' di crociana memoria ma, piuttosto, la fatica traduttiva e l'impegno editoriale necessari alla pubblicazione di un testo che avrebbe potuto facilmente essere invisibile al regime. In una lettera del 7 aprile del 1929 leggiamo:

soggiaceva. Così Giovanni Laterza tenne in vita la «Gius. Laterza & Figli» grazie alla sua politica di 'sopravvivenza', che alternò uscite per la «Biblioteca Romantica» e novità nella «Biblioteca esoterica», di minor valore culturale della collana 'crociana', indubbiamente, ma indispensabile alla vita della casa editrice, viste le vendite e l'apprezzamento del regime.

io son dell'opinione che quel che importa è prevenire qualche altro studioso o editore. Emil Ludwig continua a battere le grancasse sul libro. [...] Con questa campagna che un uomo dell'autorità del Ludwig vien facendo al libro Lei comprende benissimo come io tema che alcuno più sollecito di noi riesca ad accaparrarsi i diritti di traduzione e a pubblicare il libro stesso in veste italiana. (AL, AA)

A luglio dello stesso anno le trattative tra Laterza e l'editore inglese di Wells sono concluse, Lorizio inizia a lavorare sulla revisione della sua bozza di traduzione non appena «liberato [...] dagli ultimi esami» e si concentra anche su un «saggio» - quella che poi diventerà la «Nota del Traduttore»:

Chiarissimo Sig. Commendatore,

Lei ha perfettamente ragione e Le invio insieme a queste il saggio promesso. Io avevo molto spesso pensato di scriverle, ma me ne ero astenuto perché speravo passare da Bari fin dalla metà del mese, cosa che non mi è stata possibile. Ci verrò per il 5 o il 6 di settembre a omaggiarla, e son certo che Lei, dopo aver saputo di persona quanto dovevo dirle, mi giustificherà il ritardo, che non è dovuto a trascuratezza o a cattiva volontà. (AL, AA, 3 luglio 1929)

Lorizio vuol incontrare di persona l'editore per parlare «delle questioni trattate dal Wells che riguardano la nostra patria, e ciò potrà essere di utilità per il lavoro, come Le dirò a voce, quando avrò il piacere di omaggiarla». Non può scrivere a Laterza dell'internazionalismo di Wells, della sua visione egualitaria delle civiltà mondiali e dell'aspirazione a una pace universale che anima l'intero libro. Il rischio che le lettere vengano intercettate e che la pubblicazione del libro venga fermata dal regime è troppo alto. Nella «Nota del Traduttore», Lorizio giustificherà i suoi tagli e i suoi interventi:

non è men doveroso rilevare e additare quelle parti dell'opera che giustificano i biasimi. Di tali rilievi una prima categoria concerne il tono generale e l'idea informatrice del libro e riguarda anche in generale lo storico, a qualunque nazione egli appartenga; un'altra riguarda in particolare noi Italiani. [...] Ha vinto nell'A. il disegno e l'onda di ribellione che mossero i suoi padri e tanta parte d'Europa a staccarsi dal ceppo romano [...]. È singolare quanto non comprensibile la diminuzione cui in quest'opera è stata sottoposta l'idea della romanità. (Wells 1930, 3-5)

E, infine, il tentativo di Wells di accostarsi «alla storia europea dal più ampio orizzonte della storia mondiale» credendo «di vedere molto più distintamente che non possano fare gli storici nazionalisti» (6) non è che una «pecca» e l'idea di pace universale che sottende l'intera opera confon-



de «utopia e realtà»: «Le nazioni vivono operano e prosperano nella lotta rude, in esse si temprano, per esse diventano degne di maggiori destini. Tutto ciò che li allontana da questo è utopico e lontano dal mondo» (7-8).

Lorzio, come tutti i traduttori dell'epoca, non si concentra sulla traduzione solo come fenomeno puramente linguistico, oggettivo, «mirante solo a produrre un'equivalenza testuale», ma allarga i suoi orizzonti e, criticamente e intelligentemente, lascia che «fattori contingenti che trascendono l'aspetto puramente linguistico condizionino l'atto traduttivo» (Lefevre 1998, VII). Solo così i traduttori negli anni del regime fascista (e con loro gli editori) potranno trovare una possibile definizione di 'fedeltà' traduttiva. Gli editori che furono capaci di intuire l'importanza della circolazione di libri stranieri in Italia dovettero scendere a compromessi con la realtà storica che stavano vivendo e, dunque, compiere scelte più - come nel caso di Mondadori - o meno - come nel caso di Laterza o Einaudi (cf. Forgacs 2000, 84-94; Turi 1990) - 'compromettenti'. Le 'riscritture' di Lorzio, della Prospero, di Breglia e di tutti i traduttori che lavorarono con Giovanni Laterza furono manipolazioni indispensabili che permisero, anche in Italia, la costruzione di un pensiero critico e la circolazione di idee non dominanti, nonostante l'anestetizzante omologazione voluta dal regime.

Croce incoraggiò sempre Laterza alla traduzione di testi inglesi per sfuggire all'anglofobia del regime che, dal 1935, aveva vietato il commercio in Italia dei libri di tutti i paesi 'sanzionisti'. L'editore barese, senza esitazioni mai, diede alle stampe saggi e *pamphlets* dall'indubbio significato politico che, più d'una volta, lo misero al centro dell'attenzione censoria fascista e gli fecero subire frequenti e violente perquisizioni (cf. Mancini 2006, 31; Bobbio 1955, 100-20). Infatti, che la «Gius. Laterza & Figli» decidesse di pubblicare opere come quelle di Huxley e di Johnson proprio dopo il 1935 e il 1938 - anni, come abbiamo già ricordato, della Bonifica libraria e delle leggi razziali - è prova inconfutabile dell'impegno dell'editore barese nel suo intento di stimolare una riflessione critica e severa sul presente. Del 1939 è il sequestro della *Storia d'Europa* di H.L. Fisher,<sup>3</sup> eppure Croce e Laterza affidano ad Ada Gobetti<sup>4</sup> la traduzione di *Esperienza e vita morale. Conversazioni con Boswell* di Samuel Johnson. Un testo in linea con il progetto di riforma e riflessione morale, politica e culturale di Croce e Laterza:

Liberate il vostro spirito dalle frasi fatte, abitatevi ad indagare la verità di ogni cosa, invece d'accontentarvi, per viltà o per pigrizia, d'accettare

3 Sequestro e contestuale richiesta di «modifiche» che il Ministero della Cultura e della Stampa chiedeva per la seconda edizione: «Il sequestro del libro, divenuto in breve un classico della cultura antifascista, rappresentò uno dei più clamorosi casi di censura nella storia della dittatura» (Mancini 2006, 52).

4 Ada Prospero Gobetti fu attenta traduttrice dall'inglese che, nel suo impegno nel portare in Italia idee, passioni e visioni altre continuava il percorso di europeizzazione e sprovin-

quelle definizioni, quegli schemi che irrigidiscono, immiserendola, la meravigliosa complessità della vita reale. (Johnson 1939, 226)

Del 5 maggio dello stesso anno (AL, AA) è la risposta affermativa di Ada Prospero a tradurre «un volumetto di Huxley» e già il 3 settembre, da Meana, la Prospero scriverà:

giovedì scorso Le ho spedito da Torino il manoscritto della versione di Huxley col nuovo titolo [...]. Non so se in questo momento metterà mano alla stampa: preferisco comunque che il manoscritto sia in mano sua. (AL, AA)

Le 'paure' della Prospero sono legate alle contingenze storiche: il 3 settembre la Francia e l'Inghilterra avevano dichiarato guerra alla Germania, e il libro di Huxley, *The Olive Tree*, non era solo «intelligente, grazioso, piacevole» (AL, AA), come Croce aveva scritto a Laterza forse per eludere una censura preventiva, ma aveva in sé quella qualità sovversiva, cifra delle pubblicazioni Laterza durante gli anni del regime. Aldous Huxley aveva già scritto *Brave New World* (pubblicato in italiano da Mondadori nella collana «Medusa» nel 1933) e del 1937 è il parere di lettura per Mondadori di Lorenzo Gigli sulla raccolta di saggi *Ends and Means* in cui il 'lettore' sconsiglia la traduzione e pubblicazione della raccolta perché:

Ho letto con molta attenzione - e naturalmente con molto interesse - *Ends and Means* di Huxley. Ma francamente non vedo l'opportunità di tradurlo e pubblicarlo in Italia. [...] Anzitutto per il contenuto del libro, serrata critica politica e morale del mondo d'oggi condotta da un punto di vista rigidamente ispirato ai principi democratici e alle ideologie pacifiste e umanitarie che formano tanta parte della mentalità inglese [...]. Siamo ancora alla fratellanza universale, alla Lega delle Nazioni, e alle pregiudiziali contro i governi autoritari e alle dittature. (Albonetti 1994, 440-1)

Anche *The Olive Tree* è una raccolta 'inopportuna' che, nella sua interezza, risulterebbe sgradita al duce, forse addirittura passibile di censura o, nel peggiore dei casi, da sequestrare dopo l'avvenuta pubblicazione. Non abbiamo informazioni paragonabili alla mole di 'pareri' custodita nell'Archivio della Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori a Milano, eppure la

cializzazione iniziato con l'esperienza della rivista *Il Baretto* diretta dall'allora marito Piero Gobetti e che aveva come proposito il raggiungimento di una «cultura totale» fatta di storia, politica e letteratura italiana e straniera. Una cultura in opposizione al provincialismo e alla retorica dilaganti.

'cautela' sempre ardita dell'editore barese traspare limpidamente dalla lettura del suo carteggio con autori e traduttori. Autori che sarebbe il caso di tradurre perché «intelligenti» ma da tradurre e «rivederne la versione», commenti velati che con la loro opacità evitano l'intervento della Prefettura.

Nel tradurre *The Olive Tree*, Ada Prospero omette due saggi: *Writers and Readers* e *Words and Behaviour*. Sono due omissioni, due 'silenzii' (cf. Tymoczko e Gentzler 2002) non neutri. Il primo saggio, che è anche quello che apre la raccolta, analizza la «letteratura contemporanea», anzi:

that vast corpus of literature which is not even intended to have any positive effect upon the reader – all that doughy, woolly, anodyne writing that exist merely to fill a gap of leisure, to kill the time and prevent thought, to deaden and diffuse emotion. (Huxley 1936, 2)

Letteratura come anestetizzante, sonnifero che rende incerta la visione della realtà e, così facendo, ne smussa i dolorosi e taglienti contorni:

We read, most of the time, not because we wish to instruct ourselves, not because we long to have our feelings touched and our imagination fired, but because reading is one of our bad habits, because we suffer when we have time to spare and no printed matter with which to plug the void. (2)

Huxley punta il dito proprio verso quella letteratura 'amena' tanto promossa dal regime e osteggiata dal progetto culturale di Croce e Laterza di pubblicare «roba grave» e, anche in questa analisi, affonda il coltello ancor più in profondità, nella carne viva della misera realtà umana che «abhors the vacuum». Il saggio continua concentrandosi sulla definizione di «letteratura di propaganda» nella sua duplice accezione: «That which aims at modifying the religious and ethical opinions and the personal behaviour of its readers, and that which aims at modifying their social, political and economic opinions and behaviour» (2). Eppure la «propaganda letteraria» è sempre meno incisiva di quella giornalistica, legata alle contingenze e alle «circostanze»:

Since the war two well-written and persuasive pieces of propaganda have figured among the very best of best-sellers – I refer to Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and H.G. Wells's *Outline of History*. In Europe and America many millions of people read the German's indictment of war and the Englishman's plea for internationalism. With what results? It is hard indeed to say. All that we can be sure of is that nationalistic feeling was never so acutely inflamed as it is to-day and the expenditure on armaments never higher. Once more, circumstances

have been more effective in moulding men's minds than conscious literary propagandists. (Huxley 1936, 10-1)

L'attacco al nazionalismo scagliato da Huxley per mano, per così dire, di Wells non sarebbe di certo passato inosservato, nel 1938, a un regime che proprio in quegli anni stava intensificando la sua lotta all'internazionalismo, all'europeismo, all'altro da sé, perché «l'altro non è mai al di fuori o oltre noi; esso emerge vigorosamente dentro il discorso culturale proprio quando *pensiamo* di parlare, intimamente e nel gergo nativo, 'fra di noi'» (Billiani 2007, 207). La disamina di Huxley sarebbe evidentemente già troppo critica, riflessiva ed elaborata per un regime che auspicava l'ingresso in Italia di una letteratura che fosse esclusivamente di intrattenimento, «to kill the time», appunto. Ma il ragionamento di Huxley si fa ancor più «pericoloso» in chiusura, quando l'autore, dopo aver descritto gli effetti prodotti dalla letteratura d'immaginazione sui lettori ne elenca un ultimo, «più sottile»: la capacità delle parole non solo di esprimere il pensiero ma, addirittura, di formularlo. La loro natura evocativa e creatrice insieme:

in *The Waste Land* Mr. Eliot uses the same metaphor:

O swallow swallow  
 Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie  
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
 Why then Ile fit you, Hieronymo's mad againe  
 Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata.  
 Shantihshantihshantih.

Words have the power to support, to buttress, to hold together. And are at the same time moulds, into which we pour our own thought - and it takes their nobler and more splendid form - at the same time channels and conduits into which we divert the stream of our being - and it flows significantly towards a comprehensible end. [...] In words men find a new universe of thought and feeling, clearer and more comprehensible than the universe of daily experience. The verbal universe is at once a mould for reality and a substitute for it, a superior reality. And what props the mind, what shores up its impending ruin, is contact with this superior reality of ordered beauty and significance. (Huxley 1936, 40-1)

Le parole, in particolare le parole della 'letteratura d'immaginazione', non sono solo la rappresentazione verbale del mondo referenziale che gli autori vogliono descrivere; esse sono molto di più: sono i «fragments» che l'uomo usa per puntellare le «ruins»; le macerie di un mondo passato non più ricomponibile in intero (cf. Canfora 2000, VIII). L'uomo può e sa solo

'puntellare', tentare di ricomporre quelle 'rovine' con l'ordinata bellezza della letteratura. Le parole hanno dunque, per Huxley, una duplice funzione: da una parte creano il mondo, dall'altra sono le uniche custodi di una bellezza ormai andata in frantumi.

Proprio come le opere tradotte in Italia negli anni Trenta: una bellezza ordinata, irreggimentata, attenta alla novità e al compromesso insieme. Le parole, nella loro «ordered beauty and significance», sono l'unica possibile salvezza dell'uomo contemporaneo eliotiano e dell'anestetizzato suddito fascista. L'importanza delle parole nella loro funzione creatrice di strumenti potentissimi capaci di plasmare il pensiero dell'uomo è oggetto di analisi del terzo saggio della raccolta. Anche *Words and Behaviour* fu omissso nell'edizione italiana curata da Ada Prospero per Laterza:

Words form the thread on which we string our experiences. Without them we should live spasmodically and intermittently. [...] Inappropriate and badly chosen words vitiate thought and lead to wrong or foolish conduct. (Huxley 1936, 82-3)

Qui risiede il loro potere: le parole possono influenzare la vita dell'uomo, la sue scelte, le sue esperienze. E la loro influenza può essere «evil»:

Consider, for example, the case of war. War is enormously discreditable to those who order it to be waged and even to those who merely tolerate its existence. Furthermore, to developed sensibilities the facts of war are revolting and horrifying. To falsify these facts, and by so doing to make war seem less evil than it really is, and our own responsibility in tolerating war less heavy, is doubly to our advantage. By suppressing and distorting the truth, we protect our sensibilities and preserve our self-esteem. Now, language is, among other things, a device which men use for suppressing and distorting the truth. Finding the reality of war too unpleasant to contemplate, we create a verbal alternative to that reality, parallel with it, but in quality quite different from it. (83-4)

La parola 'guerra' è esemplare: il significato di tale parola è odioso. Odioso per tutti, per chi la ingaggia e per chi la tollera. Huxley non risparmia la coscienza di nessuno: dittatori o capi di Stato, generali, soldati semplici o cittadini, tutti coloro i quali tollerano la guerra ne sono corresponsabili. Ed è per questa verità, troppo dolorosa da nominare, che l'uomo, in particolare l'uomo di governo, fa quello che tutti vogliono - più o meno dichiaratamente - che faccia, dittatore o capo di un governo democratico che sia: distorce la realtà dei fatti con le parole. Descrive una 'guerra' meno devastante e insensata per le coscienze. Crea un racconto della verità che attenua la colpa condivisa di chi non ha e non cerca la forza di opporsi.

Nella disanima attenta della 'guerra' e del racconto della guerra, Huxley non sarebbe mai passato dalle strette maglie della censura fascista, solo tre anni dopo la guerra d'Etiopia, alle soglie della Seconda Guerra Mondiale e nello stesso anno in cui furono promulgate le leggi razziali. Quella che viene chiamata «zero translation» (cf. Tymoczko e Gentzler 2002, xx-xxi) è, forse, la manipolazione più violenta di un testo letterario. E così la scelta di Laterza, di Croce e di Ada Prospero di non tradurre l'intera raccolta di saggi dell'"intelligente" Huxley ha in sé l'eternità delle cicatrici. Segni indelebili che permettono il ricordo della violenza - diretta o indiretta - del potere. Come il silenzio nella *Waste Land* eliotiana non è solo aridità ma anche 'il cuore della luce', così i due saggi taciuti nella traduzione di *The Olive Tree* sono il taglio violento che recide l'albero d'olivo e la sua pace e, allo stesso tempo, l'unica possibilità per Huxley e il suo albero di pace di dare frutto nell'Italia fascista.

«You gave me hyacinths first a year ago,  
They called me the hyacinths girl».  
- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing.  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
(T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, vv. 35-41)

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## “Let Me Have Claudio’s Head” The Beheading of John the Baptist as a Remote Source in *Measure for Measure*

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**Abstract** In an attempt to produce a reconstruction of the genealogy of the sources, this essay investigates the relationship between *Measure for Measure* and the *Gospel* of Matthew, examining in particular the possibility that the episode related to Claudio’s supposed beheading is somehow associated with the death of John the Baptist, as recorded in Matthew 14:1-12. In Shakespeare as well as in the Evangelist’s text, the request for the head is charged with a highly symbolic value: it is a visualization of the triumph, the gift that the instigator makes to his own superiority, a narcissistic gratification. It is an expression of personal affirmation; an acknowledgment of one’s own power and of the capacity to make it operative. Doing violence becomes an investigation of one’s own political force. It represents the violation of the corpse, the desecration of the *relic*. But it is also an appalling solution to put to rest any possible accusation related to immoral or illicit relationships condemned by the law. Moreover, it is a violent act, secretly perpetrated, with neither moral purposes nor royal warning.

**Summary** 1 Crime and Punishment; Sentence and Clemency. – 2 Matthew and Shakespeare: the Death of John the Baptist as a *remote source*. – 3 The Differences with Respect to the Sources: *contaminatio* and *complicatio*. – 4 The Substitution: the Head of Ragozine. – 5 “For My Better Satisfaction”. – 6 Private Executions. Heads not Belonging to the City. – 7 To Desire to Destroy. Negative Fetishism.

**Keywords** Measure for Measure. John the Baptist. Matthew’s Gospel. Shakespeare.

### 1 Crime and Punishment; Sentence and Clemency

Among the most political of Shakespearean plays, *Measure for Measure* was represented at court in the presence of James I on December 26, 1604, the likely year of its composition. The play investigates complex issues ranging from the proper administration of justice to the ethical problems of corruption and the temptations of the flesh, to inadequacy and human inconsistency in matters that bring into play abstract ideals, generically understood, and selfish and pressing personal interests. Conviction and forgiveness, severity and tolerance, sexuality and rationality are therefore interwoven in the play.

The occasion for Shakespeare's exploration comes from the reiteration of a story that had already been narrated by other authors of the sixteenth century. It finds its first written version in a letter in Latin penned in 1547 by the Hungarian student Joseph Macarius and addressed to his patron Georgius Perzenith. 24 years later, the story is revived, and partially modified, by Martin Luther in his *Von Weltlicher Oberkeit (On Secular Authority)*. Afterwards, the episode will be presented to the public by Giraldi Cinthio and George Whetstone, who will bring several modifications with regard to the original plot.

In the version put on stage by Shakespeare, against the background of a Vienna inclined to vice, Duke Vincentio, pretending to have to leave the city for urgent reasons, delegates control and the administration of justice to Angelo:<sup>1</sup>

In our remove be thou at full ourself.  
Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
Live in thy tongue and heart.  
(*Measure for Measure* I, i, 43-5)<sup>2</sup>

Appointed to the new role, but trapped in the mazes of a rigid and uncompromising Puritanical moral code, Angelo sentences to death the young Claudio for having slept with Juliet before marrying her.<sup>3</sup>

From a critical point of view, the dramatic articulation presents a comparison between the *Old Testament* statutory scheme – embodied by Angelo, who recovers the biblical teaching of “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (*Exodus* 21:24)<sup>4</sup> and thus the precepts of the rigid and merciless application of the law – and the principle of the *New Testament* that can be summed up in the formula “Let him that is among you without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7), epitomized by the Duke and Escalus who, to quote Marrapodi, embody “the Renaissance, Counter-Reformation view based on mercy and humane understanding of the faults of others, a principle which extols, not weakens, the very nature of authority and kingly power” (2004a, 77). Thus the play investigates the debate between the stance of an unyielding and severe God (the God of fear),

1 In actual fact Vincentio does not leave the city and, disguised as a monk, oversees the executive and judicial administration of the Deputy, secretly organizing the events that follow.

2 All quotations are taken from Jowett et al. 2005.

3 By so doing, the Deputy recovers, and brings into force, in the Viennese community, an ancient law which had remained for years without an effective application.

4 All quotations of the *Old* and *New Testament* are from the *Geneva Bible*, 1599 edition.

recorded in several passages of the *Old Testament*<sup>5</sup> and brought to the stage by Angelo, and the position of a God that is loving and merciful, but not weak (the God of forgiveness), revealed by the *New Testament* and embodied by the Duke (and Isabella). Retributive justice, an *Old Testament* archetypal concept, according to which to every sin there corresponds a punishment that is equal to the crime committed, is opposed to the *New Testament* approach of merciful justice, grounded on indulgence and on the pardoning of sins.

Consequently, Angelo's strict administration of the law and his extreme severity in Claudio's sentence – inflicted for a deed which, although extramarital, was carried out with mutual love and as a full consensual act – highlight, and condemn, the aberrations of political ideologies based on the precepts of blind intransigence and merciless strictness. Furthermore, the lecherousness of the 'ransom plot' – which the Deputy presents to Isabella, offering to grant amnesty and free her brother provided that she submits to his sexual advances – gives full account of human weakness, remodelling the *Gospel* warning which thoroughly expresses the pitfalls of *sarx*, the allurements of desire: *Spiritus promptus est, caro autem infirma* (Matthew 26:41).<sup>6</sup> The Deputy's sinful fall conveys the hypocrisy and fragility that inform extremist and intolerant attitudes. And the fall is all the more serious because it affects men of high degree and of supposed moral blamelessness who administer the common good.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Matthew and Shakespeare: the Death of John the Baptist as a remote source

However, the aim of this study is not to anatomize in depth either the symbolic framework or the ethical-moral meanings of the play. In an attempt to produce a reconstruction of the genealogy of the sources, this essay intends to seek the relationship between *Measure for Measure* and the *Gospel* of Matthew, examining in particular the possibility that the episode

5 The excerpts are numerous: from the *Expulsion from Eden: Genesis 4-9*; to *Genesis 6:7*; to the violence against women and men: *Deuteronomy 22:20-4*; to the death penalty for the blasphemer: *Leviticus 24:16*; to the punishment inflicted on the people of Egypt: *Exodus 12:29-30*; but one also thinks of *Exodus 21:12-7*, or of *Ezekiel 28:23*. It is true, at the same time, that in other passages of the *Old Testament*, God is "slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, Reserving mercy for thousands" (*Exodus 34:6-7*).

6 "The spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak".

7 Dismay, mixed with terror, for the disproportion of the punishment inflicted on Claudio by the seemingly incorruptible Angelo, is highlighted by rough Pompey, servant to Miss Overdone and spokesperson for the common sentiment: "If you head and hang all that offend that way but for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a commission for more heads" (*Measure for Measure*, II, i, 227-9).

related to Claudio's beheading is somehow associated with the death of John the Baptist, as recorded in Matthew (14:1-12).<sup>8</sup>

In an essay on intertextuality, Robert Miola defines three possible categories of sources subdividing them into 'coincident', 'proximate' and 'remote' (2004, 19 ff.). To the remote sources, in particular, belong those sources and influences which are hard to trace because, being the result of previous readings or suggestions and impressions, they often participate in the author's creative process in an unconscious way:

The field of possibility here widens to include all that an author previously knew or read: grammar-school texts, classical stories and authors, the Bible, evident in allusions, turns of phrase, or reappropriated motif. The dynamic still consists of reading and remembering, even if the process of recollection and rearticulation occurs in the subconscious mind of the author. (20)

Miola's study, intended as an attempt 'to map out' Shakespeare's intertextual transactions, takes into account notions such as approximations, adumbrations, appropriations or even mediations operated by the author (13). In this regard, the correspondences between Matthew and Shakespeare have already been abundantly enucleated. Wilson Knight in his "Measure for Measure' and the Gospels" (1930)<sup>9</sup> stressed several Shakespearean allusions to the *New Testament*, with particular reference to the text of Matthew, analyzing in particular, with great accuracy, the "moral nature of man in relation to the crudity of man's justice" in the light of

8 The episode is also found in Mark (6:17-29): "17 For Herod himself had sent forth, and had taken John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, which was his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. 19 Therefore Herodias laid wait against him, and would have killed him, but she could not; 20 For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and a holy, and revered him, and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. 21 But the time being convenient, when Herod on his birthday made a banquet to his princes and captains, and chief estates of Galilee; 22 And the daughter of the same Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod, and them that sat at table together, the King said unto the maid, Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. 23 And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom. 24 So she went forth, and said to her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, John Baptist's head. 25 Then she came in straightway with haste unto the King, and asked, saying, I would that thou shouldst give me even now in a charger the head of John Baptist. 26 Then the King was very sorry, yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat at table with him, he would not refuse her. 27 And immediately the King sent the hangman, and gave charge that his head should be brought in. So he went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the maid, and the maid gave it to her mother. 29 And when his disciples heard it, they came and took up his body, and put it in a tomb".

9 But the sources of *Measure for Measure* were also investigated, among others, by Lascelles (1953) and by Prouty (1964, 131-45).

the holy postulations (73).<sup>10</sup> It has also been highlighted that the title of the play is directly connected to a passage from Matthew's *Gospel* (73 ff.):

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and *with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* (Matthew 7:1-2; emphasis added)

But the passages of the Holy Scripture in which it is possible to find similarities with Shakespeare's verses are numerous. Similarities that can be acknowledged, if more proof were needed, as further evidence of Shakespeare's familiarity with the texts recognised as the basis of Christian doctrine.<sup>11</sup> The very theological precept on which the ethical teachings of Christianity is based is echoed several times in Shakespeare's lines. The famous formula that provides the principles and measures of selfless love, uttered by Jesus and reported by all four evangelists: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39),<sup>12</sup> can be identified, for example, with a very similar expression, now reshaped in a deductive, ironic way, in the play of the English dramatist:

DUKE Love you the man that wronged you?  
 JULIET Yes, as I love the woman that wronged him.  
 (*Measure for Measure*, II, iii, 26-7)<sup>13</sup>

Isabella too, showing a refined rhetoric, relies on a series of biblical references – as well as on a strong ability to argue on theological issues – to change Angelo's mind. Her words are deeply infused with the concept of Christian redemption (Knight 1930, 29):

ISABELLA All the souls that were were forfeit once;  
 And He that might the vantage best have took

10 But see also, for example, Marx 2000, 79 ff.

11 Studies on the relationship between the Holy Scripture and Shakespeare are of course innumerable; among the most recent: Shell (2015), Kastan (2014), Cummings (2013), Hamlin (2013), Woods (2013), Boitani (2009), Beauregard (2008), Groves (2007), Marx (2000), but Knight (1967) must necessarily be taken into account, as well as the above-mentioned Knight (1930).

12 One reads the whole passage: "37 Jesus said to him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and the great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hangeth the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). The passage can also be found in: Mark (12:29-31), Luke (10:25-28), and again in Matthew (19:19).

13 The excerpt is used similarly in *Measure for Measure* (V, i, 338).

Found out the remedy. How would you be  
 If He which is the top of judgment should  
 But judge you as you are? O, think on that;  
 And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
 Like man new made. (II, ii, 75-81)

Later on in the text, the young woman again calls upon the Deputy asking him to wonder about his own sins, and to acknowledge them, thus finding the reasons for granting clemency to Claudio:

Go to your bosom;  
 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
 That's like my brother's fault: if it confess  
 A natural guiltiness such as is his,  
 Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue  
 Against my brother's life. (II, ii, 140-5)

The woman's lines seem to refer directly to the already quoted words of Christ which were recorded by John: "Let him that is among you without sin cast the first stone at her" (John 8:7). The parable, as is known, tells of Jesus' forgiveness for a woman caught in adultery. Yet Isabella's words also strongly refer to Matthew's lines dealing with the propensity to forgive the sins of others: "O evil servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou praydest me. Oughtest not thou also to have had pity on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Matthew 18:32-3).

Other excerpts from *Measure for Measure* could be assimilated, from a catechetical-Christian point of view, to episodes recorded in the Holy Scripture: references to Matthew (5:14-6)<sup>14</sup> could be found in the well-known passage of the torches lit to give light to others, and not to enlighten themselves (*Measure for Measure*, I, i, 32-5). Moreover, in the play there are also references to man originated from dust, with clear reference to *Genesis* (II, 7): "Thou art not thyself; | For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains | That issue out of dust" (*Measure for Measure*, III, i, 19-21); or even to the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*), "An Angelo for Claudio, death for death!" (*Measure for Measure*, V, i, 405-7), which is in *Genesis* (9:6), *Exodus* (21:23) and in *Leviticus* (14:19).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> But the reference is also to Luke (8:16).

<sup>15</sup> Another similarity between the Shakespearean text and a passage from the *Gospel* of Luke can be found: according to the Evangelist, Jesus, in an episode related to the death of the Baptist and referring to Herod, used the term "that fox"; one reads in Luke (13:32): "Then said he unto them, 'Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and will heal still today, and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected'". Likewise, in a scene from *Measure for Measure* when all the characters are gathered at the gates of the city, the Duke

Neither the parallels between Angelo's lascivious desire for the beautiful Isabella, "O, fie, fie, fie! | What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo? | Dost thou desire her foully for those things | That make her good?" (*Measure for Measure* II, ii, 176-9),<sup>16</sup> and the reference to adultery recorded in the famous *Sermon on the Mount*, "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28),<sup>17</sup> can be forgotten. In this regard, Geoffrey Bullough (1975, 393-5) recognised *De sermone Domini in Monte* – a text written by St. Augustine with clear pedagogical-pastoral aims to comment with meticulousness on the evangelist's words – as a certain Shakespearean source. But, as we have seen, the references to the *Gospel* of Matthew are not limited to what is reported in the teaching given by Christ to his disciples on the mountain near Capernaum.

In sum, previous criticism has unquestionably stated that the scripture of Matthew reached Shakespeare, directly or via St. Augustine. The degree of similarity between the two authors' texts shifts from direct appropriation (one thinks of the title), to evocation, to simple, unconscious, references, highlighting in any case – and this is what matters here – an undeniable legacy. This is not to say that Shakespeare deliberately used Matthew's references to manifest his own opinion about religion or to underpin his theological perspective. The complex question of Shakespeare's faith has already been explored, the investigation revealing its insolvability, the impenetrability of the topic; "the ambiguity of Shakespeare's engagement with religion self-evidently cannot tell us anything certain about his faith" (Wood 2013, 8). We could say, with Kastan, that "religion provides Shakespeare with the fundamental language of value and understanding in the plays, from the beginning of the career through its end. It supplies the vocabulary in which characters understand themselves and are presented to us to be understood" (2014, 6), yet we cannot infer with certainty Shakespeare's own convictions through the holy excerpts which he decided to use and reshape, in light of the fact that "Shakespeare declines to tell us what to believe, or to tell us what he believed" (7).

asks: "O, poor souls, Come you to seek the lamb here of the fox?" (V, i, 295). The evangelical derivation of the whole play is accurately observed by Alessandro Serpieri, in "Introduzione" (Serpieri 2003): "the reference frame of the play is undoubtedly biblical, and in particular Christian" (27). The translation is mine.

16 And precisely lust, initially opposed by the Deputy of Vienna, is the cause of the depraved request that determines the 'ransom plot': "ANGELO He [Claudio] shall not [die], Isabel, if you give me love" (*Measure for Measure*, II, iv, 144).

17 But in the Shakespearean text (*Measure for Measure*, IV, ii, 2-4) references to the *Letter to the Ephesians* (5:23) can also be found; it is also possible to find parallels between the *Letter of Paul to the Romans* (9:15-18) and *Measure for Measure* (I, ii, 116-7).



### 3 The Differences with Respect to the Sources: *contaminatio and complicatio*

Furthermore, as stated above, the sole aim of this essay is to analyze a different, new, aspect, i.e. the possibility that the Holy Scripture was in some way revived by Shakespeare in particular to elaborate the events related to the beheading of Juliet's betrothed (in reality it never occurred). In other words, the purpose of the essay is to investigate and determine whether the story of John and Salome somehow influenced the drafting of the episode of the decapitation of Claudio.

We have seen that the text of Matthew, among various other works, has been recovered and presented through a reshaping process of themes and motifs integrated, more or less consciously, in *Measure for Measure's* dramatic magma. Subsequently, this process of *contaminatio* was juxtaposed to that of *complicatio*, i.e. by an elaboration of the original source which is transformed and made new through a skilled use of dramatic variations and thematic adaptations: that is to say by the insertion of situations and events derived from further texts or perhaps directly invented by the author (Marrapodi 2004b, 2).

On this basis, it is useful, for the purposes of this essay, to scrutinize the Shakespearean episode which is the object of this analysis, highlighting any deviations from the primary sources, and identifying the elements that could indicate a possible debt to the Evangelist's text. It must be said, from the outset, that the decapitation episode is listed both in Cinthio's novella V, deca VIII, inserted in *Hecatommithi*, 1565 (then refashioned in the posthumous drama *Epitia*, 1583), and in George Whetstone's play "Promos and Cassandra" (1975), i.e. in the main sources of *Measure for Measure*.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, Claudio's beheading cannot be considered a Shakespearean invention.

Nevertheless, a number of dissimilarities, of not secondary relevance, should be underlined. In particular, Shakespeare's play differs more from Cinthio's text than from Whetstone's. Also, in the tale of the Italian author, *Epitia*, the female protagonist, is coarsely and starkly mocked by the Governor, but in this case, after lying with the woman, Iuriste, the

18 Similarly, the story is also outlined in *Von Weltlicher Oberkeit (On Secular Authority)*, the text by Martin Luther, published in 1523, which I referred to at the start of this article. In this case too, after the noble had lain with the woman, he orders the beheaded body of her husband to be delivered to her. It must be remembered that the 'ransom plot' also appears in *Philaria*, a Latin text composed in 1556 by Claude Rouillet. Again, the ruler, Severus, having consummated the relationship with *Philaria*, disregards the deal and puts *Hyppolitus*, *Philaria's* husband, to death. Moreover, in 1547, an account of the story was transcribed in a 'Letter' penned by a Hungarian student. On this subject see, among others, Marrapodi 2004. It should be added that Whetstone himself revived the story told in "Promos e Cassandra" in a short tale entitled "An Heptameron of Civil Discourses" (1582).



Governor, sends her her brother's corpse (thereby reneging on their prior agreement). Thus, at least in the novella, it is the whole body (and not only the head) that is consigned to Epitia, with a black cloth to cover the horror. The head of the deceased will be mournfully placed at the foot of the mutilated body.<sup>19</sup>

Ed egli le rispose [...] che a casa il fratello le manderebbe. [...] fe' chiamare il prigioniere, e gli disse: vanne alla prigione, e tranne fuori il fratello di questa donna e conduciglielo a casa. Epitia ciò udito piena di molta allegrezza a casa se n'andò, aspettando libero il fratello. Il prigioniere, fatto porre il corpo di Vico sopra la bara, gli mise il capo a' piedi, e copertolo di panno negro andando egli avanti il fe' portare ad Epitia. [...] Questo è, disse, il fratel vostro che vi manda il signor governatore, libero dalla prigione. (*Hecatommithi*, deca VIII, novella V)

In the novella, the gruesome mockery is not limited to the amputated part: the pitiful recognition of the brother can also be made through the limbs or the torso, and not only through the face. In this a first difference between the episode of the beheading in Shakespeare and in Cinthio is found.

In addition, determining a further, profound difference with Shakespeare's text, in Cinthio, the body sent to the woman is not that of a substitute, but the brother's real body. Thus Epitia is fully deceived; she will not manage to rescue her brother. Neither pity will be shown to Vico, nor any stratagem will save his life. Later on, having gone through moments of grief and pain, the woman will first organize the burial of the remains and then set about wreaking her revenge.<sup>20</sup>

Dissimilarly, in Whetstone the episode of (just) the head handed to Cassandra, the sister of the young Andrugio sentenced to death, is present. At least as regards this aspect, "Promos and Cassandra" could be considered the 'proximate' source of Shakespeare's play. But even in this case some profound differences with respect to *Measure for Measure* could be detected. Let's proceed in order.

Unlike what happens in Cinthio's novella, in "Promos and Cassandra" the head delivered to Cassandra is not that of her brother, imprisoned for lust, but the 'mangled' and unrecognizable head of a recluse who had recently died: "a dead mans head, that suffered th'other day" (IV, v). In the long soliloquy that ends the second scene of act IV, Promos, having enjoyed Cassandra, reveals his nefarious plan to order the beheading of Andrugio

19 Walter Moretti underlines that "In the staged version of Epitia's story, proposed by Giraldo himself [...], the 'happy ending' of the novel was assured by the expedient of replacing Vico's head with that of a convict (as, indeed, in Shakespeare's play)" (1992, 23).

20 In actual fact, once the death penalty is inflicted on Iuriste, Epitia herself will plead for mercy with the Emperor, thus obtaining clemency for the Deputy.

and the will to have the man's head conveyed to the woman:

I will to the Gayler sende | That secretelie Andrugio he behead, | Whose  
head he shall, with these same | wordes commend "To Cassandra, as  
Promos promist thee, | From prison loe, he sendes thy Brother free".  
(IV, ii)

Yet the jailer, noble in spirit, filled with compassion, will save Andrugio by making a pitiful replacement and hiding the young convict in the woods. The same Andrugio, in the fifth act of the second part of the story, will relate the facts to the king, thus leading the text towards the conclusion:

When I should dye, the Gayler mov'd to ruth, | Declared to mee,  
what Promos pleasure was; | Amazde whereat, I tolde him all the tru-  
eth, | What betwene Cassandra and him dyd passe. | He much agriev'd  
Lord Promos guylt to heare, | Was verie lothe, mee (wofull man) to  
harne; | At length, just God, to set me (wretched) cleare, | With this  
defence, his wylling minde did arme. | Two dayes afore, to death, were  
divers done, | For severall faultes, by them committed; | So that of  
them, he tooke the heade from one, | And so to Cassandra, the same  
presented, | Affirming it, to be her brothers head. | Which done, by  
night, he sent me post away (V, v)

Ergo, the replacement of the head is present both in Whetstone's text and in Shakespeare's. Notwithstanding this, it is still possible to find some differences between the events narrated in the two plays. In *Measure for Measure*, the severed head sent to Angelo presents traits that are unaltered and merely similar to those of Claudio;<sup>21</sup> in the text by Whetstone, instead, the severed head has lost its original features and looks like a tumefied and disfigured mass (cf. Lever 1967, xli).

If Shakespeare, as we shall see, finds an expedient to hand over to Angelo a head similar to that of Isabella's brother, Whetstone will hastily solve the issue of resemblance deforming the somatic traits of the head delivered to Cassandra.<sup>22</sup> Proof of this is the fact that the woman, imposing on herself an imperturbable demeanour, first asks the jailer to thank Promos for the macabre delivery "I thank him yet, he would vouchsafe on me, my brothers head"; then, when she is left alone, she will mourn her brother's fate without becoming aware of the substitution: "Andrugio, let mee kis

21 The same thing happens in Cinthio's novella, but in this case the deformation of facial features is not necessary: the head delivered to Epitia is precisely that of her brother.

22 Cassandra will be deceived by the jailer who will send her the head of a man who has features similar to those of Andrugio; the face will therefore be deformed before being delivered.

thy lippes" (IV, iv). The woman will accept the devastation of the face as a result of torture or offenses against the person and will never doubt the authenticity of the head, now unrecognizable. Thus, in Whetstone, the swelling and deformation of the features are a subterfuge necessary to the replacement and therefore to the success of the stratagem conceived for the happy ending. Conversely, in Shakespeare the head delivered to Angelo will not present signs of violence or bruising but will simply look like Claudio's. In this it is possible to find a first departure from Whetstone's work.

In sum, Shakespeare seems to have intentionally avoided the slavish repetition of the story as it was proposed by the two predecessors. And the issue of identifying the major sources is important just to have cognizance of the changes made with respect to them, to assess the extent and quality of the changes and, where possible, to try to trace the reasons for them.

What has been said so far highlights the differences between the episode in Shakespeare and the main sources of *Measure for Measure*, with the observation that it is unlikely that Shakespeare, writing of the story of the beheading of Claudio, was inspired exclusively by Cinthio and Whetstone; yet this does not demonstrate proximity to Matthew's text. For this, further considerations are required.

#### 4 The Substitution: the Head of Ragozine

It must be immediately observed that, in Shakespeare's text, before Angelo's death sentence is carried out, there comes the unexpected, and appropriate, expedient of the 'double exchange' of Claudio's substitute whose head is to be cut off. It has already been remarked that the episode of the substitution is completely absent in Cinthio's novella, while in Whetstone's play the replacement is made only once. Conversely, in *Measure for Measure*, with an unforeseen change with respect to the plan devised by the Duke to save the young convict – "Let this Barnardine | be this morning executed and his head born to Angelo" (IV, ii, 172-3) – in addition to Claudio's head, Shakespeare also decides to save Barnardine's head, replacing it with that of a pirate who died in prison:

PROVOST Here in the prison, father,  
There died this morning of a cruel fever  
One Ragozine, a most notorious pirate. (IV, iii, 66-8)

The angle that suggests a voluntary Shakespearean deviation, a clear example of *complicatio* of the source, is that following the example of "Promos and Cassandra" the story would likewise have found a happy ending: it would have indeed been enough to deliver to Angelo the 'mangled' head of a detainee who had just died that the young woman could

not have recognized (or disowned) precisely because of the swelling of the face.<sup>23</sup> In *Measure for Measure*, as in Whetstone's text, the features of the first substitute were different from those of the convict. The diversity of appearance and colours could possibly have compromised the success of the plan hatched by the Duke, also putting the Provost's life in danger:

PROVOST Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover the favour.  
(IV, ii, 174)

Yet shaving and dyeing Barnardine's head before handing over the battered head to Angelo, trusting also in the ability of violent death to alter the features, could have obviated (perhaps with some risk) the slight resemblance with Isabella's brother. As the Duke properly declares:

DUKE VINCENTIO O, death's a great disguiser; and you may add to it.  
Shave the head, and tie the beard; and say it was  
the desire of the penitent to be so bared before his  
death: you know the course is common. (IV, ii, 175-8)

Actually, in the play, suddenly "an accident that heaven provides" (IV, iii, 74) intervenes. Through a superior will, through chance, which finds its origin in a Shakespearean specific purpose, a pirate with features similar to those of Claudio dies in prison "of a cruel fever":

PROVOST One Ragozine, [...]  
A man of Claudio's years; his beard and head  
Just of his colour. What if we do omit  
This reprobate till he were well inclined;  
And satisfy the deputy with the visage  
Of Ragozine, more like to Claudio? (IV, iii, 67-72)

A new replacement is coming into view in the so far undefined path of the play. The substitution of the man to be beheaded becomes twofold: 1. Claudio → Barnardine; 2. Barnardine → Ragozine, so defining a further difference from "Promos and Cassandra". It goes without saying, that the

<sup>23</sup> It is hardly necessary to observe that this replacement makes *Measure for Measure* a perfect comedy, or rather a perfect 'dark comedy', in line with the precepts of the *tragedia di fin lieto* developed, not by chance, by Cinthio: the Shakespearean double substitution permits, indeed, every tragic killing (including that of the sinner Barnardine) to be avoided. As is known, the head sent to Angelo belongs to Ragozine: a pirate who dies in his cell.

trick is perfectly suited to the dramatic project.<sup>24</sup> Ragozine's substitution completes the path of clemency that informs the whole play: the action of sparing Barnardine's life *de facto* permits the remission of the Bohemian dissolute prisoner's earthly faults operated by the Duke in the last scene. Moreover, before the play ends, Barnardine himself is entrusted to Friar Peter "for better times to come" (*Measure for Measure*, V, i, 483), thus enforcing the lenient religious-political tone that characterizes the play. Hence, the double Shakespearean exchange, on the one hand, fully provides the similarity between the man whose head will be severed and Claudio,<sup>25</sup> while, on the other, it allows the drama to achieve a conclusion in which justice is combined with forgiveness. This ascertained, the investigation proceeds.

## 5 "For My Better Satisfaction"

To find significant traces of contiguity between *Measure for Measure* and the story of the saint another difference with respect to the two main sources must be noticed. The variation is simple to state: in neither works used by Shakespeare to draw inspiration for his play is the head of the convict 'solicited' by the Governor (or by the Deputy), nor is he ever given it. Iuriste, the alter ego of Angelo in the version of Cinthio, does not order

24 It would also have been possible that the Duke confided to Isabella the deception of the exchange of heads plotted against Angelo to resolve the issue. Yet, as a matter of fact, Shakespeare preferred to deceive even the young virgin in order to reach a greater effect in the final scene. The misleading words of the Duke, perhaps tinged with cynical sadism, are surely intended for the perfect *coup de théâtre* of the last act: "DUKE He [Angelo] hath released him, Isabel, from the world: | His head is off and sent to Angelo" (IV, iii, 112-3).

25 But what are Ragozine's features? The text communicates only that the pirate has hair and a beard of the same colour as those of Claudio and that he is of the same age. The characteristics of Ragozine's face (and therefore Claudio's) seem to recall those of John the Baptist: a beard and a young age. Claudio's green age (and therefore Ragozine's) can be inferred from the list of the *dramatis personae* which says "a young Gentleman" referring to Isabella's brother. And, according to the *Gospels*, young age is an attribute also of the Baptist: John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth (then Jesus' cousin), was born just six months before the birth of Christ. Consequently, at the time of the decapitation, the preacher could not have been more than thirty-three years old. But, obviously, this is not enough to determine a real proximity between the holy text and the beheading enacted by Shakespeare: one could argue that the similarities cannot be ascertained, or that the colour of Claudio-Ragozine's and John's beard and hair could be, at least in theory, different. In sum, the question of whether Ragozine's face recalls that of the Baptist cannot be resolved, nor is the confirmation of a physical resemblance really needed to prove the thesis of this paper. Yet the comparison is not completely fruitless: if it does not reveal a certain likeness, it demonstrates the 'possibility' of a resemblance, or at least it reveals that the features are not totally dissimilar. Moreover, the question of the severed head's features could be of some interest to point out the expedients and the precautions that should be put on stage to make the action coherent.

the severed head of the detainee to be brought to him as proof of death; rather he gives the order “to bring the brother to his sister”.<sup>26</sup> The same thing happens in “Promos and Cassandra”: the head is not sent to Promos (the governor in Whetstone’s text) as proof that the decapitation has taken place, but is sent to Cassandra as a violent expression of the breaking of the previous agreement. Both Epitia and Cassandra, who gave themselves to the Governors in their respective plays to obtain the grace of the brother, are taken by surprise (and, probably, by disenchantment and repugnance) by the arrival of the grisly remains. Yet neither in Cinthio nor in Whetstone is the horrible residue requested by the instigators of the execution. For their part, not the slightest interest is shown in the disengaged head.

In Shakespeare, instead, the head of Claudio is expressly required by Angelo (*Measure for Measure*, IV, ii, 124-5). The dramatic expedient of the severed head to be given to prove that the decapitation has happened is therefore an autonomous invention with respect to the main sources: it is an exclusively Shakespearean variation.<sup>27</sup> Let us analyze how events unfold.

When everything seems to be going according to the plan of Vincentio, instead of the grace for Claudio which the disguised Duke was expecting, the intimation arrives to put the young man to death, with the simultaneous request of the head to be received. One reads in Act IV:

PROVOST [*Reading the letter*] Whatsoever you may hear to the  
contrary,  
 let Claudio be executed by four of the clock; and in the  
 afternoon Barnardine. *For my better satisfaction*, let me  
 have Claudio’s head sent me by five. Let this be duly performed [...].  
 (IV, ii, 122-5; emphasis added)

The order is peremptory: Angelo wants the young man’s head as evidence of the beheading. Nor should we disregard the scrupulousness with which Angelo wants to verify that his commands are executed. The jailer receives an untypical solicitation: the death order is presented by the Deputy with unusual, worried pertinacity, as the recipient of the message will remind us:

PROVOST Lord Angelo, belike thinking me  
 remiss in mine office, awakens me with this unwonted  
 putting-on; methinks strangely, for he hath not used  
 it before. (IV, ii, 117-20)

26 Of great interest are the considerations presented by Walter Moretti (1992) in “La novella di Epitia e *Measure for Measure*”.

27 Among the other differences with respect to the main sources it is worth mentioning the inclusion of the character of Mariana and the ‘bed-trick’ innovation, which allows Isabella to remain chaste and to receive the marriage proposal from the Duke.

The desire for possession is rooted in Angelo, to the point of urging the gaoler and reminding him of his duty of obedience. If the expedient of saving the brother through the exchange of heads may, then, have been taken from Whetstone, the episode of the request for the severed head seems to be one of Shakespeare's innovations, and it cannot be excluded that the scene is to be considered as a *variatio* derived from the story of John the Baptist. As is known, during the banquet held for the King's birthday, in which "princes and captains, and chief estates of Galilee" were invited (Mark 6:21), Salome danced for the sovereign, fascinating him. To reward her, Herod, the king of Judea, made public promise to fulfil one of her wishes. After consulting with her mother, Herodias, Salome formulates her request to Herod: she wanted the head of the saint, kept for some time in prison,<sup>28</sup> to be delivered on a silver plate. Immediately afterwards, the girl gives the head to her mother. One reads in Matthew:

6 when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. 7 Wherefore he promised with an oath, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask. 8 And she being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a platter. 9 And the King was sorry. Nevertheless, because of the oath, and them that sat with him at the table, he commanded it to be given her, 10 And sent, and beheaded John in the prison. 11 And his head was brought in a platter, and given to the maid, and she brought it unto her mother. (Matthew 14:6-11)

The element that must be taken into critical account is how, both in the holy text and in Shakespeare, the severed head is explicitly requested: now by Salome (on behalf of Herodias): "Give me here John Baptist's head in a platter"; now by Angelo: "let me have Claudio's head sent me by five". As we shall see, in both cases, the head severed from the body, going beyond the quality of testimonial evidence, becomes an element of private satisfaction.

Even the reasons for the request could be assimilated. Herodias will have her personal desire for revenge against John, harboured for a long time because of the Baptist's allegations, finally satisfied. The woman, it should be noted, had called for the death of John to silence his criticisms about her illegitimate relationship with the king: Herodias was in fact already married to Herod's brother (Herod Philip I), and marriage with a sister-in-law was expressly forbidden by the Mosaic Law. Besides, Herod too was already married. Hence the attacks of the saint:

28 In all probability, John was imprisoned in the fortress of Machaerus on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, on the southern edge of Perea, a territory in which John had professed and preached throughout most of his life.



3 For Herod had taken John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. (Matthew 14:3-4)<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Angelo will demand the head of Claudio to be sure that no one is aware of his illicit relationship with Isabella and of his wicked proposal. Moreover, in the near future, the young brother might even take revenge for being forced to live in infamy, saved thanks to an act of lust obtained by fraud:

ANGELO He should have lived,  
Save that riotous youth, with dangerous sense,  
Might in the times to come have ta'en revenge,  
By so receiving a dishonour'd life  
With ransom of such shame. (IV, iv, 27-31)

Debauchery is as widespread in Angelo's 'palace' as it is deep-rooted in the royal court of Galilee, and the same men deputed to amend licentiousness, enforcing the law by ensuring obedience to it, are trapped in the depravity they were supposed to eliminate. Both rulers are, or will be, forced to face shameful attacks regarding their moral conduct. As this implies, Herodias' desire to see his enemy deceased is analogous to Angelo's and is now dramatically addressed to him. Both are nourishing a similar entrenched resentment towards the two convicts. The deaths of Claudio and the Baptist are necessary, appalling solutions to put to rest any possible accusation related to immoral or illicit relationships condemned by the law.

But there is more. Like Herodias, Angelo asks for the head of the prisoner "for my better satisfaction". In addition to the pleasure received from the possession of Isabella (or at least from what he considered such), the Deputy demands further satisfaction, thus failing to fulfil the contract stipulated with the woman.<sup>30</sup> Precisely in the emotional perversion that accompanies the delivery of the outraged remains - experienced as a moment of complacency, as well as a form of personal release - it is possible to trace a fundamental affinity between the holy text and Shakespeare's play. It is worth noticing that this kind of intimate satisfaction, at the same time perverse and disdainful, is absent in the other texts that inspired the Shakespearean play. Both Promos and Iuriste fully satisfy their cynicism in the consummation of the sexual act with the deceived young woman.

29 The passage is also presented in Mark (6:17-18).

30 It should be noted, then, that Angelo had already failed to keep his promise breaking the wedding promise to Mariana (III, i, 202-22). Therefore, though well orchestrated, the Duke's plan to trust the Deputy again might be considered imprudent.



Neither of them manifests the intention of receiving additional smugness from the vision of the executed man's mutilated body. Their complacency does not go beyond the outrage exerted on the woman. Among the texts that most influenced the drafting of *Measure for Measure*, the *Gospel of Matthew*, in which the story of John the Baptist is obviously present, is the only one in which the explicit request for the severed head of a protagonist sentenced to death is shown.

As in *Matthew*, in Shakespeare too, following the directions of juridically and socially superior authorities, the head will be prepared and sent to the person who had commissioned the merciless act. And it is of no importance that the head delivered in *Measure for Measure* is not the one required, and that a scam hatched against Angelo to save Claudio is underway. What should be noted is that the similarities between the two events are evident, at least in this point. In a way, the dramatic role of the Duke itself can be considered, obviously *mutatis mutandis*, comparable to that of Herod. Like the king of Judea, the Governor of Vienna, still in disguise, asks the jailer to send the mortal remains to the person who requested them, i.e. Angelo:

DUKE Quick, dispatch, and send the head to Angelo. (IV, iii, 89)

Similarly, Herod will deliver the Saint's head on a silver platter to the young Salome who demanded it as a token to give to her mother (cf. *Matthew* 14:9-11). In both cases, the order will be executed promptly:

PROVOST Here is the head; I'll carry it myself. (IV, iii, 98)

Like Herodias, Angelo will wait for the remnants in his rooms, enjoying the macabre sight.

## 6 Private Executions. Heads not Belonging to the City

A further consideration should be added. In neither of the cases is there a public execution, performed in an open area of the city. The beheadings are organized and put into practice in the hidden space of a dungeon: in a secret zone out of sight. It is worth saying that beheading as a form of capital punishment was very common in both Elizabethan and Jacobean times.<sup>31</sup> And it was commonly charged with a high paradigmatic-didactic

<sup>31</sup> Even though the plot is set in Vienna, the play is conceived and written to be performed in England, thus Shakespeare, who surely was aware of the institutional practice of exhibiting the severed heads to the community, may have used this traditional custom in his play confident that the audience would recognize it as a well-established procedure. Indeed, in

value: it was offered to the city as admonition and reprimand:<sup>32</sup> a kind of political propaganda deliberately exhibited as evidence of the king's surveillance and control over the municipal life. There is a wealth of testimony to displacement, in central places, of heads stuck on pikes and tarred to preserve them from the action of the weather:

The heads of executed criminals were exhibited in centralized places - London Bridge, Westminster Hall, the Tower of London [...] or at the boundaries of cities, on gates, bridges and walls. Dead body parts announced the crime, as well as humiliating the criminal. [...] Heads were preserved so that they could be displayed for as long as possible. [...] traitors' heads were coated in tar or parboiled to slow the rot [...]. For more than three hundred years, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, there was a Keeper of the Heads who lived in the gatehouse on London Bridge, and whose job it was to arrange traitors' heads [...] to their best effect. (Larson 2014, 90-1)

The exposed head, as Regina Janes states, "models the sovereign's power over the living, warned, terrorized [...]. That head fulfils the sovereign's responsibility for order and peace to the people, and belongs to them as much as to him. The claim on the symbolic preserves behaviours that would otherwise be condemned" (2005, 18).<sup>33</sup> It is self-evident that if heads-on-the-bridge are symbolic proof of injustice persecuted, conversely, heads-privately-cut-off have a deeply cruel, malicious meaning, standing for a violent act, secretly perpetrated, with neither moral purposes nor royal warning. Claudio and John are put to death<sup>34</sup> on the boundary of merciless justice, carried out for the realization of private, unrevealed objectives. Hence, the remnants of the beheadings have no need to be shown off. The expositions would not have been welcomed by the community which could have judged them as pitiless and against popular sentiment. On

*2 Henry VI*, the heads of Lord Say and Sir James Cromer are brought on stage stuck on two poles and then exhibited in the streets (cf. *2 Henry VI*, IV, viii, 92-154).

**32** Most of the beheadings took place at the Tower of London or on Tower Hill, as public executions; obviously there were exceptions (usually for women): see, for example, the decapitation of Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, on May 28th 1541; of Anne Boleyn, on May 19th 1536; of Catherine Howard, on February 13th 1542; of Lady Jane Grey, on February 15th 1554, privately carried out, or at least in front of a small group of people. But for these private beheadings there was a reason: "The sight of a woman having her head hacked off, with all the goriness which this entailed, was thought likely to provoke sympathy for the victim, no matter what she had done" (Webb 2011, 18). On February 25th 1601 also Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, was beheaded privately (on his own request).

**33** Also of great interest is Stahl 1986.

**34** In reality, as is known, Claudio's death is only supposed.

the contrary, they need to be covered with silent watchfulness, and tacit approval.<sup>35</sup> The reason is that while heads exposed in local places glorify the King's power, stressing his strength and his mastery in administering justice, mortifying the victims,<sup>36</sup> in the case of Angelo and of Herod, the heads secretly cut off and never given to the public gaze shame them. Both private beheadings are indeed a strong testimony to Angelo and Herod's awareness of the wicked, unpopular value of their death sentences.

Moreover, if the severed heads of the executed belonged to the people as well as to the sovereign, in the case of John and Ragozine, the heads could not be considered a 'property' of the city, neither in a physical nor in a metaphorical sense. They are not exhibited as a civic, open reprimand,<sup>37</sup> as part of a teaching, moralizing process. Both heads will just be part of a personal, macabre memory, conveying the idea of a monopoly of violence, of a sole control over the victims. No longer is the punishment addressed to the public; it is now an end in itself. In so doing, the very function of the ruler, as a disinterested and loyal governor of the country, is lost.

## 7 To Desire to Destroy. Negative Fetishism

Hence the possession of the head is given as a dynamic of control and as an enemy's submission. The need to receive the severed head is an expression of personal affirmation; an acknowledgment of one's own power and of the capacity to make it operative. The need to directly verify the execution of the order refers to both the sense of pleasure that comes from receiving effective feedback to one's own will, and to the sadistic enjoyment arising from the subjection of the antagonist. Doing violence becomes an investigation of one's own political force.

Set in this context, the request for the head is charged with a highly symbolic value: it is a visualization of the triumph, the gift that the instigator makes to his own superiority, a narcissistic gratification. But at the

35 Neither Herod's guests nor Shakespeare's Provost would dare to overtly condemn the order given by the instigator. The jailer himself, in *Measure for Measure*, asks for evidence and guarantees to secretly disregard Angelo's will - he himself trembling for his own life - and so the Friar (the disguised Duke) will show him a letter with the seal of the Duke (IV, ii, 155-95).

36 In this case, the use of the verb 'mortify' is not a chance one, the verb deriving from late Latin *mortificāre*: 'to cause death', 'to put to death', or 'to subdue (the flesh)'; from Latin *mors* (death) and *facēre* (to make). For further information, see also Hoad 2003.

37 According to the *Gospels*, the Baptist's body was buried by Jesus' apostles: "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus" (Matthew, 14:12). Thus, neither John's head was exposed as a warning nor was it given to the public for adoration (how could it be possible, Christian religion not being officially spread and recognized yet?).

same time it represents the violation of the corpse, the desecration of the 'relic', the outrage on the individual that others have loved more than their own person.<sup>38</sup> It is a negative fetishism, a negation of idolatry. The request for possession is activated not out of fanatical adoration but out of revenge. The delivery of the head does not assume either a consecratory or worshipping value, it does not coincide with the beginning of a cult for an object considered charged with mystical meanings, but it is given as a mortification of the rival. The reception of the severed head is the final step in the path of socio-political annulment of the other considered as a menace to the preservation of personal supposed moral integrity, and to the maintenance of power.<sup>39</sup>

The act of delivery consecrates a phenomenology of horror. It reveals an insane tendency towards an ethical subjectivism, and therefore towards a process that lets behavioural rules correspond to individual purposes. The satisfaction that comes from the observation of the macabre remains complies with the aberrations of a diverted justice. It is the expression of a perversion related to the exercise of power; an affirmation of greatness.<sup>40</sup> The vision of the horror coincides with a moment of unspoken pleasure: the motionless, sacrificed, mutilated body awakens an intimate, never uttered, excitement.

The deaths of John and Claudio (the latter only supposed) represent the primacy of a passionate and violent impetus aimed at an egotistical self-realization. But those deaths also represent a suppression of the truth, or rather the elimination of any aspect that could give voice to the truth. For this reason, at the same time, they represent the wrong which needs repair, injustice waiting to be punished. And, while the redemption for the story of John the Baptist will be consigned to the judgment of God, the redemption of the wrong suffered by Claudio (and Isabella) is consigned to the fully earthly reality of the city of Vienna:

ISABELLA Justice, O royal Duke! (V, i, 20)<sup>41</sup>

38 In Angelo's eyes, Isabella is prepared to sacrifice her body to save her brother.

39 The process of annulment being commenced with the imprisonments of the two men.

40 In *Discipline and Punish* - originally published in France as *Surveiller et punir* (1975) - Michel Foucault points out how in some cases crime "reveals the monstrosity of the strong and powerful", becoming "the exclusive privilege of those who are really great" (1977, 68-9).

41 With these words Isabella will plead for justice: "ISABELLA Justice, O royal Duke! Vail your regard | Upon a wronged, - I would fain have said, a maid. | O worthy prince, dishonour not your eye | By throwing it on any other object | Till you have heard me in my true complaint | And given me justice, justice, justice, justice!" (V, i, 20-5).

Not so much the act of beheading must be owed to Matthew, but the procedures of the decapitation and delivery of the severed head and, above all, the wicked satisfaction felt by the Deputy on receiving the cranium of the condemned man. Obviously, the personal events regarding Claudio and the Baptist's lives cannot be superimposed (how could they be?). Nor do I wish to say here, it is worth emphasizing, that Shakespeare intended to slavishly reproduce the *Gospel* passage. Instead, the fact is to be considered that, having to write about an act of beheading, and deciding to deviate from the sources, Shakespeare drew inspiration (also) from the episode narrated in Matthew's text, that critics have already recognized as a source of the play. Thus, it is in some way possible that Shakespeare operated a sort of 'mythic transformation', turning biblical conventional episodes into literal prototypes of a secularized society. As Debora Shuger has painstakingly highlighted, the renewal of biblical features, the renegotiation of the mythical element in terms of dramatic production, were not uncommon to Elizabethan writers:

mythic transformations were possible because in Renaissance practice the biblical narratives retained a certain (if limited) flexibility: not necessarily a theological flexibility but a sort of extra-dogmatic surplus of undetermined meanings – or rather meaning capable of being determined in various ways. (1994, 5)<sup>42</sup>

Yet, encroachments in sacred territory, translations of New or *Old Testament* in the Elizabethan plots were not necessarily indicators of specific theological intentions or of doctrinal messages surreptitiously conveyed to the audience by the author. Most likely they were a secularized repositioning of epic-biblical material, that is to say of the numerous religious cultural features which the Elizabethan community was imbued with, also considering the massive circulation of holy texts in Shakespeare's England.<sup>43</sup>

The process of secularization that affected Elizabethan culture was long-lasting: necessarily, the texts produced in those years shared, in their interstices, either reconstructions (or reshapings) of religious episodes, or aspects of religious patterns, not to mention echoes of biblical speeches. In a way, the Shakespearean stage-world also remained linked to previous performances in which the dialogical context re-proposed scriptural, archetypal models. But, possibly, Shakespeare's use of biblical-allegorical patterns, as well as his reshaped use of biblical references, were functional

42 But one reads also Greenblatt 1980, 1991.

43 As Kastan states: "what is everywhere evident is Shakespeare's awareness of the inescapability of religion in his England" (2014, 7).

to the didactic and moral purposes entrusted to the modern stage (for further information, cf. Leone 2016). They fitted more with the dramatic-educational project that underpinned Renaissance theatre than with a path of encoded Catholicism detectable through the parallels between the holy excerpts and the dramatist's lines. To this extent, it is in some way possible, as Alison Shell points out, that Shakespeare "treated all religions, including the Christian doctrine of his time, as subservient to artistic unity and closure" (2015, 235).<sup>44</sup>

*Measure for Measure* is given to the public as a secular drama in which holy promptings and evangelical loans are certainly present, but set in a civic environment, in the ordinariness of a corrupt Vienna. The plot is undoubtedly infused with a religious atmosphere, the Bible's moral features, its ethical and principled purposes are unquestionably incorporated, yet the play delves into the analysis of a fully human society, depicting the decline of human nature when guided by obtuse and repressed lechery, also presenting the risks related to the inconsiderate use of an intransigent law. The ethical, religious insights, the symbolic references to the *Gospels*, the lenient atmosphere of the last scene are pigeonholed in Shakespeare's dramatic pattern in which the character is turned into a legal subject called to account for his conduct not only to God but especially to a civilized society governed by specific legal rules intended to protect the dignity and honour of every member (Leone 2016, 13). On stage there is presented the tragic, wholly earthly, struggle between aspirations to virtue and tangible mediocrity of those who are called to administer the common good (13). In this exemplar, theatrical scheme, Christian precepts, biblical parables are necessarily considered as prototypical models to refer to.

The Shakespearean differences with regard to the texts of Cinthio and Whetstone can be considered as a resolute intention to diverge from the works of the authors who had preceded him; to change the emotional landscape in which to place the *new* story of Claudio, proposing different dramatic details, introducing significant variations. The double substitution of the man whose head is to be cut off, the delay in the execution of Barnardine,<sup>45</sup> but in particular the request for the severed head made by the instigator, the procedure of the *private* beheading, and the consequential complacency gained, suggest that Shakespeare can possibly have drawn from the episode of the Baptist the changes he intended to offer the Elizabethan audience, without attributing to those changes any definite conceptual value. They could be considered as simple loans, presumed to

44 Also of great interest are Boitani's reflections on Shakespeare's immanent *Gospel*, considered, *mutatis mutandis*, a symmetrical, earthly remodeling of the transcendental one (cf. Boitani 2009).

45 Another significant parallel with the Holy Scripture can be found in the time that passes before the decapitation of the dissolute Barnardine, "a Bohemian born [...] that is a prisoner

be useful to the dramatic construction; expedients to obtain diversification from the source path; a further testimony to Shakespearean attention to a play that acutely investigates the complex fragility and vulnerability of the human being.

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nine years old" (IV, ii, 1, 131-2) is finally carried out. Strangely, the execution of Barnardine is continually postponed until it coincides with the execution of Claudio ("to-morrow morning are to die Claudio and Barnardine", IV, ii, 6). Hence, according to the original plan contrived to deceive the Deputy, Barnardine should have been beheaded instead of Claudio. And the postponement of the Bohemian detainee's execution is the result of persistent pressure exerted by the prisoner's friends, and of the deferment conceded by the Duke:

DUKE VINCENTIO How came it that the absent Duke had not either delivered him to his liberty or executed him? I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.

PROVOST His friends still wrought reprieves for him: and indeed, his fact, till now in the government of Lord

Angelo, came not to an undoubtful proof. (IV, ii, 134-9)

Similarly, the Holy Scripture reports that the execution of John the Baptist is constantly postponed by Herod, who, on the one hand recognizes John's qualities, while on the other he greatly fears the people's reaction to the possible death of the prophet. One reads in Matthew: "And when he [Herod] would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a Prophet" (Matthew 14:5). The Baptist then remains in jail for a long time, in the fortress of Machaerus, just as the Bohemian remains in his Viennese prison for a long time. Thus, not only the waiting times for the execution of Barnardine's sentence seems to refer to that of the Baptist, but in a sense also the reasons for the deferral of the capital punishment: "His friends still wrought reprieves for him" (IV, ii, 137) the Provost will answer the question formulated by the disguised Duke who enquires about the reason for the delay of Barnardine's execution. And if in case of the story narrated in the *Gospels* the continual postponement of the date of the Baptist's death finds its reasons in the historical and religious context in which the event happened, in Shakespeare this delay is the result of a deliberate choice: indeed the scene could have been expunged from the text without producing consequences. It would have been sufficient to proceed directly with the replacement of Claudio's head with that of Ragozine, the pirate who died in prison whose head will in the end be cut off and sent to Angelo.



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# Under Lowland Eyes: David Balfour in the Land of the Jacobites

## Robert Louis Stevenson's Mapping of 18th-century Scotland in *Kidnapped*

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**Abstract** This article explores the relationship between travel, space and history in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. It provides a mapping of the protagonist's movement, highlighting the historical implications conveyed in the way in which the Highlands and the rest of Scotland are described. An interesting essay in literary geography, this is an attempt to provide the reader with a new perspective on Stevenson's novel, stressing his interest in Scottish history and his attention to internal colonialism.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Mapping Scotland as an Example of the World. – 3 David's Perspective: Experience, Passions and Mistakes.

**Keywords** Stevenson. *Kidnapped*. Highlands. Landscape. History. Literary geography.

### 1 Introduction

*Kidnapped* was published in 1886, when Robert Louis Stevenson was 36 years old and had already written several works, among them *An Inland Voyage* (1878), *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) and *Treasure Island* (1883). Like other works by Stevenson, *Kidnapped* hinges upon the ideas of travel and adventure. Though, there are many eye-catching features distinguishing this novel from the previous ones. *Kidnapped* is not just an adventure tale, but a historical novel: it is set in 1751 – a few years after the 1745 Jacobite rising – and is peopled with accurately reconstructed historical characters (Alan Breck Stewart, James Stewart of the Glen, Cluny Macpherson, Robin Oig). The structuring principle of the novel is travel; David's adventures follow one another while he travels around Scotland. As in Scott's *Waverley*, the protagonist experiences what being an outsider means; indeed, both David Balfour and Edward Waverley travel through the Highlands, a territory completely unknown to them. Unlike *Waverley*, however, David does not dream of a life of romantic adventures. Instead, when he leaves Essendean it is with a prospect of a wealthy, ordinary life; David expects stability, rather than adventure.

In this essay, I will explore two main issues, namely: the function of the setting and its historical meaning – why the Highlands? Why the year 1751? –; and the protagonist's emotional perception of the Highlands. *Kidnapped* is a retrospective story told by the protagonist, David Balfour, a seventeen-year old Lowland boy with a country rearing, who is compelled to leave his well-known, provincial world, in order to travel through the Highlands with a Highlander (Alan Breck) charged with having killed Colin Campbell of Glenure (the so called Appin Murder, in which David gets accidentally involved). This story-telling structure allows the reader to distinguish between David's own perception of the world and the historical reality portrayed by Stevenson.

## 2 Mapping Scotland as an Example of the World

Scotland seemed to offer in miniature the key to a complete global understanding that would make time and space simultaneously available as a subject of inquiry (Fielding 2011).

The geography of eighteenth-century Scotland can be very useful in order to understand the changes that led Europe from feudalism into modernity. Like Scott, Stevenson was aware that the years following the 1707 Act of Union not only were of crucial importance to the development of Scotland, but they also condensed in half a century events that in the rest of Europe took about two centuries to happen. In *Kidnapped*, Stevenson portrays eighteenth-century Scotland as a divided world, where each area represents a different stage in social development:

The bleak landscape and clan society of the Highlands, the agricultural improvements of the Lowlands and the flourishing cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, bourgeois centres of commerce and the professions, could be read as a kind of living museum in which all stages of society could be exhibited to the historical observer. (Fielding 2011, 3)

Accordingly, the inhabitants of one area differ from those of other areas. In *The Fictions of Geography*, Penny Fielding calls this feature “geographical determinism”, meaning that “social organisation” is “an expression of the experiences of the local population” (2011, 4). Since people are influenced by their experience of the land they live in, a Lowlander as David has nothing in common with a Highlander as Alan.

Stevenson's mapping of eighteenth-century Scotland in the novel is organized around two main lines: the Highland-Lowland divide and the primitive-civilised divide. Before Culloden, the Highlands stood apart from the Lowlands; as Stevenson wrote in “The Foreigner at Home”, the Highlanders “wore a different costume [tartan], spoke a different language

[Gaelic], worshipped in another church, held different morals, and obeyed a different social constitution from his fellow countrymen either of the south or north" (1895, 21). On the Highlands, feudalism was still present; people lived in clans and obeyed their chieftains. Agricultural techniques were outdated and scarcely productive; the Lowlands, instead, were opening to modern economic systems and advanced agricultural techniques, as well as to commercial and industrial activities. The divide was not only geographical, but also temporal. The Lowlands were opening to the present and were already on the track to progress and modernity, while the Highlands were stuck in the past.

From an English and Lowland viewpoint, there was a wide civilisation gap between Lowlands and Highlands. Indeed, for the 36-year-old Stevenson, the Highlands represented what the South Seas represented for the middle-aged Stevenson – they were a relic of our shared past as primitive men, worthy to be preserved rather than destroyed by civilisation. As Kenneth McNeil argues in *Scotland, Britain, Empire*, the Highlanders “were an anachronism, a people on the first rung of the ladder of social progress, sharing affinity with other contemporaneous ‘primitives’ around the globe while living adjacent to, and sometimes venturing into, the civil space of the modern nation” (2007, 21). In the half-century following the 1707 Act of Union the Highlands were brought (by force) into modernity, they were ridden of their primitive feudal system and introduced to English economics, politics and laws.<sup>1</sup> When David Balfour, a Lowland Whig, crosses the border between Lowlands and Highlands and enters what he calls “the wrong side of the Highland Line”, he steps into a most bewildering world, in which the conflict between past (James of the Glen and Alan Breck Stewart) and present (the Red Fox, King George’s agent) produces violence and poverty.<sup>2</sup>

In this “chronicle of modernization”, present and past are closely connected with the Highland-Lowland divide (Maxwell & Trumpener 2001,

1 Law is a crucial issue in the novel; Alan and David hold different viewpoints about what is right and what is wrong. David believes things in the Highlands work the same way they do in the Lowlands, but Alan knows very well that clan-laws are rather different from the idea of justice held by Edinburgh lawyers. After the Appin Murder, both David and Alan are pursued as partakers in the crime. David, quite naively, has the idea to go to the authorities and declare their innocence. Alan stops him from doing such a foolish thing and explains to David how justice works in the Highlands: “This is a Campbell that’s been killed. Well, it’ll be tried in Inverara, the Campbell’s head place; with fifteen Campbells in the jury-box, and the biggest Campbell of all (and that’s the Duke) sitting cocking on the bench. Justice, David? The same justice, by all the world, as Glenure found a while ago at the road-side” (Stevenson 2007, 126).

2 Donald McFarlan’s notes to the text thus explain the idea of the Highland line: “A cultural boundary (and, to a certain extent, a geographical fault) between the predominantly Gaelic-speaking clan territories of the west and the Scotch-speaking lowlands to the east. Very roughly, it can be considered to start at the southern end of Loch Lomond and run northwards to Inverness” (Stevenson 2007, 231).

108). These two regions of Scotland are embodied in two characters: Alan and David. Alan Breck represents the past, David the present. Alan is a native of the Highlands, a region that, due to its feudal social system, is considered as a symbol of the past. Moreover, he embodies the figure of the story-teller, establishing a relationship between the past and the present; he tells David about both national history and personal story; he proudly speaks about his father and his clan, his relatives and his roots. On the other hand, David embodies the present; as such, he knows little or nothing about his roots; he knows nothing about his family on the side of his father, a schoolmaster in Essendean, and only supposes his mother's family was from Angus. When he is hosted by Duncan Dhu Maclaren in Balquidder, David receives a visit by Robin Oig, one of Rob Roy's sons and a notorious outlaw, who fought in the 1745 Jacobite rising. The Highlander asks David about his family and origins, but the young man is unable to answer. David's ignorance of his roots is received as a shameful thing by Oig, who calls him a "kinless loon that didn't know his own father" (Stevenson 2007, 183). David's role is to represent the present; he does not need to know his past, because the narrator's emphasis is on his present impressions and experiences.

Stevenson's narrative is set at the periphery of Great Britain, in what can be called the 'outlands'. In an essay called *The Romance of the Outlands. The fin-de-siècle Adventure Story Between History and Geography*, Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (2001) explore the idea of the "romance of the outlands". Their source is a 1905 article written by Edward Wright and published in the *Quarterly Review*, in which the phrase "romance of the outlands" is coined for W.H. Hudson's works and extended to the novels written by Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson (106). Maxwell and Trumpener explain that the romance of the outlands is characterised by three main features: it must be set on the frontier between two worlds, it must avoid exoticism and must "expand the spatial boundaries of the Victorian fictional world" (106). I decided to call this paper "Under Lowland Eyes" in order to draw attention to the fact that both *Kidnapped* and Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) are structured around the principle of juxtaposition; in fact, the plot of both novels revolves around the opposition of two conflicting worlds: the Lowlands and the Highlands for Stevenson, East and West for Conrad. In both cases one of the conflicting parts is showed to the readership through the experiencing subjectivity of a first person narrator, who belongs to the other area; moreover, the dramatic event at the core of both novels is a politically tinged murder connected with a failing revolution.

At a first glance the conflict underlying society in *Under Western Eyes* is more global than that in *Kidnapped*. The East-West divide concerns Eurasia while the Lowland-Highland divide concerns Scotland only; though, the conflict between East and West is located in Russia, a local place consid-

ered for centuries as the very periphery of the civilised world. Some late nineteenth-century Russian philosophers focussing on Russian identity maintained that Russia had itself a double identity, an Eastern one and a Western one.<sup>3</sup> The divide is not only geographical, but also temporal. In a similar way the Highland line divides Scotland into two worlds different not only in culture but also in their degree of civilisation, the Urals divide Russia (and Eurasia) between East and West. After Peter the Great's work of Europeanization, the inhabitants of the Western parts of Russia felt closer to Europe and adopted Volterian rationalism as a way to come out of their primitivism, which they identified with oriental features such as mysticism, apathy and tyranny. The tsars treated the regions beyond the Urals as a colonial possession, the same way Stevenson suggests the English did with Scotland.<sup>4</sup>

The Highlands of Stevenson, as well as those of Scott, are the outlands in which the identity of the protagonist is discussed and redefined, in which the boy becomes a man by confronting himself with a hostile world. The word 'outlandish' is used by Stevenson himself, through David's narration, while speaking of those "strange, outlandish Gaelic names" (2007, 202) and that "poor enough attire of an outlandish fashion" that David is wearing at the end of his Highland journey" (190). The transformation at the end of the novel concerns not only David's outward appearances, but also his perception and knowledge of the world.

As a romance of the outlands, *Kidnapped* consistently hinges upon the representation of space and geography. In fact, the novel can comfortably be considered as belonging to the genre of geographical fiction. In *Kidnapped* great importance is attached to places. Its plot does not revolve around a concatenated series of adventures that are tightly connected with one another; instead, it is more like a 'necklace', a series of episodes arranged as successive stages of a journey (Clunas 1983, 110). Each place visited is crucial to the development of the story, and plays the same function a real character would in the plot. This is in tune with what Stevenson wrote in "A Gossip on Romance":

It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, that particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my

3 See, for instance, the article published by Maksim Gor'kij in 1915 on the journal *Letopis* (1, Moscow). The article is called "Dve Dushi", which means 'the two souls'; by this phrase, the author hints to the two souls that characterize the East and the West (Europe and the Far East, more in specific).

4 An interesting study about the colonialist approach adopted by Russians in the conquest of the lands beyond the Urals is provided by Aldo Ferrari in *La foresta e la steppa. Il mito dell'Eurasia nella cultura russa* (2003).



race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. (1895, 252)

The titles of chapters are symptomatic of the importance attached to places in the novels. Most chapters are called after placenames, especially the headings of central chapters, where the pronoun 'I' and other characters' names disappear. The route followed by David describes a sort of anti-clockwise circle – the boy leaves the Lowlands, circumnavigates the northern regions of Scotland, shipwrecks on the Isle of Mull, goes through the Highlands and eventually arrives in Queen's Ferry again (the Lowland port where he was kidnapped at the beginning of his sea voyage). David's journey serves Stevenson's purpose to provide his contemporary readership with a compared view of two worlds, Highlands and Lowlands, portrayed when they were still in conflict. In 1886, in fact, not only was Scotland a modernised part of the British Empire, but the Highlands were a well-integrated part of Scotland. In 1751 things were rather different.

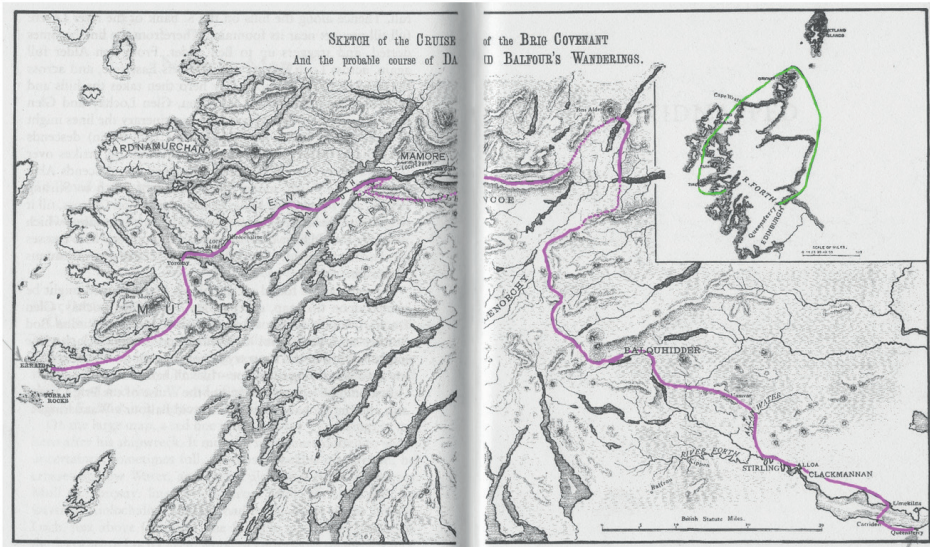


Figure 1. Reproduction of the map included by Stevenson at the beginning of the novel. David's route is highlighted; the green line in the smaller picture shows David's voyage by sea, while the pink one shows his route by land



The book opens on David Balfour leaving his country village of Essendean for the house of Shaws, his uncle's dwelling. The already motherless boy has recently lost his father, so that his only relation in the world is his uncle. Throughout the narration, the reader is informed that uncle Ebenezer had, unfairly, taken possession of the house of Shaws instead of David's father; therefore, David is the rightful heir to the estate. Lowland countryside is here described as it would be in a pastoral poem, with blackbirds whistling, hawthorn bushes in full bloom, low hills covered with woods, pastures dotted with sheep and fertile plains. David is ready to leave this peaceful, idyllic scenery, in order to move to what he thinks is a "great, busy house, among rich and respected gentleness of [his] own name and blood" (Stevenson 2007, 10).

Despite the beauty of the surrounding landscape, the house of Shaws turns out to be an infernal place; a dark, ruined house, inhabited by an old villain laying out the most mischievous plans to get himself rid of David. Ebenezer, in fact, has David kidnapped by Helias Hoseason, the captain of a ship called *Covenant*. Ebenezer's aim is having David sold into slavery in the South Carolinas. Instead of sailing to the Americas, the *Covenant* unexplainably follows a different route, circumnavigating northern Scotland. On board, David experiences the hard life of the cabin boy; he is mistreated and desperate for being far from home. During a storm, the *Covenant* crew rescues a shipwrecked Highlander dressed in French clothes called Alan Breck Stewart. His outlooks are extremely interesting, but at the same time disquieting; to David, Alan's eyes are "both engaging and alarming" (58-61). David grows more and more interested in the stranger and decides to warn him against Captain Hoseason's plan to kill and rob him. David supports Alan in his fight against Hoseason and they took control of the ship. Unfortunately, due to the storm the *Covenant* crashes against the Torran Rocks, in the neighbourhoods of the Isle of Mull.

David is shipwrecked on the small tidal islet of Earraid, whence he sets on a long journey through the Highlands in quest of Alan, the only person he knows there. On his way to James of the Glens' house, where he has been told Alan is waiting for him, David gets involved in the Appin Murder. While asking for some information to a company of soldiers on a road in the wood of Lettermore, the leader of the party is shot dead by somebody concealed among the trees. The man's name is Colin Campbell, Factor of the King. Campbell's fellows charge David with being an accomplice to the murderer and order redcoats to apprehend him. Providentially, Alan comes out of the wood and hides David from the redcoats. Together they set on a long flight, which will lead them through the Highlands to the Lowlands, where David will be restored his rightful inheritance and Alan is supposed to leave for France to serve his exiled chief.

The Highlands experienced by David are not the exotic destination for travellers they became during the Victorian age. The aftermaths of the Act

of Union first and of the defeat at Culloden then had sorely impaired the economy of a land which was already quite poor, due to a scarcely fertile soil and a cold climate.<sup>5</sup> In chapter XII, David and Alan have just defeated Captain Hoseason and took lead of the brig *Covenant*; while having some rest after their heroic deed, they tell each other their own stories. Alan tells David about his mission (collecting a second rent from the Appin farmers and delivering it into his chief's hands) and provides him and the reader with an account of what the defeat of Culloden entailed for clan chiefs and tenants:

When the men of the clans were broken at Culloden, and the good cause went down, [...] Ardshiel had to flee like a poor deer upon the mountain, he and his lady and his bairns. A sair job we had of it before we got him shipped; and while he still lay in the heather, the English rogues, that couldnae come at his life, were striking at his rights. They stripped him of his powers; they stripped him of his lands; they plucked the weapons from the hands of his clansmen, that had borne arms for thirty centuries; ay, and the very clothes off their backs – so that it's now a sin to wear a tartan plaid, and a man may be cast into gaol if he has but a kilt about his legs. One thing they couldnae kill. That was the love the clansmen bore their chief. (82)

Alan is talking about the repressive measures adopted by the English government in order to suppress the Highlanders' spirit of rebellion. The core event of the novel, the Appin Murder, is the direct consequence of these measures; once the chiefs had been spoiled of their lands, their properties were given to people like Colin Campbell of Glenure – King George's Factors collecting rents from the tenants and administering justice. Therefore, Colin Roy Campbell became the catalyst of the Appin people's rage against the new government and its measures. Moreover, the conflict between the Campbells and the Stewarts was a long-standing

5 Life conditions in Scotland after the union of the Parliaments are well described in "The Price of Union", the twelfth chapter of Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry's *History of Scotland* (1992). Besides the Jacobite Risings, this chapter gives useful information about the government's measures against the Highlanders, which were "aimed at destroying completely the whole Highland clan structure": "the chiefs were stripped of all their authority and powers. Hereditary sheriffdoms and other jurisdictions were abolished, and in so doing the government bracketed the jurisdictions of clans who had not supported the Jacobites. [...] the clan chiefs were left with no powers, no pride, no purpose. The wearing of tartans and kilts, the playing of pipes, and the owning of weapons of any kind, were all forbidden on pain of death or long-term imprisonment. Even the speaking of Gaelic was prohibited. It was a systematic attempt to 'obliterate the Celtic mode of life'". According to Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry, the cause of this "devastation of the Highlands" is that both the London government and "many Lowland and Presbyterian Scots [...] hated Highlanders more for their stubborn adherence to the Roman Catholic faith than their loyalty to the Stewarts" (1992, 197-8).

one, so that Alan Breck Stewart's hostility to the Campbells also represents his clansmen's refusal to give up their loyalty to their chief in order to submit to their old enemy.<sup>6</sup>

The emphasis laid by Stevenson upon Alan's words suggests that the writer's sympathy was likely to be on the Jacobite side. About Alan's passionate story-telling, Barry Menikoff (2005) writes: "Alan in *Kidnapped*, via Allan in the *Trial*, is the voice for all that rage directed toward the clan Campbell - and via the Campbells toward the entire political, economic, and social system that led to the defeat and subjugation of all those who followed Prince Charles just six years earlier" (142). Moreover, many tenants were compelled to leave their farms and either go abroad or became outlaws and hide themselves in the Highlands. The clearing off of the farms passed under the name of 'Highland clearances'. This phenomenon was still a matter of interest in Stevenson's days; many of the societies created in the nineteenth century for the preservation of Highland traditions took interest not only in Highland literature, but also in their history. In 1872 an interesting paper appeared in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, in which John Macdonald called attention to the aftermath of the union between Scotland and England:

Events that have so completely changed the outward aspect of the North and the social condition of its people, will not and cannot be so easily forgotten, at any rate so long as the injustice perpetrated on a peaceable and industrious people is attempted to be justified under the mask of a false political economy. [...] In justification of the evictions we are continually reminded that the Highlanders have always benefited and improved in circumstances when removed from the scenes of their childhood. [...] but not a word do we ever hear of the thousands of cases of individual and family suffering caused, [of people] sank into poverty and ill-health, dying broken-hearted. (1871-72, 79-80)

Fourteen years after the publication of this paper (which we have no evidence Stevenson ever read), *Kidnapped* was published and read by both Scotsmen and Englishmen. Its appeal to the public is undeniable; readers of every age appreciate this romance, although they may be fond of it for different reasons - some may love its dynamism, others its historical accuracy, others its setting and characters. Although he avoided clichéd exoticism, Stevenson loved the picturesque. Noteworthy, to Stevenson the word did not merely describe a pictorial category; in *Kidnapped*, in fact, the picturesque seems to be connected more with dress and local identity,

6 This conflict is frequently hinted at by Alan, for instance when he says: "[...] as for the Campbells, they would never spare siller where there was a Stewart to be hurt" (Stevenson 2007, 149).

than with landscape. Moreover, it stresses aspects of Highland life that make David feel increasingly an outsider, highlighting the differences between Highlanders and Lowlanders.

Alan, for instance, is the most picturesque of characters, as can be understood by reading the following description, which was given by the authorities in a bill issued to recognize him (and a hundred pounds prize was put on his and David's heads): "a small, pock-marked, active man of thirty-five or nearby, dressed in a feathered hat, a French side-coat of blue with silver buttons and lace a great deal tarnished, a red waistcoat and breeches of black shag" (Stevenson 2007, 152). The French clothes Alan considers as 'fineness' and wears proudly, David sees as odd and almost ridiculous. The Highlanders' attire is picturesque as well, but the description is rather sympathetic; after the tartan was forbidden, people did not resign to give up their dress, but adapted it in the oddest ways: "Some went bare, only for a hanging cloak or great coat, and carried their trousers on their backs like a useless burthen; some had made imitation of the tartan with little parti-coloured stripes patched together like an old wife's quilt; others, again, still wore the highland philabeg, but by putting a few stitches between the legs, transformed it into a pair of trousers like a Dutchman's" (102-3).

In Stevenson's reconstruction of mid-eighteenth-century Scotland, the tartan had a very important social function - it identified the clan to which the wearer belonged. When David meets Colin Roy Campbell and asks him some pieces of information about the residence of the Stuarts, some knowledge about tartan colours would have spared him lots of troubles. Actually, a man of the party, probably a servant, is wearing some tartan clothes in the Argyll colours (blue, green and yellow); a Highlander would have known at once the Campbell colours and would have never asked a Campbell about the Stewart of Aucharn; David's lack of experience in Highland affairs, instead, makes him asking Colin Roy Campbell about James Stewart of the Glen's house and is automatically considered as a friend of the Stewarts and a supporter of the Jacobites.

Picturesque episodes also occur; some of them are concerned with local colour and myth (Cluny's 'cage', the duel at the pipes between Alan and Robin Oig), others with Alan's wits (when he and David are in the wood and in need to write a letter, he transforms a dove-feather into a pen and uses gunpowder and water to make ink), others with poverty, dirtiness and lawlessness. All this, which David labels as "curiosities of the time and place" (112), is not the fruit of Stevenson's invention; instead, he drew most of these episodes from the sources he studied. G.W.T. Omond, in an essay called *Notes on the Art of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1900), focused on the care with which Stevenson transformed historical sources into true-to-life descriptions and dialogues; about Alan's clothes, for instance, he writes: "The 'French clothes' worn by Alan Breck [...] are so described by

the witnesses who gave testimony against the real Alan Breck. The silver buttons [...] figure also in the evidence" (35).

### 3 David's Perspective: Experience, Passions and Mistakes

The reef on which we had struck was close under the south-west of Mull [...]. Sometimes the swell broke clean over us; sometimes it only ground the poor brig upon the reef, so that we could hear her beat herself to pieces; and what with the great noise of the sails, and the singing of the wind, and the flying of the spay in the moonlight, and the sense of danger, I think my head must have been partly turned, for I could scarcely understand the things I saw. ("The Loss of the Brig", in Stevenson 2007).

Highland landscape and its inhabitants are described in the novel from the perspective of the protagonist, David. As its sequel *Catriona, Kidnapped* is a retrospective tale of the protagonist's growth into a full-grown man. Nevertheless, this is not a *Bildungsroman*, but a historical novel of adventure. David's growth, indeed, is not represented as the chief event of the novel, but rather as a consequence of what the young man sees, perceives, feels and experiences throughout his adventures in a foreign land. When finally back home, David exclaims: "So the beggar in the ballad had come home", identifying himself with the hero of a traditional Scottish ballad (218). The ballad plot David imagines for himself is the same he had a thought of at the beginning of the novel, while trying to explain to himself his uncle's mean and vicious behaviour. This element works as a foretelling narrative feature: "[...] there came up into my mind (quite unbidden by me and even discouraged) a story like some ballad I had heard folk singing, of a poor lad that was a rightful heir and a wicked kinsman that tried to keep him from his own" (26). Such a plot was quite common not only in ballads but also in novels; in *Guy Mannering*, for instance, Sir Walter Scott tells quite a similar story: Henry Bertram, the rightful heir to the Ellangowan properties, is kidnapped when only a child and led by events to learn about his true origins and to gain his rightful inheritance.<sup>7</sup>

Like Henry Bertram, David comes back to Essendean and becomes the laird of his family's estate; not only has he rightfully inherited the house and lands, but he has also gained important knowledge of the world: now, David is a man. Instead of going on a Grand Tour on the continent, as Ebenezer says to people in order to conceal David's kidnapping, David has

<sup>7</sup> Stevenson knew *Guy Mannering* very well and mentioned it in "A Gossip on Romance" as a "model instance of romantic method", but also as an "idly" written novel, maintaining that Scott, though he "conjured up the romantic with delight [...], had hardly patience to describe it" (Stevenson 1895, 270-4).

actually gone on a tour in the outlands, attaining what we may call an "outlandish" education. It is due to his incredible adventures on the Highlands and to the strong emotions he felt there – pain, fear, weariness, anger, pity, horror, loneliness and friendship – that David has finally become a man.

Experience is the key word in *Kidnapped* and it is gained in an unsophisticated, primitive land. David the story-teller is the full-grown man, the experienced man who tries to describe events and emotions as he experienced them when he was a boy. As a consequence, experience influences the narration and makes the retrospective element of the novel clearer to the reader. Evidence of this is spread all over the text; sometimes David openly anticipates forth-coming events, sometimes he employs certain adjectives which suggest his changed opinions about what he lived in 1751.<sup>8</sup> Changed opinions seem to be more frequent when David describes his relationship to other people, and in particular to Alan. Their friendship is quite a weird one; David has saved Alan's life on board the *Covenant*, but he privately charges Alan with being the cause of their dangerous and peniless flight from the redcoats among the Highlands. When David comes to a quarrel with Alan, David the story-teller acknowledges his former childishness and seems to reproach himself for the way in which he treated Alan and himself; instances of this attitude are present in Chapter XXIV:

I knew it was my own doing, and no one else's; but I was too miserable to repent. I felt I could drag myself but little farther; pretty soon, I must lie down and die on these wet mountains like a sheep or a fox, and my bones must whiten there like the bones of a beast. My head was light, perhaps; but I began to love the prospect, I began to glory in the thought of such a death, alone in the desert, with the wild eagles besieging my mast moments. Alan would repent then, I thought; he would remember, when I was dead, how much he owed me, and the remembrance would be torture. So I went like a sick, silly, and bad-hearted schoolboy, feeding my anger against a fellow-man, when I would have been better on my knees, crying on God for mercy. (1775)

The whole novel is imbibed with David's feelings; the first-person narration never censures David's passions, even the most private and least honourable. David-the-grown-man is the actual narrator of the story, but he presents things as he saw and felt them when he was a boy; sometimes,

<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of his adventure David anticipates what would happen to him: "The warlock of Essendean, they say, had made a mirror in which men could read the future; it must have been of other stuff than burning coal; for in all the shake and pictures that I sat and gazed at, there was never a ship, never a seaman with a hairy cap, never a big bludgeon for my silly head, or the least sign of all those tribulations that were ripe to fall on me" (Stevenson 2007, 33).

he himself criticizes his former attitude towards Alan and the Highlands, ending up in reinforcing the reader's feeling that young David's perception of the Highlands is wrong. At a first reading, David can result as an unsympathetic character, an ungrateful, spoiled child, who despises Alan and the Highlanders instead of appreciating their helping attitude and hospitality. At a second read, one becomes more aware of David-the-grown-man's opinions, i.e. of his grateful feelings for Alan and of his friendship with him. This feature makes the reader disengage his opinions from young David's, so that when David criticizes the Highlanders and Alan, the reader tends to find an excuse for their faults, growing sympathetic with their poor conditions. Actually, the reader does what Stevenson did when he wrote the novel, that is to say ending up siding with Alan and the Jacobites.

Young David appears as an unreliable character because he is often blind about what is really going on around him. Passions and emotions repeatedly overwhelm his intellectual faculties and stop him from acting; he often falls a victim to blunders and wrong opinions. It is only afterwards, when other people show him how things really are, that he changes his mind and adjusts his behaviour. The most representative episode of David's utter unawareness of reality is his shipwreck on the Isle of Earraid. When the *Covenant* hits the Torran Rocks, he is flung off the ship and led by the flow on the shores of a small islet. This is the first time David experiences utter loneliness, hostile nature, cold, hunger and weariness; as a result, he is panic-stricken. Fear and horror blind his eyes and his mind, he crosses Earraid on all sides and looks around in search for human beings, instead of waiting for the tide to be off. The Isle of Earraid, indeed, is a tidal islet and can be reached and left on foot twice a day. It is only when two Gaelic-speaking fishers tell him the word 'tide' - in their bad English - that David's "sense of horror [...] whenever [he] was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea" abandoned him and his mental faculties are restored (95). As he himself laments at the end of this four-day dreadful sojourn, "a sea-bred boy would have stayed a day on Earraid", and even himself, "if [he] had sat down to think, instead of raging at [his] fate, must have soon guessed the secret, and got free" (99).

David's "sense of horror" for nature is recurrent in the novel; unlike Edward Waverley, Scott's character, David is indifferent to, and even horrified by, mountain and natural sublime. Highland nature is rather different from the Lowland nature David is used to - his heart belongs to the low country, and when he finally returns to the Lowlands his heart is filled with pleasure at the sight of that "comfortable, green, cultivated hills and the busy people both of the field and sea" (190). The Highlands stand in clear opposition to David's countryside, they are scarcely cultivated and scarcely inhabited. In the three chapters called "The flight in the Heather", David experiences how nature can be cruel to man; he frequently employs the words 'horror', 'horrible', and 'horrid'. When Alan and David find them-



selves compelled to jump across a thundering river, David is stricken by such a strong fear that abates his intellectual faculties:

So we stood, side by side upon a small rock slippery with spray, a far broader leap in front of us, and the river dinning upon all sides. When I saw where I was, there came on me a deadly sickness of fear, and I put my hand over my eyes. Alan took me and shook me; I saw he was speaking, but the roaring of the falls and the trouble of my mind prevented me from hearing; only I saw his face was red with anger, and that he stamped upon the rock. The same look showed me the water raging by, and the mist hanging in the air; and with that, I covered my eyes again and shuddered. (139)

Alan's redness might not be a symptom of anger, but rather of fear and strong emotions; in fact, Alan is much more experienced in Highland nature than David, and manages to make his young friend win his fear, by giving him a dram of brandy; this helps David to turn his fear into courage: "I bent low on my knees and flung myself forth, with that kind of anger of despair that has sometimes stood me in stead of courage" (139). David's experience of the moor is even worse; in their flight, the two fellows are compelled to go eastward and cross a country "as waste as the sea": "Much of it was red with heather; much of the rest broken up with bogs and hags and peaty pools; some had been burnt black in heath fire; and in another place there was quite a forest of dead firs, standing like skeletons. A wearier looking desert man never saw" (155).

David's body is as unused to the moor as his mind is. In order to avoid being seen by the redcoats, they must run on their hands and knees, protected by the heather. While Alan is swift and nimble in his movements, "as though it were his natural way of going", David's body cannot stand that posture: "The aching and faintness of my body, the labouring of my heart, the soreness of my hands, and the smarting of my throat and eyes in the continual smoke of dust and ashes, had soon grown to be so unbearable that I would gladly have given up" (157). Once again it is fear that supports David: "Nothing but the fear of Alan lent me enough of a false kind of courage to continue" (157).

The "sense of horror" produced in David by nature is inferior only to the horror of violence and death. Right after the murder of the Red Fox, David and Alan meet and hide themselves in the bushes; David is convinced that his friend is a killer and says: "[...] my only friend in that country was blood-guilty in the first degree; I held him in horror; I could not look upon his face; I would rather have lain alone in the rain on my cold isle, than in that warm wood beside a murderer" (123).

David's dominant passions are fear and anger; they provide him with a surrogate of courage that make him react to events and misfortunes. His



relationship to the hostile world of the Highlands is conditioned by his flawed perception of it; finding himself in a totally unknown world, both his mind and his senses are unable to perceive it properly. Moreover, his body is unable to face with Highland hostile nature, while Alan's is much better at it. In an essay about the *Umwelt*, a term by which the author means the individual lifeworld each person experiences thanks to his/her own perceptive capacities, John Deely (2001) investigates the connection between subject and object, as to perception and experience. Every living being experiences reality in a different and unique way; like a bird perceives light, colours or distance differently from a man, every person perceives the world in his own way, according to his own past experiences and rearing. David was born and reared in the Lowland country, his eyes are skilled at recognising a blackbird, or a hawthorn, but he is amazed at the sight of a seaport and horrified by the wilderness of the mountains. *Umwelt* describes the lifeworld each living being creates, by means of the fragments of reality his body and mind are able to perceive and process: "For an Umwelt is not merely the aspects of the environment accessed in sensation. Far more is it the manner in which those aspects are networked together as and to constitute 'objects of experience'. [...] the organism does not simply respond to or act in terms of what it senses as sensed, but rather in terms of what it *makes* of that sensation, what it perceives to be sensed, rightly or wrongly" (Deely 2001, 127-8).

The idea of *Umwelt* entails a deeper relationship between man and environment, in which the way man approaches the world is conditioned by the capacities of his body. In *Kidnapped* the reactions of the body to wilderness and hostile nature are very well described - unlike Alan, David is always terribly fatigued and wearied, he often falls ill and loses his senses, he slows the flight and nourishes a growing hatred towards Alan and the places he leads him through. Instead of acknowledging Alan as a worthy guide, without whose experience he would have been caught by the redcoats, David blames him for every hardship they have to face. Moreover, if it were not for Alan, David would have probably been shipped to the Carolinas and become a slave in the plantations.

Perception plays a rather crucial role in the novel. It is through David's eyes and emotions that we know characters, places and events. As to characters, it may be of some interest to point to the importance of David's perception in the creation of some of them. Many people in the novel, in fact, are described by a predominant feature, which is indissolubly attached to them by David. Uncle Ebenezer, for instance, is associated with darkness - the absence of light in the house, the "pitch darkness" in the tower - while Captain Hoseason with cold: "It's a habit I have [...] I'm a cold-rife man by my nature; I have a cold blood, sir. There's neither fur, nor flannel - no, sir, nor hot rum, will warm up what they call the temperature" (Stevenson 2007, 40).

David's unreliable perception of the Highlands serves a precise function in the economy of the novel. *Kidnapped* is a pleasant diversion from the canon established by Scott's *Waverley*, not only because the novel is set six years after Scott's *Forty-five*, but also because Stevenson's attitude towards the Jacobites is clearer than Scott's. Indeed, while Scott accurately avoids to take part in the Whig-Jacobite conflict, Stevenson seems to side with the Highlanders and the Jacobites. Actually, his most exploited source is Colonel David Stewart's *Sketches of the Character, Manners and Present State of the Highlands of Scotland*, an author who "not only bears the name of the royal line whose cause was defeated, but [whose] work is suffused with an attitude that can only be elegiac" (Menikoff 2005, 30). Stevenson's partaking with the Jacobites is supported not only by the sources he employed in his preparatory studies, but also by David's narrative function in the novel. David is a complex character; at the beginning of the novel he is definitely a stereotypical Lowlander, a Whig and Covenanter full of prejudices about the Highlands, but at the end of his adventures he becomes some sort of hybrid man, half Lowlander and half Highlander.

David inherits the House of Shaws in the Lowlands, but he nevertheless decides to go back to the Highlands, in the name of his friendship with Alan. Actually, in the Highlands, David has found a new home; while in the Lowlands he has no longer a family, in the Highlands he has a good friend, a man who has helped him out of his childhood and led him into adulthood. It is thanks to Alan, to the Highlanders and to Highland nature that David is grown up a man. When he leaves from Essendean, David's *Umwelt* is that of a Lowlander, but when he comes back at the end of the novel, his *Umwelt* is that of a complete Scotsman, a man who is both a Lowlander and a Highlander. The divide between Lowlands and Highlands is eventually bridged in David Balfour, a complex character by whom Stevenson shows his readers that everybody, even those who were reared in the most provincial villages, can learn to understand other cultures and to make friends with foreigners. In addition to this, Stevenson makes his readers more aware of the aftermath of the Union between England and Scotland in the Highlands; as he did later on in his South Sea stories, his attention is always on the poor, the defeated, the outlandish inhabitant of the periphery of the British Empire whose culture is being eradicated in the name of modernization.

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## **“The Essence of Individuality”** Hardy, the Regional Novel and the Romantic Legacy

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**Abstract** If there is a literary genre which can stand as a symbol for the Victorian Age, this is the provincial novel. Just when faster means of transport were making it possible to reach even the remotest places in Britain, and the industrial revolution was making of the modern towns the very centre of human life, many novelists established themselves on the literary scene by focusing on peripheral, remote and often backward provincial regions. This seeming paradox is all the more striking if we consider that one of the most outstanding authors of Victorian provincial literature was Thomas Hardy, one who carried this concentration on localities to extremes. Indeed Hardy's *Wessex* proves to be made up of microcosms, each asserting its own peculiarities. Yet, at the same time, Hardy also distanced himself from other provincial novelists by overtly claiming that concentrating on Wessex – that tiny corner of England – did not actually involve missing universal truths. The paper investigates into this seeming paradox, focusing on Hardy's debt to the Romantic legacy of Walter Scott and William Wordsworth on the one hand, and on the parallelism between his method and the method of the rising science of anthropology on the other hand.

**Summary** 1 Wessex, the Last Region. – 2 Wordsworth's Long Shadow. – 3 The Consequences of 'Beach-pebble Attrition'.

**Keywords** Thomas Hardy. Regional novel. Romanticism. Walter Scott. William Wordsworth.

### **1 Wessex, the Last Region**

In no other Victorian novelist more than in Thomas Hardy did the feeling that differences between counties were fading trigger the reaction that it was necessary to preserve what was disappearing before it was too late. Hardy felt the urgency of fixing on the page the peculiarities of the counties of the South West of England, in particular the traditional ways of living and the uniqueness of its inhabitants. Whatever Hardy wrote in prose is set in Wessex, a region coinciding more or less with that area. Even when he decided to write poetry, Hardy did not dismiss Wessex, and his first collection of poems was entitled *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898).

Hardy was certainly in the right position to become the regional novelist *par excellence*. Born in Higher Bockhampton, three miles from Dorchester, he spent all his life in Dorchester, excepting some years in London when he was trying to make his way in literature while also working as

an architect. He was therefore a native and a product of Dorset, who intimately knew the traditions, the language and the stories of the local people. But at the same time he was an outsider as for education, profession, and experience (cf. Keith 1979, 39-40). Hardy portrayed this sense of irretrievable loss and of the impossibility of return in many of his characters, most notably Clym Yeobright and Grace Melbury, natives whose identities are defined by their places of origin but whose cosmopolitan experiences have somehow denatured them. Yet Hardy was an outsider not only in his own native place, but also – and especially – in London and in the panorama of Victorian literature.

In this essay I will argue that the peculiarity of Hardy's regionalism is due to the fact that on the one hand he practiced a sort of early nineteenth-century regionalism, and on the other he undermined the very assumptions Romantic regionalism was founded upon. Firstly, I will illustrate how Hardy's regionalism has its origin in Romanticism, in particular in a line traced by Wordsworth and Scott; secondly, I will argue that Hardy, while adopting and elaborating the main contributions offered by Romanticism, subverted the regional novel from within, so that his novels represent both the highest point reached by regional literature and, at the same time, the beginning of its end. I will concentrate mainly on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, because this is the novel where both the influence of Romanticism and its rejection by Hardy are clearly visible. As we will see, Hardy's regionalism contains in itself the seeds of its own disruption, as much as his Wessex is threatened from within, rather than from a generic modernity coming from without.

## 2 Wordsworth's Long Shadow

Hardy wrote the *Wessex Novels*, a cycle of fourteen regional novels, at the end of the century that had seen the birth of the regional novel and its developing into the provincial novel of George Eliot and Anthony Trollope, although the two genres often tended to merge, making a clear-cut distinction ineffective. Critics (cf. Duncan 2002, Pite 2002) have observed that Hardy's novels share many features characterising the regional literature that had flourished at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in particular the claim that regions entertain with the nation a synecdochical relationship and the precise and realistic portrayal of rural settings. However, the label of 'regional novelist' is too restrictive for the author of both *Under the Greenwood Tree* – which is rather a provincial novel, with its subtitle ("A Rural Painting of the Dutch School") evoking Chapter 17 of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* – and of *Jude the Obscure*, where rural localities are as bleak as town suburbs. Indeed Hardy's eccentricity (and modernity, after all) in the panorama of Victorian literature is due to the peculiar use he

made of the Romantic legacy left by Scott and Wordsworth.

In order to understand how Hardy's regionalism was influenced by Romanticism, we have to bear in mind the two main features of provincial literature, that is to say the genre that, together with the sensation novel, was most in vogue when Hardy began writing. Unlike the region, in general the province is, in Duncan's words, "defined more simply by its *difference from the metropolis*" (2002, 322, emphasis in the original). Moreover, in provincial novels locality does not play such an essential role. For instance, in George Eliot's great provincial novels "a setting is given near the beginning of her novels and then its geographical position is allowed to slip into the background as events unfold within a single community, whose structure, tensions and changes epitomize those beyond" (Pite 2002, 70). While regional novelists deemed regions as a sort of small-scale reproductions of the nation and therefore allowed them to explore wider issues, provincial novelists tended to see provinces as surviving enclaves of traditional ways of living in opposition to alienating urban areas. Although some of Hardy's novels might suggest an idea of Wessex as a pastoral idyll, for example the already mentioned *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (the titles themselves reinforcing this impression), such novels as *A Laodicean* and *Jude the Obscure* work in the opposite direction, with the result that in the end Wessex appears as a complex system where modernity cohabits with relics - archaeological as well as sociological - of an archaic past. As each novel, excepting *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, is set in an extremely confined portion of the South West of England, the result is that the multi-faceted character of Hardy's Wessex can be appreciated only by considering the cycle in its entirety. It could be said, therefore, that Wessex, with its internal differences and complexity, stands for England (and even for Europe, as we will see), where rural areas live side by side with industrial towns. Indeed Hardy was particularly interested in the South West of England (above all Dorset) not only because that was his native region, but because he deemed it a perfect clinical case, the best place where the effects of the advent of modernity could be studied from close-up.

Hardy's firm belief that in Wessex one could observe the dynamics and the consequences of radical changes at work was founded on the assumption that progress does not irradiate from urbanised areas into peripheral rural districts in a homogeneous and smooth way. This is particularly evident in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where the narrator comments on the differences between two villages (Marlott, Tess's native village, and Trantridge, where her supposed relatives live) which lie at no great distance from each other: "Even the character and accent of the two peoples had shades of difference, despite the amalgamating effects of a roundabout railway; so that, though less than twenty miles from the place of her sojourn at Trantridge, her native village had seemed a far-

away spot" (Dolin & Higonet 2003, 75).

This is obviously the concept of 'uneven development', or of 'the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous',<sup>1</sup> which had been widely explored by Walter Scott (cf. Chandler 1998, 131-5) a long time before historians investigated the phenomenon. At the end of *Waverley*, Scott thus explained his choice of setting his novel in 1745 Scotland:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. [...] The gradual influx of wealth, and the extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time. (Lamont 1998, 340)

Scotland before the definitive defeat of the Jacobite party in 1745 is worth dwelling upon because it represents what Europe was like in the Ancien Régime, that is before the advent of modernity. Scott insists on the fact that Scotland was 'primitive' not only from a geographical point of view, but also from the point of view of "manners and customs" (340). Here Scott implies that Scotland's 'uneven development' is an interesting object of study because it enables us to better understand the transformations undergone by England over more than two centuries. But the reference to Europe implies also that Scott's perspective was not limited to the United Kingdom, and that he considered Scotland as a case-study in the European context. Unlike Orientalist writers, Scott believed that it was not necessary to go outside the national boundaries to find pockets of backwardness.

Hardy made a statement similar to Scott's in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where Tess and her mother exemplify Wessex's 'uneven development':

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (Dolin & Higonet 2003, 23)

This comment by the narrator echoes Scott's statement (cf. Villari 1990, 51-3). Joan and Tess Durbeyfield, though mother and daughter, belong to two distant epochs because a time span of two centuries has been condensed into a few years. This radical transformation, however, is far from

<sup>1</sup> The expression *Ungleichzeitigkeit* was first used by the German art historian Wilhelm Pinder (1926, 11), but it was Ernst Bloch who theorised the concept of 'non-simultaneity' (cf. Bloch 1962, 104-60).



being confined to Wessex, let alone to Marlott. Tess's belonging to a later age is due to her "trained National teachings" and to the "Standard knowledge" made possible by the introduction of the Revised Code in 1862. Hardy's reference to this national reform suggests that Tess and her mother illustrate a change that had national origins and therefore was affecting the whole nation, including its remotest areas. Tess and Joan stand not only for thousands of other mothers and daughters separated by standard education, but also for two different ages of British history, the Jacobean and the Victorian. The juxtaposition of Tess and her mother makes the suddenness of the change, its extent and its effects plainly visible, just as Scotland condensed and illustrated two hundred years of human progress.

Hence we can say that Wessex and the microcosms it is made of are Hardy's clinical case(s), as much as Scotland is for Scott the region where changes from archaic to modern ways of living can be observed from close-up. The fact that both Scott and Hardy refer to Europe to justify their choice of concentrating on a locality implies that their concern was understanding what was happening (and had happened) in larger Europe by studying a small and remote part of it. Although Hardy has often been criticised for his almost excessive concentration of Wessex, his frequent allusions to Europe and to the universal character of the region where he set his novels suggest that the question of the relationship between the regions and the nation, the particular and the universal, was dear to him. Hardy overtly wrote his own vindication of his method and choices in what is considered as his most significant declaration of poetics, that is to say the 1912 "General Preface" to the *Wessex Edition of the Novels and Poems*, where he stated:

I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not too much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbled in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose. (Orel 1967, 45)

This could be considered the manifesto of Hardy's regional novel. Hardy's choice of Wessex is justified by the fact that in that area, bigger than Attica but still rather limited in space, a writer can find sufficient material for his study of man's emotions and human relationships.

So Wessex can stand for England and even for Europe as a whole because human emotions there are no different from those felt in the "palaces of Europe", which became the setting of *The Dynasts*, an ambitious drama in verse in three parts about the Napoleonic wars (1904, 1906 and 1908). However, it is important to point out that even in *The Dynasts*

Wessex plays a crucial role. Although *The Dynasts* dramatises 'great' historical events which affected the major European countries, Wessex acts as a counterpart to the events taking place on the battlefields and in the "palaces of Europe". Yet Hardy went as far as to say that Europe itself is in the end a microcosm if one observes it from an aerial perspective, which is exactly what he did in *The Dynasts* through the point of view of the "Phantom Intelligences". In the "General Preface" to the *Wessex Edition* Hardy wrote that "by surveying Europe from a celestial point of vision - as in *The Dynasts* - that continent becomes virtually a province - a Wessex, an Attica, even a mere garden" (Orel 1967, 48).

By preferring the close-up observation of a regional microcosm which stands for a nation or even for a continent, Hardy exerted what he called "the art of observation" which, in his own words, "consists in [...] the seeing of great things in little things, the whole in the part" (Millgate 1989, 262). Now, both Hardy's (and Scott's) firm belief that greater issues can be better understood by studying small communities had its origin in Romanticism, and more precisely in a poet contemporary of Scott. In the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" (1800), Wordsworth, beside defending his and Coleridge's choice of giving voice to common people using their very language, wrote:

The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature [...]. Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable [...]. (Brett & Jones 1991, 289-90)

Wordsworth claims here that passions in rustic people are not only more visible and more freely expressed, but that they "attain their maturity", that is they are fully expressed. Their feelings are "elementary" and simpler (if compared to urbanised people's), and the reason why they are worth being focused on and studied is that "elementary feelings" determine more durable manners. Humble people, in other words, cannot show affectation, nor feign, and their acts are consistent with their emotions.

In a passage at the beginning of *The Woodlanders*, Hardy explicitly explained why close communities are easier to study and underlined what we can learn about man from the observation of human dramas in such a

remote place as Little Hintock:

It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premisses, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, no less than in other places, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein. (Ingham 1998, 8)

As in the passage from the *Life* about “the art of observation”, Hardy here insists on the reason why isolated rural communities are as worth observing and representing as complex societies. If seclusion, on the one hand, constitutes a barrier between the inhabitants of Little Hintock and the world, on the other hand it forces the members of the community to live in close contact with each other. This forced cohabitation, combined with unrestrained passions, gives birth to dramas of such an intensity that the real nature of human beings and their relationships become more clearly visible.

Hence both Scott and Hardy learned from Wordsworth that in a restricted and out-of-the-way region observation of the elementary laws of progress is made easier. Indeed human beings living in a remote and rural environment have a simpler personality and, as a consequence, observation of human nature there is made easier too. A declaration surprisingly similar to Wordsworth's is to be found in a novelist who was born in the same year as Hardy, the Italian Giovanni Verga, who wrote in his preface to *I Malavoglia*:

Il movente dell'attività umana che produce la fiumana del progresso è preso qui alle sue sorgenti, nelle produzioni più modeste e materiali. Il meccanismo delle passioni che la determinano in quelle basse sfere è meno complicato, e potrà quindi osservarsi con maggior precisione. (Simioni 1979, 51)

Verga's statement is interesting because, much in the same way as his contemporary Thomas Hardy, he combines Wordsworth's belief that human passions can be better understood if observed in humble people with Scott's awareness that the dynamics of social changes are more apparent if observed in peripheral and backwards areas (Scott's Scotland, Hardy's Wessex, and Verga's Sicily).<sup>2</sup> The early nineteenth-century Romantic Wordsworth and Scott and the late nineteenth-century 'naturalist' Hardy and Verga shared,

2 For the larger implications of this special line of development of the Romantic legacy, cf. Villari 2015.

together with anthropologists, the firm belief that the observation of ways of life, behaviours and customs in rural communities – or even in exotic ethnic groups, as in the case of anthropology – can shed light on urban societies, where the superimpositions of culture often tend to make the study of human nature more difficult, being the point “where culture separates itself from nature” (Duncan 2010, 62) concealed under artificial manners and the “emphatic language” Wordsworth speaks of.

Finally, the main influence Wordsworth exerted on Hardy’s special regionalism regards the relationship between human beings and nature. At the end of the passage of the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” above cited, Wordsworth says that the last reason why he decided to give voice to rustic people was that in rural communities “the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature” (Brett & Jones 1991, 290). Man and environment form an indissoluble whole, making the study of nature inseparable from the study of human nature, and vice versa. In Hardy the theme of the union of man and landscape found its most wholehearted interpreter. First of all, it is locality – i.e. Wessex – that gives the name to the collection of his novels. Secondly, one of the three categories into which he divided his novels in 1912 is “Novels of Character and Environment” (Orel 1967, 44-5). The choice of the title of this group, to which all the major novels by Hardy belong, is fundamental. In the first place, “Novels of Character and Environment” implies that in these novels man and place are put on the same level and are given the same importance. Secondly, in these novels the main characters *are* their environment, and vice versa. This means that people are more or less like plants, which grow only in their habitat and cannot be rooted out of it without serious consequences.<sup>3</sup> One of the most wholehearted statements of the perfect communion between men (in this case, women) and place can be found in *Tess*, when the narrator describes the labourers employed in the harvest in Blackmoor Vale:

But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of

<sup>3</sup> The equation between human beings and plants well suits the close relationship between men and their environment in Hardy’s novels. Desmond Hawkins wrote that “Hardy’s characters seem to grow up out of the land as naturally as its plants and trees” (1984, 82) and Michael Millgate (1971) stated about *The Woodlanders* that there Hardy represented a small group of characters different as to birth, class, education and wealth and divided them into two groups, the woodlanders and the ex-urbanities. Then he inflicted on them “a wide range of misfortunes which nature, society, sexual drive, human folly, and simple accident can bring. Working with the established human ecology – men and women trained by the inheritance of generations to live in these particular circumstances – Hardy transplants exotic growths (Mrs Charmond and Fitzpiers) from elsewhere. He also takes one promising plant (Grace Melbury) from its natural soil, forces it in hothouse conditions, and then transplants it back to its place of origin” (1971, 250).

binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times. A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it. (Dolin & Higonnet 2003, 87-8)

Women in their 'habitat', that is to say the land, are literally a part of it. Shortly before, the narrator had described Tess wandering in the woods by night, commenting: "Her flexuous and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene" (85). When, after being abandoned by Angel, Tess goes to work at Flintcomb-Ash, the narrator uses similar words: "Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field-woman pure and simple, in winter guise" (280).

If, on the one hand, individuals, especially women and Tess in particular, are part of the landscape where they live, the environment, on the other hand, is described as if it were a human being. The field at Flintcomb-Ash where Tess and Marian work is an anthropomorphic entity, while the two girls are reduced to flies:

Every leaf of the vegetable having already been consumed, the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features, as if a face, from chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone. So these two upper and nether visages confronted each other all day long, the white face looking down on the brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies. (285)

This anonymous, desolate, colourless landscape around Flintcomb-Ash anticipates the kind of environment depicted in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's novel where the close bond between man and landscape is destroyed, thus marking – as we will see – the end of his regional novel. This is the reason why *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* marks a point of no return in the panorama of the *Wessex Novels*. *Tess* coincides with the acme of its author's regionalism, while at the same time foreshadowing its end.

### 3 The Consequences of 'Beach-pebble Attrition'

If Hardy's regionalism was deeply influenced by Romanticism, it is also true however that his originality in the panorama of Victorian provincial literature depends on his making a personal use of Scott's and Wordsworth's

legacy. Regionalism in him went hand in hand with realism (cf. Keith 1979, 36), and from this point of view Hardy went even further. He was indeed so realistic that he decided to include even those elements of modernity that regional novelists generally tended to omit. As W.J. Keith pointed out, “the chief case against regionalism lies in its undue emphasis upon the uniquely local which, almost by definition, leads to distortion” (37). Hardy, on the contrary, not only included references to railways, turnpike roads, threshing machines, the telegraph, etc., but he made these elements of modernity a central issue of his novels. On the other hand, Hardy was not exactly a realist novelist (cf. O’Gorman 2013). In his autobiography Hardy clearly expressed his opinion about the relationship between art (and therefore literature) and realism:

Art is a disproportioning - (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) - of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would probably be overlooked. Hence ‘realism’ is not Art. (Millgate 1989, 239)

The duty of the artist is to emphasise certain aspects of reality, being thus faithful to his or her impressions rather than to nature. Hardy adopted this “art of disproportioning” in his novels and short stories, but another note from the *Life* clarifies what the concept of ‘disproportion’ exactly meant for him:

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience mental or corporeal. [...] The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters; and the writer’s art lies in shaping that uncommonness while disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely. (154)

According to Hardy it is the events that must be “throw[n] out of proportion”, rather than the characters, who on the contrary must be as ordinary as possible to allow readers to identify with them. And indeed many of Hardy’s plots – for example *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – have been criticised for their improbability.

Yet Hardy did not limit himself to distorting events through the recourse to coincidences and timing encounters, but he also manipulated on purpose the region where his novels and stories are set, so that from this point of view he can hardly be defined as a ‘regional novelist’. After all Hardy himself reminded those who tried to identify the places mentioned in his novels that his Wessex was a “partly real, partly dream-country” (Morgan & Russell 2000, 393), thus defending the novelists’ right to modify the real world to convey certain ideas. I will not analyse in depth the

use Hardy made of existing places in his novels and short stories. There is however an aspect which is worth considering, as it sheds light on his interpretation of Scott's legacy. Although Hardy decided not to exclude the elements of modernity from his Wessex, on the other hand he often tended to accentuate the gap between the old and the new, thus making Wessex villages and countryside seem quaintier than they actually were. For instance, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* he willingly made Casterbridge appear more Elizabethan than the actual Dorchester by deleting seventeenth and eighteenth-century buildings (cf. Enstice 1979, 3-9) and by avoiding any references to railways. The result is that readers familiar with such novels as *The Woodlanders* or *Far from the Madding Crowd* are struck when they realise that in fact modernity has already affected even the most out-of-the-way spots in Wessex.<sup>4</sup>

Thus Hardy did sometimes adopt a realistic approach to Wessex, and at other times decided to 'disproportion' reality, because what he wanted to convey was his full awareness that not only did the South West of England represent the past within the present, but also - and especially - that the 'uneven development' had generated a rupture. And in this lies the main difference between Hardy and Scott. *Waverley's* subtitle, "'Tis Sixty Years Since", hints at the circumstance that the change had been rapid, but by no means immediate, as it had taken modernity two generations (i.e. roughly sixty years) to affect Scotland. Secondly, in Scott the passage from past to present seems to have been certainly traumatic but rather smooth, in the sense that the backward areas were not left behind. The general impression is that the process of integration was somehow achieved. This is not the case in Hardy's Wessex, where we witness a completely different kind of process. First of all, there is a sense in which Wessex was characterised by internal differences well before the advent of modernity. The setting of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a telling example, since in the county-town of Dorset Roman and even Neolithic remains live side by side with Palladian townhouses and Gothic churches. In spite of the internal differences, Hardy's Wessex is characterised by a common feature, that is to say the coexistence - spatial as much as temporal - of different layers of time which do not even seem to reflect a chronological order. Indeed it often happens that remains and practices dating back to prehistoric times are more tangible and visible than more recent artefacts, as in Egdon Heath, where Rainbarrow continues to be a point of reference, while contemporary constructions are engaged in a never-ending, and self-consuming, battle against nature.

4 Indeed railways often recur in Hardy's work, from *Desperate Remedies*, his first published novel, to *Jude the Obscure*, his last novel. Therefore novels set in apparently pre-industrial communities (*Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Woodlanders*) are juxtaposed to novels where the elements of modernity play an important role (cf. Gatrell 1999, 28-9).



Therefore progress does not simply appear as the latest layer of time that settles on the land of Wessex. The passage from a pre-industrial world to modernity is represented as brisk and immediate: so immediate that integration is perforce impossible. Both in *Waverley's* Scotland and in Hardy's Wessex sudden progress engenders temporal lags because in the passage from the Elizabethan to the Georgian age (in Scott) and from the Jacobean to the Victorian (in Hardy) the intermediate stages seem to have been skipped. But in Hardy's Wessex the coexistence (or confusion, to be more precise) of different ages within the same community – and even the same person, as we will see – gives birth to unsolvable conflicts and jarring contradictions. This results in anachronisms, if not in monstrous hircocervuses, that is to say pockets of extreme backwardness juxtaposed to extremely modern places. The monstrous outcomes caused by the excessively rapid irruption of modernity are particularly evident in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, whose setting expands to follow the heroine's peregrinations. Thus we become aware of the dual nature of Wessex, split between tradition and progress, since in one and the same novel remote and backward localities (Marlott and Talbothays) feature together with the outposts of progress.

Moreover, Hardy modified reality in order to make archaic and modern places lie very close one another. The most striking case is that of Sandbourne, a stylish seaside resort, which lies next to Egdon Heath:

This fashionable watering-place, with its eastern and its western stations, its piers, its groves of pines, its promenades, and its covered gardens was, to Angel Clare, like a fairy place suddenly created by the stroke of a wand, and allowed to get a little dusty. An outlying eastern tract of the enormous Egdon Waste was close at hand, yet on the very verge of that tawny piece of antiquity such a glittering novelty as this pleasure city had chosen to spring up. Within the space of a mile from its outskirts every irregularity of the soil was prehistoric, every channel an undisturbed British trackway; not a sod having been turned there since the days of the Cæsars. Yet the exotic had grown here, suddenly as the prophet's gourd [...]. (Dolin & Higonnet 2003, 375-6)

It is interesting to point out here that what Hardy calls “the exotic” is not the prehistoric Egdon, but Sandbourne. This suggests that according to Hardy the uncommon is not the wild, unspoilt, lonely Egdon, but rather the “pleasure city” of recent construction. To the lack of individuality of Sandbourne I will come back later on, but what is worth remarking here is that in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy carries the concept of the ‘simultaneity of the non-simultaneous’ to extremes. Sandbourne (where Tess lives with Alec) lying at a stone's throw from Egdon is foreshadowed in the Phase the First by the ominous closeness between The Chase, a “sylvan



antiquity" (38) where memories of Druidical rites are still fresh, and The Slopes, a "fake" manor-house of recent construction. Yet in *Tess* Hardy carried the juxtaposition of old and new even further. The last scene of the novel is set in a town where contradictions are the dominating features. In the description of Wintoncester, in the last chapter, the narrator draws our attention on the sharp contrast between the irregular Gothic buildings and the prison where Tess is about to be hanged, a squalid and unimaginative building "bespeaking captivity"<sup>5</sup> which is a "blot on the city's beauty" (397). The circumstance that Wintoncester/Winchester, where the Hospital of St Cross is still well visible, is made the very setting of Tess's punishment by the hands of a pitiless justice is a typically Hardyian irony.

Finally, in *Tess* the coexistence of different epochs is not confined to places alone, but affects human beings as well. The most telling example is Angel Clare, who is undoubtedly a modern man, and yet falls prey to the most reactionary prejudices when he cannot forgive Tess her being the victim of Alec's rape. Tess's personality too is the result of a disordered compound of modern and traditional elements. As we have seen above, unlike her mother, Tess received a modern standard education and wishes to become a teacher, but at the same time superstitious beliefs have not abandoned her yet: the legend of the d'Urberville coach seems to upset her, just as the afternoon cock's crow after her wedding does. And the plot itself seems to suggest that a certain dose of magical thinking, combined with a kind of cynical knowledge only an experienced mother can provide, is of more use in life than school training.

The juxtaposition of different epochs in human beings produces anachronisms which can have monstrous effects. The proof is Tess Durbeyfield herself, who turns into a murderess right in Sandbourne, the place the narrator calls a "glittering novelty". Indeed Angel Clare cannot even imagine Tess living there, to the point that he asks himself: "Where could Tess possibly be, a cottage-girl, his young wife, amidst all this wealth and fashion?" (376). And when Tess kills her old lover Angel calls her act an "aberration" (385), as if to suggest that this time Tess has turned for real into "Another woman in [her] shape" (229), and that the "aberration" was the result of the monstrous union between "a cottage-girl" and a place where the "arithmetical demon Profit-and-Loss" (379) reigns supreme.

5 To be more precise, the narrator does not explicitly say if the prison is of recent erection, but we can venture a guess starting from two details. The prison is characterised by its "formalism" and by "an ugly flat-topped octagonal tower" (Dolin & Higonnet 2003, 397), which remind us of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (theorised in 1787), a central-plan structure where the inmates were unable to understand if they were being watched or not (cf. Božovič 1995). Hence Hardy's Wintoncester appears as a superposition of A.W.N. Pugin's two illustrations from the *Contrasts* where he contrasted a medieval alms-house with a modern workhouse (cf. Pugin 2003). I am indebted to Prof. Jeanne Clegg, who pointed out to me the affinity between Tess's prison and the Panopticon.

The process of modernisation portrayed by Hardy differs from Scott's not only because of its immediacy and non-homogeneity. The main reason why modernity in Hardy appears as catastrophic and, in a certain sense, 'tragic', is that progress is not imposed from without, but comes from within, from Wessex itself (cf. Taylor 1982, 166). In Scott's *Waverley* innovation comes from the South, from England, and Scotland must surrender, sooner or later, and conform itself to the rest of the country. The region of the Borders witnesses the encounter/clash between two centuries, but integration is possible because human nature is at the core unchangeable. Walter Scott underlined this aspect in the introductory chapter to *Waverley*, where he wrote that, although his story is set in the (recent) past, his characters are by no means obsolete, suggesting that anyone can identify with them. Having recourse to the metaphor of book editions, Scott wrote that nature is like a book which remains the same although new editions are issued (cf. Lamont 1998, 5), since the contents (that is to say the core of human nature) remain the same. It is true that Hardy himself stated that Wessex provided him with a representative sample of human nature. But it is also true that in Hardy there is a sense in which human beings experienced a sort of anthropological mutation during the brisk passage from tradition to modernity. Not only the environment, but also the inhabitants seem to have undergone a deep transformation – so deep that they do not even seem to belong to the same species as their fathers.

The most visible consequence of modernisation is the loss of individuality which affects people and places alike. As in Hardy "characters and environment" are closely associated, changes affecting the environment have consequences on the characters, and vice versa. Thus homologation of individuals and places is the inevitable side effect of the advent of progress. This tendency surfaces in many of Hardy's novels and reaches its acme in *Jude the Obscure*. Hints that Wessex, its peculiarities and its highly individualised inhabitants were actually "living on borrowed time" (Gatrell 1999, 28) made their first explicit appearance in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where Stephen Smith, an unimaginative architect, is set in sharp contrast with his father:

John Smith [...] was a satisfactory specimen of the village artificer in stone. In common with most rural mechanics, he had too much individuality to be a typical 'working-man' – a resultant of that beach-pebble attrition with his kind only to be experienced in large towns, which metamorphoses the unit Self into the fraction of the unit Class. (Dolin & Manford 2005, 83)

John Smith might well have featured among the rustics in such novels as *Under the Greenwood Tree* or *Far from the Madding Crowd*, but he is old, and the future is represented by his son Stephen, whose individuality

has already been lost in that “beach-pebble attrition” going on in large towns. Indeed London and Paris produce the same effects on Clym Yeobright, in whose face “could be dimly seen the **typical** countenance of the future” (Gatrell, Higonnet & Barrineau 2008, 165; emphasis added). At the same time, places too undergo a process of assimilation, becoming ‘types’. Sandbourne is one of them because, with its artificial promenades and its rows of anonymous lodging-houses, it is not so different from many other seaside resorts which mushroomed in the nineteenth century. The incongruous vegetation planted by men makes it appear as “a Mediterranean lounging-place on the English Channel” (Dolin & Higonnet 2003, 376), while The Slopes, screened as it is by Austrian pines, is a sort of Bavarian estate transplanted into the heart of England.

Now, there is a close relationship between the loss of identity of many Hardy characters and the homologation of places. It is true that almost all of Hardy’s characters who leave their places of origin incur in the same fate, that is to say they lose their original identity but are unable to acquire a new one. Yet this is more likely to happen if they are transplanted in places lacking a definite identity. For example Tess’s constitution is not incompatible with Talbothays, even if the valley of the Great Dairies is very different from her Vale of Blackmoor, but it certainly is with Sandbourne, as we have seen. Angel himself abandoned his original natural and cultural ‘habitat’, and this seems to have denaturalised him. Although being from Emminster, a village as remote and rural as Marlott and Talbothays, he was supposed to study and enter the Church. Despite his parents’ plans, Angel desired to become a farmer, but his ‘conversion’ proves disastrous, since, like Clym, he is too educated to belong to Tess’s world, but at the same time he has become different from his father and his brothers.

All these characters – Smith, Tess, Clym, Angel Clare – share a common feature: they have a place (and a family) of origin from where they depart and where they then try to return. On the contrary, the eponymous hero of Hardy’s last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, is an orphan and we do not know where he was born, even if his aunt says he came from Mellstock, where his father was living before his death. Yet Marygreen is unlikely to become Jude’s home, being as anonymous and ‘without history’ as Jude himself. The other places and characters featuring in the novel are no peculiar either. Indeed towns and villages seem to have lost their distinctiveness and they continue to be ‘unique’ only in the mind of the protagonist. Places are so anonymous as to be “little more than names” (Pite 2002, 179), and Christminster seems different (at least, until Jude acknowledges that even the city of his dreams is as dull as the others) only because of the importance attached to it by the protagonist. People too suffer the same fate: minor characters are mere names, while Jude himself is a rather evanescent – or, better, ‘obscure’ – hero (cf. Enstice 1979, 176).

The novel ends with Jude’s death and with his leaving no offspring, but

with *Jude Wessex* too came to an end. After *Jude the Obscure*, perhaps Thomas Hardy thought that regional novels were no longer possible because the vanishing of geographical areas characterised by local peculiarities involved the vanishing of their 'products' too, that is their inhabitants. Thus Hardy brought to the extreme the Wordsworthian concept that man forms a harmonious whole with the environment. In Hardy the bond between man and place is so strict that the decline of highly individualised localities corresponds to the extinction of characters with a clearly defined and unique identity. Hardy did believe that "a certain provincialism of feeling is [...] of the essence of individuality" (Millgate 1989, 151), and this is why the regional novel reached its peak with him, whose novels did indeed illustrate examples of perfect communion between man and place. Yet at the same time Hardy's novels explored the beginning of their utter estrangement, thus foreshadowing the very end of the literary genre which had characterised nineteenth-century English literature. Moreover, by insisting on the universal character of Wessex, Hardy suggested that the process of homologation was by no means confined to the South West of England, or to Great Britain alone. Anthropological mutations cannot be confined to regional areas, as Hardy clearly suggested with the story of Jude's monstrous son Little Father Time who, he wrote, was affected by the new sort of illness which he called the "coming **universal** wish not to live" (Taylor 1998, 337; emphasis added).

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# Myths of Violence and Female Storytelling in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet*

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**Abstract** Stories of violence and oppression from classical mythology and fairy tales are re-deployed in two novels by Atwood (1985) and Atkinson (1997) as archetypal pre-texts that impact on plot and narrative process. Although they are very different in genre and theme, both novels present first-person female narrators who are trapped in a claustrophobic present, and pose the question of the extent to which a story can be told from within the boundaries traced by myth, fairy tales and quasi-mythical literary texts. Clearly indebted to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a dystopian world where women live segregated by a male regime. References to the tale of Little Red Cap, classical myths and ceremonies are embedded in the text and reveal the story as a narrative that replicates the oppressive structure in which the female protagonist is imprisoned. On the other hand, Atkinson's *Human Croquet* is a metafictional family saga where Ovidian imagery, fairy tales and Shakespearean texts shape throughout the hyperliterate narrator's vision of the world, leaving her (and the reader) with a sense of inescapable and at times threatening *déjà-vu*. Besides the connections between myths of violence and plots, the essay will highlight the structuring principle of repetition, which in both works emerges as a form of epistemic violence that tragically questions or diminishes the narrative voice.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Frustration, Repetition and Closure in *The Handmaid's Tale*. – 3 *Human Croquet*: the Character, the Reader, her Story and its Author. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Margaret Atwood. Kate Atkinson. Myth. Fairy tales.

We are in the gravitational pull of past and future. [...] We lie helpless in the force of patterns inherited and patterns re-enacted by our own behaviour.

(Winterson 2006, 99)

The writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting.  
(Said 1983, 135)

## 1 Introduction

The dimension of violence is central to several classical myths and fairy tales and, especially in the latter ones, it was often sanitized to tailor them to specific readers and moral values, as is the case of the famous Grimms' tales. In the twentieth century, Greek myths, fairy tales and literary clas-



sics became part of the female (or openly feminist) revisionist writing, which sought to rediscover a neglected female tradition or marginalized perspectives inside canonical texts in order to question the male-centred literary tradition. The redeployment of the same sources also characterized much postmodernist fiction, as a fascination with ancient materials and fabulation became its distinctive hallmark. The ever-expanding corpus of female and postmodernist rewritings has indeed enriched the literary canon and liberated new hermeneutic potential from the texts being rewritten. Two late twentieth-century novels literalize the postmodernist tenet about the power and the necessity of storytelling, showing the dramatic constraints derived from the textualization (and ideologization) of history and reality. What the present essay sets out to interrogate are the effects, tonal and structural, of the use of pre-given narrative patterns in two novels by Margaret Atwood and Kate Atkinson, the modalities with which the story 'stages' within itself those patterns and the extent to which repetition inscribes violence upon narratorial agency.

These novels make use of repetition both as a thematic device and a structural strategy, with the metafictional dimension adding to its effect. Repetition is clearly visible in chapter titles. Offred's story in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) opens and closes with "Night", a title given to other chapters as well, and *Human Croquet* (1997) has both the first and the last section entitled "Streets of Trees". In Atkinson's novel, these chapters are part of larger unities, which are titled respectively "Beginning" and "Future"; such headings seemingly tell of a progression in time, which is in fact contradicted by the alternating of sections bearing the titles "Present" and "Past" throughout the story. Both novels establish a close connection between textuality and circularity of history and time. For the two protagonists, repetition also means being trapped in a claustrophobic present, in which the act of telling is both a form of resistance and inescapably doomed to perpetuate circularity.

## 2 Frustration, Repetition and Closure in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Whereas *Human Croquet* presents a highly interlaced structure which flaunts at every turn its own textuality, Atwood's novel explicitly points at only few of its intertextual connections. Even so, the way these few mythic or fairy-tale narratives are inserted in the story is often allusive or fragmentary. One of these references appears in chapter two:

Everything except the wings around my face is red [...]. I never looked good in red, it isn't my colour. [...] I go out into the polished hallway, which has a runner down the centre, dusty pink. Like a path through the forest, like a carpet for royalty, it shows me the way. [...] There remains a mirror,



on the hall wall [...] and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak, descending into a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger. (Atwood 2011, 18-9)<sup>1</sup>

In a regime where brutality is enforced upon the most minute aspects of everyday life but masked under petty routines, a woman sees herself as a distorted version of *Little Red Cap*. Much of the distorting effect lies in tonal and generic difference, being the fairy-tale subtext treated with irony by the self-conscious first-person narrator and appearing in an Orwellian world in which power is exerted through the control of biology, namely women's reproductive ability. Offred finds herself to live in a tragic parody of the Grimms' tale, one in which, according to Atwood scholar Sharon R. Wilson (1993), she has already been devoured by the wolf, here the Commander, to whom she has been assigned by the State to bear him and his wife a child. A second, allusive reference to Red Cap similarly mentions "a cloak, with a hood" (Atwood 2011, 243); this is a disguise the Commander makes her wear in order to safely reach "the Club", a secret brothel that high officers of Gilead have arranged for themselves. The disguise allows her to enter yet another world of deforming mirrors; this journey to an unknown place can be seen as a second experience in the wolf's belly, an immersion into the depths of the mechanisms of exploitation of Gilead. This episode also recalls Persephone's descent to the Underworld, first as raped girl and later as Hades' spouse.<sup>2</sup>

The repetition of the title "Night" throughout the novel thus acquires archetypal resonances that suggest a cyclical descent into the nightmare as well as the passage of time, being (biological) time the ruling principle of the Handmaids' lives.<sup>3</sup> "The bell that measures time is ringing" (18): so begins Offred's day; perhaps a distant echo of the opening of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this seemingly neutral remark turns into the Commander's wife's more threatening comment to Offred that "[y]our time is running out" (214) and later into a mock reference to Cinderella: "I must be back at the house before midnight; otherwise I'll turn into a pumpkin, or was that the coach?" (266). The sense of incumbent threat seeping into everyday

1 Page references to the novels discussed are from the editions cited in the bibliographical section. Only page numbers are given parenthetically within the essay.

2 In fact, the same mytheme appears in both fairy tale and classical myth. The myth of Persephone has been reworked by Atwood several times. On the connection between this mythic figure and fairy-tale characters, cf. Wilson 1993, 53; Wilson specifically sees Offred as both "already eaten Red Cap [and] raped Persephone maiden" (272). On the use of mythological intertexts in Atwood's works in general, see also Wilson 2000, 215-28.

3 Nevertheless, the night has also positive connotations, being Offred's "time out", namely the only moment during which she can travel through her memories back to her former life (cf. 47).

life that we find in the opening sequence of chapter two is also reminiscent of the beginning of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However far apart they may seem, *Little Red Cap* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, converge in their predictive and warning quality. Orwell's dystopia projects into the future negative aspects of the present, creating a 'thought experiment' in order to make the reader face the potential outcome of dangerous trends of his own epoch. For its part, the fairy tale of *Little Red Cap* is included by Jean-Michel Adam and Ute Heidmann among *Warnmärchen*, as opposed to *Schreckmärchen* (2010). Indeed, it contains a double warning: the first one, before Red Cap sets out for her grandmother's house, comes from her mother and is concerned with the child's behaviour ("Be nice and good, and give her my regards. Don't tarry on your way, and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall and break the glass", Zipes 1993, 135); a second warning appears after Red Cap has been rescued by the hunter, and this time is uttered by her own voice ("and Little Red Cap thought to herself: Never again in your life will you stray by yourself into the woods when your mother has forbidden it", 137). In the Grimms' story - the version probably chosen by Atwood (cf. Wilson 1993, 278) - this happy culmination of events is followed by a shorter episode, which didactically puts to test the character's newly acquired experience ("But this time Little Red Cap was on her guard, went straight ahead", Zipes 1993, 138).

Red Cap's brief introspective reflection mentioned above and the positive outcome of her second visit to her grandmother mark her growing awareness of the dangers of life; the use of free indirect thought and the occasional diaristic form in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* give access to a changing consciousness, caught in its fragility, strengthening, neurosis and breakdown. The combination of cautioning element and confessional narrative bears on to the voice in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Neither in Winston Smith's diary, nor in Offred's account do the first-person narrators say that their stories are intended as a warning; besides the fact that this aspect is specifically performed by the dystopian genre, Offred's record does contain predictions and warnings that she reads as such only retrospectively and which, as in Red Cap's tale, first come from someone else and only much later are internalized. They are voiced mainly by Offred's lesbian friend Moira in flashbacks. Moira, the rebel who had believed in "a women-only enclave" (Atwood 2011, 181) and defied the totalitarian matriarchy of the instructors (the Aunts), was alert to the slow changes that were turning the country into an oppressive regime. Whereas most people "lived, as usual, by ignoring" (66), Moira had foreseen the danger and sensed something more terrible yet to come.

A confessional narrative, however, always presupposes a 'you' and Offred's is no exception. In the following passage, Offred considers the events she is recording: "But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always

someone else. Even when there is no one. A story is like a letter. *Dear You*, I'll say. [...] I'll pretend you can hear me. But it's no good, because I know you can't" (49-50). These words testify to the clash between the urge to reach someone else and the painful awareness that any attempt is vain. Frustration is the dominant note. Of course, we know that Offred's story has reached a number of readers and we know that from the "Historical Notes" closing *The Handmaid's Tale*, the most destabilizing moment of the novel. But if we keep our gaze at the level of the Handmaid's tale (and not *The Handmaid's Tale's*), we will note that Offred's self-reflexive passages, including those instances addressed to a 'you' in the future, similarly betray the narrator's frustration; her story mirrors her oppressive present and accordingly engenders circularity, in the sense of a text folding up on the 'I' speaking. Near the end, however, the 'you' becomes more solid, as a result of Offred's need to believe in the existence of a narratee in the future: "I tell, therefore you are" (279). Sherazade-like, Offred keeps telling her story, which both "will [the reader's] existence" (279) and keeps her alive for her imagined reader. At a certain point, she briefly sketches an alternative story about herself that also reveals her artistic quest: "I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape. [...]. I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments [...]. But there is nothing I can do to change it" (279). The last statement metafictionally suggests the irrevocable nature of both History and her narrative.

In my reading, what I see as 'alternative versions' represent indeed another symptom of circularity; they consist of possible destinies, including happy endings, that Offred makes up for her beloved. At a first glance, this would sound rather contradictory, since providing an alternative reflects the prospect of a deviation from a prescribed pattern; however, this is precisely what the narrative forestalls.<sup>4</sup> This is clearly visible, for instance, in the frames introducing or closing the alternative stories involving Offred's former lover, Luke (1) and Moira (2):

- (1) There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or elsewhere. Who knows where they are or what their names are now? [...]. I can conjure them but they are mirages only, they don't last. (113)  
The things I believe can't all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of them, all three versions of Luke, at one and the same time. (116)

4 Cataldo starts from similar premises but sees Offred's alternative versions and her storytelling in a more optimistic light, as an effective way of "coming out of the labyrinth of her own mind" (2013, 160).

- (2) [Moir]a shrugs again. It might be resignation. Here is what I'd like to tell. I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if I couldn't tell that, I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it. I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again. (262)

Both passages betray Offred's frustration at not knowing anything about her beloved, or knowing that she can only make up alternative stories. The second passage is preceded by Moira's first-person account of how she became a prostitute in the Club ("Jezebel's"); although her story has no happy ending, it is a true story, and for a moment the reader forgets that it is told vicariously by Offred in Moira's voice ("I've tried to make it sound as much like her as I can. It's a way of keeping her alive" is the introductory statement, 256). The effect of 'hearing' it (almost) from Moira's lips makes us feel relieved at knowing that this fierce woman is alive. The fact that Offred has chosen to tell it as if she were Moira mirrors the role her friend has played in her life; the same fact, however, also makes us more aware of the (re)constructedness of the narrative, which, significantly, culminates with the revisionary conclusion quoted above.

*Little Red Cap* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are not the only intertexts that inscribe epistemic violence in the form of repetition, closure and consequent forestalling of alternative versions. In addition to the myth of Persephone, other references to the Greek-Roman past contribute to this effect. For example, one of the first descriptions of Serena Joy, the Commander's Wife, depicts her while "knitting scarves" (22). In a society that claims to be founded on the respect for individual abilities and needs, in fact on a preconceived distinction of sexual roles,<sup>5</sup> a woman who devotes much of her time to the traditional female activity of sewing, quite naturally brings to mind several characters from classical epic and mythology, all described while spinning, weaving or both. Several implications, practical and metaphorical, emanate from this activity. In addition to possessing an aesthetic and self-reflexive dimension (as Helen's web in the *Iliad*; Athena's and Arachne's tapestries in the *Metamorphoses*), weaving can perform a subversive function and be instrumental to a heroine's life (Penelope, Philomela) or the life of another (Ariadne's thread); spinning is explicitly connected to human life, or rather the control over it, in the image of the three Moirae (cf. Frontisi-Ducroux 2010).

5 Cf. 127: "From each" says the slogan "according to her ability; to each, according to his needs".

According to Offred, Serena Joy's scarves look rather "too elaborate" (Atwood 2011, 22) to be sent to the soldiers at the front, and look instead more suitable for children. Children are Serena's (and the Wives') most cherished goal; knitting scarves can thus be seen as a way of wishing a child into existence ("her form of procreation, it must be", 162). In fact, Offred believes that knitting scarves is maybe "just something to keep the Wives busy, to give them a sense of purpose" (23) and even imagines that those scarves are "unravelling and turned back into balls of yarn, to be knitted again in their turn" (23); Offred, too, wishes she "could embroider [...] [w]eave [and] knit, something to do with my hands" to deceive "the amount of unfilled time" (79). These remarks inevitably evoke Penelope's cunning in the *Odyssey*, but perhaps they more appropriately suggest a Penelope *manquée*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, whether it is a substitute for procreation or the means to fill their empty days, sewing only allows the Wives to make their frustration tangible and reveals an entropic quality that is absent from the Homeric heroine's web. Serena Joy is probably closer to the Moirae spinning, dispensing and cutting the threads of human lives, since the Wives, not the Commanders, have power over the Handmaids.<sup>7</sup> This mythic subtext is reinforced in the passage in which Serena points out to Offred that her time "is running out" (214), the scene taking place while the wife asks her handmaid to help her holding and winding a wool skein.

Classical antiquity is explicitly mentioned in the novel in connection with (legendary) history: it is the allusion to the rape of the Sabine Women that is mentioned during a secret meeting between Offred and the Commander ("The picture is called *The Sabine Women*", 197). No explanation of this ancient event is provided within the text, no hint at whether Offred knows who the Sabine Women were and what happened to them. What are we to make of this reference? Even though no comment is given, the allusion is so plain that we could easily conclude that Atwood expects the specialized reader to pick up the obvious mirroring between the misogynistic violence lying at the heart of Gilead's project and the abduction of those women by the ancient Latin tribes. As the story of the Sabine Women is writ large in the foundational act of the modern state, it provides an even more paradigmatic subtext to *The Handmaid's Tale* than the Biblical intertext of Jacob, his wife Rachel and her maid Bilhah, which thematically plays such a fundamental role in the novel. However, this reference does not so much interrogate the reader's classical background, as it puts centre stage a gloomy meditation on the appropriation of knowledge. As my analysis

6 Brown (2012, 214-5) suggests parallels between Serena Joy and the Penelope of Atwood's revisionary epic, *The Penelopiad* (2005).

7 Cf. 127: "the transgressions of women in the household, whether Martha or Handmaid, are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Wives alone".

will show, this classical allusion also questions the reader's neutral position: we are safely outside the fictional reality of the novel yet possibly and unconsciously in collusion with the Commander, the only one in the story who apparently has the power to control knowledge.

In order to explore the ideological implication of this episode of Roman history, we need to take a step back and consider the following passage earlier in the story: "The Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us. *Fraternize* means *to behave like a brother*. Luke told me that. He said there was no corresponding word that meant *to behave like a sister*. *Sororize*, it would have to be, he said. From the Latin. He liked knowing about such details. The derivations of words, curious usages" (21). Offred soon realizes that she will not 'sororize' with any woman in the household, the regime forbids it. Even though in Gilead the concept does exist, and the bond among some of the maids proves it, one suspects that the State aims at eradicating that instinct for good once the ideal society will be completed. In a totalitarian state, power rests on language as much as it does on violence. Words like 'Handmaids', 'Angels', 'Ceremony' and names that ostensibly unname women like 'Offred', show the basic principle of renaming and erasing individual identity. The word 'sororize', however, escapes these mechanisms, since it has never existed officially and, ironically, its non-existence seems to have become more significant to Offred in her present situation. It is noteworthy that Offred is only aware of its meaning thanks to Luke, who probably knew Latin or at least was interested in "the derivations of words". This detail, however innocent as it may appear, takes a much more revealing turn when Offred comes across Latin a second and a third time. She discovers a sentence carved in a corner of her cupboard: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* (62). These words lead to another circular pattern. In her mind, they become a message from the former Offred who occupied her room in the Commander's house and a way to 'sororize' with that unknown woman; later she repeats them as a prayer during the ritual reading that precedes the regular intercourses between Jacob-the Commander and Bilhah-Offred, assisted by Rachel-the Wife; finally, she comes to consider them as a "hieroglyph to which the key's been lost" (156). At first, Offred is attracted to the transgressive lure of those words and although she does not know their meaning she senses their power; when the phrase cannot be decoded, Offred is brought back to isolation, her hope and desire for knowledge turned into resignation.

In Offred's third encounter with Latin, that lost key is unexpectedly provided by the Commander. This is the episode in which she sees the picture - of a statue perhaps - of the Sabine Women. By this time Offred has gained confidence enough to ask the Commander straightforward questions; this confidence does not stem from sexual intimacy, but from two illicit acts involving language: playing Scrabble and reading. Without



revealing where she has seen the sentence, she writes it down, performing another transgressive act ("The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains" 196). The following is an excerpt of the relevant scene:

[The Commander] begins to laugh [...] "That's not real Latin," he says. "That's just a joke".

"A joke?" I say, bewildered now. It can't be only a joke. Have I risked this, made a grab at knowledge, for a mere joke? "What sort of a joke?"

"You know how schoolboys are", he says. His laughter is nostalgic, I see now, the laughter of indulgence towards his former self. He gets up, crosses to the bookshelves, takes down a book from his trove; not the dictionary though. It's an old book, a textbook it looks like [...].

What I see first is a picture: the Venus de Milo, in a black-and-white photo, with a moustache and a black brassiere and armpit hair drawn clumsily on her. [...] "There", he says, pointing, and in the margin I see it, written in the same ink as the hair on the Venus. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*.

"It's sort of hard to explain why it's funny unless you know Latin", he says. "We used to write all kinds of things like that. I don't know where we got them, from older boys perhaps". Forgetful of me and of himself, he's turning the pages. "Look at this", he says. The picture is called *The Sabine Women*, and in the margin is scrawled: *pim pis pit, pimus pistis pants*. "There was another one", he says. "*Cim, cis, cit...*". He stops, returning to the present, embarrassed. Again he smiles; this time you could call it a grin. [...]

"But what did it mean?" I say.

"Which?" he says. "Oh. It meant, 'Don't let the bastards grind you down'. I guess we thought we were pretty smart, back then". (195-7)

This scene shows how knowledge is coded in the Commander's language: access to it takes place only once Offred has stepped into his study, first in the playful frame of Scrabble, later through the reading of a women's magazine, and finally through the Latin textbook. Offred teeters between the illusion of having gained some power over him and the awareness of being at his mercy. The way the Classics are conceptualized in this passage is revealing. On the one hand, the Commander's attitude towards them – both in his youth and in the present – is mocking; they are surrounded by the innocent playfulness of a schoolboy (the Latin phrase turns out to be "just a joke"; "the Venus de Milo [...] with a moustache"; the fake verb forms); on the other hand, that attitude, by the Commander's own admission, was inherited from "older boys" and fed, as it were, the sense of camaraderie of generations of students who thought themselves to be "pretty smart". Both these elements are far from neutral of course. The mocking attitude

also debases its object: one finds difficult to overlook the fact that both visual examples feature women's bodies; the two mock-conjugations are also sexual puns. Only boys, not girls, are mentioned; the former Offred, who "was never a schoolboy", must have seen the sentence in similar circumstances in the Commander's study "during some previous period of boyhood reminiscence, of confidences exchanged" (197); likewise, it was Luke, not the protagonist, who knew some Latin. These details inevitably force us to imagine a society where Latin was still largely a prerogative of male education. We can picture the Commander and his fellow students turning from innocent schoolboys scribbling all over their Latin book into fervent reformers of their society. According to many studies in the field of Classical Reception,<sup>8</sup> the Classics have contributed for centuries to shape the Western imperialistic mentality via the education of the future members of the ruling classes, and well into the last century, they were considered a property of the Western white male elite and appropriated in a variety of ways for specific political agendas. Similar ideological resonances can be detected in the scene quoted above, in particular in the Commander's remark that "It's sort of hard to explain why it's funny unless you know Latin", a comment that emphasizes the distance (of class and gender) between them.

In the same episode, knowledge is also sinisterly connected to death. When Offred finds out about the origin of the phrase, she also learns that the previous handmaid had killed herself. Nonetheless, at the end of their encounter frustration turns again into a sense of power; her new weapon is the tacit threat of taking her own life. In exchange, she asks for knowledge: "Things have changed. I have something on him, now. What I have on him is the possibility of my own death. [...] 'What would you like?' he says. [...] 'I would like...' I say. 'I would like to know.' [...] 'Know what?' he says. 'Whatever there is to know [...] What's going on'" (197-8). Whether Offred's request is fulfilled or not by the subsequent events is open to question. For instance, should we take the Commander's explanations about the origin of Gilead at face value, especially considering the sarcastic attitude mixed with indifference with which Offred listens to them? Was men's "inability to feel" (221) the deepest reason why the old way of living had to be erased and a new one be built? Might we not interpret the *katabasis* of Offred-Persephone into Jezebel's as a journey of knowledge orchestrated by the Commander himself in order to give her what she had asked for? Given his position at the highest hierarchical level of Gilead and as one of its ideologists, the Commander at the same time is and is not the most reliable source of information; in other words, he is in control of the codification and decodification of meaning.

8 Selected reference works include Edwards 1999, Goff 2005, Schein 2008, Bradley 2010.



Atwood's novel is devised in a way that assumes us always as secondary or deferred readers as opposed to Prof. Pieixoto and his colleagues, who are the primary exegetes of Offred's record and the 'protagonists' of the "Historical Notes". How are we to situate ourselves at this stage? Do we run the risk of being conspiratorial with the Commander's and Prof. Pieixoto's patronizing gaze? Of course, knowing classical languages (and being a literary critic) is not a guilt. However, the "Historical Notes" call into question, by means of parody, a kind of attitude that is based on the claim of cultural superiority and that unsympathetically dissects its object of study. This, I would argue, is the web of questions in which the rape of the Sabine Women and the other classical references are discursively embedded. The "Historical Notes" also help us to put into a larger historical perspective Offred's account (her assertion that "context is all" is, after all, a compelling invitation to the critic). Yet Atwood is clearly making fun of academic readers, while at the same time striking a very serious note: that of readerly responsibility and the use (and misuse) of knowledge.

The "Historical Notes" radically change the reader's perspective. Even though *The Handmaid's Tale* is often read as an open-ended novel (cf. Baccolini 2000, Cataldo 2013), I believe that this is more accurate in relation to Offred's story alone; as a matter of fact, the last section brings closure by presenting a ready interpretation that imposes pre-given patterns from the outside. For instance, we learn from Prof. Pieixoto that the title he has given to the anonymous record he has found is "partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer" (Atwood 2011, 313). The last reference to the Classics that I would like to discuss appears at the end of this section, and its position doubly invites the reader to take a retrospective look at the story s/he has just finished. Speculating on the possible destinies Offred may have met after the van has taken her away, Prof. Pieixoto aligns her with the mythic Eurydice and us, implicitly, with Orpheus: "We may call Eurydice forth from the world of the dead, but we cannot make her answer; and when we turn to look at her we glimpse her only for a moment, before she slips from our grasp and flees" (324). Looking back involves circularity, too. Is Prof. Pieixoto's look, and ours, appropriate or appropriative? Whereas at the beginning Offred reluctantly sees herself as a version of Red Cap ("I never looked good in red"), at the end she has become a new Eurydice. However, by comparison with the former, the latter is usually a silent character in myth; likewise, silent and fading away is how Prof. Pieixoto portrays her at the end of his speech.

### 3 *Human Croquet: the Character, the Reader, her Story and its Author*

A mosaic of literary intertexts, Atkinson's second novel is the story of an English girl who tells about the tragic, mock-tragic and frightening adventures that she experiences in the months after her sixteenth birthday, until Christmas Day, a date that she relives twice. Whereas the most part of the story is narrated by Isobel Fairfax in the first person, other sections are told from her omniscient perspective<sup>9</sup> in the third person and go back in time to events that took place in her childhood and in the past of her family, in particular of her mysterious mother Eliza who one day disappeared in the woods. Shakespearean allusions pervade the entire novel, starting from the chronotopic name of Isobel's house, Arden, which was once surrounded by a forest now almost vanished.

In "On Originality" Edward Said asked a question about the purpose of reading - "reading as development or reading as appropriation?" (1983, 129) - that can be applied to the young protagonist of Atkinson's novel, who, besides being a storyteller, is a voracious reader by her own admission (cf. Atkinson 1998, 45). In the same essay, Said raises another interesting point about "contemporary writing [...], as in the case of fabulists like Borges, Pynchon, and García Márquez": writing, for them, "is a desire to *tell* a story much more than it is one for telling a *story*" (1983, 130). The word 'desire' is equally important here, especially given Said's previous discussion of the "original (irreducible) impulse" to write, and of writing as a gesture that is "never exhausted by the completion of a piece of writing" (128). This impulse to write and rewrite is what drives much post-modernist fiction, with its emphasis on the process of storytelling (and proliferation of stories, to be sure). Said's second point on desire and telling is relevant to the adult Isobel, who is the narrative voice of the last chapter and is surprisingly neglected more often than not by criticism on this novel. This Isobel is a writer of historical romances (cf. Atkinson 1998, 436) and perhaps the author of the improbable, labyrinthine story that is *Human Croquet*. This hypothesis does not solve the riddle of a novel where, as Smith effectively shows (2007, 57-86), everything, until the last page, remains suspended between the fairy-tale and the realist chronotopes.

(Re)reading and (re)telling can be seen as the shaping drives of the universe of *Human Croquet*, where life blatantly imitates and parodies art. As in Atwood's novel, character and narrator overlap, with the added possibility of the (fictional) author comprising them both. If, on the one hand, Isobel is more graspable than Atwood's Offred and her narratorial

9 In the first chapter, Isobel boasts about her omniscience: "I am the alpha and omega of narrators (I am omniscient) and I know the beginning and the end. The beginning is the word and the end is silence. And in between are all the stories. This is one of mine" (26).

voice much more self-confident from the outset, on the other hand she equally resorts to pre-given narratives and falls victim to them, although for different reasons. In this novel, not only does the world of Isobel and the other characters often follow recognizable plots of fairy tales, Shakespeare's plays and myths; also, events, situations and even days in their lives are doubled. Some motifs are repeated in different plots with minor differences; for instance the sudden appearance and disappearance of a child occurs first in Isobel's life, when a baby is found at the door of Arden house, and in the second-to-last "Past" section, which dispels the mystery surrounding Eliza, herself a stolen child. At other times, the same event is narrated from different perspectives, adding to narrative and structural repetitions. The episode in which Eliza is rescued by the soldier Gordon from a bombed building during World War II serves as an example: it is briefly told from the grandmother's perspective, then a second time from Gordon's and later Eliza's (of course, behind all three versions is Isobel, the silent omniscient narrator).

Several hypotexts contain evil or evil intentions but little explicit violence; Atkinson's most recurring strategy is to exploit this violent potential and create macabre versions of the tales. A case in point is the story of Eliza's death. Several motifs from Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Hansel and Gretel and Little Thumb can easily be detected in the story: the siblings Charles and Isobel get lost in the woods while searching for Eliza and Gordon, their father, who is also looking for his wife; Charles finds a shoe belonging to their mother; they find Eliza "loll[ing] against the trunk of a big oak tree, like a carelessly abandoned doll or broken bird" (154). While previous descriptions of her usually conjure up beautiful and wicked queens, now Eliza evokes innocent characters like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White; the blood that in their respective stories is safely kept at a distance in the form of few drops, a comparison for a colour, and an unfulfilled request (the hunter who is about to kill Snow White spares her), is converted here into the unmistakable sign of a murder ("this sleeping mother who refused to wake up [...] looked very peaceful [...]. Only the dark red ribbons of blood in her black curls hinted at the way her skull might have been smashed against the trunk of the tree", 154). On their return way, Charles wishes "they'd brought the uneaten sandwiches with them. 'We could scatter the crumbs [...] and find our way back.' Their only blueprint for survival in these circumstances, it seemed, was fictional. They knew the plot, unfortunately, and any minute expected to find the gingerbread cottage - and then the nightmare would really begin" (156). In chasing his wife, Isobel's father is partly a hunter figure; after many years, however, he confesses his daughter what he believes to be his crime, the murder of Eliza, while in fact she met her death at the hands of Mr Baxter, her lover (who previously in the novel is also revealed as incestuous father). The story of Eliza's disappearance in the woods also parallels

the mysterious vanishing of the first Lady Fairfax back in the late sixteenth century. Initially, both women are presented as malevolent *femmes fatales*; later we learn about their stories of suffering and family abuse. By contrast to Lady Fairfax, whose disappearance is finally clarified as a flight with her lover, Eliza meets no romantic end and dies instead struck with one of her shoes. Therefore, this conclusion revises both the happy ending of fairy-tale princesses and of the Fairfax ancestor – in itself a suspicious grand finale<sup>10</sup> –, and replaces them with a version more appropriate for a story of female envy and male jealousy set against a suburban background.

At some point Isobel wakes up in a hospital and learns about the car accident she had on her birthday and that consequently she has spent nearly a month in a coma. This forces us to reconsider what happened before as the result of her hallucinations (“The cosmic journey I took was the world of the comatose”, 365); in fact, this rational explanation dispels neither Isobel’s nor the reader’s hesitation as to the strangeness surrounding Arden, since some events in the ‘real’ world double events that took place in Isobel’s comatose world, only with minor differences, producing an effect of “permanent *déjà vu*” (413) that makes her question the ontological status of reality. In my reading, however, what is more important than to assess what is ‘real(istic)’ and what is not, are the reasons and the ways in which Isobel – character and narrator – textualizes her life. Sixteen-year-old Isobel appropriates fairy tales and other texts to mediate and perhaps exorcise her sense of a fragmented self and the painful memory of her mother’s loss. This mediating function of literature becomes apparent when we take into account some clues related to Isobel’s young age: the uneasiness, desires and fears deriving from her changing body and the first erotic experiences of adolescence. Despite her bold and over-confident tone, her narrative betrays anxiety and fragility, as well as the belief that the comedy of life has a fundamental tragic quality.

These feelings emerge already in the opening section of the first “Present” section. Echoing the alliterative *incipit* of Nabokov’s *Lolita* – an allusion that has gone unnoticed so far, yet tellingly connected with the themes of incest and family tragedy so recurring in this novel –, Isobel discusses her appearance: “Is-o-bel. A peal of bells. Isabella Tarantella – a mad dance. I am mad, therefore I am. Am I? Belle, Bella, Best, never let it rest. Bella Belle, doubly foreign for beautiful, but I’m not foreign. Am I beautiful? No, apparently not” (29). She goes on describing her “human geography”

10 The ‘myth’ of the happy ending is deconstructed by Isobel herself at the end of the section immediately preceding Lady Fairfax’s story, related in the first person (the only first-person narrative in the novel up to this chapter is Isobel’s): “Only the imagination can embrace the impossible – the golden mountain, the fire-breathing dragon, the happy ending” (418). This sentence thus casts doubts on the happy ending and, as a consequence, on the implicit claims to authenticity of the subsequent chapter.

and concludes: "I'm a big girl, in other words" (29); her stature clearly troubles her, especially when it is linked with adulthood by Mrs Baxter, who sees it as a sign of Isobel's being "a real woman now" (31). The piece of information about her age is surrounded by allusions to fairy tales that show both her awareness of their sexual subtext and her preoccupations about that subtext: "It's the first day of April and it's my birthday, my sixteenth - the mythic one, the legendary one. The traditional age for spindles to start pricking and suitors to come calling and a host of other symbolic sexual imagery to suddenly manifest itself, but I haven't even been kissed by a man yet, not unless you count my father, Gordon, who leaves his sad, paternal kisses on my cheek like unsettling little insects" (29-30).<sup>11</sup> While working on a school essay on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Isobel writes that the play "is about darkness and death - the music and the comedy only serve to highlight what lies beyond the pools of golden light - the dark, the inevitability of death, the way time destroys everything" (267). Perhaps more than the phrase "appearances can be deceptive" (267) and other similar hints to look behind the surface of things, this comment on Shakespeare's comedy plays a similar role to Offred's "context is all", because it provides the reader with the key to the peculiar tonal quality of this novel.

Isobel's anxiety about her changing body is enfolded in, and mediated through, the allusions to the master epic of shape-shifting, namely Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The poem is a repertoire of episodes of violence performed on the human body, especially the female one - often preyed on, raped, chased. If, on the one hand, we can contend with Sanders that "Atkinson does, in a manner akin to Ovid and Shakespeare, use the metamorphic idea to swerve away from tragic potential" (2001, 79), on the other, we should not overlook the fact that the experience of metamorphosis is itself both marvellous and violent. In particular, Isobel picks up the "intense somatic nature" (Gildenhard & Zissos 1999, 163) of the transformation in the episodes of Phaeton's sisters metamorphosed into trees (cf. Atkinson 1998, 194; *Ov., Met.*, 2340-66) and Daphne into laurel (cf. Atkinson 1998, 312-3; *Ov., Met.*, 1548-52). Whereas the former myth appears as a passage that Isobel translates for her Latin class, the latter is actually experienced when, like Daphne, she is suddenly, yet only provisionally, metamorphosed into a tree as a consequence of her silent request to be rescued from an attempted rape. Although metamorphosis saves Isobel from the tragedy of rape, it does not prevent her from acknowledging the erotic potential of her own body and experiencing that sense of tragedy that typically stems from teenage melancholy: this episode is preceded by the aggression of a boy in her room (cf. 270) and by her dissatisfaction about her party dress

11 On the last line of this passage (Gordon kissing his daughter), cf. Sanders 2001, 67.

(cf. 275). If we look closer at the frame in which the myth of Phaeton's sisters occurs, we realize how central it is to Isobel's perception of her grief: it includes elements like the sad music on the radio, the feeling that she has been "turned by grief into something strange", musings like "Will I ever be happy? Probably not. Will I ever kiss Malcolm Lovat? Probably not", and finally her dream about "[being] lost in an endless dark wood, alone and with no rescuer" (194-5).

The transformation of fairy tales into stories of domestic violence<sup>12</sup> can be interpreted as a sign of Isobel's transition from childhood to adulthood and her discovery of evil in the ordinary, everyday world.<sup>13</sup> However, the question about the ways in which she rereads and retells fairy tales and other texts is further complicated by the fact that two opposite sets of versions are available to her since her childhood. At one point, the narrator compares Mrs Baxter's and Eliza's fairy tales: whereas the former ones "all had happy endings", her mother's versions "had frequently ended badly and contained a great deal of mutilation and torture [and] everyone usually died, even Little Red Riding Hood" (229). Isobel is familiar with both versions, the conventional ones - where violence is temporary or used to restore moral order (as in "Red Riding Hood") - and the macabre ones, which can also be seen as the non-sanitized versions of the former. These gruesome stories also recall the tragic events of Eliza's life, and later Isobel and her friends' lives will resemble (or will be made to resemble) them, too.

In a novel that repeatedly deconstructs itself, and in keeping with the best postmodernist tradition, both these statements are equally valid: Isobel appropriates stories and stories appropriate Isobel. This means that

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the murder of Eliza in the woods, the Baxter family fleshes out the incestuous and violent potential of fairy tales like Grimms' "Rapunzel" and "Thousandfurs", Joseph Jacob's "Tattercoats" and Perrault's "Bluebeard", all of which feature either daughters or wives who are oppressed by a tyrannous father/husband (cf. Smith 2007, 68-71). Mrs Baxter, who plays the role of the benign fairy godmother to Isobel, is beaten by her husband; the man also abused Audrey, their daughter, who gives birth to a child; Mrs Baxter eventually murders her husband when Audrey reveals the identity of her child's father. These facts take place on Isobel's second Christmas Eve, and precede the two Christmas Days in a row, both of which end with Malcolm Lovat's death and Isobel's awakening in the hospital. Incest and murder haunt the narrative, and Isobel's imagination, as it were: after she has woken up from coma and unwilling to believe the official version of Mr Baxter's suicide (depression), she reconstructs an alternative explanation that involves poisoning and shooting, and once again Mrs Baxter in the role of the murderer. Not only does this version replicate the story given in Isobel's comatose world, it is also the only one that she acknowledges as untrue: "Maybe there can be more than one version of reality [...]. Take Mr Baxter's death, for example, perhaps there are other versions. Imagine -" (408). On a metafictional level we could read this gesture as Isobel (the fictional writer)'s imposition of narrative justice on her story.

<sup>13</sup> Significantly, in the first version of the murder of Mr Baxter, the narrator alludes to her and her friends' "lost innocence" (343), when she tells how they helped Mrs Baxter and Audrey to bury the corpse in their garden.

Isobel epistemically, that is linguistically in the first place, is imprisoned in a world that she cannot imagine without resorting to pre-given texts. Certainly, circularity, doublings and *déjà vu* suggest a claustrophobic universe. However, stories, including stories of violence, also have a mediating role in her development as a character and narrator. Isobel literally inhabits the world of fiction and claims that books are “the only reliable otherworlds I’ve discovered so far” (45). They provide her with recognizable situations that can be reassuring and frightening at the same time (like her Ovidian transformation into a tree) or utterly upsetting and that ultimately become part of the complexity of life with which Isobel, as a teenager, is struggling.<sup>14</sup> For Isobel, storytelling represents both a necessity and an experiment: Meyer notes that it is necessary “in order to arrive at a coherent construction of the self” (2010, 452) and speculates that “[Isobel] could in fact use the narration as a kind of experiment on paper to find out what could happen if the parameters change” (454). Experimenting is perhaps more relevant to Isobel in her narratorial and authorial role; indeed, if the novel appears as a palimpsest of the genres of *Bildungsroman*, family saga, crime and science fiction, assembled through the modes of magic realism and metafiction, this is also because it can be interpreted as the result of the aesthetic training of its young narrator. For instance, Isobel acts out her fears when she reconstructs her mother’s death in the wood and tests her desire of the perfect family when she relives her second Christmas Day with her parents reunited; these are narratorial experiments that, by imitating one of those otherworlds, at the same time test her as a character in her own story.

Character, narrator and writer cannot be easily distinguished one from the other. About Isobel as author we only know the few pieces of information that she tells us in the “Future” section, in which she appears as a grown woman, a mother and a professional novelist. If we took the whole novel as a story written by Isobel Fairfax, that is a fictional autobiography, we could venture to conclude that, firstly, she makes fairy tales relevant to a female narrative not by empowering their protagonists but by problematizing their violent subtexts; and secondly, that repetition and *déjà vu* are less indications of female oppression than evidence of the sheer pleasure of narration, Said’s “desire to *tell*”.

14 In an interview Atkinson says that “[f]airy stories teach girls about life. They teach girls about how to negotiate the pitfalls of living in a male world: that’s what they do *par excellence*” (Tolan 2008, 8). On this topic also cf. Sellers 2001, in particular chapter one.



## 4 Conclusion

In both novels, structural repetition creates the impression that neither protagonist is fully in control of her narrative. In *The Handmaid's Tale* Offred lays bare the problem when she states: "If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. [...] It isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along" (Atwood 2011, 49). By contrast, Atkinson's narrator apparently knows "how it ends" (1998, 441). Her character, however, is not so self-confident and asks, instead, "Can you step into the same river *thrice*?" (351) and when she does know the plot, she fears the worst ("They knew the plot, unfortunately, and any minute expected to find the gingerbread cottage – and then the nightmare would really begin", 156). In Atwood's novel, circularity is only provisionally undermined by a few uncertain alternative versions and the open ending, and reinstated in the academic conclusion. Offred is seen through the lens of myth from cover to cover and the only site of resistance against epistemic violence is not language (that is, not even storytelling), but, as in Orwell's dystopia, the body, once she has freely given herself to Nick. In Atkinson's novel, myths of violence and their repetition appear to be related in different ways to the three layers of agency that can be (speculatively) 'located' in Isobel (character, narrator, author). Whereas as a writer she is free to experiment with pre-existing narratives and motifs, as a character and narrator she has to negotiate between their oppressive force and predictability and their heuristic value.

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## Romola: the Emerging Female Self in Renaissance Florence

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**Abstract** In *Romola* (1862) George Eliot investigates the complex interplay between the female self and the surrounding cultural stifling milieu to explore the limitations and possibilities of femininity in Renaissance Florence. The author vests the eponymous heroine with an urgent desire to overthrow the socio-political structures founded on male patriarchal values, dominant in Florence and unfitting to accommodate women's talents, thus echoing the debate about women's place in mid-Victorian androcentric society. Romola's aspiration to moral freedom, a vocation alternative to marriage and childbearing, and to an intellectual autonomy unmolested by a long-established patriarchal system, is crushed by the burden of family traditions, past obligations and social responsibilities. The purpose of this paper is twofold: to examine the evolution of the heroine's character through her spiritual journey (which echoes Eliot's own religious struggle) and to show her triumph over the egotism inherited from patriarchal figures by emerging into the self-denial which lies at the heart of Eliot's agnostic ethical humanism. Entangled in the universal conflict between individual desire and moral responsibility, Romola stands as an intellectual woman capable to find a balance between dutiful obedience and resistance to the rigid morality outlined by the male social code, thus attaining her autonomous female identity as a fully-individualized human being, and not as a merely 'Other' in relation to men.

**Keywords** George Eliot. Desire. Responsibility. Humanism.

While reading about Savonarola it occurred to me that his life and times afford fine material for an historical romance [...] a subject which will fall in with much of [Eliot's] studies and sympathies.

(*The George Eliot Letters*, 3, 295)

It is in the journal of George Eliot's beloved companion George Henry Lewes, in the days of the couple's first trip to Florence in 1860, that the 'germ' of her Italian novel *Romola* (1862-63) can be found. Eliot's deep interest in Italian culture led her to carry much detailed research into Florentine customs, culture and language and to go through an exhausting labour of historical reconstruction in order to write her Italian novel. In her diary she observes that this novel marked a transition in her life: "I began it a young woman – I finished it an old woman" (cf. Ashton 2013, 256). Eliot was driven by a strong desire – as her contemporary Henry James (1885) termed it – to "neglec[t] nothing that would enable her to live, *intellectually*, in the period she had undertaken to describe" (1971, 500; italics)

added). The causes which prompted Eliot to venture to Italy, beyond the boundaries of her childhood English Midlands countryside of her early fiction, and to give detailed reconstructions of Florentine life, were both psychological and historical, as the principle at work in *Romola* is: "to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself" (*The George Eliot Letters*, hereinafter *GEL*, 4, 96). In order to voice her plea for an equal participation of men and women in shaping society and its cultural development, Eliot investigates the complex interplay between the female self and the stifling milieu, thus echoing the debate about women and their place in mid-Victorian androcentric society, which seemed unfitting to accommodate women's talents and desire for a vocation alternative to marriage and childbearing. The conflict *Romola* experiences looking for a balance - or even a compromise - between her individual yearnings and outward conditions, has many points of resemblance also with the struggle Eliot experienced herself as an intellectual woman in Victorian England. Indeed, the strong desire for self-assertion hindered by an impulse to self-denial, characterizes *Romola* as it did her creator. At Eliot's time, John Stuart Mill identified these two components as essential in his ideal of self-development. In his philosophical work *On Liberty* (1869), he contrasted Pagan self-fulfilment against the Christian ideal of self-denial, arguing that the latter is as important as the former in the individual's attempt to find a balance between personal freedom and the necessary acceptance of the rules of society. Verging on the boundary between selflessness and selfishness, *Romola* is pitted against authoritarian and patriarchal figures against whom she proves capable of rebellion without stifling her generous impulse to unselfishness.

In the attempt to read *Romola* as a *Bildungsroman*, this essay will investigate the three main stages of the heroine's personal development: *Romola's* daughterly devotion first, her enthusiastic commitment to the duties imposed by Christian humanity then, and her final sympathetic morality as a stepmother and a Madonna. In *Romola's Bildung* the apparently irreconcilable opposites - to be at once dutiful and unconventional - seem to find an harmonization in the final triumph of her capacity for 'fellow-feeling', as the best means for women to triumph over men's egotism, avoiding both the unfeelingness of utter self-assertion and the passivity of utter self-denial. In this sense, the ending of *Romola* inaugurates Eliot's mature elaboration of the centrality of sympathy in both her ethics and aesthetics in *Middlemarch*.

In Book V of George Eliot's *The Mill of the Floss* (1860) the heroine Maggie Tulliver, longing for intellectual autonomy, is offered Madame de Staël's book *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). Despite not being able to resist the temptation of the pleasure that reading affords her, she does not want to finish the novel because she foresees that the talented Anglo-Italian poetess Corinne is going to be overcome by the fair and light-complexioned

lady, Lucile. Through Maggie's refusal to witness Corinne's wreck, Eliot is underlining how marriage and motherhood alone are inadequate outlets for women's intellect and ardour, although they seem to be the only possibilities available to them in Victorian England. Indeed, Eliot's contemporary society was dominated by a sort of male cultural authority which seemed incompatible with female intellectual ambitions and desire for intellectual autonomy. This distorted, yet widely held view claimed reason as male and emotion as female, whereby masculinity was to be associated with genius and femininity with the liabilities of the female body. In this perspective, and contrary to Maggie's feelings, as Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* puts it, *Corinne* was instead "the book of the woman of genius" (1976, 173), as within this novel the eponymous heroine discovers that in early nineteenth-century Italy a woman had far more freedom to perform in public and devote herself to the arts than in England. This greater freedom of action is proved by Corinne's success as a passionate lover and a performing artist, as well as by her personal and artistic boldness in displaying herself in public to receive the applause of an ecstatic crowd when she is crowned as a national genius at the Capitol in Rome, thus celebrating the rights of intellectual freedom for women. Her public triumph, transgressing all rules established for female behaviour, validates the possibility for a talented woman to assert her female identity as a fully-individualized human being, not merely as a submissive 'Other' in relation to man.

Eliot knew of some Italian women having successful public careers, as she noted in her early meditation on "womanly intellect" entitled *Woman in France: Madame de Sablé* (1854): "we confess ourselves unacquainted with the productions of those awful women of Italy, who held professional chairs, and were great in civil and canon law" (1990, 9). And so it was not surprising that it was precisely to Italy - one of the countries where eminent Victorians travelled to during their nineteenth-century middle-class version of the Grand Tour to cultivate their minds - that Eliot shifted in *Romola*. The rise and fall of Girolamo Savonarola's popular religious party shapes the historical plot of the novel, following the downfall and expulsion of the secular Medici family from Florence in 1492 and the expedition led by King Charles VIII of France entering the city in triumph. George Eliot's "treatment of Florentine politics reflects Victorian political apprehensions" (Robinson 1962, 34), caused mainly by the pressure to adjust to the economic, social and demographic changes unleashed by the industrial revolution, as well as by the increasing conflict between different emerging social classes. But *Romola* is particularly hinged on the peculiar opposition between the "ardent public man" (Ashton 2011, 836) and the "ardent private woman": while the first is driven by an aspiration to political leadership, or at least to an advancement in politics, the second is completely excluded from political life. Through the male hero of the novel, Tito Melema, the author explores how political events

affect the development of an individual's nature as, in order to become a valued member of the Florentine society – as a translator, secretary, ambassador and double agent working impartially for both the Mediceans and the supporters of Savonarola – he will be led to deny part of his past. Never, instead, is the female heroine directly involved in political activities, neither granted the possibility to give her opinion on political issues, nor to give her contribution to the political events upsetting the Republic of Florence. In accordance with the commonplace division between male and female space, Romola's confinement to the private sphere of domesticity undoubtedly reflected Eliot's own refusal to support any political causes, which in itself was a token of her belief that a woman's "incalculably diffusive" (838) influence in society ought to be limited to morals, rather than extended to politics. Yet, with respect to the 'Woman Question' – as the confused thoughts on the subject of women were labelled by the Victorian ruling middle classes – *Romola* explores the eponymous heroine's endeavour to define 'her place' (ch. 42, book III, is entitled "Romola in Her Place") as an intellectual woman in Renaissance Florence, challenging the power of the numerous male figures surrounding her and the obligations of a long-established patriarchal system. Romola's painful struggle for autonomy is hindered not only by her husband Tito Melema, but also by the many father-figures present in her life, namely her natural father Bardo de' Bardi, her godfather Bernardo Del Nero and her spiritual father Girolamo Savonarola. All these patriarchal figures will be dead by the end of the novel and Romola will be left with no 'traditional patriarchal authority', eventually assuming full authority, first as a Madonna ministering a community of plague-stricken villagers, then as the leading matriarch of an all-female household. But this is only the end of a very new beginning.

The main concern of the first part of *Romola* is with a woman's responsibility and duty to her father, and broadly to male figures. Described as a "pre-Raphaelite Madonna", since the very beginning Romola is presented as the dutiful daughter of her learned father, the commanding figure of patriarchal authority who has been ruling her life so far. By blind Bardo De' Bardi, whose scholarly ambitions are unfulfilled, she is raised as a humanist and for him she acts as an amanuensis, submissively assisting him in classical studies. Therefore, confined within the walls of his library, Romola attempts to give meaning to her life through passive filial obedience and piety for her father. Her dedication to Bardo's needs – which cannot but remind the readers of Marian Evans's taking care of her ageing father Robert in the 1840s – partly compensates also for the loss of her mother in early childhood, a painful loss her creator had experienced too. Romola's moving devotion stands in stark contrast with the egotism characterizing all other male characters in the novel. While her brother Dino's stern spirituality has led him to desert Bardo and reject scholarly life for a monastery of Dominican friars (thus becoming Fra Luca, a zealous

devotee of Savonarola's), her husband Tito will betray both his father and father-in-law in his attempt to advance in Florentine society.

Precisely because she is 'merely' a woman, Romola has been confined to the office of a secretary transmitting male texts. Despite Bardo's recognition and admiration of her "wide-glancing" intelligence and intellectual industry – notably, she is praised as being "endowed beyond the measure of women" (Barrett 1996, 69) – Bardo remarks that his daughter has been anyhow assigned by Nature to a "lower category". This narrow-minded assumption inevitably leads him to underrate his daughter's intellectual capacities and power of application, and to reproach the lack of accuracy in her memory. Romola's sense of intellectual inferiority to men is further heightened by the comparison her father frequently makes between her capacities and her brother Dino's scholarship, in whose shadow she has grown up. Therefore, Romola realizes she is "by no means sufficient to [her] father" (68), persuaded by his depreciative remarks that she is not gifted with the qualities indispensable for scholarship traditionally ascribed to men. After all, Bardo observes, "the unbeaten paths of knowledge are still less reconcilable with the wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind than with the feeble powers of the feminine body" (51). Yet, it is only within the walls of her father's library that Romola can show herself as an intelligent and educated woman, since for women the acquisition of learning was transgressive according to society, as it threatened the borders of gender definition. Thus, the only feminist cause Eliot seemed to support in *Romola* was precisely the educational cause, which she had already addressed especially in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), deploring girls' narrow educational opportunities in Victorian England as a source of misery.

As Shona Simpson (1998) observed, if Romola's confinement at Bardo's library in Florence is an oppressive "prison", it also serves as a protective 'cradle' for the heroine. The enclosed spaces of her house protect her from "the debasing influence of [her] sex", "with their sparrow-like frivolity and their enslaving superstition" (54) which her father has been careful to keep her away from. The precious books and antiquities ranged in perfect order on the shelves of Bardo's spacious library also provide the heroine with a reliable source of knowledge, allowing her to expand her intellect and ennoble her mind. On the other hand, this life of cloistered knowledge and scholarly seclusion seems to oppress the heroine, who longs for escaping the domestic walls: "this proud pale face [...] was in a state of girlish simplicity and ignorance concerning the world outside her father's books" (58).

Romola is not only a dutiful daughter, but also an obedient wife, as the first volume unfolds her happy encounter and marriage with Tito Melema, an Italianate-Greek scholar who has suffered shipwreck after deserting his father Baldassarre Calvo. When Romola's impoverished father expresses



his wish to “find a fitting *parentado*” (Barrett 1996, 54) for her, she objects to the prospect of getting married soon, rather promising that she will study diligently so that “perhaps some great scholar will want to marry me [...] and he will be to you [Bardo] in place of my brother [...] and you will not be sorry that I was your daughter” (54). Yet, when Tito is first introduced at the Bardi library, his visit is welcomed with a sparkle of joy and hope in Romola’s face, and even a smile and pink flush rise to her usually pale cheeks:

it seemed like a wreath of spring, dropped suddenly into Romola’s young but wintry life, which had inherited nothing but memories – memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father’s happier time – memories of far-off light, love, and beauty, that lay embedded in dark mines of books. (59)

A new close comradeship develops and quickly evolves into deep mutual affection, as the Greek youth suddenly falls in love with the majestic beauty of Bardo’s daughter, whom he compares to a “great nature-goddess”. At first he even paradoxically feels in subjection to her simplicity, experiencing “that loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood” (9). Tito’s youthful beauty and scholarly attitude win him not only Romola’s affection, but also her father’s respect, as Bardo charges him with the task of translating some old manuscripts and help him to clear off his debts. So, it is Tito who takes the role of carrying on Bardo’s work Dino was appointed to perform for him. At Easter time, with the blind scholar’s consent, the two young protagonists are married in a union compared by the narrator to Bacchus’ mythical crowning of Ariadne’s poor life.

Marriage – Eliot claims in the *Finale* of *Middlemarch* – is “the beginning of the home epic, the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union” (Ashton 2011, 168) represented by Adam and Eve. Tito’s marriage to Romola begins as a union of hope, yet it ends in despair and conflict. The failure of their wedding is anticipated by Fra Luca’s premonitory vision, foretelling a marriage between Romola and a mysterious stranger – in such terms is Tito introduced in Book I – who will bring pain to her and her father. In spite of his attempt to warn his sister “against marriage as a temptation of the enemy” (Barrett 1996, 158), Dino fails to persuade Romola not to marry Tito. As foreshadowed by Fra Luca’s fantasy, Tito egoistically tries to maintain control over Romola’s feelings and actions by appealing to his commanding role of husband and master. After Bardo’s death, he plans to sell his distinguished library to the invading French as, having betrayed his foster father and being embroiled in devious political intrigues, he wishes to leave Florence. By selling Bardo’s ancient library without his wife’s consent, Tito betrays both his father-in-law and Romola, who then realizes the true overbearing nature of her



husband's character. Moreover, Tito encourages his wife to be passive and wants absolute control over Romola, who soon becomes "careful to suppress all those promptings that seemed to isolate her from him [...] labouring, as a loving woman must, to *subdue* her nature to her husband's" (247; italics added). Tito exerts his powerful male authority also on the other main female character in the novel, Tessa, a witless milkmaid with whom he has gone through a "mock marriage", thus being compelled to take charge of her two illegitimate children, Lillo and Ninna. While Romola is forcibly expelled from the suffocating oppressiveness of Bardo's library to be relegated to the painted chambers of Tito's house, Tessa is forbidden to go out without Tito's permission. Nevertheless, as soon as Romola discovers the treachery of her Greek husband and his dereliction of duty, she accuses him of never being open with her. Feeling that she cannot remain in subjection to the mind of a selfish and faithless husband any longer, she proves bold enough to break the marriage contract by leaving Tito, holding him unworthy of her wifely devotion: "the relation had become for her *simply a degrading servitude*. The law was sacred. Yes, but *rebellion* might be sacred too" (468; italics added).

In her historical reconstruction of the eccentric life of Romola, an educated woman in fifteenth-century Florence, and of utter subjugation to her husband, George Eliot seems to underline the remote origins of the state of complete subjugation to their husbands in which Victorian women, even intellectual women, were obliged to in marriage. Romola's attempt to abandon her unhappy marriage and escape the stifling conditions in which married women were kept in Renaissance Florence voices Eliot's critique of the institution of marriage in the Victorian Era. And Romola's helpless condition, which doesn't allow her to protect her father's library from Tito's greediness, seems the origin of a similar helpless condition, whereby Victorian married women were left vulnerable and unprotected by the restraining common law of property.

In Victorian England, when a woman married, all that she owned, inherited or earned belonged solely to her husband, entitled to dispose of it to his own liking. The injustice of the marriage laws was denounced also by many social theorists contemporary to Eliot. This is the case, for instance, with John Stuart Mill's indictment in his popular essay *The Subjection of Women*:

[for Victorian women] marrying is giving themselves *a master* [...] of all their earthly possessions [...]. [...] the wife is the *actual bond-servant* of her husband [...]. She can do no act whatever but by his permission, at least tacit. She can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes *ipso facto* his. In this respect the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries. ([1869] 1991, 501; italics added)

Such a striking parallel between the miserable living and working conditions of women in Victorian England and those of slaves was drawn in Eliot's time also by other eminent female writers, including her friend Harriet Martineau: "while woman's intellect is confined, her morals crushed, her health ruined, her weaknesses encouraged, and her strength punished" (as quoted in Carroll 1998, 106). Chief among those Victorian women who sought reform of the Victorian marriage law was especially Barbara Leigh Smith, later Bodichon, whose action impressed Eliot so much that from her she drew inspiration for her Italian heroine (cf. Strachey 1928, 38). Women's non-existence within marriage was Bodichon's polemical priority, which she tackled in her first nation-wide publication on this subject. Her remarkable pamphlet *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws concerning Women* (1854) listed for the first time the legal disabilities and restrictions under which women lived, reporting hundreds of instances of women losing everything on marrying a man who absconded after the wedding, thus leaving them destitute. Even worse, if such a woman were subsequently to earn or inherit any money, the errant husband could return at any time, seize all she had and leave her again. Not to mention also the abuse of power, that of disposing freely of a woman, granted to a man by the marriage institution, perpetrated when a man got married for the only purpose of holding possession of her wife's money. Miss Bodichon also managed to form a committee of 24 ladies, whose intention was to reform the law and give married women their inalienable right to their own property and the fruits of their labour. The "Petition for Reform of the Married Women's Property Law" which she drew up, gathered more than 3,000 signatures in London, including the name of Eliot, who believed that the proposed law could "help to raise the position and character of women" (*GEL*, 2, 225). Although the petitioners' request was rejected by the Parliament, this event actually represents the first organised feminist action in the United Kingdom and was followed by the "Married Women's Property Bill" (1857). However, it was only in 1870, when the first of the Married Women's Property Acts became law, that the injustice of the English marriage laws was removed. Finally, *The Englishwoman's Journal*, which Miss Bodichon purchased two years later, allowed her to disseminate nation-wide her ideas on women and the rights movement, and was welcomed heartily by Eliot as well: "It *must* be doing good substantially - stimulating woman to useful work, and rousing people generally to some consideration of women's needs" (*GEL*, 2, 225).

Romola's first signs of rebellion anticipate the future struggle of modern women like Eliot's militant friend Bodichon. Actually, Eliot seems to have figured her Italian heroine as an embodiment of Bodichon's activism, a goal for which Romola strives earnestly. Yet, although Eliot signed the Petition, she limited herself to a severe criticism of the institution of marriage through her writings and her own life experience. In 1854, she

violated all conventions about marriage through her unlawful elopement with the bohemian George Lewes, being consequently ostracized by her contemporaries as a 'fallen woman' and compelled to live "in the shadow of the world's disapproval" (Woolf 1954, 145). On 16th May 1880, at the age of sixty, she courted controversy once more by legally marrying a man twenty years younger than herself, John Walter Cross, changing her name to Mary Anne Cross.

A significant insight into Eliot's opinions on marriage is provided also by her analysis of the typical upper-class French marriage of the seventeenth century in her early essay *Woman in France* (1854):

No wise person, we imagine, wishes to restore the social condition of France in the seventeenth century, or considers the ideal programme to be a *mariage de convenance* at fifteen, a career of gallantry from twenty to eight-and-thirty, and penitence and piety for the rest of her days. Nevertheless, that social condition had its good results, as much as the madly-superstitious Crusaders had theirs. (Eliot 1990, 12)

Such "good results" included for instance the patronage of the arts by French women, who kept their *Salons* for their intellectual intercourses with men. Eliot held essentially liberal, yet not extremely radical, views on the subject of marriage and her conception rested on the equal status between husband and wife, insisting especially on the importance of reciprocity, which places the wife in a position that enables her to assert her own rights. Eliot's views of the oppressive *mariage de convenance*, by which innocent young girls were married to rich older men for social benefits rather than out of personal attachment, were influenced also by her reading of George Sand's social novel *Jacques* (1833), which deeply moved her. The protagonist Jacques is disappointed by his union to an uneducated and inexperienced wife, Fernande, and his words voice Sand's critique of the marriage institution as "une des plus barbares institutions" (1993, 136). Like her homonymous English sister novelist, George Sand demanded a reform of the marriage laws. But she also advocated freedom for married couples to pursue their relationship outside marriage, claiming that "le pacte du mariage [...] brise absolument les droits de propriété de tout un sexe" (136). Unlike Sand, Eliot was not in favour of open marriage, yet she was unconventional enough not to inscribe *Romola* - a novel hinged on a bitter criticism of the stifling social structures allowing men to impose marriage on women - to the man with whom she considered to be engaged in a marital relationship. The manuscript of Eliot's Italian novel opens indeed on the dedication of her story to her beloved Lewes, whom she insisted on calling "her own husband" despite not being formally married to him: "To the Husband whose perfect Love has been the best source of her insight & strength, this manuscript is given by his devoted Wife, the

writer" (as quoted in Rignall 2000, 341). Betrayed by Tito, Romola seems to experience a desire for emancipation similar to those of George Eliot's militant friends struggling to defend women's rights. She resolves to flee from the imprisoning world of her husband's house, as she leaves her home city disguised as a nun in a wintry dawn. This first flight propels her from the close confines of home into the outside world of the city of Florence and makes her temporarily experience a sense of freedom. A lonely and unhappy wife as she is, the heroine dreams of an "instructed independent life" for women and is determined to ask the Venetian woman scholar Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558) – considered "the most learned woman in the world" (Barrett 1996, 322) – how a woman of learning can support herself by scholarship. Alone among Eliot's heroines in receiving the same education reserved to men, Romola desires indeed to become "wise enough to write something which would rescue her father's name from oblivion" (322). Notably, her uncommon intelligence and remarkable education fuel her desire to vindicate an intellectual woman's right to scholarship against the strong contemporary social forces that opposed the participation of married women in scholarly enterprise.

Romola, however, is halted by Savonarola and commanded to return to Florence to follow the path of religious submission and fulfil her obligations to her marriage and her fellow citizens. Appealing to the "the bond of a higher love", higher even than the one provided by marriage, the Prior of San Marco accuses her of "turning [her] back to the lot that has been appointed for [her]" and "fleeing from the presence of God" (358), a warning which seems to imply that only through absolute obedience to God's will can moral good be attained. Savonarola reminds Romola that she is bound by "the ties of marriage, the state and religious discipleship" (358), the very three forces hindering her struggle for independence. Romola thus submits to that broader sense of social duty, maintained by many of Eliot's heroines, inherited from her father and sharpened by the Dominican friar. In Savonarola she finds both the ideal of personal duty and citizenship grounded in piety and the moral guidance she is desperately seeking after her father's death. Freed from the bonds of filial duty and wifely obedience, Romola now performs – equally dutifully – her role as a *Piagnone* (or 'Wailer'), as the adherents to Savonarola's religious party were labelled by their opponents. Therefore, under the influence of Savonarola's religious enthusiasm, Romola's yearning for an 'instructed' independence is redirected into compliance with benevolent subjugation, as she learns to "obey passively the guidance of outward claims" (365). Hence, the end of Book II ratifies her choice of relapse into renunciation and submission, this time to the puritanical patriarchal figure of Savonarola, as she vows: "Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back" (362).

Once the umbilical cord that had kept her symbiotically tied to her father is cut, the range of Romola's sphere of influence is extended, as she wan-

ders about the streets of Florence as her “new home”. She adopts the role of a Madonna performing her duty of nursing the needy. Having even transformed her courtyard into a makeshift hospital, in the Florentine pestilence she passionately devotes herself to “tending the sick” and comforting the poor, like the “blessed mother” of all gracing the streets of her hometown. Notably, while famine is in the streets and Florence is threatened on all its borders by the imminent invasion of Charles VIII, it is Romola who saves from poverty Tito’s father, back in Florence as a prisoner of the King, by offering him shelter at her place. Driven by the self-denying instinct she has developed under Savonarola’s influence, Romola “had ceased to think that her own lot could be happy [...], to think of happiness at all: the one end of her life seemed to be the diminishing of sorrow” (388).

Suzanne Graver pointed out that Eliot “holds to the Comtean idea of women’s special sympathetic power and its importance as a corrective loss for community in modern society” (as quoted in Blake 2001, 215). Upon her return to Florence the heroine has not only recovered a new sense of vocation in her life – her “woman’s tenderness for father and husband, ha[ving] transformed itself into an enthusiasm of sympathy with the general life” (Barrett 1996, 388) – but she has also been reunited to her native community, for which she “stand[s] ready to answer to her name [...] feeling the stress of a common life” (468). Hence, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot explores how the ego must be sacrificed to the community, as Romola replaces her female intellectual ambition and desire for autonomy with the principle of fidelity to community, channelling her intelligence into social good and Christian charity. This emphasis on membership in the human community characterizes also the vision for which Savonarola acts as a mouthpiece with his insistence on the identity of the religious and the political, since “the cause of [his] party is the cause of God’s kingdom” (492). The republican approach of his popular party was based on a call for reforming the Church founded on Christian principles in both public and private life. Yet, the republic he established after the expulsion of the ruling Medici was doomed to be short-lived, since he was excommunicated and eventually burned at stake for disobeying and defying the Pope by preaching under a ban. Therefore, the question central to the life of Romola, that of “where the sacredness of obedience ended and where the sacredness of rebellion began” (468) – as Eliot wrote in a letter to Richard Hutton in 1863 – “essentially coincides with the chief problem in Savonarola’s” (*GEL*, 4, 97). This juxtaposition of a male historical figure and a female fictional character allows Eliot to transcend the separation between history and fiction and microcosmically reproduce the tension, existing in all historical societies, between respect for tradition and for the traditional laws, and the necessity to sometimes break them in view of a broader social renewal. Indeed, the author was fully aware of how oppressive and unfair old laws might be (as the laws on marriage she

engaged to fight against with her friend Bodichon), whether in fifteenth-century Florence or nineteenth-century England or Italy. Therefore, she vests her heroine with the urgent desire to overthrow the political structures founded on male patriarchal values. At the same time, by fictionally showing that Romola's intellectual and ethical problem was the same as Savonarola's, Eliot established and consolidated her belief that the crucial point of the 'Woman Question' – that "essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being" (1990, 36) – was the cooperation between male and female intellects in the progress of mankind. Namely, denying the superiority of male intellect over the female, Eliot affirmed her faith in the intellectual intercourse and social interaction across genders – of which she found an early embodiment in the *Salons*, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocratic French "réunions of both sexes" (36) – which was still missing in Victorian England. Only that "marriage of minds" (36) Eliot appreciated in the French *Salons*, only the principle of intellectual cooperation between the sexes, Eliot believed, could lead to the formation of a balanced social milieu in which women's intellectual growth and social equality between the sexes could be fostered.

When Romola's Medicean godfather Bernardo Del Nero is sentenced to death for conspiring against the Florentine Republic, she is disappointed with Savonarola's cold refusal to intervene. While initially she was able to see a deep love of humanity behind Savonarola's wish for church renovation and the charitable activities performed by his religious order, now only the "ring of egoism" seems to resonate in his plans. Therefore, she rejects his guidance and, deprived even of her godfather's protection and comforting counsel, resolves to leave the city once again. Romola's flight from Florence is ultimately a liberation from the rigid patriarchal bonds and duties constraining her previous life as 'angel in the house': "a new rebellion had risen within her [...] she was alone now: she had freed herself from all the claims, [...] even from that burden of choice which presses with heavier and heavier weight when claims have loosed their guiding hold" (Berrett 1996, 501, 504).

In Chapter 61, Romola emulates Gostanza in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* seeking escape in drifting out to sea in a small boat which becomes a "gently lulling cradle of a new life" (551). As the heroine drifts ashore a nameless plague-stricken community, she emerges like a Renaissance Madonna, "in a purely Feuerbachian effort of human sympathy" (Ashton 2013, 265), as a rescuer of the few inhabitants left alive by the plague. Seeking a law outside religion and having failed to find it in the men – Bardo, Tito, Bernardo and Savonarola – who deceive her, Romola has finally managed to make "tenderness and keen fellow-feeling for the near and loved [...] the religion of her life" since "she felt there could be no law for her but the law of her affections" (320). Moreover, this experience among the plague-ridden Jews is "like a new baptism" to Romola – as Eliot describes



it – giving her a new purpose to her life, so that she finds strength to return homeward and reassume all her obligations as a “daughter of Florence”.

Back in Florence once more, Romola learns of Tito's and Baldassare's deaths – the latter having eventually had his vengeance on his ungrateful son's desertion – and at the end of the novel the readers find her reigning as a matriarch over Tito's illegitimate family. Indeed, her widowed cousin Monna Brigida, the helpless Tessa and her two children are reunited under the same roof where Romola cares for them all as “a stepmother who does not need authority from anyone other than her self” (Simpson 1998, 63). The achievement of the heroine's quest for autonomy and power, ultimately for a fully developed identity, is to be found precisely in this female-headed household on which the novel ends, since it is in Romola's choice of responsibilities that her full independence lies.

George Eliot allows her heroine to perform the maternal duty, which she regarded as both the highest form of duty of which women are capable and the quality distinguishing them from men: “that precious specialty lying quite apart from masculine aptitudes and experiences” (1990, 36). Yet, like her creator, Romola never becomes a ‘real’ mother, nor does she ever look after children of her own. She is called anyhow to assume the role of a stepmother to Tessa's children, by whom she is addressed to as ‘Mamma Romola’ and at least twice in the novel does she display a “ready maternal instinct”. In Chapter 56, in one of her walks into town she stops by to rescue a lost little boy who soon turns out to be Lillo. In Chapter 68 she saves and temporarily adopts a Jewish infant, whom she christens Benedetto, the only survivor in a family annihilated by the pestilence. Through the idea of a family headed by a mother figure who is not a natural but an adoptive and surrogate mother, “the ideal community” – unconventionally pairing the angel in the house with the unconventional woman – is “not exactly a family, but *like* a family” (McDonagh 2001, 51), mirroring George Eliot's own experience as a stepmother. While writing *Romola*, she had already assumed her role as a ‘Mutter’ to Lewes's sons and was a ‘spiritual mother’ to her young British fellow-women.

As Dorothea Barrett (1991) remarked, the image of the Madonna exploited throughout the novel shows the power of the Virgin, traditionally supporting divine patriarchy, as rather a substitute for patriarchal power. Notably, the central chapters of the novel are entitled “The Unseen Madonna” (ch. 43) and “The Visible Madonna” (ch. 44), then Romola is addressed to by her fellow citizens as Madonna Romola, while she is a “Madonna of Restoration” and a “Blessed Lady”, the Virgin Mary herself, for a village decimated by the plague. Finally, the image of her carrying Benedetto on her arms resembles a ‘Holy Mother with the Babe’ picture. *Romola* thus presents a “reversal of the male-high and female-low structure” (Barrett 1996, xxiii), since within the matriarchal family the heroine assumes the place of the male authoritative figure, both as a father and as an educator.

In rescuing the other female characters of the novel from distress, Romola appears to have taken over also Tito's protective role. Such a displacement of the male-father figure is presented especially in the final scene of the novel, where Romola is shown to be in Tito's place, which has now become 'her place':

She sat down in Tito's chair, and put out her arms towards the lad, whose eyes had followed her. He hesitated: and, pointing his small fingers at her with a half-puzzled, half-angry feeling, said, 'That's Babbo's chair', not seeing his way out of the difficulty if Babbo came and found Romola *in his place*. (581; italics added)

Separated from her husband and a childless mother, Romola stands up as a model of an intellectual woman who succeeds in her "womanly labours" (387) even without winning the man's love and without having children. Caroline Levine underlines how *Romola* "has radically revised conventional relations between wife and mistress, having adopted her husband's lover as her own partner. Affirming a startling independence, the women run the household together, free from the demands of men" (1998, 137). Hence, the position of moral authority in which she appears at the end of the novel seems to suggest the possibility for women of escaping patriarchal hegemony and finding a 'space' to exercise their influence within the restraint placed on women by rigid gender conventions.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that for several reasons the epilogue cannot be considered a complete endorsement of female self-assertion, as Romola does not succeed in achieving a truly liberating status of the intellectual woman unrestrained by the roles of the nurse, Madonna and mother. The final setting of the novel is an all-female household set up by three women, the heroine eventually returns to the enclosed space of domesticity she had earlier escaped from. Romola becomes a tutor to Tito's illegitimate son, whom she instructs in the same learning her father had transmitted to her. On the one hand, this scene presents a reversal in the traditional transmission of knowledge, whereby women humanists were educated by men: Romola, a scholarly assistant to her father instructed by him at the beginning of the novel, turns into a tutor herself to another man at the end of the story. On the other hand, Lillo's thirteen-year-old sister Ninna is placed in a subordinate position as she sits in a corner, weaving wreaths for Savonarola's altar, and is not granted the possibility to receive instruction too. Therefore, the novel's contradictory ending seems to perpetuate a system in which learning is still a prerogative of boys, while girls are left accepting silently their duty and work. Finally, what Romola continually describes to Lillo is her admiration for the martyred friar Savonarola, whose influence has been inspiring for her. Hence, one of the last images the readers are left with is that of Romola worshipping the



image of Savonarola, that is the image of patriarchal authority from which the heroine seems incapable to detach herself. In other words, Eliot seems to have identified in passionate resignation the balanced solution to the extreme opposites of patient passivity, epitomized by the figure of the Madonna, and intransigence, exemplified by an unconventional behaviour wavering between daughterly obedience, sisterly piety and rebellion against patriarchal authority. As highlighted by Kelly Battles, Romola's withdrawal from the public stage coincides also with her retreat from the historical scene, so that the novel becomes the space where history is 'domesticated': "Romola shows a pathway by which women can achieve agency as *historical actors*, but this agency persists only for as long as they remain childless and active operators within the public sphere" (2009, 224; italics added).

Romola's final decision to abandon Savonarola's dogma and reject his rigid doctrine results from her incapacity to act in the name of a moral code that could execute her godfather, since she is seeking a wider vision than the Friar's stern and fanatical version of Christianity, leading him to die as 'a martyr' witnessing the destruction of his own ideas. Yet, Romola has retained for her human ethic what seems useful and right in his teaching, namely the sense of human fellowship he has awakened in her, leading her to assume a new sympathetic morality interpreted by many critics as analogous to Comte's Positivist 'Religion of Humanity'. Hence, a slow, yet profound, evolution is traced in the heroine's character through the spiritual journey she undertakes in the novel, which reflects George Eliot's own religious crisis leading her to disavow her Evangelical faith to embrace the so-called 'Religion of Suffering'. Initially a Pagan, Romola then approaches the Christian faith to ultimately accept the 'Religion of Humanity' against the fanatical religious dogmatism of a corrupt government. Moreover, Romola's human principles and values are very similar to those supporting her fictional sister heroine Maggie Tulliver's renunciation of her aspiration to moral freedom and independence, crushed, as she is, by the burden of family traditions, past obligations and social responsibilities. In this respect, many readers might agree with Rosemary Ashton's definition of Romola as a "generalized, and at the end idealized, version of Maggie Tulliver, feminist in feeling but submitting herself to *her sense of duty* to others" (2013, 295). Against the general modern trend of the predominance of mind and knowledge over feelings and passion, deriving mainly from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Eliot identified moral greatness in the capacity for sympathy and posited it in her novels as the essential requirement for women to be able to overcome men's egotism.

Eventually Romola emerges into unselfishness, or 'fellow-feeling', from the constraints of the egotism inherited from her father and then displayed as a zealous devotee of Savonarola, as she learns true "sympathy with the individual lot" through the painful experiences of her husband's betrayals and her commitment to humanitarian service. Thus, Romola appears capa-

ble to find a balance between renunciation and resistance in her ultimate definition of her autonomous identity. With her example, she provides a solution to male egotism, epitomized by Bardo's intellectual snobbery and Tito's hedonistic desire for social success, without being forced to the utter self-denial epitomized, instead, by Savonarola's martyrdom. Behind the notion of egoism of George Eliot's ethical humanism stands Comtean Positivism, replacing the Christian notion of original sin with the idea of 'the difficulty of the human lot'. Feuerbachian psychology as well, which presumes the essential goodness of human beings, forms the basis of Eliot's faith in the "good within them" (*GEL*, 5, 448) that lies at the heart of her sceptical ethical humanism. Like her Florentine heroine, Eliot rejected the most dogmatic and rigid elements of religion and explored the possibility of goodness without "God's all-seeing eye" (Reynolds 2008, 167) in an essentially humanist way. Her stance on religion is clearly explained in a letter she sent to Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe:

I believe that religion has to be modified - 'developed', according to the dominant phrase - and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent, must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. (*GEL*, 5, 31)

It is true that Romola is debarred from the vocation of a scholar or the possibility of pursuing a public career; in this sense she is, like her successor Dorothea Brooke, a "foundress of nothing" (Ashton 2011, 4). Yet, self-reliant and mature, she emerges as a self-defined individual in a patriarchal society in which she manages to find 'her place' without sacrificing her 'self'. Eventually she triumphs because, as the future narrator of *Middlemarch* was later to conclude - celebrating the quiet happiness of the small domestic duties to which an affectionate woman is called to dedicate herself - "the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs" (838).

It remains doubtful whether the protagonist of *Romola* - alone amongst George Eliot's novels to be given a woman's name as its title - can be labelled as an 'ideal', or rather 'utopian', heroine. In this respect, Eliot shared Sara Hennel's accusation of having "painted a goddess and not a woman". As her friend wrote:

Romola is pure idealism [...] a being who could be so loved, so wanted, as you show her, is so utterly blissful to my conception, that, if not envied, she must be worshipped as a beautiful saint [...], one that by the

very *eagerness of her desire for human fellowship* never succeeded in obtaining it; one who, feeling intensely that the only salvation from her own inner sins and sorrows was in loving communion with fellow beings, yet *felt herself for ever rejected* as exactly the nature that is not capable of communicating that which really makes her a blessing to others; *one whose most earnest efforts to get out of self are always a most desperate flinging back upon self* – simply because all endeavours to cling must always be an encumbrance. It is only those who want nothing for themselves, that can really be wanted by others. (*GEL*, 4, 103; italics added)

To quote Leslie Stephen, *Romola* can be read as an attempt by the novelist-historian to record “the last traces of [a disappearing and idealized way of life] vanishing so rapidly amidst the change of modern revolution that its picture could hardly be drawn again” (1971, 469). Actually in this novel – Eliot’s only historical novel set in a remote past – George Eliot investigates a pre-industrial order swept away by the materialistic, middle-class values of the Victorian age, since only such a coherent order “could perform the function of knowledge for an ardently willing soul” (Ashton 2011, 3), as she claims in the “Prelude” to *Middlemarch*. Yet, in the opening of the “Proem” to *Romola*, Eliot shortens the distance between fifteenth-century Florence and the contemporary England of the Victorian readership to mitigate its exoticism: Renaissance Florence is “seeming to stand as an almost unviolated symbol, amidst the flux of human things, to remind us that we still resemble the men of the past more than we differ from them” (Barrett 1996, 2). Hence, *Romola* appears to transcend the centuries and recover a sense of the difficulty of the human lot as what is common to both modern and ancient human beings across centuries of historical and political changes. Furthermore, several scenes of the last book are “on a symbolic level – paradoxically set outside time – in an ahistorical ideal realm in which justice is done and woman comes into her own” (1996, xv). Notably, Tessa’s place stands immune to the contingent restraints of androcentric culture and society which limited an intellectual woman’s contribution to cultural development, and yet permitted Eliot’s own success as a self-made intellectual woman. She struggled to write *Romola* in the severely limited space allowed to a talented woman of her time, being compliant and yet necessarily resistant to that patriarchal culture which gave her intellectual birth. “Suffer[ing] the slavery of being a girl” (Cave 2003, 358), Eliot felt compelled to write under the guise of a man, adopting a male pseudonym which allowed her to justify her intellectual authority by reinventing her social identity in order to voice her plea for an equal participation of men and women in shaping society and its cultural development. Hence, through the return to a pre-industrial world, unmolested by history and untroubled by the constraining ideologies of nineteenth-century bourgeois patriarchy, Eliot relegates the unbearable

lot of nineteenth-century women to an ahistorical place. Yet, an implicit parallel between Renaissance Florence and mid-Victorian England was very early underlined by many critics, assuming these were both times of social upheaval, as well as of religious and political turbulence. Notably, Richard Hutton (1863), with whom Eliot engaged in correspondence while writing *Romola*, identified the relation of the Florentine setting with the author's contemporary age: the purpose of the story is "to trace out the conflict between liberal culture and the more passionate form of the Christian faith in that strange era, which has so many points of resemblance with the present [...]" (1971, 2263). In this respect, Felicia Bonaparte's speculation about the eponymous character's possible role as a "thoroughly contemporary figure, the Victorian intellectual struggling to resolve the dilemmas of the modern age" (1979, 377) appears reasonable. Simultaneously, while reading *Romola* as a critique of the constrained lot of Eliot's women peers, it is impossible not to identify also the author's self-projection in a woman able to transcend a whole series of cultural and social proscriptions. Indeed, "the closeness of relation between heroine and author" (Leavis 1948, 62) marks *Romola* as well as it had previously marked *The Mill on the Floss*. In Leavis' words, *Romola* is:

another idealized George Eliot, less real than Maggie Tulliver and more idealized. While patrician and commandingly beautiful, she has also George Eliot's combination of intellectual power, emancipation, inherent piety and hunger for exaltations. (48)

As exemplified by Eliot's own experience as an outstanding, unconventional intellectual woman, "the shifting relation between passion and duty" (Byatt 1979, 511) - in other words feeling and knowledge, traditionally ascribed to the female and the male sex respectively - can resolve itself into a positive cooperation not only in Renaissance Florence, but also in Victorian England. Indeed, George Eliot herself managed to reconcile male intellect and female feeling - that combination all her heroines in different ways aim at achieving - in her own person, integrating her overpowering "need to be loved" (316) with a resistance to the ideological pressure on Victorian middle-class women to conform.

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## **Когнитивное осмысление времени в рассказе Л. Улицкой «Путь осла» в русле постмодернистской эстетики**

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**Abstract** The focus of our discussion is the cognitive study of time in the story “Put’ osla” by Ludmila Ulitskaya. Cognitive literary studies are a new interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of fiction. We consider most important the employment of the cognitive approach in analyzing texts of fiction as a particular type of man’s mental activity. Applying the conception of cognitive linguistics we can reveal the conceptual models existing in the author’s consciousness and understand the mechanisms of modelling the reader’s consciousness. Actively manipulating the time, combining its archetypal and new models, constructing the dichotomy temporary–eternal, using the time as an instrument of magic the author awakens the archetype of Christmas in the characters’ consciousness and creates an evaluative model of modernity – the epoch of postmodernism. The explication of the linguo-cognitive information of the story enables us to reveal the world of a second level or the so-called textual world. Thus the reader is given an opportunity of his own interpretation which results in intertextuality characteristic for the postmodern aesthetics. Reviving in mind the archetype of Christmas the characters of the story are seeking a miracle but no miracle takes place because the time is inappropriate. Ulitskaya shows the reality of her time and the modern man in it.

**Keywords** Ulitskaya. Cognitive linguistics. Cognitive model. Time.

В последние десятилетия в литературоведении наряду с разными методами активно используется когнитивный метод, который занимается рассмотрением художественного произведения с точки зрения мыслительных процессов (Fauconnier 1994; Fauconnier, Turner 2002; Turner 1991; Turner 1996). Литература как особый вид мыслительной деятельности человека может предоставить ученым-когнитивистам огромный материал для исследования и приоткрыть завесу тайн мышления. Когнитивное литературоведение во многих своих аспектах рассматривается как возникшее на основе когнитивной лингвистики направление, которое объединяет концептуальную и языковую деятельность. Когнитивная теория опирается на данные языка и связана с лингвистическими теориями. Изучение механизмов порождения и конструирования смыслов – важнейшее направление когнитивной науки в целом и ее лингвистической отрасли в частности. Язык как отражение структур и способов мышления дает возможность проникнуть в человеческое сознание и изучать процессы концептуализации.



При изучении художественного произведения необходимо обращать внимание на лингвокогнитивные аспекты текста и использовать выработанные концептологией подходы (Арутюнова 1990; Баранов 2004; Блэк 1990; Кубрякова и др. 1997; Лакофф, Джонсон 2004; МакКормак 1990; Минский 1979; Филлмор 1988 и др.). Различные аспекты перцепции созданной автором конкретной ситуации становятся возможными на основе анализа лингвистической информации и логико-семантических связей текста. Связь между когнитивной лингвистикой и когнитивным литературоведением проявляется в применении концепций когнитивной лингвистики при анализе текстов художественной литературы.

Зарождение и расцвет когнитивной науки в основном совпал с эпохой деконструктивизма и постструктурализма, получивших свое эстетическое воплощение в постмодернистской культуре, в частности литературе, которая является вербальным отражением нового сознания (Барт 1989; Бодрийяр 2013; Липовецкий 1997, 2008; Эпштейн 2005, Possamai 2000 и др.). В связи с этим становится возможным совмещение когнитивного подхода к литературе с некоторыми положениями постмодернизма. Когнитивное литературоведение (Fauconnier 1994; Fauconnier, Turner 2002; Turner 1991, 1996) пытается выявить концептуальные модели, существующие в сознании автора, а также делает попытку понять, каким образом автор моделирует сознание читателей, конструирует определенные модели, создает ту или иную картину мира.

В моделировании картины мира (Арутюнова 2000; Кубрякова 1988; Постовалова 1988; Серебренников 1988 и др.) незаменимую роль играет концепт *время*. В процессе познания в сознании человека создается концептуальная модель мира, которая не может обойтись без осмысления времени (Арутюнова 1997, Гуревич 1984, Толстая 1997, Толстой 1997, Элиаде 1998, Яковлева 1994). Однако эмпирически человеку дано восприятие конкретного конечного времени. Но картина мира остается неполной без введения в нее понятия вечности, которую человек не может непосредственно ощутить и познать, но в существовании которой он абсолютно уверен и без которой не может представить будущее. Картина мира осмысливается как единое целое в результате соединения конечного, видимого мира предметно-практической деятельности, и бесконечного, невидимого мира, в сознании человека. Картина мира должна выходить за пределы реального жизненного опыта, чтобы давать ему возможность состояться в будущем. «Человек должен как-то отнестись к ощущаемой им бесконечности мира, включить ее в поле своего внимания. Картина мира есть синтез форм знаний, осмысливающих обыденно-практическую жизнедеятельность человека – область конечного и область бесконечного, часто интерпретируемого как «сакральное» (Постовалова 1988, 50-1). Противо-



поставление *времени* и *вечности* восходит к христианской традиции, к трудам Августина Блаженного. Время и вечность противопоставляются как человеческое и божественное, преходящее и абсолютное, только через временное становится возможным постижение вечного: «исследовать временное лишь настолько, насколько это нужно, чтобы через понимание сотворенного увидеть и понять вечность» (Августин 1979, 220).

Дихотомия временного (человеческого) и вечного (Божественного) рассматривается как оценочная оппозитивность: ложность, испорченность времени противопоставляется высоте, ценностному абсолюту вечности (Яковлева 1994, 88). Как видим, оппозиция временный-вечный существенна в структурировании картины мира.

Рефлектируя о времени и о его месте в картине мира, Н. Арутюнова в работе «Время: модели и метафоры» в языковых моделях времени выделяет модели Пути человека и модели Потока времени. В моделях первой группы главной фигурой является человек, а модели второй группы ориентированы на само время. Модель Пути человека в разные эпохи развития человечества имела разные наполнения и даже направления. Арутюнова вводит понятие Традиционного пути, по своей сути оно максимально приближено к циклическому восприятию времени человеком. Идущий по Традиционному пути следует завету предков, «прошлое спрессовано для него в архетипы» (Арутюнова 1997, 54). Движение модели Традиционного пути направлено в сторону прошлого – справа налево, где будущее занимает привычную правую позицию, а прошедшее – левую. С наступлением Новой эры модель пути претерпевает значительные изменения. Целеполагание становится характерным признаком модели Пути в Новое время. Траектория времени совпадает с хронологией времени: человек движется вперед. Время протекает из прошлого в будущее – слева направо. Эту модель времени Арутюнова называет хронологической. Иначе, это модель исторического времени, в которой временна́я последовательность устанавливается каузальной интерпретацией событий.

Объективный мир находит свое отражение в человеческом сознании в виде познания и оценки и выражается в языковой картине мира. Одним из интереснейших и вместе с тем своеобразных проявлений языковой картины мира, иначе говоря, вербализованного сознания является художественный нарратив. «...время становится человеческим временем в той мере, в какой оно артикулируется нарративным способом, и, наоборот, повествование значимо в той мере, в какой оно очерчивает особенности временного опыта» (Рикёр 1998, 13).

В контексте сказанного о картине мира, а также месте и роли в ней времени представляет интерес рассказ Людмилы Улицкой «Путь осла» (2005), предваряющий остальные рассказы сборника «Люди нашего царя». Весь рассказ структурируется и организуется концептом *вре-*

мя: посредством использования различных моделей времени создается модель современной постмодернистской эпохи с характерными для нее особенностями. Автор, сопоставляя и одновременно противопоставляя различные эпохи, прошлое и настоящее, выявляет их связь, непрерывность и прокладывает путь к будущему.

Улицкая в рассказе выступает в роли активной личности. Она чрезвычайно тонко через настоящее ведет свою линию, определяет движение в будущее. Наряду с автором-рассказчиком Женей, свидетельствующим о происшедшем, в ткань повествования посредством размышлений вводится настоящий автор, который с помощью разного рода лингвистических, стилистических, когнитивных и ряда других средств проявляет свое отношение к тому или иному явлению или событию и заставляет задуматься над ними. Но не только, поскольку благодаря используемым когнитивным моделям Улицкая весьма искусно влияет на формирование определенного отношения, создает в сознании читателя заведомо продуманную картину мира.

Здесь считаем необходимым отметить роль паратекста – промежуточных текстовых инстанций между текстом и реальностью. К ним относятся имя автора на обложке книги, жанровая маркированность текста, заголовок, эпиграф, предисловие, аннотации, авторские интервью, год написания, издания и другие факты. Все эти промежуточные элементы, являясь знаками авторской и издательской воли, необходимы, чтобы направлять чтение и обеспечивать тексту наиболее соответствующую замыслу автора интерпретацию. Паратекстовые меты порой слишком явные, чтобы их замечали, и воздействуют, как правило, незаметно для адресата, но воздействует зачастую весьма значительно (Женетт 1998).

Итак, более подробно остановимся на таких элементах паратекстового аппарата, как заглавие, эпиграф и авторское предисловие, анализ которых позволит выявить волю автора. Эпиграф к сборнику, взятый у Н. Лескова: «Каких только людей нет у нашего царя», представляет собой развернутую версию названия сборника. Прочитав рассказы, понимаем, что царь – это Бог, а люди – герои рассказов или же все мы, читатели – разные и единственные в своем роде, и все мы под Богом ходим. Посредством эпиграфа автор с самого начала поднимает философский вопрос человеческого существования, вопрос соотносительности человеческого и божественного, временного и вечного – тема, которая получает свое продолжение в другом элементе паратекста – в предисловии к сборнику.

С юности делаешь титанические усилия, чтобы собрать, сложить свое «я» из случайных, чужих, подобранных жестов, мыслей, чувств и, кажется, вот-вот ты готов обрести полноту самого себя.

И вдруг – крах! Куча осколков. Никакого цельного «я». Ужасная

догадка: нет никакого «я», есть одни только дорожные картинки, разбитый калейдоскоп, и в каждом осколке то, что ты придумывал, и весь этот случайный мусор и есть «я». (7)

На определенном этапе своего существования человек вдруг осознает, что он растворился в вечности, потерял границы своего я, ту кажущуюся гармонию, которую якобы создал. Разбивается на маленькие осколки картина мира человека, иначе говоря, происходят сдвиги в пространственно-временной парадигме восприятия вселенной: определяется проблема человека и времени. Ключом для раскрытия концепции рассказа является время, эпоха, в которой разворачиваются события рассказа, – начало 2000-х – рубеж двух веков, конец и начало одновременно (сборник рассказов вышел в свет в 2005г.). Заметим, что время написания и издания наряду с другими фактами являются комментарием для читателя и влияют на восприятие текста (Женетт 1998). В рассказе практически вырисовывается время, когда эпоха постмодернизма уже в полной мере проявила себя. Эпоха, где сосуществует множество правд. Человеческий мир – это сосуществование разных культур, индивидов, сознаний. В век постмодернизма формируется восприятие мира как одного глобального текста. Формула классического типа художественной литературы текст = мир замещается формулой мир = текст (Липовецкий 1997, 2003). Текст в этом смысле предшествует художественному произведению. Мир-текст (сознание) осмысливается как безграничное пространство бесконечных потенциальных возможностей интерпретаций и всякого рода трансформаций. В мире-тексте, в котором есть разные правды, понятные, приемлемые и даже абсолютные для одного социума, для определенного типа сознания, иначе, одного культурного языка и непонятные другому культурному языку, возникает необходимость диалога. Все это разнообразие нуждается в некоторой организации, в установлении некоего порядка, космоса. «...хаос симулякров состоит из осколков различных языков культуры, языков гармонии, которые звучат вразнобой, перекрывая друг друга, и с которыми писатель-постмодернист вступает в диалогические отношения» (Лейдерман, Липовецкий 2003, 380). Именно здесь проявляется необходимость того самого целеполагания, чтобы собрать все эти осколки воедино, в целое, в одну картину. И не случайно в рассказе «Путь осла» обращение к истокам современной цивилизации, возвращение на две тысячи лет назад. Меняя направление времени справа налево согласно модели Традиционного пути, движущегося в сторону прошлого, Улицкая апеллирует к архетипам. В рассказе разговор о современности она строит через диалог времен на расстоянии 20 веков. Одновременно автор создает модель единой каузальной картины времени, его общности, несмотря на специфичность и даже уникальность каждой исторической эпохи в отдельности.

Но картина мира не ограничивается временным, она включает в себя вечное.

Размышляя о всеобъемлющей теме философии жизни и о месте человека в ней, автор ненавязчиво, без малейшего намека на патетику затрагивает тему мистерии существования вселенной.

Какая дивная игра открывается, когда расстояние от себя самого так велико! Замечаешь, что красота листьев и камней, и человеческих лиц, и облаков слеплена одним и тем же мастером [...] умирают старики и вылупляется молодежь, а облака тем временем преобразовались в воду, были выпиты людьми и животными и вошли в почву вместе с их растворившимися телами. (8)

Посредством простого описания природы Улицкая рефлектирует о сложных философских явлениях и категориях: проблеме мироздания, его творца, единства мира, зарождения и умирания, идее движения, вечности и бессмертия. Предисловие представляется как маленькая миниатюра космогонического и эсхатологического мифов или как художественно-поэтическая авторская интерпретация библейского высказывания «Всему свое время, и время всякой вещи под небом» (Книга Екклесиаста 3,1). Таким образом автор весьма искусно обращается к архетипным моделям восприятия мира, организуясь на основе циклического восприятия времени и в то же время поднимает вопрос о вечном, сакральном в его христианском понимании. В рассуждениях о красоте мира семантически значимой является мысль о том, что все это слеплено *одним и тем же мастером*. В этом выражении *мастером* выступает в качестве темы, данности, а роль ремы выполняет *одним и тем же*, которое приобретает значение текстовой доминанты. Так автор создает еще одну модель мира в сознании человека: есть один мир и один мастер. Удивительна несоизмеримость глубины описываемого и простоты его выражения. Улицкая сама выступает как мастер – мастер слова. Словом она создает свой мир-текст, свою картину мира. Интересно, что в названии сборника Улицкая не использует слов *Бог, Господь, Творец, Создатель, Всевышний*, которые являются наиболее принятыми наименованиями божественного начала, а слово *царь*, которое в данном отрывке заменяется словом *мастер*, т.е. творец, создатель. Слово *царь*, как известно, в христианской традиции связано с образом Бога и Христа. В связи с названием рассказа «Путь осла» представляет интерес история вхождения Христа в Иерусалим. Христос вошел в Иерусалим, оседлав молодого осла, на которого никто никогда не садился. Израильский народ с великой радостью и ликованием приветствовал его как Царя своего:

На другой день множество народа, пришедшего на праздник, услы-

шавши, что Иисус идет в Иерусалим, взяли пальмовые ветви, вышли навстречу ему и восклицали: осанна! благословен грядущий во имя Господне, царь Израилев!

Иисус же, нашед молодого осла, сел на него, как написано: «Не бойся, дочь Сионова! се, Царь твой грядет, сидя на молодом осле (Евангелие от Иоанна 12,12-15).

При сравнении заглавий «Люди нашего царя» и «Путь осла», с одной стороны, и библейской истории вхождения Иисуса Христа в Иерусалим, с другой, обнаруживается связь между ними. Вырисовываются параллельные ряды: люди – народ, царь – Христос, путь – вхождение в город, осел – молодой осел. Апеллируя к Новому Завету, автор создает интертекстуальность и тем самым конструирует текст второго уровня, в котором и кроется ключ к расшифровке рассказа. Священный город Иерусалим в сознании вызывает архетип сакрального центра. Еще архетипный человек верил в сакральную значимость Центра. Символом Центра могли служить Священная Гора – место, где встречаются Небо и Земля, священный город, храм. Позднее эта символика была перенесена в христианство, где середину мира символизирует Голгофа – вершина космической горы. Священная гора символизирует не только самую высокую точку Земли, но и точку первотворения. В космогонических мифах наряду с Центром пространственный ориентир создает Дорога (Путь), ведущая в центр. Представляет интерес тот факт, что дорога характеризуется как трудная, полная опасности и поиска. Она символизирует переход от мирского к сакральному – к вечности (Элиаде 1998).

Обратим внимание, что идея дороги, ведущей в сакральный центр, присутствует уже в заглавии рассказа «Путь осла». И сам рассказ начинается с описания дороги.

Шоссе протекало через тоннель, выдолбленный в горе перед первой мировой войной, потом подкатывалось к маленькому городку, давало там множество боковых побегов, узких дорог, которые растекались по местным деревням, и шло дальше, в Гренобль, в Милан, в Рим... (11)

Уже в первом предложении автор использует три слова, содержащие сему пути: *шоссе, тоннель, дорога*, далее встречаем еще одно слово с этой семой – *автострада*. Динамическая картина движения вперед создается благодаря лексическим единицам и конструкциям *протекало, подкатывалось, давало множество побегов, растекались, шло дальше* и т.д. Интересно, что дорога ведет в Рим, куда стекаются и где скрещиваются все пути. Явная аллюзия на выражение: «Все дороги ведут в Рим». Таким образом Улицкая в очередной раз поднимает на

поверхность сознания когнитивную модель сакрального центра мира, тем самым достигая прототипического эффекта. Согласно Лакоффу, прототипический эффект заключается в том, что отдельный член категории обладает особым статусом – быть лучшим примером, или прототипом всей категории (Lakoff 1987, 68-76).

Перед въездом в тоннель мы свернули с автострады на небольшую дорогу, которая шла по верху горы. Марсель обрадовался, что не пропустил этот поворот, как с ним это не раз случалось, – съезд этот был единственный, по которому можно попасть на старую римскую дорогу, построенную в первом веке. (11)

Как видим, герои рассказа сворачивают с пути. Они не выбирают дорогу под землей, ведущую в Рим (*Шоссе протекало через тоннель*), а перед самым въездом в подземелье поднимаются ввысь, на гору, которая, как выявляется из дальнейшего повествования, становится новым сакральным центром первотворения. Рим словно превращается в периферию. Однако возможно и другое прочтение, при котором римская дорога, на которую, поднимаясь в гору, случайно попали герои, – это символ Рима, виртуальный Рим. Заметим, что и гора пробуждает в сознании когнитивный образ, восходящий к прототипам. Таким образом автор сводит воедино два центра: Сакральную/Священную Гору и Рим/римскую дорогу – и конструирует в сознании один центр первотворения.

Концептуально важной для данной дискурсивной ситуации и для всего рассказа является лексическая единица *гора*, которая выполняет когнитивно-моделирующую функцию. Уже в первом значении лексемы *гора* (*значительная возвышенность, поднимающаяся над окружающей местностью* – Ожегов 1988) обнаруживаются семы, структурирующие в сознании движение вверх: сема «высь» (*возвышенность*) и сема «верх/подъем», которая содержится в слове *поднимающаяся* (поднимаются *вверх*). Отметим, что лексема *гора* изначально содержит в себе идею *пути*, продвижения вверх. И не случайно, что путь героев представлен в виде подъема на гору: от низа к верху, ввысь. В контексте рассказа путь в гору можно интерпретировать и как путь человека из прошлого (через настоящее – время, когда происходят описываемые события) в будущее, и как путь от временного к вечному (наблюдается переход пространства во время). В этом путешествии человека снизу вверх есть как момент целеполагания, о котором говорила Арутюнова (Арутюнова 1997, 59), так и указанная Яковлевой оценочная оппозитивность (Яковлева 1994, 88). В виде описания римской дороги Улицкая читателю предлагает определенную модель мира, структурируемую на основе сочетания конкретного конечного времени и бесконечности – вечности, которая за временем,



доступным человеку в его земном существовании.

И вовсе не случайно, что герои с большой современной автострады, ведущей в тоннель, попадают на старую маленькую дорогу, ведущую вверх. Как видим, рассказ строится на постоянном использовании антонимических параллелей: центр – периферия, верх – низ, маленький – большой, старый – новый, прошлое – настоящее. Используя оппозиционную дихотомию как механизм воздействия на сознание, Улицкая создает определенный настрой. На старой римской дороге настоящее как будто на миг останавливается. Уже нет той динамичности повествования, герои свернули с дороги и, преодолев время, попали в прошлое. Произошел сдвиг во временной и пространственной парадигме.

В традиционной народной культуре человек пытался управлять временем, использовать его как инструмент магии. Магический акт преодоления времени представлял собой его растягивание или сжатие, но в обоих случаях наблюдалось отклонение от нормы с целью сакрализации времени (Толстая 1997, 34-5). Таким образом, манипуляция временем – будь то компрессия или растягивание, сдвиг или искажение, опережение или отставание, возвращение в прошлое или путешествие в будущее, сведение воедино в одной точке разных времен, то есть отклонение от нормы, может привести к магическому эффекту. Улицкая в полной мере владеет всеми указанными средствами манипуляции временем. Она словно играет со временем и каждый раз создает новые модели.

Достигается это посредством образа дороги. Привлекает внимание время, когда она была построена – первый век нашей эры, начало новой цивилизации. Итак, идет разграничение эпох, времен, цивилизаций. Особую важность месту, где оказались герои, придает следующее обстоятельство:

Когда-то у подножья этой горы была римская станция курьерской почты, обеспечивавшей доставку писем из Британии в Сирию. Всего за десять дней... (11)

Это место имело стратегическое значение: являясь перекрестком между Западом и Востоком, оно выполняло коммуникативную функцию. Наряду с противопоставлением Запада и Востока происходит их сближение: дорога объединяет Запад и Восток. В выражении *Всего за десять дней...* основную информационную нагрузку несут слова *за десять дней*, однако семантически доминирующим оказывается слово *всего*, посредством которого автор создает ощущение пространственной и временной близости между западом и востоком как географическими ориентирами. Но не только: ведь Запад и Восток представляют собой сложный концепт, содержащий не только про-

странственно-временную когницию, но и культурно-политическую. Сопоставляя в тексте Британию и Сирию и сближая их одним, но невероятно содержательным в данном контексте лексическим маркером *всего*, автор в сознании читателя формирует определенное мироощущение: казалось, нечаянно оброненным словом создается картина единого мира. Этому также способствует синтаксическая маркированность выражения. Оно не случайно дано отдельной синтаксической единицей в виде парцелляции. Таким образом достаточно тонко транслируется субъективное мироощущение автора, которое, несмотря на проблемы культурологического и политического характера между Западом и Востоком, заключается в единстве и общности человеческой цивилизации. Однако предложение заканчивается многоточием, которому отводится функция создания многозначности текста. Таким способом читателю предоставляется возможность собственной интерпретации, которая порождает интертекстуальность, характерную для постмодернистской эстетики.

Как видим, язык сам по себе не создает когнитивной конструкции – он всего лишь является минимальным, но достаточным стимулом-подсказкой (*prompt*) для структурирования данной ситуации. Как только эти ключи-подсказки объединяются с уже существующими когнитивными схемами и фоновым обрамлением, становится возможным образование предполагаемой конструкции, и результат может намного превосходить любую эксплицитную информацию (Fauconnier 1994, xviii). Когнитивный подход не только указывает, но и выявляет и рассматривает механизмы, с помощью которых порождается многозначность и многоуровневость текста. Итак, в данной ситуации Улицкая посредством языка представляет не только информативно-содержательную сторону произведения, но и организует глубинную семантику текста-дискурса. Используя в качестве механизмов языковые явления, автор тонко и осторожно конструирует в сознании реципиента определенную когнитивную модель, определенную картину мира.

Еще одну когнитивную модель времени, созданную на основе приема противопоставления, видим в следующем отрывке из рассказа:

...большинство европейских автострад – роскошных, шестирядных, скоростных – лежит поверх римских дорог. И Марсель хотел показать нам ту ее небольшую часть, которая осталась в своем первоначальном виде. Невзрачная, довольно узкая – две машины едва расходятся – мощеная дорога от одного маленького городка до другого после постройки тоннеля была заброшена. (11)

При описании новой и старой дорог посредством использования таких лексических маркеров, как *роскошный, шестирядный, скоростной*, с одной стороны, и *невзрачный, довольно узкий, две машины едва*



*расходятся* – с другой, подчеркивается их контрастность. Однако при этом указывается, что новые дороги лежат поверх старых дорог. Как видим, в тексте выражаются две мысли. Во-первых, новые дороги – это новое время с характерной для него современной европейской благоустроенностью, комфортом и бешеным, скоростным ритмом жизни, а старые дороги – это забытое первозданное прошлое. Атрибутивная лексема *шестирядный* применительно к новой дороге, как ни странно, не создает упорядоченной картины движения: в сознании скорей всего визуализируется беспорядочное мелькание бешено мчащихся в противоположных направлениях машин, причем в шесть рядов – в каждую сторону по три ряда. Все это создает какое-то чувство растерянности. Даже такие маркеры, как *роскошный* и *шестирядный*, не перекрывают этого ощущения. И не понятно, воспринимать ли *роскошный* и *шестирядный* в качестве контекстуальных синонимов или здесь наблюдается их противопоставление. Обратим внимание на то, что автострада именно шестирядная. Уже число шесть вызывает определенные ассоциации, но вместе с тем эти шесть – это 3 и 3. Это образ хаоса, однако не лишено какого-то порядка: возникает состояние двойственности. И как нам представляется, это образ нового, постмодернистского времени. Новой, постмодернистской дороге противопоставляется старая дорога, при описании которой возникает ощущение покоя, уединенности, отсюда и некоей защищенности. Каждая из этих дорог – это определенная жизнь, определенное время. Налицо оценочная оппозиционность, при которой старое расценивается как позитивное, отождествляется с хорошим. Вспомним выражения: *давно забытые времена, старые добрые времена* и т.п. И независимо от того, каким в реальности было это прошлое, отношение к нему, как правило, положительное. В отношении к прошлому практически всегда есть нечто ностальгическое. В данном случае действуют идеализированные когнитивные модели, которые в своей основе имеют не столько объективную природу явлений, сколько поверхностное, идеализированное восприятие действительности (Lakoff 1987, 68-76).

Во-вторых, при описании новой и старой дорог затрагивается также тема преемственности времен, связи между ними: новая дорога проложена не на новом месте, а поверх старых. Каждая эпоха – определенный заверченный цикл, вместе с тем новое зиждется на старом. Описание новой и старой дорог напоминает структуру с горизонтальными ярусами, которые нанизываются на вертикальный каркас. Так в сознании конструируется модель единого времени. Единство прошлого и настоящего делает возможным будущее.

Итак, герои оказываются на том месте, где разные временные и пространственные измерения пересекаются в одной точке. Репрезентативное описание дороги в силу сложной многоуровневой структуры текста приобретает функцию представления содержательно-концепту-

альной информации. Посредством дороги автор ведет читателя в глубь веков, в эпоху становления новой европейской цивилизации.

Эти дороги рассекли земли сгинувших племен и создали то, что потом стало Европой. (12)

На вершине горы, на том самом месте, где выглядывала небольшая часть римской дороги, сохранившейся в своем первоначальном виде, произошло чудо: герои побывали в прошлом. Далее герои возвращаются в машину – в некое пространство современной, настоящей реальности, и спускаются вниз, то есть покидают магический центр, однако ментальный канал в прошлое остается открытым в их сознании. Они продолжают говорить о римских и греческих дорогах. И здесь впервые в самом тексте рассказа возникает образ осла, фигурирующего в названии произведения:

Марсель рассказывал, чем греческие дороги отличались от римских – греки пускали через горы осла, и тропу прокладывали вслед его извилистого пути, а римляне вырубали свои дороги напрямую, из пункта А в пункт Б, срезая пригорки и спуская попадавшие на пути озера. (13)

Рассказ Марселя имеет концептуальное значение для понимания всего произведения. Улицкая создает две модели-сценария пути. В этом отрывке, казалось, пути противопоставляются, однако в общем контексте рассказа они отождествляются. Кстати, прием, не раз встречающийся в рассказе, когда контрастные явления сводятся воедино и образуют целостность. В одном случае путь прокладывается напрямую. В другом случае путь идет по горам, вверх. Затем по этому пути вслед за ослом идут люди. Путь этот маркируется словом *тропа*, что говорит о том, что он узок. Путь осла извилист, следовательно, и тропа, проложенная людьми вслед ему, извилиста. Соединение понятий *узкий* и *извилистый* применительно к пути образует новое понятие: *трудный*. Вспомним, что, говоря о римской дороге, автор отмечает, что она шла с большим подъемом – свидетельство о том, что путь был трудным. Через семантико-оценочную характеристику римской и греческой дорог в сознании происходит интеграция ментальных пространств, действует механизм бленда (Fauconnier, Turner 2002, 39-50): путь к Богу осмысливается как трудный. Сам текст как бы предлагает развернутый сценарий заданных выше моделей, выявленных на основе анализа заглавий сборника «Люди нашего царя» и рассказа «Путь осла». Путь осла – это путь вошедшего на осла в Иерусалим Христа, за которым последуют остальные – люди Царя нашего. Христос – это Путник, прокладывающий дорогу, и одновременно – единственный

путь. Вспомним, что съезд, ведущий на старую римскую дорогу, вверх в гору, тоже был единственным. И снова наблюдается проекция, в результате которой в сознании происходит сведение воедино двух путей – римского и греческого.

Для более полной экспликации интенции автора обратимся к Библии, которая является одним из главных источников кратких базовых нарративов, существующих в нашем сознании в виде прототипических образов, моделей, схем, сценариев. Апеллируя к ним, накладываем одну историю на другую. Происходит проекция исходного нарратива на целевой, в результате чего одна история понимается в терминах другой. Как известно, это явление в концептуальной риторике Тернера называется параболой (Turner 1996, v). В свете сказанного проанализируем следующий отрывок из Нового Завета:

Да не смущается сердце ваше; веруйте в Бога, и в Меня веруйте. В доме Отца Моего обителей много. А если бы не так. Я сказал бы вам: Я иду приготовить место вам. И когда пойду и приготовлю вам место, приду опять и возьму вас к Себе, чтобы и вы были, где Я. А куда Я иду, вы знаете, и путь знаете. Фома сказал Ему: Господи! Не знаем, куда идешь; и как можем знать путь? Иисус сказал ему: Я есмь путь и истина и жизнь; никто не приходит к Отцу, как только через Меня». (Евангелие от Иоанна, 14, 1-6)

Здесь мы находим подтверждение мысли о том, что Христос есть и путник, и путь. Однако здесь есть и другая очень важная мысль. Путь, истина и жизнь отождествляются и образуют единое понятие. Заметим, что в первой части ответа Христа на вопрос Фомы *Я есмь путь и истина и жизнь* между словами *путь, истина, жизнь* нет запятых, необходимых при однородных членах предложения. Происходит их слияние в одно понятие, в одно целое. Образуется триединство в лице Христа. Обратим внимание на порядок следования указанных слов. Они расположены друг за другом в определенной логической последовательности и образуют смысловой ряд. Христос – путь. Путь, который через познание истины, то есть самого Христа, поведет к жизни – к Отцу. Таким образом Отец и Христос идентифицируются. Именно эта мысль содержится на глубинном уровне во второй части ответа Христа: *никто не приходит к Отцу, как только через Меня*. При такой интерпретации жизнь понимается как вечность. Путь делится на две части – до прихода к Отцу и после прихода к Отцу. Пространство трансформируется во время: с одной стороны – земное, человеческое, с другой стороны – божественное, сакральное. При проецировании двух текстов выявляется вся глубина текста Улицкой. Конструируется дихотомия время – вечность, без которой, как было сказано выше, картина мира не будет полной. Выход в вечность открывает возмож-

ность будущего на основе преемственности идеалов и ценностей. Так, благодаря вербальному тексту становится возможным проникновение в ментальную сферу, сознание автора и выявление когнитивных моделей. Если автор от когниции идет к тексту, то читатель от текста идет к когниции.

В начале рассказа герои находились во времени и пространстве реального измерения, характеризующегося некой беспорядочностью и хаотичностью, «волею случая» они попадают в некое сакральное пространство первотворения, где царил гармония. В дальнейшем в рассказе герои, сами не осознавая, попеременно будут как бы входить в сакральное пространство и выходить из него, что в конечном итоге, словно опережая время, вызовет и пробудит в их сознании сценарий Рождества. Однако происходит это в неподходящее время – осенью.

На стыке реального и ирреального создается атмосфера волшебства, магии, которая усиливается при виде дома Женевьев, которая поселилась в маленькой деревушке высоко в горах, чтобы в уединении наслаждаться жизнью. Помещение, куда вошли герои, изначально не было жилым. Здесь, скорее всего, был хлев, о чем свидетельствуют крюки, к которым когда-то привязывали скотину. Автор прямо не говорит об этом, но намекает: действует механизм когнитивной эстетики восприятия. В очередной раз в сознании героев происходит пробуждение прототипа – Рождества Христова. В доме, оторванном от цивилизации, мирской суеты, где вся обстановка была как бы восставшей из праха, происходит чудо. Искусно лавируя на грани времен, автор отсылает к прошлому, создавая, а точнее, вызывая в сознании героев и читателей образ давно прошедшего времени.

Магического эффекта автор добивается также сгущением красок в самом прямом смысле. Одна яркая, красочная зарисовка сменяет другую. Простые, даже грубые вещи приобретают силу воздействия, создают атмосферу праздничности, необычности происходящего. В этом смысле особая роль в рассказе «Путь осла» отводится краскам, в особенности оранжевому, красному и золотистому – цветам осени. Представляет интерес описание стола, вокруг которого собираются гости Женевьев.

Большой стол был покрыт оранжевой скатертью, в овальном блюде отливало красным золотом пюре из тыквы, в сотейнике лежал загорелый кролик, охотничий трофей Марселя, а между грубыми фаянсовыми тарелками брошены были ноготки, горькие цветы осени. (17)

Посредством вербализации желто-оранжево-красной цветовой гаммы создается ментальная визуализация картины, даже можно сказать – визуализация осени. И только после сцены Рождества становится понятно, почему время года с такой последовательностью

транслировалось в сознание читателя. Помимо художественно-эстетической, данная зарисовка выполняет и когнитивную функцию. Все готовит героев, а вместе с ними и читателей к главному событию произведения.

Итак, в середине осени наступает Рождество. Словно происходит священное таинство, повторяется сакральный ритуал. Все началось с песни маленькой Иветт, дочки мужа Женевьев от второй жены Мари, из программы, которую она готовила к Рождеству.

Из-под детских рук выбивались звуки, складывались в наивную мелодию, и Женевьев запела неожиданно высоким, девчачьим голосом, приблизительно такие слова: «Возьми свою гармонику, возьми свою свирель... нет, скорее, флейту... сегодня ночью рождается Христос». (19)

И здесь, когда и читатель, и герои погрузились в атмосферу волшебства, поверили, что наступило Рождество, происходит пробуждение – просыпается Шарль, тем самым как бы возвращая героев в реальность. Как известно, погружение в состояние сна или полубытья и пробуждение в художественной литературе является идеальным средством для создания возможных миров, показа смещения временной и пространственной парадигмы. В рассказе Улицкая неоднократно использует прием пробуждения, посредством которого реальное и ирреальное постоянно сменяют друг друга. В атмосферу чуда героев возвращает немолодая негритянка Эйлин – знаменитая певица из Америки, исполнительница спиричуэлз. Неожиданно для всех она встала и запела.

Amusant grace она пела, и эта самая милость сходила на всех, и даже свечи стали гореть ярче. (21)

Все опять погрузились в состояние полубытья и наслаждались чудесным, божественным пением Эйлин. На этот раз причиной пробуждения становится стук в дверь. Чудо прерывается, происходит возвращение в реальную действительность.

В общем, несмотря на совершенно неподходящее время года, происходило Рождество, которое началось от смешной детской песенки Иветт. Эйлин кончила петь, и все услышали стук в дверь, которую раньше не могли расслышать из-за огромности ее пения. (22)

Реальность словно является продолжением ирреальности: появляется еще один необходимый атрибут Рождества – ягненок, явная референция к рождению Христа в яслях. Появление на пороге пастуха-монаха

с ягненком поразило всех. Теперь уже присутствуют все атрибуты Рождества: Мария, муж Марии Жанпьер, который намного старше нее, как Иосиф, младенец, пастух, ягненок и звезда, подавшая знак. Не было только осла. Вообще-то он когда-то был, но умер. Но сейчас его не было. Так и должно быть. Ведь это не настоящее Рождество: еще рано.

Улицкая, как бы желая опередить события, сжимает время и нарушает хронологию. Однако, как видим, идеал прошлого не проецируются на современность. Оживив в сознании архетип Рождества, герои рассказа стремились к чуду, однако чуда не произошло, потому что время было неподходящее. Как нам представляется, тем самым Улицкая хотела показать реальность своего времени и состояние современного человека в нем. Ожидание героев рассказа быть свидетелями чуда не оправдывается, они возвращаются в реальность – в несовершенный мир современности, где каждый из них остается при своих сомнениях и догадках, в некоем неопределенном и потерянном состоянии. Однако не столь важно, что чуда не произошло, сколь важно то, что оно пробудилось в сознании человека. Посредством игры, скрещения, наложения и столкновения различных моделей времени Улицкая представляет эпоху постмодерна с присущими ей противоречиями и симулятивностью. В рассказе автор создает модель идеала, однако, не найдя референта в реальности, она не срабатывает.

Малышу Шарлю три года, и он впервые в эту «рождественскую» ночь заговорил. Но ему не суждено ходить, двигаться, такая у него болезнь. На следующий день погиб ягненок со сломанной ногой, несмотря на антибиотик. Осла мы так и не увидели, хотя он был. Чуда в общепринятом понимании не было. Но вместе с тем чудо произошло. А затем снова наступила обычная жизнь.

Но если не чудо, то ведь что-то произошло в ту осеннюю ночь. Что-то же произошло? (24-5)

Произошло очищение, появилась надежда, это *что-то* – подготовка к тому, что должно непременно произойти: путь должен привести к храму. Если до сих пор рассказ строился на противопоставлении и в то же время совмещении прошлого и настоящего, их преемственности, то теперь в рассказе проглядывает будущее. Временная дихотомия прошлое-настоящее перерастает в трехчленную временную парадигму: прошлое-настоящее-будущее. Это очень важный момент, поскольку временная парадигма теряет все свое значение без третьего компонента – будущего, которое понимается как ожидание (Рикёр 1998). Здесь в роли выразителя авторской модальности выступает частица *ведь*, содержащая семантику утверждения. И опять в очередной раз сталкиваемся с моделированием сознания, которое

достигается посредством правильного использования языковых средств. Вся предыдущая история рассказа вела к этому моменту.

Казалось бы, наступило логическое завершение рассказа. Однако рассказ на этом не заканчивается.

Да, и самое последнее: Марсель повез Эйлин в фестивальны́й городок и показал ей римскую дорогу. Но это не произвело на нее ни малейшего впечатления – она вообще ничего не знала про римские дороги. Это довольно естественно: к африканцам, даже американским, христианство шло совсем иными путями. (25)

В финале рассказа Улицкая, как нам представляется, утверждает возможность существования разных путей к Богу. Пути могут быть разные, главное – куда они ведут. В этом контексте маркер *естественно* выступает в роли носителя авторской модальности. Опять, несмотря на декларацию в введении к рассказу не выражать своего мнения, автор проявляет свое отношение, свою толерантность к людям. Это естественно, что африканку Эйлин римские дороги не впечатлили: имеет право. Герои рассказа – люди, разные по национальности, по своей истории, по пройденному пути. Но при всей этой разности все они люди царя нашего и путь у них один – путь осла, направляющегося в Иеруслим, в град Божий.

Еще один интересный момент: рассказ начинается со старой римской дороги, заканчивается тоже старой римской дорогой. Казалось бы, круг замкнулся. Наблюдается чисто формальная завершенность композиции, где, казалось, есть и завязка – случайное попадание героев на старую римскую дорогу, в прошлое, и кульминация – Рождество осенью, и развязка – возвращение в настоящее, в современность. Но в рассказе нет сюжета как такового, нет развития действия, нет главного героя. Есть идея и настроение, а главным героем становится время. Однако в рассказе остается ощущение ожидания. Не случайно события рассказа происходят осенью, в преддверии зимы, с которым в сознании связывается приход Рождества как начала пути к обновлению. И только после нового Рождества будет новый путь на осле в град Божий, к Храму.

Рассказ Л. Улицкой «Путь осла» небольшой по объему, но чрезвычайно емкий по содержанию. Это размышления автора о нашем времени, о современном поколении, о том, что его ждет, по какому пути оно пойдет. Создается текст, замещающий собой мир. Мир = текст (сознание) как возможность сочетания хаоса и порядка, гармонии и дисгармонии, как возможность принятия разных правд и разных путей приглашает к диалогу. С самого начала рассказа автор неоднократно подчеркивает некую хаотичность современного мироустройства. В поиске гармонии герои рассказа неосознанно обращаются к временному



архетипу, существующему в их сознании. Отметим, что как архетипное, так и современное восприятие времени имеют место в сознании современного человека. Сталкивая обе модели времени, Улицкая показывает, что для героев рассказа ни одна из них не может быть идеальной. Хаотическая реальность современности не укладывается ни в одну из них, потому что современная постмодернистская действительность не поддается моделированию. Однако Улицкая вводит в рассказ понятие вечности, которое приоткрывает завесу будущего, основанного на преемственности и непрерывности идеалов и ценностей. Как видим, *время* в рассказе Улицкой «Путь осла» играет как смыслообразующую, так и конструирующую роль. Модели времени образуют единую парадигматическую и синтагматическую систему, на которой собирается весь текст.

Справедливости ради надо отметить, что рассказ «Путь осла» может существовать вне сборника, автономно от остальных рассказов. Он сам по себе является полноценным литературным произведением. Это художественный нарратив-дискурс со сложнейшей многоуровневой структурой, информативно-содержательной и концептуальной семантикой, отражающий ментальные представления автора, а также обладающий большим прагматическим потенциалом в плане конструирования определенной картины мира, его когнитивной модели в сознании реципиента. На это направлена и вся художественно-концептуальная стилистика текста, определяемая системой средств, выполняющих как художественную, так и когнитивную функцию. В рассказе задействованы разные аспекты литературной рецепции: интертекстуальность и цитатность; сочетание линейности повествования и гипертекстуальной организации глубинной семантической структуры текста; противопоставление и в тоже время соединение контрастного; аффективное воздействие на читателя; внутренняя визуализация; лингвистические средства, начиная с лексики и кончая синтаксическими особенностями предложения вплоть до пунктуационных знаков, в том числе и авторских.

Как видим, рассказ представляет собой сложнейшим образом организованную структуру, иначе говоря, мы имеем дело с многоуровневым текстом. Представление о том, что возможно полностью раскодировать вербализованную сферу художника подчас является утопическим. Созданная автором художественная модель мира зачастую является плодом не до конца осознанного самим автором процесса, создается на интуитивном, а может, и бессознательном уровне. Использование разных подходов при анализе текста представляет возможность осмыслить его и дать разные интерпретации, каждая из которых может выявить еще одну грань произведения.

Итак, в рассказе Улицкой обнаруживается мир второго уровня, так называемый текстуальный мир, который читатель эксплицирует на



основе лингво-когнитивной информации, направленной на концептуальные аспекты человеческого сознания.

В заключение заметим, что проделанный когнитивный анализ способствует экспликации гуманистической направленности рассказа. Это глубоко философское произведение о судьбах человечества вообще, о преемственности времен, о вечности. Однако когнитивный потенциал рассказа не исчерпывается представленным анализом. Текст рассказа дает возможность для новых интерпретаций, каждая из которых может рассматриваться как своего рода самоидентификация интерпретатора.

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## Bioy Casares: neofantástico y deconstrucción

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**Abstract** The complex dynamics of space and time present in some of the stories of Adolfo Bioy Casares have their roots in the interstitial that separates the genres of fantasy and neo-fantasy, and most of all in the suggestion of ontological ideas and doubts that characterise the latter. Deeply rooted in the unknown land of a reality that is full of doubts, the literature of Bioy Casares seeks to restore, through the multiple games of fiction, the perception and perceptions of a continuous changes that end with generating parallel worlds. The neo-fantastic passes the crucial limit of traditional fantasy, the stable and certain dichotomy between the real and the imaginary, and to do this it relies on the fragile foundations of a reality in full process of deconstruction. The centre of immateriality in which are born the sinuous spatio-temporal bifurcations that structure stories like “La Trama Celeste” of Bioy Casares or “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” (1941) of Jorge Luis Borges has its origins in an instability that is inscribed in the real. Therefore, when during a period of crisis the rules which govern a culture become shrouded in doubts and demonstrate their false transparency, the neo-fantastic can transform itself into a fundamental tool for describing the crucial nature of the destabilisation taking place: it converts itself into a mimetic process at the structural level.

**Sumario** 1 Bioy Casares y Borges: la ‘imaginación razonada’. – 2 Hiperficción y deconstrucción. – 3 Imaginación razonada: estrategias textuales de deconstrucción. – 4 Configuración de un antisistema espacio-temporal.

**Keywords** Bioy Casares. Deconstruction. Neo-fantastic. Postmodern.

En la compleja dicotomía entre lo real y lo imaginario, se sitúa un importante debate sobre el carácter mimético de la literatura fantástica. Existe una fila de estudiosos, entre otros Jakobson (2002) y Höfner (1980), para los cuales las infracciones del género fantástico respecto a un determinado sistema de códigos reguladores deben considerarse en el marco de una relación mimética entre texto y realidad. Estos estudiosos sostienen que sin una marcada oposición entre realidad y ficción, que procede de una preponderante mimesis textual, sería imposible que las transgresiones de lo fantástico resaltaran respecto a un determinado sistema. Como sostiene De Toro, de acuerdo con Lotman (1990):

Sin la oposición de lo inexplicable y de lo real no se puede definir el subtipo textual ‘fantástico’. La transgresión de leyes y normas en un mundo determinado (por ejemplo la transgresión de leyes de la verosimilitud) se considera como fantástica. La narración y el mundo de lo

fantástico poseen todos los criterios del mundo cotidiano-real, donde de pronto los personajes se ven confrontados con acontecimientos que van más allá de la experiencia de un mundo normal. (De Toro 2002, 136)

En línea con las consideraciones de De Toro, Todorov (1970) en su descripción de las características del fantástico tradicional, usa las observaciones de otros estudiosos como Castex («Le fantastique [...] se caractérise [...] par une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle» 1968, 8) y Caillois («Tout le fantastique est rupture de l'ordre reconnu, irruption de l'inadmissible au sein de l'inaltérable légalité quotidienne» 1965, 161) y define el género en base a la oscilación de incertidumbre que determina en el héroe y en el lector: «un événement étrange, qui provoque une hésitation chez le lecteur et le héros» (Todorov 1970, 38). El punto de vista de Todorov supone un proceso de identificación entre lector y personaje, y una duda, una vacilación del sentido, determinada por la estructura del texto. En base a esos estudios, parece oportuno alejar las estructuras textuales de algunos cuentos de Bioy Casares y de Borges de una concepción tal del fantástico, para investigar, a través de sus mecanismos internos, la posibilidad de un nuevo género fantástico, con características de base totalmente distintas y un nivel de infracción mucho más alto en comparación con el fantástico tradicional.

La transgresión del género fantástico, llamada neofantástico, está profundamente vinculada a las dinámicas que tienen que ver con la relación entre subjetividad y el mundo, y a una indagación crítica sobre la naturaleza de nuestras percepciones, finalizada a la confutación de las nociones del 'yo', de la 'materia', del 'espacio' y del 'tiempo'.

En el trabajo de uno de los críticos que definieron el género fantástico, Finné (1980), se pueden vislumbrar los orígenes del neofantástico, de aquella transgresión del género originario basada en un profundo incremento de distancia entre lo real y lo imaginario. Finné llega a definir tres tipos de fantástico: 1) el fantástico tradicional, profundamente vinculado a la realidad, de carácter lúdico, sin ninguna finalidad, a parte del entretenimiento; 2) el fantástico totalmente falto de vínculos con lo real, que tiene que ser interpretado como «une forme de l'art pour l'art, un jeu, une gratuité»; 3) el neofantástico, en el cual se usa la estructura del fantástico para poner en discusión, analizar, difundir ideas (1980, 15).

El último tipo, el neofantástico, asume un valor gnoseológico y un empate epistemológico muy superior a los primeros dos tipos. Se trata de «un fantastique qui s'éloigne de la gratuité, pour qui le surnaturel n'est plus un but en soi mais un tremplin destiné a diffuser certaines idées» (15). Lejos de considerar antimimética la literatura fantástica, el estudioso tendrá que orientarse dentro de un sistema que, aunque mantiene su propia relación mimética con lo real, lo transgrede en al-

gunos de sus elementos y así insinúa la sombra de la incertidumbre, la vacilación del sentido propia del fantástico. El proceso de superación de la relación mimética, a través de una serie de estrategias textuales que ceban el pase de la mimesis a la simulación (Baudrillard 1981, 16-7) se remite a una concepción de la literatura totalmente autoreferencial. Por medio de este pase crucial desde el fantástico se llega al neofantástico.

Antes de adentrarnos en un análisis del cuento «La trama celeste» nos parece oportuno referirnos al prólogo de Borges a *La invención de Morel* (1940) de Bioy Casares y a la prefación escrita por Bioy Casares a la *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940) recopilada en colaboración con Borges y Silvina Ocampo.

Los dos textos citados, ambos publicados en 1940, brindan, a través del extremo nivel metatextual que pertenece al género prólogo, una nueva concepción de la literatura y una comunión de finalidades que confluirán en las obras sucesivas de los dos autores; baste recordar *Ficciones* (1941) de Borges y *La invención de Morel* (1940) o «La trama celeste» (1948) de Bioy Casares.

## 1 Bioy Casares y Borges: la 'imaginación razonada'

En el prólogo a *La invención de Morel*, Borges utiliza determinados criterios narratológicos para analizar y definir la obra de Bioy Casares, y empieza catalogando dos opuestas categorías terminológicas. La primera, que Borges asocia a *La invención de Morel* está compuesta por expresiones como 'inventar', 'rigor', 'peripecia', 'artificio verbal', que estructuran un texto organizado por un orden intelectual, contrapuesto a una segunda categoría de términos como 'novela psicológica', 'informe', 'realista', 'vana precisión' y 'toque verosímil'.

La oposición que resulta parece poderse resumir en la dicotomía entre la concepción de una literatura autoreferencial e antimimética y la idea del texto literario como sistema mimético, referencial finalizado a generar aquel *effet de réel* que Macedonio tanto criticaba.

Borges, a las vanas precisiones de la novela realista, a sus lánguidas vaguedades, prefiere la novela de aventuras, que califica como un sistema que no sufre ninguna parte injustificada.

Por otra parte, la novela 'psicológica' quiere ser también novela 'realista': prefiere que olvidemos su carácter de artificio verbal y hace de toda vana precisión (o de toda lánguida vaguedad) un nuevo rasgo verosímil. [...] La novela de aventuras, en cambio, no se propone como una transcripción de la realidad: es un objeto artificial que no sufre ninguna parte injustificada. (Borges 2002, 25)

Además Borges efectúa una fundamental distinción entre sobrenatural y fantástico y describe el segundo como una arquitectura narrativa que sigue sus leyes de funcionamiento y transformación (inventar, rigor, peripecia) y que se configura como una construcción autoreferencial (artificial, orden intelectual, imaginación razonada). De esa manera Borges, y con él Bioy Casares, introduce una nueva definición del fantástico que se aleja de la oposición clásica entre real y sobrenatural, visto que el real va perdiendo lugar en favor de un nuevo referente: la 'imaginación razonada'.

Muchos términos adquieren en el prólogo de Borges, un valor nuevo. El orden interno al que se refiere ya no corresponde a un orden según las reglas de la mimesis; se trata más bien de una disposición de las varias partes del cuento organizadas según el nuevo criterio estético concebido en colaboración con Bioy Casares. Incluso términos como 'peripecia' y 'aventura' ya no hay que entenderlos en el sentido aristotélico-realista, sino más bien recodificarlos e interpretarlos como repeticiones, variaciones, deformaciones obradas por la imaginación razonada. Para comprobarlo, basta con analizar *La invención de Morel* o «La trama celeste», narraciones en las que, con el soporte de frágiles tramas de aventura, se ceban los mecanismos de la nueva concepción del fantástico.

También la prefación de Bioy Casares a la primera edición de la *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940) resulta fundamental para entender a fondo la pequeña revolución que los dos autores están elaborando en relación al fantástico tradicional. En ella Bioy Casares trata de preparar al lector a las dificultades, pero también a los gozos intelectuales que algunos cuentos de Borges, contenidos en la antología, podrán desencadenar en su mente.

Fantasías metafísicas [...]. Con *El acercamiento a Almotásim*, con *Pierre Menard*, con *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Borges ha creado un nuevo género literario, que aúna el ensayo y la ficción; son ejercicios de incesante inteligencia y de imaginación feliz, carentes de languideces, de todo elemento humano, patético o sentimental, y destinados a lectores intelectuales, estudiosos de filosofía, casi especialistas en literatura. (Borges, Ocampo y Bioy Casares 1977, 7)

Lejos de ser un simple ejercicio retórico, la prefación de Bioy Casares representa una toma de conciencia fundamental de la extraordinaria fuerza innovadora del 'cuento-ensayo' borgiano.

El recorrido estilístico abierto por la construcción de una obra narrativa que sigue leyes de funcionamiento y transformación típicas del ensayo y al mismo tiempo de la 'ficción', constituye en sí una etapa fundamental en la nueva concepción del cuento de Borges y Bioy Casares. En ella el despliegue erudito y la mistificación, el continuo juego a cargo de la ima-



ginación razonada, transforman el límite entre realidad y ficción en una nueva región del pensamiento que tendrá que ser analizada con nuevos instrumentos críticos.

Entre «los ejercicios de incesante inteligencia y la imaginación feliz de los lectores intelectuales estudiosos de filosofía» y las languideces, el «elemento humano y patético sentimental» (7), Bioy Casares marca una línea de separación, tal como Borges había hecho en el prólogo a *La invención de Morel*.

No obstante la falta del elemento humano en los cuentos de Borges no tiene que ser interpretada en dirección de una deshumanización del arte, sino más bien como una tentativa de liberación de una concepción mimética de la literatura, de una dependencia del sistema del cuento en relación al referente real.

Mientras Borges tomaba en consideración en el citado prólogo más la vertiente de la escritura, Bioy Casares se refiere también a las dinámicas de la recepción, y propone una reconfiguración de la relación entre autor y lector como consecuencia directa de una nueva concepción de la literatura: un nuevo género, el neofantástico, implica la creación de un nuevo lector que participa en el proceso de renovación en acto.

## 2 Hiperficción y deconstrucción

Lectores intelectuales, estudiosos de filosofía, expertos de literatura se encontrarán con los escritores en la región inexplorada de un nuevo género, para promover una idea de literatura autoreferencial y reformar la relación entre escritura y lectura. Borges y Bioy Casares, según De Toro, determinaron una «deteritorialización del canon en las orillas de la literatura, produciendo un desierto para reterritorializarlo, esto es, habitarlo en forma nueva, produciendo su *patois*» (De Toro 2008, 281).

La autorreferencialidad que caracteriza la idea de literatura descrita por Borges y Bioy Casares determina, de acuerdo con lo que sostiene De Toro: «un 'oriente', un pliegue como espacios deteritorializados o no-espacios que son en definitiva un espacio virtual y simulado» (2002, 144).

Así Borges y Bioy Casares conciben estrategias poéticas que resultarán centrales en los años Cincuenta y Sesenta en el *nouveau roman*, impulsadas por el grupo «Tel Quel», y que se harán precursoras de una reconfiguración de las complejas dinámicas de lectura y escritura.

En uno de los más famosos cuentos de Borges, «Tlön, Uq̄bar, Orbis Tertius» (1941), en el cual los dos personajes de Borges y Bioy Casares, están involucrados en una apasionada búsqueda bibliográfica, siguiendo las huellas de un misterioso planeta imaginario, un concepto atrae la atención del estudioso:

Descubrimos (en alta noche ese descubrimiento es inevitable) que los espejos tienen algo monstruoso. Entonces Bioy Casares recordó que uno de los heresiarcas de Uqbar había declarado que los espejos y la cópula son abominables, porque multiplican el número de los hombres. (Borges 2002, 431)

El peligro que esconde el espejo, la ilusión que genera, no hay que interpretarla, en el caso de Borges, de manera literal. Parece más oportuno hallar en tal visión de la experiencia especular el progresivo alejamiento de una concepción mimética de la literatura.

Todo signo, todo libro, es según Borges como un espejo que en su continuo reproducirse se va perdiendo en sus mismas profundidades. El sobreponerse de imágenes y máscaras parece borrar el signo originario, y lo sustituye en un incesante proceso degenerativo. Es el caso, por ejemplo, en *El libro de Arena* (1975), del término 'arena', que adquiere los rasgos de la *trace* (Derrida 1972) o de lo *scriptible* de marco barthiano (Barthes 1981, 254). En este sentido son clarificadoras las palabras de Foucault:

Hoy el espacio del lenguaje no está definido por la retórica, sino por la biblioteca: por el encabalgamiento hasta el infinito de los lenguajes fragmentarios, que sustituye la cadena doble de la retórica por la línea simple, continua, monótona de un lenguaje entregado a sí mismo, de un lenguaje que está consagrado a ser infinito porque ya no puede apoyarse sobre la palabra del infinito. Pero que encuentra en sí la posibilidad de desdoblarse, repetirse, de hacer nacer el sistema vertical de los espejos, de las imágenes de sí mismo, de las analogías. (1999, 292)

Este proceso de reflexión infinita del lenguaje deriva, si se mira a fondo, del grande maestro fabulador Macedonio Fernández: una concepción del lenguaje que parece tener origen preciso, localizable en la profunda desestabilización epistemológica descrita por Foucault en *Les mots et les choses* (1966), entre los siglos XVIII y XIX. Pero Borges parece hacer aún más extrema y radical la dispersión del pensamiento y del saber, la falta de un sujeto y de un centro definido. Él parece llegar a un idealismo total que se hace patente en la profunda fragmentación del pensamiento sistemático. Pero el discurso borgiano no procede en dirección de un nihilismo filosófico, sino que va dirigido hacia lo que Schulz-Buschhaus define «especulación poética» (Schulz-Buschhaus 1999, 96): o sea a utilizar estructuras gnósticas con finalidades semiótico-literarias.

Bioy Casares, en relación al infinito espejarse del lenguaje, parece adoptar una actitud aún más extrema que la de Borges. Bioy Casares considera los espejos, y la metáfora que custodian, como el lugar de la simulación, del mundo virtual, y no de la reproducción. O sea la experiencia especular

no tiene que ver, según Bioy Casares, con la mimesis o con la imitación, sino más bien constituye un aniquilamiento de lo que ya existe en favor de una nueva entidad, de un nuevo espacio. Bioy Casares trata de dar a través de la metáfora del espejo su propia idea de la obra de arte, del proceso creativo, visto que, en lugar de multiplicar y difundir, los espejos producen una hiperrealidad que diverge de la visión borgiana. En palabras del estudioso MacAdam:

Bioy Casares [...] creates a series of linked metaphors to describe the transformation of a man into an artist and finally, the artist into art. [...] It celebrates the death of a man who has achieved immortality, the ironic immortality of art which requires the death of a man. (2002, 310)

La atención de Bioy Casares hacia la vertiente de la recepción, para el proceso de recreación ínsito en la lectura, implica una transposición de la metafórica relacionada al acto creativo en el objeto libro y en el espacio previsto para la acción del lector. Un lector que tendrá que desatender su propio 'pacto de credulidad' y desenmascarar sin piedad los mecanismos de la ficción. Solo a través de un proceso tal de purificación, hasta el lector podrá emprender el viaje intelectual teorizado también por Macedonio Fernández: un viaje de lectura extenuante y tortuoso, una aventura del pensamiento que aspira a deconstruir el mismo pensamiento y la presunción de la existencia del individuo, hacia la liberación final, la superación de la muerte.

### **3 Imaginación razonada: estrategias textuales de deconstrucción**

Las complejas dinámicas del espacio y del tiempo presentes en algunos cuentos de Bioy Casares tienen sus propias raíces en el intersticio que separa el fantástico<sup>1</sup> del neofantástico<sup>2</sup> y sobretodo en la sugestión de ideas y dudas ontológicas que caracteriza el segundo. Hundida en la tierra desconocida de un real que se agrieta de dudas, la literatura de Bioy Casares trata de representar, mediante los múltiples juegos de la ficción, la percepción, las percepciones de una continua mutación que termina por generar 'mundos paralelos' o, como con más agudeza y precisión los definía David Albert, «interpretación de los varios puntos de vista» (1986, 42).

1 Sobre el género fantástico, véase Caillois 1965, Castex 1968, Cersowsky 1983, Suvin 1979, Todorov 1970, Wörtche 1989.

2 Sobre el género neofantástico, véase Alazraki 1990, Williams 1976, Finné 1980.

El neofantástico transgrede el límite crucial del fantástico, la estable y segura dicotomía entre real e imaginario, y para hacerlo se sostiene sobre los frágiles cimientos de un real en pleno proceso de deconstrucción (Derrida 1972).

Mediante los postulados lógicos contruidos sobre el relativismo filosófico e psicológico de un pensamiento metafísico y teleológico, el neofantástico parece aventurarse en el temerario propósito, de marco borgiano, de insinuar que la ciencia, como el arte, la filosofía, la religión, son construcciones culturales profundamente impregnadas de ideología. Así cuando durante un periodo de crisis, los códigos que regulan una cultura se agrietan de dudas y revelan su falsa transparencia, el neofantástico puede transformarse en un instrumento fundamental para describir la desestabilización en acto: se convierte en un proceso mimético a nivel estructural. La racionalidad que lo atraviesa tiene una nueva electricidad. Las infinitas velocidades del pensamiento pueden juntarse en un discurso que no aspira a afirmar algo, a proponer posibles conclusiones, sino más bien a deconstruirse. Y el signo de esa deconstrucción es más fuerte cuanto más evidente es la estructura racional del discurso, que se impone entonces como reflexión sobre la naturaleza misma del lenguaje y sobre su ser inseparablemente vinculado a un determinado sistema de «códigos reguladores» (Foucault 2005,15).

Lo que asombra de la compleja espacio-temporalidad de cuentos de Bioy Casares como «La trama celeste» (1948) no es tanto la idea del proliferar de posibles universos paralelos, cuanto el estado de suspensión psíquica y metafísica en el que parecen moverse algunos de sus personajes. Suspensión que genera la razonable duda de si a Bioy Casares le interesan más las dinámicas de la percepción interior de los personajes que la enmarañada metafísica de las posibilidades.

Como el grande maestro fabulador Macedonio Fernández, Bioy Casares parece afrontar, a través de la creación literaria, un viaje en el interior del alma humana, en la percepción, o mejor en la combinatoria de las posibles percepciones, de universos «divergentes, convergentes y paralelos» (Borges 2002, 479).

El centro de inmaterialidad donde nacen las sinuosas bifurcaciones espacio-temporales que estructuran cuentos como «La trama celeste» de Bioy Casares o «El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan» (1941) de Borges, tiene su origen en una inestabilidad inscrita en lo real, o en el *cosmo* para usar las palabras de Deleuze (1990, 126-36). Si el caos es el plano de inmanencia que no se puede pensar, que está dentro y afuera del pensamiento, entonces la subjetividad toma su propia inestabilidad, que la hace nómada y libre, de una soberanía de la inconstancia que es al mismo tiempo una admonición, una advertencia ínsita en toda mirada sobre el mundo que aspire a ser definitiva, como un imperativo categórico que impone considerar todo resultado del pensamiento como una aproximación: un pequeño paso en un sendero tortuoso que puede bifurcarse, ser engañoso o llevar

hacia el claro central de un laberinto, en el cual, el sabio, protegido por un pabellón, construye su recorrido de sabiduría. Y es ese sujeto mutable en continuo devenir, ese incesante eros creativo, lo que caracteriza la libertad de la filosofía, del pensamiento.

Lo que da sustancia al nuevo género teorizado por Borges y Bioy Casares son varias estrategias textuales que en acción conjunta contribuyen a generar la distancia asimétrica del texto en relación a su referente real, que denominamos, de acuerdo con Borges y De Toro, 'imaginación razonada'.

El análisis de «La trama celeste» (1948) de Bioy Casares, evidenciará las modalidades por medio de las cuales la 'imaginación razonada' ejercita su propósito deconstruccionista en favor de una concepción del texto literario como sistema de signos autorreferenciales. Las estrategias textuales que caracterizan este proceso son: 1) la presencia de reiteraciones, variaciones de diálogos o de situaciones presentadas que producen una proliferación rizomática en correspondencia con la idea de los 'mundos posibles'; 2) la concisión en relación a las informaciones sobre situaciones o personajes, que a menudo genera problemas interpretativos en el lector, que se encuentra en una aparente fragilidad sistémica, lo que es en realidad ya la primera pieza fundamental del neofantástico, que consiste en la falta de un eje central de la narración que pone en relación eventos pasados, presentes y futuros. La narración así es como si flotara en un eterno presente, dirigida cada vez por la percepción del narrador hacia otras temporalidades. El narrador termina por desarrollar de esa forma una función de *medium* semiótico; 3) la transtextualidad, como «trascendencia del texto de otros textos» (Genette 1997, 5), se manifiesta especialmente en fenómenos de intertextualidad y metatextualidad: baste con pensar en los autores citados en «La trama celeste» (Blanqui, Cicerone), o por Borges referidos a *La invención de Morel* (Stevenson, Wells, Kafka). Además en el cuento de Bioy Casares, sobretodo en las páginas finales, interviene un narrador-escritor (a menudo en la obra de Bioy Casares y de Borges los dos escritores son personajes-narradores, comentaristas del mismo cuento), lo que implica una mirada continua de autoexploración hacia la obra y a través de mecanismos metaliterarios, el estímulo para el lector a fin de que desatienda su 'pacto de credulidad' y desenmascare sin piedad los mecanismos de la ficción.

#### 4 Configuración de un antisistema espacio-temporal

En base a las estrategias textuales descritas, no puede asombrar que los criterios que definen el género fantástico no resulten adecuados a la descripción de la estructura y de los mecanismos de funcionamiento y transformación de los cuentos de Bioy Casares. Será entonces necesaria, como hemos sostenido hasta ahora, la definición de un nuevo género, denomi-

nado neofantástico, que tenga en cuenta los procedimientos estructurales que determinan, en «La trama celeste», la formación de una macrometáfora textual de la que procede una 'literatura de la percepción', basada en configuraciones rizomáticas y de simulación (Baudrillard 1971, 16-7).

La simulación define una literatura que, abandonado el referente real, tiene como punto de referencia solo la especulación intelectual, aquella 'imaginación razonada' que hace que se puedan definir las narraciones de Borges y Bioy Casares como filosóficas o metafísicas.

El neofantástico implica pues una concepción de la literatura que recrea el mundo, reflejo de un espejo, dentro de un sistema autorreferencial de signos. Se determina con ello su naturaleza virtual, su movimiento en un antisistema espacio-temporal trazado con ausencias y presencias fantasmales siempre en el borde de un abismo, en el límite entre percepción y sueño.

El nuevo género del neofantástico empieza a configurarse como superación completa de la separación ontológica entre original y copia, entre auténtico y artificial, entre verdadero y falso, hacia el concepto de simulacro teorizado por Baudrillard. El neofantástico hay que enmarcarlo en un contexto epistemológico posmoderno que implica un progresivo alejamiento del referente real y se mueve en dirección de una arquitectura textual determinada por los conceptos de simulación y deconstrucción; en el caso específico de «La trama celeste» de Bioy Casares y de «El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan» de Borges esas instancias del posmoderno configuran la espacio-temporalidad de universos paralelos y de la teoría de los mundos posibles.

En el prólogo a *La invención de Morel* (1940), Borges, en una síntesis de pensamiento y escritura, alumbra críticamente el cuento de Bioy Casares describiéndolo como sigue:

Básteme declarar que Bioy renueva literariamente un concepto que San Agustín y Orígenes refutaron, que Louis August Blanqui razonó y que dijo con música memorable Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

I have been here before,  
 But when or how I cannot tell:  
 I know the grass beyond the door,  
 The sweet keen smell,  
 The sighing sound, the lights around the shore... (2002, 26)

Bioy Casares vuelve a tomar y desarrollar en muchos de sus cuentos el tema del 'tiempo cíclico'. San Agustín, Orígenes, Blanqui, Demócrito, Cicerón, Nietzsche, Pitágoras, son nombres recurrentes en sus obras, a menudo vinculadas a las pruebas que confutan o confirman la ciclicidad del tiempo y la idea del eterno retorno.

El tema de la infinita repetición de la historia está profundamente unido a la concepción de tiempos y espacios infinitos y a la teoría de los mundos

posibles. Detrás de algunas tramas urdidas por Bioy Casares y por Borges es posible descubrir indicios de *L'éternité par les astres* (1872) de Luis August Blanqui y de las reflexiones sobre el infinito presentes entre sus páginas.

Pascal a dit avec sa magnificence de langage: «L'univers est un cercle, dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part». Quelle image plus saisissante de l'infini? Disons d'après lui, et en précisant encore: L'univers est une sphère dont le centre est partout et la surface nulle part. (Blanqui 1996, 15)

El paso citado lleva la memoria del estudioso a «La biblioteca de Babel» de Borges (1941): «Básteme, por ahora, repetir el dictamen clásico: La Biblioteca es una esfera cuyo centro cabal es cualquier hexágono, cuya circunferencia es infinita» (2002, 479). No obstante, aunque innumerables, los elementos que componen el universo no son infinitos; de ahí la intuición de muchos pensadores de que el infinito sea el resultado de una compleja y eterna combinatoria que se repite.

Ces combinaisons, malgré leur multitude, ont un terme et, dès lors, doivent se répéter, pour atteindre à l'infini. La nature tire chacun de ses ouvrages à milliards d'exemplaires. Dans la texture des astres, la similitude et la répétition forment la règle, la dissemblance et la variété, l'exception. (Blanqui 1996, 111)

La «La biblioteca de Babel» di Borges refleja una concepción del infinito basada en la repetición y en la combinatoria:

Acabo de escribir infinita. No he interpolado ese adjetivo por una costumbre retórica; digo que no es ilógico pensar que el mundo es infinito. Quienes lo juzgan limitado, postulan que en lugares remotos los corredores y escaleras y hexágonos pueden inconcebiblemente cesar – lo cual es absurdo. Quienes lo imaginan sin límites, olvidan que los tiene el número posible de libros. Yo me atrevo a insinuar esta solución del antiguo problema: La biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica. Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido sería un orden: el Orden). Mi soledad se alegra con esa elegante esperanza. (2002, 471)

La idea de Blanqui es que los distintos mundos se diferencian entre sí, en virtud de innumerables posibilidades de combinaciones diversas, terminadas las cuales volverán a repetirse, eternamente. Pues, en el caso de la humanidad, a cada instante el hombre elige una entre todas las posibles



direcciones, como un punto a través del cual pasan infinitas rectas, y deja todas las demás a sus sombras sosias.

Une terre existe où l'homme suit la route dédaignée dans l'autre par le sosie. Son existence se dédouble, un globe pour chacune, puis se bifurque une seconde, une troisième fois, des milliers de fois. Il possède ainsi des sosies complets et des variantes innombrables de sosies, qui multiplient et représentent toujours sa personne, mais ne prennent que des lambeaux de sa destinée. Tout ce qu'on aurait pu être ici-bas, on l'est quelque part ailleurs. Outre son existence entière, de la naissance à la mort, que l'on vit sur une foule de terres, on en vit sur d'autres dix mille éditions différentes. (1996, 142)

Parece oportuno ahora dar un breve esquema de las ideas propuestas por Blanqui en *L'éternité par les astres*, de manera que se perciban a fondo los efectos de la intertextualidad presentes en «La trama celeste». En la obra de Blanqui desarrolla un rol fundamental el tema del infinito, cuyas configuraciones pueden ser resumidas como sigue: 1) espacio y tiempo son infinitos; 2) la materia, cuantitativamente inalterable, está compuesta por una serie de elementos simples, limitados e invariables. Esos podrán entonces formar una serie numerosísima de combinaciones cuya variedad será siempre finita; 3) toda combinación se repite infinitamente porque el espacio es infinito, como el tiempo; 4) nuestro sistema solar existe en miles de millones de ejemplares. En cada ejemplar existe una Tierra idéntica a la nuestra. Las únicas modificaciones posibles son obra del hombre, que, a través del libre albedrío, puede elegir entre diferentes opciones. La humanidad así pues no es la misma en cada Tierra-sosia. Cada tierra creará historias diferentes de diversas trayectorias evolutivas; 5) para las Tierras-sosias, para esas variantes de la humanidad, vale lo que se dijo para los elementos que componen la materia: su número es limitado, ya que los elementos a disposición son finitos, y los hombres de una tierra, como los sistemas estelares originales, están formados por un número finito de elementos; pero cada variante existe en miles de millones de ejemplares.

Las bifurcaciones temporales de Blanqui inspiraron seguramente también la creación borgiana de «El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan» (1941). La concepción del universo de Ts'ui Pên, personaje clave del cuento, parece de hecho un eco no demasiado lejano de las teorizaciones presentes en *L'éternité par les astres*.

El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan es una imagen incompleta, pero no falsa, del universo tal como lo concebía Ts'ui Pên. A diferencia de Newton y de Schopenhauer [...] no creía en un tiempo uniforme, absoluto. Creía en infinitas series de tiempos divergentes, convergentes



y paralelos. Esta trama de tiempos que se aproximan, se bifurcan, se cortan o que secularmente se ignoran, abarca toda las posibilidades. No existimos en la mayoría de esos tiempos: en algunos existe usted y no yo; en otros, yo, no usted; en otros, los dos. (Borges 2002, 479)

Dentro del mecanismo de ficciones encajadas que caracteriza «El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan», detrás del velo de la primera ficción, representada por el cuento de espías, hay un cuento interno, cuyo suspense es lógico-metafísico y la ambientación es china. «El cambio de las relaciones entre narrador y narración constituye *per se* un procedimiento laberíntico de tipo formal que confunde los niveles de realidad del conjunto del relato» (Cuesta Abad 1995, 169). En el cuento externo hay algunos fragmentos anticipadores que gradualmente llevan la narración a la mayor complejidad de su centro. Sobre ese centro, cuento interno, y la investigación especulativa que contiene concentraremos nuestro análisis.

Cisne Tenebroso, traductor/lector, perverso falsificador de historias ajenas (o que se postulan como ajenas) son algunas de las definiciones que Borges se da a sí como «escritor». [...] Este *homo sapiens* es también, y muy particularmente, un *homo ludens* que se complace en saquear toda biblioteca. Y porque no puede hacer otra cosa que repetir (y porque es altamente consciente de ello), el narrador de las ficciones borgianas las presenta desde el comienzo como algo que le es ajeno. (Madrid 1997, 114)

En «Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius» (1941), el narrador Borges revela que, con Bioy Casares, está razonando sobre:

la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiera o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitieran a unos pocos lectores – a muy pocos lectores – la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal. (2002, 431)

La novela a la que Borges hace alusión es sin duda *La invención de Morel*, donde es simple encontrar una gran cantidad de información, sin la cual el lector se encuentra desplazado en relación a personajes y situaciones de las que desconoce los antecedentes.

Además, una serie de repeticiones y de redundancias invalidan la linealidad y las relaciones causales internas al texto.

Resulta fundamental la alusión a los pocos lectores que serán capaces de descifrar los enigmas propuestos en la narración, que recuerda perfectamente la referencia de Bioy Casares, en la prefación a la *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, a los lectores intelectuales, estudiosos de filosofía, especialistas en literatura y de imaginación feliz.

Fantasías metafísicas [...]. Con *El acercamiento a Almotásim*, con *Pierre Menard*, con *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Borges ha creado un nuevo género literario, que participa del ensayo y de la ficción; son ejercicios de incesante inteligencia y de imaginación feliz, carentes de languideces, de todo elemento humano, patético o sentimental, y destinados a lectores intelectuales, estudiosos de filosofía, casi especialistas en literatura. (Borges, Ocampo y Casares 1977, 7)

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## Nature and Predestination in William Faulkner's "Dry September"

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**Abstract** William Faulkner's Protestant culture, as well as his will to revitalize the Christian message, has a strong influence on his literary production. His work is not simply rich in images and motives related to the Protestant religious tradition: it expresses a vision of the world which is deeply influenced by philosophical concepts belonging to that tradition. These concepts, defined for the first time by Protestant reformers, have been repeatedly reformulated through history by different thinkers and artists in the language of their age. Faulkner's view of the particular notions of damnation and predestination, underlying many of his works, plays a central role in the short story "Dry September", where it is illustrated both in symbolical and realistic terms. Faulkner's conception of predestination and damnation is very close to the one expressed by the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology*. The affinity between Faulkner's and Tillich's view is not surprising. Indeed, the German theologian faced the themes which the American writer inherited from his Protestant ancestors in the light of the spirit of his same age, an age which experienced historical and cultural upheavals, such as the World War and the rise of psychoanalysis.

**Keywords** Nature. Predestination. Faulkner. Dry September.

William Faulkner shares with other modernist writers the propensity to take concepts, motives, and images inherited from the past tradition and, to use Pound's words, "make them new". The main source he relies on is the religious Protestant culture that accompanied the birth of the first New England colonies. As Hyatt H. Waggoner rightly pointed out in *William Faulkner. From Jefferson to The World*, Faulkner "takes creedal Christianity, apparently, as unhistorical myth containing profound redemptive moral and psychological truth which he has undertaken to reinterpret in modern terms" (1959, 248). Indeed, Faulkner re-elaborates and enriches some aspects of Protestant religion according to twentieth-century sensibility, while maintaining their deep meaning essentially unchanged. He treats the particular notions of predestination and damnation not in relation to their primeval eschatological meaning but in relation to earthly life, in spite of their religious origin. As can be demonstrated by making particular reference to the short story "Dry September", the new form these notions thus acquire can be analyzed through the reflections of Paul Tillich, the theologian who reformulated the Lutheran doctrine in the light of modern existential thought.

Existence implies two painful experiences for many of Faulkner's characters: they perceive their physical and spiritual limitation as incompleteness and as a source suffering, but they also live in a state of conflict with themselves, other people, and their world. In the novels whose protagonists are the Compson family and the Sartoris family, the conflict of the individual with reality manifests itself mainly as inability to adapt to the modern world, dominated by amorality and selfishness. Such inability is often accompanied by the nostalgia for the South of the past, usually evoked as an orderly world where life was regulated by precise ethical and social codes. The old South, forever erased by an irreparable decline, is often mythicized in Faulkner's work. Significantly enough, in *The Sound and the Fury* it tends to overlap with the world of childhood, where the temporary ignorance of the most painful aspects of human existence engenders serenity and a feeling of security. As a consequence, in Faulkner's work both childhood and the past acquire the suggestive power characterizing the edenic symbols.

At the base of this view of human life and feelings there are the features of existence that Paul Tillich identifies with the state of sin and describes in philosophical terms. In Tillich's view, existing means to have experienced the loss of a previous condition of union with the One - the Being or God - to which everything originally belongs. Entering existence means entering a new condition of finitude and precariousness, sooner or later destined to become the object of a painful realization for the individual. The condition of 'alienation', or separation from what one belongs to, tends to provoke a deep feeling of nostalgia and, most of all, several inner and external conflicts. Such conflicts can be overcome only through love, meant as aspiration to reunification (Tillich 1963, 29-44, 59-62). In figures like Dilsey and Lena Grove, their capacity to love nullifies the negative implications of what Tillich defines 'alienation'. In other cases, the implications of alienation develop up to the point where they engender in the characters' states of radical conflict with their peers, their world, and, most of all, with themselves. These conflicts often take the form of psychic and psychological disorders, such as obsessions and neuroses, that can be caused by traumatic events or deep mental deficiencies. Sometimes the desperation caused by the inability to overcome these states of conflict results in unsolvable conditions of suffering and even processes of self-destruction. Sometimes it arouses that feeling of hostility toward one's fellowman with which Faulkner seems to identify moral corruption.

Faulkner's view of the moral implication of the 'state of sin', as just defined, is clearly an evolution of the view embraced by seventeenth-century American Calvinists. In Protestant thought, the state of sin - meant as a state of separation from God - manifests itself concretely in the human inability to want the real Good, the Good inspired by the love for God and other men. More precisely, the state of sin provokes an obfuscation of the human faculties that makes the individual unable to recognize the

real Good and leads him to selfishly want his own good, that is Evil. In the eighteenth century, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup> explained in detail the causes of this “obfuscation” in his treatise entitled *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758). According to Edwards, the first human being had two different kinds of “principles” within itself. The inferior or “natural” principles were essentially appetites and passions such as self-love. The superior or “supernatural” principles consisted of the spiritual features that formed the image of God in the human beings and conferred moral qualities to them. Originally, these two kinds of principles balanced each other in human kind but, after its rebellion, God revoked the supernatural principles provoking the dominion and the excess of the natural ones, that became what the scriptures call “flesh”. Human kind remained then in a mere state of nature and the inclination to selfishness that is the source of moral evil originated in it (Edwards 1970, 381-4). According to Perry Miller, Edward’s supernatural principle essentially results in the possibility to perceive the harmony of creation and experience a consequent feeling of consent towards it. When human beings are deprived of this possibility, they cannot recognize the inherent Good and, as a consequence, they prefer objective goods to it. Human kind’s loss of the supernatural principle is the reason why History is dominated by selfishness and violence (Miller 1949, 275-6).

Only divine Grace can heal human being’s faculties and restore their original equilibrium. Grace is the acceptance of being accepted by God, the acceptance of the message of acceptance contained in the Scriptures (Tillich 1968, 229). It does not result in a simple external adhesion to a doctrine or a code of behaviour. Grace is something that leads the individual to accept God’s design gladly, to honestly want what God wants and act consequently. In this view, sin is not in the individual’s actions but in his heart and in his authentic will, hence in the ‘spirit’ in which he acts.

According to the doctrine of predestination, God gives Grace only to those who are destined to salvation and denies it to those who are destined to damnation, in order to make both of them play a role inside His providential design. The aim of such design is the triumph of the divine glory in the creation: the fulfilment of an overall harmony that the weak human reasoning cannot grasp in its entirety. As Tillich explained in *A History of Christian Thought* (1968), faith in predestination originates from the empirical observation of the fact that not everyone heard Christ’s love message while some, in spite of hearing it, did not understand it. Paradoxically, the doctrine of predestination does not deny the freedom of human will. When human beings want the Evil, they sincerely want it and they pursue

1 In the twentieth century, facing the menace of Calvinist orthodoxy that the spreading of the ideas of Enlightenment in the New Continent represented, Jonathan Edwards restated the main Calvinists doctrines in a clearer way, often using the same instruments of rationalism.

it on their own accord. Still, their freedom is the instrument through which God works in the world. There is no real contradiction in this, because the level of divine action and the level of human action – meant as a mixture of freedom and destiny – are independent from each other (267, 269).

In Faulkner's work, moral corruption is often engendered or accompanied by those states of psychic malaise that are the extreme developments of the existential alienation described by Tillich. Sometimes, the suffering that these mental states provoke can foment the most selfish and aggressive instincts characterizing human nature. Once aroused, such instincts can affect the individual's vision of the world up to producing, in some characters, sadistic and cruel drives, that they can either choose or cannot help but follow. In other words, extreme selfishness and cruelty are often the results of the suffering that existence inflicts on the human being. Most of the time, Faulkner does not seem to identify the cause of this suffering with the absence of Grace – or acceptance of the divine love – but rather, with the experience of feeling rejected by one's fellowman and the consequent inability to receive and give love.

This interpretation can be applied to some of the most 'negative' characters inhabiting Faulkner's novels. Jason Compson is cut off from the love of his father and his siblings by a neurotic and egocentric mother. As a consequence, he addresses to himself the love he could have given to others, nourishing his own selfishness. Moreover his sense of exclusion makes him constantly rancorous towards his relatives and the people who surround him (Volpe 2003, 122-3). The neurosis, the obsessions, and the persecution complex that he inherited from his mother arouse in him feelings of hostility towards the entire world and an undefined desire for revenge. The gangster Popeye is abandoned by his father and neglected by his mother, who is numbed by syphilis. Since the physical and mental consequences of the illness that he inherited from his parents make him feel isolated and cut off from life, he succeeds in asserting his existence just by giving death. In the first years of Popeye's life, his victims are little animals, in his adult years they are human beings (Vickery 1966, 133). Joe Christmas is abandoned, as a child, in an orphanage where he is mocked for the colour of his skin. This experience makes him hate himself up to the point that he hates whoever loves him (Waggoner 1959, 103-4). As a consequence, he develops a sadomasochist attitude and murderous drives. As will be illustrated in detail later, the moral corruption of the protagonists of "Dry September" as well is caused by the psychological malaise stemming from their condition of extreme alienation and their desperate inability to overcome it, in a world where love seems to be totally absent. The power of their egoistical and cruel drives is so strong that it leads them to consciously or unconsciously distort reality in order to satisfy their tendencies.

In Faulkner's work, the role played by destiny – or predestination – in an individual life takes on a new and more problematic form than in his



ancestors' view. As previously explained, according to Calvinist theology, since it is destiny that determines the spiritual condition of the individual and, as a consequence, his will, human beings are not free to choose what they want, but they are free to choose following their authentic will. This means that each human action is an expression of both freedom and destiny. In Faulkner's novels, freedom and destiny intertwine more intricately, up to the point that most of the time it is not possible to understand where the border between them lies. Destiny manifests itself essentially through nature. Nevertheless, in this case, Nature is not meant as Edwards meant it, namely as a combination of appetites and passions. It is meant in its broadest sense, as external circumstances and, most of all, inner drives having mainly psychic and psychological origins. Faulkner's characters exercise their freedom starting from these two elements and from their influence on the individual will. Generally speaking, destiny actualizes itself in the given - in this case provided by Nature - starting from which the human being makes its choices. In order to be absolutely free, an action should be completely disjointed from any context and circumstance. Since this is not possible, freedom and destiny coexist in every human action. In this respect, like in others, Faulkner's view resembles Tillich's. According to the German theologian, destiny intertwines with personal freedom in every human action - including the one that provokes the fall -, most of times taking the form of nature. In the *Book of Genesis*, destiny, meant as nature, is symbolized by the serpent who influences Adam and Eve's choice to transgress God's command without releasing them from their responsibility (Tillich 1965, 32, 33-4).

In spite of what these reflections might suggest, it would be wrong to define Faulkner a naturalist or a determinist writer. The dynamics of nature, as he conceives them, do often contribute to make his characters what they are and to determine the way they act in the world, but it is rarely possible to understand to what extent they do so. In Faulkner's overall production, the space left by nature for human freedom is not always clear. Moreover this space seems to vary in each novel and even for each character. Some characters - like the Compson brothers - seem to be led by their psychic condition to act under the spell of their own compulsions, while others - like Horace Benbow - are clearly able to choose and act more freely.

As Hyatt H. Waggoner wrote, the classification of Faulkner as an authentically Christian author is made problematic by the fact that often, in his work, "the crucifixion is central and pragmatic, but the resurrection might never have occurred". In other words, if the Christian thought emphasizes the tragic nature of the human condition in order to remind that such condition is temporary and can be one day transcended (as Christ's resurrection testifies), in Faulkner's work tragedy often seems to be final and impossible to overcome (1959, 247-8). That is the case in "Dry Sep-

tember". The short story describes a world afflicted by desperation and violence, where the rare manifestations of human solidarity are destined to remain sterile. In order to persuade herself and other people to still be young and attractive, Minnie Cooper accuses Will Mayes of having molested her. Her accusation gives McLendon and other men dominated by violent impulses a pretext to vent them on a black man who, as such, is not protected by justice. These events happen thanks to the approval of an intimately violent society, whose implicit complicity with the murderers render Hawkshaw's attempt to save Will Mayes ineffective. The short story is composed of five sections. The first, the third, and the fifth revolve around McLendon and the killing of Will Mayes, while the second and the fourth sections describe Minnie Cooper's inner conflicts and crisis.

"Dry September" - originally entitled "Drought" - is set in an infernal atmosphere that symbolically evokes the personal 'hell' experienced by its two protagonists, their existential condition of alienation, desperation, solitude, and spiritual sterility. But the story's atmosphere also alludes to the oppressive and cruel nature of the community to which the characters belong. The events take place in suffocatingly hot weather, the presence of which is particularly powerful in the three sections dedicated to McLendon. Significantly enough, these sections are dominated by the motifs of aridity, sweat, and stale air. The air becomes saturated with dust in the third and the fifth sections, whose dark settings resemble, in many respects, the underworld as it is portrayed in the collective imagination.<sup>2</sup>

By setting his story in an infernal context alluding to the characters' inner condition, Faulkner conveys the idea that hell is a symbol of a spiritual state commonly experienced in human existence. This idea is far from being alien to Protestant thought. Luther believes that hell is not a place but a state (Tillich 1968, 233), namely the state of those who feel the desperation of being separated from God, the only real "punishment" that can be suffered by the human being (230). In other words, hell is the spiritual and emotional condition experienced by the individual who lives in the state of sin. This conception is related to the notion of 'spiritual death' defined by Edwards. The spiritual death, that entered the world on the eve of the fall, is the condition of spiritual misery deriving from the loss of an original state of union with God. In Edwards's view such condition is eternal, because it is destined to affect the human being even after its biological death, unless the divine grace saves him (1970, 238-9, 309). Tillich, like Luther, considers "condemnation" one of the symbols of desperation but, unlike Edwards, he holds that the idea of "eternal damnation" is misleading, because God alone is eternal. The human being,

2 For further details about "Dry September"'s landscapes, cf. Jack F. Stewart (1979), "The Infernal Climate of Faulkner's "Dry September".

instead, is finite in time and space, end as a consequence, cannot suffer an eternal condemnation. Being desperate, feeling "doomed" means perceiving more or less consciously as insurmountable the experience of being bound to God – meant as the foundation of each being and the very Being itself – without being united with Him in the act of love (1963, 78). The personal hell of the protagonists of "Dry September" consists exactly in the desperation of experiencing a condition of radical alienation, in a world apparently devoid of the unifying principle of love. In the short story alienation takes all its possible forms: separation and conflict from oneself, one's peers, and one's world.

According to Tillich, the desperation provoked by alienation tends to result in several forms of self-destruction. In general, the human being has an innate suicidal tendency deriving from its longing for rest without conflicts. Such tendency, named "death instinct" by Freud, engenders the human desire for intoxication and, in the most painful moments, the temptation to escape pain by eliminating oneself. When desperation strengthens the death instinct, undermining the unconscious will to live, it can induce physical or psychological suicide. The latter consists in the suspension of the resistance to the threat of non-being usually deriving from the radicalization of one of the conflicts characterizing human existence (Tillich 1963, 75-6). Besides inducing her to alcoholism, Minnie Cooper's alienation and desperation produce an unsolvable and self-destructive inner conflict in her, while McLendon's alienation and desperation produce an opposite effect: a destructive attitude towards the external world. In both cases, desperation is accompanied by a process of moral corruption, because Minnie and McLendon use another human being as an instrument to make their condition more tolerable, sacrificing his life. All this can be better understood by a detailed analysis of the two characters.

The reasons of McLendon's desperation are not as evident as those of Minnie Cooper's, but his spiritual condition is clearly symbolized by the infernal scenarios that surround him in each episode of the short story. In the last section, he contemplates in solitude the dark and silent world extending beyond the porch of his house, that appears to him "stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars" (Faulkner 1955, 338). Moreover, the raging attitude he shows even towards the members of his family demonstrates that love and the possibility of conciliation with himself and other people are totally absent from his life.

McLendon "turns to sadistic violence as a means of asserting his existence" (Waggoner 1959, 196) because this is the only way he knows to rebel against the "non-being" that threatens him and his own desire to find a liberation from insurmountable desperation. Since he constantly feels beset by spiritual death, he succeeds in feeling alive only when giving death. Significantly enough, right from the very beginning the author presents McLendon as an ex-soldier who during World War I conducted American

troops on the French front and was awarded a medal for it. Nevertheless, McLendon's tendency to react to desperation through violence requires further examination.

The deep moral difference between McLendon and Hawkshaw - naturally disposed to defend Will Mayes by saying the truth - makes them look "like men of different races" (Faulkner 1955, 329). The ex-soldier and the barber could appear to the reader of Calvin and Edwards like actors playing a role in the drama that God puts on the stage of the world by blinding some human beings and touching the heart of others. McLendon's overwhelming will to do evil makes him the perfect emblem of the individual languishing in the state of sin, as the two theologians meant it. Still, the reflections on destiny previously illustrated allow to give a more complex interpretation.

The oppressive hot weather that dominates the story and arouses people's aggressiveness is a very significant symbolic element. "It's this darn weather", a client of the barber shop says, "It's enough to make a man do anything" (327). The heat is a perfect example of what has been previously defined as the manifestations of destiny in the dynamics of nature inside and outside the human beings. It is a natural circumstance external to the human beings and, at the same time, it is a stimulus inside them. Human beings make choices and act starting from this circumstance and stimulus. Just like the heat oppresses each single character in the tale, there is no human being who can avoid the influence of circumstances and natural impulses, especially those leading to violence. The symbolic heat seems to exert its spell even on Hawkshaw, who instinctively hits the panic-stricken Will Mayes when he hits him by mistake. Nevertheless, while Hawkshaw's violent instincts prove to be controllable, McLendon's seems to be so overwhelming that they make him what he is and guide his actions.

McLendon's violent temperament induces him to distort reality by turning a rumour into a story allowing him to vent his aggressiveness and, at the same time, legitimize it. Indeed, he does not simply take for granted that the rumour about Will Mayes is truthful: he exaggerates it up to the point where he assumes that the man is a rapist. This mystification is carried out by the ex-soldier thanks to the contribution of the men surrounding him, especially Butch and another client of the barber shop who, like McLendon, seem to be particularly oppressed by the hot weather. Even those who in the beginning had doubts about Will Mayes' guilt become convinced of it. All the murderers end up believing in the lie they have woven by deceiving each other, because this allows them to vent a need for violence that is both personal and collective. The dust that saturates the air in the episode of the murder and in the end swallows the car driven by McLendon probably alludes to the obfuscation of the killer's lucidity about objective reality. Sometimes the dust seems to acquire a sort of cosmic dimension: "The dust [...] hung for a while, but soon the eternal dust absorbed it again" (Faulkner 1955, 335).

With the exception of Hawkshaw, no member of the white community of Jackson opposes or denounces Will Mayes' murder, even though everyone seems to doubt the veracity of the rumor that causes his death. Such behaviour can be explained in the light of what Sigmund Freud writes in "Dostoevsky and Parricide". According to Freud, "Dostoevsky's sympathy for the criminal [...] goes far beyond the pity which the unhappy wretch has a right to". It seems like a sort of 'holy awe'. This is probably due to the fact that every community has in itself a certain rate of violence that someone must vent. By committing the crime everyone wanted to commit, the criminal takes the burden of the community's guilt upon himself, becoming the scapegoat and redeemer (Freud 1997, 247-8). It happens differently in "Dry September": McLendon effectively gives voice to a collective need for violence but it is the victim who becomes a scapegoat, while the murderer becomes a hero thanks to the mystification that he carried out and the collectivity supported. As a consequence, since the criminal is not found guilty nor condemned, there is no redemption for anyone.

As hinted before, McLendon's old bond with war is very significant. If in the past, in war he found a legitimate outlet for relieving his violent instincts, the end of the conflict and the loss of his role of soldier make him no longer able to legitimately vent his drives. Moreover, if war granted him a role and a lifestyle that were congenial to his way of being, in peace time he experiences the disorientation deriving from the loss of a defined social identity and function recognized by the collectivity. Will Mayes' demonization and his sacrifice allow the ex-soldier to acquire a 'useful' collective function again by becoming a 'guarantor' of justice and order. Obviously, McLendon's delusions do not modify the truth: the aggressiveness guiding his actions is the fruit of his desperation and, as a consequence, it cannot be channelled into any gesture rendering it significant and pacifying it. This is confirmed by the episode in which, after claiming to be the defender of women, once back home the ex-soldier shows to exert constant physical and psychological violence on his wife. At the end of the story, he remains alone, trapped in a cramped house compared to a "birdcage" and "almost as small" (Faulkner 1955, 337). Panting and furiously wiping away his sweat, he looks at the infernal world extending beyond his porch, a gloomy projection of his spiritual condition.

Minnie Cooper likewise lives in a condition of deep desperation, the consequences of which are different from those of McLendon's. Minnie experiences a double conflict with herself and the people who surround her. Since she feels she cannot be accepted for what she is, she does not accept herself. This leads her to create a false image of herself that contrasts with the way other people see her and, most of all, with what she actually is. With the passage of time, this conflict intensifies but, since she is made desperate by her inability to overcome it, Minnie delves into it, going through a process of self-destruction.

As Greek tragedy testifies, reality is marked by a series of 'opposites' that in the finitude of human existence tend to clash with each other, threatening the individual's psychic balance and sometimes destroying it. This can be clearly noticed in moral conflicts and psychopathological disruptions (Tillich 1965, 61). According to Tillich, one of the main conflicts usually experienced by the human being is the conflict between dynamics and form. Human existence is dynamic but it spontaneously creates and takes on forms allowing it to resist chaos and non-being. Still, these forms tend to become a constraint for existence and inhibit its vitality. They are creations and institutions of individual, social, cultural, and religious nature in which human dynamism actualizes itself but, when they become stable, they threaten dynamism itself. The human being is anxious both about the possibility of a final form and about the possibility of a total absence of form. Indeed, the former would repress its vitality while the latter would result in complete chaos. As a consequence, the human being normally experiences a constant swinging between form and dynamics, but the loss of one of the two polarities can make the other destructive. In particular, when a form abstracted from the dynamics that produced it is imposed on the dynamics to which it does not belong, the individual perceives it as an oppressive external constraint. Such imposition can engender a condition of paralysis or a rebellion of dynamics that provokes chaos and sometimes, in reaction, stronger forms of repression (64-6). Minnie herself takes on a form that is a cultural product under the delusion that this will allow her to avoid the experience of not being accepted by the society in which she lives. But, as the woman changes, the form she identifies with narrows, becoming more and more oppressive until finally provoking a breaking point and a crisis.

As Edmund L. Volpe explains in "'Dry September'. A Metaphor for Despair" (1989), in the period when the story is set, society assigns women a limited number of codified roles related to their social condition and to the different stages of their life. Women from middle and upper classes must be able to 'play' two main roles: before marrying they must be attractive and adhere to precise stereotypes of reserve and femininity in order to find a husband; after their marriage, they become mothers and must devote their life to their family by accomplishing a certain number of tasks. An unmarried mature woman cannot perform the only function that society assigns to her and is consequently judged as a failure. That is Minnie's case: in spite of having been, in her youth, more attractive and popular than other girls of her same age, at "thirty-eight or thirty-nine" (Faulkner 1955, 330) she is still unmarried. Since the social pressures she suffers make the idea of a definitive failure unbearable to her, she still needs to think of herself as a woman who is young and beautiful enough to arouse interest in men. This attitude leads her to remain in the first of the two stages previously illustrated. In other words, her "image of her-



self has been arrested at the pre-marital stage" (Volpe 1989, 62-3). That is the reason why she takes so much care of her appearance and asks the daughters of her female friends to call her "cousin" instead of "aunty" (Faulkner 1955, 331).

When Minnie starts to realize her situation, she begins to wear a mask that she exhibits to other people and to herself: "her face began to wear that bright, haggard look. She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes" (331). Nevertheless, in spite of her constant denial of her condition, "Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality" (331). Indeed, in spite of her being detached from reality, Minnie cannot completely overlook her natural ageing, the growth of her little 'cousins', the indifference of the men she comes across in the streets, the pitiful and derisive attitude held by the people surrounding her. The contrast between all these aspects and her image of herself (as well as her consequent behaviour) make her situation so grotesque that she tries to escape it through alcohol. In the end, led by the need to keep her delusions alive, Minnie invents, misunderstands, or imagines having been "scared" by Will Mayes and puts into circulation a rumour that allows her to win the attention she desires at the price of his life.

Will Mayes' destiny does not seem to be a source of worry for Minnie. The night when the murder is committed, she wears a new dress in order to go to the cinema with her girlfriends. The perspective of making her appearance in the main square of the town raises a feverish excitement in her. Such excitement turns into inner exaltation when she realizes that the men in the square welcome her with "suddenly ceased voices, deferent, protective" and even with interest: "the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed". When, in the movie theater, among "turning faces" and "undertones of low astonishments" (336), Minnie sits in front of the screen in motion, her exultation provokes a stimulus to laugh that she tries to stifle. But, in spite of her efforts to restrain herself, the malaise that underlies the violence of her feelings makes her burst into compulsive laughter and screams. This crisis could be the result of a sudden epiphany, arising from the contrast between the flowing of the images on the screen – probably a symbol of Minnie's dreams – and the silhouette of the young couples standing out against it – images of the happy condition she has lost.<sup>3</sup>

3 The connection between Minnie's dreams and the movie screen has been pointed out by several critics. For example, cf. Paul Rogalus (1990), "Faulkner's 'Dry September'"; Arthur L. Ford (1962) "Dust and Dreams. A Study of Faulkner's 'Dry September'"; William B. Bache (1954), "Moral Awareness in 'Dry September'".

There is a clear relation between the image of the cinema and the image of the dust. Minnie's and McLendon's delusions, the artificial constructions through which they manipulate reality, have the same origin. They are the outcome of the main manifestation of the character's alienation from reality: their refusal to accept reality as it is and their will to modify it according to their personal desires as well as their need to satisfy them. What we are not given to know is to what extent this process is conscious.

The instincts of violence harboured by Jefferson's white community do not manifest themselves just in the attitude of tacit complicity held by people towards Will Mayes' murderers. Such instincts also underlie the behaviour of the women surrounding Minnie. Since in the past they have been less popular than her, and since they have learned "the pleasure of [...] retaliation" (Faulkner 1955, 331), the other women tend to underline the negative character of Minnie's condition of unmarried woman and, indirectly, to favor her gradual descent into her personal hell. Moreover, when in reaction to the pressures she suffers Minnie says she had been scared by Will Mayes, her friends pander to her and encourage her to lie even though they doubt the veracity of her words. The women's behaviour clearly demonstrates that the hell described in the short story is not just 'personal'. It has a collective dimension as well. "Dry September"'s hell is the fruit of a long and articulate chain where cruelty and selfishness engender suffering that, in turn, engenders new cruelty, selfishness, and suffering, thereby nourishing a potentially infinite process.

The moon shining above this infernal world is a faraway and ambiguous presence: "Below the east was a rumor of the twice-waxed moon" (332). When its light becomes more intense, it takes the form of a "wan hemorrhage" that is filtered by the dust in the air and gives it a silvery colour, turning the atmosphere into a sort of "bowl of molten lead" (333). Even when the moon rises high in the sky, shedding light on the entire town, its light reaches the planet only through the dust: "The moon was higher, riding high and clear of the dust at last, and after a while the town began to glare beneath the dust" (335). This makes the celestial body appear very far and indifferent, as the closing sentence clearly states: "The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars" (338).

The image of the moon probably alludes to the possible existence of another reality that transcends the suffering, the hate, and the divisions dominating the fallen world described in the story. Still, this reality proves to be totally alien to the characters' lives. Meant as a symbol of love and reunification - both felt to be unreachable ideals - the moon might evoke the figure of Christ, twice fleetingly mentioned in the story. His name resounds in the exclamation "Jees Christ, Jees Christ" (330) whispered by one of the barbers in the beginning of the first section and is again pronounced by an undefined voice in the middle of the third section, the section of the murder: "Christ! - A voice said" (333). Will Mayes is the only



character in the story who is somehow remindful of the figure of Christ, both for his role of a sacrificed innocent and because, as a watchman at an ice plant, he is the only person to escape the oppressive heat of September. Nevertheless, he is the victim of a sacrifice that implies no resurrection or redemption. Indeed he curses his killers: "The others stuck him with random blows [...] and he whirled and cursed them" (334). If any hope is suggested in the story, it probably lies in Hawkshaw's good intentions. Even though ineffective, they express the author's confidence in the possibility of a moral redemption for the human being.

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## A Feeling You Cannot Name Clocks and Time in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*

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**Abstract** This essay is devoted to a thematic comparative analysis of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*. Focusing on the recurring watch motif, the aim is to show the evolvement of a pivotal issue in Southern US literature: the troubled relationship with (social) time and history. The comparison is triggered by some passages in which McCarthy clearly rewrites Faulkner's novel. Quentin Compson, the narrator from the second section of *The Sound and the Fury*, is obsessed with the passing of time – a fixation which is embodied in the watch that his father gave him. Cornelius Suttree shares the same obsession about time and clocks, and, just like Quentin, he is also tormented by an ambiguous relationship with the Southern aristocratic society he is part of. *The Sound and the Fury* and *Suttree* are hence tied together in their critique of the social neuroses of the South through the depiction of a biased sense of time.

**Keywords** Cormac McCarthy. William Faulkner. Time. Southern Gothic.

Oggetto di questo saggio è l'analisi comparata di due opere fondamentali nella letteratura del sud statunitense: *The Sound and the Fury* di William Faulkner e *Suttree* di Cormac McCarthy. La lettura di questi romanzi, pubblicati esattamente a cinquant'anni di distanza l'uno dall'altro, punta a mostrare come i maggiori narratori delle rispettive epoche si siano rapportati a quella che è forse la più grande ossessione di questa regione: il rapporto con il tempo e dunque con la Storia. In particolare, il paragone tra i personaggi di Cornelius Suttree e Quentin Compson, rappresentanti di contesti culturali diversi e sensibilità individuali distinte seppur sostanzialmente assimilabili, mostra efficacemente come la nevrosi tipica della società meridionale riguardo al passato e al suo potere di influenzare il presente si sia evoluta, da Faulkner a McCarthy, in un modo completamente diverso di rapportarsi con la percezione del tempo mediata da quella stessa società.

Quentin Compson e Cornelius Suttree sono costruzioni letterarie figlie di uno stesso intento, tanto che si potrebbe non a torto considerare il secondo come derivazione del primo – una riscrittura rivista e corretta per accogliere il nuovo *setting*, che dalla Cambridge del 1910 si sposta nella

Knoxville degli anni Cinquanta. L'ambientazione urbana è significativa nel caso di McCarthy, essendo *Suttree* l'unico romanzo (a eccezione di *No Country for Old Men*, necessariamente estraneo a questo discorso in quanto parte della produzione western dell'autore) nel quale la città sostituisce il mondo rurale (o comunque, non inurbato) come luogo privilegiato dell'azione. Questa caratteristica, insieme alla scelta di mescolare narrazione in terza persona, discorso indiretto libero e flusso di coscienza, avvicina fortemente il romanzo alla tradizione modernista, anche se la critica ha spesso associato *Suttree* a *Ulysses* piuttosto che al romanzo di Faulkner (cf. Wallach 2011). Cornelius Suttree è senz'altro scosso da inquietudini esistenziali che ne muovono la ricerca d'identità paragonabili a quelle di Stephen Dedalus, ma il senso della sua *restlessness*, lungi dall'essere parte di un ritratto che mira alla definizione di una caratteristica antropologica universalmente applicabile alla modernità com'è nel caso di Joyce, si realizza appieno solamente quando è inquadrato in dinamiche sociali, e soprattutto familiari, più specificamente appartenenti al microcosmo del sud statunitense. Cornelius e Quentin scontano i traumi del patriarcato pseudo-nobiliare che è retaggio storico dell'*Old South* e che si esprime attraverso continue coercizioni psicologiche invalidanti, con effetti tragici nel caso di Compson, la cui nevrosi derivata dall'impossibilità di definirsi al di fuori dei morbosi paradigmi familiari lo porterà, com'è noto, al suicidio.

L'idea che Quentin Compson abbia funzionato come modello per Cornelius Suttree è già stata suggerita da alcuni critici. Georg Guillemin in *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, ha scritto di come, nel suo interrogare il senso della vita e nella presenza ossessiva di immagini di morte, il romanzo di McCarthy rispecchi piuttosto fedelmente la seconda sezione di *The Sound and the Fury* (Guillemin 2004, 52), sottolineando anche le innegabili somiglianze dei due protagonisti: entrambi hanno origini borghesi, un'educazione di alto livello, sono tormentati dai fantasmi delle rispettive storie familiari e, aggiungerei, mostrano una certa tendenza all'analicità e a un'ossessiva rielaborazione intellettualistica della vita che sfocia spesso nell'involutione piuttosto che nella rivelazione. I contatti tra i due non si limitano però a una superficiale somiglianza. Come già notato da Thomas D. Young Jr., McCarthy inserisce nella narrazione i temi e i motivi che accompagnano il personaggio di Faulkner nel suo ultimo giorno, dando vita ad alcune palesi riscritture del capitolo dedicato a Quentin (Young 1999, 103). In particolare, Young nota come McCarthy riproponga l'immagine faulkneriana della vetrina di un orologiaio, momento di confronto fondamentale tra i due romanzi che merita di essere discusso più nel dettaglio. Attraverso la ripresa dell'ossessione di Quentin Compson per gli orologi, veicolo di una più ampia nevrosi generata dalle dinamiche di una società vinta dalla Storia, moribonda e incapace di affrontare la propria decadenza, McCarthy riprende il discorso laddove Faulkner lo aveva abbandonato con il salto suicida del suo protagonista nel Charles River, mostrando come

cinquant'anni dopo il Sud si rapporti ancora, seppur in modi e con esiti diversi, con gli stessi fantasmi.

È facile notare come *Suttree* si situi su una linea di continuità rispetto a *The Sound and the Fury*: lo stile e i temi di Faulkner sono stati senza dubbio l'influenza maggiore per McCarthy durante la stesura ventennale del romanzo.<sup>1</sup> Somiglianze strutturali a parte, *Suttree* mostra sin dalle battute d'apertura dei sottili quanto solidi richiami alla figura di Quentin Compson, e la somiglianza tra i due non può essere limitata, come sembra aver fatto finora la critica, al superficiale, inevitabile richiamo di un illustre antecedente da parte di uno scrittore non ancora affermato, nell'intento di rendere più complessa la propria opera disseminandola di momenti intertestuali. Cornelius Suttree, figlio rinnegato di quella che si intuisce essere una rispettabile famiglia del luogo, ritiratosi in esilio volontario come pescatore in una baracca galleggiante sul fiume Tennessee, assiste al recupero del corpo di un suicida gettatosi da un ponte poco distante, «above the boathouses» (Faulkner 1990, 90), esattamente come il Quentin di Faulkner. Questo elemento, di per sé insufficiente a legittimare un paragone, è rafforzato da un dettaglio - inserito da McCarthy nel passaggio - che è impossibile considerare casuale, e che richiama immediatamente alla memoria le elucubrazioni dei Compson in materia di tempo. Nel presentare il suicida, infatti, l'autore scrive: «He wore his watch on the inside of his wrist as some folks do or used to do and as Suttree passed he noticed with a feeling he could not name that the dead man's watch was still running» (McCarthy 1992, 10; corsivo aggiunto). Accostare un orologio funzionante a un uomo morto suona come un ironico commento alla famosa osservazione di Jason Compson Sr. che affiora alla coscienza del figlio in contemplazione della vetrina del gioielliere: «Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life» (Faulkner 1990, 85).

La cinica attitudine mostrata da Compson Senior nei confronti del tempo è figlia della volontà tutta sudista di negare la Storia: le sue parole sono una condanna del *calcolo* del tempo, ovvero della sua sistematizzazione cronologica, e dunque, più che a un'interrogazione filosofica, fanno pensare a un attacco alla dimensione sociale implicita nell'organizzazione del tempo. A conferma e corollario della precedente affermazione, si ricordi la nota raccomandazione che accompagna il dono dell'orologio a Quentin: «I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire. [...] I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it» (76).

1 Cf. <http://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/a-z/mccarthypapers.html> (2016-03-28).

Possedere il tempo, nella filosofia dei Compson, vuol dire perdere traccia del suo scorrere e situarsi in una condizione non dialettica e non storicista nella quale (parafrasando le parole del patriarca) nessuna battaglia è vinta perché non è nemmeno combattuta, e la vittoria altro non è che un'illusione. L'interpretazione di questa filosofia pone di fronte a due opposti paradossi: la progressione del tempo morto e l'immobilità del tempo vivo. Ha ragione quindi Jean-Paul Sartre quando definisce la rappresentazione del tempo in Faulkner una «vitesse glacée» (Sartre 1947, 67), un'immagine funzionale nell'illustrare l'idea anti-intuitiva di una forza viva ma immobile, obbiettivo della ricerca tanto dei Compson che di Suttree. Un tempo senza progressione che non sia un non-tempo quanto piuttosto un tempo astorico, «sans horloge», sempre nelle parole di Sartre (66).

Si tratta, in definitiva, del tempo mitico e circolare delle rappresentazioni pastorali, la cui funzione è essenzialmente quella di esistere come spazio mentale di fuga dalla Storia, e in particolare del suo portato sociale e culturale. È questo il cronòtopo che definisce la scrittura del *Dixie*, e la dedizione di Faulkner e McCarthy alla loro terra implica in prima battuta l'aderenza o meno a questo genere. A scanso di equivoci è necessario precisare come il termine 'pastorale' non sia qui da intendersi nell'accezione classica di genere d'ispirazione arcadica dedicato ad amene rappresentazioni di paesaggi e società agricole o generalmente premoderne, ma in senso più ampio – e in forza di quanto scritto in precedenza – come veicolo di una particolare attitudine nei confronti della società e della Storia. La pastorale del Sud, infatti, soprattutto in seguito alla sconfitta dei confederati nella guerra civile e al successivo collasso dell'economia schiavile e quindi delle strutture sociali che attorno a quell'economia si erano consolidate, è andata sempre più identificandosi con la definizione di uno spazio mitico esistente al di fuori delle dinamiche storiche, non influenzato dallo scorrere del tempo. Questo luogo mentale separato dal flusso degli eventi è generato da quello che John Grammer ha definito «the [southern] gnostic will to deny History» (1999, 35), uno sguardo retrospettivo sulla vita che porta inevitabilmente con sé un'insopportabile nostalgia di tempi migliori, tanto più aurei quanto più stridente è il contrasto con il presente.<sup>2</sup> Per contro, la volontà di negare la Storia denota in fondo la necessità e la parallela impossibilità dell'individuo

2 La definizione di uno spazio pastorale tipico degli Stati Uniti del sud deriva, oltre che dal fondamentale studio di Bachtin sul cronòtopo, da un'ampia serie di saggi più o meno dedicati alla letteratura e alla cultura di quest'area. Avendo citato Sartre, si potrebbe menzionare, sempre in ambito esistenzialista, l'interpretazione del mito di Sisifo data da Camus (1947), in cui la circolarità offre un antidoto all'insensatezza dell'esistenza. La discussione sulla pastorale americana non può poi prescindere dallo studio di Leo Marx (2000), *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Specificamente dedicati alla pastorale nell'accezione qui descritta, sono inoltre il saggio seminale di W.J. Cash (1991), *The Mind of the South*, quello di Lewis P. Simpson (1983), *The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature*, e lo studio di Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan (1980), *The*

di definirsi al di fuori delle strutture sociali e culturali che sono responsabili della scrittura di quella stessa storia. A riprova di ciò, l'escapismo collegato alla pastorale non di rado è portato alle sue estreme conseguenze: la fuga dalla Storia diviene evasione in un passato remoto che vira decisamente nell'ambito del primitivismo. Proprio in quest'accezione esasperata, l'idea è stata sfruttata tanto da McCarthy (ad esempio con *Child of God*) quanto da Faulkner (*The Bear* su tutti). Non è necessario però spostare l'attenzione su questo particolare tipo di rappresentazione pastorale per rendersi conto di come il tempo e la Storia siano, nei mondi creati da questi scrittori, fonte di nevrosi, entità prevalentemente distruttive. Al contrario, proprio focalizzando l'attenzione sui personaggi che nel flusso della storia sono più radicati, si può ottenere un quadro più nitido del rapporto dell'uomo del Sud con il tempo così come è presentato da Faulkner e McCarthy. Non Ike McCaslin, quindi, ma Quentin Compson è la rappresentazione più lucida di questa dialettica e, nel caso di McCarthy, non Lester Ballard nascosto dal mondo nelle caverne degli Appalachi, ma Cornelius Suttree, tormentato *flâneur* dei bassifondi di Knoxville.

I tentativi di Quentin, volti alla distruzione simbolica del tempo storico e sociale incarnato dall'orologio che i Compson si consegnano di padre in figlio come una maledizione, trovano una chiosa nell'episodio narrato da McCarthy, che accostando un orologio ticchettante a un cadavere, ne mostra l'intrinseca futilità. La volontà di riportare il tempo in vita, di (ri)appropriarsene strappandolo alle convenzioni che lo controllano è, in definitiva, nient'altro che un'illusione. L'orologio dei Compson continua a ticchettare anche dopo essere stato danneggiato, le lancette strappate; e continua il suo ticchettio anche trasfigurato nell'orologio dell'anonimo suicida di *Suttree*, riunendo questa morte e quella di Quentin. Il tempo morto dell'orologio sopravvive all'uomo, che diviene vittima impotente di un ordine fuori dal quale non c'è apparentemente possibilità di esistenza. Il «sentimento innominabile» che invade Suttree alla vista del suicida è riconducibile con tutta probabilità proprio all'amara, ironica consapevolezza dell'impossibilità di sottrarsi a quest'ordine artificiale e pervasivo anche nell'eliminazione della propria coscienza, come sottolineano in maniera beffarda le lancette che continuano a segnare l'ora anche per chi ha ormai volontariamente posto fine al proprio tempo, abbandonandolo invece di farsene padrone, liberandosi con un gesto estremo da una prigionia che pare altrimenti inevitabile.

*Dream of Arcady. Place and Time in Southern Literature.* John Grammer, citato in precedenza, offre un'analisi accurata di questo tema in *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (1996). Infine, le considerazioni di Paul Ricœur (1988) sulla persistenza del passato in relazione al presente e all'atto narrativo, contenute nel capitolo «La realtà del passato storico» del terzo volume di *Tempo e racconto*, ben si adattano allo «sguardo retrospettivo» della società del Sud così come descritta da Faulkner e McCarthy.

La vanità della società bianca del Sud, convinta di poter negare la Storia e puntualmente inghiottita da essa, è ulteriormente sottolineata in *The Sound and the Fury* dal fatto che l'unico personaggio apparentemente in possesso di un certo controllo su quello che ho definito tempo morto (o tempo misurato) non appartiene alla dinastia dei Compson, ma è la serva nera Dilsey. L'ultima sezione del romanzo, quella che Faulkner definiva espressione del 'narratore' (cf. Gwynn, Blotner 1995), è scandita infatti da un orologio da tavolo che non è stato regolato correttamente: «a cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times. 'Eight oclock', Dilsey said» (Faulkner 1990, 274). L'atteggiamento di Quentin, che cerca in ogni modo di perdere traccia dello scorrere dei minuti, è diametralmente opposto rispetto a quello della vecchia serva che, spostando su di sé la responsabilità di determinare l'ora, riesce laddove Quentin fallisce. Dilsey è il tempo vivo strappato alle «little wheels» che ne uccidono l'essenza: ne padroneggia la scansione al punto da correggere l'orologio senza curarsi di spostare le lancette sull'ora esatta. L'orologio, in quanto possesso dei Compson, ed essendo regolarmente in errore (significativamente, in ritardo rispetto al giusto), è il simbolo dell'impossibilità della famiglia di vivere di un tempo che non sia fuori sesto e incarnazione della condanna del passato. Solo un personaggio che, pur orbitando attorno alla famiglia, è sostanzialmente estraneo alle dinamiche perverse instauratesi tra i suoi membri come Dilsey è in grado di 'aggiornare' il tempo segnato; il resto dei Compson, come le loro storie dimostrano, è vittima dell'impossibilità di slegare il presente da ciò che è stato, e di esistere dunque in un tempo vivo piuttosto che ri-vivere continuamente il passato. Significativa è in questo senso l'appendice che raccoglie la genealogia dei Compson aggiunta da Faulkner al termine di *The Sound and the Fury*, nella quale, sotto il nome di Dilsey, si legge semplicemente «They endured» (1990, 343), lapidaria considerazione dell'autore sulla capacità della donna e della sua stirpe di sopravvivere alla 'maledizione'.

I traumi sociali e familiari dai quali deriva la malattia del tempo di Quentin si ripropongono sostanzialmente immutati in Cornelius Sutter, anch'egli indubbiamente segnato sin dal principio della sua esistenza dall'appartenenza a una 'nobile' dinastia del Sud. I Compson e i Sutter sono uniti nella negazione della vita che risiede appena al di fuori dei confini disegnati dalle strutture intricate e coercitive della famiglia meridionale. «If it is life you feel you are missing», scrive Sutter Senior al figlio che gli rifiuta ormai qualsiasi contatto, «I can tell you where to find it. In the law courts, in business, in government» (McCarthy 1992, 13-4). L'affermazione è paradossale proprio perché vorrebbe reindirizzare Sutter all'interno della stessa dimensione che è colpevole (seguendo anche il ragionamento di Jason Compson III) di aver sottratto alla vita la sua essenza. L'ipocondria di Sutter nei confronti del tempo viene racchiusa



da McCarthy in una scena completamente calata nell'atmosfera di nobile decadenza che avvolge il protagonista sin dall'infanzia. In compagnia di un anziano parente la cui propensione all'oratoria pomposa ricorda ancora una volta le vuote elucubrazioni di Compson Senior, il giovane Suttree assiste al cronometraccio delle prestazioni di un cavallo da corsa: «the aging magistrate snapped his thumb from the keep of the stopwatch he had and [...] said anent that simple comparison of rotary motions and in the oratory to which he was prone that they had witness *a thing against which time will not prevail*» (136; corsivo aggiunto). È significativo che il ricordo riaffiori alla memoria di Suttree mentre, ubriaco, si aggira tra le stanze della vecchia tenuta di famiglia ormai in rovina. Benché l'uomo intenda in realtà sottolineare il risultato memorabile dell'animale, la sua affermazione scatena nel bambino una morbosa riflessione sullo scorrere del tempo e sull'inevitabilità della morte che, presentati nella cornice decadente della villa, tipica *southern mansion* simbolo della pseudonobiltà terriera del Sud, va ben oltre le malinconie individuali per diventare malattia di un'intera classe sociale.

L'inserimento di questa *rêverie* dedicata a qualcosa su cui il tempo non avrebbe potere costruisce infatti uno scenario antitetico rispetto alla casa in rovina, il cui stato miserando (descritto da McCarthy con vivida ferocia iconoclasta) rende l'abitazione il simbolo iperbolicamente degradato della società dalla quale Cornelius Suttree è fuggito nella speranza di riconciliarsi con la vita. L'uomo si muove tra le stanze dai muri scrostati e insudiciate da escrementi umani per fermarsi a osservare il traffico cittadino in lontananza attraverso una finestra, «locked in another age of which some dread vision had afforded him this lonely cognizance» (135). Misurate sulle rovine della villa, le parole del vecchio magistrato trovano un'amara confessione: il segno materiale del passaggio della dinastia dei Suttree mostra tutti gli effetti del logorio impietoso del tempo. Com'è per l'«Old Compson place» faulkneriano, trasformato in una *boardinghouse* e infine venduto da Jason IV, il luogo dell'infanzia di Suttree, privato dell'aura d'incorruttibilità, diviene al contrario il simbolo concreto della decadenza inarrestabile di un sistema di valori sconfitto proprio dalla propria presunzione d'immortalità. La posizione del protagonista di McCarthy, «chiuso dentro un'altra epoca», sottolinea la volontà del Sud di negare la Storia e di accettarne il progresso inevitabile ponendosi al di fuori di essa, negli spazi astorici propri della rappresentazione pastorale. Il contrasto tra vita e meccanica, tra tempo morto e tempo vivo delineato da Compson Senior, è riproposto da McCarthy, che scrive: «The clock has run, the horse has run, and which has measured which?» (136). L'interrogativo, espressione delle riflessioni del protagonista, è ancora una volta epitome di una coscienza irrimediabilmente divisa tra due distinte incarnazioni del tempo: da un lato il cronometro, dall'altro un essere vivente. Com'è nell'esempio di Dilsey, esistere all'interno di una dimensione cronologica

artefatta, definita attraverso le scansioni dettate dalle strutture sociali, vuol dire subire il trascorrere del tempo e, in definitiva, soccombervi: i due giovani sono intrappolati in una dimensione di morte che non riescono ad abbandonare nonostante gli sforzi, e alla quale al contrario ritornano con opprimente regolarità

Il fatto che la società di cui Suttree e Quentin sono gli ultimi rappresentanti esista (o pretenda di esistere) in uno spazio altro, parallelo al mondo esterno, è efficacemente sottolineata da McCarthy nel momento in cui il suo protagonista lascia la proprietà per ritornare in città. Descrivendo Suttree che abbandona il rudere della sua infanzia, McCarthy inserisce infatti un dettaglio di vitale importanza. L'autore scrive:

Suttree went out through the kitchen and through the ruined garden to the old road. [...] Old paint on an old sign said dimly to keep out. Someone must have turned it around because it posted the outer world. He went on anyway. He said that he was only passing through. (1992, 136)

Il cartello sul limitare della proprietà, significativamente, ammonisce a non oltrepassare i confini verso il mondo esterno, racchiudendo la casa in uno spazio separato rispetto a quest'ultimo. L'avvertimento sottolinea di nuovo la considerazione precedente secondo la quale Suttree si troverebbe imprigionato in un'altra dimensione, aumentando ulteriormente la distanza tra la proprietà dei Suttree e il resto della città di Knoxville (e, per estensione, il mondo intero) con l'imposizione di una frontiera. Nell'attraversare questo confine, Suttree dice a sé stesso di essere solo di passaggio, come scusandosi per l'effrazione. Seguendo la logica spaziale instaurata dal cartello, il protagonista si considera dunque di passaggio nel mondo esterno, palesando la sua appartenenza a una dimensione in effetti separata dal resto, ovvero quella dei ricchi possidenti (bianchi) del Sud. Nell'ubriachezza, Suttree partorisce forse il più lucido dei suoi pensieri: è il mondo nel quale è fuggito ad essergli estraneo, e la sua appartenenza al mondo che vorrebbe invece lasciarsi alle spalle non può essere cancellata, ma solo ignorata.

L'esistenza dell'alta società bianca su un piano diverso, o per lo meno la pretesa di esistervi, è chiaramente suggerita tra le righe di questo passaggio dai toni elegiaci. Si ripropone ancora una volta la grande ossessione del Sud, il desiderio di ritirarsi in un luogo che non sia influenzato dallo scorrere del tempo; o meglio che, situandosi nelle pieghe di un passato che perde progressivamente di connotati realistici per acquistare i toni soffusi del mito, viva proprio del tempo circolare e infinitamente uguale a se stesso che del mito è caratteristico.

La conclusione dell'analisi dei rapporti dei due personaggi con il tempo e la società è da ritrovarsi, infine, nella già citata scena della vetrina dell'orologiaio, individuato dalla critica come il momento in cui McCarthy si avvi-

cina di più a quella che sembra una diretta citazione di Faulkner. Proprio il paragone di questi due momenti fondamentali nelle storie dei protagonisti esemplifica la diversa risposta che Faulkner e McCarthy danno al dilemma madre della mente del Sud, mostrando per estensione la direzione verso cui muove, nella generazione successiva a quella della *Southern Renaissance*, la letteratura di quest'area. Com'è noto, l'ultima giornata di Quentin Compson comprende, tra le varie tappe, quella fondamentale presso il negozio di un gioielliere, al quale il giovane vorrebbe in un primo momento affidare l'orologio che egli stesso ha volontariamente danneggiato al risveglio. Com'è lecito aspettarsi da una coscienza nevrotica come quella di Quentin, il luogo non fa che acuirne l'ipocondria, divenendo una sorta di tempio per tutto ciò che il giovane tenta di fuggire. È ormai superfluo sottolineare come l'orologio, in quanto oggetto ipersemiotizzato, luogo d'incontro tanto delle storie familiari dei Compson quanto della storia dell'intera società bianca del Sud, è fonte di angoscia per Quentin non solo perché, continuando a ticchettare nonostante il danno ricevuto, è un monotono *memento mori* per un individuo che sa di non avere più molto tempo davanti a sé, ma soprattutto perché racchiude tra gli ingranaggi il motivo per il quale il ragazzo ha deciso di porre fine alla sua breve e tormentata esistenza - fatto sottolineato da Quentin stesso quando, pensando all'orologio donatogli dal padre, lo descrive: «Holding all I used to be sorry about like the new moon holding water» (Faulkner 1990, 85).

Pur nella volontà di non conoscere l'ora, e quindi di non reinserirsi nel tempo scandito vivendo liberamente le ultime ore che gli restano, il giovane Compson si trova suo malgrado intrappolato in una dimensione dove il tempo morto degli orologi si moltiplica apparentemente all'infinito mostrando la sua intrinseca fallacia e artificiosità, giacché nessuno dei suddetti orologi segna l'ora esatta. È questo il momento in cui Quentin sembra essere più consapevole della relatività del tempo sociale e dell'inevitabile sottotesto psicologico che questo porta con sé:

There were about a dozen watches in the window, a dozen different hours and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance that mine had, without any hands at all. Contradicting one another. I could hear mine, ticking away inside my pocket, even though nobody could see it, even though it could tell nothing if anyone could. (Faulkner 1990, 85)

Nella vetrina dell'orologiaio il tempo, disperso in una miriade di frammenti che si contraddicono l'un l'altro palesando la futilità delle misurazioni, subisce un martirio che avrebbe senza dubbio causato un tracollo nervoso a Jason Compson III. Qui, l'attitudine tramandata di padre in figlio viene sottoposta alla più grande irrisione possibile perché, se è vero che apparentemente il relativismo esasperato posto in vetrina potrebbe funzionare da antidoto liberatorio alle malinconie dei Compson, è indubbio

che la moltiplicazione della *reductio ad absurdum* dell'esperienza umana non possa che avere l'effetto opposto sull'ambiguo sistema filosofico e sulla mente fragile di Quentin. Nonostante queste considerazioni, infatti, è chiaro come il ragazzo non riesca, in definitiva, a slegarsi in nessun modo dalle proprie morbide elucubrazioni, delle quali cadrà vittima di lì a poco.

Il fatto che questa scena si ripresenti, trasfigurata in un delirio febbricitante, anche in *Suttree*, la rende particolarmente degna di nota e ne fa il momento fondamentale di confronto tra le due opere. Ridotto in fin di vita da una febbre tifoide, Suttree è immobilizzato in un letto d'ospedale, preda di violente allucinazioni provocate dalla morfina. In una di queste, McCarthy lo descrive mentre sogna di essere:

Along a wet street, a freshened wind with spite of rain in it. [...] Clockshop. A fourlegged clock in a glass bell, a pending treblehook baited with gold balls revolving slowly. Coming to rest. The clock hands too. He looked at his face in the glass. On the wall beyond other clocks are stopping. Me? The shop is closed. A thought to ask. He will not ask, however. Clocks need winding and people to wind them. (McCarthy 1992, 453-4)

Nel delirio di Suttree, le profezie di Compson Senior vengono ad avverarsi. Il tempo è infine slegato dalla sua dimensione meccanica: gli orologi si fermano, riportandolo in vita. Il personaggio di McCarthy, contrariamente a Quentin, evita persino di «chiedere»,<sup>3</sup> riportando alla giusta dimensione il rapporto tra l'uomo e gli ingranaggi. I secondi necessitano del primo e non viceversa: la sudditanza umana nei confronti del tempo è rovesciata. L'esperienza pre-morte di Suttree diventa ancora più significativa quando la si paragona a un altro dei momenti nei quali la morte fa la sua comparsa nel testo. Ripensando agli ultimi istanti di vita del nonno (con tutta probabilità lo stesso uomo con il cronometro citato in precedenza), Cornelius ricorda come «The old tin clock on Grandfather's table hammered like a foundry» (13), ponendo in parallelo questa morte con quella dell'anonimo suicida dall'orologio ancora funzionante e, ovviamente, con quella di Quentin Compson, che non solo lascia dietro di sé, chiuso nel cassetto di Shreve, l'orologio del padre (e del nonno) con il suo insopportabile peso simbolico ed emotivo, ma si avvia verso il suo destino sull'ultimo rintocco del campanile («The last note sounded», Faulkner 1992, 78).

Superata la malattia, Suttree sarà in effetti un uomo cambiato, e riuscirà a lasciarsi completamente alle spalle il passato abbandonando Knoxville probabilmente per sempre. Se, come accennato in precedenza, sfuggire

3 A chi Suttree si rifiuta di chiedere? È forse leggibile in quell'affermazione il superamento delle ossessioni del protagonista faulkneriano che, pur temendo la risposta, non può evitare di chiedere al gioielliere se qualcuno degli orologi in vetrina stia in effetti misurando correttamente le sue ultime ore?

al tempo in questo particolare contesto vuol dire essenzialmente rompere i legami instaurati dal patriarcato sudista, ancora una volta è il romanzo di McCarthy a mostrare una via d'uscita. In Faulkner, le ultime azioni di Quentin sono dedicate al ristabilimento di un futile decoro in preparazione del salto, accompagnate dal fantasma di una conversazione avuta con il padre riguardo allo scandalo provocato dalla sorella Caddie e alla sua decisione di sfidare Dalton Ames a duello. Notevolissimo, in questo scambio, è il brusco passaggio dal pronome di prima persona singolare maiuscolo («I») che Quentin utilizza pensando a sé, al minuscolo («i») durante il confronto con il padre (cf. McHaney 2008). Con quest'espediente tipografico Faulkner suggerisce l'evirazione simbolica del giovane a seguito dell'insuccesso nel vendicare l'onore della sorella, e soprattutto dell'opprimente presenza paterna nella definizione dell'io del protagonista, che è privato di una personalità autonoma, dissolta all'interno dei perversi legami familiari dei Compson e nell'ignavia che li caratterizza. Il finale dedicato a Quentin è tutto sotto il segno dell'assenza di individualismo, dell'impossibilità di trovare una dimensione sana nella quale esprimere sé stesso. L'ambiguità del giovane è espressa in questo passaggio in tutta la sua forza distruttiva, mostrando la furia impotente che ne anima i comportamenti e che lascerà traccia memorabile nella chiusura di *Absalom, Absalom!*, dove Quentin, a seguito della domanda di Shreve sul perché odi il Sud, risponde con il grido strozzato di «I don't. I don't. I don't hate it! I don't hate it!» (Faulkner 2002, 388).

Sarà invece destino di Suttree sopravvivere alla tormentata storia familiare e proseguire altrove la sua storia personale, slegata dagli strascichi della vita passata. Di ritorno dall'ospedale, guarito e deciso ad abbandonare Knoxville, Suttree torna alla sua casa galleggiante per trovare la porta forzata e un senzatetto, morto da settimane, disteso nel suo letto. La macabra scoperta coincide con l'arrivo della sorellastra di Gene Harrogate, «the city mouse», un ragazzino spiantato e non troppo sveglio (a tutti gli effetti il *comic relief* del romanzo) di cui Suttree si è occupato più volte durante la sua permanenza lungo il Tennessee. La donna è lì per chiedere notizie del ragazzo, che non sa essere finito in prigione per una serie di piccoli furti e nonostante i continui avvertimenti del tutore putativo. Il breve scambio di battute, posto in apertura di finale, funziona come una rappacificazione di Suttree con la dimensione familiare da lui continuamente rifuggita. Infatti, oltre a mantenere dei rapporti fortemente conflittuali con la propria dinastia (e probabilmente proprio a seguito di questi), Suttree aveva precedentemente abbandonato moglie e figlio, stabilendosi nei bassifondi di Knoxville in ripudio totale della posizione altolocata cui era destinato per diritto di nascita. Il nucleo familiare non si ricongiungerà mai più a causa della prematura morte del bambino, notizia che giungerà indirettamente al protagonista e lo spingerà a incontrare nuovamente la moglie dopo quelli che si suppongono essere anni di silenzio. Violentemente rifiutato dalla

famiglia della sposa il giorno del funerale, Suttree è costretto a osservare la funzione da una posizione ritirata, riempiendo egli stesso la fossa una volta che tutti i partecipanti se ne sono andati. La sepoltura del figlio coincide con una violenta acquisizione di coscienza da parte del protagonista riguardo agli effetti deleteri del patriarcato sudista. Proprio nel tentativo di svincolarsene, infatti, Suttree aveva abdicato al ruolo (potenzialmente sano) di padre, causando la rovina della sua famiglia. Solo in questo momento il personaggio sembra realizzare la vanità del suo gesto (posto sulla stessa linea di continuità distruttiva e caratterizzato dalla stessa sterilità del suicidio di Quentin Compson), ponendo un interrogativo senza risposta alla bara semisepolta che è, come nel caso di Quentin, l'espressione di un'irrimediabile crisi d'identità: «who is this fool kneeling over your bones, choked with bitterness?» (McCarthy 1992, 154). Il risanamento di questa ferita avviene proprio al termine del romanzo, con l'investitura simbolica a padre di Harrogate da parte della sorella di questi. «Gene's a good boy» (466), afferma Suttree con toni inequivocabilmente paterni, supplendo alla sua passata e fallita esperienza da genitore con una sorta di transfert sul «city mouse».

A questo punto la liberazione di Suttree è quasi completa. La sua ultima passeggiata per il ghetto di McAnally Flats è un progressivo spogliarsi di tutto ciò che è stato, ovvero l'abbandono delle definizioni imposte dalle strutture familiari, che questa volta non mietono l'ennesima vittima com'è nel caso di Faulkner, ma vengono finalmente accantonate nella costruzione di un'identità che, muovendo verso una dimensione più ampia, lascia i confini soffocanti del Sud per esprimersi altrove. Scrive McCarthy: «Walking down the little street for the last time he felt everything fall away from him. Until there was nothing left of him to shed. It was all gone. No trail, no track» (1992, 468). La recisione definitiva avverrà di lì a poco. Parallela all'abbandono di Knoxville, infatti, è la scoperta da parte delle autorità del cadavere nella baracca galleggiante, alla quale assistono tre anonimi vicini, parte anche loro del colorito e degradato microcosmo di McAnally Flats. Tutto lascia pensare che il corpo sia proprio quello di Suttree, tant'è che i tre giovani rispondono evasivamente alle domande dei paramedici, probabilmente coscienti dei passati e ripetuti guai del protagonista con la legge. In questo scambio è possibile leggere la morte simbolica del Suttree rappresentante del Sud, l'abbandono definitivo dell'ambiente che, direttamente o indirettamente, ne aveva diretto le azioni fino a quel momento. Per quel che concerne la società, le sue genealogie e i suoi schemi, Cornelius Suttree è ormai ufficialmente deceduto. Morte simbolica cui fa però seguito l'effettiva rigenerazione del personaggio, del resto presagita anche da uno degli astanti che, nell'osservare l'ambulanza allontanarsi esclama: «Shit [...]. Old Suttree ain't dead» (470), avvicinandosi alla realtà più di quanto possa sapere.

I fantasmi del passato e l'impossibilità di vivere il presente che Faulkner associava all'alta società bianca del Sud vengono infine accantonati in

McCarthy. Faticosamente, c'è da dire, tant'è che *Suttree* potrebbe efficacemente essere letto nella sua interezza come lungo percorso di 'purificazione' dai mali dell'uomo meridionale, un romanzo di formazione al contrario, nel quale il protagonista disimpara le norme che ne avevano fino a quel punto definito l'identità. L'eredità del Sud era a tutti gli effetti in azione nella psiche di Suttree, la cui vita, vissuta fino all'addio al negativo di quell'eredità, ne mostrava forse ancora più violentemente il portato deleterio. Nel passaggio da *The Sound and the Fury* a *Suttree* si assiste in sostanza al superamento della condizione paralizzante nella quale la mente del Sud è venuta a trovarsi a seguito del rifiuto di concepirsi all'interno di una progressione storica. Cosciente o incosciente che sia, il ritrarsi nella dimensione storica che ho definito 'pastorale' in virtù della qualità mitica che questo spazio offre, è innegabilmente alla base delle nevrosi invalidanti che agiscono tanto su Quentin Compson quanto su Cornelius Suttree, e che a loro giungono come non desiderata eredità di una classe sociale vinta dagli eventi, che preferisce volgere lo sguardo altrove piuttosto che ripensarsi e ricostruirsi. Il discorso sull'imprigionamento della mente del Sud nel passato è ovviamente più complesso, e sarebbe una leggerezza imperdonabile restringerlo alla semplice (e capricciosa) volontà di non accettare l'esito degli eventi, ma ai fini di questa analisi è sufficiente accettare tale attitudine come irrimediabilmente incorporata nella visione del mondo che è espressione di questa regione. Ha ragione dunque Matthew Guinn quando, nell'introduzione a *After Southern Modernism*, scrive: «The Southern Renaissance always contained a thread of 'melancholy in even its most powerful artistic moments» (2000, xix), individuando il sentimento dominante del Sud, frutto per l'appunto di una psiche collettiva irrimediabilmente proiettata all'indietro, inguaribile nelle sue derive elegiache. «[N]othing is even worth the changing of it» (Faulkner 1990, 78), è l'insegnamento deviato di Jason Compson Senior al giovane Quentin, affermazione che mostra come tale malattia dello spirito sopravviva e si rafforzi attraverso le generazioni grazie al complesso iper-formalizzato dell'organizzazione sociale delle classi agiate (o presunte tali) figlie della storia di sconfitta del *Dixieland*.

Sempre Guinn, paragonando la stagione del tardo modernismo a quella post-modernista, della quale Cormac McCarthy è indubbiamente l'autore più compiuto e rappresentativo, descrive quest'ultima «probing and interrogating the cultural adhesives of the contemporary South» (2000, xx), esplicitando l'azione di ripensamento delle costruzioni culturali dell'*Old South* che trovano un esempio illuminante nell'operazione che McCarthy fa con *Suttree*. Che il romanzo funzioni da critica e rielaborazione dell'eredità culturale del Sud risulta chiaro anche dal fatto che, dopo questo lavoro, l'autore sposterà la sua produzione al Sud Ovest, tornando nei luoghi della sua formazione solo con l'ultimo romanzo pubblicato, *The Road*, opera che comunque non instaura, al contrario di *Suttree*, un dialogo tanto serrato



e mirato verso l'insieme dei tratti che compongono la cultura del Sud. La conclusione di questo saggio è affidata alle ultime righe del romanzo di McCarthy, nelle quali l'autore parla in prima persona per ammonire direttamente i lettori, concretizzando nell'allegoria di un cacciatore e i suoi mastini instancabili i pericoli insiti nell'accettare un portato culturale che, nell'impossibilità di guardare al futuro, condanna a morte chi, al contrario di Suttree (e come Quentin), non riesca a liberarsene:

Somewhere in the gray wood by the river is the huntsman and in the brooming corn and in the castellated press of cities. His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them. (1992, 471)

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## Civilization and its Failures in the Unpublished and Lesser-known Twain

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**Abstract** Critics of Mark Twain are well acquainted with what have been referred to in various instances as the author's ambivalent, contradictory or dialectic attitudes. It is in Twain's approach towards science, technology and the concept of progress itself that this ambivalence is particularly evident. These themes underlie some of Twain's most famous novels such as *The Gilded Age* (1873), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889); however, it is in a series of lesser-known and unpublished sketches, short stories and novels that we find more explicit and creative examinations of the mixed blessings and failures of progress. This paper will analyze a selection of texts that include "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1867), "Sold to Satan" (1904) and Twain's original manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger*, with the objective of garnering a more precise perspective on the author's varying attitudes towards progress which have often been inserted into comfortable linear schemes based on biographical interpretation rather than textual data. Moreover, we will go beyond the convenience of simply presenting Twain's ambiguity in an attempt to understand the actual point the author is making or at least to explain what lies behind his lack of partisanship in the specific cases of these texts.

**Summary** 1. The Paige Typesetter/Conversion Narrative. – 2 Defining Progress and Civilization. – 3 Imperial Concerns. – 4 Satan as Dialectical Adversary in *The Mysterious Stranger*. – 5 The Enlightenment and Positivism in "The Secret History of Eddypus" and "Sold to Satan". – 6 Social Progress in "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn". – 7 Civilized Savages on the Railroad. – 8 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Mark Twain. Progress and civilization. Imperialism. Technology and science.

### 1 The Paige Typesetter/Conversion Narrative

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is, perhaps, the work in which Mark Twain offers his most in depth analysis of the themes of progress and civilization. Since it was first published, it has also been one of the texts that has produced the most divisive interpretations regarding its literary merits and its overall message. Within Twain's literary production it is often characterized as a watershed novel that divides a more creative and humorous period from an abortive, bitter and existentially pessimistic one. One of the most influential and highly biographical analyses of Twain's works in this sense is that offered by Bernard DeVoto in *Mark Twain at Work* (1942, 105-30). DeVoto characterizes the period

leading up to and immediately after the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee* as the beginning of Twain's disillusioned phase and ascribes Twain's transition from "incarnation of Southwest humor" (Cox 1966, 223) to "Mad Prophet" (DeVoto 2004, 61) to a series of personal and economic misfortunes; among these, Twain's failed investment in the infamous Paige typesetting machine has been given a central role in past criticism, particularly with regard to *A Connecticut Yankee*. Henry Nash Smith, in his seminal work *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964), also seems to adhere to the notion that these personal and economic hardships begin to heavily influence Twain's views on capitalism, technology, progress and civilization. Smith uses what we will refer to as the 'Paige typesetter narrative' or 'conversion narrative' to partially explain Twain's supposed difficulties in formulating a coherent celebration (or denunciation) of progress, technology and "laissez-faire liberalism" in *A Connecticut Yankee* (58-9, 90). This notion has already been questioned,<sup>1</sup> but not effectively challenged and is partially adhered to, by James M. Cox. In fact, Cox further expands upon DeVoto's and Smith's biographical analysis and views the development of *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular as flawed or confused due to Twain's personal and creative upheavals (1966, 224-5; 1982a, 398-9). Moreover, Cox insists upon the importance of the abortive development of the Paige typesetter as it influences and parallels Twain's "extravagant failure" in writing *A Connecticut Yankee* (1982a, 391); he suggests that Twain increasingly identified himself with the failed invention while writing the novel (397) and that the protagonist Hank Morgan "is to a large extent the concrete embodiment of Twain's obsession with Paige's invention" (398).

The Paige typesetter debacle still finds its way into interpretations of *A Connecticut Yankee* and is largely referred to as direct influence on the genesis of text; however, something we have inherited from New Criticism and reader-response criticism which we can take advantage of is the possibility of pushing an author's biographical data into the background or even completely eschewing it if necessary. In offering my own analysis of Twain's work I wish to partially embrace the critique of the intentional fallacy to the extent that I am under no obligation to "assume the role [...] of a psychologist who must define the growth of a particular artist's vision in terms of his mental and physical state at the time of his creative act" (Kuiper 2012, 228), but without being orthodox in my position. Indeed,

1 In *Mark Twain. The Fate of Humour* (1966), James M. Cox partially departs from DeVoto's "speculations" regarding Twain's later period as they "rest on the assumption that the life 'causes' the art, that behind the work lies the experience" (224). Cox espouses Henry James' thesis that it is "art" that "makes life" and rejects H.G. Wells conclusion to the contrary (224). However, both in *Fate* and in "The Machinery of Self-Preservation" (1982), Cox does maintain positions that are highly dependent on biographical interpretation.

I would also adopt enough of a rhetorical approach to be able to use the name 'Mark Twain' to indicate either the implied-author or something closer to the "flesh-and-blood author" (Phelan 2011, 134), and to speak of his possible intentions when analyzing the strategies he adopts in his authorial agency. I am interested, to use James Phelan's terms, "not in private intention but in public, textualized intentions" (133), allowing "elbow room for intentionality" but without necessarily "driving the anti-intentionalists out of the Hermeneutic Temple" (134-5). I wish to perform an analysis that is not bogged down in biographical minutiae (such as letters to friends, editors and acquaintances) but which deals with Twain (implied-author-Twain or otherwise) whose intentionality and perhaps even opinions, are represented by a series of literary texts. Deliberately ignoring the 'Paige typesetter/conversion' narrative and the implications it has for the interpretation of Twain's texts is one of the healthiest and most productive tendencies critics have more recently begun to adopt; however, I wish to recuperate it once more if only to offer a counternarrative so that its relevance can be put into perspective and somewhat attenuated. Rather than a biographical narrative, I propose a brief text-based one in which we will analyze a series of texts that span Twain's entire literary career and demonstrate how in his works the theme of progress evolves over time. In Twain's portrayal of progress and civilization there are attitudes which remain constant and others that vary, but hopefully this reading will present an interpretation that sees the treatment of these themes as relatively coherent and of central importance throughout his literary career: to the Paige typesetter 'failure/conversion' narrative I oppose one that describes a more linear development wherein the critique of progress and civilization are constant and differ more in terms of degrees of intensity than in terms of a fundamental changing of position. Let us - like Hank Morgan - go backwards in time to discuss Twain's idea of progress in a series of texts, some of which were written almost a decade from one another, and which range from the beginning of his literary career to incomplete works published posthumously. These texts are: "Sold to Satan" (1904), "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), Twain's original manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger* (1897-1908 circa), "The Secret History of Eddypus" (1901), *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889), "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn" (1879) and "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1867).

## 2 Defining Progress and Civilization

First of all, it would be useful to define exactly what is meant by Twain when using the terms 'progress' and 'civilization' and how these terms stand in relation to technology and scientific advancement. To do so, let us briefly observe how these concepts are delineated in *A Connecticut Yan-*

kee, being that it is the text which deals most explicitly with these themes and is at the center of our polemic. Henry Nash Smith's *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964) is one of the critical works that has propagated the 'conversion' narrative and it deals expressly with the themes of progress and civilization in *A Connecticut Yankee*. According to Smith, in the novel, progress is expressed by Twain as:

The contrast [...] between poverty-stricken, ignorant, tyrannical feudalism and the enlightened industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century. Mark Twain, in common with virtually all his contemporaries, held to a theory of history that placed these two civilizations along a dimension stretching from a backward abyss of barbarism toward a Utopian future of happiness and justice for all mankind. The code name for the historical process thus displayed was progress, and in nineteenth century America it had the status of secular theology. (82)

However, I would argue against this generalization which takes one particular aspect of *A Connecticut Yankee* and applies it not only to the entire novel but to the author himself; to expand this hypothetical attitude so broadly so is to ignore much of Twain's precedent literary production from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to *Roughing It* (1872). In these and in other works, we have an almost limitless amount of examples wherein Twain displays attitudes towards the concept of progress - as expressed by Smith - that vary from an irreverent tone to a highly condemnatory one. This is not to say that a negative view of civilization that we might find in one text represents any true or sole opinion that is universally applicable to Twain's works in their entirety; nor does it mean that Twain never celebrates the technological marvels of his age or the virtues of democracy and republicanism, however, both leanings need to be given at least equal relevance in order to appreciate the profoundly dialogic qualities of Twain's works.

With regard to the relationship between progress/civilization and technology, Smith affirms that: "the most obvious exemplification of progress in the story is the Yankee's technological achievements - his creation of a complex of factories, railways, and telegraph and telephone lines. This aspect of the contrast between civilizations is an allegory of the industrial revolution; its emphasis is primarily economic" (1964, 84). Smith points out how Hank often equates civilization and progress with industry and technology: in chapter X, entitled "Beginnings of Civilization", Hank lists the various infrastructures he has created in his role as self-proclaimed "despot [...] with the resources of a kingdom at his command" (Twain 1982a, 51) and refers to the "nuclei of future vast factories" as "the iron and steel missionaries of my future civilization" (50); in chapter XLII ("War!"), when Hank and Clarence talk of "blow[ing] up our civilization" they are referring to

"all our vast factories, mills, workshops, magazines, etc." (243). Beyond the more technophilic or materialist aspects of Hank's revolution there is also a socio-political dimension which, according to Smith, makes *A Connecticut Yankee* an "allegory of the French Revolution" (1964, 84). I would, however, expand the limits of this conclusion so that the text becomes a partial allegory for all conflicts in which the concepts of progress and civilization have been involved, so as to include many other historical events such as the English Civil War - "Cromwell's soldiers" (6) are mentioned in the first chapter of the book and put in relation with Hank's own feats -, the settlement of the Frontier and the American Civil War in particular.

According to Smith, with his "practical knowledge of machines" and "his devotion to republican institutions", Hank is "meant to be a representative American", however, "at different times Mark Twain emphasized first one aspect and then the other" (1964, 84) and dealt ineffectively with both themes (85-86); part of my understanding of *A Connecticut Yankee* is that these flaws are to be seen as part of the character of Hank Morgan rather than flaws of the text itself which we can ascribe to hypothetical uncertainties on Twain's part. Hank often expresses his high socio-political ideals but when these are translated into more practical terms they are reduced to mere means of production: the terms "man-factories" (50), "civilization-factories" (249) and even "teacher-factory" (50) are perhaps symptomatic of the limits of his project or of the mindset which he superimposes upon Camelot. For the moment we can use Smith's defining parameters of progress as they well describe the spirit of Hank Morgan's theory of history and his relationship with technology. However, one of our main objections, which remains valid for the successive discussion is that Smith, in his discussion of *A Connecticut Yankee*, generally tends to identify the author with the protagonist; by doing so, and by adapting his analysis to the questionable limits of a biographical interpretation, he not only misses some of the most interesting developments of Hank's character but diminishes the dialogic merits or paradoxical ambivalences that render this text a more interesting and contemporarily valid treatment of the theme of progress. It is my belief that a certain distance exists (and necessarily exists in any work of fiction for that matter) between narrator/character and author, and that Twain is offering a critical analysis, but not necessarily a denigratory one, of Hank Morgan himself. Moreover, an exact definition of the terms 'civilization' and 'progress' that is valid for all of the texts we will be analyzing is impossible, however, the different perspectives and variations that each text offers will give us an overview of Twain's idea of such complex concepts.

### 3 Imperial Concerns

In Many of Twain's later texts, those that were written after his loss of faith if we refer back to our 'conversion narrative', civilization and progress are inevitably associated with the language of imperialism; moreover, these late works are unequivocally and universally understood as being critical of the concepts of civilization and progress, particularly when used in terms of hierarchical opposition of peoples. In pieces such as "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), "The Stupendous Procession" (1901) or "The Fable of the Yellow Terror" (1904-05) the term 'civilization' is mostly characterized as a collective deception, a fraudulent global marketing scheme, or as the thin veil of propaganda that disguises predatory colonial action. In "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (Twain 1901) we find various exhortations for the Western world to stop "conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness" and "give those poor things a rest" (164). This specific text is not merely a paternalistic puff piece that celebrates the innocence of the 'noble savage' and there are intimations of a profound ethical conviction that civilization is not something to be conferred from one entity onto another. Apart from denouncing the hypocrisy of Western missionary and colonial exploits by juxtaposing such "Civilization-tools" as "Glass Beads and Theology, [...] Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment (patent adjustable ones, good to fire villages with, upon occasion)" (165), Twain's text also hints towards principles of cultural relativism. Referencing current events, he laments the fact that the United States have not allowed the "Filipino citizens" to "set up the form of government they might prefer [...] according to Filipino ideas of fairness and justice - ideas which have since been tested and found to be of as high an order as any that prevail in Europe or America" (170). Moreover, it is declared that "most of those People that Sit in Darkness have been furnished with more light than was good for them or profitable for us" (165), statement which not only ridicules the idea of savagery that the concept of "Sitting in Darkness" itself refers to, but implicates economic interests in the arbitrary assignation of a certain degree of civilization to a nation or a people. This critical assessment of the concepts of civilization and progress is almost indistinguishable from his critique of imperial politics; in order to stay on topic and not trespass into the vast and complex field of discussion that surrounds Twain's anti-imperialist writings - in order, that is, to find an analysis that is more abstractly conceptual than political - we must look to other works such as the manuscripts for the incomplete novel conventionally referred to as *The Mysterious Stranger*. However, what we may find is that more often than not, the analysis of the idea of civilization/progress in Twain inevitably leads us back at some point to the topic of colonialism/imperialism telling us one of three things (or all three): that in Twain's mind the discussion of one necessarily leads to the other; that in this age of global



imperialism the discussion of one unavoidably leads to the other; or that to speak of civilization/progress inevitably means to speak of empire.

#### 4 Satan as Dialectical Adversary in *The Mysterious Stranger*

The three distinct manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger* which were never published or completed during Twain's life have been assigned this collective title based on that of the fraudulent version published in 1916, after the author's death, by Albert Bigelow Paine.<sup>2</sup> The stranger in question and central character of all three versions is a figure who is both Satanic and ambiguously Angelic and whose origin and motives remain, as per the title, mysterious. A recurring figure in the works of Twain, Satan is often employed as the voice that can properly act as dialectical opposite to conventional knowledge, religious dogma or humankind's vainglorious view of itself. Beyond reprising his folkloristic role of bringer of mischief, Satan is one of the many mysterious, magical or time-travelling outsiders that Twain uses to offer a counterpoint to the dominant narratives and perceptions pertaining to the society the external element is introduced into. In a way this figure retains his biblical role of 'adversary,' however, in Twain's works Satan remains more of an intellectual or philosophical opponent than one animated by malice. In an age of boundless and often blind enthusiasm, of absolute faith in progress, machines and empires, an age, perhaps, of hubristic arrogance, the presence of an existential adversary is intended to have a sobering, undercutting effect. The first manuscript, *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, is set in the Austrian village of Eseldorf in 1702; in this version, Satan seems mostly indifferent to human concerns and he inhabits a higher plane of existence from which human beings are not viewed as individuals but only as one of many species, perhaps the cruellest of species. Totally removed from the human condition, the young Satan of *Chronicle* sees 'Civilization' as but a series of deceptions and inventions, such as "modesty, and indecency", and maintains a Rousseauan appreciation for "the natural man, the savage" who has "no prejudices about smells, and no shame for his God-made nakedness" (Gibson 1969, 139).

In all three versions that exist of *The Mysterious Stranger*, Satan is a figure who like Hank Morgan possesses knowledge of times to come. What is particularly interesting for our analysis is the fact that Satan is a being for which all moments, past present and future, are simultaneous, there-

2 Paine's version of the story represents a patchwork of parts of the first (*The Chronicle of Young Satan*, 1897-1900 circa) and third manuscript (*No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, 1902-1908 circa) in chronological order.

fore he is the most qualified to comment upon what Smith refers to as the “theory of history” (1964, 82) that he credits Twain as adhering to in *A Connecticut Yankee*. On the subject of war, for example, Satan declares that “there has never been a just one [...]. I can see a million years ahead and this rule will never change” (Gibson 1969, 155). It is from this perspective that Satan debates with the human protagonists of *Chronicle* upon the concepts of progress and civilization and the immortal being repeatedly offers but a burst of cruel laughter (“unfeeling” and “unkind laugh”, 137; “evil chuckle”, 138) in response to humankind’s claims to improvement: “But Satan, as civilization advances - ‘Of Course he broke in with a laugh. He could never hear that word without jeering at it and making fun of it. He said he had seen thirteen of them rise in the world and decay and perish to savagery [...] and they were all poor things: shams and hypocrisies and tyrannies, every one” (156). When pressured by his human interlocutors to elaborate, he offers to show them human existence from his perspective: “would you like to see a history of the progress of the human race? - its development of that product which it calls Civilization?” (134); he proceeds to offer visions of human history or as Satan puts it “this long array of crimson spectacles [...], from the time that Cain began it down to a period of a couple of centuries hence” (136-7). Once they have completed their voyage through time Satan sums up the history of human civilization by stating: “you have made continual progress. Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor [...]; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder” (135-6). Progress is therefore reduced to series of improvements in offensive technology, “to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race” (137). The apex of this process is contemporary “Christian Civilization” without which “war must have remained a poor and trifling thing” (136). Satan then proceeds to list various more recent and contemporary events, including the “bloody exhibitions” of the French Revolution, leading up to the age in which “the lands and peoples of the whole pagan world will be at the mercy of the sceptred bandits of Europe, and they will take them. Furnishing in return, the blessings of civilization” (136). Once again Twain’s critique of the concepts of progress and civilization tends to lead into a discourse on the evils and inherent hypocrisy of imperialism.

It should be clear why this phase of Twain’s production is often considered one of pessimism and despair and the content of *Chronicle* is certainly overtly darker than that of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; however, it is undeniable that even in the latter novel a critique of the “sivilized” (Twain 1999, 38) society of pious slaveholding widows and oxymoronically **violent** Southern **gentlemen** is present. It would be an error to limit the critique of human civilization, in *Huck Finn* and in other texts, to any specific chronologic and geographical confines. Moreover, as we have stated

in the case of Hank Morgan, character and author, in this case Satan and Twain, do not necessarily coincide. From a rhetorical perspective, the author may be using the voice of Satan to expose unacknowledged truths about human nature and his dialectical opponents may be inferior to him in every way, but perhaps their basic human empathy and instinct have their say in the final equation of what is to be taken from the text. We are not, in other words, necessarily asked to adopt Satan's perspective in full. As the narrator points out multiple times, we are dealing with a being who from a purely emotional stand point can seem unnecessarily cruel or who, in the narrator's words, has "strange notions of kindness" (53). Satan shows himself to be indifferent to human death and suffering when he fails to intervene against the various individual acts of cruelty they witness, even though he clearly has the power to do so. This power, on the contrary, is mostly used to play cheap tricks (143, 153), and occasionally to punish (119); and when confronted with the spectacle of unjust and senseless death which causes his human companions' hearts to break Satan simply comments: "Oh, it is no matter, we can make more" (52).

## 5 The Enlightenment and Positivism in "The Secret History of Eddypus" and "Sold to Satan"

In a short story of around the same period as *Chronicle* entitled "The Secret History of Eddypus" (written 1901), Twain offers a slightly different perspective on human progress which initially seems to be more in line with the positivist zeitgeist described by Henry Nash Smith. In this text, the focus seems to be more on the advances of science and technology and the point of view is that of historian living in an obscurantist religious dystopia who is looking back at the past through badly translated documents. The nineteenth century is described as being "sown thick with mechanical and scientific miracles and wonders that ha[ve] changed the face of the world" (1984a, 185); moreover, it is stated that during the 1800s "a host of extraordinary men were born - the future supreme lords and masters of science, invention and finance, *creators of the Great Civilization*" (205). The term, 'the Great Civilization', used to indicate Twain's era, expresses the absolutistic faith in progress by which it was characterized; however, the term is used so repeatedly and the achievements of the era so often punctuated with exclamation points that one begins to suspect that there may be more than a fanatical celebratory intent behind the rhetoric and that there is a level of irony to be added. All great scientists and inventions are transposed, in this erroneous reading of history, to the nineteenth century and scientific discoveries are celebrated and immediately after burlesqued within the same section. For example, Galileo and Joseph Priestly (among

many others) are listed as contemporaries (206) and the discovery of oxygen of the latter is described as having been obtained through a series of experiments in killing animals through asphyxiation, starting from mice and moving up to men in the belief that “the Scientist never allowed himself to be sure he could kill a man with a demonstration until he had followed the life-procession all the way up to that summit” (209). When the narrator is discussing Herbert Spencer and his “all-clarifying law of Evolution” (222), “the climaxing mighty law [...], binding all the universe’s inertness and vitalities together under its sole sway and command” (223), the reader could almost be fooled by the hyperbolic, overenthusiastic tone that celebrates: “the all-supreme and resistless law which decrees slow, sure, implacable persistent, unresting change, change, change, in all things, mental, moral, physical [...], never halting, never tiring, all the universe ranked and battalioned in the march, and the march eternal!” (222); these statements, seen from the point of view of a static multi-millennial dystopia, may easily be understood as ironic.

Twain ends this short story with an even more ironic twist by showing us the inherent contradictions or ethical incoherencies of the idea of progress when it is posited in necessary correlation with the market economy and personal profit. The “vast discoveries” of our fictional nineteenth century are described as having created “an intellectual upheaval [...] such as had never been experienced in it before from the beginning of time [...]. Men’s minds were free, now; the chains of thought lay broken [...]. This marked an epoch and a revolution [...], a revolution which emancipated the mind and the soul” (1984a, 224). However, the intellectual and material benefits of this enlightened Eden breed an unlikely hidden serpent in the form of “Arkwright’s spinning-frames” (224) and Watt’s steam engine which bring to the raise in demand, and therefore in price, of American cotton. Following a logical chain of events, cotton, which “had ceased to be profitable”, is now profitable; therefore, slavery, which “had long ago ceased to be profitable” and was “disappearing” in accordance with the “plans and prophecies” (224-5) of the enlightened elite, becomes once again profitable:

and the disappearing process stopped [...]. Slavery got a new impulse; the slave’s price rose higher and higher, the demand for him grew more and more pressing; men began to *breed* him for the market, other men [...] began to kidnap him in Africa [...]. Whitney went on improving his machine [the cotton gin] and – So many people stole his invention and manufactured it that another circumstance resulted – the enactment of a rational patent law [...]; and out of this grew a colossal thing, the stupendous material prosperity of the Nineteenth century! [...]. Slavery was gratefully recognized by press, pulpit and people, all over the land, as God’s best gift to man, and the Prophecy which had once been so

logically sound and mathematically sure drew the frayed remnants of its drapery about it and in sorrow lay down and died. (225)

So much for the liberating power of machines! Twain, in a move which would be highly unconventional for the milieu Henry Nash Smith positions him in, creates a direct correlation between capitalism and the institution of mass slavery, viewing the latter more as a recent development of the market economy than as the heritage of retrograde barbarism and anticipating conclusions later elaborated upon by historians such as C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Stanley L. Engerman and Robert William Fogel. The implication of scientific and technological progress in the rebirth and expansion of the slave system serves as an example of the fallibility of Spencerian evolutionism and other positivist socio-economic ideologies, ideas and theories that dominated in much of the popular utopian-dystopian literature of the time.

In the short story "Sold to Satan" (written in 1904), the figure of Satan returns in a slightly different form. He remains a charming, intelligent and sociable character who has telepathic powers, however, he is now more Mephistophelean both in form and function. Satan is called upon by the narrator (Twain himself) so that a Faustian pact can be made: Twain's soul in exchange for wealth. What renders this Satan unique is the fact that his body is made of the radioactive element radium which is later revealed as the very substance Twain is promised he will make his fortune with. Its radioactive properties are prophetically described by Satan as being the energy source of the future: "In twenty million years [radium] has had no value for your race until the revolutionizing steam-and-machinery age was born [...]. It was a stunning little century, for sure, that nineteenth! But it's a poor thing compared to what the twentieth is going to be" (Twain 1984b, 228) - prediction which, perhaps, reveals radium's potential for both great and terrible things. Indeed, the radioactive properties of the element will allow Twain to "light the whole world, heat the whole world's machinery, supply the whole world's transportation power from now till the end of eternity" and for a healthy profit (232); however, Satan also tells fictional Twain that the power of radium can "blast [his house] like a breath from hell, and burn [him] to a crisp in a quarter of a minute [...]; at my will I can set in motion the works of a lady's watch or destroy a world" (229-30).

In "Sold to Satan", scientific discovery is portrayed as inevitably connected to financial and utilitarian concerns. Twain's persona seems motivated only by personal gain and has little regard both for his soul and Satan's hints regarding the dangers of radium. When first informed of the nature of Satan's body and of the potential value of radium, narrator-Twain immediately imagines a way to exploit this: "I gazed hungrily upon him,

saying to myself: 'What riches! what a mine! Nine hundred pounds at, say, \$3,500,000 pound [...]. Then a treacherous thought burst into my mind!'" (Twain 1984b, 227). However, the Devil perceives his thoughts and laughingly compliments him for his initiative and original ideas: "to kidnap Satan, and stock him, and incorporate him, and water the stock up to ten billions - just three times its actual value - and blanket the world with it!" (227). In general, the language used throughout the story satirically mimics that of the world of business and finance which is used even in reference to abstract concepts such the soul, and heaven:

I concluded to sell my soul to Satan. Steel was away down, so was St. Paul; it was the same with all the desirable stocks [...]. [...] I sent word to the local agent, Mr. Blank, with description and present condition of the property, and an interview with Satan was promptly arranged, on a basis of 2 ½ per cent, this commission payable only in case a trade should be consummated. (226)

The message of this modern-industrial variation on the folkloristic, devil's pact tale seems clear: progress, particularly in relation to material gain, is always a form of Faustian pact. With regard to the science-fictional aspect of the story, Twain seems to at least have some rudimentary notion of the radiophysics of the day and quotes Marie Curie's research, but perhaps for poetic necessity or simply ignorance, he bends the physics a little in order to make a point. In exchange for his soul the protagonist gains the rights to a large deposit of radium in a mountain crater in the Cordilleras; the origin of this deposit is the accumulation of the corpses of myriads of fireflies, who, it is said, contain a small quantity of radium in their bodies and have chosen this place as their "cemetery" (232) for over a million years. Twain seems to be referencing the biogenic hypothesis for the formation of fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum which were still fuelling the industrial revolution he had witnessed. The author may be subtly commenting upon the nature of progress by underlying how it is inevitably fed by some form of death. Similarly to what we had observed in "Eddypus", the author also briefly evokes the shadow of Slavery when explaining how radium can only be controlled and plied to human needs by using another element, "polonium", which "shall put the slave whip in your hand" (230). Twain's thermodynamic economic theory in "Sold to Satan" seems to state that the energy to fuel the machine of progress must inevitably come from somewhere, it is never self-generating, and the place it comes from is usually one of suffering and corruption.

## 6 Social Progress in “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn”

A text that represents the prototypical antecedent for *A Connecticut Yankee* and perhaps tells us something of how the theme of progress and civilization is to be understood in this novel is “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn” (1879), published a decade before in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In this short story the mutineers of the *Bounty* and their Tahitian wives have founded an idyllic (one could say utopian), secluded community on the small Pacific island of Pitcairn. The community is constituted as “an appanage of the British crown” (Twain 1982b, 273) but being so small, remote and devoutly Christian it does not attract the attention of either the Empire or missionaries (274-5); therefore it enjoys its own political and economic freedom and elects its own leaders according to a democratic elective system based on universal suffrage (men and women) from the age of seventeen. Pitcairn is described in unequivocal terms as an Edenic or pastoral utopia: “The sole occupations of the people were farming and fishing; their sole recreation, religious services. There has never been a shop in the island, nor any money. The habits and dress of the people have always been primitive, and their laws simple to puerility” (274). However, here too we find an external element that sows discord and chaos, in the form of “One stranger, an American” by the name of Butterworth Stavely who has “settled on the island” and is immediately characterized as “*a doubtful acquisition*” (275). If the ethicality of Hank Morgan’s agency can be considered ambiguous, here the Yankee bringer of progress is in no uncertain terms overambitious, driven by personal gain and ultimately misguided in his attempts to transform the tranquil community into an “empire” (279). Once he has manipulatively gained a reputation for being the most religiously zealous person on the island – using ostentation – he begins “to secretly sow the seeds of discontent among the people” with the “deliberate purpose, from the beginning, [of] subvert[ing] the government” (274). Once he gains power and “oozing reform from every pore” (277) he pushes the community to proclaim independence from an unobtrusive motherland using the rhetoric of the enlightened liberator, which Hank himself is prone to use, perhaps more justifiably. In response to the islanders claims that England has never bothered them he declares: “So slaves have felt and spoken in all ages! This speech shows how fallen you are, how base, how brutalized you have become under this grinding tyranny! What! has all manly pride forsaken you? Is liberty nothing? [...]. [...] rise up and take your rightful place in the august family of nations, great, free, enlightened, independent” (278). Once this meaningless or obsolete independence has been declared Butterworth then attempts to make an “empire” of the Pitcairn community by creating an army and a navy and when questioned about this – “Do we *need* an empire and an emperor?” – he answers “What you *need*, my friends, is unification. Look



at Germany; look at Italy. They are unified. It makes living dear. **That constitutes progress** [bold added]. We must have a standing army and a navy. Taxes follow as a matter of course. All these things summed up make grandeur" (279). Although initially the population is enthusiastic about these reforms, the usual evils of privilege start to seep in, economic chaos ensues after the introduction of money and the expense of keeping a standing army threatens their survival as there is nobody to "till the fields" (280). This situation quickly erodes the newly founded "empire", Butterworth is deposed and there is a return to the initial harmony. Butterworth repeatedly urges his followers to look to Germany and Italy as examples of states that have taken the road of unification and aspire to a grandeur on par with that of their neighbouring empires, even though, it is heavily implied, they do not have the resources to do so (280). Twain's satire is directed towards, but not limited to, the economic problems that followed the recent unification of these two states and the interference of religion in political affairs the world over. What are also being critiqued, however, are hierarchical, linear or totalizing ideas of historical progress whereby all states and all peoples must follow certain predetermined and ascendant stages: it is clear that Pitcairn, as we initially see it, represents an example of perfect pastoral or primitivistic equilibrium that requires no interference and the terms "unification" or "empire", to which Butterworth repeatedly appeals, may as well stand for "Civilization" within the context of this short story. After he is deposed and "very much depressed" he seems offended as he states: "I freed you from a grinding tyranny; I lifted you up out of your degradation, and made you a nation among nations; I gave you a strong, compact, centralized government; and, more than all, I gave you the blessing of blessings - unification" (281).

## 7 Civilized Savages on the Railroad

The brief sketch, "Cannibalism in the Cars", published in 1968 in *The Broadway Annual*, represents perhaps one of the earliest examples of Twain's treatment on the subject of progress and civilization, however, these themes remain part of the subtext of the sketch rather than its main and broadest focus. "Cannibalism in the Cars" is the account of a former congressman who is the supposed survivor of an incident in which a train is caught in a snow drift for various days; the twenty-four passengers resort to cannibalism to survive but adopt the most civil of decision making processes - which mimics and satirizes governmental procedure - in order to choose whom to eat. The sketch well represents the humoristic style that characterized Twain's early career as a journalist and correspondent, and there is a nod to the lurid yellow journalism which he often parodied in his Western hoaxes. As in many of his early sketches, violence, in this



case very understated and civilized violence, is also paradoxically exaggerated to the point that it is rendered satirically grotesque. Beyond the more obvious surface level of political satire, the mock congressional debates to decide who shall be eaten belie a critique of the concept of civilization itself, as a train car of highly civilized gentlemen and ladies is reduced to a group of “bloodthirsty cannibal[s]” (Twain 2000, 69) by a week-long breakdown of transport. The process is somewhat gradual: it is only on the fifth day that we see signs of “a savage hunger look[ing] out at every eye” (62) and on the seventh that “RICHARD H. GASTON, of Minnesota” takes the metaphorical podium and declares “Gentlemen, - It cannot be delayed longer! The time is at hand! We must determine which of us shall die to furnish food for the rest!” (62). However, from a question of mere survival, the situation degenerates into a grotesque and surreal farce; during the debating procedure, a “Gentleman from Oregon” is initially discarded as a candidate due to the fact that he is “old, and furthermore is bulky only in bone - not in flesh. I ask the gentleman Virginia if it is soup we want instead of solid sustenance?” (65). After their first meal the passengers acquire a taste for human flesh and become both greedy and fussy (our narrating congressman in particular) about what, or better whom, they eat in a horrific juxtaposition of high refinement and anthropophagism:

After breakfast we elected a man by the name of Walker, from Detroit, for supper. He was very good. I wrote his wife so afterward. He was worthy of all praise. I shall always remember Walker. He was a little rare, but very good. And then the next morning we had Morgan of Alabama for breakfast. He was one of the finest men I ever sat down to - handsome, educated, refined, spoke several languages fluently - a perfect gentleman - he was a perfect gentleman, and singularly juicy. (67)

Moreover, after the ranks begin to thin, the previously mentioned “Oregon patriarch” is once again reconsidered for “election” and it is confirmed that:

he was a fraud, there is no question about it - old, scraggy, tough [...]. I finally said, gentlemen, you can do as you like, but I will wait for another election. And Grimes of Illinois said, ‘Gentlemen, I will wait also. When you elect a man that has something to recommend him, I shall be glad to join you again.’ It soon became evident that there was general dissatisfaction with Davis of Oregon, and so, to preserve the good will that had prevailed so pleasantly since we had had Harris, an election was called, and the result of it was that Baker of Georgia was chosen. He was splendid! (67-8)

Apart from the obvious political satire, Twain is anticipating, albeit in an understated manner, the more developed critique of the concept of civili-

zation we have observed in his later works: a critique of a society that has “invented a thousand useless luxuries, and turned them into necessities; it has created a thousand vicious appetites and satisfies none of them” (Twain in DeVoto 2004, 99). In “Cannibalism in the Cars” the situation is reversed as it is “necessity” that becomes “luxury” and “vicious appetites” are definitely satisfied, however, it is in this reversal that this story finds its satirical and grotesque force: within the space of a few pages we move from civilization and technology (the train) to savagery and from savagery to refinement or civilization, exposing the fine line, or absence of a line, that truly exists between supposed binary opposites. It is a parable that elucidates the predatory aspects of human nature and perhaps of the history of the frontier (or of America in general) given the dynamics – from necessity and survival to greed and opulence – and the setting. The fact that this story of regression occurs within a train car is of extreme interest, regardless of Twain’s intentions to use the railway as a metaphor of civilization or not, due to the fact that the railway has become, and already was at the time, the quintessential symbol of the march of progress,<sup>3</sup> the emblem of the “obscure kinship between [...] Machine power and the progressive forces of history” (Marx 2000, 214).

## 8 Conclusion

“Cannibalism in the Cars” demonstrates that as early as 1868, well before the Paige typesetter fiasco and the subsequent financial crisis, Twain is reflecting upon the idea of progress and the profound contradictions of civilization and the other texts we have analyzed so far prove in no uncertain manner how he returns to these themes repeatedly throughout his career. Moreover, a certain continuity in Twain’s treatment of these topics can be observed, and in comparing “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn” and *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular, we may concur that this short story does offer various analogous premises and developments that assist us in characterizing the critique of Civilization and imperialism as it appears in *A Connecticut Yankee*. Considering our initial theoretical premises regarding authorial agency, there does not even seem to be the need to implicate any “different implied authors” in the discussion of these varied texts as there are no great or “surprising difference[s] in ideological or ethical positions” (Phelan 2011, 135). On the other hand, Pitcairn does not necessarily equal Camelot nor does Butterworth Stavely equal Hank Morgan and the fact that the latter can be perceived as partially naïve and well-intentioned

3 Both Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* and Ronald Takaki in *Iron Cages* give countless examples that attest to the fact that the steam locomotive had become “the voice of the civility of the Nineteenth century” (Emerson as quoted in Marx 2000, 17) as early

in contrast with the self-serving Butterworth is just one example of how these texts vary in their scope, intent, rhetorical strategies and dialogic properties. Nevertheless, "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn" and the other texts we have analyzed, render the characterization of Twain as a chauvinistic or anglophobic propagandist obsolete and they attenuate the idea of a supposed sudden loss of faith in progress. These texts become fundamental in defusing the notion that *A Connecticut Yankee* serves only as a simplistic contrast between America/Britain, Civilization/Savagery, Present/Past or Progress/Pastoral in limiting terms of Positive/Negative respectively, or vice versa. The idea that this novel represents a mere contraposition of a completely justifiable Yankee protagonist and the barbaric Arthurian aristocracy – which is at the basis of many "hard" (Carter 1982, 434) analyses of the novel – cannot subsist if we work inter-textually.

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as the 1840s (Marx 2000, 15; Takaki 1990, 150-1). The concept of the steam engine as a literal locomotive of progress had, in this period, already been eroticized (Takaki 1990, 149-51) and even satirized by Hawthorne (Marx 2000, 27) in *The Celestial Railroad* (1843). Closer to the publication of Twain's short sketch, although after, we find John Gast's widely circulated painting *American Progress* (1872) which famously shows a divine female figure in the center of the scene, advancing West and laying down telegraph lines as she does so while a locomotive follows immediately in her wake.

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## Ginnastica degli affetti e *fitness* Premesse a una lettura biopoetica di *Emilia Galotti*

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**Abstract** The category of biopoetics constitutes an ulterior development of what is known as the ‘anthropological turn’, which, from the mid-1980s onwards, profoundly modified the face of the humanistic disciplines. Biopoetics finds its niche at the junction between two methodological orientations focusing on clarifying the relationship between literary invention and the sphere of bios in a mainly cognitivist perspective (the evolutionistic aesthetic and the neurological interpretation of processes of aesthetic reception); biopoetics can be defined in terms of a meta-discourse that is required to hold together the forms in which bios has found its structuring in: the poetics of authors, the rhetoric that presides over fictional representation of bios in literary works and the way in which processes of aesthetic response are regulated by anthropological constants. The article aims to adopt this conceptual apparatus in its analysis of *Emilia Galotti* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. A traditional and now dated political interpretation of this tragedy saw in the character of Emilia the exponent of bourgeois opposition to the caprices and immorality of the feudal aristocracy. This resistance had no real space in which it could be exercised pragmatically and was therefore doomed to extinguish itself in a pure and simple spiritual testimony, culminating in the (self)-destructive gestures of Emilia and Odoardo Galotti. In line with the hypotheses of eighteenth-century anthropology and, above all, Lessing’s theories regarding drama, a biopoetic reading of the work should, on the other hand, draw attention to the aspects of unilaterality and imbalance in Emilia’s character, to the absence, in her upbringing, of ‘gymnastics’ of passion geared towards reinforcing her emotional ‘fitness’ (‘fitness’ is a fundamental category in evolutionistic aesthetics). A reading of this nature would also conclude by placing the character of the Prince of Guastalla in a different light; he would look like the carrier of a notion of “fitness” based around premises typical of absolutist culture, such as ‘sprezzatura’ and *décence*, which, however, never reach the point of mitigating his personal inclination towards excess and loss of control.

**Keywords** Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Emilia Galotti. Biopoetics. Fitness.

### 1

Le due categorie che pongo alla base di questo lavoro – ginnastica degli affetti e *fitness* – sono accomunate dal loro rilievo in una lettura di ordine biopoetico dei fatti della storia letteraria. Se la biopoetica, che rappresenta la forma più recente assunta da quella «svolta antropologica» responsabile

negli ultimi trent'anni di un profondo ripensamento dei saperi umanistici,<sup>1</sup> punta a riconoscere e valorizzare teoricamente i nessi tra scienze della vita (intese, queste, non solo in un'accezione disciplinare, ma nel senso più ampio legato a tutto lo spettro dei discorsi possibili sulla dimensione organica del *bios*) e pratiche della creatività estetica,<sup>2</sup> tali connessioni devono essere necessariamente viste, oltre che nella loro fecondità ermeneutica di ordine generale, anche nella specifica dimensione storico-culturale che hanno assunto nel corso del tempo. Solo a questa condizione, infatti, quella «extensive Kontextualisierung auf theoretischem Gebiet»,<sup>3</sup> che è stata indicata come la tendenza principale degli studi di letteratura dagli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso in poi, è in grado di esplicitare la propria fecondità senza smarrire la necessaria relazione con il proprio oggetto. In questo senso, come hanno osservato - tra gli altri - Michele Cometa,<sup>4</sup> Winfried Menninghaus<sup>5</sup> e Wolfgang Riedel,<sup>6</sup> la cultura del Settecento tedesco si presenta come uno smisurato terreno di coltura di concetti, metafore, disposizioni ermeneutiche congeniali a una lettura biopoetica dei fenomeni finzionali, poiché la sua dominante inclinazione antropologica identifica nel *bios* una specie di sostrato universale comune a tutti i possibili discorsi. Il radicamento di una prospettiva biopoetica nella 'scienza dell'uomo' così cara al dibattito illuministico, peraltro, non è che il punto di partenza dal quale considerare gli intrecci fra estetica e vita organica nella cultura del Moderno. Su queste intersezioni si è addensata una tradizione particolarmente complessa, che ha uno snodo fondamentale nell'elaborazione delle teorie di Charles Darwin, sulla base delle quali si è cominciato a inquadra-

1 Per un particolareggiato, vivace bilancio critico si veda Gansel, Carsten (2012). *Story Telling. Geschichten Erzählen in evolutionstheoretischer Perspektive*. Peter, Georg; Krauß, Reuß-Markus (Hrsgg.). *Selbstbeobachtung der modernen Gesellschaft und die neuen Grenzen des Sozialen*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 271-300.

2 Cf. Borsò, Vittoria (2010). 'Bio-Poetik'. *Das 'Wissen für das Leben' in der Literatur und den Künsten*. Asholt, Wolfgang; Ette, Ottmar (Hrsgg.). *Literaturwissenschaft als Lebenswissenschaft. Programm - Projekte - Perspektiven*. Tübingen: Narr, 223-46.

3 Jahraus, Oliver (2013). *Die Erfindung der Literatur durch die Literaturwissenschaft und die Rache der Literatur*. Knaller, Susanne; Pichler, Doris (Hrsgg.). *Literaturwissenschaft heute. Gegenstand, Positionen, Relevanz*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 27-39 (29).

4 Cometa, Michele (2011). *La letteratura necessaria. Sul confine tra letteratura ed evoluzione*. *Between*, 1, 2, 1-28.

5 Nell'ampia pubblicistica di Menninghaus dedicata alla relazione tra estetica e *bios* cf. almeno *Kunst als «Beförderung des Lebens»*. *Perspektiven transzendentaler und evolutionärer Ästhetik* (2008). München: Carl-Friedrich-von-Siemens-Stiftung, e *Wozu Kunst? Ästhetik nach Darwin* (2011). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. Traduzione italiana (2014). *A cosa serve l'arte? L'estetica dopo Darwin*. A cura di Massimo Salgaro. Verona: Fiorini.

6 Riedel, Wolfgang (2004). *Literarische Anthropologie. Eine Unterscheidung*. Braungart, Wolfgang; Ridder, Klaus; Apel, Friedmar (Hrsgg.). *Wahrnehmen und Handeln. Perspektiven einer Literaturanthropologie*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 337-66.

re l'apprezzamento e la produzione di strutture esteticamente significative come prassi collegate da un nesso funzionale al comportamento di specie dell'uomo e alla sua storia evolutiva.

La formazione di un'estetica evolucionistica, a far data dai primi tentativi maturati nel positivismo tedesco,<sup>7</sup> ha gradualmente spostato l'accento da una 'filosofia dell'arte', interessata ad attribuire alle attività addette all'esplicitazione della formatività un ambito il più possibile autonomo e separato nell'insieme complessivo delle attività umane, a una lettura cognitiva destinata in particolare a cogliere gli aspetti comportamentali impliciti in tutte le pratiche esteticamente orientate,<sup>8</sup> fino al punto di «affermare la relazione di dipendenza dei giudizi estetici dagli istinti gradualmente sedimentatisi nella storia naturale della nostra mente».<sup>9</sup> In questo slittamento, la categoria di *fitness* ha progressivamente acquisito una posizione cruciale, muovendo dal significato che Darwin le attribuisce come catalizzatore di varie dinamiche attinenti ai processi di selezione naturale. La *fitness* riproduttiva di un individuo si intreccia, come Darwin stabilisce al più tardi nel *Descent of Man* (1871), con i processi di selezione sessuale che chiamano in causa la competizione tra individui maschi della stessa specie per garantirsi il favore delle femmine. Darwin imposta su queste dinamiche le basi per una teoria generale sulla funzione adattativa dell'estetico, che ha a sua volta generato diverse interpretazioni circa il formarsi nell'uomo di una disposizione alla pratica dell'arte e circa l'esistenza di «poetogene Strukturen» di ordine antropologico, per citare una formula di Rüdiger Zymner che ha goduto di notevole fortuna negli ultimi anni.<sup>10</sup> Fra tali interpretazioni si sono affermate in particolare quella degli psicologi evolucionisti americani John Tooby e Leda Cosmides<sup>11</sup> – secondo i quali le pratiche finzionali possiedono la capacità di organizzare il reale secondo modalità di complessità crescente, e dunque utili ad alimentare

7 Cf. Bölsche, Wilhelm [1887] (1976). *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie. Prolegomena einer realistischen Ästhetik*. München: dtv; Tübingen: Niemeyer.

8 Il testo capitale per l'illustrazione di questo cambio di paradigma è il grande studio di Ellen Dissanayake (1995). *Homo Aestheticus. Where Art Comes From and Why*. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press.

9 Bartalesi, Lorenzo (2012). *Estetica evolucionistica. Darwin e l'origine del senso estetico*. Roma: Carocci, 49.

10 Cf. Zymner, Rüdiger (2004). *Poetogene Strukturen, ästhetisch-soziale Handlungsfelder und anthropologische Universalien*. Zymner, Rüdiger; Engel, Manfred (Hrsgg.). *Anthropologie der Literatur. Poetogene Strukturen und ästhetisch-soziale Handlungsfelder*. Paderborn: Mentis, 13-29.

11 Cf. Tooby, John; Cosmides, Leda (2001). «Does beauty build adapted minds?» *Substance*, 30, 6-25. Dei due autori è fondamentale inoltre il saggio «The Psychological Foundations of Culture» (1992). Barkow, Jerome H.; Cosmides, Leda; Tooby, John (eds.). *The Adapted Mind. Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 19-136.



la cosiddetta «scope syntax» attraverso la sollecitazione di singole facoltà adattative in una versione, per così dire, simulata e potenziale – e quella del germanista tedesco Karl Eibl, che ha visto nella creatività estetica l'espressione di un «Lustmodus»<sup>12</sup> in grado di assicurare una migliore resistenza allo stress generato dalle pratiche di sopravvivenza e dunque un vantaggio adattativo.

Ora, la crescente importanza del concetto di *fitness* in ogni operazione ermeneutica di carattere biopoetico si spiega con la natura articolata e plurale della nozione di temporalità che sta sul suo sfondo. Assumendo come orizzonte di riferimento non la durata circoscritta dei periodi storico-culturali comunemente codificati, ma quella dilatata e indistinta delle grandi ere evolutive, la biopoetica prende evidentemente una posizione molto netta in merito alla questione se la formatività debba essere studiata lungo la dimensione orizzontale e sincronica definita dalla compresenza di molteplici modelli in una relazione di concorrenza reciproca, o se debba invece essere misurata sullo sviluppo progressivo di una linea di continuità antropologica che, se anche nei singoli momenti della sua evoluzione è segnata da fratture, salti di senso e asimmetrie, sul tempo globale della sua stratificazione complessiva si presenta dotata di un assetto stabile e non revocabile. Se, dunque, la biopoetica è inseparabile da una considerazione di lungo periodo, e in ogni caso diacronicamente organizzata, dei fattori operanti nelle procedure di conferimento formale, la *fitness* soddisfa in un duplice senso questo dominio della temporalità: da un lato, infatti, essa rende conto della condizione di efficienza detenuta da un individuo in alcuni dei campi nei quali si dispiega la sua capacità di operare, e rimanda dunque all'esito finale, stabilmente consolidatosi, di un processo di trasformazione e di perfezionamento; dall'altro, però, nel collegare tale capacità al percorso evolutivo generale della specie alla quale l'individuo appartiene, la categoria di *fitness* dà ragione non solo di uno stato, bensì anche e soprattutto delle procedure che in un certo lasso di tempo hanno presieduto al raggiungimento di quello stesso stato. L'accertamento di una capacità in atto attira l'attenzione sia sull'ambito nel quale si dispiega il suo esercizio, sia sulla sequenza dei passaggi che hanno portato una attitudine a manifestarsi in termini di capacità realizzata. La *fitness* – vale a dire la facoltà di fare esperienza cogliendo e producendo attivamente relazioni di significazione simbolica – presuppone, e anzi evoca, la serie delle operazioni alle quali l'individuo che si trova in una situazione di efficienza deve il suo possesso. La *fitness* è sempre il risultato di una ginnastica. La cultura estetica del Settecento tedesco lavora con notevole incisività su questi nessi: la disposizione a un grado elevato di capacità emotiva, che da Baumgarten in poi viene vista in una correlazione

12 Cf. Eibl, Karl (2004). *Animal poeta. Bausteine der biologischen Kultur- und Literaturtheorie*. Paderborn: Mentis, e Eibl, Karl (2009). *Kultur als Zwischenwelt. Eine evolutionsbiologische Perspektive*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.



strettissima con l'attitudine al compimento di esperienze estetiche, è sempre integrata dalla previsione delle dinamiche necessarie al suo potenziamento. L'esercizio degli affetti come contenuto elettivo della comunicazione estetica sta insomma, in questa prospettiva, in un rapporto storico-culturale abbastanza serrato con la categoria evolucionistica di *fitness*, ne costituisce in un certo senso una stratificazione anteriore. Di seguito intendo mostrare come nel diciottesimo secolo la prassi dell'esercizio venga adombrata nell'ambito di diverse semantiche come una tecnica preferenziale per il perfezionamento dell'umano, e in particolare per il conseguimento di una relazione di equilibrio fra disposizioni che l'antropologia del tempo vede come saldamente collegate tra loro.

## 2

Il paradigma tipicamente settecentesco della perfettibilità presuppone evidentemente una lettura temporale ed evolutiva delle pratiche sociali, poiché la disposizione dell'uomo ad avvicinarsi con sempre maggiore efficacia all'adempimento della propria naturale destinazione<sup>13</sup> non può che prendere corpo in un lavoro progressivo, misurabile, prima ancora che in ragione del risultato ottenuto, sulle fasi del suo graduale divenire. Questa processualità – che corre parallela allo sviluppo di alcuni grandi discorsi epocali (lo storicismo, il primitivismo, l'utopia) tutti incentrati sull'idea di una umanità in movimento, così come fluidi e in perpetuo dinamismo sono le sue condotte e i suoi valori – trova espressione nell'uso frequente di una metaforologia basata sull'immagine dell'esercizio. In esso, innanzi tutto la *Popularphilosophie* identifica una tecnica per la stabilizzazione di quelle attitudini virtuose che, proprio perché devono esplicitare il loro potenziale in un arco prolungato di tempo, richiedono per essere davvero efficaci una paziente attività di fissazione e consolidamento. Anche Kant teorizzerà una prassi del genere nei *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre* (1797), lì dove parlerà di «ethische Gymnastik», la quale consisterebbe «in der Bekämpfung der Naturtriebe, die das Maas erreicht, über sie bey vorkommenden, der Moralität Gefahr drohenden, Fällen Meister werden zu können».<sup>14</sup> L'esercizio, dunque, come metodo sistematico per sottoporre le inclinazioni contingenti al dominio di una norma razionale e sovraderminata – per interiorizzare questa norma mediante la frequenza della sua ripetizione.

13 Cf. Macor, Laura Anna (2013). *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748-1800). Eine Begriffsgeschichte*. Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.

14 Kant, Immanuel (1797). *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre*. Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 177.

Questa congenialità dell'esercizio a un più ampio disegno di teoria della civiltà si rispecchia a partire dalla metà del diciottesimo secolo in vari altri ambiti, a partire da quelli della cultura materiale. La pubblicistica del tempo registra per esempio una gran quantità di testi d'uso a marcata connotazione didattica legati a diversi campi dell'apprendimento e della trasmissione scolastica e accademica del sapere. La sfera semantica del termine *Übung* è qui evidentemente legata alla sua stretta destinazione referenziale - si tratta per lo più di manuali volti a disciplinare le pratiche di apprendimento del discente, con una frequenza particolare nell'ambito dello studio delle lingue, classiche e moderne. Un carattere regolativo ancora più forte hanno i testi prodotti in contesti religiosi, con l'obiettivo di regolamentare la vita spirituale degli individui, vincolandola alla ripetizione di alcune pratiche obbligate. Anche in questo contesto si può parlare della *Übung* come applicazione di una tecnica, poiché la stabilizzazione del sentimento religioso procede attraverso lo svolgimento di esercizi codificati e di impronta rigidamente prescrittiva, destinati per lo più a garantire al soggetto il pieno controllo sulle proprie passioni. L'abitudine gesuitica a scrutare nel profondo dell'individuo mediante la pratica degli *exercitia* informa in misura dominante questa letteratura.

Alla pubblicistica religiosa, che mira a consolidare il dominio dello spirito, corrisponde in una sorta di simmetria secolarizzata una tipologia testuale calibrata sulla tensione tutta settecentesca verso l'equilibrio di filosofia e fisiologia, sull'ideale illuministico, diffusissimo in particolare nella *Popularphilosophie*, del *commercium mentis et corporis*: mi riferisco a saggi, articoli e manuali sul benessere del corpo e sulle strategie per raggiungerlo e mantenerlo. Quella che è forse la caratteristica eminentemente transdiscorsiva del concetto di 'esercizio', il fatto cioè che la *Übung* debba strutturarsi sul 'lungo periodo', che si tratti insomma di una prassi misurabile innanzi tutto sulla base di grandezze temporali, assume qui una consistenza materiale molto evidente, nel senso che il lavoro fisico a cui il lettore è sollecitato viene illustrato nel carattere progressivo dei suoi effetti, i suoi vantaggi vengono adombrati nel dinamismo accelerato e benefico della fisiologia corporea, la sua esecuzione viene subordinata al rispetto di un ritmo regolare e segnato da scadenze in armonia con il funzionamento generale della macchina umana. In un articolo apparso anonimo con il titolo *Von der Uebung* nel «Neues Hamburgisches Magazin» del 1781, l'autore, nell'elencare i pregi di un corpo tenuto in esercizio costante, precisa che «durch sie wird die natürliche Wärme im Körper erregt, die überflüssigen Säfte vorgetrieben, die verdorbenen gebessert, die Glieder hurtig gemacht, die Nerven und Flächsen gestärket; die Schweißlöcher mehr geöffnet, und überhaupt alle Abführungswerkzeuge

zu ihrem Dienste geschickter gemacht».<sup>15</sup> L'esistenza del corpo umano viene descritta nell'ottica metabolica di un bilanciamento continuo tra le energie che ne permettono l'attività e il residuo prodotto da questa stessa attività, che deve essere eliminato in forme che non alterino il bilancio energetico generale. Il benessere dell'individuo è soggetto alla condizione che questo equilibrio tra produzione e residuo si mantenga costante nel tempo, che il corpo insomma si trovi il più a lungo possibile in una condizione di pulizia e purificazione.

Non diversamente, in autori fondamentali per l'estetica teatrale del medio Settecento – Lessing e Mendelssohn su tutti, ma anche Sulzer e Meier – l'effetto di una rappresentazione scenica è messo in relazione all'agio che lo spettatore ha di 'esercitare' la propria sensibilità attraverso il contatto ripetuto con una macchina semiotica intesa a suscitare le 'passioni tragiche' di derivazione aristotelica.<sup>16</sup> In un lavoro decisivo per il retto intendimento degli incroci fra fisiologia ed estetica nella Germania del diciottesimo secolo, Cornelia Zumbusch ha spiegato la concezione della catarsi nei drammi e nelle opere teoriche del classicismo weimariano sulla base del concetto biopolitico di 'immunità'.<sup>17</sup> In particolare Schiller, che argomenta a più livelli servendosi di metafore attinenti al campo dell'immunizzazione, intenderebbe l'effetto tragico come una prassi di preparazione all'incontro con il dolore reale: l'incorporamento del male in una logica razionale sarebbe possibile appunto mediante l'esercizio sensibile permesso dall'arte. Questa semantica del potenziamento ginnico e dell'applicazione terapeutica che è propria della categoria di *Übung* configura, come è evidente, un'interpretazione del procedimento di catarsi in chiave metabolica, basata non sulla prevenzione 'dietetica' degli affetti in eccesso, ma sulla loro progressiva espulsione tramite il potenziamento dei circuiti endocrini che presiedono al bilancio energetico dell'individuo. Non si tratta insomma di immunizzarsi dalla potenza distruttiva degli affetti attraverso il loro incorporamento in una costruzione armonica ed equilibrata, nella quale l'esercizio secondario delle passioni – il contatto dello spettatore, cioè, con le passioni messe in scena durante l'azione drammatica – serve a produrre una sorta di stoica

15 [Anonimo] (1781). «Von der Uebung». *Neues Hamburgisches Magazin*, 532-51 (533).

16 Per una teoria generale delle basi cognitive della sollecitazione di affetti in letteratura cf. Anz, Thomas (2007). «Kulturtechniken der Emotionalisierung. Beobachtungen, Reflexionen und Vorschläge zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Gefühlsforschung». Eibl, Karl; Mellmann, Katja; Zymner, Rüdiger (Hrsgg.). *Im Rücken der Kulturen*. Paderborn: Mentis, 207-39. Una costellazione storico-culturale specifica è stata analizzata da Katja Mellmann (2006). *Emotionalisierung. Von der Nebenstundenpoesie zum Buch als Freund. Eine emotionspsychologische Analyse der Literatur der Aufklärungsepoche*. Paderborn: Mentis.

17 Zumbusch, Cornelia (2011). *Die Immunität der Klassik*. Berlin: Suhrkamp. Il medesimo strumentario concettuale è al centro del lavoro di Johannes Türk (2011). *Die Immunität der Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer.

impassibilità. Si tratta, semmai, di tenere in esercizio la normale fisiologia degli affetti, raggiungendo uno stato di benessere attraverso il mantenimento del ciclo ordinario di alimentazione e deiezione. In una prospettiva del genere gli affetti sono il nutrimento basilare che innesca la dinamica del funzionamento corporeo, la quale a sua volta si conclude, disponendosi nel frattempo a un nuovo ciclo, con l'eliminazione delle sostanze eccedenti la misura del fabbisogno reale. La catarsi è in questo senso davvero il purgamento delle passioni, vale a dire la loro riduzione a una proporzione ordinata e benefica. Non diversamente argomenterà a metà Ottocento il filologo classico Jacob Bernays quando, recuperando il sostato medico-scientifico del lessico aristotelico, proporrà come traduzione per il termine  $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\theta\alpha\rho\sigma\iota\varsigma$  l'espressione «erleichternde Entladung».<sup>18</sup>

Questa concezione igienica dell'esercizio regolare e disciplinato degli affetti si ritrova a metà Settecento anche nei trattati di Georg Friedrich Meier, per il quale le passioni sono il risultato di un atto di «conoscenza intuitiva» - «anschauende Erkenntnis» è da Leibniz e Christian Wolff in poi un nesso onnipresente nella filosofia tedesca del Settecento. Si ha conoscenza intuitiva, così Meier, quando l'oggetto eccede la misura del segno che gli è riferito. Dove il segno, al contrario, è in grado di contenere l'oggetto, è all'opera una forma 'simbolica' di conoscenza della realtà. L'una, quella simbolica, è di pertinenza delle cosiddette «obere Seelenkräfte», quelle addette alla chiarificazione razionale, alla strutturazione dell'esperienza secondo ordini generali e sovraperpersonali. L'altra, quella intuitiva, è invece prodotta dalle «untere Seelenkräfte», quelle inclini ad attivarsi per improvvisa illuminazione e a stringere la realtà in un fascio percettivo sintetico e indistinto. Meier chiarisce al di là di ogni dubbio che gli affetti sono una dimensione connaturata alla vita dell'uomo e in quanto tali non eliminabili se non a prezzo di una irrimediabile mutilazione. Essi sono anzi, finché insistono entro una dimensione ben proporzionata, un elemento di sicuro equilibrio nel rapporto tra corpo e psiche, poiché innescano nell'individuo un dinamismo propizio al mantenimento di una costituzione armonica ed efficiente. Il mutevole gioco delle passioni nell'animo umano è alimentato, nello schema fisiologico di Meier, dall'alternarsi di «Begierde», desiderio, e «Verabscheuung», ribrezzo. Gli affetti si possono complessivamente riportare alla protensione verso un oggetto immaginato come fonte di piacere e alla ritensione dal contatto con un oggetto produttore di sensazioni spiacevoli. L'amministrazione degli affetti nell'ottica di un metabolismo ben ponderato prevede l'abbandono a un quieto moto

18 Bernays, Jacob (1858). *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*. Breslau: Trewendt, 148.

pendolare tra i poli del desiderio e del ribrezzo.<sup>19</sup> L'anima alternativamente si distende verso l'indeterminato e si ritira entro i propri confini, dando luogo a un'oscillazione regolare che configura evidentemente una spiccata performatività degli affetti, i quali sono sì intesi come il prodotto di una sensazione impressa dall'esterno sulla psiche del soggetto, ma allo stesso tempo necessariamente anche come l'effetto della disponibilità della psiche stessa a lasciarsi pervadere da quella impressione.

Questa condizione ideale di benessere, fondata sul temperamento degli eccessi e sul reciproco contenimento di attitudini contrapposte, si giova nel disegno di Meier di una duplice tipologia di esercizio. La pratica costante di *Übungen* coerenti con la determinazione naturale dell'individuo ha l'effetto di irrobustire tale determinazione o di correggerla nelle parti dove si rendano necessari dei correttivi rispetto al temperamento originario. D'altra parte, l'esercizio può essere anche volto alla riduzione attiva degli affetti, se questi trascendono la misura di una ordinata compensazione reciproca:

So bald, wie man merckt, daß die Umstände und die Vorstellungen gegenwärtig werden, unter welchen und woher unsere Leidenschaften zu entstehen pflegen, so müssen wir uns aller der Gegengründe erinnern, die wir als Einwürffe wider die Leidenschaften eingesamlet haben. Diese Regel kann man nicht anders ausüben, als wenn man dieselbe schon oft geübt hat. Folglich muß man sich, noch ehe das Gemüth bewegt wird, schon oft alle Gründe, woher die Leidenschaft entspringt, vorher vorgestellt und dieselben widerlegt haben.<sup>20</sup>

Meier ipotizza un esercizio volto a consolidare il potenziale sensitivo e un altro inteso a curare il veleno di una eccessiva sensibilità. In entrambi i casi presenta l'esercizio come una componente decisiva nei processi di produzione e percezione estetica, nel senso che l'uso frequente di una certa rappresentazione è in grado di prolungare la durata della sua presenza nell'immaginazione di un individuo, e dunque anche la capacità dell'individuo stesso di sottoporla a un regime disciplinato. Negli *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1748-1750) si legge che

Der anhaltende Gebrauch des sinnlichen Erkenntnisvermögens (*pro-tensio facultatis cognoscitivae inferioris*) ist diejenige Vollkommenheit desselben, vermöge welcher dasselbe im Stande ist, die Wirklichkeit

19 Cf. Stöckmann, Ernst (2009). *Anthropologische Ästhetik. Philosophie, Psychologie und ästhetische Theorie der Emotionen im Diskurs der Aufklärung*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 113-47.

20 Meier, Georg Friedrich (1744). *Theoretische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen überhaupt*. Halle: Hemmerde, 367.

einer Vorstellung lange zu erhalten. Wenn man alle Schönheiten der Erkenntnis, den Reichthum, die Grösse, die Wahrheit, die Klarheit, die Gewisheit, und das Leben hervorbringen wil, so kan man dasselbe nicht in einem Augenblicke erhalten. Ein Maler muß viele Tage zubringen, ehe er ein vortreffliches Gemälde verfertigen kan. Folglich würde unsere Erkenntnis keine grössere Schönheiten erhalten können, wenn unser Erkenntnisvermögen nicht die Geschicklichkeit besässe, in seiner Anstrengung lange anzuhalten.<sup>21</sup>

Il tempo di produzione e di esistenza delle rappresentazioni mentali è indicato anche da Moses Mendelssohn come la caratteristica specifica della conoscenza sensibile. «Der Vernunftschluß ist überzeugender, allein die anschauende Erkenntnis ist lebhafter und schneller; sie äußert daher eine stärkere Gewalt auf das Begehungsvermögen, und bringt in dem Körper willkürliche Bewegungen hervor», così scrive nel 1761 nella *Rhapsodie oder Zusätze zu den 'Briefen über die Empfindungen'*.<sup>22</sup> L'esercizio viene qui chiamato in causa come una strategia destinata a incrementare la velocità delle rappresentazioni che fanno capo alla conoscenza razionale, poiché mette in moto la logica associativa che secondo Mendelssohn è alla base delle attività intellettuali. Esercitando regolarmente le proprie competenze, la ragione si abitua a riconoscere sempre più velocemente il legame che sussiste tra rappresentazioni apparentemente disparate, interiorizzando la loro connessione e trasferendola su un piano cognitivo non bisognoso di ulteriori ancoramenti analitici. Mendelssohn riprende qui una questione che era stata già posta da Christian Wolff nella *Metafisica tedesca*:<sup>23</sup> trasformando una semplice attitudine («Fähigkeit») in una capacità («Fertigkeit»),<sup>24</sup> stabilizzando e concretizzando, per così dire, il

21 Meier, Georg Friedrich (1749). *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*. Bd. 2. Halle: Hemmerde, 10.

22 Mendelssohn, Moses [1755-1771] (2009). *Ausgewählte Werke. Studienausgabe*. Hrsg. von Christoph Schulte, Andreas Kenneke, Grażyna Jurewicz. Band 1. *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Ästhetik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 237.

23 «Wir finden, daß die Seele so wohl in Ansehung des Verstandes eine Fertigkeit zu denken und zu schliessen, als in Ansehung des Willens eine Fertigkeit zu wollen und nicht zu wollen durch die Uebung erlangen kan. Ja, es gehet auch dieses die Einbildungs-Kraft, das Gedächtniß, die sinnliche Begierde und Affecten an. Die Uebung bestehet in oftmahliger Wiederholung einer Art der Gedancken, und überhaupt in allen Fällen in einer oftmahligen Wiederholung einerley Handlungen. Und die Fertigkeit, so daraus erwächset, bestehet in einer Leichtigkeit dergleichen Handlungen zu vollziehen» (Wolff, Christian [1720] (1983). *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*. Hrsg. von Charles A. Corr, Hildesheim: Olms, 321-2).

24 «So ofte wir eine Verrichtung wiederholen; so ofte müssen wir die Reihe von Begriffen überdenken, die zu dieser Verrichtung gehören, und jedes mal werden diese Begriffe genauer mit einander verbunden; denn je öfter wir uns eine Reihe von Begriffen vorstellen, desto

potenziale psichico di un individuo, l'esercizio naturalizza la conoscenza razionale e promuove l'accordo di «untere» e «obere Seelenkräfte». Mendelssohn ragiona evidentemente secondo quel paradigma di equilibrio metabolico che vede la chiave dell'accordo tra mente e corpo, e dunque il centro dell'ideale di totalità antropologica proprio del Settecento, non nel potenziamento di alcune disposizioni che dovrebbero ripristinare una condizione di sanità perduta, ma nel puro e semplice mantenimento attivo di un ordine naturale. In questa stessa prospettiva Johann Jakob Engel, uno dei teorici più importanti nella costellazione del *commercium mentis et corporis*, dirà a commento del dialogo platonico *Menone*, in cui si discute la questione se la virtù sia il prodotto di un'attitudine innata o un possesso da acquisire progressivamente, che la *Übung*, «die überhaupt alle unsere Kräfte vervollkommt, muß auch die Kraft unsrer Vernunft, die angebohrne Fähigkeit zur Erkenntniß der Wahrheit, vervollkommenen».<sup>25</sup>

Questo indirizzo trova poi una codificazione stabile nell'opera di Johann Georg Sulzer, la cui *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, pubblicata tra 1771 e 1774, rappresenta la massima sintesi, nella cultura tedesca del Settecento, tra le istanze del sensismo inglese, quelle dell'enciclopedismo francese e quelle della *Popularphilosophie*. Sulzer presenta la *Übung* come pratica di equilibrio efficace a tutti i livelli dell'attività umana, sul piano della conoscenza razionale, su quello del sentimento morale e su quello della percezione estetica. Per natura, argomenta Sulzer, l'uomo tende ad accostarsi esclusivamente a ciò che gli procura piacere; raggiunta una condizione di benessere sensibile, respingerà tutto ciò che minacci di alterarla. A procurare godimento, peraltro, non è tanto il contenuto della sensazione che prende corpo nell'individuo, quanto la semplice sollecitazione meccanica, il cambiamento di stato generato dall'attivazione di un impulso dinamico. È l'ingresso in uno stato di attività a dilettere lo spirito, occupandolo con una sequenza di rappresentazioni mentali tanto più piacevoli, quanto più rapida è la loro successione e quanto più breve è l'intervallo di inattività imposto all'immaginazione. Il piacere aumenta in

mehr Beziehungen und Verhältnisse nehmen wir zwischen ihnen wahr. Daher können wir eine Folge von Vorstellungen, die wir öfter gehabt, weit schneller überdenken, bis endlich die Begriffe in einer so kurzen Zeit auf einander folgen, daß sich unsere Seele derselben nicht mehr deutlich bewußt ist. Wenn dieses geschiehet; so hat sich unsere Fähigkeit in eine Fertigkeit verwandelt» (Mendelssohn, Moses [1755-1771] (2009). *Ausgewählte Werke. Studienausgabe*. Hrsg. von Christoph Schulte, Andreas Kenneke, Grażyna Jurewicz. Band 1. *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Ästhetik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 236).

**25** Il passo prosegue con un richiamo alla canonica distinzione tra *Fähigkeiten* e *Fertigkeiten*: «Die Natur mag mit ihren Gaben so verschwenderisch seyn, als sie will; so giebt sie doch weiter nichts, als die Anlagen, die Fähigkeiten: und nur durch lange anhaltende Uebung werden diese Fähigkeiten in Fertigkeiten verwandelt» (Engel, Johann Jakob (1780). *Versuch einer Methode die Vernunftlehre aus Platonischen Dialogen zu entwickeln*. Berlin: Voß, 20-1).



ragione dell'oscurità delle sensazioni che si affollano nella psiche umana.<sup>26</sup>

L'esercizio è in un'ottica del genere una componente fondamentale del benessere dell'uomo, poiché potenzia il dinamismo delle sue rappresentazioni e rende dunque più efficienti tutte le sue attitudini. L'esercizio rende inoltre l'uomo migliore perché, moltiplicando l'energia delle sue inclinazioni sensibili, pone rimedio al vizio di astrattezza della conoscenza razionale; il sentimento morale ricava enorme giovamento dalla prontezza con la quale l'immaginazione riesce a sostanziare una regola generale di condotta, per esempio la compassione, evocando l'immagine concreta di un vicino in difficoltà.<sup>27</sup> Nella *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, infine, l'esercizio viene promosso a condizione necessaria per superare nell'arte il livello di un volenteroso diletterantismo e conseguire il pieno dominio della materia. In una delle voci più importanti dell'opera, quella intitolata *Kunst*, Sulzer codifica questo principio ponendolo come condizione fondamentale di ogni possibile efficacia estetica: «Im Grunde ist sie [Kunst] nicht anders, als eine durch Uebung erlangte Fertigkeit, dasjenige, was man sich vorstellt, oder empfindet, auch andern Menschen zu erkennen zu geben, oder es sie empfinden zu lassen».<sup>28</sup>

Chiarito come il discorso settecentesco sull'equilibrio di affetti e ragione trovi nell'idea di un ponderato esercizio di entrambi un paradigma inteso a potenziare l'attitudine dell'uomo a svilupparsi in una relazione di organico equilibrio fra le parti che concorrono alla definizione della sua identità, provo di seguito a sviluppare il filo di questo principio biopoetico in *Emilia Galotti*.

26 Cf. Déculot, Élisabeth (2006). «Métaphysique ou physiologie du beau? La théorie des plaisirs de Johann Georg Sulzer». *Revue Germanique Internationale*, 4, 93-106 e Nowitzki, Hans-Peter (2011). «Denken. Sprechen. Handeln. Johann Georg Sulzers semiotische Fundierung der 'Allgemeinen Theorie der Schönen Künste'». Grunert, Frank; Stiening, Gideon (Hrsgg.). *Johann Georg Sulzer (1720-1779). Aufklärung zwischen Christian Wolff und David Hume*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 137-67.

27 «Nur durch eine lange Gewohnheit und Uebung bringt man es dahin, daß man die Stärke der Evidenz empfindet, insonderheit wenn sie Wahrheiten betrifft, die geradezu nicht uns, sondern bloß andere interessiren [...]; die Rechte der übrigen Menschen erkennt man nur in der Theorie, das heißt, man erkennt sie, aber man empfindet sie nicht» (Johann Georg Sulzer [1773] (1974), «Psychologische Betrachtungen über den sittlichen Menschen». *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*. Bd. 1. Hildesheim; New York: Olms, 213).

28 Johann Georg Sulzer [1793<sup>2</sup>] (1994). *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste in einzelnen, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter aufeinanderfolgenden Artikeln abgehandelt*. Bd. 2. Hildesheim; New York: Olms, 96.



## 3

Secondo una linea interpretativa dominante per lungo tempo nella ricezione critica dell'opera, *Emilia Galotti* – la tragedia con la quale nel 1772 Lessing conclude dopo varie occasionali riprese il progetto di incentrare un lavoro tragico su «eine bürgerliche Virginia»,<sup>29</sup> come suona una dichiarazione epistolare resa nel 1758 – porterebbe sulla scena il contrasto fra aristocrazia e borghesia, connotandolo nel senso di una insanabile opposizione fra il dispotico arbitrio del principe di Guastalla e l'incorruttibile attaccamento alla virtù di Emilia e dei personaggi a lei vicini. In particolare la scena finale, nella quale l'eroina – nell'impossibilità di sottrarsi al dominio del suo persecutore – persuade il padre a ucciderla con lo stesso pugnale che costui aveva creduto di poter vibrare contro il principe, condenserebbe con la massima efficacia la sostanza politica del dramma, perché da un lato renderebbe evidente la superiorità morale della classe subordinata nei confronti della disumana arroganza del sovrano e dei suoi cortigiani, ma dall'altro, lasciando che tale superiorità si consumi in un atto autodistruttivo come quello che conduce Odoardo Galotti ad affondare l'arma nel corpo della propria stessa figlia, chiarirebbe come la borghesia non abbia a disposizione uno spazio reale nel quale esercitare concretamente i propri valori, riducendo ogni impulso libertario all'angusto orizzonte della «rinuncia».<sup>30</sup> Contro questa chiave di lettura, che tra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta del Novecento applicava evidentemente all'opera di Lessing un criterio generale di analisi storico-sociale del Settecento e di tutta la cultura del Moderno, sono state sollevate obiezioni di molteplice natura.<sup>31</sup> Più di tutto, si è provveduto a ridimensionare la temperatura politica di uno scontro – quello tra il principe e la famiglia Galotti – che, se pure presuppone un notevole squilibrio di forze fra i contendenti, in nessun frangente del suo sviluppo chiama in causa una esplicita consapevolezza di classe nei soggetti contrapposti. Costoro, anzi, si trovano più di una volta ad avvicinare, se non proprio a invertire, le logiche di ruolo che ispirano

29 Lettera a Friedrich Nicolai del 21 gennaio 1758. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1987). *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Hrsg. von Wilfried Barner. Bd. 11/1. *Briefe von und an Lessing 1743-1770*. Hrsg. von Helmuth Kiesel, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 267.

30 Si esprimeva così Gert Mattenklott in «Lessing. Letteratura come prassi?» (1972). Freschi, Marino (a cura di). *Lessing e il suo tempo*. Cremona: Libreria del Convegno, 131-54 (154).

31 A partire dal fondamentale saggio di Monika Fick (1993), «Verworrene Perzeptionen. Lessings 'Emilia Galotti'». *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 37, 139-63. L'autrice (2010) ripercorre le varie linee della tradizione critica in *Lessing-Handbuch. Leben - Werk - Wirkung*. 3. Auflage. Stuttgart: Metzler, 380 ff. Per una lettura della tragedia conforme a questo cambio di paradigma cf. Tucci, Francesca (2005). *Le passioni allo specchio. Mitleid e sistema degli affetti nel dramma di Lessing*, Roma: Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici, 234-73.

i loro comportamenti (come poco prima della morte di Emilia, quando il principe si abbandona alla fantasia che Odoardo possa essergli «amico, guida e padre»,<sup>32</sup> e in tutto il dialogo fra Odoardo e Orsina, quando la relazione di subalternità sociale a cui poco prima il vecchio Galotti si era piegato senza riserve, accettando di sottomettere alla volontà del principe la possibilità di rivedere Emilia, trapassa in una relazione di mera umanità fra due personaggi soggetti all'uguale disorientamento, nonché esposti all'uguale pericolo di perdere se stessi), e in ogni caso sono reciprocamente vincolati dalla comune appartenenza all'ambiente curtense, che nel principe ha sì il vertice dell'autorità, ma nei Galotti e nel conte Appiani ha anche, indipendentemente dall'entità del sostegno attivo da essi prestato al suo consolidamento, dei soggetti senz'altro cointeressati, poiché tutta la loro esistenza di proprietari è basata sulla tenuta delle relazioni di forza che presiedono al sistema feudale.

La correzione della tradizionale ottica socio-politica basata sulla mera presupposizione di un conflitto di classe ha indotto a ricollocare *Emilia Galotti* nel sistema complessivo della concezione tragica di Lessing, leggendo l'opera nella prospettiva del discorso sulle passioni che pervade il suo svolgimento. Tale discorso, peraltro, non può essere analizzato esclusivamente nel senso dell'effetto che la configurazione dell'intreccio genera nel pubblico, ma deve essere riportato anche alla posizione dei personaggi e alla loro condotta, tanto più in considerazione dell'importanza che nell'estetica teatrale dell'autore, fin dal carteggio con Nicolai e Mendelssohn degli anni 1755-1757, rivestono l'indagine delle motivazioni alla base di quella condotta e l'accertamento della coerenza tra il carattere delle figure rappresentate e la loro sorte.<sup>33</sup> La rete così articolata degli interessi materiali, delle affermazioni valoriali e delle opzioni identitarie in capo ai singoli personaggi, mentre si distende sull'azione spingendo i destini di tutti al punto di massimo scontro nella scena conclusiva, con il suo sviluppo lineare e geometrico (secondo il famoso giudizio di Friedrich Schlegel,<sup>34</sup>

32 «O Galotti, wenn sie mein Freund, mein Führer, mein Vater sein wollten!» (Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1987). *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Hrsg. von Wilfried Barner. Bd. 2. *Werke 1770-1773*. Hrsg. von Klaus Bohnen. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 366).

33 Jürgen Fohrmann (2005). «Die Tragödie der Empfindsamkeit und die Rettung der Souveränität (am Beispiel von Lessings 'Emilia Galotti')». Garber, Klaus; Széll, Ute (Hrsgg.). *Das Projekt Empfindsamkeit und der Ursprung der Moderne. Richard Alewyns Sentimentalismusforschungen und ihr epochaler Kontext* München: Fink, 115-28 ha sostenuto con forza la necessità di leggere *Emilia Galotti*, anche contro alcune prescrizioni formulate da Lessing nella *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, innanzi tutto nell'ottica delle passioni provate dai personaggi.

34 Friedrich Schlegel [1797] (1967). *Über Lessing*. Behler, Ernst et al. (Hrsg.). *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Bd. 2. *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796-1801)*. Hrsg. von Hans Eichner. München et al.: Schöningh; Zürich: Thomas, 100-25 (116-7).

orientato peraltro a stigmatizzare l'incongruenza fra la tenuta strutturale del dramma e l'insondabilità delle ragioni innanzi tutto psicologiche che ispirano il suo scioglimento) si allarga fino ad inglobare una componente metascenica, nel senso che i comportamenti conflittuali dei personaggi appaiono riprodurre il conflitto che nelle teorie di Lessing sul teatro si stabilisce tra vari possibili modelli di interpretazione circa la natura degli affetti e l'ambito della loro performatività. L'irrisolutezza di Odoardo, per esempio, la rigida unilateralità della sua concezione di morale, fondata non su una dettagliata conoscenza dell'umano, ma sull'applicazione di una sistematica diffidenza; e ancora, l'insistita ricerca di un patteggiamento che offra una via di uscita dalla strettoia nella quale la macchinazione di Marinelli lo ha ridotto insieme alla figlia nel quinto atto,<sup>35</sup> così come l'assassinio di Emilia, chiaramente consumato in un accesso umorale e dietro la provocazione delle parole di sfida che la stessa Emilia gli rivolge - tutto ciò svuota dall'interno il paradigma della *Bewunderung* come motore fondamentale dell'azione tragica, nel momento stesso in cui l'apparente grandezza del gesto finale parrebbe consegnare la figura di Odoardo all'ammirazione del pubblico. D'altra parte, la facilità con la quale Hettore Gonzaga passa dalla sicura affermazione della propria sovranità a un inconsolabile smarrimento, dal confidente vagheggiamento di una nuova trasparenza delle relazioni umane all'accettazione della violenza come strategia per il controllo dei subordinati, e infine da una disincantata cognizione del potere degli affetti sulla psiche a un estenuato sentimentalismo, questa facilità rende incerta e oscura qualunque univoca classificazione del personaggio, ostacolando l'innesco di ogni possibile reazione emotiva dello spettatore. Perfino Marinelli, la cui ambizione prepara e causa la catastrofe, e la cui capacità di dissimulazione gli permette di costruire una sorta di sovranità separata, alla quale il principe stesso finisce per sottomettersi integralmente, appare in un frangente come il depositario di una regola di dignità e autodisciplina che, se applicata, depotenzierebbe l'energia anarchica del desiderio sessuale e placherebbe l'incontinenza del regnante.<sup>36</sup>

35 Di altro segno la lettura di Wilfried Wilms (2002). «Im Griff des Politischen. Konfliktfähigkeit und Vaterwerdung in 'Emilia Galotti'». *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 76, 50-73, secondo cui la condotta di Odoardo avrebbe l'effetto di consolidare la famiglia come cellula di organizzazione politica alternativa alla logica autoritaria del sistema assolutistico.

36 Alla richiesta d'aiuto di Gonzaga («Liebster, bester Marinelli, denken Sie für mich. Was würden Sie tun, wenn Sie an meiner Stelle wären?») Marinelli risponde evocando un ordine di responsabilità che trascende il livello della mera contingenza, abbracciando i fondamenti stessi della sovranità: «Vor allen Dingen, eine Kleinigkeit als eine Kleinigkeit ansehen; - und mir sagen, dass ich nicht vergebens sein wolle, was ich bin - Herr!» (Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, (1987). *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Hrsg. von Wilfried Barner. Bd. 2. *Werke 1770-1773*. Hrsg. von Klaus Bohnen. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 305). È vero che immediatamente dopo, di fronte all'ennesima manifestazione di

Se la materia del dramma è di per sé disposta intorno a un centro biologicamente definito, perché la questione principale riguarda il corpo di Emilia<sup>37</sup> (la sua appropriazione per il principe e per Marinelli, nonché per gli sgherri al loro servizio, la sua difesa per tutta la cerchia dei Galotti, ma anche la sua rappresentazione estetica per il pittore Conti, protagonista nel primo atto di un lungo episodio che meriterebbe di essere studiato analiticamente secondo le teorie immaginali associate alla sfera della visualità), alla costellazione del *commercium mentis et corporis* fanno capo anche le retoriche impiegate dai personaggi per scrutare nel fondo dei propri moventi, per rappresentare se stessi e per strutturare i propri rapporti con i personaggi vicini. Hettore Gonzaga collega esplicitamente l'inizio dell'attrazione per Emilia al rapido consumarsi del legame con Orsina, cogliendo il segno più sicuro del proprio disamore nel mutamento della relazione di intimità con il corpo della donna oramai non più desiderata e con l'esaurimento del benessere spirituale che tale relazione gli procurava. La stessa Orsina, inoltre, lascia che il disvelamento delle cause che hanno condotto i Galotti nella residenza estiva del principe culmini in una violenta fantasia di compensazione, nella quale l'investimento simbolico sul corpo dell'amato infedele è condotto in termini conformi al duraturo interesse di Lessing per lo stile tragico senecano.<sup>38</sup> La svolta che prepara il sanguinoso esito della vicenda, infine, è introdotta dai dubbi di Emilia circa la sua capacità di mantenere il pieno controllo dei desideri che la confidenza con l'ambiente di corte avrebbe risvegliato in lei,<sup>39</sup> mentre la scena dell'uccisione è evidentemente connotata in termini sessuali, incardinati ancora una volta sul presupposto della disponibilità del corpo di Emilia, che ella stessa si incarica di rappresentare con una metaforologia – l'immagine della rosa

desolata impotenza da parte del principe, provvede ad avviare il piano volto a impedire le nozze di Emilia e Appiani; ma è anche vero che la regola di autocontrollo così adombrata è affidata senza infingimenti alla libera volontà del principe stesso, il quale con la medesima libertà decide di non farne alcun uso.

37 Fondamentale per questo aspetto il saggio di Judith Frömmer (2005). «Vom politischen Körper zur Körperpolitik. Männliche Rede und weibliche Keuschheit in Lessings 'Emilia Galotti'». *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 79, 169-95.

38 «Wann wir einmal alle, – wir, das ganze Heer der Verlassenen, – wir alle in Bacchantinnen, in Furien verwandelt, wenn wir alle ihn unter uns hätten, ihn unter uns zerrissen, zerfleischten, sein Eingeweide durchwühlten, – um das Herz zu finden, das der Verräter einer jeden versprach, und keiner gab! Ha! das sollte ein Tanz werden! das sollte!» (Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1987). *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Hrsg. von Wilfried Barner. Bd. 2. *Werke 1770-1773*. Hrsg. von Klaus Bohnen. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 356). Sulla ricezione di Seneca in Lessing cf. Wilfried Barner (1973). *Produktive Rezeption. Lessing und die Tragödien Senecas*. München: Beck.

39 Per un'accurata analisi di questa scena nell'ottica del dibattito settecentesco sulle passioni cf. Stefan Schröder (1997). «Tödliche Ratio. Zur Konfiguration in Lessings 'Emilia Galotti'». Polheim, Karl Konrad (Hrsg.). *Die dramatische Konfiguration*. Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 33-56.

spiccata prima di venire deturpata dalla tempesta - destinata ad attirare l'attenzione sulla sua passività e sulla sua acquiescenza alla volontà altrui.<sup>40</sup>

Questa dimensione così intimamente costitutiva per la configurazione e lo scioglimento dell'intreccio tragico trasporta sul piano dell'azione la medesima dinamica degli affetti che Lessing vede operare sul piano dell'effetto estetico.<sup>41</sup> Se, stando al celebre pronunciamento contenuto nella lettera a Nicolai del novembre 1756, il compito del poeta tragico consiste nell'ampliare la sensibilità dello spettatore in modo tale da potenziare la sua facoltà sensitiva, e di conseguenza la sua capacità morale, anche quando queste si trovino a dovere essere esercitate fuori dal perimetro protetto dello spazio teatrale, proprio la mancanza di questa disciplina degli affetti è il tratto comune a tutti i personaggi di *Emilia Galotti*, nonché il più potente fra i motori che alimentano la costruzione della vicenda. Lessing inizia a elaborare il soggetto dell'opera nel periodo in cui l'apertura di un concorso per lavori tragici, promosso di concerto con Nicolai e Mendelssohn in appoggio alla fondazione della «Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und freien Künste», lo obbliga a occuparsi del *Codrus* di Johann Friedrich von Cronegk, il dramma che, non in ultimo per la scarsa qualità della concorrenza, avrebbe finito per aggiudicarsi il premio nel 1758. *Codrus*, come lo stesso Cronegk non avrebbe mancato di rilevare, è appesantito da varie asimmetrie nella costruzione, e soprattutto da un'oscillazione mai veramente risolta tra il polo dell'ammirazione, che il tragediografo sentiva in ogni caso come congeniale a causa della sua formazione classicistica, e quello della compassione, verso il quale lo spingeva il moderato sensismo appreso alla scuola gellertiana. L'esempio di un dramma indebolito da una cattiva gestione del potenziale affettivo dei personaggi doveva evidentemente sollecitare Lessing a porsi con particolare urgenza il problema della definizione emotiva delle figure tragiche.

In questo senso, tanto Odoardo quanto Emilia e Hettore Gonzaga sono afflitti dal *deficit* di equilibrio tra gli affetti e il controllo razionale degli affetti stessi, nel quale l'antropologia settecentesca aveva indicato un pericolo per la conduzione di un'esistenza virtuosa, adombrando l'unica soluzione possibile nella pratica costante di un esercizio inteso a tenere le

40 Per una lettura della passività di Emilia come risultato di un paradigma pedagogico cf. Pikulik, Lothar (2006). «'Sonst ist alles besser an Euch, als an Uns'. Über Odoardos Lobrede auf die Frau in 'Emilia Galotti'». Friedrich, Hans-Edwin; Jannidis, Fotis; Willems, Marianne (Hrsgg.). *Bürgerlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 303-22.

41 Maurer, Karl-Heinz (2005). «Verführung durch Mitleid. G. E. Lessings 'Emilia Galotti' als Selbstaufhebung der Tragödie». *The German Quarterly*, 78, 172-91, ha fondato su questa premessa una lettura particolarmente spregiudicata del dramma, secondo la quale Emilia manipolerebbe consapevolmente gli affetti tragici per rendere evidente la propria appartenenza a un orizzonte etico superiore al piano della contingenza.

due facoltà in una relazione funzionale e ben ponderata.<sup>42</sup> La compassione, in quanto affetto tragico capitale, non solo – come Lessing scrive nella replica a Mendelssohn del 28 novembre 1756 – procura il miglioramento dell'uomo senza limitazioni di classe, cultura o capacità cognitiva (perché a differenza dell'ammirazione agisce su alcune costanti antropologiche primarie, e ha in ciò un effetto schiettamente biopoetico, fondato sulla sollecitazione di una risposta fisiologica e non mediata dalla ragione), ma – ed è ciò che più conta – predispone a una correzione radicale degli eccessi e a un perfezionamento di lunga durata, perché impianta nell'uomo sensibile al suo effetto una disposizione prima ancora che una condizione in atto, una potenzialità prima ancora che uno stato. Il contagio del *Mitleid*, aderendo a quella naturale disposizione alla virtù che Lessing trovava teorizzata nei lavori del sensismo inglese,<sup>43</sup> trasferisce nell'animo dell'individuo un'attitudine che richiede di essere esercitata pragmaticamente.<sup>44</sup>

Il dispositivo pedagogico messo in atto dai Galotti nei confronti di Emilia, così come viene delineato nel dialogo tra Odoardo e Claudia del secondo atto, presuppone l'idea che dall'azione del male ci si difenda non mediante l'acquisto di una graduale conoscenza del male stesso, ma tramite l'astensione dal contatto con il mondo e la subordinazione acritica a un sistema di valori passivamente accettato nella sua autoevidenza. Odoardo deplora vivamente che la moglie abbia deciso di far crescere la figlia nell'ambiente della città, allontanandola dal contesto circoscritto e protetto della campagna, dove il persistere di condizioni premoderne più agevolmente l'avrebbe protetta dall'influenza di ogni tentazione sensibile, e identifica il massimo pregio di Appiani proprio nella fermezza con la quale costui intende, una volta celebrato il matrimonio con Emilia, abbandonare la corte e stabilirsi

42 Ritchie Robertson (2009). «Virtue versus 'Schwärmerei' in Lessing's 'Emilia Galotti'». *German Life and Letters*, 62, 39-52, riconduce gli eccessi affettivi dei personaggi all'incidenza del modello comportamentale basato sulla *Schwärmerei* di ascendenza pietistica.

43 In Francis Hutcheson, di cui nel 1756 traduce il *System of Moral Philosophy*, Lessing ha a disposizione un collegamento diretto fra la pratica dell'esercizio e l'obiettivo del perfezionamento morale: «Es ist mit der Uebung unsrer Kräfte eine hohe Glückseligkeit verknüpft; und je edler die Kraft ist, desto glücklicher sind wir, wenn wir sie üben, wenn die tugendhaften Unternehmungen gelingen: so entsteht von dem Bewusstseyn eines guten Herzens, von dem geselligen Gefühl bey dem Schicksal anderer, von der erwarteten Liebe und dem Beyfall aller Menschen, besonders von dem Wohlgefallen unsers Schöpfers, ein Zusammenflus von so reinen Freuden, die alle andre Vergnügungen übertreffen» (*Franz Hutchesons der Rechte Doctors und der Weltweisheit Professors zu Glasgow Sittenlehre der Vernunft* (1756). Aus dem Englischen übersetzt. Leipzig, 217).

44 Resta valida la definizione di Max Kommerell (1960), lì dove incentra la ricezione delle teorie aristoteliche in Lessing sull'idea che l'effetto della tragedia sullo spettatore consista nella «Übung der Seele im Mitleid» e che la «Lebensfunktion» di tale dinamica coincida con uno «Schulungsmittel auf dem Weg des Menschen zu sich selbst» (*Lessing und Aristoteles. Untersuchung über die Theorie der Tragödie*. 3. Auflage. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 106).

nelle sue proprietà rurali. La stessa Claudia, peraltro, pur sondando chiaramente i limiti della morale professata dal marito e pur manovrando con una certa disinvoltura i registri della dissimulazione e dell'adattamento alla convenzione sociale, non pensa affatto a differenziare l'educazione di Emilia avvicinandola al carattere necessariamente complesso delle relazioni umane e si illude di poter dominare il conflitto acceso dal tentativo di seduzione del principe ora riconducendolo a una pratica di *bien vivre* priva di qualunque sostanza,<sup>45</sup> ora appellandosi autoritariamente a una capacità di reazione alla quale Emilia, per la sua estraneità al linguaggio dei rapporti umani, è evidentemente del tutto impreparata.<sup>46</sup> In termini biopoetici, la rovina di Emilia è l'esito della mancanza di un apprendistato duraturo alla dinamica delle emozioni. L'assenza di una condizione di *fitness* esercitata attraverso una regolare ginnastica delle passioni la espone senza alcuna mediazione non tanto all'intensità estrema delle suggestioni suscitate dal linguaggio seduttivo del principe, quanto all'angoscia della perdita di sé e della stigmatizzazione sociale. In modo analogo, nella condotta di Hettore Gonzaga gli affetti si manifestano, nella loro autoreferenzialità, secondo una intensità completamente priva di legami con l'identità profonda del soggetto desiderante, il quale finisce per ricorrere di preferenza a paradigmi di autorappresentazione basati sulla commiserazione e sulla svalutazione di sé. L'esercizio delle passioni praticato nelle forme prescritte dal cerimoniale curtense, intese a coltivare un ideale di *décence* e di sprezzatura che deve rendere visibile il possesso di un indisturbato controllo su ogni possibile turbamento, si rivela insostenibile di fronte alla pressione dell'attrazione sensuale, in balia della quale il principe non può che rinunciare a se stesso, cercando affannosamente un surrogato ora nella logica dell'intrigo elaborata da Marinelli, ora nel fantasma di una relazione amorosa sostenuta da una sincera comunione degli affetti.

45 «Der Prinz ist galant. Du bist die unbedeutende Sprache der Galanterie zu wenig gewohnt. Eine Höflichkeit wird in ihr zur Empfindung; eine Schmeichelei zur Beteuerung; ein Einfall zum Wunsche; ein Wunsch zum Vorsatze. Nichts klingt in dieser Sprache wie Alles: und Alles ist in ihr so viel als Nichts» (Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1987). *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. Hrsg. von Wilfried Barner. Bd. 2. *Werke 1770-1773*. Hrsg. von Klaus Bohnen. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 318).

46 «Ich will hoffen, daß du deiner mächtig genug warest, ihm in Einem Blicke alle die Verachtung zu bezeigen, die er verdientet» (316).





## **Un atlante di immagini del buio** Walter Benjamin vs Ernst Jünger

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**Abstract** “In these times, when my imagination is preoccupied with the most unworthy problems between sunrise and sunset, I experience at night, more and more often, its emancipation in dreams, which nearly always have a political subject. I would really like to be in a position to tell you about them someday. They represent a pictorial atlas of secret history of National Socialism”. Walter Benjamin writes such words on March 3rd, 1934 to his friend Gershom Scholem. Benjamin at the end did not succeed to tell the story of the 1930s after the Nazi seizure of power through his images, even if the dimension of the dream is always present in his thinking. The reconstruction of such an idea seems legitimate, following the hint to the oneiric-unconscious representation of this “secret history”, which can be found in some writings Walter Benjamin's. In this sense the text “Cellar” in his *One-Way-Street* is to be discussed, in which he develops a reflection about friendship, psychological repression, and sacrificial symbolism. This text can be confronted with another dream's vision by Ernst Jünger in his *The Adventurous Heart*: in “The Cloister Church” he describes a sacrifice which can be understood as an allegory of its complicated relations to the Nazi. Discussing the images of these two texts I propose a reading of the presentation of this “Third Reich of Dreams” (so the title of a book of German-Jewish journalist Charlotte Beradt of 1966) in a metaphorical and literary sense, as a reflection on the different ways of political dream's visuality within the literary discourse.

**Sommario** 1 Introduzione. Le immagini del male. – 2 Sacrifici dimenticati nello scantinato. – 3 Topografie surreali. – 4 Intermezzo junghiano. Ricordare l'ignoto. – 5 Il cuore avventuroso e la violenza nella cripta.

**Keywords** Visuality. Dream. National Socialism. Sacrificial symbolism.

### **1 Introduzione. Le immagini del male**

Nel marzo 1934, all'amico Gershom Scholem – ormai da tempo residente in Palestina – Walter Benjamin, che invece ha assistito in Europa alla presa del potere da parte dei nazionalsocialisti in Germania e ora, dopo un inquieto girovagare, si trova in Francia (che sarà la sua terra d'esilio drammaticamente definitiva), scrive da Parigi:

In questo periodo, in cui la mia fantasia deve occuparsi quotidianamente dei problemi più umilianti, di notte essa si emancipa invece sempre più spesso, e produce sogni che hanno quasi sempre un contenuto politico.

Mi piacerebbe molto essere in condizione di raccontarteli, un giorno o l'altro. Rappresentano un atlante di immagini per la storia segreta del nazionalsocialismo. (Benjamin, Scholem 1987, 117-8)

Il suggestivo e ambizioso progetto benjaminiano, di redigere «un atlante di immagini per la storia segreta del nazionalsocialismo [einen Bilderatlas zur geheimen Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus]» a partire dai sogni, è stato già in parte affrontato negli anni Sessanta dalla psicologa tedesca Charlotte Beradt, che ha raccolto e catalogato una serie di sogni fatti da cittadini tedeschi nel periodo del 'Reich millenario' (cf. Beradt 1991); e tuttavia resta largamente impregiudicata, dell'intuizione benjaminiana, la questione concettuale delle **immagini** di questo atlante. Da questo punto di vista, dunque, l'aspetto più importante e sostanzialmente inedito è dato proprio dalla dimensione visuale di questa idea benjaminiana. In che senso allora - ci si potrebbe chiedere allargando il quadro di questa intuizione - si dà una *Bildergeschichte* segreta della tirannide nazista? Come esprimere cioè visivamente la malvagità, e contemporaneamente formularne una critica? E, ancora e più in generale, come confrontarsi in maniera critica e radicale - letteralmente, scendendo criticamente alla radice dei fenomeni - con il proprio tempo, restando consapevoli che tale radice è ora emersa, sia pure in forme spesso non-razionali e dai contorni ancora imprecisi - e che anzi è proprio la forma di questa emersione ad imporsi prepotentemente alla riflessione e alla visione?

Per tentare di rispondere a queste domande - che, chiaramente, non riguardano soltanto la collocazione politica, ideologica e culturale degli intellettuali negli anni immediatamente precedenti alla presa del potere da parte di Hitler - si analizzeranno qui due brevi testi dalla struttura e dal contenuto sorprendentemente simili, ma dotati di premesse concettuali e biografiche del tutto diverse, per non dire confliggenti: da un lato uno di Walter Benjamin contenuto nel suo *Einbahnstrasse*, del 1928; e dall'altro uno di Ernst Jünger, presente nella raccolta di annotazioni uscite un anno dopo nella loro prima edizione con il titolo *Das Abenteuerliche Herz*. In entrambi i testi, come si vedrà, il sogno e la visione assumono una centralità cruciale, non solo come modalità proprie di un tessuto narrativo votato allo sperimentalismo, ma come vere e proprie *issues* gnoseologiche di fondo: è attraverso il sogno, cioè, ovvero per mezzo di una percezione visivamente immediata di una 'realtà' impalpabile oltre la realtà quotidiana, che quest'ultima offre nuove e impensate connessioni, nuove **visioni** di ciò che va interpretato al di là della sua sintassi più immediatamente riconoscibile. Comune ad entrambi i testi è inoltre la volontà da parte del narratore di strutturare il proprio racconto secondo una funzione allegorico-discorsiva, più che narrativa in senso stretto (coerentemente con la forma utilizzata), che in questi due testi si condensa intorno a un nucleo simbolico incentrato sul tema dell'edificio e del sacrificio. Non è un caso,

poi, che queste riflessioni si collochino in un momento storico in cui la Germania sta attraversando un processo di modernizzazione impetuoso eppure segnato da una crisi della rappresentanza, delle forme, delle strutture politiche e culturali - e contemporaneamente segnato da una sottolineatura del carattere **classico** di tale modernità, ovvero da una sua dimensione tipologica che ha nel richiamo alle forme classiche della politica, dell'arte, della cultura e della intellettualità la sua chiave di volta, sullo sfondo di un quadro sociale assai mosso e aperto a tutte le possibilità (cf. Peukert 1995). In tal senso, gli ultimi anni del laboratorio weimariano offrono una preziosa cartina al tornasole per verificare in che misura tale laboratorio politico-culturale possa offrire un quadro di insieme interpretativo in cui le parole-chiave crisi, modernità, tradizione, sperimentazione, possano articolarsi in un reciprocamente dialettico spazio tensionale; uno spazio che ha nella visione onirica la modalità privilegiata di rappresentazione.

## 2 Sacrifici dimenticati nello scantinato

Come è noto, il libro di Walter Benjamin uscito con il titolo *Einbahnstrasse* (*Strada a senso unico*) si compone di piccoli testi, di natura genericamente autobiografica e dalla struttura indubbiamente originale, quello che Ernst Bloch chiamò «un fotomontaggio» «attraverso l'epoca che si svuota» (1992, 309); un fotomontaggio che in Benjamin assume la forma di un *Denkbild*, di un'immagine concettuale che condensa cioè in pochi tratti un preciso spazio di riflessione intellettuale, nella forma cioè di una esposizione emblematica connessa a un luogo: *Denken* appunto, ma anche *Bild*. La sezione che si intitola *N. 113* (in riferimento a un numero civico), in particolare, si compone di tre testi intitolati *Scantinato*, *Vestibolo* e *Sala da pranzo*, che hanno appunto il compito di cartografare un simbolico edificio - dominato, nelle ultime due sezioni, dalla figura di Goethe, per così dire oniricamente museificato in un'immagine che resta sospesa tra visione archetipica e immagine di sogno - inaugurato da un breve testo che si riporta qui per esteso:

Scantinato.

Abbiamo dimenticato da molto tempo il rituale secondo cui è stata eretta la casa della nostra vita. Ma se essa dovrà venir presa d'assalto, se già le esplodono contro le bombe nemiche, quali rinsecchite e bizzarre antichità queste non metteranno allo scoperto nelle fondamenta! Cosa non è stato sepolto e sacrificato tra formule magiche, che raccapricciante collezione di curiosità là sotto, dove alle cose più banali della vita quotidiana sono riservati i fossi più profondi! In una notte di disperazione mi sono visto, in sogno, intento a rinnovare calorosamente i legami d'amicizia e di fraternità col mio primo compagno di scuola, che

non conosco più da decenni e di cui nel frattempo non mi sono quasi mai ricordato. Svegliandomi ho capito: ciò che la disperazione, come una carica di esplosivo, aveva portato alla luce era il cadavere di quel tale, murato là per ottenere questo: chi abiterà qui non gli dovrà somigliare per niente.<sup>1</sup> (Benjamin 1983, 6-7)

Il *Denkbild* benjaminiano si struttura insomma intorno a una serie di idee-chiave che delineano un percorso riflessivo che si snoda tra disperazione, rapporto con il passato e la tradizione e loro crisi, finendo con l'espone quello che qui si considera il punto di maggiore interesse, ovvero il legame occulto tra sacrificio e progresso. Come cioè nei rituali arcaici, per assicurare la robustezza di una costruzione, c'era bisogno di un atto sacrificale, ovvero murare o seppellire una vittima rituale dentro o sotto la costruzione, allo stesso modo anche l'edificio ricostruito da Benjamin qui ha avuto bisogno di un sacrificio di fondazione per mantenersi eretto: in questo caso l'amico d'infanzia ormai dimenticato, la cui presenza riaffiora però in questa «notte di disperazione», per sottolineare come la sua presenza nascosta riemerge proprio nell'istante di maggior pericolo (il riferimento è alle bombe nemiche).

Sacrificio di fondazione, si è detto; con ciò ci si riferisce a una figura classica indagata dall'antropologia culturale e dalla storia delle religioni, *in primis* da uno studioso come Mircea Eliade, che al sacrificio di fondazione ha dedicato un interessante quanto controverso saggio, la cui tesi di fondo è così riassunta:

Soltanto la 'morte violenta' di una divinità o di una creatura straordinaria (fata, eroe, ecc.) è **creatrice**, poiché accresce sempre la realtà. Una vita, che svolge il suo filo sino al termine e finisce in un modo naturale, non dà frutto, non si trasforma in qualcosa di vivo, più precisamente, la **fine naturale** di questa vita è sterile. Al contrario, ogni vita sacrificata attraverso una 'morte violenta', prima di aver esaurito tutte le possibilità di manifestazione, si trasforma in una nuova forma della vita. (Eliade 1990, 72)

Questo saggio del 1943 (anche se Eliade si era dedicato a questa storia già in un corso universitario del 1936-37)<sup>2</sup> è controverso perché lo stu-

1 Il titolo si scioglie come un riferimento ai sotterranei del Palais Royal parigino, nelle cui stanze, appunto al numero civico 113, si trovava tra la fine del XVIII e l'inizio del XIX secolo un locale noto come sala da gioco e bordello (così il commento al testo, in Benjamin 2009, 352-3).

2 Spineto 2000, 214 ss. ha il merito di riesaminare lo scottante dossier politico-culturale del giovane Eliade senza pudichi infingimenti postumi, ma senza neppure una certa *vis* polemica che caratterizza molti studi tesi a 'rivelare' gli scottanti segreti dell'Eliade 'rumeno'.

dioso rumeno, nel rievocare una leggenda del suo paese che narra di un gruppo di muratori disperati perché il monastero che stanno costruendo crolla ogni volta, sino a quando non scoprono che, per renderlo saldo, è necessario murare nelle sue fondamenta un essere umano (che la sorte vuole essere la moglie incinta del capomastro che dà il titolo alla ballata), ha certamente presente il contesto storico generale europeo e quello particolare della Romania alla fine degli anni Trenta, quando cioè lo scenario politico è dominato da molte tensioni sociali e dalla presenza della Guardia di Ferro, un movimento paramilitare e antisemita dalle forti connotazioni mistiche: i suoi militanti si dichiaravano infatti pronti a sacrificare la propria vita in nome della rigenerazione della Romania, quasi a testimoniare in forme militanti la funzione creatrice della morte violenta di cui parla appunto Eliade nel suo studio.<sup>3</sup> La questione quindi diviene chiara - se non in termini strettamente antropologici e di storia del folklore, in cui il tema del sacrificio di fondazione assume tonalità complesse e sfaccettate,<sup>4</sup> certamente però in quelli più generali di storia delle idee e per così dire di psicologia intellettuale: è proprio negli anni tra le due guerre che non a caso vengono a maturazione i «frutti proibiti» di una certa interpretazione di «scienza del mito» in chiave vitalistica e irrazionalistica, quale è possibile ritrovare in una costellazione di autori che, grossomodo, va dai

3 Giustamente sottolinea Spineto che Eliade in quegli anni andava concentrando la sua attività di ricerca sul folklore rumeno, e più in generale sulla storia delle religioni riletta in forma comparativa (il cui modello, ovvero Sir James Frazer e la sua monumentale ricerca dal titolo *Il ramo d'oro*, era ben noto allo studioso rumeno), una ricerca incentrata appunto sul carattere **sacrificale** dei principali miti di fondazione e di rigenerazione; nondimeno, lo studioso Eliade - che all'epoca era appunto un simpatizzante del movimento guardista - non può non esser stato consapevole del contesto storico-politico cui i suoi studi dedicati a Mastro Manole fanno implicito riferimento, studi che anzi vanno in qualche modo considerati come il suo personale contributo a una politica di rigenerazione dell'anima rumena per mezzo del suo patrimonio folklorico: in tal modo questo studio eliadiano «manifesta [...] la sua volontà di inserirsi nel movimento di recupero delle tradizioni rumene e riafferma il valore e il senso di una tematica cara ai legionari» (Spineto 2000, 216). Anche uno studioso brillante e *sui generis* come Furio Jesi ha dedicato all'Eliade di Mastro Manole delle pagine illuminanti, dotate della *verve* polemica e passione militante che caratterizzava lo studioso precocemente scomparso, e tuttavia contraddistinte da forzature interpretative, come ad esempio il costante riferimento al dossier dell'istituto ebraico-rumeno 'Niemirower', che si era posto il compito di rivelare il passato guardista, nazionalista e antisemita dell'intellettuale rumeno, e che uno studioso attento come Roberto Scagno ha ricondotto al contesto 'neostalinista' e nazionalpatriottico della Romania degli anni Settanta, rivelandone in tal modo assunti ideologici di fondo e debolezze concettuali (cf. Jesi 1979, 38 ss.; Scagno 2000). In generale, sul giovane Eliade e i suoi rapporti con il mondo politico-culturale rumeno tra le due guerre, un'utile messa a punto - con pubblicazione in traduzione tedesca di alcuni testi giovanili militanti dello storico delle religioni - si trova in Müller 2004.

4 Si veda ad esempio un altro titolo classico della ricerca folklorica come lo studio di Seppilli 1990, in cui l'autrice sottolinea, concentrandosi sul significato simbolico-rituale dell'acqua e del ponte che l'attraversa, «il senso del sacrilegio già implicito in ogni manomissione del mondo così come è» (235), che dunque va medicato tramite un'offerta rituale.

*Kosmiker* a Georges Bataille, dalla riscoperta di Bachofen al culto della lega maschile di impianto militare, senza dimenticare Carl Gustav Jung e, appunto, la storia delle religioni come 'scienza' alla ricerca di nuove verità ultime (cf. Moretti, Ronchi 1987). In questo senso il sacrificio appare come una vera e propria architrave concettuale e politica in cui la nozione di «morte violenta e creatrice» appare destinata a strutturare, più che una interpretazione antropologico-culturale del patrimonio folklorico, una vera e propria dimensione politico-esistenziale di lettura del contemporaneo. All'interno di questa costellazione Mircea Eliade rappresenta un caso paradigmatico, dal momento che il suo profilo intellettuale e scientifico non appare esente da simili tentazioni, che in lui poi si accompagnano a una pessimistica concezione intorno all'uomo e al suo «terrore per la storia».<sup>5</sup> In tal modo, «terrore per la storia» e fascinazione per la violenza fondatrice diventano architravi concettuali di un *habitus* intellettuale conservatore destinato a convalidare politicamente il carattere scientifico delle discipline accademiche: un *habitus* evidentemente funzionale al lessico politico-totalitario del tempo.<sup>6</sup>

La «presenza inquietante» del religioso, nelle forme del sacrificio umano di fondazione, **dentro** il processo storico, emerge chiaramente nel breve testo benjaminiano: il riferimento al «rituale secondo cui è stata eretta la casa della nostra vita», ormai da lungo tempo dimenticato, va inteso simultaneamente come un richiamo a un passato arcaico e altrimenti irraggiungibile, e per ciò stesso opaco e indistinto, e come un implicito riferimento alla violenza costitutivamente insita in esso, che lo fonda e lo legittima. Dal momento che il sacrificio, in quanto dispositivo antropologico-religioso in cui è profondamente inscritta la grammatica della violenza (cf. Grottanelli 1999), si mostra non solo etimologicamente come *sacra facere*, come svolgimento rituale di un'azione sacralmente intesa, ma più precisamente come declinazione del rapporto con il sacro e la divinità incentrato sull'idea di **offerta** di una vittima: è solo offrendo cioè al trascendente un elemento vivente proveniente dal mondo dell'immanenza che è possibile considerare legittima, e dunque efficace, l'azione sacra. Da questa procedura rituale basata sull'offerta scaturisce appunto l'applicazione della violenza, che in tal senso va considerata come consustanziale al dispositivo sacrificale stesso. Nel sacrificio di fondazione, più in particolare, l'applicazione della violenza su una vittima predestinata serve a stabilire la legittimità religiosa della costruzione, che altrimenti sarebbe

5 Non è questo il luogo per un'approfondita disamina delle posizioni intellettuali e scientifiche di Mircea Eliade. Tra la ormai sterminata letteratura che si è attualmente dedicata a lumeggiare la figura dello studioso rumeno, oltre a quella citata, vorrei fare riferimento a due saggi su Eliade in qualche modo 'marginali': Ginzburg 2010 e Grottanelli 2005, su cui si tornerà.

6 Cf. al proposito Junginger 2007.

destinata all'inconsistenza (simbolica ma anche concreta, visto che senza sacrificio l'edificio crolla). In tal senso il testo di Benjamin, se da un lato si iscrive pienamente nella polemica contro il mito che caratterizza tutto il suo pensiero - nelle forme di una critica delle origini le quali, parimenti, non possono non riemergere in quanto tali alla coscienza -<sup>7</sup> dall'altro, e proprio per questo motivo, mostra la liceità di un legame (certamente non diretto) con l'apparato concettuale eliadiano rispetto al sacrificio di fondazione, nella misura in cui l'allegoria benjaminiana esibisce criticamente la dimensione ancestralmente violenta di tale dispositivo, che invece in Eliade riceve una coloritura esplicitamente simpatetica.

### 3 Topografie surreali

All'interno di quell'atlante allegorico della città che è *Strada a senso unico*, Benjamin da un lato cartografa per così dire l'anima stessa dello scrittore, proiettandone ansie e disperazioni sulla topografia di una città immaginaria ma tangibile; dall'altro procede, conformemente alla sua attitudine di *Literaturkritiker*, a una disamina dei paradossi e delle contraddizioni che vi hanno sede (sia nell'anima stessa, che nel circostante allegorico). Il fatto cioè che in quell'edificio che corrisponde al nm. 113 (in cui, come detto, si trovavano a Parigi una casa da gioco e di appuntamenti), non vada dimenticato il cadavere fondativo, significa che dentro questo paesaggio allegorico abita la caducità, nella forma della violenza. *Strada a senso unico* si mostra dunque come un raffinato dispositivo filosofico e narrativo che, se da un lato si iscrive pienamente nella corrente di letteratura 'sperimentale' tipica della sua epoca (di cui fa parte anche *Il cuore avventuroso* jüngeriano), da un altro si concepisce semplicemente come una «plaquette für Freunde», come dice lo stesso Benjamin (cf. Raullet 2006, 359) - una sorta di 'gioco' dunque (serio come tutte le riflessioni benjaminiane intorno al gioco), circa la vita e l'amore.<sup>8</sup>

7 Sulla problematizzazione benjaminiana del mito e delle origini, cf. quanto Benjamin scriverà anni dopo a proposito di Kafka: «L'epoca in cui egli vive non significa per lui alcun progresso sugli inizi preistorici. I suoi romanzi si svolgono in un mondo palustre. La creatura appare in lui allo stadio che Bachofen definisce eterico. Che questo stadio sia dimenticato, non significa che esso non affiori nel presente. Anzi, esso è presente proprio in virtù di questa dimenticanza. Un'esperienza che va più a fondo di quella del borghese medio viene a contatto con questo strato» Benjamin 1962, 295.

8 Schiavoni 2001, nel cap. 10 (*Stratega nella battaglia letteraria*), forse troppo frettolosamente rubrica il testo esclusivamente sotto il segno biografico del confronto sentimentale con Asja Lacis, la rivoluzionaria lettone conosciuta in quegli anni, di cui Benjamin si innamora non ricambiato, per spiegare il contenuto nascosto e più ancora l'atmosfera di disperata frustrazione che percorre questi testi. La nuova edizione tedesca del testo nella *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* già citata mostra ora in maniera più precisa, grazie alla ricchezza di ma-



Ma in questo testo appare centrale il confronto con la scrittura, la storia e la memoria, in cui anche la dimensione onirica e inconscia assume un ruolo ovviamente non secondario. Solo attraverso la forma del sogno, insomma, si offrono alla riflessione in forma immediata - **visualmente** immediata, il che però non significa: gnoseologicamente immediata - elementi preziosi per la riarticolazione del nesso interno tra storia, memoria, scrittura e mito, e della loro ricaduta in ambito storico ed esistenziale. Se quindi lo scantinato di cui parla qui Benjamin si configura come deposito occulto del passato (nella forma decisiva della gioventù e della sua metafisica (cf. Benjamin 1982), lo è appunto nelle forme del *Denkbild* onirico, in cui la realtà passata appare trasfigurata in una sorta di surrealtà, tanto più vera quanto più i suoi contorni si fanno oniricamente impalpabili.

La dimensione onirica di tale *Denkbild* articola dunque, per il percorso interpretativo che qui si sta delineando, un paesaggio allegorico della caducità attraversato dalla violenza fondatrice - allegorico perché espresso nelle forme del sogno, che prende le forme ironiche di un vecchio compagno di scuola. In tal modo Benjamin allude al suo periodo giovanile, il quale, nonostante e anzi proprio in forza delle sue successive elaborazioni intellettuali e politiche, si costituisce nel percorso intellettuale benjaminiano come una sorta di premonizione (cf. Steizinger 2013). «Chi cerca di accostarsi al proprio passato sepolto deve comportarsi come un individuo che scava»: così scrive ancora Benjamin presumibilmente nel 1932, quando cioè il suo lavoro di scavo intorno al proprio passato ha preso la forma della *Berliner Chronik*, da cui questo testo inedito, pubblicato col titolo di *Scavare e ricordare*, con tutta probabilità ha preso le mosse. E aggiunge più avanti: «Così i ricordi veri devono non tanto procedere riferendo, quanto piuttosto designare esattamente il luogo nel quale colui che ricerca si è impadronito di loro» (Benjamin 2003, 112). È proprio a partire da questa topografia onirica che si rende dunque perspicuo il *Denkbild* benjaminiano su «la casa della nostra vita»: scavando come un archeologo, il suo abitante si renderà rapidamente conto - tanto più rapidamente se lo scavo non è volontario e 'scientifico', ma effetto del 'bombardamento nemico', che qui sta evidentemente a significare l'irruzione di forze ostili - del fatto che sotto e dentro di esso risiedono forze oscure e dimenticate, che vanno riportate alla luce, per poi essere nuovamente superate: «chi abiterà qui non gli dovrà somigliare per niente», sottolinea Benjamin in chiusura.

teriali inediti e preparatori, le articolazioni interne ed esterne del testo, sottolineando la complessità dei rimandi politici e concettuali intorno a *Strada a senso unico* (cf. in proposito il *Nachwort* in Benjamin 2009, 554 ss.).



#### 4 Intermezzo junghiano. Ricordare l'ignoto

Un meccanismo tipico della procedura psicanalitica, in particolare di quella junghiana, è proprio il frequente utilizzo di metafore architettoniche. I testi dello studioso svizzero brulicano in effetti di tali metafore, che operano sia a un livello «oggettivo» e scientifico<sup>9</sup> che a un livello più intimo e personale. In uno dei protocolli dei seminari tenuti in inglese da Jung nel 1925, l'autore racconta un sogno occorsogli una volta tornato da un viaggio in America:

Sognai di trovarmi in una casa medievale, una casa grande e complicata con molte stanze, passaggi e scale. Vi ero entrato dalla strada e poi ero sceso in una stanza gotica a volta e da lì in cantina. Pensavo di essere ormai in fondo, quando scoprii un buco quadrato. Con una lanterna in mano, sbirciai giù nel buco e vidi delle scale che conducevano ancora più sotto e le discesi. Erano scale piene di polvere, molto consunte e l'aria era pesante, l'intera atmosfera era molto misteriosa. Giunsi in un'altra cantina, di struttura antichissima, forse romana, e anche qui c'era un buco attraverso il quale potei guardar giù in una tomba piena di cocci preistorici, ossa e teschi; siccome la polvere era intatta, pensai di aver fatto una grande scoperta. A questo punto mi svegliai.<sup>10</sup> (Noll 1999, 166-7)

Il sogno viene da Jung qui interpretato in chiave filogenetica, non personale; ed è in effetti in questa chiave che va inteso. Il *topos* della casa a molti strati, che rappresenta in maniera molto vivida il lavoro di scavo che lo psicanalista compie nella mente, che procede dal conscio all'inconscio, implica dunque una discesa verso il basso, alla ricerca delle fondamenta, ovvero del momento fondativo e originario di quell'edificio. Sia in Benjamin che in Jung alla fine di questa discesa si trova un morto - esplicitamente sacrificato nel primo caso, solo archeologicamente scoperto nel secondo caso (comunque, anche evitando indebite inferenze sacrificali nell'interpretazione del sogno junghiano, esso possiede inequivocabili caratteristi-

9 Come nel caso di questo passo, tratto da *Seelenprobleme der Gegenwart*, del 1931: «Mi si permetta il seguente paragone: noi abbiamo da descrivere un edificio i cui piani superiori furono costruiti nel secolo XIX; il pianterreno invece data dal secolo XVI, e lo studio accurato dei muri maestri rivela che essi derivano da una trasformazione di una torre del secolo XI. Nella cantina scopriamo fondamenta romane e sotto la cantina una caverna interrata; sul fondo di questa si rinvennero nello strato superiore strumenti dell'età della pietra, e nello strato più profondo resti di fauna della medesima età. Tale sarebbe all'incirca l'immagine della nostra struttura psichica; noi abitiamo nel piano superiore e siamo coscienti solo in modo crepuscolare dell'antichità del piano inferiore. Di ciò che agisce sotto terra non abbiamo alcuna coscienza» (Jung 1979, 125).

10 Cf. anche Jung 1990, 23.

che tombali). Il sogno riferito da Jung, poi, volutamente esibisce una serie di istantanee storico-archeologiche che hanno il compito di sottolineare il carattere filogenetico di quell'interpretazione: scendere nei sotterranei dell'edificio della mente – con le armi del sogno – significa allo stesso tempo andare a ritroso nella catena dei fatti storici, scoprendone letteralmente, alla fine, il momento fondativo violento e/o sacrificale. Lo sguardo di Jung su questo lavoro di scavo è affascinato, stregato da questa letterale discesa negli inferi della memoria e della storia dell'umano; mentre quello di Benjamin è piuttosto disincantato, nel senso che appare consapevole del complesso processo di *Entzauberung* cui è sottoposto il Moderno. Lo strato selvaggio, elementare, auroralmente violento dell'origine – che in Jung appare come pietrificato nel rinvenimento sepolcrale delle ossa, e che in Benjamin incarna ironicamente e melanconicamente ad un tempo quel vortice indifferenziato che per il filosofo berlinese è l'*Ursprung* (cf. Benjamin 1971) – si incarica quindi di rivelare lo sviluppo filogenetico e storico dell'*oikos* umano che culmina nell'*interieur* borghese.

## 5 Il cuore avventuroso e la violenza nella cripta

Se quindi il testo benjaminiano ripercorre criticamente la storia individuale dell'autore considerandola anche come capitolo della storia collettiva, utilizzando la forma espositiva del *Denkbild* onirico, non appare peregrino abbinarle il testo di Ernst Jünger, tratto dalla raccolta *Il cuore avventuroso*, noto come *Die Klosterkirche*, qui nella versione italiana di Quirino Principe, che traduce la seconda versione della raccolta jüngeriana edita nel 1938:

La chiesa del convento.

Eravamo riuniti nella chiesa di un antico convento, avvolti in splendide vesti ricamate di rosso e d'oro. Fra i monaci là adunati ve n'erano alcuni, fra i quali io stesso, che si davano appuntamento di notte nelle cripte. Appartenevamo a coloro che deviano dalla retta via poiché il sapore del potere li inebria come vino. Era nostra guida un uomo ancora giovane, con una veste più preziosa di quelle degli altri. Il luogo alto e spazioso, sotto le cui volte s'incrociavano variopinte travature ad arco e dai cui altari brillavano pietre e metalli, rendeva un'eco vibrante, come quando si picchia su un bicchiere di squisita fattura non ancora usato.

Improvvisamente, colui che era nostra guida e ispiratore venne afferrato e trascinato con forza su una delle panche del coro. Vedemmo come dinanzi al suo volto alcuni tenessero due candele di cera dorata che bruciavano sprizzando scintille ed emanando un fumo che stordiva i sensi. Perse conoscenza, e fu portato di peso su uno degli altari. Un gruppo di monaci di basso rango, con volti d'incallita malvagità, circondò la figura

posta a giacere. Ma ancor più freddi dei loro lucidi coltelli mi parvero gli sguardi dei gerarchi che stavano venendo dal chiostro, entrando dalla parte dell'altar maggiore, dal portale della sacrestia e dal reliquiario; essi contemplavano il gruppo degli altri monaci con gravità. Mi accorsi soltanto, con raccapriccio, che i monaci portavano alla bocca calici pieni di un liquido lattiginoso su cui s'increspava una schiuma sanguinosa.

Tutto si compì molto velocemente. Gli spaventosi figurì fecero qualche passo indietro, e il torturato si levò lentamente in piedi. Leggemmo sul suo volto che egli non era consapevole di ciò di cui era stato protagonista. Era invecchiato, macilento, esangue e bianco come calce viva. Al primo passo che fece in avanti, cadde a terra morto.

Questo esempio, che ristabilì irrevocabilmente l'antico ordine, mi empì di un'ansia indicibile. Ma, stranamente, anche un altro sentimento si mischiava al dolore che mi tagliava in due come la lama di una falce, e il cui ricordo continuava ad accompagnarmi come una seconda coscienza. Lo sentivo come uno di quei traumi che ci destano dal sonno. Come talora uno spavento repentino ridà al muto la parola, così da allora in poi si sviluppò in me una forte sensibilità alle questioni teologiche. (Jünger 1986, 18-20)

Sin qui il testo di Jünger, come detto nella seconda versione della raccolta, profondamente rimaneggiata rispetto alla prima, che invece aveva visto la luce appunto nove anni prima, nel 1929. Non si tratta qui di affrontare *in extenso* le cruciali differenze tra le due versioni del libro, ma soltanto sottolineare come si possa considerare la versione del 1929 più 'militante' rispetto a quella del 1938 - dal momento che lo Jünger del 1929 è ancora sostanzialmente legato ai circoli neo-nazionalisti presso i quali era considerato un faro del pensiero della *Konservative Revolution*. I testi raccolti in quella prima edizione col sottotitolo *Aufzeichnungen bei Tag und Nacht* (per la nuova edizione il sottotitolo muterà in *Figuren und Capriccios*) vengono dalla critica letti come un apparato narrativo volto a conferire profondità metafisica alle parallele riflessioni politiche dell'autore (cf. Staub 2000).

Lo stile che Jünger sceglie è però quello onirico, ispirato a una modalità di scrittura di tipo sperimentale, di produzione di immagini di surrealtà, in cui la dimensione politica da un lato e dall'altro quella intellettuale e personale (nella forma della autostilizzazione di Jünger in quanto scrittore) giocano un ruolo centrale. Il nesso tra procedimento espositivo per immagini, *Darstellung* politica, stile letterario e produzione di stati avanzati di coscienza nella forma di una sorta di 'realismo magico', appare cioè strettissimo in Jünger. Il quale, come noto, non è estraneo a una tendenza a condensare la sua epoca in immagini, raccolte anch'esse in una *Bilderfibel*, come lui stesso chiama simile procedimento (Jünger 2007). In tal modo Jünger pare realizzare in forma pubblica - e sia pure *ex ante* - l'intuizione

benjaminiana, che intendeva la stesura di un atlante per la storia **segreta** del suo tempo – perché affidata ai *privatissima* individuali e collettivi, ovvero al bagaglio onirico di immagini entro cui si condensa la propria epoca. E ciò nonostante, altre immagini percorrono la produzione letteraria dello Jünger di quegli stessi anni: immagini che recano in sé davvero – per dirla con Benjamin – un «indice segreto» della propria leggibilità.

Proprio questo pare il caso del testo *Die Klosterkirche*, il quale presenta esattamente questa dimensione di 'leggibilità dell'immagine', indecidibilmente sospesa tra pubblico e privato, tra realtà e sogno, tra osservazione e partecipazione, che serve a restituire una dimensione, la quale ha a che fare con il dominio della violenza che anche per lo Jünger nazionalrivoluzionario il nazionalsocialismo finisce per rappresentare.

Senza scendere nel merito delle differenze tra le due edizioni, talvolta sottili e di natura squisitamente stilistica, talaltra invece rilevanti sino a farne dei veri e propri ripensamenti ideologici, occorre sottolineare come la chiusa del sogno nel testo della prima edizione appaia molto più concisa e per così dire interpretativamente sospesa («questo esempio ci empì di ansia indicibile»), di quella che invece presenta l'edizione del 1938:

Questo esempio, che ristabilì irrevocabilmente l'antico ordine, mi empì di un'ansia indicibile.<sup>11</sup> Ma, stranamente, anche un altro sentimento si mischiava al dolore che mi tagliava in due come la lama di una falce, e il cui ricordo continuava ad accompagnarmi come una seconda coscienza. Lo sentivo come uno di quei traumi che ci destano dal sonno. Come talora uno spavento repentino ridà al muto la parola, così da allora in poi si sviluppò in me una forte sensibilità alle questioni teologiche. (Jünger 1986, 20)

In effetti la nuova conclusione dell'autore, rispetto alla precedente secca chiusa, ci dice molto sullo stile – e dunque sul contenuto – che informa questo *Traumbild*. Con la nuova edizione cioè Jünger accentua gli elementi per così costituenti di quella drammatica e corrusca scena sacrificale, sottolineandone l'esplicita dimensione religiosa (o teologica, come la definisce, un po' impropriamente, lo stesso Jünger). Il sogno diventa qui insomma, nella versione più tarda, allo stesso tempo allegoria del mutato clima politico (quel ristabilimento di un «antico ordine» espresso all'inizio della conclusione, che funge un po' da spiegazione di «quei traumi che ci

<sup>11</sup> La frase che apre la conclusione in entrambe le edizioni è la stessa, provvista però adesso di un interessante inciso: l'esempio sacrificale ha finito per ristabilire «irrevocabilmente l'antico ordine». Inoltre, il traduttore italiano qui incappa in un piccolo errore, dimenticando il «ci» collettivo, che rimane identico nelle due versioni, ma che nella traduzione italiana diventa un «mi» – in questo influenzato forse dallo stesso Jünger, che nell'integrazione della seconda versione passa poi effettivamente alla prima persona singolare.

destano dal sonno»), e dichiarazione programmatica di una poetica tutta votata al recupero della dimensione onirica concepita in quanto 'seconda coscienza' (tanto che la dicitura iniziale di «Traum» scompare nella seconda versione). Il cardine del testo resta l'episodio centrale che struttura il sogno: cioè il martirio che viene imposto alla «nostra guida» (ovvero «unser Führer»: la dicitura «ispiratore» che si accompagna nel testo italiano alla traduzione di *Führer* è un'aggiunta del traduttore, ma non è presente né nel testo del 1929 né in quello del 1938). E se nella prima edizione tale sacrificio viene mostrato in maniera narrativamente immediata, vale a dire facendo ricorso a una dizione diretta di quel che accade, nella seconda viene inserito in una cornice più esplicitamente metadiegetica, rafforzata da molte indicazioni stilistiche che vanno in questo senso («wir sahen», «erschieden mir die Blicke», «wir lasen aus seinem Gesicht»), quasi assenti nella prima versione, che conferiscono così al testo un andamento molto scandito, quasi ieratico.

Con ciò siamo allora giunti al cuore dell'atteggiamento intellettuale interiore dello Jünger della fine degli anni Venti; un atteggiamento prodotto da una situazione storico-spirituale in cui la vecchia fede vacilla, e una nuova subentra, con contorni ancora imprecisi - e in cui l'ambiguità semantica tra fede religiosa e fede politica viene assolutamente mantenuta, perché vitale alla *Selbststilisierung* di Jünger come **scrittore politico**. La 'nuova fede' appare ambigua in un altro, decisivo senso: perché con essa ci si può riferire sia alla 'nuova fede' nazionalsocialista, che alla fede nella rivoluzione nazionale che invece il nazismo ha tradito (un'ambiguità testimoniata anche dai rapporti non chiari che sussistono tra la «nostra guida» e i suoi persecutori). Di tale indecidibilità - tra vecchio e nuovo, tra ideologia e politica, infine tra politica e letteratura - ne va dell'interpretazione di questo testo, nella misura in cui lo stesso *Cuore Avventuroso* si situa nella produzione jüngeriana alla confluenza tra politica e attività di scrittura, ovvero tra profilo dell'intellettuale in quanto guida politica e in quanto scrittore compiuto.

Del resto, politica e letteratura in questo decisivo torno di anni appaiono costitutivamente sovrapponibili, perché funzionali entrambi alla *Darstellung* di una nuova fase della modernità, quella appunto 'classica', che se da un lato ha nel richiamo all'ordine e alla tradizione uno dei suoi momenti culminanti in chiave estetica e storico-artistica, trova - dall'altro e di conseguenza - nell'applicazione di tale richiamo a una sorta di sinestesia delle Forme, in cui cioè è la *Gestaltung* del fatto letterario, politico, scientifico o poetico a diventare centrale, un paradigma di perfetta sovrapponibilità di sfera politica e sfera estetica.<sup>12</sup>

12 «Für dasjenige, was im Deutschland der Weimarer Republik vorbereitet wird und 1933 dann auf den Plan tritt, ist das moderne autonome Ästhetische in einer bestimmten Ausrichtung zugleich das Politische» (Hebekus 2009, 11).

Il *Traumbild* jüngeriano, inscenando un sacrificio rituale, articola dunque un'interessante sovrapposizione di letteratura, sogno, allegoria politica. *Die Klosterkirche*, nel momento in cui espone una *Wende* politica nella forma di una *rêverie* allegorica di stampo medievaleggiante, si struttura come una *Geheimgeschichte*, nel senso che la sua genealogia corrisponde alla ricostruzione di una semantica di sensi nascosti e riposti, che vanno dunque pazientemente decifrati. Si tratta quindi in questo caso di una vera e propria teologia politica degli *arcana imperii*, che Ernst Jünger sembra praticare con particolare intensità. L'ambientazione religiosa del testo nasce da qui, da questa semantica del potere che unisce *arcanum*, sacrificio e *secretum* – e culmina nel *medium* ideale del suo osservatore, visibile ed invisibile ad un tempo, proprio come lo è il nocciolo insondabile del potere: un potere politico, ma anche, evidentemente, un potere della scrittura, in grado di raccontare visivamente il mistero dell'iniquità, nella forma di un sacrificio.<sup>13</sup>

13 In gioco qui non vi è tuttavia alcuna economia sacrificale di tipo girardiano («il sacrificio polarizza sulla vittima i germi di dissenso sparsi ovunque e li dissipa proponendo loro un parziale appagamento» Girard 1980, 22), quanto piuttosto un dispositivo intraletterario di riattivazione 'violenta' del mito in chiave non espiatoria, bensì intimamente necessaria; nel senso insomma in cui Furio Jesi parla di sacrificio in Cesare Pavese: «il sacrificio umano fu per Pavese l'emblema di un vincolo sotterraneo, vissuto nella profondità della coscienza, fra rituale e comportamento morale, fra mito e dovere» (Jesi 1968, 165). Molto interessante sarebbe qui tracciare i lineamenti 'sacrificali' che informano le riflessioni di Jünger del secondo dopoguerra, con tutte le implicazioni connesse al suo delicato *ralliement* nella Repubblica Federale; un *ralliement* che trova appunto in un'etica e in una retorica del sacrificio uno dei suoi momenti culminanti. Si pensi per esempio a questo passo del fortunato trattato postbellico *Il trattato del ribelle (Der Waldgang)*: «Vincere la paura della morte equivale [...] a vincere ogni altro terrore: tutti i terrori hanno significato solo in rapporto a questo problema primario. [...] Ogni autentica guida spirituale [...] sa condurre l'uomo al punto in cui egli riconosce la realtà. [...] Il granello di frumento, morendo, ha generato non numerosi, ma infiniti frutti. Si tocca qui quella eccedenza del mondo di cui ogni atto generativo è un simbolo temporale, oltre che un segno della vittoria sul tempo. [...] Le cattedrali crollano, ma nei cuori rimane un patrimonio di sapere che, simile alle catacombe, mina dall'interno gli edifici dei tiranni. Già per questo motivo, possiamo essere sicuri che la pura violenza esercitata secondo i modelli antichi alla fine non prevarrà. Quel sangue ha immesso sostanza nella storia, ed è quindi giusto continuare a contare gli anni a partire da quella data che ha segnato una svolta epocale. Regna qui la piena fecondità delle teogonie, la mitica forza generativa. *Il sacrificio si ripete su innumerevoli altari*» (Jünger 1990, 76-7); un passo che sembra una perfetta epitome, quasi trent'anni dopo, del sacrificio descritto nella *Klosterkirche*. L'etica e la retorica del sacrificio jüngeriane costituiscono qui in altri termini le indispensabili articolazioni etico-discorsive di una ridislocazione del proprio pensiero in chiave più limpidamente (ovvero metafisicamente) teologico-politica. Tali etica e retorica del sacrificio, poi, trovano una significativa convergenza con le attività di Eliade già citate: su ciò cf. Grottanelli 2005, in particolare le conclusioni, 141-5.

## 6 Conclusioni

La giustapposizione, *l'Auseinandersetzung* di due brevi ma significativi testi di Walter Benjamin ed Ernst Jünger aveva qui lo scopo di sottolinearne punti in comune e linee interpretative divergenti, coerentemente con il profilo intellettuale dei due scrittori.<sup>14</sup> Quello che è emerso, però, è fondamentalmente un diverso atteggiamento verso il nesso tra il mito e la storia, colto nella forma del disvelamento onirico: mentre Benjamin sottolinea il carattere critico-ironico che tale disvelamento deve assumere, in Jünger esso appare funzionale alla messa in scena di un **nuovo** potere, quello dell'osservatore. Si tratta insomma di un diverso atteggiamento cifrato verso il proprio tempo: se il fascismo lavora per la riemersione di mitologemi politici (che a loro volta si collegano a un dispositivo religioso ancora più antico) fondati sul nesso violenza/sacrificio, per Benjamin si tratta di riconsiderarli entro un ambito di secolarizzazione e di ironica *Entzauberung*, per Jünger di ricollocarli in una nuova attenzione verso il lessico e la semantica del mito, improntata a una rinnovata *Verzauberung*.<sup>15</sup> E tuttavia occorre sottrarsi alla tentazione di una facile e meccanica giustapposizione delle due impostazioni, giacché – ormai è chiaro – così come Benjamin, nello svelare il dispositivo mitico di occultamento della fondazione violenta, conferisce una nuova cifratura al suo racconto (nella forma del *Denkbild* onirico), allo stesso modo Jünger, pur nella affascinata contemplazione di quello stesso *Ur*-sacrificio, modula all'interno del suo racconto una densa dialettica tra visibilità e invisibilità, tra attività e passività di quella stessa logica sacrificale, tentando così di svelarne gli interni meccanismi.

I due testi qui esaminati, insomma, esibiscono in ultima analisi un percorso interpretativo simile, nei termini di una nuova centralità del discorso mitico-sacrificale, che assume a sua volta le fattezze della cifratura allegorica, sia pure in termini radicalmente diversi, proprio sul terreno della autorialità sottesa a tale discorso (che a sua volta, chiaramente, allude all'orizzonte politico in cui tale autorialità si dispiega): se lo Jünger del 1938 è già lo scrittore olimpico campione della 'emigrazione interna' (con tutte le ambiguità personali e politiche che questa definizione implica),

<sup>14</sup> Non è forse un caso che, in particolare in ambito italiano, vi sia una rinnovata attenzione a questi due autori, volta a individuarne punti di contatto e linee analitiche comuni. Un'attenzione che ha indubbiamente il merito di sottolineare alcune *issues* ermeneutiche comuni al di là della inaggirabile distanza ideologica, essenzialmente centrate proprio sul nesso inscindibile tra Estetico e Politico (interpretato soprattutto a partire da un confronto tra il saggio sullo *Arbeiter* e quello sull'opera d'arte). È principale merito però di Pierandrea Amato aver sottolineato il dispositivo post-nietzschiano presente in entrambi, con cui l'arte diventa politica. Cf. Amato 2014, 75-110.

<sup>15</sup> Scalzo (2011) ha esaminato Jünger e Benjamin proprio a partire da queste premesse concettuali, in un saggio di notevole interesse.



dunque abituato a 'scrivere tra le righe' (tuttavia mantenendo inalterata tutta la propria autorevolezza di scrittore affermato), il Benjamin del 1934 è costretto invece a praticare una emigrazione esterna drammaticamente reale e a scrivere sotto pseudonimo (il che peraltro gli conferisce una notevole autorevolezza postuma).<sup>16</sup> Si potrebbe insomma dire che, se il sacrificio prefigura in Benjamin la pericolosa latenza del Politico, esso significa invece in Jünger il ridispiegamento 'teologico' di quella stessa latenza.

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16 Quando nel 1934 Klaus Mann invitò Benjamin a partecipare con un suo saggio alla rivista da lui diretta *Die Sammlung*, questi gli rispose: «Meine Arbeiten bitte ich zu zeichnen: O. E. Tal. Unter diesem Pseudonym werde ich in der Emigration arbeiten und ich würde mich freuen, es in der 'Sammlung' ins Leben treten zu sehen. Es ist die Umkehrung des lateinischen LATEO» (Benjamin 1998, 301).



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## Un vomito liberatore

### Percorsi del disgusto nel romanzo *Die Blechtrommel* di Günter Grass (1959)

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**Abstract** At the core of Günter Grass' literary work lies a marked interest for elements normally thought of as unpleasant, vile and nauseating. Part of the fascination of his books resides precisely in the possibility of observing the world from a different point of view, that is to say, from a crooked perspective which defies mainstream taste. *The Tin Drum* (1959) offers a clear example of this inclination: Oskar's decision to linger in a state of extended childhood can be associated with the Freudian reflection on the human psyche, more specifically with the idea of the child as 'polymorphic pervers', indifferent to or even fond of things which adults are bound to find disgusting. In the novel *The Flounder* (1978) we find a similar constellation, although phylogenetically situated in history. In such context, the focus on food and on cooking conveys singular undertones. The use of the grotesque in Grass' work is strictly linked to dietary elements, such as: the canned fish Oskar's mother gulps down in order to kill herself, the insistence on entrails, the recurring use of figures of speech regarding food, and the whole context of *The Flounder*, in which the history of man's violence runs parallel to a feminine cooking history rich in grotesque figures, like Mestwina or the anorexic saint Dorothea von Montau. Through Grass' work, the idea of 'disgust' thus becomes a useful tool for investigating contemporary scenarios in the relationships humans establish with each other and with their history.

**Keywords** Günter Grass. The tin drum. Disgust. Food in literature.

La categoria del disgusto può apparire fuori luogo nel tentativo di analizzare un testo letterario; eppure questa «sensazione forte» (Menninghaus 1999) è parte del nostro quotidiano e riguarda zone del nostro vivere con gli altri profondamente rivelatrici di ciò che siamo. Il dato che appare più interessante nel disgusto è la sua visceralità, che sembrerebbe segnalare il carattere 'naturale' della sensazione. L'impulso a vomitare, prima e più appariscente reazione al ribrezzo, inscindibile da esso, sembra provenire da profondità filogenetiche, da tendenze a noi connaturate, inscritte nella nostra carne; esso segnala invece la nostra irreparabile esclusione dell'Eden della natura e dell'animalità. Per quello che ne sappiamo, non vi sono animali infatti che reagiscono a uno stimolo esterno vomitando; e il vomito, proprio o altrui, non suscita in nessun animale quella brusca reazione di ripulsa, quel desiderio incontrastabile di allontanarsi da un oggetto, una situazione o un'immagine che chiamiamo disgusto. In generale, infatti, tendiamo a pensare che questo sia un meccanismo di difesa dell'orga-

nismo che funziona «inibendo il contatto con ciò che è marcio, tossico e perciò pericoloso» (Korsmeyer 2011, 1), al fine di evitare qualche tipo di contagio; ma a un secondo sguardo questa delimitazione di campo risulta troppo blanda. È evidente infatti la componente culturale profonda della sensazione di rifiuto viscerale, che impone ad appartenenti a gruppi diversi di trovare disgustose cose diverse. Gli esempi più eclatanti provengono certamente dall'ambito culinario. Ciò che in un luogo è una *Delikatesse*, altrove è considerato un emetico; basti pensare alla carne di alcuni animali, come cavalli e cani, prelibata per alcuni e ripugnante per altri. Vi sono ambiti ritenuti universalmente – per quel che ne sappiamo – disgustosi dagli esseri umani, come la putrefazione; e a grandi linee si potrebbe dire che lo schifo sia spesso riconducibile ad associazioni che riguardano in primo luogo il decadimento e la morte fisica. Suscita poi generalmente ribrezzo tutto ciò che proviene direttamente dal corpo, e in particolare dal suo interno (che della putredine ha l'odore): il vomito, le feci, l'urina, le secrezioni come saliva, sudore e muco, il sangue, soprattutto quello mestruale, il seme maschile; ciò che rimanda alla putrefazione per il suo odore, come certi tipi di formaggio o le interiora presenti in diverse preparazioni culinarie; e anche ciò che la richiama alla lontana, come il brulicare dei vermi; e ancora certi animali, come gli insetti, i ragni e i serpenti (per analogia coi vermi?) e come i topi, forse per l'atavico terrore che possano esaurire le nostre scorte alimentari, o insozzarle irreparabilmente. Va notato che queste cose erano considerate disgustose anche prima che si avesse coscienza della loro pericolosità epidemiologica, della loro connessione col diffondersi di determinate malattie. Può darsi che si tratti di qualche tipo di presago adattamento evolutivo; certo la spiegazione appare oggi insufficiente. È probabile, poi, che sia da ricercare in questo ambito anche il motivo del ribrezzo che provocano certi tipi di bruttezza e di deformità, così vicine ai contorcimenti della sofferenza e della morte da richiamarle quasi direttamente.

Resta l'ambito morale, il più scivoloso e opaco, quello nel quale la sfera culturale più prepotentemente si fa strada. Carolyn Korsmeyer annota: «spesso il linguaggio del disgusto viene applicato a situazioni morali per indicare disapprovazione enfatica in una modalità più metaforica che letterale» (4, trad. dell'Autore). Ci sarebbe quindi una sorta di slittamento, un moto associativo per cui una data condotta viene equiparata per via di metafora a qualcosa di ripugnante, finendo anch'essa per suscitare ribrezzo. Questa «modalità metaforica» emerge in maniera evidente nella pletera di implicazioni problematiche che tuttora avvolge la sfera sessuale: la nudità, le scene di sesso esplicite e l'omosessualità sono tipici esempi di contesti che possono suscitare – anche nella nostra 'avanzata' società – forme di «disgusto morale». È evidente qui il ruolo che gioca la fisicità del corpo, con le sue secrezioni. Non è un caso che molte campagne politiche contro l'omosessualità si servano di argomenti legati al 'pericoloso' scambio di

liquidi corporei – fra l'altro senza rilevare che i rapporti eterosessuali non ne sono affatto esenti, come ben mostra Martha Nussbaum a proposito dei libelli di Paul Cameron (Nussbaum 2010, cap. 1). Del resto anche la 'lotta politica' contro altre razze, etnie o gruppi è giocata in gran parte sulle possibilità di contagio del corpo sociale 'puro' da parte dei germi estranei veicolati (o costituiti!) da ebrei, neri, stranieri e *Untermenschen* in genere. Non è poi un caso che spesso a costoro venga associata un'esuberante attività sessuale, per esasperarne i tratti ripugnanti (cf. per esempio i saggi di Jensen, Schüler-Springorum 2013).

In campo morale, inoltre, l'abiezione è spesso legata all'infrazione di tabù. Così l'incesto era considerato disgustoso anche prima che fosse evidente la connessione con determinate malattie ereditarie; e l'argomento dell'adattamento evolutivo pare reggere solo entro certi limiti, a fronte dei molti mammiferi, come i gatti, la cui specie non pare avere subito danni particolari dalla sua pratica corrente (Fox 1994). Certamente il disgusto è uno dei mezzi con i quali i tabù sono stati fissati all'interno della cultura: tabuizzare significa circondare determinati oggetti, situazioni o esseri umani (dall'animale totemico al re all'unione con il parente prossimo) con un cordone sanitario che impedisca ad ognuno di avvicinarvisi – non per la loro pericolosità effettiva e immediata, ma per motivi più o meno strettamente sociali e culturali (cf. Pignato 1998). La cosa che mi sembra più interessante a questo proposito è il ruolo del corpo: l'interdizione connessa al tabù si radica infatti nelle viscere, e trova nel disgusto uno dei meccanismi più efficaci affinché l'individuo non superi la soglia che il tabù difende. In questo senso il nostro corpo è un crocevia, uno spazio ambiguo di tensioni che provengono dall'ambito squisitamente culturale, ben oltre il limite che siamo disposti a riconoscere consciamente.

Questa sommaria ricognizione sul concetto di disgusto – al quale altri, assai meglio, si sono applicati (cf. per esempio Kolnai 1998, 2004; Menninghaus 1999; Korsmeyer 2011; Nussbaum 2004, 2010; McGinn 2011) – crea lo sfondo per la riflessione che intendo condurre sul romanzo *Die Blechtrommel (Il tamburo di latta)* di Günter Grass ([1959] 1974), nel quale mi sembra che il disgusto giochi un ruolo centrale, che negli approcci critici è sempre passato in secondo piano a causa della strabordante varietà di temi e immagini che attraversa la narrazione. È un esercizio interessante, anche dal punto di vista della prospettiva storica. Alcune delle cose che suscitavano ribrezzo all'epoca della sua uscita – in particolare il carattere 'pornografico' di molte scene che trascinarono persino in tribunale il romanzo e il suo autore (cf. Schiavoni 2011) – oggi ci fanno sorridere, se confrontate con l'apparato di «sfumature di grigio» (James 2011) di cui nel frattempo si è – apparentemente – dotata la nostra cultura, a tutti i livelli. Rimangono però molte scene che percepiamo come 'genuinamente' disgustose; su queste vorrei provare a ragionare nelle pagine che seguono, per studiare il modo in cui Grass ha sfruttato questa

'sensazione forte' come lente per dipingere il mondo che circonda Oskar Matzerath.

Al centro dell'opera letteraria di Günter Grass è evidente un forte interesse per elementi che normalmente si considerano sgradevoli, disgustosi o ripugnanti. Parte della fascinazione dei suoi libri risiede precisamente nella possibilità di osservare il mondo da un punto di vista diverso da quello comune, da una prospettiva storta che prova un palese piacere a opporsi al gusto corrente. Così la deformità fisica di personaggi come Oskar e Mahlke (Grass [1959] 1974, [1961] 1983), con il suo addentellato respingente per coloro che li circondano (e per il lettore), funge da filtro che permette di vedere altre malformazioni, altre e ben maggiori storture nel corpo sociale. La bruttezza del rombo (Grass 1977), perfettamente rappresentata dalla sua bocca storta, è funzionale a un rovesciamento di prospettiva che mette in dubbio il ruolo del progresso nella storia umana, e insieme il ruolo delle forze che tradizionalmente si pensa che la governino, siano esse Dio o il «Weltgeist» hegeliano. Nello stesso romanzo, è interessante notare la predilezione del narratore e dei suoi molti Io per cibi che non tutti ritengono appetitosi, come la trippa e le interiora in genere. Da un lato questo sembra accordarsi con l'immagine di virilità solida e un po' smargiassa che l'Io vuole mantenere, contro tutte le insidie del Femminile; per altri versi, si direbbe un salutare esercizio di anticonformismo, in linea con le posizioni dello stesso Grass. Vi sono poi pasti più decisamente disgustosi, che hanno un ruolo importante in vari luoghi dell'opera grassiana, con sfumature anche molto differenti. Se Oskar viene costretto a ingurgitare un'orrida pozione dai bambini del suo cortile, in una scena sornionamente faustiana, come vedremo più avanti, gli spaghetti che gli propone il pittore Klepp durante il loro primo incontro, per quanto repellenti nel loro aspetto esteriore, segnano in realtà l'inizio di un'amicizia capace di andare oltre anche al ribrezzo. La carne e le interiora che nel romanzo *Hundejahre* Tulla divide con il pastore tedesco Harras, nei sette giorni in cui lei non si allontana dalla cuccia per via della morte di suo cugino Konrad (Grass 1963, 177 ss.), richiamano i tratti più vitalistici del carattere della bambina, la sua schietta 'animalità', espressa altrove dai suoi atteggiamenti per nulla schifiltosi – come nella scena memorabile di *Katz und Maus* in cui si trastulla con il seme che i ragazzi «spandono in terra» durante i loro «giochi olimpici» sul dragamine:

Als das Zeug endlich kam und auf den Rost klatschte, begann sie erst richtig zappelig zu werden, warf sich auf den Bauch, machte enge Ratenaugen, guckte guckte, wollte ichweißnichtwas entdecken, hockte wieder, ging auf die Knie, stand leicht x-beinig darüber und begann mit dem beweglichen großen Zeh zu rühren, bis es rostrot schäumte: «Mensch, prima! Mach du jetzt mal, Atze!». (Grass [1961] 1983, 26)

Quando la roba finalmente veniva fuori e s'impiastrava sulla ruggine, Tulla cominciava a mostrarsi nervosa, si buttava sulla pancia, faceva occhietti da topo, guardava, cercava di scoprire nonsopoihecosa, tornava a guardare, si metteva in ginocchio, si metteva in piedi proprio sopra, con le gambette a x e si dava a frugarci dentro con l'alluce del piede, che aveva snodato, finché si formava una schiumetta color ruggine: «Formidabile, accidenti! Provaci tu, adesso, Atze». (Grass 1989, 48)

Pur non essendo lei deforme, il narratore si premura di informarci circa la sua caratteristica bruttezza: Tulla è «ein Spirkel mit Strichbeinen» («una specie di sgorbio con le gambe storte») il cui volto si potrebbe disegnare «mit einem Punkt Komma Strich» (25) («con un punto virgola trattino», trad. it. 47), che suscita l'interesse dei compagni solo per la sua disponibilità sessuale - collocandosi così nella zona del 'moralmente discutibile' e del 'disgustoso' secondo i canoni correnti nel suo ambiente. In lei, come in Oskar, riconosciamo un tratto palesemente importante per Grass: una amoralità che si costituisce come profondo disinteresse per gli altri. Anche la Tulla ormai anziana che compare nella novella *Im Krebsgang* (Grass 2002), con le sue convinzioni tanto salde quanto contraddittorie, permane in questa sfera, assai disturbante per chi la circonda. Sebbene meno trasparente, anche qui il disgusto gioca un ruolo importante; con le sue posizioni nostalgiche e scioviniste Tulla si mette di fatto nella stessa area politica dei neonazisti, trascinando con sé anche il nipote in uno spazio per cui il figlio Paul prova ribrezzo. L'irrisolto Paul, che incarna molte debolezze della società tedesco occidentale, non è però capace di trasformare questo disgusto in una fonte di valori positivi per il figlio, che rimane chiuso nelle sue proiezioni ultranazionalistiche.

A questo proposito potremmo inserire qui un'altra categoria di disgusto morale, causato da tutti quei comportamenti che violano le norme di collaborazione interumana normalmente considerate elementari. Tulla e Oskar hanno vari cugini nella letteratura mondiale; pensiamo all'egoismo abissale di Fëdor Karamazov, che non presenta tratti di sadismo, ma solo la più assoluta indifferenza nei confronti del suo prossimo (Dostoevskij [1880] 1996; cf. l'interessante Semerari 2014), o l'opaco atteggiamento di Jean-Baptiste Grenouille nel romanzo *Das Parfum* (Süskind 1986), o ancora la crudele forma di asocialità di Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (Ellis 1991). Più ancora che la crudeltà o i comportamenti riprovevoli, ripugnante e abietta appare l'autoesclusione dalla società e dai suoi riti compromissori - non in virtù di una legge superiore di qualche genere, ma semplicemente a causa di un egoismo talmente assoluto da inibire ogni tipo di empatia con quasi tutti gli altri esseri umani. Tulla Pokriefke e Oskar Matzerath, con la loro divertita noncuranza per il mondo che li circonda, si inseriscono perfettamente in questa linea.

Mi pare, questo, un punto di partenza particolarmente interessante



per l'analisi del *Tamburo di latta*. Il dato principale su cui concentrarsi è certamente il fatto che la narrazione viene condotta da Oskar in prima persona; fin dalla primissima riga del romanzo, il protagonista dichiara giocosamente la sua inaffidabilità: «Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt» (Grass [1959] 1974, 9) («E va bene: sono recluso in una casa di salute», Grass [1962] 2009, 9), laddove la «Anstalt» si rivela ben presto essere un manicomio. Il narratore di Grass mette le mani avanti fin dal principio: tutto ciò che leggiamo è filtrato dai suoi occhi, cioè dagli occhi di un uomo quantomeno sospettato di non essere mentalmente sano, e che in più occasioni nel racconto si rivela, appunto, «inaffidabile, vacillante, bugiardo, e narratore di eventi fantastici e indimostrati» (Beyersdorf 1980, 138). Grass gioca con queste possibilità, che sono peraltro tipiche del romanzo picaresco: chi vive di espedienti e truffe non può certo essere ritenuto attendibile quando ci racconta la sua vita. La prospettiva di Oskar è poi fortemente caratterizzata in senso spaziale: un nano non può che guardare il mondo dal basso verso l'alto. Questo comporta una deformazione della visuale consueta che si trasmette anche al lettore, tramite uno di quegli espedienti che impediscono in maniera salutare di «dare per scontata la realtà» (Ginzburg 1998, 34). Lo straniamento è acuito dall'insistenza con cui Oskar rimarca la sua decisione di smettere di crescere all'età di tre anni, lasciando credere a chi lo circonda che al mancato sviluppo fisico corrispondano dei deficit intellettivi. Negli anni che seguono il nano approfitta abbondantemente della situazione per godersi lo spettacolo che va in scena attorno a lui. Uno dei motivi centrali per questa decisione va certamente individuato nella volontà di orientare i propri comportamenti soltanto secondo le esigenze dei suoi desideri, senza mediazione alcuna con quelli degli altri; così facendo, il nano si sottrae al peso di qualsiasi responsabilità nei confronti del mondo, ciò che sembra essere uno dei suoi obiettivi principali. In questo senso, mi sembra perfettamente riconoscibile un tratto che accomuna pressoché tutti i personaggi maschili di Grass, come gli Io narranti del *Butt* e di *Im Krebsgang*, i quali esattamente come Oskar aspirano alla «Rückkehr zur Nabelschnur» (Grass [1959] 1974, 144) («ritorno al cordone ombelicale», Grass 2009, 179). Quello che li attira nel ritorno all'utero è in particolare la condizione entropica di non essere gravati da alcun obbligo, soprattutto di tipo affettivo; *a latere*, ovviamente, c'è la possibilità di vedere soddisfatti senza sforzi i bisogni primari di cibo e di calore. Tuttavia, mentre i due Io narranti adulti sono costretti continuamente a scendere a compromessi con le donne (e con la realtà) che hanno intorno, Oskar si pone radicalmente in contraddizione con il mondo degli adulti e la loro capacità di adattamento reciproco, proprio con la scelta di non crescere, cioè di non strutturare il proprio comportamento e la propria personalità secondo le norme della 'civiltà', permanendo in uno stato di sospensione egomaniacale. Questa scelta gli permette di mantenere l'inquietante ed enigmatica distanza da



chi lo circonda che è per lui così caratteristica. Il lettore non ha mai la possibilità di comprendere le motivazioni di fondo del suo agire, né di cogliere la misura in cui è coinvolto emotivamente negli eventi dolorosi che gli capitano. Gli esempi più eclatanti provengono certamente dalle molte situazioni luttuose del romanzo – le morti di Agnes, Bronski, Matzerath, Herbert Truczinski, Roswitha, sorella Dorothea – alle quali il nano partecipa con stupefacente freddezza. A questo punto mi sembra importante sottolineare che la sua non è una protesta in nome dell'equazione «Väter sind Täter» (i padri sono i criminali), che di lì a non molto sarebbe diventato uno dei maggiori slogan del movimento studentesco in Germania; né il suo astrarsi dal mondo può configurarsi come uno slancio politico *lato sensu* al fine di rimanere innocente e di non farsi contagiare dall'atmosfera dell'hitlerismo. Il motivo della radicale opposizione di Oskar alle norme che regolano la socialità del mondo adulto sembra essere solamente il suo smisurato egoismo, unito ad intenzioni artistiche piuttosto vaghe, verso le quali il nano ha però un'enorme fiducia. Questa opposizione radicale si associa poi a un'altra forma di rifiuto, più sottile e inquietante, rispetto alla vita come fenomeno in sé e per sé. Mi pare che questo tratto si colga molto bene nei suoi tentativi di uccidere il bambino che sta crescendo nel ventre di Maria, la seconda moglie di Matzerath. È ovvio che a guidarlo sia un sentimento di gelosia per quello che potrebbe essere suo fratello (o anche suo figlio); tuttavia Oskar sceglie parole molto interessanti, quando dice: «[Ich] verließ [...] unser Wohnzimmer, das mir angesichts eines raumfüllenden Leibes zu eng geworden war» (245) («sono uscito dal nostro soggiorno, che a fronte di un corpo che intasava lo spazio m'era diventato troppo stretto», 302). Mi pare che sullo sfondo della narrazione grassiana vi sia una sorta di angoscia di fronte a questa situazione 'double bind': da una parte la dolorosa consapevolezza associata ai limiti imposti dal mondo adulto, con le sue responsabilità e le sue maschere; dall'altra parte l'indifferente e orribile natura, la vita nuda di fronte alla quale il nano prova un creaturale spavento. La soluzione, per quanto instabile, sembra l'essere quanto più possibile vicino alla situazione nirvanica del grembo materno.

È curioso che il *Tamburo di latta* non sia mai stato analizzato estensivamente dalla critica sotto il profilo psicanalitico; probabilmente gli elementi di ispirazione freudiana sono fin troppo palesi e in fondo dichiarati per dedicarvi degli studi specifici. Ad esempio, Oskar ha un manifesto complesso edipico, complicato dalla presenza di due possibili padri, cioè Matzerath e Bronski; per inciso, gli riesce anche di fare in modo che entrambi muoiano prematuramente, sebbene la questione della sua intenzionalità – se cioè si tratti di omicidi colposi o premeditati – rimanga sempre in ombra. Non riuscirà a portarsi a letto sua madre (personaggio fra i più teneri e umani usciti dalla penna di Grass), ma la sostituirà provvisoriamente con la seconda moglie di Matzerath, Maria. Del desiderio di ritorno al grembo materno abbiamo appena detto; e tutta la sua storia può venire letta come

una forma di regressione. Inoltre il romanzo pullula di oggetti fallici, riassunti verso la fine del romanzo da Gottfried von Villar: «Trommelstock, Narbe, Patronenhülse, Ringfinger» («Mazza da tamburo, cicatrice, bossolo, anulare»), cifre che richiamano chiaramente le bacchette del tamburo, le cicatrici sporgenti sulla schiena di Herbert Truczinski, il bossolo legato alla morte di Jan Bronski e il dito anulare di sorella Dorotea. Gottfried prosegue dicendo: «ein aufgeschlossener Mensch [müßte] die Folge [...] mühelos begreifen» (474) («la sequenza [...] è d'immediata comprensione per ogni persona di mente aperta», 582). Anche se non sono qui citati, altri ovvi riferimenti fallici includono l'«undicesimo dito» di Oskar (229; trad. it. 282), il «piccolo annaffiatoio» della statua del Bambinello nella chiesa del Sacro Cuore di Gesù (114; trad. it. 141), e le anguille del più famoso - e probabilmente più disgustoso - episodio del romanzo.

Data la sua importanza, sarà bene osservare più da vicino la scena in questione. Un giorno l'intera famiglia allargata di Oskar - compreso il cugino/amante di sua madre, Jan Bronski - fa una gita sul Baltico. Qui i quattro trovano per caso un uomo che pesca con una corda per stendere alla quale è attaccato qualcosa, che venendo tratto fuori dall'acqua si rivela «ein[] Pferdekopf, ein[] frische[r], wie echte[r] Pferdekopf, de[r] Kopf eines schwarzen Pferdes» (120) («una testa di cavallo, una testa di cavallo fresca, autentica a vederla, la testa di un cavallo nero», 149), dalla quale schizzano fuori «tante piccole anguille verdoline».

Es gelang dem Stauer [...] vielleicht zwei Dutzend kleinere Aale in den Sack zu stopfen, den Matzerath hilfsbereit, wie er sich gerne gab, hielt. So konnte er auch nicht sehen, daß Mama käsig im Gesicht wurde [...]. Aber als die kleinen und mittleren Aale im Sack waren und der Stauer [...] anfang, dickere, dunkle Aale aus dem Kadaver zu würgen, da mußte Mama sich setzen, und Jan wollte ihr den Kopf weg drehen, aber das ließ sie nicht zu, starrte unentwegt mit dicken Kuhaugen mitten hinein in das Würmerziehen des Stauers. [...] [Er] riß, mit dem Wasserstiefel nahchelfend, dem Gaul das Maul auf, zwängte einen Knüppel zwischen die Kiefer, so daß der Eindruck entstand: das vollständige gelbe Pferdegebiß lacht. Und als der Stauer [...] mit beiden Händen hineingriff in den Rachen des Gauls und gleich zwei auf einmal herausholte, die mindestens armdick waren und armlang, da riß es auch meiner Mama das Gebiß auseinander; das ganze Frühstück warf sie, klumpiges Eiweiß und Fäden ziehendes Eigelb zwischen Weißbrotklumpen im Milchkafeeeguß über die Molensteine, und würgte immer noch, aber es kam nichts mehr. [...] Nichts außer grünlichem Schleim kam - und die Möwen kamen. Kamen schon, als sie anfang zu spucken, kreisten tiefer, ließen sich fett und glatt fallen, schlugen sich um das Frühstück meiner Mama [...]. Als der Stauer fast fertig war und zum Abschluß dem Gaul einen mächtigen Aal aus dem Ohr zog, mit dem Aal die ganze weiße Grütze aus dem Hirn

des Gaules sabbern ließ, da stand zwar gleichfalls dem Matzerath der Käse im Gesicht, aber die Angeberei gab er dennoch nicht auf. (121-2)

Bene o male lo scaricatore è riuscito [...] a stivare forse due dozzine di anguille mediopiccole nel sacco che gli reggeva, per fare il premuroso, Matzerath. Il quale così non ha potuto vedere che la mamma diventava terrea in faccia. [...] Ma quando le anguille piccole e medie sono state nel sacco e lo scaricatore [...] ha cominciato a svellere dalla carogna altre anguille più grosse e più scure, lì mamma ha dovuto sedersi, Jan cercava di voltarle via la testa ma lei non voleva saperne, fissava senza tregua con sporgenti occhi bovini su tutta quell'estrazione di vermi. [...] Aiutandosi con lo stivale impermeabile [lo scaricatore] ha spalancato la bocca del ronzino, gli ha forzato un bastone tra le mascelle suscitando la seguente impressione: gialla e al completo la dentatura cavallina ride. E quando lo scaricatore [...] ha cacciato le mani nelle fauci del ronzino e ne ha tirate fuori due in una volta, grosse e lunghe almeno quanto un braccio, anche alla mia mamma si è spalancata la dentatura: tutta la colazione ha rigettato, grumoso bianco d'uovo e filamenti di rosso d'uovo tra grumi di pan bianco in salsa di caffelatte, sulle pietre del molo, e i conati di vomito continuavano ma non usciva più niente. [...] Non le veniva più niente, a parte un po' di muco verdastro - e son venuti i gabbiani. Sono venuti quando ha cominciato a sputare, volteggiavano sempre più bassi, si lasciavano cadere pingui e lisci, si battevano per la prima colazione della mia mamma [...]. Matzerath non si curava affatto di mamma. Lui rideva e scimmiottava lo scaricatore, faceva quello coi nervi saldi, e quando lo scaricatore, a lavoro quasi terminato, per concludere ha estratto al ronzino un'anguilla imponente dall'orecchio e con l'anguilla tutto un bavoso tritume bianco è scaturito dal cervello del ronzino, pur diventando anch'egli terreo in faccia Matzerath ha insistito a fare il bullo. (150-1)

Il nodo dell'immagine di questa pagina è particolarmente intricato, e il disgusto che ne deriva nasce da molti elementi concomitanti, abilmente intrecciati da Grass. Ai fattori più 'ovviamente' disgustosi - come l'immagine verminosa della carogna divorata dalle anguille, il vomito di Agnes, i pezzi di cervello del ronzino, le espettorazioni granulose del pescatore (cf. 120; trad. it. 148), il suo rovistare dentro la testa di cavallo - si aggiunge una componente straniante che acuisce la sensazione di ribrezzo. Essenziale mi pare la brusca modalità con la quale avviene il passaggio dall'atmosfera di idillio festivo allo stupore per la situazione rivoltante. Il lettore è portato a partecipare ai sentimenti di raccapriccio di Agnes e di Jan, mentre il modo di atteggiarsi degli altri personaggi funziona come un prisma che aumenta l'inquietudine che promana dalla scena. All'inizio il pescatore, con la sua bonaria indolenza, è perfettamente inserito nello scenario idillico; ma poi

l'impassibilità con cui compie le sue azioni – il far emergere dall'acqua la testa, il frugarvi dentro – gli conferisce una sfumatura demoniaca e in ogni caso inumana: è difficile riconoscere un sodale, un altro essere umano, in chi non condivide il nostro disgusto per qualcosa. Anche Matzerath vuole mostrarsi impassibile, ma la sua spacconeria vacilla di fronte al crescendo delle azioni del pescatore e delle sue prede, mentre Oskar mantiene la sua usuale noncuranza di *treenne*. Sullo sfondo vi sono poi gli animali, le anguille e i gabbiani, 'naturalmente' impassibili ma non per questo meno inquietanti nel loro essere attratti da cibi che consideriamo ripugnanti, come la carogna di cavallo, il vomito di Agnes e lo sputo del pescatore.

In secondo piano, in questa costruzione del disgusto, mi pare ci sia il riferimento tacito a uno dei limiti più chiari della cultura, un abbagliamento che ci consente di nutrirci: la capacità di dimenticare da dove arriva il cibo che mangiamo, in particolare la carne animale, così simile a quella umana. Le preparazioni culinarie, come ha già mostrato Lévi-Strauss (1966), costituiscono anche dei modi per nascondere l'origine dei cibi, per allontanare da noi l'idea di essere affini agli altri animali. Il pescatore e Matzerath dialogano ad esempio a proposito del procedimento piuttosto crudele con il quale le anguille vengono preparate per venire poi affumicate: esse vengono chiuse in un sacco pieno di sale, che toglie loro la bava, e per il fastidio sono costrette a muoversi fino a morire. La pratica, ci dice Oskar, è vietata dalla polizia, ma il pescatore vi assegna una sorta di ineluttabilità: «Wie sollte man sonst auch den Schleim ohne Salz von den Aalen herunter und von innen heraus bekommen» (122) («Sennò come sarebbe possibile, senza sale, far cacciare alle anguille la bava dalla pelle e da dentro», 151). L'appetito delle anguille e dei gabbiani non è differente da quello degli esseri umani; questi hanno però trovato dei modi raffinati per soddisfarlo, modi che allo stesso tempo hanno la funzione di separare nettamente la sfera animale da quella umana. Mi pare, *en passant*, che si riveli qui una delle più importanti funzioni culturali del disgusto: quello di segnalarci a vicenda la nostra 'civiltà', ossia il grado di distanza dalla condizione animalesca.

Poco più avanti il pescatore fa un'osservazione ancora più sorprendente rispetto alle anguille: «Und in menschliche Leiche gehen sie auch [...]. Besonders nach der Seeschlacht am Skagerrak sollen die Aale mächtig fett gewesen sein» (122) («E pure nei cadaveri si ficcano [...]. Specialmente dopo la battaglia dello Skagerrak le anguille, a quanto si afferma, sarebbero ingrassate a dismisura», 152). L'accento al cannibalismo – sebbene per interposto animale – aggiunge un ulteriore elemento ripugnante alla scena, toccando un altro tabù (cf. Eckhardt 1999). Più interessante mi pare però il riferimento alla guerra, che offre un improvviso allargamento della prospettiva. Ciò che dovrebbe suscitare ripugnanza non è tanto la naturale evenienza che le anguille si nutrano di qualsiasi cadavere, né che quelle stesse anguille possano poi venire consumate da altri esseri umani, bensì

il fatto che la guerra, con i suoi massacri insensati e del tutto innaturali, non venga considerata abnorme e disgustosa (sorvolo sul parallelo con ciò che avviene oggi in vari punti del Mediterraneo; e anche sul disgusto che *dovrebbero* suscitare le condizioni che spingono a migrare, e le posizioni di certi governi).

In realtà la narrazione sul filo del disgusto prosegue. Subito dopo questa scena, Matzerath, che è un cuoco appassionato, compra alcune anguille dal pescatore con l'intenzione di cucinarle (è il venerdì santo!). Una volta a casa, ne nasce un litigio con la moglie, che dopo il macabro spettacolo al molo non ha più intenzione di mangiare pesce nella sua vita. Segue una scena piuttosto divertente, nella quale Matzerath – che è un uomo buono, molto affezionato a sua moglie – chiede a Jan di calmare Agnes, stesa sul letto matrimoniale, e questi lo fa in un modo assai caratteristico, fra susurri in casciubico e mani sotto la gonna. Oskar segue la scena, non visto, dall'armadio della camera. Tutto sembra poi risolversi con una serena partita a skat, ma dopo alcune settimane Agnes – «von rätselhaftem Willen besessen» (129) («posseduta da una volontà enigmatica», 159-60) – comincia a ingurgitare enormi quantità di pesce. Non è il marito a costringerla; anzi, Matzerath sembra sinceramente preoccupato per il comportamento della moglie.

Aber sie begann mit Ölsardinen zum Frühstück, fiel zwei Stunden später [...] über das Sperrholzkästchen mit den Bohnsacker Sprotten her, verlangte zum Mittagessen gebratene Flundern oder Pomuchel in Senfsöße, hatte am Nachmittag schon wieder den Büchsenöffner in der Hand: Aal in Gelee, Rollmöpse, Bratheringe, und wenn Matzerath sich weigerte, zum Abendbrot wieder Fisch zu braten oder zu kochen, dann verlor sie kein Wort, schimpfte nicht, stand ruhig vom Tisch auf und kam mit einem Stück geräucherten Aal aus dem Laden zurück, daß uns der Appetit verging, weil sie mit dem Messer der Aalhaut innen und außen das letzte Fett abschabte, und überhaupt nur noch Fisch mit dem Messer aß. Tagsüber mußte sie sich mehrmals übergeben. [...] [Mama] führte den Aal durch die Maibutter und aß unentwegt, als hätte sie eine Fleißaufgabe zu erfüllen. [...] Wenige Tage später sah ich, wie sie in der Küche nicht nur über die gewohnten, verdammten Ölsardinen herfiel, sie goß auch das Öl aus mehreren älteren Dosen, die sie aufbewahrt hatte, in eine kleine Soßenpfanne, erhitzte die Brühe über die Gasflamme und trank davon [...]. Noch am selben Abend mußte Mama in die städtischen Krankenanstalten eingeliefert werden. [...] Es sollte sich herausstellen, daß Mama weder die Mole noch den Pferdekopf vergessen hatte, daß sie die Erinnerung an den Gaul [...] mit sich nahm. Ihre Organe erinnerten sich schmerzhaft überdeutlich an den Karfreitagsspaziergang und ließen, aus Angst von Wiederholung des Spazierganges, meine Mama, die mit ihren Organen einer Meinung war, sterben. (129-30)

Ma lei cominciava con sardine sott'olio per prima colazione, in capo a due ore [...] si buttava sulla cassetina di compensato piena di spratti di Bohnsack, a mezzogiorno pretendeva sogliole fritte con merluzzo in salsa di senape, nel pomeriggio aveva daccapo l'apricatole in mano: anguilla in gelatina, salacche arrotolate, aringhe fritte, e se Matzerath si rifiutava di friggere o lessare altro pesce per cena mamma non sprecava una parola, non inveiva, si alzava tranquillamente da tavola e tornava dal negozio con un pezzo di anguilla affumicata che ci faceva passare l'appetito, perché lei raschiava via col coltello dalla pelle anguillesca l'estremo grasso esterno e interno, e insomma ormai mangiava col coltello e nient'altro che pesce. Durante il giorno doveva vomitare parecchie volte. [...] [Mamma] fece passare l'anguilla nel burro di primo fiore e mangiò senza tregua, come se avesse da eseguire un compito. [...] Pochi giorni dopo la vidi in cucina non solo gettarsi sulle solite maledette sardine sott'olio, versò anche l'olio rimasto in parecchie scatole antecedenti e tenute da parte in un padellino per la salsa, riscaldò la brodaglia sulla fiamma del gas e se la bevve. [...] Quella stessa sera mamma dovette essere ricoverata all'ospedale civico. [...] Sarebbe poi risultato che mamma non aveva dimenticato né il molo né la testa di cavallo, che anzi il ricordo del ronzino se lo portava con sé. I suoi organi si ricordavano della passeggiata del venerdì santo con estrema, dolorosa chiarezza, e per paura di una ripetizione di quella passeggiata vollero che la mia mamma, la quale era dello stesso parere dei suoi organi, morisse. (160-61)

Mi pare qui più che evidente che il mezzo con il quale la donna sceglie di annichilirsi è la coazione a ripetere - di nuovo un tema freudiano. L'episodio al molo rappresenta per lei un trauma, qualcosa difficile da elaborare (cioè da digerire), ed è molto interessante che Grass scelga un insieme di immagini così viscerale per parlare della sua morte. Al complesso del molo si aggiunge un altro elemento: per potersi suicidare Agnes trasforma il disgusto in un'emozione che la avveleni definitivamente. La donna usa il suo leggero disturbo alimentare, a cui Oskar accenna durante l'episodio delle anguille - «heimlich aß sie» (121) («mangiava di nascosto», 150) - come un'arma contro sé stessa, distruggendo a un tempo la sua «anima snella» e il suo «corpo florido» (172; trad. it. 211).

Non conosciamo con esattezza i motivi del suo suicidio, o quali siano davvero le ragioni della sua disperazione. Si trova nel mezzo di una complicata rete di relazioni con suo marito e il suo amante, e a questo punto del romanzo è di nuovo incinta. Tuttavia la situazione - perlomeno per come la racconta Oskar - non sembra nemmeno lontanamente disperata, e i tre hanno raggiunto un equilibrio che definirei invidiabile. Può darsi che il motivo della mancata felicità di Agnes risieda tanto nei timori per la nuova gravidanza (è chiaro che il nano è una spina nel fianco per sua

madre) che nell'inadeguatezza degli uomini che la circondano. La malinconica, femminile delicatezza di Jan, che pure appare tanto in sintonia con la personalità di Agnes, contrasta con la gioviale e bonaria virilità di Matzerath, che probabilmente soddisfa altre esigenze, interiori ed esteriori, della donna. È interessante che sia proprio la peste del nazionalismo hitleriano ad acuire i contrasti e a rendere impossibile, nel prosieguito, l'amicizia fra i due (cf. 172; trad. it. 211); allo stesso modo del trombetta Meyn, simpatico e vitale fino a quando non entra nelle file naziste. Il nazismo appare nel romanzo come una stortura della civiltà, che inquina i rapporti umani sulla base di valori che non sono tali, di disvalori come la nazione, l'ordine e la pulizia. Meyn, da ubriaco, suona stupendamente la tromba e vive con quattro gatti puzzolenti in precarie condizioni igieniche; la divisa delle SA gli impone invece di essere sobrio, di non suonare la tromba e di sentirsi in dovere di uccidere gli animali, i cui afrori gli sono improvvisamente intollerabili. Oskar racconta questo episodio crudele in un capitolo particolarmente intenso e straniante, in parallelo alla Notte dei cristalli (cf. il capitolo «Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe», 159-68) («Fede, speranza, carità», 197-206).

Passando di nuovo a Matzerath, trovo molto commoventi le parole che usa quando è posto di fronte alla disperazione della moglie: «Warum willst du das Kind denn nicht? Is ja gleich, von wem es is'» (129) («Ma perché il bambino non lo vuoi mica? Fa lo stesso di chi è», 161). Devo ammettere di provare una certa simpatia per questo personaggio. Matzerath non è in alcun modo una vittima; è un uomo tranquillo, a cui piace ridere, cantare e cucinare. Non è geloso della moglie e di suo cugino, ma non mi sembra che questo dipenda da indifferenza o da mancanza di tenerezza nei confronti di Agnes. Anche a Oskar vuole bene, nonostante la caparbia distanza che il nano frappone fra sé e lui, fra sé e il mondo, e si oppone con rabbia all'idea di portare il figlio deforme in un centro per l'eutanasia (298; trad. it. 366). Eppure entra nel partito nazista molto presto. Per quel che ne sappiamo, non svolge un ruolo attivo nella violenza verso gli ebrei, per esempio durante la notte del 9 novembre 1938 (163; trad. it. 202), ma di sicuro è un sostenitore entusiasta del movimento, un *Mitläufer*. È interessante che sia proprio durante l'episodio delle anguille che Oskar mette in luce come la sua entrata nel partito corrisponda alle sue abitudini:

Aber das war so seine Angewohnheit, immer zu winken, wenn andere winkten, immer zu schreien, zu lachen und zu klatschen, wenn andere schrien, lachten oder klatschten. Deshalb ist er verhältnismäßig früh in die Partei eingetreten, als das noch gar nicht nötig war, nichts einbrachte und nur seine Sonntagsvormittage beanspruchte. (122-3)

Semplicemente era abituato così, a gesticolare tutte le volte che altri gesticolavano, a gridare, ridere e battere le mani tutte le volte che altri



gridavano, ridevano e battevano le mani. Per questo motivo è anche entrato nel partito relativamente presto, quando non era ancora necessario, rendeva zero e si limitava a sequestrargli la domeniche mattina. (152)

Matzerath è un uomo comune, un esponente della piccola borghesia. Per quel che mi riguarda, in quanto lettore, i sentimenti di simpatia che suscita in me sono forse la parte più inquietante e per certi versi la più disgustosa del romanzo.

Tornando alla psicanalisi, è evidente che la narrazione si costruisce intorno a molti elementi che simboleggiano l'utero materno. Fra questi possiamo certamente ricordare la «gonna spaziosa» della nonna di Oskar (9; trad. it. 9), dove Koljaiczek trova rifugio all'inizio della storia, e dove anche Oskar fugge spesso dalle brutture del mondo - ritrovando ogni volta «den Geruch jener gelblich zerfließenden, leicht ranzigen Butter» (136, cf. anche 272, 289) («l'odore di quel burro giallastro, liquefatto e un po' rancido», 169, cf. anche 335, 354). Anche gli armadi svolgono palesemente questa funzione simbolica. Ho già accennato al modo in cui Oskar si nasconde nella camera da letto dei suoi genitori durante il litigio, subito dopo l'episodio delle anguille, a Danzica. Si tratta di un passaggio piuttosto interessante, perché la narrazione degli avvenimenti si interrompe per fare spazio a un brano dal deciso sapore onirico, nel quale si affacciano temi già comparsi in precedenza - ad esempio la passione di Oskar per le infermiere, che come fornitrici di cure sostituiscono chiaramente la figura materna - e altri che si definiscono qui con precisione per la prima volta, come la Cuoca nera, enigmatica e mortifera protagonista di una filastrocca infantile tedesca<sup>1</sup> e *summa* di tutte le paure del nano.

Alcuni anni dopo ritroviamo il nano in un altro armadio, questa volta nella stanza occupata da un'infermiera, sorella Dorothea, che vive porta a porta con lui a Düsseldorf. Il nano non l'ha mai vista, ma il suo interesse per le infermiere la rende per lui in ogni caso attraente. Oskar entra di nascosto nella sua camera, mentre lei è al lavoro, e dopo aver curiosato in giro si infila nell'armadio della donna (404 ss.; trad. it. 499 ss.). È evidente che si tratta di una penetrazione *in absentia*, di un tentativo feticistico di possedere sessualmente la sconosciuta, e allo stesso tempo è un'espressione del desiderio di essere contenuto in uno spazio ristretto, circoscritto, più piccolo del mondo: in un ventre, probabilmente materno. Nell'oscurità

1 «Ist die schwarze Köchin da? / Nein, nein, nein! / Dreimal muss ich 'rummarschier'n, / das viertemal den Kopf verlier'n, / das fünftemal: komm mit! / Ist die schwarze Köchin da? / Ja, ja, ja. / Da geht sie ja, da steht sie ja, / die Köchin aus Amerika!» («È qui la cuoca nera? / No, no, no! / Tre volte mi fanno marciare, / la quarta la testa tagliare, / la quinta tocca a te! / È qui la cuoca nera? / Sì, sì, sì! / Eccola che va, eccola che sta, / la cuoca che arriva dal Canada») [trad. dell'Autore]) Craig 2016.



dell'armadio Oskar rivive con molta intensità l'episodio delle anguille; in maniera piuttosto significativa, a ricordarglielo è un altro elemento fallico, una cintura di pelle nera appesa nel guardaroba. Si tratta di un vero e proprio *re-enactment* del trauma, nuovamente narrato con ricchezza di particolari, come a ribadirne l'importanza per la psiche di Oskar.

Vorrei a questo inserirmi nella scia di alcune interessanti annotazioni di Winfried Menninghaus, che all'interno del suo volume *Ekel. Theorie und Geschichte einer Starken Empfindung* (1999) propone un capitolo dal titolo «*Psychoanalyse des Stinkens: Libido, Ekel und Kulturentwicklung bei Freud*» (275-332).<sup>2</sup> Menninghaus suggerisce che Freud non abbia colto appieno il ruolo del disgusto all'interno della sua teoria, sottolineando l'evidente piacere dello psicanalista nell'immaginare nell'infanzia una condizione di paradisiaca assenza di barriere del disgusto, con la loro funzione civilizzante e nevrotizzante. Per il nostro discorso è interessante soprattutto l'idea del bambino piccolo come «perverso polimorfo» (Freud [1917] 1969, 213; trad. it. Freud 1978, 157), non disturbato, e anzi spesso molto interessato a ciò che gli adulti non possono fare a meno di trovare disgustoso. Nelle sue *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, Freud mette in luce come la sessualità del bambino differisca in molti punti da quella in seguito ritenuta normale, mettendo al centro alcuni fenomeni, fra i quali la «barriera del disgusto».

Was wir im Leben der Erwachsenen 'pervers' nennen, weicht vom Normalen in folgenden Stücken ab: erstens durch das Hinwegsetzen über die Artschranke (die Kluft zwischen Mensch und Tier), zweitens durch die Überschreitung der Ekelschranke, drittens der Inzestschranke [...], viertens der Gleichgeschlechtlichkeit, und fünftens durch die Übertragung der Genitalrolle an andere Organe und Körperstellen. Alle diese Schranken bestehen nicht von Anfang an, sondern werden erst allmählich im Laufe der Entwicklung und der Erziehung aufgebaut. Das kleine Kind ist frei von ihnen. (1969, 213)

Ciò che noi chiamiamo 'perverso' nella vita degli adulti, si scosta dalla normalità nei seguenti punti: primo, per l'incuranza della barriera tra le specie (dell'abisso fra uomo e animale); secondo, per lo scavalcamento della barriera del disgusto; terzo, di quella dell'incesto [...]; quarta, di quella dell'uguaglianza di sesso; e quinto, per il trasferimento del ruolo dei genitali ad altri organi e parti del corpo. Tutte queste barriere non esistono fin dall'inizio, ma vengono erette solo poco a poco nel corso dello sviluppo e dell'educazione. Il bambino piccolo ne è libero. (1978,

2 *Disgusto. Teoria e storia di una sensazione forte*. Cap. 6: *Psicoanalisi del puzzare. Libido, disgusto e sviluppo della cultura in Freud*. L'opera non è tradotta in italiano.

156-7)

Il personaggio di Oskar è sicuramente una raffigurazione molto plastica del bambino come «perverso polimorfo», e soprattutto dell'adulto che vorrebbe che queste barriere non fossero mai state erette. Ne sono testimonianza il suo feticismo, cui abbiamo già accennato, i suoi brividi omoerotici, per esempio di fronte a «das Gießkännchen des Jesusknaben» (Grass [1959] 1974, 114) («il piccolo annaffiatoio del Bambin Gesù», Grass [1962] 2009, 141), la sua prospettiva al di là di ogni morale nelle questioni sessuali, i suoi desideri incestuosi e, appunto, il particolare rapporto che ha con la «barriera del disgusto».

Al di là della sua sempre distaccata narrazione, il nano tamburante non è esente dal provare ribrezzo. Significativo in questo senso è l'episodio della zuppa che gli altri bambini del caseggiato preparano per gioco e poi lo costringono con la forza a ingollare, dentro alla quale, oltre alla triplice espettorazione di tabacco masticato di un vicino di casa, vi sono due rane, un mattone sbriciolato e l'orina di diversi bambini. Oskar - che «quel sapore non lo scorder[à]» - vomita subito la brodaglia, peraltro «senza scoprire [...] resti di rana» (77-8.; trad. it. 95-6.). L'episodio suscita in lui un impulso all'azione che allarga i suoi orizzonti vetricidi, spingendolo a evitare il cortile del caseggiato e i suoi cuochi. Non è l'unico luogo del romanzo in cui il senso di ripulsa, soprattutto alimentare, ha una funzione apertamente gnoseologica.

Restando in questo ambito, è notevole l'osservazione fatta da Oskar a proposito del soggiorno dei coniugi Scheffler, che gli sembra «kaum nach [s]einem Geschmack» («quasi per nulla di suo gusto») almeno quanto lo è stata l'esperienza del primo giorno di scuola. Il nano, precoce cosmopolita, considera offensiva per lui la «süßlich-niedliche[] Behausung» (70) (il «focolare sdolcinato», 86), che con la sua folla di suppellettili e centrini ricamati incarna perfettamente gli ideali piccolo-borghesi che anche sua madre condivide (cf. 34; trad. it. 40). L'unica differenza, come nota cinicamente il nano, è che Agnes può contare su Jan Bronski come passatempo, mentre Gretchen Schleffer deve accontentarsi di sferruzzare. Gretchen sublima le mancate attenzioni del marito fornaio, e l'assenza di figli a cui badare, tramite l'attivismo indefesso della casalinga; l'ambito erotico forzatamente rimosso ritorna però alla luce, complice anche il libro che Oskar sceglie come suo principale abbecedario, *Rasputin e le donne*, ricco di particolareggiate descrizioni della complicata vita erotica del santone. Il ritorno del rimosso non si esaurisce solo in confusi risolini da parte della donna durante la lettura, ma anche in sfrenatezze alimentari in cui coinvolge anche il nano; per non ingrassare troppo, questi sviluppa un procedimento che descrive con cura:

Oft wußte ich mir nach allzu süßen Unterrichtsstunden [...] nicht anders

zu helfen, als daß ich [...] ein Stück trockenes Brot an einen Bindfaden band, in das norwegische Fäßchen mit eingelegten Heringen tunkte und erst herauszog, wenn das Brot von der Salzlauge bis zum Überdruß durchtränkt war. Sie können sich nicht vorstellen, wie nach dem unmäßigen Kuchengenuß dieser Imbiß als Brechmittel wirkte. Oftmals gab Oskar, um abzunehmen, auf unserem Klosett für über einen Danziger Gulden Kuchen aus der Bäckerei Scheffler von sich; das war damals viel Geld. (75)

Spesso, dopo le ore di lezione troppo dolci [...] non sapevo come arrangiarmi se non [...] legando un pezzo di pane secco a uno spago, intingendolo nel barilotto norvegese delle aringhe in conserva e tirandolo fuori solo quando il pane era inzuppato di salamoia fino alla nausea. Non potete immaginarvi l'efficacia emetica di questo spuntino dopo una smodata ingestione di torta. Spesso Oskar, per dimagrire, cedeva alla nostra tazza del cesso più di un fiorino di Danzica in dolciumi della panetteria Scheffler, che ai tempi era molto denaro. (92)

Si è accennato sopra alle disavventure del primo giorno di scuola (nel capitolo *Der Stundenplan, L'orario delle lezioni*); è assai interessante che il rifiuto di Oskar passi direttamente per le esalazioni acide degli studenti e dei loro zaini (70; trad. it. 86). Oskar ha infatti un rapporto del tutto particolare con gli odori, a cui è molto sensibile. Molti personaggi e luoghi del romanzo vengono caratterizzati per il tramite degli effluvi che emanano. Abbiamo già citato il «burro rancido» che Oskar avverte sotto le gonne della nonna, e anche le esalazioni dei cappotti nell'armadio della camera da letto dei genitori. Verso la fine del romanzo Oskar, inseguito dagli uomini dell'Interpol per l'omicidio di sorella Dorothea, enumera una serie di odori che gli tornano alle narici e che rimandano a momenti più o meno rilevanti della sua vita; fra questi l'olio delle sardine usate dalla madre per suicidarsi, l'acqua di colonia di Jan, al quale «la morte precoce [...] trasudava da tutti gli occhielli», 600) («atmete [...] der frühe Tod durch alle Knopflöcher» (488), le patate del verduraio Greff e altri ancora. Il primo di questi odori è «la vaniglia di Maria ragazzina», a cui il nano dedica una partecipe descrizione introducendo il personaggio (217; trad. it. 267). Il rapporto dei due può essere letto, ancora una volta, sotto il segno del complesso edipico: come seconda moglie di Matzerath, Maria è una sorta di madre sostitutiva per il nano che non vuole crescere – ma che nonostante tutto, a questo punto del romanzo, sente con vigore le tensioni ormonali dell'adolescenza e considera Maria il suo primo amore. La diciassettenne, nella sua solida noncuranza, tratta Oskar come un bambino piccolo, lavandolo accuratamente ogni sera e non preoccupandosi di celare le proprie nudità. L'episodio più interessante per il nostro discorso avviene durante una gita al mare, in una cabina sulla spiaggia di Brösen, nel momento

in cui Maria si spoglia completamente davanti al nano. «Spaventato dal triangolo villosa», Oskar

sprang auf, warf sich Maria zu. Die fing ihn auf mit ihren Haaren. Er ließ sich das Gesicht zuwachsen. Zwischen die Lippen wuchs es ihm. Maria lachte und wollte ihn wegziehen. Ich aber zog immer mehr von ihr in mich hinein, kam dem Vanillegeruch auf dem Spur. [...] Erst [...] als mir die Vanille Tränen in die Augen preßte, als ich schon Pfifferlinge oder sonst was Strenges, nur keine Vanille mehr schmeckte, als dieser Erdgeruch, den Maria hinter der Vanille verbarg, mir den modernden Jan Bronski auf die Stirn nagelte und mich für alle Zeiten mit dem Geschmack der Vergänglichkeit verseuchte, da ließ ich los. (220)

è balzato in piedi, si è gettato su Maria. Lei lo ha accolto con i suoi peli. Lui se li è lasciati crescere in faccia. Gli crescevano tra le labbra. Maria rideva, cercava di tirarlo via. Ma sempre di più io tiravo dentro di me qualcosa di lei, ero a caccia dell'odore di vaniglia. [...] Solo quando [...] la vaniglia mi ha riempito gli occhi di lacrime, quando ormai gustavo dei gallinacci o qualcosa di altrettanto acre ma nessuna vaniglia, quando l'odore di terra che Maria nascondeva dietro la vaniglia mi ha inchiodato alla fronte Jan Bronski in decomposizione contaminandomi per sempre col sapore della caducità, solo allora ho mollato la presa. (270)

I sommovimenti erotici del nano adolescente mettono in luce una connessione di cui Oskar non aveva coscienza, quella fra amore e morte – in una modalità lontanissima da ogni sdilinquinamento di matrice romantica. Nella percezione di Oskar, il vago sentore di putredine del sesso di Maria rimanda direttamente al putrefarsi di Jan Bronski, evocato poco prima, nel viaggio per arrivare alla spiaggia. È interessante notare che il nano, nel momento in cui entra nella sfera adulta con questo primo, maldestro e in un certo senso inintenzionale atto erotico, non pensa alla madre, anch'essa già morta a questo punto del romanzo, ma al probabile padre, della cui morte alla Posta Polacca sa di essere responsabile. Nell'atto del goffo *cunnilingus* si mescolano impulsi che non sono solo strettamente sessuali, ma anche olfattivi e alimentari, se Oskar è «a caccia dell'odore di vaniglia». Anche in questo episodio la nausea ha un valore conoscitivo: la promessa di benessere e felicità legata al sesso si rivela fallace nel momento in cui si svela il suo legame con il decadimento e con la perdita delle persone care. L'incerto Eden di Oskar, il suo sottrarsi alle responsabilità col permanere bambino, sembra mostrare qui i suoi limiti: se gli consente di appagare i suoi desideri erotici al netto di ogni impegno (con Maria, con Lina Greff), lo lascia anche nell'indeterminatezza degli affetti, esaltando la sua solitudine.

L'ossessione per l'odore di Maria sostiene la narrazione anche nel prosieguo. Non stupisce che Oskar, durante il pranzo per il battesimo di suo

fratello (o forse suo figlio) Kurt, sia disturbato dalla «dicksüssige, gelbsüssige [...] Vanillesoße» («fluida e densa, fluida e gialla [...] crema di vaniglia») che guarnisce i budini al cioccolato serviti come dolce, soprattutto per il fatto che Maria - «die aller Vanille Anstifterin» («la causa prima di ogni vaniglia») (250, trad. it. 308) - è seduta davanti a lui tenendo la mano di Matzerath. La gelosia fa sì che Oskar, non avendo a disposizione la nonna Anna, si rifugi fra le gonne di Lina Greff, una vicina di casa di cui in precedenza era stata evocata la «sciatteria sempre più maleodorante» col passare degli anni (cf. 243; trad. it. 299).

[Oskar] genoß zum erstenmal jene, der Lina Greff eigene Ausdünstung, die jede Vanille sofort überschrie, verschluckte, tötete. | So säuerlich es mich auch ankam, verharrte ich dennoch in der neuen Geruchsrichtung, bis mir alle mit der Vanille zusammenhängenden Erinnerungen betäubt zu sein schienen. Langsam, lautlos und krampflos überkam mich ein befreiender Brechreiz. [...] [Da] begriff ich meine Ohnmacht, schwamm ich in meiner Ohnmacht, breitete sich Oskars Ohnmacht zu Füßen der Lina Greff aus - und ich beschloß, [...] meine Ohnmacht zu Frau Greff zu tragen. (250)

Oskar [...] per la prima volta ha gustato quell'esalazione che apparteneva solo a Lina Greff e che immediatamente ha subissato, ingoiato, ammazzato ogni vaniglia. | Per acido che fosse, ho perserverato nel nuovo indirizzo olfattivo finché tutti i ricordi legati alla vaniglia mi son parsi anestetizzati. Lentamente, senza suono e senza conati mi si è imposto un vomito liberatore. [...] [Lì] ho compreso la mia impotenza, ho sguazzato nella mia impotenza, l'impotenza di Oskar è dilagata ai piedi di Lina Greff - e ho deciso che [...] avrei portato la mia impotenza alla signora Greff. (308)

L'impotenza di Oskar coincide con l'impossibilità di appagare i suoi desideri. L'effetto emetico non deriva dalla semplice reazione spontanea e per così dire meccanica dell'organismo per il mescolarsi dei due odori - il delicato profumo di vaniglia di Maria, richiamato dalla crema, e gli effluvi acidi di Lina; esso assume un valore conoscitivo, perché consente a Oskar di comprendere la centralità del desiderio erotico nel mondo che si va costruendo. Lo «streng sauerliche[r], vielfach gewobene[r] Dunstkreis» (251) («l'aura olfattiva variegata e severamente acida», 309) della donna svolge qui il ruolo di una chiave di volta. Ciò che per il marito della donna è evidentemente fastidioso, come mostra l'episodio del catino con l'acqua saponata lasciato vicino al letto (254; trad. it. 313), sembra essere indifferente al nano, o forse costituisce addirittura uno stimolante amoroso. Lina Greff lo accoglierà ripetutamente nel suo letto di ipocondriaca, divenendo un «territorio d'esercitazioni» a un tempo erotiche, militari e artistiche (cf.

254; trad. it. 313) e dandogli ampiamente occasione di «pervenire ad un ampio respiro epico»: nausea, erotismo e arte si fondono in un complesso produttivo e vitale.

L'incidente al battesimo di Kurt viene ripreso durante la visita alla camera di sorella Dorothea, di cui si è già parlato. La vista del suo reggipetto, appeso alla spalliera di una sedia, suscita in Oskar il ricordo di quei conati e dell'eccessiva dolcezza del profumo di vaniglia. Le sue coppe sono

Schüssel[, die ich tagtäglich, die Kost nicht kennend, gerne ausgelöffelt hätte; ein zeitweiliges Erbrechen schon einbeziehend, denn jeder Brei ist manchmal zum Kotzen, dann wieder Süß hinterher, zu süß oder so süß, daß der Brechreiz Geschmack findet und wahrer Liebe Proben stellt. (408)

tazze che ben volentieri, senza conoscere il cibo che contenevano, avrei scucchiato ogni giorno; mettendo già in conto un periodico attacco di nausea, perché ogni pappa ogni tanto è da vomitare e dopo torna dolce, troppo dolce, o talmente dolce che la nausea ci trova gusto e impone prove di vero amore. (501)

La prova del vero amore è il superamento del disgusto - non sempre e comunque, ma in determinate condizioni, come ben mostra l'episodio del primo incontro con il jazzista Klepp. Questi ha «den Geruch einer Leiche an sich, die nicht aufhören kann, Zigaretten zu rauchen, Pfefferminz zu lutschen und Knoblauchdünste auszuscheiden» (416) («l'odore di un cadavere che non sa smettere di fumare sigarette, succhiare mentine e sprigionare miasmi d'aglio», 509). Oskar racconta in maniera molto divertita di questo artista, suo parente nello sfrenato individualismo, talmente pigro da non alzarsi neppure per urinare e da riutilizzare molte volte l'acqua per cuocere gli spaghetti, fino a farla diventare una «immer sämiger werdende Brühe» (418) («broda [...] sempre più vischiosa», 510). Lo straniamento qui emerge soprattutto dal contrasto che si sviluppa fra lo scenario di disordine e sporcizia - difficile immaginare un luogo più diverso dai soggiorni piccolo-borghesi dell'infanzia di Oskar! - e il dialogo dei due, improntato a un'etichetta tanto cortese da divenire surreale: due *clochard* che si trattano reciprocamente come dei lord inglesi. Klepp invita Oskar a mangiare con lui una porzione di spaghetti, che cuoce nella broda di cui prima, appena ingentilita da un'aggiunta di acqua fresca, nella pentola incrostata. Il nano rimarca la sgradevolezza delle stoviglie, il fatto che Klepp gli porga «den scheußlichsten aller Teller» («il più schifoso di tutti i piatti»), pulito con un giornale sporco e un'alitata, insieme a «üblem, den Fingern klebendem Besteck» («pessime posate che si attaccavano alle dita»). Perfino Oskar, che sappiamo essere di bocca piuttosto buona, trova ripugnante l'intera situazione: l'odore di Klepp, le condizioni igieniche

della stanza, la sporcizia di pentola e stoviglie. Ma immediatamente dopo fa una considerazione che mi pare caratteristica per gli elementi che ho cercato di mettere in luce fin qui:

Bis heute hat Oskar nicht verstehen können, wie er sich damals zum Gebrauch von Löffel und Gabel hat aufraffen können. Wunderbarerweise schmeckte mir das Gericht. Es wurden mir sogar jene Kleppschen Spaghetti zu einem kulinarischen Wertmesser, den ich von jenem Tag an jeden Menu anlegte, das mir vorgesetzt wurde. (420)

Fino a oggi Oskar non è riuscito a capire dove abbia trovato la forza di usare cucchiaio e forchetta. Miracolosamente il cibo mi è piaciuto. Anzi quegli spaghetti kleppiani son diventati per me un parametro culinario, su cui da quel giorno mi baso per giudicare qualsiasi menu. (516)

Il disgusto torna ad avere una funzione conoscitiva: tramite gli «spaghetti kleppiani» Oskar impara a dare valore ai rapporti e non al contorno, superando così la logica piccolo-borghese dei centrini e dei tappeti ossessivamente battuti. In questo caso non è la violenza dei compagni di gioco a costringerlo a superare il disgusto, bensì la cortesia di chi lo ospita. Questa cortesia non ha però i tratti ipocriti dell'uso borghese, non è cioè semplicemente un'ulteriore mezzo di quella strategia che tende solo al profitto personale, a scapito degli altri. Gli spaghetti mangiati con Klepp segnano un passo avanti nella vita e nelle amicizie di Oskar; diventano un «pasto solidale» (cf. Wierlacher 1987, 66) nel quale le differenze fra i commensali sono annullate in favore di una fraternità partecipe.

Un'ultima considerazione, un po' eccentrica rispetto a quanto detto finora: sebbene la protesta di Oskar sia del tutto ecumenica - nel senso che il nano «stambura» contro ogni tipo di adunata e di strombazzamento di ideali - e venga fatta esclusivamente «aus privaten, dazu ästhetischen Gründen» (100) («per ragioni private e per giunta artistiche», 123-4), il romanzo può ben essere considerato, fra le altre cose, una sorta di accusa contro quei cittadini tedeschi che hanno scelto, con gradi differenti di coazione, di rimanere per dodici anni in uno stato infantile piuttosto inquietante, amando il Führer come un padre, ma senza cercare di ucciderlo, né dentro di sé, né nella realtà, e giocando volentieri con ciò che avrebbe dovuto essere disgustoso, ossia l'arbitrio e la violenza. Lampante è il caso del trombettista Meyn, che una volta indossata la divisa delle SA rinuncia alla vita per un ordine perverso, inseguendo il quale si sente in dovere di uccidere crudelmente i suoi quattro gatti, la cui puzza gli ricorda troppo da vicino le condizioni della sua vita precedente. In altre parole, il suo disgusto si rivolge verso l'oggetto sbagliato. Anche in questo senso mi sembra che il romanzo si ponga piuttosto vicino all'idea della «Unfähigkeit zu trauern», dell'«incapacità di elaborare il lutto» di



cui Alexander e Margarete Mitscherlich (1967) parleranno qualche anno dopo: il vero oggetto di lutto per la maggioranza dei cittadini tedeschi alla fine della guerra è la perdita di Hitler (e con lui dell'illusione narcisistica della grandezza del proprio Sé), non la coscienza dei crimini compiuti in suo nome. Per Grass, i tedeschi-bambini hanno approfittato un po' troppo volentieri dello stato di minorità in cui il regime li costringeva, sfruttando lo schermo della 'naturale' cecità infantile come scusa per non considerare ripugnanti gli atti criminosi del regime. Eccezionale in questo senso, per la vitalistica fiducia nelle possibilità umane che offre, mi pare un'annotazione di Oskar scolaretto. Nel primo e unico giorno di scuola del nano, l'antipatica maestra tamburella per un breve momento insieme a lui, liberandosi per quei pochi istanti della sua «esistenza caricaturale»; Oskar è pronto a riconoscere anche in lei una figura finalmente «menschlich, das heißt, kindlich, neugierig, vielschichtig und unmoralisch» (63) («umana, vale a dire infantile, curiosa, polimorfa, immorale», 77).

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## **Il cantore nel mare** La voce silenziosa del Mediterraneo in *Die Einsamen* di Paul Heyse

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**Abstract** After his journey in Italy, Paul Heyse (1830-1914) wrote *Ein Jahr in Italien* (1853) and several short stories. Among them he composed *Die Einsamen* (1857). The story tells of a German painter who, during his stay in Italy, encounters Teresa and Tommaso (sister and brother) and becomes spectator and narrator of their lives. His words first, and those of the protagonists then, will reveal the sad events which led them to leave Naples and the Mediterranean Sea the loved and lived so close to. The Mediterranean becomes gradually and inexorably the true protagonist of the story. It dominates the scene, is always present, with its strength and flows. Its waters know everything, they hide secrets but, most of all, hide the truth. The sea is a mirror the protagonists fear to look in because they would see all their sorrows and faults in it. Thus, they reveal their whole complexity only when they get in contact with it, look at its waves from far or try to escape from it. The sea is always there, and, even if tempestuous, it is never cruel: its storms are due to the secrets it shields. This work proposes to interpret the characters of *Die Einsamen* by means of their relation with the sea. The Mediterranean Sea of Paul Heyse is the key to discover their deepest nature: it is the guardian of their hidden and unsaid desires and pains and the only one that could help them to face life and truth.

**Sommario** 1 Paul Heyse e il canto della natura. – 2 Paul Heyse e l'Italia. – 3 Le novelle di Heyse. – 4 *Die Einsamen*. – 5 Il Mediterraneo e le sue voci.

**Keywords** Heyse. Sea. Mediterranean. Characters.

### **1 Paul Heyse e il canto della natura**

Avrebbe preferito star ritto su una rupe ad intonare un canto senza parole al cospetto dell'infinito, una semplice eco di tutte le voci di primavera che lo avvolgevano. C'era un motivo se diffidava che la sua voce potesse diventare degna messaggera del suo animo. Quanto invidiava in quell'attimo il tenore che lo aveva profondamente emozionato una sera a Roma! Oh, con questa voce colmare qui l'immensità! Gli sembrò di essere misero e muto come un ladro, privo di suono come il bastone che aveva in mano quando attraversò la gioia dei canti e dei suoni della natura.

(Heyse 2012, 68)<sup>1</sup>

1 Tutte le citazioni da *Die Einsamen* sono tratte da Paul Heyse (2012) e saranno indicate d'ora in avanti con la sola indicazione della pagina.

Così Paul Heyse descrive lo stato d'animo del viaggiatore tedesco protagonista della sua novella *Die Einsamen* (1857). Un canto senza parole, un cantore, la natura con i suoi suoni e voci che suscitano emozioni profonde e avvolgenti: sono questi i tratti che, secondo la sua *Falkentheorie*, definiscono la *starke Silhouette* della novella: elementi atti a far emergere il **falcone** ovvero quell'elemento caratteristico che distingue la storia narrata da mille altre.

Le voci, il cantore e la natura di Heyse sono quelle italiane. È l'Italia il luogo in cui quel canto si sprigiona suscitando emozioni e sentimenti forti, profondi e, a volte, dolorosi. È nella natura del nostro Paese e, in particolare, nel suo Mar Mediterraneo che quelle voci abitano e trovano la forza di liberarsi e diffondersi. È il Mediterraneo il tratto che definisce il nucleo tematico della novella riflettendosi sull'intera narrazione e struttura narrativa.

## 2 Paul Heyse e l'Italia

Heyse fu attratto dall'Italia fin da giovanissimo e ancor prima di intraprendere il suo primo viaggio nel nostro paese, all'età di diciannove anni, scelse un soggetto italiano per il suo dramma *Francesca von Rimini* (1850).

L'interesse per il nostro paese si ritrova in moltissima della sua produzione: dalle numerose traduzioni che fece di opere di autori italiani<sup>2</sup> fino alle sue novelle. Tale passione non poteva che condurlo a visitare la nostra terra e così, nel 1852, egli partì alla volta di quella che definì «la terra promessa».<sup>3</sup>

2 Heyse sosteneva che saper felicemente tradurre i grandi poeti è opera non meno meritoria che lo scrivere una bella lirica, un dramma degno di applauso, una novella elegante. Il buon traduttore dona al poeta straniero una cittadinanza ben più durevole e porta fra molti il beneficio della luce che era concentrata su pochi: attenua i limiti che dividono popolo da popolo, fa sparire le faticose differenze della lingua e del linguaggio e concorre prepotentemente al concetto di *Weltliteratur*. La sua prima traduzione, *Italienisches Liederbuch* (1860) non riguarda un'opera colta bensì un *corpus* di poesie popolari provenienti da varie regioni d'Italia. Questo gusto non lo perderà neanche in seguito quando si cimenterà con i versi di Giuseppe Giusti o la poesia romanesca di Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli. In seguito, egli tradurrà opere di Vincenzo Monti, Ludovico Ariosto, Giuseppe Parini, Vittorio Alfieri, Ugo Foscolo, Alessandro Manzoni e Nicolò Machiavelli, ma il suo nome si lega in maniera speciale a Leopardi, cui l'autore tedesco dedicherà non solo parte della sua opera di traduzione ma anche il racconto «Nerina».

3 L'Italia, meta di pellegrini, mercanti diplomatici, diviene, nella seconda metà del XVI secolo, una delle destinazioni predilette da una differente categoria di viaggiatori che non intendono valicare le Alpi per inseguire la gloria delle armi né sfidare l'ignoto in terre sconosciute e vergini. Si tratta di giovani, figli di aristocratici o borghesi che compiono il loro viaggio in Italia adeguandosi, non sempre docilmente, alle finalità educative illustrate dalla vasta letteratura sull'argomento. Il viaggio in Italia del tardo Rinascimento, intrapreso dai gentiluomini francesi, dai giovani aristocratici inglesi o dai *Kavalieren* tedeschi si configura

Heyse si recò in Italia grazie a una borsa di studio di cinquecento talleri, offerta dal governo prussiano, al fine di svolgere una ricerca sulle poesie provenzali inedite presenti nelle biblioteche italiane. Le sue ricerche andranno avanti con alterne vicende e, solo verso la fine del suo soggiorno, scoprirà documenti interessanti nella Laurenziana e Riccardiana di Firenze, nell'Estense di Modena e nella Marciana a Venezia.

Durante il suo viaggio egli annotò con precisione avvenimenti, incontri e circostanze, descrisse luoghi e paesaggi e registrò minuziosamente ogni sua impressione e suggestione. Questi appunti costituiscono i primi due dei suoi ventotto *Tagebücher* nonché quel capitolo della sua autobiografia che è *Ein Jahr in Italien* (1900).<sup>4</sup>

Heyse visita l'Italia percorrendola da nord a sud seguendo un itinera-

come peregrinazione di città in città e non più come soggiorno in centri universitari. L'idea di viaggio che si diffonde presso l'aristocrazia europea nell'ultimo scorcio del XVI secolo nasce dalla curiosità intellettuale della nuova scienza che osserva fenomeni naturali e culturali e, nel contempo, le antichità classiche con estasiata contemplazione.

Il termine *tour* si affianca ora a quelli di *travel* e *journey* con il significato di 'giro' dei paesi continentali e, in particolare, dell'Italia. Il viaggio in Italia diviene espressione di un'Europa che privilegia la circolazione degli uomini e del sapere e, dalla fine del XVI e per tutto il secolo del successivo, prosegue incessantemente.

Il dibattito sull'utilità del viaggio (si pensi, ad esempio, a Burton o Bacon), si riversa nelle guide rivolte a quello che gli inglesi definirono il *Gentleman Traveller* e che diede vita ad un nuovo genere letterario ovvero la *Travel Literature* per gli anglosassoni o *Reiseliteratur* dei tedeschi che, nei secoli XVI e XVII, sviluppa una mole cospicua di opere e l'articolazione in differenti filoni come la memorialistica, i vademecum per i viaggiatori e le relazioni di viaggio, una via di mezzo tra la guida, il saggio di costume e a descrizione narrativa. Se il Seicento vede il fiorire di tutta questa nuova letteratura con una concezione prevalentemente didattica, nel secolo successivo, si assiste ad una progressiva e inarrestabile dilatazione del fenomeno. È L'epoca di Gibbon, di Goethe, di Sterne, del Marchese de Sade, di Winckelmann, di quello spirito cosmopolita che fa del *Grand Tour* uno strumento di incontro tra intellettuali, aristocratici, uomini di scienza, finanzieri, artisti e studenti genera n altro fenomeno che è lo spostamento sempre più verso sud dei confini del viaggio.

Nell'Ottocento si fa più intenso nei viaggiatori un irrazionale bisogno di evasione, di recupero della memoria storica e di effusione sentimentale e l'attenzione si sposta ora dalla realtà esterna all'animo di chi guarda e osserva con il recupero della possibilità di stupirsi davanti allo spettacolo della natura e dell'arte. Il viaggio diviene un modo per risvegliare negli uomini una spontanea adesione alla vita e agli aspetti mutevoli del mondo, redimerli dalla quotidianità, dalla consuetudine dei doveri e dei rapporti convenzionali con un ritrovato incantamento.

La Restaurazione e l'eclissi dello spirito cosmopolita sanciscono la fine del *Grand Tour* nei Paesi europei. La ripresa dei viaggi avviene all'insegna esclusiva del 'viaggio in Italia' intrapreso ora, oltre che da artisti e scrittori, anche da agiati borghesi, professionisti, uomini di chiesa e intere famiglie. Ma i viaggiatori non sono più quelli della tradizione illuministica e romantica e la diversità è data dai fini dell'impresa, dai nuovi ceti che vi accedono, da una sensibilità inedita e da un altrettanto inedito atteggiarsi nei confronti del nostro Paese, della sua arte e della sua storia. Sul viaggio in Italia si vedano: Brilli 2014, D'Agostini 1987 e Tresoldi 1977.

4 Su Heyse ed il suo viaggio in Italia si vedano, tra gli altri: Battafarano 1988, 1997; Berbig, Hettche 2001; Bertazzoli 1987, 1994; Bertozzi 2011; Kroes Tillmann 1993; Miller 1986-1988.

rio che si snoda su una topografia letteraria: la campagna di Ancona del Leopardi, Milano in cui erano stati scritti *I Promessi Sposi*, Pisa e Verona che richiamavano alla sua memoria il Giusti, Firenze città della *Vita Nova*, la Roma di Goethe e dei sonetti del Belli. Un itinerario che poi Heyse ripercorrerà con le sue novelle: ritroveremo Pisa con la vedova Lucrezia in *Die Witwe von Pisa* (1865), Sorrento con *L'Arrabbiata* (1853), la Napoli di *Die Einsamen* (1857) la Venezia di *Andrea Delfin* (1859).

Nel suo diario di viaggio, così lontano dalla temperie politica di quegli anni, l'autore focalizza la sua attenzione non solo sulle bellezze artistiche, ma su quelle che egli stesso definisce «brava gente e personalità significative». Così scrive Heyse:

Ciò che avevo in comune con tutti i viaggiatori [...] animati dall'arte sarebbe di scarso interesse e ingigantirebbe talmente questo resoconto sul mio primo viaggio in Italia da farlo diventare un intero volume. Qui deve essere menzionato soltanto ciò che è rimasto in me delle esperienze personali fatte in parte nel mio mondo interiore, in parte frequentando brava gente e personalità significative. (2010, 40)

Viaggio, brava gente, personalità significative sono nelle opere di Heyse delle costanti che si intersecano e intrecciano in maniera indissolubile per condurre al significato più profondo delle sue novelle.

L'autore è il primo della lunga serie di viaggiatori che popolano i suoi racconti: da un viaggio ne scaturisce un altro e un altro ancora così da declinare il tema odeporico in innumerevoli modi, tanto diversi e numerosi quanto lo sono i protagonisti delle storie che egli racconta. Per Heyse il viaggio è un catalizzatore di significati: è il *grand tour*, una gita, una passeggiata, una traversata, ma è anche slancio, scatto verso qualcosa di nuovo e diverso, è esplorazione, incursione in una diversa dimensione, movimento verso l'altro e verso sé stessi.

Coloro che Heyse definisce «brava gente e personalità significative» non sono unicamente i viaggiatori, protagonisti – talvolta solo in apparenza – delle sue novelle, ma anche gli abitanti dei luoghi che questi visitano: persone umili, semplici; non sono tedeschi, inglesi o francesi: sono italiani. Le loro mete non sono la Germania, l'Inghilterra o la Francia, non devono prendere treni, battelli o carrozze o portare tanti bagagli, si muovono con una semplice barca di pescatori o a piedi: non hanno bisogno di andare lontano, ma semmai in profondità. Le loro storie e i loro viaggi emergono da altre narrazioni odeporiche o sono sin da subito al centro delle novelle e, in un modo o nell'altro, giungono a dominare la scena. I viaggiatori atipici di Heyse narrano i loro viaggi (o non viaggi), raccontano di loro stessi e, forse, anche un po' di noi.

Nascono così le sue novelle italiane,<sup>5</sup> frutto delle suggestioni cui egli sa abbandonarsi e dell'intreccio di queste con la sua personalità e cultura che affiora negli innumerevoli riferimenti a scrittori, classici e contemporanei, musicisti, cantanti, pittori, creando così un'immagine vivace ma profonda dell'umanità.

### 3 Le novelle di Heyse

La produzione novellistica di Heyse si colloca nel periodo di maggiore fioritura di tale genere, nell'epoca del *bürgerlicher Realismus* di metà Ottocento, quando si pubblicavano con enorme successo le novelle di Storm e Keller. Con la sua estetica esplicitata nelle pagine introduttive al *Deutscher Novellenschatz* (1873) e in quelle relative a *Meine Novellistik*, Heyse «cercò di difendere la *Novelliererei* dall'accusa di *Nivelliererei*» (2012, 33) e dimostrare che la novellistica non doveva essere bollata come letteratura triviale.

A tal proposito Heyse elaborò la cosiddetta *Falkentheorie*, la «Teoria del Falcone» in riferimento alla nona novella della quinta giornata del *Decamerone* di Boccaccio.<sup>6</sup> Scrive Heyse:

la novella deve palesare, in un unico centro, un solo conflitto, un'idea morale o fatale, oppure un profilo decisamente reciso [...]. La storia, non le situazioni, non l'evento, la *Weltanschauung*, che si riflette in esso, sono il motivo fondamentale. Un profilo incisivo [...] non dovrebbe mancare a ciò che noi chiamiamo novella in senso proprio. [...] è vero che una forma così semplice si adatterebbe difficilmente a tutti gli spunti offerti alla nostra moderna e raffinata civiltà. Eppure non sarebbe male se il novelliere, anche dovendo trattare un argomento dei più intimi e più complessi, chiedesse prima a sé stesso dove sta il 'Falcone' ovvero l'elemento caratteristico che distingue questa storia da mille altre. (Heyse 2005, 16)<sup>7</sup>

5 Al primo soggiorno di Heyse italiano risalgono *L'Arrabbiata* (1853) e gli *Idyllen von Sorrent* (1854). La composizione di opere di ambientazione italiana continuerà copiosa anche dopo i numerosi altri viaggi nel nostro paese. Se ne ricordano qui, per brevità, solo alcune: *Italienische Novellen* (1853-79), *Versen aus Italien* (1880), *Frühling am Gardasee* (1897), *Novellen vom Gardasee* (1902) e *Ein Wintertagebuch* (1903).

6 «Federigo degli Alberighi ama e non è amato, ed in cortesia spendendo si consuma; e rimangli un solo falcone il quale, non avendo altro, dà da mangiare alla sua donna venutagli a casa; la qual, ciò sappiendo, mutata d'animo, il prende per marito e fallo ricco» (Branca 1956, 470-7).

7 A proposito della teoria del Falcone si veda anche Hillenbrand 1998 e Berbig, Hettche 2001.

Da un punto di vista formale e strutturale lo scrittore precisò che il motivo conduttore della novella doveva distinguersi con chiarezza e mostrare un elemento straordinario e specifico fin dalla struttura del racconto, a prescindere dal contenuto. La novella, classica o moderna, deve avere come nucleo centrale un motivo chiaro e incisivo, immediatamente riconoscibile grazie a uno svolgimento semplice ed essenziale. A tal riguardo Heyse introduce l'immagine della *starke Silhouette*: un profilo deciso disegnato intorno al motivo centrale e formato da elementi necessari all'intreccio.

Nella novella di Federigo degli Alberighi la figura del falcone rappresenta quell'elemento distintivo che attribuisce al motivo centrale la sua specificità. Quanto più calzante sarà l'elemento specifico tanto più la novella resterà impressa nella mente di chi legge.

#### 4 *Die Einsamen*

Poco dopo il suo rientro dall'Italia e tre anni dopo la più famosa e celebrata *Arrabbiata*, Heyse scrisse un'altra tra le sue numerose novelle ambientate nella nostra terra e, in particolare tra Napoli e Sorrento,<sup>8</sup> dal titolo *Die Einsamen*.

La storia è quella di un poeta tedesco che, in viaggio in Italia - in Campania nelle vicinanze di Sorrento - nel corso di una passeggiata incontra Teresa e attraverso la voce della donna prima e quella del fratello Tommaso poi scopre la triste vicenda che li ha portati a trasferirsi nella forra, lontani dal mare, da quel mare di Napoli che per loro era ragione di vita e che tanto amavano. Perché in quel mare riposa Nino, promettente cantante, migliore amico di Tommaso e promesso sposo di Teresa. Tutto ruota intorno al Mar Mediterraneo, la morte di Nino e le vite dei due fratelli: un mare che li ha uniti e poi divisi.

In *Die Einsamen* l'evento significativo, il **falcone** - il motivo ubertoso, come è stato anche definito da alcuni critici, ovvero ciò che distingue questa novella da qualunque altra, che deve appassionare il pubblico - è costituito dalla colpa di Tommaso, dalla sua incapacità di affrontare sé stesso e gli altri, che condurrà lui e la sorella nella forra, in esilio, a una vita da solitari.

Per rendere tale motivo netto e distinguibile con chiarezza occorre una valida struttura portante: uno sviluppo semplice e lineare, un profilo deciso

8 «Se la *Italienische Reise* dell'italianissimo Heyse fino a Roma si era snodata lungo un percorso letterario prestabilito, [...] l'indimenticabile permanenza a Sorrento fu un autentico *Naturerlebnis*, l'incontaminata esperienza nel paesaggio e nel popolo italiano grazie al quale il poeta scoprì l'imperituro amore per il grande stile della natura. [...] Anche Fontane, riferendosi ai 'frutti poetici sorrentini' dell'amico Heyse, notò che il viaggio a Sorrento del poeta si rappresentava quale un vero e proprio ritorno alla natura» (Heyse 2005, 31-2).



o, come lo definì Heyse, una *starke Silhouette* che si disegna attorno al tema centrale ed è costituita da tutti gli elementi fondamentali per l'intreccio. In questo caso sarà il mare – il Mediterraneo – con il suo canto e le voci dei personaggi che da questo si sprigionano, a far emergere la colpa di Tommaso. Il Mediterraneo diverrà il catalizzatore del significato più profondo della novella, quel tratto che rende evidente e unico il falcone.

La *starke Silhouette* della novella pone in relazione il mare e il canto, la natura e l'arte – che si tratti di pittura, poesia, canto o teatro – mette in luce il potere che quest'ultima ha di scoprire ed esprimere la natura nella sua più autentica essenza. Il tema della rappresentazione artistica costituisce nell'opera di Heyse una costante declinata in molteplici modi. È la passione dell'autore per la pittura e il disegno, la ricerca affannosa della *starke Silhouette* del paesaggio: «O quale felicità per l'artista anche più insignificante e modesto se ha a malapena imparato a tracciare la silhouette della montagna in alto» (68) e dell'essere umano: «Almeno *la silhouette!* – si disse infuriato – Almeno uno schizzo! Almeno una dozzina di tratti!» (70), scrive Heyse descrivendo il primo incontro del poeta tedesco con la protagonista femminile di *Die Einsamen*. È l'incontro a Sorrento con l'amico Joseph Viktor von Scheffel, in quel periodo tormentato dalla scelta tra pittura e poesia. È la passione di Heyse per il canto, è il gusto per la rappresentazione scenica che contamina la struttura della novella creando un gioco di ruoli in cui il viaggiatore/poeta tedesco da protagonista diviene testimone e spettatore della vicenda dei due fratelli. È il senso di difficoltà che si prova quando si cerca di raffigurare o raccontare la natura, anche umana, che si intreccia con la durezza e la sofferenza di comprenderla, viverla e affrontarla.

Una natura che racchiude e poi rivela la molteplicità dei suoi significati: il paesaggio, l'Italia e, in particolare, la terra campana in cui sono ambientate molte delle novelle di Heyse; gli elementi atmosferici che si scatenano in tutta la loro potenza e, soprattutto, il mare, il Mediterraneo.

È lui il vero protagonista di *Die Einsamen*, è lui che dà e toglie la vita, è in lui che si cela la verità che tormenta l'animo dei protagonisti, che li tocca e ferisce perché raggiunge la loro più profonda natura. È con il Mediterraneo che si apre *Die Einsamen*. Il mare dei solitari è un mare in tempesta, inquieto, che tormenta e, nel contempo, feconda la natura del golfo di Sorrento. Il mare costringe il viaggiatore a rimanere chiuso nella locanda dove alloggia e, dall'altana, questi lo osserva combattere con le rocce e con le opere dell'uomo, lo osserva scurirsi e poi lottare con il sole primaverile. La sua brezza lo incanta e lo induce ad avventurarsi lontano dal fragore della gente in festa e ad incamminarsi per un sentiero di montagna: «sentì risvegliarsi con energia tutte le passioni. Mai aveva visto sole di primavera così vittorioso e possente: mai si era così profondamente inebriato di fresca brezza di mare» (67-8). Il suo immergersi nella natura lo conduce gradualmente dalla percezione del paesaggio a quella

dell'arte fino a raggiungere l'animo umano. Il desiderio e l'incapacità del viaggiatore di saper intonare quel canto silenzioso, eco delle voci che lo avvolgono, di poter colmare con la stessa perizia del tenore l'immensità della natura, compresa quella umana, lo fa sentire muto, miserevole, privo di suono.

Ma ora davanti a lui si staglia la *silhouette* di Teresa, una di quelle che egli ha definito «personalità significative», una «improvvisa apparizione che avanzava sul fianco sinistro della via non sembrava certo adatta a placare la sua disperazione quanto piuttosto ad accenderla tra fiamme incandescenti» (70). Così ha inizio il vero viaggio del poeta, quello verso la conoscenza di tutta la natura che può essere raccontata solo se considerata e compresa nella sua interezza, solo se ogni aspetto di essa si connette con l'altro e, soprattutto, se si presta ascolto attentamente alle voci e al canto.

La vicenda di Teresa e di suo fratello Tommaso si sviluppa per il tramite di una narrazione a più voci: non quelle festose e primaverili che prima avvolgevano il viaggiatore ma quelle dei protagonisti i quali, uno alla volta, entrano in scena, e offrono al pubblico, rappresentato dal viaggiatore/poeta, la loro storia. Non si tratta di un coro, bensì di voci isolate, solitarie che narrano la propria versione, drammaticamente differente, di come il mare si sia portato via Nino.

È il mare al centro della conversazione tra Teresa il forestiero: un mare che lei non vede più dalla sua nuova dimora dove vive con il fratello, nella forra, e che desidera tanto guardare ancora:

«Il mare è più bello di me! E farete bene a guardarlo invece di guardare i miei occhi che nulla hanno da dirvi!»

«Il mare? Ma io lo guardo tutti i giorni dalla mia altana».

«Io invece no. Permettetemi dunque di approfittare dell'occasione», e si voltò.

«Forse che il mare non si vede dappertutto da questa montagna?», chiese il forestiero.

«Il mulino di mio fratello è affossato in quella forra laggiù, coperto dalla rupe e dall'invadente sterpaglia che impediscono la vista del mare». (72)

Al mare Teresa si volge un'ultima volta prima di arrivare al mulino: «Giunti alla forra, Teresa gettò un ultimo lungo sguardo alla Marina» (72) e davanti alle domande del forestiero, inizia a raccontare la sua storia: «Chissà se ci credete, ma prima d'allora, quando abitavamo a Napoli e Tommaso faceva il pescatore, non sapeva neanche cosa fosse un mulino e come ruotassero le mole» (75). Ma ora la vista di quello stesso mare lo fa soffrire.

Se inizialmente Teresa è reticente ed evasiva riguardo al fratello, una volta giunti all'abitazione, davanti al ritratto di un uomo in una cornice funerea, Teresa racconta la sua versione della storia di Nino:

Chi lo conosceva sa bene che non esisteva al mondo anima più pura della sua. Perché sorprendersi, dunque, se Tommaso odi il mare che gli ha portato via un amico straordinario? E che sia triste dal giorno in cui uscì per mare con lui per la pesca e dovette tornarsene senza il suo amico? Nessuno ha biasimato la sua malinconia e l'odio per il suo mestiere. (77)

È il mare che ha portato via a Tommaso il suo migliore amico, è il mare l'oggetto del suo odio e dolore. Nino era una promessa del canto, tutti lo amavano e, più di tutti, Tommaso e Teresa. Ma alla vigilia del suo esordio artistico Nino volle uscire in barca con Tommaso:

Mi sembra ancora di vedere mio fratello al timone e Nino con i remi, la chioma infiammata nell'incendio del tramonto e lo sguardo rivolto alla nostra casa; ho sempre questa scena nel cuore. Il sole era appena scomparso all'orizzonte quando, udito il tonfo dei remi, corsi alla porta a salutarli. Ma Tommaso era solo in barca e remava con la furia di un folle, gridando 'Buonasera Teresa, ti porto i saluti di Nino, lui già dorme in fondo al mare'. Di più non riuscii ad ascoltare. (77)

Il peso della rete aveva trascinato Nino in mare e da quel giorno, dice Teresa, la pace di suo fratello rimase sepolta nell'abisso del mare, egli bruciò la barca, le reti e poi andò via da Napoli, con lei.

A questo punto un'altra figura femminile fa la sua entrata in scena. Si tratta di Lucia, una strega la definisce Teresa, che vuole rubarle il fratello, dice lei. Teresa fa nascondere il poeta in una stanza e, da questo privilegiato punto di osservazione, egli sarà testimone delle altre due versioni della storia di Nino. Vede Tommaso, un giovane dall'imponente corporatura e la chioma arruffata e Lucia «una giovane donna bionda vestita in gramaglia» (78).

Teresa si allontana e i due rimangono soli, l'uno di fronte all'altra. Il forestiero osserva e «sebbene conoscesse a metà il passato di queste persone ne sapeva abbastanza per presagire una scena straordinaria» (81).<sup>9</sup> E così sarà. Dice Lucia:

«Lo so Tomma', lo so. Lo capisce anche un bambino che dopo quella tragedia perdeste la voglia di vedere il mare. [...] Non viviamo tutti il

9 Il richiamo al tema del teatro e della rappresentazione scenica è sempre più evidente: a partire dalla descrizione della casa: «Il mulino era deserto e, quando si avvicinò il tedesco fu quasi tentato di paragonarlo a una scenografia teatrale. Gli scuri delle finestre erano accostati, la porta di legno scuro incassata nella grigia facciata della casa senza maniglia pareva inaccessibile, l'ombra sotto l'aggetto del tetto poteva benissimo essere dipinta» (74). È così che il narratore assume il ruolo di vero e proprio spettatore dal suo privilegiato punto di osservazione.

nostro destino e dobbiamo comunque restare tra la gente? Non viene forse dal cielo la sventura? E può mai impietrirci fino a farci odiare gli uomini che nulla possono contro la sorte avversa? Per i nostri peccati? Ma cos'abbiamo da rimproverarci? Quale altro beneficio mi ha concesso il nostro amore se non di soffrire e piangere da lontano?» [...] Aveva impresso in volto tutto lo spavento di una passione disperata. (82)

Ecco svelato un primo segreto, qualcosa che Teresa non sa e che, forse, solo adesso comincia a immaginare e presagire. In fondo, la versione di Lucia della storia di Nino coincide con quella di Teresa. Ora è Tommaso a parlare:

«Te lo dirò», disse Tommaso tirando un respiro profondo, «ma poi va' via e non chiedermi altro. È Nino che ci separa [...]. Nessuno lo sa e Teresa meno che mai, ne morrebbe se venisse a saperlo». (83-4)

Lui amava Nino, il suo vecchio compagno di giochi, come un fratello: avrebbe ucciso per lui, andava fiero di lui, dice «come se gli avessi donato io la voce pescata in fondo al mare» (84). Ma Nino riusciva a leggergli dentro e aveva capito e voleva che mettesse fine alla storia con Lucia. Quella sera andò a trovarlo e volle uscire in barca con lui, gli disse ciò che sapeva e gli chiese di rinunciare, per lui e per la loro fraterna amicizia, a quella donna che era la moglie di suo zio. Tommaso continua: «Io caparbio tacqui, con gli occhi fissi sulla rete, senza più ascoltare furiosamente nelle tempie. Un'ora dopo tornai in barca solo» e poi ancora: «No Lucia», disse lui con voce roca, «non ho mentito allora. La rete lo trascinò nell'abisso, i suoi piedi si impigliarono nelle maglie, non l'ho fatta capovolgere io la barca» (86). Ma non solo:

«Io ero ancora al timone quando lui cadde in mare. Avevo le ossa ghiacciate, gli occhi incollati al vortice d'acqua lì davanti a me... dov'era appena scomparsa la testa di Nino; poi vidi affiorar una spuma di bollicine che sembravano dirmi 'respira ancora là sotto!' E ora, ora, riemergeva tra i flutti la sua mano che cercava la stretta dell'amico, non distava da me più della lunghezza della barca - un anello d'argento al mignolo luccicava sotto il sole - avrei dovuto solo allungargli il remo ed era salvo. Lucia! E io, forse, non volevo salvarlo? Non doveva, forse, essere questa la mia volontà? Non avevo il remo sulle ginocchia? Un piccolo movimento del braccio... e la mano con l'anello al mignolo l'avrebbe afferrato. Ma nella mia anima albergava il demonio che paralizzava ogni mia fibra, e raggrumava goccia a goccia il mio sangue. Rimasi come fulminato dallo spavento, incatenato dalle vertigini e tentai di urlare mentre continuavo a fissare la mano che veniva sommersa fino alla punta delle dita, finché non scomparve completamente». (87)

Quando Tommaso torna a casa e dà la notizia a Teresa questa sviene e, solo in quel momento, egli scorge al dito della sorella l'anello di Nino e capisce: «lei lo aveva cambiato con quello di Nino qualche giorno prima. Ma io non ne sapevo nulla» (87). Quella mano, quell'anello, scomparsi nel mare sono sempre davanti agli occhi di lui:

«Cosa volete ancora da Tommaso? Non la vedete, qui tra noi, la mano con l'anello d'argento che s'alza ovunque innanzi a me e indica il cielo? Se fossimo sull'altare e mi porgeste la vostra mano con l'anello d'oro, mi si drizzerebbero i capelli, gli occhi si annebbierebbero e inizierei a confondere l'oro con l'argento, la mano di Lucia con quella di Nino... e il demonio mi caccerebbe a colpi di frusta dalla chiesa». (87)

Lucia capisce che le cose non cambieranno mai ed esce di scena.

Anche il forestiero, dal suo nascondiglio, vede la mano di Nino. Quando Teresa tornerà, non le dirà neanche lui la verità e se ne andrà, proprio come il pubblico alla fine dello spettacolo, e tornerà verso la sua locanda imboccando «il primo sentiero che lo conduceva verso dimore di uomini più felici» (89). Ma mentre si allontana, vede qualcuno e lo osserva commosso:

Quand'ebbe oltrepassato il declivio di una rupe che sporgeva arditamente sul mare, notò su un ciglione un uomo a cui il vento scompigliava la nera chioma ricciuta. Aveva lo sguardo fisso sul mare, in direzione di Carotta, verso Napoli, mentre di sotto una barchetta issava la sua vela. Gli parve di riconoscere quell'uomo solitario lassù e di sapere chi stesse seduto in quella barca veleggiante. (89)

Il mare ha preso Nino, con la sua mano inanellata, lo ha accolto mentre Tommaso, paralizzato dalla passione, non lo poteva salvare. Quel mare, da cui Tommaso diceva di aver pescato la meravigliosa voce di Nino, se la è ripresa. Il mare custodisce i segreti dei protagonisti di questa vicenda e li incatena: l'amore di Tommaso e Lucia, l'amore di Nino e Teresa. Li terrà con sé e tutti continueranno le loro vite portando il fardello del proprio dolore e/o delle loro colpe. I solitari rifuggono il mare che ricorda la tristezza della loro esistenza: quel mare che un tempo era motivo di vita, di sostentamento, di amicizia, di gioia e di amore, ora è il loro tormento. Si rifugiano nella forra, lontano da lui: Tommaso costruisce dighe per arginare le acque, ma in fondo sa che quel mare lo avrà sempre nel cuore, comunque. E così torna, di nascosto, a osservarlo quando Lucia partirà.

## 5 Il Mediterraneo e le sue voci

Il tema odepórico, l'arte, la brava gente, le personalità significative, tutto questo si riversa nel mare, in quel Mediterraneo che Heyse racconta: qui trovano il proprio posto e il più profondo significato le riflessioni dell'autore sulla natura, sull'arte e sull'uomo. Di quel Mar Mediterraneo, *mare nostrum*, culla di civiltà e culture, il mare delle fatiche di Ulisse e di Enea, di passaggi, partenze e ritorni, luogo dei commerci delle repubbliche marinare e di aspre battaglie, di questo mare, carico di significati tanto diversi quanto profondi, Paul Heyse propone la sua visione.

Il mare di Teresa, Tommaso, Nino e Lucia è un mare inizialmente furioso, in tempesta, che costringe il viaggiatore/poeta/narratore a rimanere chiuso nella sua stanza e a osservarlo dall'altana. È un mare in lotta con la terra, con il sole e con le opere dell'uomo. Ma più che contrapposto alla terraferma, al resto della natura e agli esseri umani, il mare di Heyse è un mare che si colloca tra due terre, tra due dimensioni: tra il passato e il presente dei personaggi, tra loro vita a Napoli e quella della forra, tra benessere e mestizia, tra amicizia, amore e solitudine, tra gioia e dolore, tra fragore e silenzio, tra vita e morte.

È un mare infuriato, sì, perché lui sa più di chiunque altro, di Teresa, Tommaso, Nino e Lucia. Loro conoscono solo una parte della verità - la loro versione - mentre il mare, involontario attore della vicenda, l'ha vissuta nella sua interezza, in tutte le sue sfaccettature e sfumature. È lui che ha accolto Nino e con lui l'intera verità. Non è il mare la causa di questo dolore, piuttosto ne è il testimone.

Il Mediterraneo di Heyse diviene la chiave di lettura di tutti i personaggi, è uno specchio nel quale essi temono di guardarsi perché sanno che lì vedrebbero il loro dolore. Solo quando sono a contatto con lui i protagonisti si rivelano nella loro completezza, nel loro essere e levano le loro voci più autentiche. Sul mare si confrontano Nino e Tommaso; è il mare che Teresa guarda con un sentimento di nostalgia, mentre Tommaso lo fugge e poi osserva di nascosto quando Lucia se ne va, per sempre.

Questo è il mare di *Die Einsamen* di Heyse: tutt'uno - nel bene e nel male - con la vita di Teresa, Tommaso, Nino e Lucia. Un mare che domina la scena, che si erge con tutta la sua forza e potenza, a protagonista della vicenda: agitato, furioso, ma anche fecondo. Le sue acque invadono, colpiscono duramente, sommergono. Ma il Mediterraneo non è crudele neanche quando è in tempesta, si agita perché custodisce dolorosi segreti, serba la verità, ha accolto Nino. È un mare che è sempre presente anche quando ci si rifugia tra le montagne, anche quando splende il sole.

Il Mediterraneo di Heyse con le sue voci e i suoi canti è la *starke Silhouette* che l'autore ha disegnato per la sua novella e che fa emergere prepotentemente quel falcone che conferisce a *Die Einsamen* tutta la sua unicità. Le voci che il mare sprigiona sono come l'avvolgente canto di

primavera, come la voce del tenore romano così ammirato dal viaggiatore tedesco: emozionano e colmano l'immensità.

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## Il passato tra condanna della memoria e desiderio di riconciliazione Paradossi ironici e malinconia in *Der Verlorene* (*Il fratello perduto*, 1998) di Hans-Ulrich Treichel

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**Abstract** In his lessons on poetics, Hans-Ulrich Treichel underscored the close connection between his writing and the theme of memory, speaking both of the absence, triggered by a traumatic experience, of a communicative memory within his family and of the repercussions of this absence on his writing. Following the pathway marked out by Treichel, critics and scholars have put forward mainly thematic readings of the short novel *Der Verlorene* (1998), duly foregrounding nevertheless its historical and autobiographical underpinning. Treichel seems partly to answer these readings in his novels *Menschenflug* (2005) and in *Anatolin* (2008), which, together with *Der Verlorene*, form an actual trilogy dedicated to his lost brother and characterised by an extremely close association of life and fiction. This essay takes up the critical results achieved so far but moves beyond a thematic approach to the novel: by also taking into consideration other works by Treichel, a purely literary analysis of the text is proposed here, aimed in particular at investigating the writing strategies through which the author combines irony and detachment with melancholy and desperation. This line of inquiry is especially fruitful in revealing the special character of this novel within the wider context of contemporary literature of memory, and at the same time it represents a fresh contribution to a poetological analysis of memory in literature.

**Sommario** 1 La problematica di fondo. – 2 La scrittura di Treichel nel contesto della letteratura contemporanea della memoria. – 3 La prospettiva di analisi. – 4 Le lezioni di poetica. – 5 La trilogia della perdita e la coazione a ripetere. – 6 *Der Verlorene*. – 6.1 Il passato, il ricordo, l'io. – 6.2 Ironia e malinconia.

**Keywords** Hans-Ulrich Treichel. Literary comedians. Melancholy. Memory.

### 1 La problematica di fondo

Nicht Überwindung des Individualismus sei unser Ziel, sondern Einfügung des individuellen Bewußtseins in ein umfassenderes, kollektiveres. Die Schriftsteller, unverbesserlich, werden nie aufhören, von sich selbst zu erzählen. Aber sie werden sich als Teil eines Ganzen wissen, wenn sie in ihr Privatestes einzukehren scheinen.

La citazione è tratta dalla premessa al volume autobiografico *Kind dieser Zeit*, nel quale Klaus Mann, ancora giovanissimo, ripercorre gli anni della sua infanzia e adolescenza (1906-24). In queste pagine introduttive, il bambino Klaus è presentato esplicitamente come un figlio del proprio tempo, che a otto anni ha conosciuto lo scoppio di una guerra mondiale, a dodici la rivoluzione, a sedici-diciassette l'arrivo dell'inflazione e la conseguente carenza di cibo e di vestiario (7). Nel mettere in relazione la propria vita con il tempo storico, Mann conferisce portata rappresentativa alla propria infanzia; la narrazione autobiografica, pur non abbandonando mai il piano privato, personale e soggettivo, comprende anche la dimensione collettiva, la quale - è bene sottolinearlo - resta comunque subordinata al racconto della vicenda individuale: anche se, scrivendo di sé, l'Io scrive del tutto, lo fa, almeno idealmente, per ricostruire il proprio Sé in relazione con la realtà. Ciò che assume valore emblematico è quindi l'Io, il suo sguardo sul mondo, la sua interiorizzazione dello stesso.

Il riferimento di Klaus Mann all'individualismo dello scrittore è certamente comprensibile alla luce del soggettivismo dell'era moderna. D'altro canto, l'integrazione tra prospettiva individuale e collettiva deriva anche dall'idea dell'autore che è nel ricordo che il tutto si crea. Fin dalle prime pagine del testo, egli si pone apertamente sulla scia del Proust di *Du côté de chez Swann* e fa sua la convinzione che la realtà possa essere avvertita come vera solo se sottratta alla contingenza del momento, conservata nella memoria e resa così disponibile al ricordo.<sup>2</sup> La reminiscenza viene così a costituire la premessa necessaria alla fondazione stessa della realtà, che non esiste se non nel soggetto che ricorda e riconosce. In questa prospettiva, la narrazione diventa necessariamente atto fondativo e conoscitivo, poiché è sia evocazione (e creazione) della realtà vissuta, sia riflessione su quanto il ricordo evoca. La scrittura del ricordo e dell'Io è, dunque, concepita e legittimata quale strumento utile, se non addirittura necessario, a dare consistenza al Sé e alla sua realtà.

Che il rapporto tra realtà, memoria e scrittura in Proust sia molto più complesso, stratificato e problematico rispetto alla (consapevole) riduzione che ne propone Klaus Mann riferendosi solo al primo volume della *Recherche*, è cosa evidente. Ciononostante, la sua riflessione sulla scrittura

1 «Il nostro scopo non sia il superamento dell'individualismo, bensì l'integrazione della coscienza individuale in una più ampia, più collettiva. Gli scrittori, incorreggibili, non smetteranno mai di raccontare di sé. Ma sapranno di essere parte di un tutto, nel momento in cui sembreranno trovare rifugio nel loro privato più intimo» (trad. dell'Autrice).

2 Il debito nei confronti di Proust è tematizzato più volte dall'autore e reso manifesto fin dal celebre passo tratto da *Du côté de chez Swann* e premesso al volume come motto: «La réalité ne se forme que dans la mémoire» (Mann [1932] 1982, 5).

dell'Io in relazione alla memoria è significativa e, nel contesto di questo saggio, utile a mettere in evidenza un'importante problematica letteraria che interessa molta letteratura contemporanea della memoria, e, come si vedrà, trova conferma *ex negativo* anche nell'opera narrativa di Hans-Ulrich Treichel, segnandone profondamente i percorsi.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 La scrittura di Treichel nel contesto della letteratura contemporanea della memoria

Come è noto, soprattutto dopo la svolta epocale del 1989 e la scomparsa della DDR come Stato, molti autori della letteratura contemporanea si sono dedicati a un processo di ricostruzione (o, per lo meno, di rivisitazione) del passato personale, familiare e collettivo, sia di quello più recente, sia del passato nazionalsocialista. Lo hanno fatto talora con opere autobiografiche basate sul ricordo personale, talaltra mediante l'interrogazione di documenti della memoria familiare, collettiva e culturale. Le intenzioni, i percorsi e gli esiti della scrittura del ricordo offrono certamente un panorama molto variegato, in parte anche contraddittorio.<sup>4</sup> Indipendentemente da queste differenze, è un dato di fatto che la letteratura contemporanea ha contribuito massicciamente a consolidare anche in ambito tedesco una cultura della memoria, e a valorizzare il ricordo del passato come fondamentale per la costituzione dell'identità personale e collettiva in un momento di svolta e di rottura con la tradizione sociale e culturale precedente.

Anche in riferimento al nazionalsocialismo, la produzione letteraria si è mossa generalmente in sintonia con una politica culturale che ha ormai elevato la memoria a valore etico di per sé. Mentre nei decenni precedenti l'appello al dovere della memoria era ancora legato a intenzioni di denuncia nei confronti di un presente che rimuoveva coscientemente il ricordo di un passato colpevole, doloroso e devastante, verso la fine del XX secolo l'orientamento generale è diverso: la rivisitazione del passato da parte di molti autori non ubbidisce necessariamente a un imperativo etico-politico, quanto piuttosto all'urgenza soggettiva – richiamata all'inizio tramite l'esempio che Klaus Mann aveva dato in precedenza – di confrontarsi con il passato, di dargli forma conoscibile (o, semplicemente, riconoscibile) tramite la scrittura del ricordo, soprattutto al fine di capire se stessi in

3 Treichel ha al suo attivo anche una produzione lirica che gli è valsa alcuni premi e meriterebbe un'analisi specifica. In questa sede ci si riferirà esclusivamente all'opera narrativa.

4 La bibliografia dedicata all'argomento è vastissima. Per la ricchezza panoramica offerta si rimanda in particolare a Agazzi 2003 (che a Treichel dedica un intero capitolo, 79-84); Parry, Platen 2007; Cambi 2008; Gislimberti 2009; Maldonado Alemán 2012.

relazione con il proprio tempo e con le proprie origini.<sup>5</sup>

Hans-Ulrich Treichel si inserisce a pieno titolo in questo contesto letterario e culturale della scrittura dell'Io e del ricordo. Nondimeno, egli si caratterizza per una posizione eccentrica rispetto alla tendenza generale, intrattenendo la sua scrittura un rapporto duplice, se non addirittura ambiguo, con la memoria. Per riprendere le immagini mitiche che egli utilizza in modo ironico nel romanzo *Tristanakkord* (Treichel 2000b) – nel quale, tra le altre cose, si prende gioco della sterminata produzione letteraria e saggistica contemporanea dedicata alla memoria del passato –<sup>6</sup> si potrebbe affermare che la sua opera non solo oscilla costantemente tra il desiderio di Lete e la ricerca impellente di Mnemosine, ma le porta addirittura a confondersi l'una con l'altra. Nella competizione tra i due poli sono però sempre le acque di Lete che prevalgono e, a seguito di rovesciamenti paradossali, inghiottono infine anche l'Io che le aveva evocate.<sup>7</sup> La scrittura di Treichel, la sua ironia, come pure la malinconia dei suoi testi, si comprendono a partire da questi paradossi, che scaturiscono dal rapporto difficile tra l'Io, la realtà e la memoria del passato.

### 3 La prospettiva di analisi

Dati i suoi riferimenti autobiografici e storici, *Der Verlorene* ha giustamente goduto, oltre che di un grande successo di pubblico, dell'attenzione di studiosi che si occupano di memoria in letteratura. Si è valorizzato il testo in relazione a temi sensibili da un punto di vista storico-culturale, quali l'emigrazione forzata, le sofferenze della popolazione tedesca proveniente dai territori orientali di confine dell'ex impero tedesco, il trauma, l'incapacità di parlarne da parte di chi l'ha subito, infine la sua rimozione

5 Il discorso si limita ovviamente a mettere in evidenza alcune tendenze generali che necessiterebbero di più precise differenziazioni al loro interno. Le tendenze indicate trovano comunque generale accordo tra gli studiosi.

6 Georg, protagonista del romanzo, è un aspirante dottorando: alla ricerca di un progetto di studio originale, egli medita di scrivere sulla dimenticanza in letteratura, differenziandosi dalle schiere di dottorandi e studiosi di letteratura che si dedicano invece allo studio della memoria, cf. Treichel 2000b, 17.

7 Emblematica in questo senso è la scena finale del romanzo *Tristanakkord* (Treichel 2000b, 233-4), nella quale Georg viene avvolto dal buio della notte mentre guarda in alto verso la finestra della stanza del compositore Bergmann, illuminata ma coperta alla vista da una tenda. Il silenzio della notte è improvvisamente rotto da un accordo cupo che il maestro realizza al pianoforte e al quale seguirà di nuovo il silenzio, questa volta definitivo. La dissolvenza in chiusura di romanzo ha un evidente valore simbolico: Georg, che pensa di scrivere una tesi di dottorato su Lete, collabora di fatto a un progetto di Bergmann ispirato a Mnemosine (la stesura delle sue memorie), ma, mentre lo fa, sperimenta l'eclissi della propria persona ed è avvolto dal buio, nella tradizione occidentale una delle metafore più importanti della dimenticanza. Sulle metafore di Lete, cf. Weinrich [1997] 2000, 14-8.

dalla memoria e dalla coscienza personale e collettiva del dopoguerra.<sup>8</sup> Pur essendo profondamente segnata dall'esperienza autobiografica dell'assenza di memoria comunicativa all'interno della famiglia - data la reticenza dei genitori a parlare del trauma dell'emigrazione forzata e della perdita del primogenito durante la fuga (cf. Treichel 2000a, 21-6) - l'opera di Treichel ha di fatto offerto un contributo importante alla memoria culturale di un passato su cui a lungo si era taciuto. Allo stesso tempo, è importante sottolineare che i temi citati rappresentano sì lo sfondo storico e autobiografico di *Der Verlorene* (come anche di altri testi cui si farà riferimento più avanti), ma non ne costituiscono il fulcro narrativo, rappresentato piuttosto, come si avrà modo di mostrare nei paragrafi successivi dedicati all'analisi, dalle sensazioni e dai pensieri di un Io profondamente in crisi, malinconico e solipsistico, disturbato nel suo rapporto con il mondo, di cui è comunque figlio.

L'autore è stato, dunque, oggetto di interesse per motivi evidentemente importanti, che, però, non essendo di ordine primariamente letterario - e stando almeno alla rielaborazione ironico-patetica che egli propone delle reazioni al suo racconto nei romanzi *Menschenflug* (Treichel 2005) e *Anatolin* (Treichel 2008) - gli creano un certo fastidio. Sebbene Treichel abbia in parte contribuito a indirizzare in senso autobiografico la ricezione dei suoi testi e sia stato egli stesso ricettivo alle reazioni del pubblico e dei critici ricavandone stimolo ulteriore per la scrittura, il fastidio ha le sue ragioni d'essere. Allo stesso tempo, l'intuizione degli studiosi che hanno letto *Der Verlorene* dal punto di vista della memoria del passato è tutt'altro che ingiustificata, poiché è il testo stesso a creare uno stretto rapporto tra i disturbi del protagonista bambino e un passato che non passa, pur rimanendo definitivamente perduto.

Nel tentativo di sottrarsi al circolo vizioso della lettura autobiografica, al quale l'opera di Treichel strutturalmente invita, e dando per acquisiti i risultati a cui critici e studiosi sono giunti fino a oggi, si presenteranno di seguito alcune considerazioni generali sulle lezioni di poetica e sulla scrittura dell'autore, con particolare riferimento ai testi che ruotano intorno al motivo del fratello perduto; si proporrà quindi un'analisi della declinazione letteraria del ricordo del passato in *Der Verlorene* e si focalizzerà l'attenzione sul connubio di ironia e malinconia, connubio che origina dalla problematica tracciata all'inizio e rappresenta la cifra stilistica più peculiare dell'autore.<sup>9</sup> In questo senso, il tipo di analisi proposto può essere anche inteso come un contributo al dibattuto problema di un'analisi

8 Cf., tra gli altri, Nuber 2001; Taberner 2002, 79-94; Parry 2007; Stopka 2008; Clarke 2009. Su Treichel autore rappresentativo di una certa generazione di autori tedeschi occidentali, cf. Williams 2002.

9 Sull'ironia di Treichel, cf. Curran 2005.

specificamente letteraria della memoria in letteratura.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4 Le lezioni di poetica

Nelle lezioni di poetica (cf. Treichel 2000a), tenute nel 2000 presso l'Università di Francoforte, l'autore ha inteso affrancarsi dall'associazione dei suoi testi alla letteratura della memoria di tradizione occidentale, quindi dalla loro interpretazione autobiografica. Nella prima lezione, intitolata significativamente *Lektionen der Leere* (11-39), definisce il ricordo materia vitale della maggioranza degli scrittori, e il tempo trascorso, nonostante la sensazione malinconica che il ricordo può suscitare, il capitale di vita che essi accumulano sul proprio conto (11). Treichel scrive dell'infanzia come il tempo più prezioso e mai completamente perduto per un autore, che lo utilizza per la propria opera. Cita Rousseau, Proust, Goethe, Fontane, ossia grandi autori che avrebbero goduto di un'infanzia felice, dalla quale avrebbero poi tratto spunti fecondi per la loro opera. A questi nomi contrappone autori come Karl Philipp Moritz e Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, i quali, privi di questa felicità infantile, si caratterizzerebbero invece per un'autorialità incompleta (14).

Di primo acchito, si potrebbe credere che con questi riferimenti Treichel voglia offrire le coordinate letterarie della sua scrittura. In realtà, essi gli servono a dire ciò che lui e la sua scrittura non sono: né una felicità né un'infelicità particolare lo avrebbero spinto a scrivere; il desiderio della scrittura sarebbe piuttosto scaturito da un'esperienza che si caratterizza per la sua condizione di terzietà rispetto ai due poli: l'esperienza dell'assenza e del vuoto (15). Con un esplicito riferimento a Proust, Treichel afferma che il pensiero della sua infanzia non dischiude al suo ricordo una Combray, bensì solo una casa piena di scatole provenienti dall'attività commerciale dei suoi genitori:<sup>11</sup> scatole imballate da un lato, scatole vuote dall'altro, le quali, riproducendosi in modo esponenziale e proporzionale al successo crescente dell'esercizio commerciale, invadevano tutti gli spazi vitali e di gioco del bambino (18-9). L'immagine di una casa stracolma di scatole per lo più vuote è sufficientemente eloquente e basta da sola a delineare ironicamente il contrasto che Treichel intende tracciare tra sé e Proust, tra una cittadina della Vestfalia orientale e Combray, tra la Germania prosaica e traumatizzata del dopoguerra e un mondo ancora

10 Per una panoramica delle problematiche principali legate allo studio squisitamente letterario della memoria, cf. Erll, Nünning 2005. Nei dieci anni che ci dividono dalla pubblicazione di questo testo, molte questioni restano ancora aperte.

11 «Mein Combray war eine Altpapierhalde, und mein Madeleine-Erlebnis der Geruch von Holzwolle [...]» (La mia Combray era una montagna di carta straccia, la mia madeleine l'odore di trucioli [...]. Trad. dell'Autrice) Treichel 2000a, 18.

passibile di trasfigurazione mitica.<sup>12</sup>

Tenuto conto di questo quadro, Treichel parrebbe essere un autore agli antipodi del rapporto tra memoria, realtà e scrittura, delineato sopra tramite l'esempio di Klaus Mann. In verità, come si è accennato in apertura, il modello è conservato, sebbene svuotato ironicamente dall'interno. La scrittura di Treichel ripropone, infatti, costantemente e ossessivamente quello spazio vitale sottratto al bambino, quel vuoto di vita di cui le scatole assurgono a icona, e che in *Der Verlorene* trova la sua espressione più compiuta. Sempre dal punto di vista specificamente letterario e non biografico, poco importa se si tratta di un vuoto autentico oppure di una cifra poetica; significativa è, invece, la continua riproposizione di quel vuoto, di cui tutti i personaggi di Treichel sono singole figurazioni e variazioni. Se la pubblicazione di un nuovo romanzo rappresenta di per sé uno slancio verso il futuro, in Treichel il nuovo racconta, con differenze talvolta minime,<sup>13</sup> una storia già narrata. In tal senso, la sua scrittura è anche una scrittura del ricordo di se stessa: in questo ricordo essa prende effettivamente forma. Come si vedrà, i tratti fondamentali di questo percorso letterario sono fondamentalmente già tracciati in *Der Verlorene*, tanto che il testo viene ad assumere un valore simbolico di origine, sia sul piano esistenziale che letterario: non solo cronologicamente ma anche simbolicamente, esso rappresenta quell'oggetto perduto - sia questo il fratello, il tempo dell'infanzia, l'amore genitoriale, la sostanza dell'Io -, su cui tornano anche i romanzi successivi.

## 5 La trilogia della perdita e la coazione a ripetere

A partire da quanto appena illustrato, è interessante notare che in *Lektionen der Leere* l'autore pone il dato autobiografico alla base della genesi della sua scrittura, tanto che non pare sbagliato affermare che alla lettura autobiografica dei suoi testi egli contrappone motivi altrettanto autobiografici. Come molti scrittori chiamati a parlare della loro opera, anche Treichel sembra voler offrire all'interprete una precisa griglia interpretativa della sua opera, ben conscio dell'attrazione che esercita la 'trappola' autobiografica: parla della desolazione della sua storia personale e fami-

12 Allo stesso tempo, l'immagine è abbastanza ambigua da far sorgere il dubbio che l'ironia non sia solo autoironia, ma miri a colpire lo stesso modello proustiano o, almeno, l'insistenza generale - in ambito letterario, scientifico e politico-culturale - sul tema della memoria. Disambiguare l'ironia non è fondamentale ai fini di questo saggio, per il quale è sufficiente registrare la chiara presa di distanza dal modello, indipendentemente da quali siano le reali intenzioni dell'autore e le loro cause.

13 Si vedano in particolare i romanzi *Der irdische Amor* (Treichel 2002) e *Mein Sardinien* (Treichel 2014b), costruiti su un identico impianto narrativo.

liare, ma ne presenta un'interpretazione che affascina. La bellezza del linguaggio, l'alto livello di riflessione poetologica, i rovesciamenti ironici non possono lasciare indifferente il lettore e lo conquistano all'interpretazione autobiografica; se non che poi Treichel prende le distanze dal dato biografico e sottolinea la finzione letteraria della sua opera, il gioco letterario con le possibilità del proprio Io,<sup>14</sup> che, afferma, gli permette di sottrarsi all'aspettativa di autenticità da parte del lettore.<sup>15</sup>

Questo continuo gioco al rimando tra vita e letteratura, che caratterizza tutte le opere narrative di Treichel pubblicate fino a oggi, è particolarmente evidente non solo in *Der Verlorene*, ma anche, e soprattutto, nei romanzi *Menschenflug* e *Anatolin*, scritti successivamente alle lezioni di poetica. I tre testi possono essere considerati una vera e propria trilogia dedicata alla ricerca del (fratello) perduto, ricerca che parte dalla rielaborazione letteraria di un'esperienza biografica e termina con un romanzo in cui l'Io pare sovrapponibile in tutto e per tutto all'autore.

*Der Verlorene* è una fiction autobiografica, in cui Treichel rielabora liberamente e in modo comunque straniante la vicenda personale dei suoi genitori. In *Menschenflug*, uno dei pochi romanzi di Treichel narrati in terza persona, il protagonista, Stefan, è un uomo in piena crisi di mezza età, il quale, dopo aver scritto un romanzo sul fratello maggiore disperso, ha deciso, dopo vari tentennamenti e spronato dalla ricezione del suo romanzo, di mettersi alla ricerca del fratello disperso. In *Anatolin* l'Io è uno - o, forse, lo - scrittore che prima ha scritto un romanzo sul fratello maggiore perduto dai genitori durante la fuga dall'Est, poi ha scritto un romanzo il cui personaggio, dopo aver scritto un romanzo sul fratello disperso, ha deciso di mettersi alla sua ricerca; in *Anatolin* l'Io decide di imitare il personaggio del suo secondo romanzo e si mette alla ricerca del fratello che i genitori non hanno mai potuto ritrovare. Incalzato dai lettori che si sentono in dovere di aiutarlo a cercare il fratello perduto del suo romanzo, egli ripercorre a ritroso il viaggio migratorio fatto dai suoi genitori: raccoglie documenti, testimonianze, ricostruisce la memoria collettiva della fuga dall'Est e dei tempi che l'hanno preceduta, arriva infine nella *Heimat* originaria dei genitori, ma trova solo il vuoto: quel passato, mai raccontato dai genitori, è irrecuperabilmente perduto, anche se continuerà a pesare sulla vita e sulla scrittura dell'Io. *Anatolin* rappresenta un vero e proprio viaggio alla ricerca del passato dei genitori, possibile grazie a testimonianze e a documenti: è il viaggio alla ricerca di quella memoria comunicativa negata all'Io di *Der Verlorene*, che - almeno per

14 Nella lezione *Raucherbedarfartikel* (2000a, 112) Treichel scrive: «Entscheidend ist die Erfahrung der eigenen Ich-Disponibilität» (Decisiva è l'esperienza della disponibilità del proprio Io. Trad. dell'Autrice).

15 «Die Erfindung des Autobiographischen entlastet vom Authentizitätsdruck» (L'invenzione dell'autobiografia libera dal peso dell'autenticità. Trad. dell'Autrice).



Treichel - nessuna memoria culturale può sostituire. *Anatolin* è il romanzo meno letterario di Treichel - o, se si preferisce, il più vicino al saggio -, che si sviluppa come una lunga riflessione dell'Io sulla propria storia, sul rapporto con la scrittura, sul rapporto con il pubblico dei suoi lettori. Il finale del romanzo rimanda al finale di *Der Verlorene*, nel quale l'Io bambino, disperato, non capisce perché la madre non voglia neppure guardare il trovatello che ha sperato essere suo figlio, e nel quale egli vede ormai il riflesso di se stesso. Ma la chiusura del cerchio è di segno negativo: in *Anatolin* il test del DNA prova che il trovatello - ormai adulto - non è il fratello perduto. Il viaggio nella memoria (e della memoria) non riesce a colmare il vuoto da cui ha preso inizio.

Come ha notato Giusi Zanasi (2009), in questa esperienza del vuoto, della perdita, dello spaesamento

Treichel si muove consapevolmente a tutti gli effetti nella tradizione dei moderni per i quali quell'esperienza ha costituito una sicura e preziosa fonte di linguaggio e di senso: la sua opera rimane ancorata a quella coscienza poetica fortemente segnata dalla nostalgia di un centro, di fondamenta, di radici, di un'origine, di sconfinamento oltre le traiettorie dell'Io, di fusione simbiotica, anche se tutto questo si manifesta ora ovviamente col dovuto disincanto, senza ansia d'assoluto o speranze di salvezza. (148)

In questa nostalgia di un centro che è assente si può riconoscere la matrice narrativa da cui originano tutti i personaggi principali di Treichel. Per citare altri esempi, oltre quelli già menzionati, basti pensare ai protagonisti dei romanzi *Tristanakkord* (2000), *Der irdische Amor* (2002), *Grunewaldsee* (2010), *Frühe Störung* (2014a) e *Mein Sardinien* (2014b). Essi sembrano tutti riconducibili a un unico prototipo, che trova nel bambino di *Der Verlorene* la sua prima vera e propria messa a punto letteraria: uomo, solitario, malinconico, pauroso, attanagliato dalla sensazione dell'annientamento, schiacciato dal senso di vergogna, incapace di entrare veramente in relazione con la realtà circostante, continuamente a disagio, impossibilitato a portare a termine i propri progetti, egocentrico suo malgrado (seppure innocuo nel suo egocentrismo), tendenzialmente autodistruttivo e soggetto a disturbi psicofisici improvvisi, come ad esempio orticaria, pollachìuria, impedimenti respiratori.

Senza poter eclissare completamente il dubbio di trovarsi di fronte a una produzione a catena di una formula narrativa evidentemente di successo, non si può mancare di notare che la scrittura di Treichel sembra essere intaccata dagli stessi disturbi ossessivi di cui soffrono i suoi personaggi. Tale caratteristica è troppo evidente per non suscitare il sospetto che l'autore stia portando avanti un gioco ironico con il lettore, inducendolo verso l'interpretazione psicologica e autobiografica di quello che nel romanzo

Anatolin ha definito il suo «*morbis biographicus*» (Treichel 2008, 57): il vuoto intorno al quale ruota la sua scrittura sarebbe un vuoto di vita, derivante non da ultimo da un vuoto di conoscenza.

Se non che, seguire la traccia autobiografica significherebbe contribuire, come interpreti, a quella coazione a ripetere cui tendono sia i personaggi, sia la scrittura di Treichel. In essa la ripetizione fa sì che il vuoto si dilati oltre misura e si riempia di testi che, similmente alle scatole di cartone che affollavano la casa della sua famiglia senza riuscire a riempirne il vuoto, non solo non riescono a colmare la lacuna, ma la amplificano, tanto che essa diventa routine, disturbo,<sup>16</sup> e anche la cifra stilistica rischia di trasformarsi in una formula che la svuota e la rende sempre più prevedibile via via che si prosegue con la lettura. Data l'assoluta consapevolezza e l'indiscutibile abilità letteraria dell'autore, pare innegabile che questa ripetizione contenga anche elementi di divertita autoparodia; d'altro canto, egli sembra teso a scrivere un unico romanzo che ruota intorno a un Io sempre identico a se stesso, che si trova via via in situazioni diverse seppure accostabili le une alle altre, un Io che stenta a prendere forma se non appunto in modo disturbato. Treichel scrive, ma non sembra credere nella possibilità della scrittura di costruire una realtà, per quanto chiaramente di finzione.

Se, per i motivi detti, è lecito prendere *Der Verlorene* a paradigma della scrittura treicheliana, è altrettanto lecito affermare che questa coazione a ripetere dà concretezza all'idea che la realtà non possa formarsi se il passato è perennemente presente, se non riesce a trasformarsi in un passato da depositare nella memoria e da richiamare al ricordo, impedendo così alla vita di scorrere, di evolversi, di cambiare. La scrittura non può riuscire in questa impresa, poiché la scrittura non può essere sostitutiva della vita, quindi stenta a evolversi oppure non vuole farlo. La ripetizione diventa allora fissità, svuotamento della realtà, dissolvenza dell'Io, strumento di Lete e non di Mnemosine, nello stesso momento in cui non può fare a meno che voltarsi indietro verso il passato. È la memoria del passato come condanna a destinare paradossalmente il soggetto a Lete e a sfociare nel desiderio altrettanto impossibile di condanna della memoria. La scrittura non risolve il paradosso, ma lo ripropone incessantemente, tentando di giocarci ironicamente e oscillando tra la nostalgia dell'Io di riconciliarsi con il Sé e con una realtà di sofferenza da una parte e, dall'altra, la consapevolezza malinconica che sia il Sé che il suo mondo sono costantemente sull'orlo del vuoto.

16 Il penultimo romanzo di Treichel si intitola, in modo non certo privo di ironia, *Frühe Störung* (Disturbo precoce). Cf. Treichel 2014a.

## 6 *Der Verlorene*

### 6.1 Il passato, il ricordo, l'Io

In *Der Verlorene* il narratore racconta al passato di sé bambino, e di come viene piano piano a conoscere la tragedia vissuta dai genitori durante la fuga dai soldati russi. Nel tentativo di salvargli la vita, essi hanno consegnato a una donna sconosciuta il primogenito ancora lattante, ma, nel panico del momento, non hanno pensato di chiederle il suo nome, né tanto meno di dirle il nome del loro bambino che, come il padre, si chiamava Arnold. Solo dopo aver capito che i soldati miravano alle donne e non avevano intenzioni assassine, si rendono conto di aver agito precipitosamente: né la loro vita né quella del figlio erano veramente in pericolo. Una serie di allusioni mai chiarite fa pensare che la madre abbia subito delle violenze, ma l'argomento è tabù, e il racconto non fornisce ulteriori spiegazioni utili a sciogliere il dubbio. L'Io adulto ha infatti un'altra consapevolezza rispetto all'Io bambino, non per questo ha un diverso livello di conoscenza. Tramite questo espediente letterario e nonostante il tono distaccato della narrazione, il lettore è reso emotivamente partecipe della stessa atmosfera sospesa in cui vivono l'Io e i suoi genitori, in attesa continua dello scioglimento del dramma, che non arriva.

L'Io narrante è il secondogenito che, nato qualche anno dopo questi eventi, non sa niente di questo passato, finché la madre non decide di raccontargli come sono andate le cose. Nel momento in cui i genitori intravedono la possibilità di ritrovare il figlio perduto, il secondogenito viene confrontato con una parziale ricostruzione delle vicende dei genitori. Essi gli comunicano solo lo stretto necessario, ossia che, a differenza di quanto gli avevano raccontato in precedenza, Arnold non è morto, e come lo hanno perduto.

La scoperta della verità ha un effetto devastante sul protagonista, ed egli comincia a percepire il fratello come una presenza ingombrante. Intuisce che il senso di colpa e il sentimento di vergogna che da sempre lo tormentano altro non sono se non il riflesso dei sentimenti di suo padre e sua madre; soprattutto, nella sua megalomania di bambino, avverte di non essere sufficiente a colmare il vuoto lasciato dal fratello. Sviluppa disturbi fisici che sono chiari sintomi di una crisi legata non da ultimo alla scoperta di una vita costruita su illusioni, silenzi e menzogne. Si sente escluso dalla famiglia, messo in un angolo da Arnold, verso il quale sviluppa un infantile sentimento di rabbia. Escogita strategie al limite del ridicolo, con le quali cerca di opporre resistenza all'affiorare di una verità scomoda, alla comunicazione di un ricordo fino a quel momento taciuto.

Il racconto non ricostruisce il passato dei genitori, bensì come l'Io-bambino sviluppi di fatto una psicologia disturbata e una profonda malinconia

di fronte a una realtà e a un Sé che perdono di sostanza. L'Io narrante scrive del bambino che un tempo è stato, trasferendo su carta i pensieri e i sentimenti di quel bambino. Il tempo verbale del preterito segnala la distanza temporale che è anche una distanza di prospettiva, grazie alla quale il bambino ricordato viene oggettivato e narrato. La presa di distanza dal bambino rende possibile l'infrazione di un tabù, ossia l'ammissione della condanna della memoria, dell'auspicio di una rinnovata rimozione del ricordo di un passato scomodo, del desiderio dell'oblio che, unico, permetterebbe di cominciare una nuova vita senza vergogna né sensi di colpa. Il bambino si augura, infatti, una terza guerra mondiale, affinché il fratello muoia veramente di fame e lui possa di nuovo guardarsi allo specchio senza vedere Arnold ma se stesso (cf. Treichel 1998, 58). Ai suoi occhi solo la dimenticanza del figlio perduto potrebbe restituirgli la sua consistenza di persona.

Di fatto, non solo la rimozione della memoria ma anche la consapevolezza di quella rimozione è qualcosa che l'Io non cerca, ma subisce. Il ricordo del passato, infatti, torna suo malgrado, ed è funzionale a uno scopo preciso: i genitori devono raccontargli la loro storia perché hanno bisogno di lui per le misurazioni biologiche necessarie a capire se il trovatello nm. 2307, che in base ad alcune caratteristiche potrebbe essere Arnold, lo sia veramente.

Rispetto al ricordo della cacciata da parte dei russi, della fuga e dell'emigrazione forzata la narrazione ripropone la stessa strategia comunicativa usata dai genitori con il loro secondo figlio. Anche nel testo il racconto del ricordo del passato genitoriale è funzionale allo scopo narrativo che consta nella rappresentazione della confusione, della crisi identitaria, dei sentimenti paralizzanti di colpa e di vergogna del bambino, fornendone una spiegazione plausibile. L'espulsione e la fuga sono solo citate ma non ricostruite. Ciò che invece viene ricostruito è un altro ricordo, ossia il ricordo di come il bambino abbia sviluppato le sue insicurezze, la sua malinconia, i suoi disturbi; il ricordo di come la madre sprofondi costantemente nella tristezza e nel pianto; di come il padre, grossista di carni, si ammazzi letteralmente di lavoro, dandosi anima e corpo agli affari; di come gli affari crescano e, parallelamente, di come crescano i muri di silenzio e l'impossibilità di una comunicazione tra i membri della famiglia. Detto in altri termini: il racconto mostra e ricorda come il passato che non passa abbia determinato e distrutto il presente, condannando questo presente a essere una realtà sussidiaria, di sola facciata, che ha la sola funzione di distrarre da un vuoto incolmabile, derivante da una perdita che non ha mai smesso di creare dolore.

Il servizio di ricerca dei dispersi e l'individuazione di un trovatello che potrebbe essere Arnold riaccendono nei genitori la speranza di ritrovare il loro primogenito. Ciò che ufficialmente era stato dichiarato morto, torna

a essere vivo e fagocita tutte le energie e le attenzioni della famiglia;<sup>17</sup> al contempo, esso getta nuova luce sull'intera organizzazione familiare e sui suoi processi di rimozione a causa dell'impossibilità di separare passato e presente. Il passato (Arnold) è, infatti, un presente continuo, poiché un figlio disperso e mai ritrovato non appartiene solo al passato, ma al presente, seppure in modo paradossale: egli è presente in quanto perennemente assente.

L'impossibilità di trasformare il passato in ricordo a cui attingere mentre la vita scorre comporta, nella rielaborazione letteraria proposta da Treichel, un rapporto necessariamente distorto con il presente, con la realtà e con se stessi. L'assenza del bambino diventa così l'asse principale intorno a cui ruota tutta la vita della famiglia e, con essa, la narrazione: il testo comincia con la descrizione dell'unica foto che i genitori possiedono di Arnold e termina con l'immagine del trovatello - si potrebbe dire: di Arnold in potenza - nel quale l'Io bambino riconosce la sua immagine speculare. Il vuoto (Arnold) impedisce alla famiglia di sottrarsi alla contingenza del momento e la rende estremamente vulnerabile. L'ordine familiare è, infatti, fragile, costruito su silenzi e bugie; esso può reggere solo finché è custodito da un guardiano tiranno, il padre.

Ma la storia familiare non ha solo valore privato e, come è stato spesso osservato, essa rappresenta, in modo metonimico, la Germania del dopoguerra. A livello narrativo il parallelismo tra la famiglia e la vita nazionale avviene tramite il viaggio a Heidelberg: i tre devono recarsi all'Istituto Antropologico per fare le misurazioni biologiche necessarie a stabilire l'identità tra il trovatello nm. 2307 e Arnold. La freddezza della lingua scientifica, i buchi dei proiettili nelle pareti dello studio del medico, le fotografie del cranio e le sue misurazioni, il discorso dell'operaio delle pompe funebri sul perfezionamento dei forni crematori sono un esplicito richiamo alla memoria collettiva dell'Olocausto e del Nazionalsocialismo: il viaggio a Heidelberg non è altro che una parabola del ritorno alla memoria del passato, compiuto dai genitori e, insieme a loro, dal lettore. Senza rappresentare il passato nazionalsocialista, il testo di Treichel lo richiama alla consapevolezza del lettore e lo rappresenta come parte integrante del presente dell'Io bambino, di cui determina anche l'esistenza. Infatti, dopo il ritorno da Heidelberg - si potrebbe dire: dopo il tuffo nella memoria del passato - il padre muore a seguito di due infarti consecutivi: all'eccitazione causata dalla fredda affermazione del medico che la probabilità che il trovatello sia Arnold sta uno a uno contro la probabilità opposta, segue quella della scoperta che durante i giorni della sua assenza il magazzino delle carni è stato scassinato e i ladri, oltre ad aver rubato grossi

17 I riferimenti biblici alla parabola del figliol prodigo - in tedesco: *der verlorene Sohn* - sono evidenti fin dal titolo polisemico *Der Verlorene*.

quantitativi di carne, hanno staccato il dispositivo frigorifero, causando il deterioramento di tutta la merce. Di fronte a questo stato di cose, l'uomo è costretto a confessare alla moglie di non aver pagato l'assicurazione. Muore la sera stessa: il mondo costruito con foga e in fuga dal dolore è un mondo sempre a rischio, che non conosce assicurazione contro il risveglio di questo dolore che causa solo morte.

La rielaborazione letteraria del ricordo del passato nazionalsocialista e della migrazione forzata avviene, come detto, in modo indiretto, in quanto il testo ricorda il passato storico senza di fatto narrarlo. Il passato narrato è invece l'infanzia dell'Io narrante, quindi uno spaccato della Germania degli anni Cinquanta, che rimanda però agli anni immediatamente precedenti. Le continuità tra la Germania nazionalsocialista e la Germania del dopoguerra erano state denunciate spesso e molto prima del 1998, anno di pubblicazione di *Der Verlorene*, ed erano state anche oggetto di testi letterari. La caratteristica peculiare del testo di Treichel è la modalità letteraria scelta, per mezzo della quale egli dà forma a un paradosso: il racconto conferma, infatti, la necessità di conoscere, di ricordare e di ricostruire il passato (individuale e collettivo) per capire il presente, ma, contemporaneamente, non può far altro che sottrarsi a questa necessità. Premessa del ricordo è una linea divisoria tra due epoche, che in *Der Verlorene* non esiste, per cui il passato e il presente – sia a livello personale che collettivo – arrivano, di fatto, a coincidere, il che significa che il tempo si è fermato, impedendo uno sviluppo che non sia solo fuga e rimozione.

## 6.2 Ironia e malinconia

*Der Verlorene* è costruito su una serie di contrasti presentati come irrisolvibili: il desiderio (disperato) del bambino di preservare lo status quo, il suo desiderio di non conoscere la verità, quindi di boicottare le ricerche dei genitori e, infine, di non conoscere il trovatello, contrasta con il desiderio dei genitori di trovare una via d'uscita dal dolore. Tramite una serie di effetti comici Treichel dà forma narrativa a questa collisione; ma il comico sfocia presto nel grottesco, perché sia il desiderio del bambino sia quello dei genitori si scontrano, a loro volta e ognuno per conto proprio, con l'impossibilità della loro realizzazione a causa di una realtà pesante che li reprime.

I personaggi sono consapevoli o, comunque, percepiscono il contrasto tra la realtà e il loro desiderio, ma non possono non provare questo desiderio o comportarsi diversamente. I loro desideri e i loro bisogni sono presentati come legittimi, anche se il loro soddisfacimento è impossibile. Per mezzo del contrasto comico, la narrazione registra lo scarto tra realtà e soggetto, ma il comico va a discapito della realtà, che comunque è immodificabile, e non del soggetto, il quale ubbidisce a una necessità interiore

che gli è vitale. In questo senso, Treichel sembra proseguire la tradizione del grottesco modernista di stampo patetico,<sup>18</sup> che, nel dare forma agli scarti comici tra il soggetto e la realtà, annullava poi la distanza del comico a favore di una compartecipazione alle sorti del personaggio grottesco, nella consapevolezza dell'inevitabilità del contrasto tra l'Io e il mondo. Dalla stessa consapevolezza scaturisce, di fatto, anche la malinconia del testo di Treichel.

Allo stesso tempo, la narrazione non si ferma al grottesco modernista e tramite l'ironia – si pensi per esempio alle iperboli del bambino – mantiene le distanze dalle sorti potenzialmente tragiche dei personaggi. È l'ironia di quel disincanto cui fa riferimento Giusi Zanasi nella citazione sopra riportata: essa smussa il sottotono doloroso e fundamentalmente disperato del grottesco, e sembra originare da un tentativo – non sempre riuscito – di riconciliazione con lo scarto tra le necessità e i desideri dell'Io e la realtà, non permettendo alla disperazione di avere l'ultima parola. È così che la condanna della memoria si trasforma in nostalgia di riconciliazione, la stessa che alla fine l'Io bambino prova nel finale vedendo il trovatello: è la parte di sé di cui ha bisogno per essere completo, per ricostituirsi come unità. Solo l'ironia fa sì che questa nostalgia di riconciliazione non sfoci, a sua volta, nella disperazione del vuoto e nella malinconia più cupa che, comunque, in Treichel sono sempre incombenti.

Grazie all'ironia Treichel riesce, inoltre, a dinamizzare il processo letterario della ricostruzione del ricordo. Essa gli permette di sottrarsi al pathos del dover ricordare il passato che, come si è detto nella parte introduttiva, caratterizza generalmente il discorso politico, sociale e culturale sulla memoria. Treichel non condivide questo pathos, ma condivide la necessità di sapere cosa è stato il passato, pur sapendo che, con ogni probabilità, questo vuoto di conoscenza resterà tale; anche in questo caso, non si tratta di una necessità primariamente etica, ma esistenziale, poiché senza il ricordo la realtà dell'Io non riesce a prendere forma.

La costruzione della vicenda individuale come emblematica della vicenda collettiva porta a estendere il discorso anche alla storia nazionale tedesca: non solo non c'è stata alcuna *Stunde Null*, ma era impossibile che potesse esserci, poiché il passato ha continuato a vivere nel presente ipotecando il futuro, e lo ha fatto proprio nel momento in cui quel passato sembrava scomparso dalla coscienza e dalla memoria individuale e collettiva. In Treichel la questione non è posta in termini di denuncia, tanto meno su un piano etico-politico ma, appunto, esistenziale. Sebbene anch'egli rappresenti un conflitto tra padre e figlio, nella sua opera non c'è il pathos della responsabilità della cosiddetta *Väterliteratur* degli anni Settanta. Al contrario: i personaggi genitoriali soffrono sotto il peso di una

18 Per un esempio di analisi cf. Grazzini 2001.



colpa che essi stessi si addossano, soffrono per la consapevolezza di essere responsabili della perdita del figlio, anche se quella perdita è stata il prezzo del tentativo di salvargli la vita. Si tratta di un circolo vizioso da cui la scrittura non può trovare via di uscita, se non forse quella di riconoscerlo e cercare di giocarci in modo ironico-distaccato, mantenendo a distanza la minaccia della malinconia. L'insistenza di Treichel su questo tema e su questo circolo vizioso fa probabilmente parte di questo gioco. Anche se, a tratti, si ha l'impressione che il gioco si sia ormai consumato e abbia perso la freschezza originaria, come, forse, è inevitabile nel momento in cui la realtà interessa principalmente in relazione a un Io che essa stessa ha già annientato in partenza.

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e Culturali Comparati



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